

**A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION & CATECHESIS
ON THE PROJECT "MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE"**
(abridged)

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Introduction

At the beginning of Chapter 7 of her report, Christine Cheyne quotes Pope Paul VI:

It is up to Christian communities to analyse objectively the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the gospel's unalterable words, and to draw principles or reflections, norms of judgement and directives from the social teaching of the Church (Oct. Adv. 1971, n.4)

Although the social sciences have given us new methods of analysis, the fundamental process enunciated by Pope Paul VI is not new. According to the Second Vatican Council:

The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel, and must do this in order to carry out its task (GS. n.4)

In our own country, the Church's Commission for Justice, Peace and Development, in preparing submissions and papers has followed this three-tiered process: identifying the facts, reflecting on them in the light of the gospel and the Church's social teachings, and drawing practical conclusions.

This method of bringing empirical data and Church teaching to bear on each other is called for not only when the Church is looking at "the world"; it is called for also when the Church is looking at itself. The Second Vatican Council exhorts bishops

to employ suitable methods, especially social research, in order to consult more suitably concerning the welfare of the faithful (Decree on Bishops Pastoral Office in the Church, n.16).

The decision of the NZ Catholic Bishops' Conference to endorse the proposal of the Commission JPD to "find out whether or not sexism exists in the Church in New Zealand" (Report, p.2), is consistent with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI. In other words, it was decided (a) to research professionally the situation in our

own country; (b) to reflect on that situation in the light of the gospel, and (c) to draw practical conclusions based on the facts and their significance.

Just as it would have been inappropriate to draw conclusions without first researching the situation, likewise it would have been insufficient to draw conclusions from the research before there has been theological reflection on it. It was for this reason that the bishops asked for the research to be submitted for theological reflection. They were undertaking to ensure that theological reflection would be done; (they were not, as some erroneously presumed, intending to do that reflection on their own.)

To assist the involvement of others, these reflections are offered as an indication of what theological reflection involves. Theological reflection on the report is not a matter of merely identifying the points with which one agrees or disagrees. It is not an exercise similar to correcting and marking an essay. That would be easy but it would not be theological reflection. Theological reflection involves hard work, prayer and a way of opening oneself more completely to the truth. It engages both the heart and the head.

Reading the Signs of the Times

The need for theological reflection is linked to how the Church understands its duty to read the signs of the times.

The Second Vatican Council taught that reading the signs of the times involves

recognising and understanding the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics. (GS n.4)

This is because these signs are regarded as indications of God's purposes being unfolded in human history. In his first Encyclical letter, Pope John Paul II said that a deeper understanding of history leads to a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ (cf RH n.13), and therefore of God's purposes.

It was Pope John XXIII who first introduced this now celebrated term “signs of the times” into theological usage. One of the signs he explicitly named was the aspiration of women to participate in the decisions that affect them and affect society; in other words, this aspiration surging up in contemporary human history can be regarded as an indication of God’s purposes; (cf PT 41).

It should be noted that the changes taking place in the world are not themselves the “signs of the times”. Beyond the changes there are the effects which these changes produce on people’s lives and on human consciousness. The “signs of the times” are the longings, expectations, desires and questioning that arise because of the changes. Theological reflection goes beyond social research and analysis to see in what direction these aspirations and movements are leading human history; whether they can further those purposes which God has already revealed.

This expectation that God’s purposes are being revealed in the signs of the times is based on faith. It is only by faith that we know that God has a plan and that human history is going somewhere: that God is Lord of history (i.e. none of it escapes God’s ultimate purposes), and that the Holy Spirit is present in history for the purpose of our salvation.

Contemporary Church documents reflect this theology of the signs of the times by their recurring references to people’s aspirations for equality, for their participation in the decisions that affect them, for justice, for personal autonomy and self-determination, and for a more humane world. The Church’s appeal to these aspirations is based on the Church’s conviction that to know people’s deepest and truest aspirations is to know something that God is wanting to tell us. Even the fact that these aspirations are sometimes misinterpreted (e.g. as in Marxism) does not change the fact that the aspirations themselves may be authentic; (cf Pope Paul VI, Oct. Adv. n.30).

Of course, it is precisely because even authentic human aspirations can be misinterpreted that the Church is entrusted with special responsibility for discerning the truth. It is in the light of Christ that we are revealed to ourselves - both what is authentic and what is

not authentic.

The Church exists as a discerning community, as a prophetic community, and as a saving community. As a discerning community so that it may say its "yes", its echo to where God is saying "yes". As a prophetic community so that it may say its "no" as an echo to where God is saying "no". As a saving community so that it may lend all its purposes, all its efforts, all its initiative to try to push forward the victory that grace - God's work - is already winning in the world. (G. Arevalo, SJ, On the Theology of the Signs of the Times, Conference Paper, Baguio City, The Philippines, Feb 16, 1972).

The Church's theology regarding the signs of the times presupposes that there are moments in history when the human race reaches new levels of consciousness, moments when we see what we have not previously seen so clearly. Is that where we now stand in regard to the dignity and the rights of women? In a sense, that question is the whole point of the project Made in God's Image.

Faith or Fear?

Before proceeding further, however, it is appropriate to reflect briefly on the fact that some people interpret events more negatively. It is well-known that some did not want any research into sexism in the Church, and some felt the project was motivated by subversive forces.

In his celebrated speech at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII shared with the world this concern:

In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse, and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history...

We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster,.... In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations, which by our human efforts and even beyond our human expectations, are directed towards the fulfilment of God's greater and inscrutable designs. (Opening Speech at Second Vatican

Council)

The saintly Pope considered that people who see only the dangers and terrible things that can go wrong themselves lack good judgement and a sense of proportion; in other words, lack prudence. This is reminiscent of a comment that Pope John Paul II made, just after he was elected Pope, to the effect that courage is itself a requirement of prudence!

For John XXIII, the groundswell events of the present time were leading to “a new order of human relationships”, and Divine Providence (the unfolding of God’s purposes in human history) was involved.

Discernment

Reading the signs of the times means knowing how to recognise God’s designs unfolding in human history. The process of theological reflection most appropriate to this task is “discernment”.

Discernment is not something we can turn on just for occasions; it is a way of life. It is that way of living that expects God to be present “in all things” - in nature, in history, in events... It presupposes one’s desire to hear God’s word, to recognize God’s call, and respond to it. Anything less than an unconditional and prior acceptance of God’s will is itself an obstacle even to recognising God’s will.

More fundamentally, discernment presupposes that one’s intimacy with God, through prayer and faithfulness, has brought about a sense of what is “of God” and what is not; a sense of what is congruent with the will of God. Ultimately, this “spiritual” perception is due to the gift of God’s Holy Spirit living in us; see

Romans 8:14-15

1 John 2:20-27

1 Cor. 2:10-16

This very personal experience avoids the pitfalls of mere subjectivism by having as its constant backdrop the faith of the Church itself, i.e. the faith of Christians down the

centuries back to the first generation of Christians. It is to the whole Church that the Spirit is given, and to individuals through their belonging to that community. This is why individual claims are to be tested in the faith community, (cf 1 Cor. 12:4-1), in which some are prophets, some teachers, some pastors, etc.

Only one who is truly united with Christ can discern in the name of Christ. This loving listening to our Lord involves in turn a loving listening to the Church, which is his Body. Only one who is truly united with the Church can discern in the name of the Church. (Editor's comment, The Church's Confession of Faith, a Catechism for Adults, The Bishops of Germany, Communio Books, 1987, p.5)

Because theology is "faith seeking understanding", it has its roots in the faith of the Church. Identification with the faith of the Church is what enables us to draw things "both old and new" from the treasury of the faith; - "new" in the sense that the Church is called always "to scrutinise the signs of the times", and "old" in the sense that we interpret the signs of the times in the light of Christ's unchanging Gospel.

In the process of discernment, the focus is not directly or primarily on how one is responding to God's call. It is rather on what God is doing in the depths of one's consciousness - how one is experiencing the "drawing of the Father" (John 6:44), the "promptings" of the Holy Spirit, (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18). It also involves detecting and noticing how our sinful inclinations draw us in another direction and away from our true self. These opposing "movements" or "spirits", as they are called, have their own characteristics.

In the context of deciding between alternative lines of action one looks to see which alternative consistently yields a deep sense of peace, joy, gratitude, trust and genuine communion; (cf Gal. 5:16-25)

This process presupposes that persons involved in discernment have a total commitment to finding God's will. This does not mean some small elite; it means all Christians. That is why St Paul enjoins us

not to conform ourselves to this age but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind so that we may be able to judge what is God's will. (cf Rom. 12:2)

Consequently, if we really want to know what God might be saying to us as we read the Report, we need to read it in the spirit of prayer and discernment - noticing how we are affected, deep down, by what we read. NB: What we have to notice are not merely our surface emotions or “reactions” or “how we feel”, but rather those deeper “movements” of peace or disquiet or gratitude or challenge or joy or love that run like the deep current below the surface of our consciousness - if we are people for whom God’s will matters more than everything else.

A merely deductive approach, i.e. drawing conclusions from general principles, hardly requires that we be “transformed by the renewal of our mind so that we may know what is the will of God” (cf Rom. 12:2). Making deductions about the will of God is not the “knowing” that is entered through discernment. Nor can God’s purposes revealed in the signs of the times be known by deduction.

Interpreting the Research

In view of what we are trying to notice when we read the Report, it matters less that people’s aspirations are sometimes expressed badly. Even a poorly expressed opinion, and even a wrong opinion, can be used by God as a catalyst for how God wants us to respond in the situation. In this sense, every opinion is relevant - which is not to say that every opinion is “valid”.

We are reflecting on the experience of people who have been trying to live by the Gospel of our Lord within the Catholic tradition, and who are either still trying or have given up. By letting their experience impact on us, we are, in a certain sense, making their experience our own.

The Second Vatican Council professed that

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ. (GS n.1)

In other words, we make their experiences our own.

If that is supposed to be our attitude towards all people, even more should we take to heart and “make our own” the joys and the sorrows of the Church’s own members.

It involves a way of “listening” to their stories and perceptions that wants to know more than whether their views are right or wrong. That judgement is also necessary (see below) but it is not enough. It should not be an excuse for not “hearing”.

Since the purpose of these reflections is to give an example of how theological reflection can be done, no attempt will be made to touch on every aspect of the Report. Later in this paper reference will be made to submissions which show serious misunderstandings. At this stage, I shall single out some comments and submissions which manifest faith and faithfulness, hurts and hopes, frustrations and struggle. We all need to let these impact on us for the purpose of our discernment. For example:

I stay in the Church with difficulty, but I stay because I have, through Baptism, both a right to be there, and a share of responsibility for the quality of the Church’s life.... (cf p.111)

In the area of worship and liturgy, I no longer feel able to attend these ritual expressions of male dominance and superiority....(p. 112)

I have wept with pain while sitting in a Church listening to scripture aimed at men, praying for men and to a male deity, singing about men, while three-quarters of the congregation are women. What offends me even more is that women accept their invisibility and have little concept of their value as persons - we have been colonized. (p.110)

I live largely on the edge of parish life at present, content with prayer and sacrament. I know that growth towards wholeness is possible, painful, but worthwhile. For me that growth meant questioning authority and loyalty to traditional Church. I suspect there are a number of women in the Church, especially married women, who would like to grow in their faith but are frightened of the consequences - I see and hear them in groups, at retreats, etc. (p.111)

At the end of the twentieth century we are in a cultural milieu where, without

reference to Christ or his Church, the secular world under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is painfully accepting this truth (the equality of all people) and taking steps to implement it. In such a cultural environment, the gap between its theology and its practice is making the Church appear fundamentally illogical if not dishonest in the eyes of many of its members, especially women. We have to record our sadness and dismay at the number of Catholic women, many of whom we would never have dreamed would ever give up the Church, who are quietly leaving it. Women's awareness of the injustices they suffer is gathering momentum with unforeseen rapidity and it is having a powerful impact on women in the Church. The women's movement, so called, is no longer the preserve of a comparatively few people and it is nothing short of ludicrous to suggest that this study is instigated by them. We live amongst working class women and we are amazed at the speed of change that is taking place in their attitudes to women's place in society. What was only a small landslide as recently as ten years ago is becoming an avalanche. It is not going to stop because it is unstoppable. (pp.92-93)

I believe we, as Church, are impoverished in our theology, our liturgy, our practices, by the historical fact that the development of all these areas has been (and is) exclusively in the hands of men. Until such time as women have an equal say in the major decision-making bodies of the Church, this impoverishment will remain. "But we are complementary" says a female critic of your project - and that is precisely the point: there is no complementarity in the male power structure of the Church. (p.93)

There is a great anomaly in being responsible and taking charge of one's faith development which is what the Church demands of us as adult, and how it then copes with inquisitive, questioning and aware people in its community. (p.96)

In this diocese we have many highly qualified, skilled and experienced hospital chaplains who are women religious. We get little or no respect, acknowledgement, remuneration or whatever from the "official Church", especially the diocesan vicars who appoint retired clergy over our heads without consultation, etc. These men do untold harm and we have to calm the hurts they perpetrate while avoiding treading on their toes or we may be banned. We are highly regarded by staff, patients and relatives, especially by those who are marginalised by the attitude of the clergy past and present. I could give you shocking examples of the harm done by these insensitive, untrained and unsuitable priests in these positions. (p.100)

I found pregnancy difficult and have empathy with all pregnant women, but again I believe collectively as Church we fail to support women. Recently I was in the congregation at a Mass of the Angels. The celebrant made reference to "the little man" (the deceased babe) offering condolences to the young father and tagged his wife's name on. No acknowledgement was made of the fact that she had nurtured that life inside her own body for nine months and the special

sense of physical, spiritual and emotional loss she was experiencing. Had the celebrant been a female, this omission could not have occurred.... Pregnancy is a women's experience and no male can identify with it. So it is ignored... (p.89)

I became increasingly aware of how powerless ordinary parishioners, especially the women (who form the bulk of the active parishioners) are, and I personally, as a woman religious, experienced painful, energy-sapping frustration and anger. No matter how excited, innovative or creative we became about aspects of parish life, in the final analysis, the priest whose perception of life and reality was masculine and essentially different from the feminine view of the most involved of his parishioners, had the power to say "no"... and no one of us had any real recourse elsewhere... The parish priest is not accountable to anyone. Theoretically, the bishop can call him to account, but in fact how can the bishop really know what is going on in a parish. I am not talking about individual priests, I am talking about a system which can allow so much power to one person, always a male. (p.101-102)

The efforts that women religious have made, at considerable cost, to educate themselves theologically are rarely recognised in our Church, while a man who has not necessarily done anything beyond the level of the seminary, and that possibly limited and well out-of-date, automatically become a Doctor of Divinity. (p.102)

The language and rituals the Church uses are offensive to me. Many say that looking at language is a trivial matter, but to me it expresses a way of thinking. We have at our disposal a language which can be precise and inclusive and I feel strongly it should be used. I can no longer feel part of a community of worship when referred to as a brother. (p.73)

Confronted by comments like these, it is easy to feel:

- grateful both to God and to the people who made submissions, that it has been possible for them to share with the rest of us why they have felt hurt; why they hang on or no longer hang on; why they have wanted to be heard; why they still have hope...
- concerned that the honest sharing of these people might not be matched by serious efforts to change even what can be changed;
- compassion for those who experience a bind when they wonder whether it is better for them to stay in the Church for the sake of loyalty and sharing responsibility, or to move out for the sake of coping better or of not becoming more alienated;
- angry because most of the hurtful things are so unnecessary; they do not belong

to the nature of ministry or of liturgy; they do not belong to the gospel!

- frustrated by the slowness, and even the cynicism of people who cannot hear what is being said;
- grateful for the courage and perseverance of women who have worked for the Church through thick and thin (the kind who might be inclined to say in the spirit of Jesus' teaching "it was our duty" - (cf Lk. 17:10).

What each of us experiences at deeper levels is known only to ourselves. But if we have entered the discernment process properly, that deeper experience is what helps us to know what is congruent with human dignity and with the gospel, and what is not.

The Influence of the Church and Society on Each Other

A basic premise of the researcher was that since the Church exists in a society which is itself affected by sexism, it is at least "possible that sexist values and practices are embedded in the Church" (Report, p.2). (The research itself would be open to either possibility: "In researching the reality of sexism, it is possible to find out that there is no sexism [in the Church]; it is equally possible to find out that [there is]" [cf Report, p.2]).

Her fundamental premise was, therefore, that attitudes and practices in society can flow over into the Church. After all, the same people are members of both. Let us note that this can work for good as well as for evil. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged that scientific and social developments in the world have contributed to a truer understanding of religious faith; (cf GS n.7)

Christians can, in their turn, influence society both for good and for evil. The same Council said that by our failure to live the gospel and by our distortions of it we "can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism" (GS n.19).

Even though many social changes have their deep roots in the gospel, Christians have not always been among the first to recognise how the gospel required those changes. One of

the Report's findings was that some women felt some of their aspirations were better understood outside the Church than within; (cf p.108).

Concerning the time it can take for the radical newness of the gospel to be recognised and accepted, Pope John Paul II makes an observation that touches directly on our topic. In reference to St Paul saying that "in Christ Jesus... there is no more slave or freeman", the Pope commented:

How many generations were needed for such a principle to be realised in the history of humanity through the abolition of slavery! And what is one to say of the many forms of slavery to which individuals and people are subjected and which have not yet disappeared from history?

The point is that he said this in the context of St Paul's other words in the same passage: "In Christ Jesus.... there is no more male or female" (Gal. 3:28). Obviously, this was not a denial of their difference, but a cogent affirmation of their radical equality. The Pope was saying that this radical equality is not yet fully established "in hearts, in consciences, behaviour and customs" both within marriage and "in regard to women in every situation". (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, n.24)

The Influenced of Secular Ideology

The connection between how people think and act in society and how they think and act as members of the Church cannot be limited, a priori and selectively, just to sexism. We need to be open to the possibility and other ideologies of a secular nature influence the lives and thinking of members of the Church.

This seems to be the case, especially in regard to the unthinking acceptance of subjectivism. Subjectivism is manifested in the assumption that something is right just because of the sincerity of the person who thinks it is right. There is no need for any objective criterion against which to judge whether that person's view is right or wrong. Indeed, we are told it is not for anyone "to judge" whether another person's opinions are right or wrong.

There is an unnoticed double standard at work here. What people are prepared to allow

when it comes to religious faith and morality, they would never dream of allowing in other areas of their lives. In commerce and industry, in institutes of learning and science, and in the administration of justice, one cannot pass off wrong information or wrong opinions just by claiming they are “right for him/her”, i.e. for the person who happens to think they are right. The fallacy of subjectivism is so obvious, and yet so common!

It shows up in comments on abortion. One interviewee acknowledged that she would never have an abortion herself because “I do actually believe the foetus is alive and well from early on.” But she has no problem allowing someone else’s child in the womb to die, because she is “pro-choice”, and because no one can say what is wrong for anyone else! (cf Report, pp 47-48). The influence of secular ideology here is stark.

It seems that the influence of mood works like the influence of secular ideologies. Hurt and anger are entirely understandable reactions to injustice and perceived injustice. But they can have a distorting influence on how one interprets what others are saying. What Pope John Paul II has said in his letter on the Dignity and Vocation of Women is destined to be missed or distorted by those who are affected by an antipathetic mood. (In a plainly tendentious comment in “the Dominion” Oct. 15, 1988, Elizabeth Isichei makes the extraordinary claim that there was “one crucial text the Pope does not cite - Gal. 3:28.”) True theological reflection requires the dispassionate and sensitive process of discernment, rather than polemic.

Easy recourse to clichés, stereotypes, unthought-out or obsolete comments also reflects a double standard, because presumably we require a higher standard of ourselves in other areas of our lives. We do not normally allow ourselves to reach conclusions that are quite disconnected from the reasons we give. For example, it can be acknowledged that the work of the Tribunal sometimes involves difficulties for people, and we must always be open to improving its methods. But how does one conclude from that premise that it is never possible to know whether a given marriage is valid or not? And what does such a reckless conclusion say to people who have sought and obtained declarations of nullity and subsequently entered new and happy marriages?

Just as we can expect secular ideologies, moods and antipathies to affect our thinking even as members of the Church, so too members of the Church are capable of “transferring” to others, especially authority figures and institutions, personal problems and hurts that might have nothing to do with the people or the institutions being targeted.

It seems that the areas on which some interviewees showed the most confusion were precisely those on which the Church is sometimes accused of having too much to say, or criticised for not changing its teaching, viz abortion, homosexuality, contraception, the permanency of marriage, divorce and remarriage. It is possible that the non-acceptance, or reluctant acceptance, of the Church’s teaching might be due to factors other than whether the bishops have repeated it often enough?

In her Report, the researcher felt able to observe that some submissions showed a “poor understanding of what the concerns are of people who are aware of sexism in the Church” (p.113). It is also the case that some of the views expressed showed a poor understanding of the Church’s actual positions, - even if such misunderstandings were sometimes proclaimed with remarkable self-assurance.

Clericalism

Most of the hurts that surface in the research relate in one way or another to the way authority is exercised, perceived, or experienced in the Church. This highlights the need to distinguish between ordained ministries as such and the phenomenon of clericalism.

Clericalism is another manifestation of secular influence on the life of the Church. It results from a convergence of historical factors which have had the effect of setting the clergy apart as a particular subculture, and privileged subculture, within the Church. For different reasons, religious life has been similarly affected. The net effect of this is a diffuse impression that belonging to the Church, being Church, or being significant in the Church, are related to certain roles or groups within the Church, more than to Baptism.

This can only be corrected by a massive refocussing of the Church’s image centred on the

sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. In this way, belonging to the Church, being Church and being significant in the Church will be related to the marvellous privilege of belonging to Christ, with all that that means.

Within a Church that has been refocussed in this way, it will be easier to recognise that different vocations are different ways of being in the service of our life in Christ, that none is greater than the others (cf Mt. 20:24-28; 23:8-12), and that the call to holiness and responsibility for the Church's mission belong to all of us by reason of our Baptism.

Clericalism, on the other hand means that priesthood and religious life are perceived as somehow more significant than Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. And this exposes them to the inevitable reaction against this imbalance.

The teaching authority of the Church has already moved to correct this situation. The 1917 Code of Canon Law enshrined distinctions between clergy and laity that were not based on the sacrament of Holy Order. Clericalism was entrenched and institutionalised. The 1983 Code of Canon Law has retained only that theological distinction between clergy and laity that is based on the sacrament of Ordination itself. It remains now for this reform to be carried right through the life of the Church.

It is arguable that many of the hurts and reactions described in the research would not occur if everyone were deeply convinced that nothing greater can happen to any of us than what happens through union with Christ in Baptism and Eucharist.

It would be wrong to regard the criticism of clericalism as a criticism of priesthood itself. It would be equally naive to repudiate priesthood when the problem is clericalism. Both these mistakes derive from the failure to distinguish properly between ordained ministry which belongs to the nature of the Church, and a way of exercising ordained ministry that does not belong to the nature of the Church.

Anthropology

But some hurts result also from false perceptions of what it means to be male and female. It seems to me that sound theological reflection on what it means to be “Made in the image of God” presupposes a sound anthropology. In fact, I believe it is decisive.

Patriarchy is based on an assumption that being male is somehow superior. On this basis, it appears that men are destined by a divinely ordained natural order to be the “head”, and women subordinate. Even the case of not ordaining women was, in former times, supported by the claim that because “a woman is in a state of subjection, she cannot receive the sacrament of Orders” (St Thomas, Pt. III, Supplement Q.39,1). Such reasoning not only obscures other grounds on which the ordination question might be based, it also sets the stage for rejection.

The underlying fallacy here is a false anthropology, according to which, nature determines all, and is itself determined by its biological structures. And so personhood is determined by biology.

At the opposite extreme is an anthropology that separates personhood and bodily nature: personhood is said to be sexually neutral, and sexuality merely incidental to who we really are. This position is based on an a priori agenda: - a perceived need to reduce as far as possible the differences between male and female. And so sexuality is reduced to its reproductive role and deemed not to make any significant difference beyond that.

This interpretation of what it means to be male and female is in conflict with ordinary experience and with those sciences which highlight the ways in which our sexuality, and therefore sexual differentiation, flows through every dimension of our lives and relationships.

Fortunately, these two anthropologies are not our only options. There is a third option in which sexuality and personhood are related essentially to each other, and not just incidentally. This is different from the first view in which biological structures determine

who we are (personhood), and it differs from the second view which leaves personhood entirely unaffected by sexuality.

In this third view of human nature,

.... matter and spirit are so joined that each is proportionate to, and pervasive of, the other, with the unity of a single being, a single material/spiritual nature...

... each person is a single whole, at once human, sexed and individual. Our sexuality is not really separable from our humanity, nor from our individuality. We can think, and speak, of these three separately. But they are separate only as abstractions in our minds. A woman has no sexless humanity through which she can act to fulfil certain roles in the same way in which a man could. She is her feminine self through and through, a single, holistic self that is at once female, human, and individual. The same is true of a man: his very self, human and individual, is masculine through and through. It is a false abstraction to speak of a sexually neuter humanity, common to men and women. No one's sexuality is irrelevant to his life as a person: everyone's person is his or her sexuality, through and through. Sexuality has meaning for every aspect of each person's life. It pervades each one's very existence. It is each one's very self.

.... Human nature, then, sexed as it is, is analogous in men and women: neither univocal (completely the same), nor equivocal (totally different). All of us, men and women, have a single nature in that we all belong to the human species rather than to any other. Men and women are equal in the dignity, the rights, and the responsibilities of that nature, and neither sex is inherently more or less human than the other. But thanks to the way in which sexuality permeates every aspect of our being, that single human nature is dual in its modes; two ways of being human are realized, differently, in men and in women. We are different not just in accidental features, such as bodily organs, but in the very essentials of our humanity. The sensory-intellectual mode of knowing and the physically conditioned freedom of choice which are the marks of the human are realized differently in men and in women. The two sexes, then, enjoy two irreducibly different modes of knowing and loving, two modes of being human. The differences are not different degrees of a univocal humanity identical in both. Complementarity need not mean inequality, even if it has often been that in the practical order. Nor do the differences constitute two natures, equivocally constituting two species, so that only males would have a fully human nature. But still, the differences are real, not just biological but psychosomatic, and they are important enough to require us to discern them accurately and to express them appropriately in social and ecclesial structures.

....Sexuality that is truly human is an appropriation of nature, a reality which we must first come to possess in consciousness and freedom, and then make pertinent to our individuality. Thus our masculinity and femininity are partly

defined by our own free choice. And what free choice has defined, free choice can redefine. The definition as well as the reality of human sexuality is still in process, in each one of us as in the human race as a whole. Thus, in deciding what our sexual differences are, we cannot look to history alone, for some sexual roles have not been legitimate. Nor can we look to abstract definitions that would completely overlook history; for history is the only locus in which our bisexual human nature really exists. Thus we can easily agree that sexual roles have been in many cases inappropriate to our true sexual differences, that they are unjust, that they inhibit the full growth of God's life in us all. The remedy, though, is not a mindless dismissal of sexual differences and roles based on them, but something much harder: a new effort to discern those differences more accurately and then to invent new, legitimate roles.

Experience can be our only source of such knowledge: not sheer, uncriticised experience, which is often idiosyncratic and alien to our true humanity; but experience judged in the light of what is and what is not genuinely human, genuinely masculine and feminine. Here the social and other sciences can help, but they cannot give final answers. For in our holistic make-up we are, indeed, partly material, and thus amenable to the empirical methods of the sciences. But we are also spiritual and self-determining, especially in our sexuality. Hence it should be no surprise that the sciences have not been able to define sexual differences. They never will. The specifically human, personal aspect of our sexuality is not amenable to empirical methods. Our response to this failure of the sciences, though, is again not to deny sexual differences, but to seek to discern them through other methods, those of philosophy and, indeed, theology. (Mary F Rousseau, PhD., Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Marquette University, The Way, July 1981)

And so, we come to that passage in the scriptures where it was first said that we are made in the image of God. Adam (Adamah) is not the male of the species, but humankind. (And the name indicates our humble origin as "made from the soil"). It is only in their sexual differentiation that humans become their real selves, and are named in Hebrew, Ish and Ishah. In their unity as human and in their differentiation within that unity, they are made in the image of God. The sentence in Genesis passes easily from the singular to the plural: "Let us make man... and let them be..."

There is only one creation - that of the human creation, Adam, whom God "fashioned". The next step in the story does not come as a second process of creation, but as a step within the total process or as a further development of what began with the fashioning of Adam. This time God "builds". In other words, woman does not come after humankind

is already complete: humankind itself is built up to its own completion with the woman.

Ishah, then, does not walk in on Adam from the outside as an alien element. She proceeds from within Adam (mankind) where she was already present as that to which mankind was destined, as the development that would bring it to perfection.... Adam becomes a person, aware of himself, reaching consciousness as mankind, at the unveiling of woman. For woman is also mankind. She is no other than Adam; but she is Adam as bringing to perfection what had first been imperfect. Then is mankind aware of its status... (G. Tavad, Woman in Christian Tradition, pp. 7-8).

Whereas the Hebrew Bible speaks simply of "sleep" at the moment when human creation reached its completion, the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) speaks of "ecstasy".

"Ecstasy implies silencing the faculties only so that they may be transformed. It implies access to a new world, transfiguration no less than recognition."

Following the fall, distortion entered into human nature and human history. The feminine is treated as inferior to the masculine throughout the whole of human life, (cf John Paul II, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, n.10).

In the gospel, the original equality is restored. Even the injunction "wives be subject to your husbands" and "husbands love your wives" is at its deepest level an injunction to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21). We can too easily be put off by the culturally conditioned language. Just as the language of Genesis includes pre-scientific imagery, and just as there are polytheistic assumptions in some of the Old Testament prayers, so too, the language of some New Testament writings is affected by patriarchal assumptions. But assumptions are what the author merely assumes, not necessarily what he is teaching.

Sound criticism distinguishes between what scripture teaches "for the sake of our salvation" and what the author merely assumes or presupposes; (cf Second Vatican Council, On Divine Revelation, n.10). We have learned how to make this distinction in regard to pre-scientific assumptions and false religious assumptions. Now we need to learn how to do it in regard to deeply engrained cultural assumptions. Of course, the uncritical acceptance of patriarchal assumptions by some New Testament authors

themselves has seemed to lend the authority of scripture to their assumptions. To repudiate a scriptural passage or scriptural author on this account would be easy to do, but it would also be to miss the point.

In this passage of Ephesians, the phrase “be subject to one another” means (in our own culturally conditioned language!): put the other first, accept each other totally. The substantive point here is that this attitude must be mutual - because Christ wants it so. This teaching is all the more radical because it conflicts with deep cultural assumptions, which are visible even in the language the author uses. (cf John Paul II, *ibid.* n.24)

In between the fall and the gospel, the original dignity of womanhood is never lost.

It comes to lie with the prophets, who see Israel as the fiancé of the Lord; in the books of wisdom, where the divine Wisdom is depicted as the primordial woman antecedent to the creation of the world; occasionally in poetry, as in the Song of Songs, where the union of love between man and woman becomes a symbol of the relationship between God and God's bride Israel. Israel is also mankind, that is mankind as loved by God; it is mankind itself which is feminine before God. (G. Tavard, p.25-26)

Ordination

In the Report, reasons given in favour of the ordination of women were often related to the claim that women could do the same things that priests do, and in the case of ministering to women, could do them better. I have no wish to dispute that claim, but it is necessary to note that ordained ministry is not reducible to what the ordained are supposed to do: it is about what they are called to be, in what they do; (cf below)

Regarding the Church's practice of not ordaining women, it was felt by some that this involved a sin against human dignity (Report, p.71). The problem here, however, is that until we know whether the Church is authorised to ordain women, the claim that it is unjust not to do so begs the question.

Similarly, it was felt that women's exclusion meant that they were less fully and not equally members of the Church (cf Report, p.71). The problem here, however, is that this position is the same as the basic assumption of clericalism: it supposes that ordained

persons are meant to belong to the Church more than non-ordained persons.

The theological question that needs to be clarified before we can reach conclusions about injustice and inequality concerns how the tradition of not ordaining women is meant to be understood. What is its real meaning? Does it embody a divine intention that only men can be ordained to priestly ministry, or does it reflect an early stage of a Tradition that may develop further without prejudice to its essential continuity? It cannot be assumed that male domination is the only possible explanation for this Tradition; there may be reasons which have nothing to do with male domination. After all, ministry has its roots in the gospel; domination doesn't. The two are separable.

The fundamental question can be approached by asking other questions: e.g. is the tradition of not ordaining women merely a human tradition which says nothing about Christ's intentions, or perhaps even contradicts his intentions? Is it a tradition that enshrines cultural assumptions that have yet to be purified by the gospel?

Alternatively, is it a tradition that is intended to enshrine symbolic meaning? After all, the meaning of ordination is that one is authorised to "stand in" for Christ, making Christ's actions visible in the community. What is required of such a one? For Christ, as for us, his sexuality pertained to his very identity, and it is his person that is meant to be sacramentally re-presented by the ordained minister. Historically he was male, and the incarnation was not cancelled out by the resurrection. (This does not mean there are not other ways of representing him that do not require ordination; it means that ordination is intended to confer a particular mode of representing Christ.)

Again, given that ordained ministry only makes visible the saving actions of Christ, (it has no powers of its own), what aspects of Christ's ministry are we entitled to exclude from our understanding of ordination? E.g. He took on scripture's symbol of the Bridegroom; in contrast to customary forms of male domination, he "emptied himself" to be among us as one who serves and "gave himself up for us." In this way he highlighted the dignity of those he came to serve, and who, in scripture's use of this symbol, are the Bride. Are we

so sure that this symbolism is not intended to be continued in the ministry of those who stand in for Christ, especially when his self-offering is sacramentally re-presented in the celebration of the Eucharist? Is the more recent tendency to write off this imagery as “confused symbolic sexual relations...” (Isichei) itself a fruit of gospel values or of a secular ideology?

Is it possible that Christ intended different roles for men and women in the mission of the Church, just as they had been given different roles in the giving of life and love? Since this differentiation in the order of creation is not meant to imply inequality, why would differentiation of roles in the order of salvation have to imply inequality? Is it the influence of the gospel, or is it the influence of some secular ideology, that leads some to assume that people are equal only if they have access to the same roles? (cf S Schneiders, *Cultural influence on the Project of Ministerial Collaboration*)

It is not the purpose of this paper even to attempt answers to these questions. The point is that they are questions, and have to be taken seriously. This seriousness is lacking if it is merely assumed that there are no questions still needing to be answered. Whether claims about inequality and injustice are right depends on the answers.

The Church’s official position on this matter also deserves to be taken seriously as part of our commitment to the community of faith. But it is “not an ultimately binding dogmatic decision” (German Bishops, *The Church’s Confession of Faith*, p.247), and we are not able to exclude further development in the Church’s own understanding of this matter. Nor can we exclude the possibility that clearer understanding will confirm the present practice on non-clericalist and non-patriarchal grounds.

Jesus himself grew in his understanding of his own mission through his encounters with people and events (cf Mark 7:24-30). This has been true of the Church, too, ever since its beginnings (cf especially Peter’s experience among the Gentiles). And, it is to be positively expected that in continuing fidelity to her mission the Church will yet gain new insights into her own nature through her encounters with social and cultural

developments, especially when these developments are themselves rooted in the gospel.

In the meantime, it is for us to create the right climate for clarification. This requires putting aside the distortions and privileges of clericalism, refocussing our perception of the Church around Baptism and Eucharist, and carefully discerning the difference between secular ideologies and the gospel.

Perhaps only when women do have full participation and equal authority in administration, management, and government in the Church, will it be possible to resolve the question surrounding women's exclusion from ordained ministry. (Report, p.162).

There are aspects of government that belong to the nature of ordained ministry, but there are other aspects of government and decision-making that do not require Ordination; (cf Canons 129/2, 1421/2, 483/2).

In view of some comments in the report it seems necessary to comment also on the theology of vocation to the priesthood. A vocation is not what an individual feels, as when it is said one "feels called to" the priesthood. A vocation is the call of the Church (and ultimately of God) to an individual who is willing to serve in this way.

Preaching and Other Liturgical roles

It seems necessary to reflect also on the relationship between preaching and the ordained ministry. The right and duty of lay people to preach is soundly based on the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. (It does not depend on having to diminish the ministry of priests and deacons.) The right and duty of ordained ministers to preach is founded on the sacrament of Holy Order.

In recent centuries the sacrament of Holy Order came to be perceived narrowly in terms of conferring certain sacramental powers. The Second Vatican Council acted to correct this imbalance by restoring a more ancient perception of ordained ministry as a ministry of "word and sacrament". It even gave a certain kind of priority to preaching; (cf Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, n.4). Our reflections on preaching need to be based on our sacramental theology, relating to Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Order; (not on a

pro Vatican II mindset that would once again reduce the priest's role to a sacramental ministry (and not on claims about one's own charisms.)

Church law on this subject is not arbitrary; it is based on sacramental theology. Canon 766 speaks of the circumstances in which lay persons can be called upon to preach. The canon is intended positively and not only for cases of necessity. In fact, it reverses an earlier prohibition in the 1917 Code. It does not restrict the circumstances to outside of Mass, and it does not make any distinction between men and women.

C.767 distinguishes the homily from every other form of preaching, such as evangelising, catechesis, moral exhortation, doctrinal instruction, eulogy, etc. It restricts the homily, and the proclamation of the gospel at Mass, to ordained ministers. If there were no form of preaching based on ordination, ordained ministry as such would be a ministry of sacrament only.

An important principle of liturgical renewal is: to each ministry their own place; (cf also c. 837). This means that ministers should not usurp what belongs to other ministers, and that differences between ordained and non-ordained ministry should not be blurred.

Quite another matter is the restriction of some liturgical roles for reasons that are not based on the Church's sacramental nature. These restrictions can change, and it would be consistent with the more fundamental principles of liturgical reform that they do so.

Conclusion

There is much else, both in the report and not in the Report, that a more complete reflection would need to include. What I have offered here are only preliminary reflections for the assistance of others who wish to do further reflection. There is much for all of us to learn.