

What Makes Us Catholic?

Promoting Thomas Groome's Errors in the Archdiocese of Armagh and Beyond

Eamonn Keane

1. Introduction

At the time of writing (November 2008), the official website of the Archdiocese of Armagh in Ireland carries an advertisement inviting people to enrol in an online course titled "What Makes Us Catholic: Part 1." Sponsored by Boston College and the Armagh archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry, the advertisement says: "[T]his course is a guided discussion of the first half of Boston College Professor Dr. Thomas H. Groome's critically acclaimed book, *What Makes Us Catholic*." Enrollment in the course costs £28/€35 payable to the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry, Archdiocese of Armagh. The advertisement recommends that participants acquire a copy of Groome's 2002 book *What Makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life* (hereafter abbreviated to **WMUC**). According to Boston College's website, Part 2 of the course will be offered online over the period March 2-27, 2009.

As the advertisement for his WMUC course on the Archdiocese of Armagh's website indicates, Groome is often lauded in Catholic precincts as a shining light in religious education, catechesis and pastoral ministry. As a result he is a much sought after speaker at catechetical conventions. Reporting on the Archdiocese of Boston's annual catechetical congress in 2007, the archdiocesan newspaper, *The Pilot*, in its November 23, 2007 edition said: "The keynote speaker for the English-speaking catechists was Professor Thomas H. Groome..." After mentioning how he had mixed poetry with "readings from his own books and musings," the report went on to tell of how a female member of the archdiocesan religious education office stated how fortunate they had been to have had Groome participate: "Groome's speaking schedule takes him all over the country" she said, adding that "she was able to book him almost one year in advance."

Groome is a laicized priest and a Professor of Theology and Religious Education at Boston College, where he is also Director of its Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry (IREPM). Many of those holding executive positions in Catholic education bureaucracies throughout the English-speaking world have taken theology, religious education and pastoral ministry courses at Boston College.

Describing the objective of WMUC, Groome states that the book "attempts to respond to the confused and hurting Bobs – the Catholics who will never leave their church but feel torn between the open spirit of Vatican II and signs of a more repressive era being restored" (WMUC, XVI). He adds that "My focus throughout this book is Catholic Christian identity...I try to describe the defining attitudes of Catholic Christianity as these might shape how people engage in the world" (WMUC, XVIII)

For anyone seeking to know more about their Catholic faith so as to be able to live it more integrally in the world, Groome's WMUC rather than being useful may instead undermine their faith. The book is punctuated with anti-Catholic rhetoric and promotes dissent from the teaching of the magisterium. His theological methodology is directed to the politicization and deconstruction of the Catholic tradition, i.e. the dissolution of the historical Church, whose existence across time is rooted in its liturgical history going back to Christ himself. All of this is present in Groome's continuing assault upon Catholic sacramental realism, something that is evidenced in his continuing propaganda against the Catholic Church's doctrine on the ministerial priesthood.

2. The Hierarchy of Truths

Underlying Groome's dissent from definitive teachings of the Catholic Church is a misunderstanding on his part of what Vatican II meant when it said that in Catholic doctrine there exists a "hierarchy of truths."¹ He thinks that the existence of this "hierarchy of truths" allows Catholics to pick and choose which doctrines they will or will not accept. Giving expression to his misunderstanding of this important point, he said:

"I think that to intentionally teach the Catholic tradition one must be in basic agreement with the central dogmas and doctrines of the tradition, the ones that stand at the heart of Catholicism. On the other hand, one of the most useful things Vatican II ever said was that there's a hierarchy of truths in the tradition, and they're not all equal. Indulgences, limbo, and birth control are not on a par with the Trinity, the Resurrection, or the presence of the risen Christ in the Eucharist. I have no problem at all teaching in a very faithful way what I consider to be the heart of the Catholic tradition, even though I may disagree with the Vatican on many contemporary issues, such as the ordination of women."²

Leaving aside the question of Limbo, the magisterium of the Catholic Church has taught definitively on the questions of women's ordination, indulgences and birth control. This teaching requires the irrevocable assent of all Catholics.

The existence of the hierarchy of truths does not mean a principle of subtraction whereby some doctrines of the Church can be rejected. Referring to this and drawing on earlier comments on the question by Cardinal Ratzinger, Cardinal Christoph Schonborn, editor-in-chief of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (**hereafter CCC**) said:

"[T]he 'hierarchy of truth' does not mean 'a principle of subtraction,' as if faith could be reduced to some 'essentials' whereas the 'rest' is left free or even dismissed as not significant. The 'hierarchy of truth...is a principle of organic structure.' It should not be confused with the degrees of certainty; it simply means that the different truths of faith are 'organized' around a center."³

¹ Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 11

² Thomas Groome, *U.S. Catholic*, February 1986, p. 12

³ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Cardinal Christoph Schonborn, *Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1994, p. 42.

3. Hermeneutic of Discontinuity and Rupture

In his work Groome makes use of various hermeneutical tools. The term ‘hermeneutics’ refers to theories governing the interpretation and understanding of ‘texts,’ something which refers to linguistic and non-linguistic forms of expression and communication. The term “hermeneutic of suspicion” was coined by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005). It refers to a method of interpreting a text which assumes its literal level meaning is structured so as to conceal the political and ideological interests the text seeks to serve. Consequently, texts need to be engaged with by way of a critical evaluation that will seek to unmask their underlying interests and false claims. It is claimed that failure to engage a text from this perspective of suspicion gives rise to distorted communication and false consciousness, which in turn serves to maintain existing and oppressive power structures.

Used properly, the hermeneutic of suspicion can be a positive thing. If more Germans, for example, had subjected Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* to such a critical analysis the world might not have had World War II thrust upon it. However, since truth exists and can be communicated in propositional form so as to allow for its transmission across time and culture, then in regard to religious or moral truth, the notion of a hermeneutic of suspicion cannot be regarded as having universal relevance. Without limitation of its scope, suspicion would be open-ended, with no possibility of ever being able to formulate an absolute or definitive statement about reality. As protection against such a spiraling descent into absurdity, God has raised up the Catholic Church as “the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

The points made above raises the question of what are the principles that should govern our engagement with the Word of God as it has been transmitted across time by the magisterial teaching of the Catholic Church? In other words, what are the hermeneutical principles we need to follow when engaging with Catholic Tradition in order to remain within the realm of orthodoxy? Cardinal Ratzinger once stated that if the objective content of the deposit of faith “is no longer trusted,” then “new content slips in unnoticed.”⁴ Some 18 years later, but this time speaking as Pope Benedict XVI, he referred to the need to interpret the teaching of Vatican II using an appropriate hermeneutic. He said:

“On the one hand, there is an interpretation that I would call ‘a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture;’ it has frequently availed itself of the sympathies of the mass media, and also one trend of modern theology. On the other, there is the ‘hermeneutic of reform,’ of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God.”⁵

In describing the nature of the hermeneutic of reform and how it observes the principles governing the development of doctrine, Pope Benedict XVI in the address referred to above, recalled Blessed Pope John XXIII’s vision for the Second Vatican Council by saying:

⁴ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1987, p. 319

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Roman Curia, December 22, 2005.

“Here I shall cite only John XXIII's well-known words, which unequivocally express this hermeneutic when he says that the Council wishes ‘to transmit the doctrine, pure and integral, without any attenuation or distortion.’. And he continues: ‘Our duty is not only to guard this precious treasure, as if we were concerned only with antiquity, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us...’ It is necessary that ‘adherence to all the teaching of the Church in its entirety and preciseness...’ be presented in “faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another...,’ retaining the same meaning and message (*The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbott, S.J., p. 715).”

An excellent book on the question of how to interpret and implement Vatican II correctly was published in 2008 by Oxford University Press. Titled *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition*, the book is a collection of papers by scholars in various fields of theology and is edited Father Mathew Lamb and Matthew Levering. Fr Lamb is Professor of Theology at Ave Maria University and Levering is an Associate Professor of Theology in the same department. Describing how the hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture had taken hold in some academic circles in the Church, Fr Lamb says that efforts to implement Vatican II's reforms “were too often informed by theologies that failed to appreciate the fundamental continuity of Catholic tradition.” He added that “after the Council many Catholics in North America received doctoral training in programs that emphasised discontinuity.”⁶

Intrinsic to Groome's theological and pedagogical project is his use of a hermeneutic of suspicion to deconstruct Catholic doctrine – something that is expressive of that hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture referred to above. In conjunction with this, Groome has also constructed a methodology for religious education which he calls *Shared Christian Praxis* (SCP hereafter). SCP calls for the relativisation of the doctrinal, moral, liturgical and juridical tradition of the Catholic Church. Groome has structured SCP on the presupposition that the doctrinal patrimony of the Catholic Church needs to be sifted via a hermeneutic of suspicion.

4. Ridiculing Catholic Doctrine on the Ministerial (Ordained) Priesthood

For several decades Groome has been spreading a message of dissent against Catholic doctrine on the ministerial (ordained) priesthood. In 1982, he asserted that members of the laity can administer the sacrament of reconciliation. In an article written for teachers in Catholic schools, and in reference to what he saw as the first function of the priesthood, he stated:

“To administer God's sacramental economy to and through a Christian community...By saying that this is part of the priests' function, it must not be assumed that they have exclusive control of the sacraments. In certain circumstances, other Christians can

⁶ *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition*, edited by Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 440.

administer the sacraments too, e.g. baptism or reconciliation when in danger of death and when no priest is available.”⁷

Groome has sought to discredit the Catholic Church’s teaching on the reservation of the ministerial priesthood to men alone. Between 1976 and 1988, the magisterium of the Church reaffirmed its definitive teaching on this question on several occasions.⁸ Despite this however, Groome in his 1991 book *Sharing Faith* said: “It seems that the exclusion of women from ordained ministry is the result of a patriarchal mind-set and culture and is not of Christian faith. The injustice of excluding women from priesthood debilitates the church’s sacramentality in the world; and is a countersign to God’s reign” (p. 328). He goes on in the same book to add that the Catholic Church’s exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood entails “doing spiritual and moral harm to society. (ibid. p.517 note 114).

Regarding the question of the reservation of the ministerial priesthood to men alone, the CCC states:

“Only a baptized man (*vir*) validly receives sacred ordination. The Lord Jesus chose men (*viri*) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. The college of bishops, with whom the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the twelve an ever-present and ever-active reality until Christ’s return. The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible” (n. 1577).

In 1994, Pope John Paul II stated in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* that the practice of not conferring priestly ordination on women was founded on the example of Christ as recorded in the Gospels and on the universal Tradition of the Church. Having said this, he went on to declare:

“In order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church’s divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgement is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful” (n. 4).

In 1995, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (hereafter CDF), whose role is to assist the pope in safeguarding Catholic doctrine on faith and morals throughout the world, issued a ‘Response’ to a question regarding the binding nature of the doctrine taught by Pope John Paul II in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. Approved by Pope John Paul II and signed by Cardinal Ratzinger, this ‘Response’ said:

“This teaching requires definitive assent, since, founded on the written word of God and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the Tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium (cf. Vatican II, Lumen

⁷ Thomas Groome, *Signs of Hope: Priesthood*, PACE, Vol. 12, No. 6, March 1982, p.2; emphasis in original.

⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Response to His Grace the Most Reverend DR F.D Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, Concerning the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood*, 1975; *Inter Insigniores*, 1976; Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (n. 26), 1988; Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (n. 51), 1988.

Gentium, no. 25.2). Thus, in the present circumstances, the Roman pontiff, exercising his proper office of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk. 22:32), has handed on this same teaching by a formal declaration explicitly stating what is to be held always, everywhere, and by all as belonging to the deposit of faith.”⁹

In 1998, the CDF issued the *Doctrinal Commentary on the Concluding Formula of the Professio Fidei* (Profession of Faith) signed by Cardinal Ratzinger which stated that those who deny truths such as the “doctrine that priestly ordination is reserved only to men” are “rejecting a truth of Catholic doctrine,” in consequence of which they would “no longer be in full communion with the Catholic Church” (nn. 6, 11). In the same year as this *Doctrinal Commentary* was issued by the CDF, Groome publicly berated Pope John Paul II for issuing his Apostolic Letter *Ad tuendam fidem* (To Protect the Faith). In this document Pope John Paul II promulgated changes to Canon Law which he said were necessary to protect the Catholic Church against errors emanating from dissident theologians. When asked to comment on *Ad tuendam fidem* in the July 2, 1998 edition of the Boston Globe, Groome said it was “a pretentious attempt by the present pope to stifle conversation and dialogue,” adding, “I read the blessed thing and without being too melodramatic, I was on the verge of tears. It is a very sad day.” Again in 1998, Groome had a book published titled *Educating for Life* in which he undertook to deconstruct the teaching authority of the Pope. He said:

“In Roman Catholic consciousness, the most recognized symbol of Church authority is the papacy – the pope. The pope has primacy of leadership and teaching authority in succession to St. Peter, considered first among the apostles. [...] **In mainstream Catholic understanding of papal magisterium, however, the pope, as bishop of Rome, must teach in consultation and collegiality with the bishops of the world and represent the consensus faith of the whole Church,** in fidelity to Scripture and Tradition. But even with such important nuance, the magisterium of the institutional church symbolized in the papacy, functions as ‘authoritative teacher’ for Roman Catholics.”¹⁰

In Catholic teaching, it is the bishops who must be in communion with the Pope, not the other way round as Groome asserts. Whenever Vatican II speaks of the teaching authority of the episcopal magisterium (college of bishops), it is always conjoined with expressions such as “in union with,” “in communion with,” “joined together with,” “unity with,” “together with,” “only with the consent of,” “in agreement with,” the Roman Pontiff (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 25). Indeed, the Council says: “[T]he college or body of bishops has no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, as its head” (*Lumen gentium*, 22). Hence, as opposed to Groome’s congregationalist spin on what “papal magisterium” means in “mainstream Catholic understanding,” the actual teaching of Vatican II is:

“And therefore, his definitions [pope’s], of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable...and therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgement” (*Lumen gentium*, 25).

⁹ *Response of CDF to the ‘Dubium’, L’Osservatore Romano*, November, 22, 1995.

¹⁰ Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life*, ThomasMore, Texas, 1998, p. 240, emphasis added.

Groome seized upon the clerical sexual abuse scandals in the U.S. to advance his deconstructionist agenda for the Catholic Church. In an April 23, 2002 interview with BBC 4 World Forum, he criticised the handling of clerical sex-abuse scandals in the U.S. by an “enfeebled Pope,” and stated that the question of the ordination of women had to be “rethought”. In an article published in the April 2002 issue of *U.S. Catholic*, he said: “Not that mandatory celibacy and an all-male priesthood are direct causes of pedophilia. But they create a clerical culture that has allowed such egregious behaviour to happen too readily and to continue unchecked.” In an article published in the May 19, 2002 edition of the *Boston Globe*, Groome stated that “it is high time that we reconstruct the Catholic priesthood,” adding: “[T]he presence of women as priests and bishops would be an extraordinary gift to the life of the Catholic Church.”

On a day in which he was scheduled to address Catholic teachers in Canada on how to teach religion, Groome in an interview published in the November 16, 2003 edition of Canada’s *Catholic New Times*, again asserted that Pope John Paul II had contributed to the clerical sex-abuse scandals. He said: “Certainly this pope [John Paul II] has augmented it and heralded it. Read his Holy Thursday statements on priesthood. They all champion clericalism. It is an exaggerated and inflated sense of priesthood, rather than seeing this ‘holy orders’ as helping maintain good relations in the community, which the old sacramental name meant.” Then, in reference to the clerical sex-abuse scandals in Boston, he added:

“In a sense the pope’s exaggerated and inflated clericalist ideas are part of this scandal. Not only did it happen on his watch, but he created an ethos around priesthood. So when the scandals began to be evident, the bishops’ tendency was to cover them up. You could not allow these to become public because this is not what the Holy Father understood by priesthood. It is all a Potemkin village, a fake, a sham. It’s the elephant in the living room which Rome won’t address.”

Returning now to WMUC. After stating that “Catholic Christians have a ‘right’ to the Eucharist,” Groome goes on to say: “It would appear that the Western church is insisting upon celibacy and maleness for priesthood at the expense of people’s access to Eucharist – so central to Catholic identity and spirituality” (WMUC 102-103). He then goes on in WMUC to ridicule the Church’s doctrine on the reservation of the ministerial priesthood to men by saying:

“There can be problems in making an argument from *nature* to favor society or social arrangements. For example, there has been much gender and racial bias in how the dominant culture has interpreted ‘nature’. As late as 1880, the Massachusetts Medical Society argued that women were unsuited ‘by nature’ to be physicians. This is not unlike the argument that the Catholic church still makes against women becoming priests” (WMUC 104).

Groome proceeds in WMUC to lampoon Catholics who assent to the teaching of the magisterium. He says:

“Catholics can have an air of know-it-all, acting as if ours is the only and completely true faith, replete with all the answers. Surely, this is more the sin of pride than a truly *catholic* spirituality. Some of the hubris is encouraged by a teaching magisterium that typically sounds absolutely certain in its pronouncements, as if faith is no longer a ‘leap’

and all can be assured. The joke rings true that when the Catholic church finally agrees to ordain women, the pronouncement will begin with, ‘As we have always taught...’” (WMUC, 263)

The first point I make in response to Groome’s statement above is that there never will be a time when the Catholic Church “agrees to ordain women.” As I noted earlier, the CCC teaches that “the ordination of women is not possible” (CCC,1577). In referring to the doctrinal value of the CCC, Pope John Paul II said: “The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*...is a statement of the Church's faith and of catholic doctrine, attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition and the Church's Magisterium. I declare it to be a sure norm for teaching the faith and thus a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion.”¹¹ In light of this, it is clear that Groome’s contradiction of the CCC’s doctrinal teaching on the question of women’s ordination is a source of scandal to the extent that those who read WMUC may be led to conclude that the CCC is not a sure norm of doctrine but rather that it needs to be regarded with suspicion.

The second point I make regarding Groome’s statement above is that Vatican II teaching entitles Catholics to hold that they are in possession of the “completely true faith.” Speaking of the existence of only one true religion, Vatican II stated: “We believe that this one true religion continues to exist in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus entrusted the task of spreading it among all people.”¹² This Church is characterized by four marks which are unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. According to Vatican II, unity means that the faithful are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government.¹³ Unity cannot exist where there are differences in belief. Other Christian churches and ecclesial communities teach something less than the complete deposit of faith entrusted by Christ to his Church which is governed by the successor of St. Peter.

If what the Catholic Church holds as of faith is not “completely true,” then it must be partly false. Alternatively, since the Catholic Church does hold that it is the only “completely true faith,” then if there be another faith that also believes this about itself but which repudiates one or other of the truth claims of the Catholic Church, then the claims regarding possession of the completely true faith by the Catholic Church and this other faith cannot both be true. Either “only” one faith is “completely true” and other faiths are partly true or totally false, or no faith is completely true. To claim otherwise would be to violate the principle of non-contradiction, which according to Aristotle is the foundational principle of logic.

5. Hermeneutic of Suspicion: Deconstructing the Ministerial Priesthood

Groome’s attribution in WMUC of the “sin of pride” to those Catholics who hold that they are in possession of the “completely true faith” is not surprising given what he asserts

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution Fidei Depositum*, n. 3

¹² Vatican II, *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, n.1

¹³ Cf. Vatican II, *Decree of the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite*, n. 2

about Catholic doctrine in general. In *Educating For Life*, after first speaking of a need to approach reality with a “dialectical outlook,” Groome went on to add: “Such a ‘critical consciousness’ seems theologically appropriate to Catholic tradition, given how much untruth is in every statement of faith...” (p. 142).

If it were true as Groome asserts that “every statement of faith” contains “much untruth”, then we would be placed in an impossible position as regards our ability to give irrevocable assent to the credal statements of the Church. Since they are “statements of faith,” we would have to approach them from a perspective of suspicion in order to sift out the false consciousness or untruth they are believed to contain.

The question of the use of language to express truth in a determinative way was taken up by Pope John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*. He said: “The word of God is not addressed to any one people or to any one period of history. Similarly, dogmatic statements, while reflecting at times the culture of the period in which they were defined, formulate an unchanging and ultimate truth” (n. 95). He added that “the history of thought shows that across the range of cultures and their development certain basic concepts retain their universal epistemological value and thus retain the truth of the propositions in which they are expressed.”(n. 96). Then, by way of a footnote, Pope John Paul went on to quote *Mysterium Ecclesiae* where it says:

“As for the meaning of dogmatic formulas, this remains ever true and constant in the Church, even when it is expressed with greater clarity or more developed. The faithful therefore must shun the opinion, first, that dogmatic formulas (or some category of them) cannot signify the truth in a determinative way, but can only offer changeable approximations to it, which to a certain extent distort or alter it” (par. 96 note 113).

Before looking further at how Groome employs hermeneutical tools to deconstruct Catholicism, it would be useful if I first explain what he means by the terms “Christian Story” or “Story”. He says: “I use Story as a metaphor for the whole faith life and practical wisdom of the Christian community that is congealed in its Scriptures, symbols, myths, rituals, liturgies, creeds, dogmas, doctrines...” (*Sharing Faith*, pp. 113-114). Elsewhere he says that “in more traditional language,” the term “story” can “be called scripture and tradition.”¹⁴

In presenting the early Church as an egalitarian community, Groome states that “the classic texts of Christian faith calls for constructive and creative hermeneutics in response to the needs of the time and the ‘new things’ God is doing” (*Sharing Faith*, 234). He adds:

“This ‘constructive’ aspect of hermeneutics may at times be more accurately described as acts of ‘reconstruction.’ This is writing back into the Story/Vision, from clues and traces that remain in its texts, dimensions that were ‘written out.’ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza’s work has become a model of such reconstruction; she recreates the history of the first Christian communities to reflect more accurately the ‘basileia vision of Jesus as the praxis of inclusive wholeness’ in a ‘discipleship of equals’ with women as full partners (*Sharing Faith*, pp. 234-35).

Still utilising Fiorenza’s terminology, Groome continues: “Throughout his ministry, Jesus called together ‘an inclusive discipleship of equals’ to participate in his mission and to

¹⁴ Thomas H. Groome, *Shared Christian Praxis, A Possible Theory/Method of Religious Education*, in *Critical Perspectives On Christian Education*, edited by Jeff Astley, Gracewing, Herefordshire, 1994, p. 228.

carry it on after him” (*Sharing Faith*, p. 301). Further to which he says: “In its self-image as a people of God the Church is reminded that its first allegiance is to God and that it should be an egalitarian society” (*Sharing Faith*, p. 444).

In WMUC, Groome again lauds Fiorenza’s biblical scholarship and her understanding of the early Church as an egalitarian community. He says:

“Note the spirit of equality in the first Christian community. A great scripture scholar of our time, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, argues that a defining aspect of Jesus’ ministry was his attempt to forge ‘an inclusive discipleship of equals.’ Jesus’ community should be totally inclusive, with a radical equality among the members. Indeed, there are roles of leadership, but all Christians are equal before God...The Catholic church has yet to function as an ‘inclusive discipleship of equals.’ In fact it has looked more like the Roman Empire (its first structural context) with its top-down chains of command and severe inequalities” (WMUC, 188).

Fiorenza is a Professor of theology at the Harvard Divinity School. The notion that Jesus structured the community of his followers as an “inclusive discipleship of equals” belongs to the category of historical fiction. Referring to this aspect of Fiorenza’s work, the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* says:

“Through her optic of a hermeneutics of suspicion, she reconstructed an early egalitarian Jesus movement which existed before the introduction of oppressive male hierarchies. It is debatable, however, whether such a Christianity ever existed and is not a projection of current sensitivities.”¹⁵

Fiorenza’s method of biblical interpretation revolves around four hermeneutical elements, central to which is the hermeneutic of suspicion.¹⁶ She says that “the first and never-ending task” of a hermeneutics of suspicion “is to elaborate as much as possible the patriarchal, destructive aspects and oppressive elements of the bible.”¹⁷ Since the canon of Sacred Scripture cannot provide her with substantiating evidence that the early Church was structured as a “discipleship of equals,” she creates new “models” for interpreting the historical data “that can integrate both egalitarian and ‘heretical’ traditions.”¹⁸ She holds that “feminist biblical scholarship cannot remain within the limits drawn by the established canon,”¹⁹ but must also “explore extra-canonical writings” and make them “available to a wider audience.”²⁰ By the term “extra-canonical writings”, Fiorenza has in mind various heretical gnostic texts.

¹⁵ *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond Brown et al., Geoffrey Chapman, London 1992, p. 1145.

¹⁶ Fiorenza publicly defended the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v Wade* which effectively delivered abortion on demand in the U.S. She stated that liberalized abortion laws are an “expression of justice, mercy and faith” necessary to “protect women’s civil right to self-determination” (*Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ecclesiology of Liberation*, Crossroad, New York, 1993, p. 51).

¹⁷ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, “*The Will to Chose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work*” in *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*, edited by Letty Russel (Philadelphia: Westminster 1985, p. 130.

¹⁸ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*, op.cit. p. 174

¹⁹ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Searching The Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, Volume Two, Crossroad, New York 1994, p. 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 5

Fiorenza understands her theological project as part of a “spiritual struggle for a different religion,” which in seeking to realise “the dream and vision of G*d-Sophia’s [sic] alternative community,” will be “inspired and compelled by **Her** gospel of liberation.”²¹ The odd way in which Fiorenza spells God is deemed to be more appropriate on the basis that anything we can say about God can never exhaust all that remains hidden in the mystery that he is.

Fiorenza repudiates the Catholic doctrine on the sacrificial nature of Jesus’ death: “the death of Jesus was not a sacrifice” she says.²² She asserts that “Jesus rejected all hierarchical forms of power in his community of followers,”²³ in consequence of which the hierarchically structured Church does not represent “the authority of Jesus Christ,” hence we should not “submit to the patriarchal authority presently displayed by the Vatican.”²⁴ She says that the “exclusion of women from the sacramental priesthood corrupts the Eucharist and the Christian church.”²⁵

In WMUC, Groome also draws on the work of John Dominic Crossan whom he presents as a reliable source supporting his assertion that the early Church was structured along egalitarian lines. Referring to Crossan’s book *The Historical Jesus*, he says:

“For first-century Palestine, nothing bespoke the inclusivity of Jesus’ ministry more than his table fellowship...The New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan explains that in Jesus’ world, ‘Open [table fellowship] profoundly negated distinctions and hierarchies between female and male, poor and rich, Gentile and Jew.’ Jesus welcomed *all* to the table – total inclusion!” (WMUC, 189)

Crossan was born at Nenagh in Ireland in 1934. He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1957 but left the priesthood in 1969 and got married. He spent much of his teaching career at DePaul University in Chicago, retiring as professor of biblical studies in 1995. He is a co-director of the ‘Jesus Seminar,’ which is composed of scholars who have met annually over several decades to vote on which of the words and deeds of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels should be considered as accurate. They have concluded that over 82 percent of what Jesus said in the Gospels is not historically accurate; and that of the 176 deeds of Jesus recounted in the Gospels, only 10 are historical. They assert that Jesus did not rise from the dead, that he did not teach his disciples to pray the Our Father, and that his death had no salvific significance for the human race. Finally, they assert that Catholic teaching on the origin and nature of the Eucharist is erroneous and that St. Paul took over the tradition concerning the Last Supper from pagans in Asia Minor.

One of the presuppositions of the Jesus Seminar is what is referred to as ‘Scientific Naturalism’ which posits that anything incapable of natural explanation cannot have historical evidence to substantiate it. A presupposition is a starting assumption adopted before looking at the evidence which determines how you interpret it. Cardinal Newman held that a fundamental cause of radical differences of belief was that of different *starting points*, which is to say in fundamental assumptions. Given their adoption of scientific naturalism as a

²¹ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*, Beacon Press, Boston 1998, p. 183, emphasis added.

²² Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, SCM Press, London, 1983. p. 130

²³ Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals*, op. cit. p. 93.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 247.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 145.

starting point, the Jesus Seminar had already concluded before conducting their research that the miracles of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels could not have occurred.

Crossan has published many books on biblical questions. He asserts that the accounts of the Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord given in the Gospels are historically invalid, that Jesus did not work miracles, that there was no Virgin birth. He postulates that Jesus' body was not placed in a tomb after his crucifixion, but rather was probably "eaten by scavenger dogs, crows or other wild beasts."²⁶

By favourably citing Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*, Groome is thereby suggesting to his readers that the book is a reliable guide for resolving the question of the historicity of Our Lord's words and actions as recounted in the New Testament. Hence Groome could easily lead his readers into error if they proceed to consult *The Historical Jesus* in order to enrich their understanding of Jesus' 'table fellowship.' On the basis of a lack of correspondence he believes exists between the account of the Eucharistic celebration given in *Didache 9-10* and 1 Corinthians 10-11, Crossan goes on in this book to conclude: "It is simply that their dual existence renders most unlikely a Last Supper with its passion symbolism institutionalized and commanded to repetition by Jesus himself on the eve of his death."²⁷ What is at stake in Crossan's assertion that the New Testament accounts of the Last Supper are not historically reliable is the difference between a Church with the ministerial priesthood and Eucharist Sacrifice and a church without them.

In WMUC, Groome's egalitarian vision of the Church leads him to draw false dichotomies. In one place he says: "Vatican II championed a communal understanding of the Church, insisting that its **primary nature** is to be 'a people of God' rather than a hierarchical institution" (WMUC 118, emphasis added).

Vatican II's teaching on the nature of the Church is contained in the document titled *Lumen gentium*. The first chapter of *Lumen gentium* is called '*The Mystery of the Church*.' It opens by defining the Church as being "**in the nature of a sacrament**" (*Lumen gentium* 1, emphasis added). After saying that "the Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple," it goes on to add: "The Church, which the Spirit guides in way of all truth and which He unified in communion and in works of ministry, He both equips and directs with **hierarchical** and charismatic gifts and adorns with His fruits" (*Lumen gentium*, 4). The chapter of *Lumen gentium* dealing with the laity comes after the chapter on the hierarchy. Regarding Christ's design for his Church, it states that "the one mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church," which is a "society structured with hierarchical organs" (*Lumen gentium* 8). When talking about the 'People of God,' *Lumen gentium* is actually referring to "The entire body of the faithful," i.e. "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" (*Lumen gentium* 12, citing St. Augustine). Vatican II indicates that from the beginning the "People of God" was composed of people of varying ranks having different ministries (cf. *Lumen gentium* 13). As against this, Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out that a characteristic of early gnosticism was its anti-hierarchical and anti-institutional orientation.²⁸

Integrally connected to Vatican II's teaching on the Church being in the "nature of a sacrament" equipped by the Holy Spirit with "hierarchical and charismatic gifts," is its

²⁶ Report on Jesus Seminar, *The Message of Miracles*, Time Magazine (Domestic U.S), April 10, 1995.

²⁷ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, Collins Dove edition 1993, Victoria, Australia, p. 364.

²⁸ Cf. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Called To Communion: Understanding The Church Today*, Ignatius Press, 1996, p. 68.

teaching on the difference between the hierarchical (ministerial) priesthood and the common priesthood of all the faithful. It stated: “Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ” (*Lumen gentium* 10). It added: “The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist” (ibid.).

This teaching on the difference between the hierarchical (ordained) priesthood and common priesthood being one of essence and not merely of degree, is a hard saying for anyone hoping to reconstruct the Church along egalitarian lines. Consequently, Groome feels it necessary to “nuance” this teaching. He says:

“Concerning *designated functions of ministry*, including the ordained, I note first the sentiments of Vatican II. It claimed there is a difference not only “in degree” but “in essence” between the common priesthood of all and ordained priesthood. Though this reflects the present ‘mind of the church’ (historical circumstances and critical scholarship may yet nuance it)...in its context (*Constitution on the Church*, par. 10) the primary intent was to affirm the close relationship between the two and their common ground in the priesthood of Christ, and their distinction seems more parenthetical” (*Sharing Faith*, p.324).

Like Fiorenza, Groome holds that Catholic teaching be engaged with from the perspective of suspicion. In *Sharing Faith* he asserts that “to make absolute any expression or interpretation of a faith tradition is to ossify and deaden it,” and that “to forget that there have been distortions and corruptions reflected in Christian Story/Vision is historically naive” (*Sharing Faith* 232). To ensure that educators remain alert to such “corruptions” in ‘Christian Story,’ Groome adds: “Religious educators should approach the faith tradition with a healthy suspicion...” (*Sharing Faith*, p. 233).

In a paper delivered at a *Commonweal Forum* in January 1998, Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago, stated that “liberal Catholicism is an exhausted project” which “is now parasitical” and “unable to pass on the faith in its integrity.” Describing the methodology of liberal Catholicism, Cardinal George said: “Using sociology of knowledge and the hermeneutics of suspicion, modern liberals interpret dogmas which affront current cultural sensibilities as the creation of celibate males eager to keep a grasp on power rather than as the work of the Holy Spirit guiding the successors of the Apostles.”

In WMUC, Groome’s use of the hermeneutic of suspicion to deconstruct Catholicism is often more subliminal than explicit. However, in one instance he says:

“From experience we know well the human capacity for error...Should it surprise us, then, that we find the same – error and sin – throughout the history of the Christian people? Besides approaching Christian Story with *retrieval* and *creativity* in mind, therefore, we also need to approach it with a bit of *healthy suspicion*” (WMUC 28)

Writing in a 1978 edition of *Communio*, Fr Donald J Keefe, S.J. stated that “disputes over the ordination of women tend to become disputes over the nature of the Church, and

thus to range beyond the limits of the initial subject matter.”²⁹ The accuracy of this observation can be seen in the wide-ranging nature of Groome’s dissent from *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. In the process he deconstructs other points of Catholic doctrine on the ministerial priesthood either by contradicting their essential idea or by presenting them in tentative terms.

In WMUC, Groome’s application of a hermeneutic of retrieval to life in the early Church entails his making some fanciful historical claims that could not be true from a Catholic perspective. For example, he says that “It is clear that women carried on functions of ministry in the first Christian communities that would now be associated with the priesthood. Disciples and their communities of faith should be as fully inclusive” (WMUC 189-90). Groome does not specify what these particular functions were that women are alleged to have carried out in the early Church. We can however get an indication of what he means by referring to *Sharing Faith* where he is particularly concerned to reconstruct the history and nature of ministries in the early Church. He says:

“As gifts of the Holy Spirit, the many specific ministries in the New Testament church seems to have emerged from the existential situations and needs of the first Christian communities. As communities grew and became self-conscious about their mission, they came to two related realizations. One was that the ministerial tasks of word, of community building, of service to human need, and of communal worship required particular gifts and functions of service to fulfill them. Some people were needed to preside at worship, others to preach, to teach, and to bring the ‘good news’ to neighbouring villages” (*Sharing Faith*, 309).

The Council of Trent teaches that when Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper and commanded his apostles to celebrate it until his return, “he thereby constituted them priests of the New Covenant.”³⁰ In harmony with this, it added: “If anyone says that by the words ‘Do this in remembrance of me’ (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11: 24) Christ did not establish the apostles as priests or that He did not order (ordinasse) that they and other priests should offer His body and blood, let him be anathema.”³¹

If it is true as Groome asserts that “the many specific ministries” in the New Testament “seems to have emerged from the existential situations and needs of the first Christian communities,” then Catholic doctrine which holds that the ministerial priesthood is rooted in the words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper has to be called into question. Indeed *Groome* does exactly this. With the aid of a quotation from Kenan B Osborne which he cites favourably, he goes on in *Sharing Faith* to say:

“Of the traditional Catholic notion that the apostles were commissioned at the Last Supper to preside at Eucharist, Osborne writes, ‘In spite of the long tradition of this view, contemporary scholars find no basis for such an interpretation. In other words, Jesus did not ordain the apostles (disciples) at this final supper to be ‘priests,’ giving them thereby the power to celebrate the eucharist’” (*Sharing Faith*, p. 512, note 27).₂

²⁹ Fr Donald J Keefe, S.J., Sacramental Theology and the Ordination of Women, *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 5:3, 1978, p 235.

³⁰ Council of Trent, (DS 1740); cf. CCC, n. 1337

³¹ Council of Trent, Session 22, Canon 2, (DS 1752).

In *Sharing Faith*, Groome asserts that in the early Church women presided over the celebration of the Eucharist. After first making reference to Raymond Brown by saying - “Brown is proposing, and his thesis now seems generally accepted, that the first Christians did not see the confecting of the Eucharist as a personal and ontological power invested in one person who rendered Eucharist for the community” - he goes on to add:

“Instead, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the ‘sacramental powers’ resided in the whole community and in its enacting of the sacred symbols that made manifest God’s saving presence; the community chose certain people to preside at divine worship for the sake of ‘holy order.’ Usually, but not invariably, this designation fell to the community leader, not because of a sacral power, **but by her** or his function of leadership. Power to celebrate Eucharist did not lead to community leadership, but rather leadership led to presiding at Eucharist” (*Sharing Faith*, 310, emphasis added).

In his book *Covenantal Theology: The Eucharistic Order of History*, Fr Donald Keefe, S.J. says: “It should not be supposed that the issue of women’s orders is novel: it dates back to the Montanist heresy of the second and third centuries, and since then has surfaced intermittently in association with comparably gnostic and anti-historical interpretations of Christianity.”³² The Declaration *Inter Insigniores*, issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (SCDF) in 1976 and approved by Pope Paul VI, after stating in its introduction that “the Church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination,” went on to add: “The Catholic Church has never felt that priestly or episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women. A few heretical sects in the first centuries, especially Gnostic ones, entrusted the exercise of the priestly ministry to women: this innovation was immediately noted and condemned by the Fathers, who considered it as unacceptable in the Church” (n.1).

Vatican II teaches that “Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, committed to the Church,” where its authoritative interpretation “has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church” (*Dei Verbum*, 10). Hence, there can be no disfunction between Sacred Scripture and Tradition, i.e. between the New Testament and the definitive teaching of the Church. From its very beginning, the Church founded by Jesus Christ has been hierarchical, liturgical and sacramental. This reality is summed up in the Acts of the Apostles where in reference to the nascent Church we read: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

In his encyclical on the Eucharist titled *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* (EDE), Pope John Paul II, after first stating how the Church rejoices with “unique intensity” over Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist, went on to stress that this Sacramental presence of Christ in his Church has been one of its essential elements from its beginning. He said: “Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope.”³³

³² Fr. Donald Keefe, S.J., *Covenantal Theology: The Eucharistic Order of History* (revised edition), Presidio Press, California, 1996, p. 42

³³ *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, 1.

It is Catholic dogma that the ministerial priesthood, by which “the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time,”³⁴ is conferred through the sacrament Holy Orders which was instituted by Christ. Also, it is of the very nature of the Church, as it was established by Christ, that the power to preside over and consecrate the eucharist “is imparted only to the bishops and priests who are constituted its ministers by the reception of holy orders.”³⁵ Hence, from the very beginning, the Christian community “was deliberately structured hierarchically by its divine Founder,” in consequence of which “there have existed from its earliest days specific apostolic powers deriving from the sacrament of holy orders.”³⁶ Among these powers, which Christ entrusted exclusively to the apostles and their successors, “is the power of confecting the Eucharist.”³⁷

In EDE, Pope John Paul II was particularly concerned to reaffirm Catholic doctrine regarding the link between the celebration of the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood. He warned against tendencies to obscure “the necessity of the ministerial priesthood, grounded in apostolic succession” for any valid celebration of the Eucharistic mystery.³⁸ In stating that the Eucharist originates with Christ, Pope John Paul added that “it was entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and has been handed down to us by them and by their successors.”³⁹ He added that the ministerial priesthood “effectively came into being at the moment of the institution of the Eucharist.”⁴⁰

After stating in EDE that “succession to the Apostles in the pastoral mission necessarily entails the sacrament of Holy Orders, that is, the uninterrupted sequence, from the very beginning, of valid episcopal ordinations,”⁴¹ Pope John Paul II added that the “assembly” gathered together for the celebration of the Eucharist “absolutely requires the presence of an ordained priest as its president.”⁴² In saying this, Pope John Paul pointed out that “the community is by itself incapable of providing an ordained minister,” since “this minister is a gift which the assembly receives through episcopal succession going back to the Apostles.”⁴³ This truth is reflected also in the opening sentence of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* where Pope John Paul II stated that “Priestly ordination, which hands on the office entrusted by Christ to his Apostles of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful, has in the Catholic Church from the beginning always been reserved to men alone.” In light of all that has just been said, it is clear that Groome is in contradiction of Catholic Eucharistic doctrine when he asserts that in the early Church women presided over Eucharistic celebrations and that the power to do so was conferred on them by “the community.”

Pope St. Clement of Rome, who was the third successor of St. Peter, stated that the Apostles knew through Christ that they had to pass on their apostolic ministry. He said:

³⁴ CCC. n. 1536.

³⁵ SCDF, *Sacerdotium Ministeriale*, Section III, n.4

³⁶ *Sacerdotium Ministeriale*, Section III, 3

³⁷ Ibid. Section III, 4

³⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 10

³⁹ Ibid. n.27

⁴⁰ Ibid. n.31

⁴¹ Ibid. n.28

⁴² Ibid. n.29

⁴³ Ibid. n.29

“Our Apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of Bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect knowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned, and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry.”⁴⁴

Vatican II says: “In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church, the apostles left bishops, as their successors. They gave them their own teaching authority.”⁴⁵ The Apostles, adds Vatican II, “consigned, by will and testament, as it were, to their immediate collaborators the duty of confirming and finishing the work begun by themselves,” and to these men they gave “the order that, when they should have died, other approved men should take up their ministry.”⁴⁶ Finally, on the question of apostolic succession, Vatican II stated that bishops are “regarded as the transmitters of the apostolic line” in virtue of an “unbroken succession going back to the beginning.”⁴⁷

While the words “ordained” or “ministerial” priest do not appear in the New Testament, equivalent terms do such as *presbyteroi* (*presbyters*) which initially meant ‘elder ones’ or ‘elders.’ The Greek word *presbuteros* is rendered in Latin as *presbyter*, which translates into French as *pretre* and hence the English word *priest*. Also, those who received the power of the apostolic ministry from the Apostles were called “episkopoi” which primarily used to mean “overseers.” The English word “Bishop” comes from this Greek term “épiskopos.” In the New Testament it is not always easy to distinguish between “presbyters” (elders) and “bishops” (overseers).⁴⁸

We see how leaders were appointed in the early Church in the account of the institution of “the Seven” in Acts 6:1-6. The initiative is taken by “the Twelve” who “called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them” (Acts 6:1-2). It was the apostles who suggested to the ‘community’ how problems between the “Hellenists” and the “Hebrews” should be resolved. St. Luke says that “the whole assembly approved this proposal,” and after electing suitable candidates to carry out the assigned tasks, they then “presented these to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6: 5-6). Note how it is the apostles who confirm the “Seven” in their office; the “community” has no authority to make such an installation.

Elsewhere in the New Testament where the institution of ministers is referred to, there is no mention of a community role in the process. For example, as the Church took root in Antioch the apostles sent a representative named Barnabas (cf. Acts 11:22). After his conversion, St. Paul went with Barnabas to Jerusalem as the “ecclesial centre of authority to confer with the apostles.”⁴⁹ From Antioch, Barnabas and Paul were sent out on an apostolic mission after the apostles had “laid hands on them” (Acts 13:2-3).

As the early Church grew, the apostles appointed presbyters’ whose responsibilities are defined in detail by St. Paul in his pastoral letters to Titus and Timothy whom he appointed as heads of their respective Christian communities (cf. Acts 24:23; Tit 1:5; 1 Tim

⁴⁴ Pope St. Clement of Rome, *Letter to The Corinthians*, cited in William A. Jurgens’ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1970, Vol. 1, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, n. 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 18.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 18.

⁴⁸ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *General Audience*, March 3, 1993

⁴⁹ Pope John Paul II, *General Audience*, July 8, 1992

5:17).⁵⁰ After the Council of Jerusalem, the apostles sent to Antioch along with Paul and Barnabas two men named Silas and Judas who were considered “leaders among the brothers” (Acts 15: 22).

The principle of apostolic succession at work in the New Testament Church is evident in St. Paul’s farewell discourse to the presbyters of Miletus. Here we read: “Now be solicitous for yourselves and for the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as bishops to pasture the Church of God, which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Cardinal Ratzinger noted how this text illustrates “that the Holy Spirit places men in this office: it is not a delegation on the part of the community...but the gift of the Lord, who gives personally what only he can give.”⁵¹

The task assigned to those who succeeded the apostles in their apostolic ministry is threefold: i) to proclaim the Gospel (cf. 2 Tim 1:8, 13; 2:2; 4:2, 5; 1 Tim 4:11, 13; 6:20); ii) to exercise direction of liturgical service (cf. 1 Tim 3:9; 4:13); iii) to lead and guide the community (cf. 1 Tim 3:15; 5:17-19; 1 Pet 5:1-4). This office is perpetuated down to our own day where the bishops, as legitimate successors of the apostles, are empowered to teach, sanctify and govern those placed under their pastoral care.⁵²

The bestowal of the apostolic ministry was effected through a special sacramental rite involving the laying on of hands through which the special gift of the Holy Spirit was transmitted. In this regard, St. Paul said to his disciple Timothy: “I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands” (2 Tim 1:6), and “If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim 3:1).⁵³ To Titus he said: “This is why I left you in Crete, that you amend what was defective, and appoint presbyters in every town, as I directed you,” adding that “a bishop, as God’s steward, must be blameless...he must hold fast to the sure doctrine and also refute those who contradict it” (Titus 1:5-9).

During his time as secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Fr Albert Vanhoye S.J. (now Cardinal), in referring to the practice in the apostolic community of restricting the ministerial priesthood to men said:

“When Judas had to be replaced after the Ascension, Luke states that Peter expressly limited the choice to “men” (*andres* in Greek: Acts 1:21) who had accompanied Jesus during his public life, although some women at the time had stronger claims since they had been more faithful to Jesus than his male disciples, even on Calvary and at the tomb (Mt 27: 55, 61; par.).⁵⁴

Fr. Vanhoye stated that when the community’s growth caused problems requiring a more diversified organisation of the apostles’ ministry, the “Twelve” invited the community of the disciples to “select for the new task ‘seven men (*andres*)’ (Acts 6:3), even though the problems concerned female groups, those of the widows (Acts 6:1).”⁵⁵ Fr. Vanhoye continued:

⁵⁰ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *General Audience*, July 8, 1992

⁵¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Called to Communion*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1996, p. 122.

⁵² Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, nn, 6, 11, 12

⁵³ Cf. CCC, n. 1590. The Scripture quotations given here, which have been taken from the CCC, are adapted from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, 1989.

⁵⁴ Father Albert Vanhoye, *L’Osservatore Romano*, March 3, 1993

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

“In this account the laying on of hands is mentioned (Acts 6:6) as the ordination gesture for a ministry. It meant - and still means - the bestowal of a spiritual power conferred by God. In the New Testament women never receive this laying on of hands. The cases mentioned concern only men: Barnabas and Saul in Acts 13:3, when at the Holy Spirit’s command they were sent on an apostolic mission, and Timothy, in 1 Tim 4:14 and 2 Tim 1:6, texts which speak of a “gift of grace (*charisma*)” conferred by this rite. Similarly the texts that give directions for choosing presbyters (Tit 1:5-6) and the *episkopos* (1 Tim 3:2), state clearly that it is a question of men (*andres*).”⁵⁶

Groome treats with scant regard the New Testament data given above illustrating the link between bestowal of the apostolic ministry and the laying on of hands. Speaking of it in a dismissive way he says:

“In the first century, however, laying on of hands for ministerial commissioning was not practiced in all the communities, and where it was used, it designated people for a variety of ministries (not only sacerdotal) or was simply a symbol of blessing. This early practice then, is too fluid to be taken as synonymous with what we mean today by ‘ordination’” (*Sharing Faith* 311).

6. Promoting False Ecumenism

In WMUC, Groome compares very unfavourably a Holy Mass he attended at St Peter’s Basilica in Rome with a Protestant liturgical celebration he attended in Scotland. Describing his experience at a Papal Mass in St. Peter’s he says:

“I was present for a papal mass on that Epiphany morning, and the liturgy reflected the same exclusivity – no women or people of color in the sanctuary, only white men and none of them looked poor. Now I found myself wondering if Jesus, who founded a radical inclusive community of disciples – catholic at its best – would recognize any of this as his legacy” (WMUC 239)

In describing his experience in attending a communion service at the Abbey of Iona in Scotland he says:

“The storm howled through the rafters of the great stone Abbey of Iona as if gathering us from the four winds. We were a rainbow community, with all the hues of humanity, assembled around the high altar to share ‘the bread of life.’ Although our diversity was dramatic, more amazing still was the local inclusivity. For old neighboring enemies – English Anglicans, Scottish Calvinists, Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Catholics – were assembled here to celebrate as one Body of Christ. I’d never imagined a gathering like it this side of eternity, if then...As the sacred drama unfolded on this Sabbath morning, the presider invited us ‘to come to the table of company with Jesus...the table of sharing with the poor of the world...the table of communion with the earth in which Christ became incarnate.’ What Christian could refuse such an invitation? It felt as if the whole world came forward as one grand communion, the living and dead, the saints and sinners...” (WMUC 107-108)

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The Iona Abbey Worship Book prepared by the Iona Community is available on the internet. In a section headed “Concerning the Celebration of Communion” we read:

“We celebrate Communion twice weekly in the Abbey Church, on Sunday morning and on the evening before the guests leave. Because we are an ecumenical community, we bring a wide range of traditions to this celebration. Some call it the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion, while others refer to it as the Eucharist, the Mass or the Breaking of Bread. We believe that the invitation to this sacrament comes not from any Church or individual, but from Jesus. We therefore invite in Christ’s name all who hear his invitation and who wish to respond by receiving the bread and the wine.”

The Iona Community was begun as an ecumenical experiment in 1938 by a Church of Scotland minister. Since 2002 it has been directed by Rev Kathy Galloway who is an ordained Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) minister. At the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2007, Rev Galloway spoke in favour of same-sex marriages. She said "About 10 per cent of our membership are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgender" (*The Scotsman*, May 23, 2007).

In WMUC, Groome says “The ecumenical dialogue encouraged by Vatican II also helped Catholics to realize how much they hold in common with other Christians, and that our differences are more of emphasis than of kind” (WMUC 32). On questions relating to the Eucharist, Marian dogmas, apostolic succession, holy orders, papal infallibility etc, differences between Catholics and Protestants are definitely ones of “substance” or “kind” rather than of “emphasis”.

Continuing with his obfuscation of the nature of the doctrinal differences between Catholics and other Christians, Groome goes on in WMUC to say: “Remember, too, that there are three major expressions of Catholic Christianity, each with its own distinctiveness – Anglicanism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Roman Communion” (WMUC 33). Later in the book he adds: “...Vatican II avoided the term *Roman Catholic*, wanting to honor the *catholicity* of the whole Church of Christ – Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic [here Groome inserts a footnote referring to *Lumen gentium* 8 but does not quote from it]” (WMUC 242).

Groome goes on in WMUC to cite St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107) as saying: “Where Jesus is, there is the catholic Church” (WMUC 245, citing *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, ch. 8, v.2). In every translation of the *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* that I have looked up, where St Ignatius says “Where Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church,” the word ‘Catholic’ is spelt with a capital ‘C’ and not with a lower case ‘c’ as Groome uses in his quotation above. Groome has a particular reason for doing this which is related to his confused notions about the nature of the presence in the world of the Church founded by Christ.

Continuing his discussion in WMUC about St. Ignatius’ remark that “Where Christ is, there is the Catholic Church,” Groome goes on to add:

“The surrounding text indicates Ignatius’s meaning, namely, that when the spirit of Jesus prevails in a community, it is complete, the ‘whole’ Church is present. In other words, each Christian community constitutes its own unique expression of Church, and the completeness of the local community is an instance of Christian *catholicity*” (WMUC, 245-46)

In the passage quoted above, Groome has failed to include a key element regarding the nature of the Church which St. Ignatius referred to in chapter 2 of his *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*. Where St. Ignatius speaks of Jesus Christ being present wherever a Christian community is gathered, he has in mind a community gathered around its bishop, or someone the bishop has appointed. Below I reproduce all of chapter 8 of the *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*:

“[1] You must all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery as you would the Apostles. Reverence the deacons as you would the command of God. Let no one do anything of concern to the Church without the bishop. Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. [2]Wherever the bishop appears, let the people be there; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. Nor is it permitted without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate the agape; but whatever he approve, this too is pleasing to God; so that whatever is done will be secure and valid.”⁵⁷

The Letter to the Smyrnaeans was probably composed no later than 107 A.D. Its use of the term “Catholic Church” is very significant since St. Ignatius was the third bishop of Antioch, which is where the disciples of Jesus “were first called Christians” (Acts 11:26). The word ‘Catholic’ means ‘universal’. In using the term ‘Catholic Church,’ St. Ignatius was indicating that the Church founded by Christ existed as a unified entity throughout the world, in contradistinction to heretical sects all claiming to be Christian which had sprung up in various places.

Continuing to present an erroneous understanding of what the Catholic Church believes about herself, Groome goes on in WMUC to say:

“The Reformers associated *catholic* with the hegemony they were rejecting. By contrast, Western and Eastern Catholics began to claim that they were fully *catholic* and that this proved their credential as the Church of Jesus Christ. Vatican II avoided such polemics and proposed *catholicity* as a challenge for the whole Christian Church. **Catholic is not an accomplishment of any denomination but a vision for what Christians – Protestant and Catholic – should become together.** The *Catechism* echoed this sentiment, saying that the Church is ever ‘called to realize’ its catholicity” (WMUC 247, emphasis added)

Contrary to Groome’s erroneous assertion, the CCC never “echoed” the “sentiment” that “**Catholic is not an accomplishment of any denomination but a vision for what Christians – Protestant and Catholic – should become together.**” The Catholic Church is comprised of various rites which the CCC lists as Latin, Byzantine, Alexandrian, Syriac, Armenian, Maronite and Chaldean (CCC, 1203). All these rites have their own spiritual heritage and liturgical practices, but all are in communion with the Pope and governed by him as the Vicar of Christ and Successor of St. Peter.

The Catholic Church was universal from its very beginning. This, said Cardinal Ratzinger, “is obviously the message Saint Luke wants to convey in his account of Pentecost, where he tells us that even before there were congregations, there was already the Catholic

⁵⁷ St Ignatius of Antioch, *letter to the Smyrnaeans*, ch. 8, in William A. Jurgens’ *Faith of the Early Fathers*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1970, Volume 1, p. 25

Church, the Church of all peoples.”⁵⁸ The Church that was manifested to the world at Pentecost is an ongoing historical subject existing fully only in the Catholic Church. This Church ever remains “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” due to the fact that “Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops” (CCC, 869). Vatican II’s *Decree on Ecumenism* stated that it is through the Catholic Church alone that “the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained” (n.3), adding that it “has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all means of grace” (n. 4). This should not give rise in Catholics to triumphalism: “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Lk 12:48).

A key passage in the documents of Vatican II dealing with the question of the relationship between the Church founded by Jesus and the Catholic Church is *Lumen gentium* 8. As noted earlier, Groome makes a footnote reference to this passage on page 242 of WMUC but he does not quote from it. It says:

“This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after His Resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd (Jn. 21, 17), and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority (cf. Mt. 28, 18, f.), which He erected for all ages as ‘the pillar and mainstay of the truth’ (1 Tim. 3, 15). This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, **subsists in the Catholic Church**, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure.” (*Lumen gentium* 8, Vatican translation, emphasis added).

Many erroneous interpretations have been applied to the term “subsists in the Catholic Church,” including one which posits that the Church founded by Christ is concretely realized in Protestant communities. Faced with these erroneous interpretations, the CDF in 1985 issued a *Notification* which said: “[T]he Council chose the word *subsistit* precisely in order to make it clear that there exists a single 'subsistence' of the true Church, while outside her visible structure only *elementa ecclesiae* exist, which — as elements of the Church — tend and lead toward the Catholic Church.”⁵⁹ To clarify the question further,” the CDF in 2000 issued a document titled *Dominus Iesus* which was signed by Cardinal Ratzinger and approved by Pope John Paul II. It stated that “the Catholic faithful *are required to profess* that there is an historical continuity — rooted in the apostolic succession — between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church,” adding that when Vatican II stated that the Church founded by Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church,” it meant “that the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church” (n. 16). Cardinal Ratzinger explained the term very clearly when he said:

“*Subsisting* is a special case of *being*. It is being in the form of a subject standing on its own. This is the issue here. The Council wants to tell us that the Church of Jesus Christ as

⁵⁸ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1992, p. 193.

⁵⁹ CDF, *Notification on the book "Church: Charism and Power"* by Fr. Leonardo Boff, AAS 77 (1985), 758-759.

a concrete subject in the present world can be encountered in the Catholic Church. This can occur only once and the notion that *subsistit* could be multiplied misses precisely what was intended. With the word *subsistit*, the Council wanted to express the singularity and non-multiplicability of the Catholic Church”⁶⁰

In 2007, the CDF issued another document approved by Pope Benedict XVI explaining what *Lumen gentium* 8 meant by the words “subsists in the Catholic Church.” Titled *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church*, it reaffirmed that “subsists in” indicates “the perduring, historical continuity and the permanence of all the elements instituted by Christ in the Catholic Church, in which the Church of Christ is concretely found on this earth.” Quoting *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, it added: “This Church, constituted and organised in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him.”

From what has been said above, it is clear that the Catholic Church cannot lose any of its essential marks, those being “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.” These marks belong to the Catholic Church’s integrity as it was established by Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in her and guiding her, they will remain as a consequence of her indefectibility until the end of time. Hence, Groome is in serious error when he asserts that “*Catholic* is not an accomplishment of any denomination but a vision for what Christians – Protestant and Catholic – should become together” (WMUC, 247).

In WMUC, Groome states that “Pope John Paul II, honoring the five hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth (1983), publicly thanked the great Reformer for helping the whole Church to reclaim the *primacy of faith, the centrality of the Bible, and the priesthood of all believers*” (WMUC, p. 11, italics in original). In making this statement, Groome failed to give any reference that would allow his readers to check for themselves what Pope John Paul II might have actually said about Luther. Consequently, I assume that Groome is referring either to Pope John Paul II’s letter to Cardinal Willebrands regarding the 500th anniversary of the birth of Luther or to his discourse during a Liturgy of the Word at the church of the Evangelical Lutheran community in Rome on 11 December 1983. In both cases, while calling for the need to forge a genuine ecumenical spirit, Pope John Paul II said nothing remotely like what Groome claims he said.⁶¹

7. Inclusive Language and the Corruption of Christian Prayer

For several decades Groome has been a leading protagonist for the cause of radically altering the language used by the Catholic Church in its prayer and worship. While his ideas in this area have appeared in most of his books, it received its most detailed treatment however in his 1995 book titled *Language for a Catholic Church* (Revised edition, original edition published in 1991). His stated objective in writing the book was to help rid the

⁶⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, “L’eccelesologia della Costituzione *Lumen Gentium*” in R. Fisichella (ed.), *Il Concilio Vaticano II: Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo* (Cinisello B. 2000), 79. Cited in *Christ’s Church Subsists in the Catholic church*, Fernando Oscariz, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 21 December 2005.

⁶¹ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Message to Cardinal Willebrands for 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth*, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 14 November 1983; *Ecumenical Meeting with Rome’s Lutheran Community*, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 9 January 1984.

Catholic Church of the “sin” of “sexism” and he asserted that “Catholic congregations sin more boldly with exclusive language than do mainline Protestant ones.”⁶²

Referring in *Language for a Catholic Church* to Jesus’ revelation of God the Father, Groome says: “A particular issue for Christians is the image of God as Father, clearly the favored image of Jesus.”⁶³ He says it is “evident that Jesus’ intent was to address God as *like* a loving, trustworthy, kind, and gentle parent.”⁶⁴ He adds: “For us the crucial issue is whether or not we can still capture all that Jesus meant then by ‘Father’ by simply repeating the term and without using other terms that help to complete what Jesus intended.”⁶⁵ After calling on religious educators to “help end sexism in the Church,” he states: “An issue of particular concern for catechists is the strong tradition in primary catechesis of referring to God exclusively as ‘Father’. (This is often occasioned by the teaching of the Lord’s Prayer, the Sign of the Cross, and the ‘Glory Be’)...if ‘Father’ is the only image used of God, and especially in early catechesis, it may no longer teach what Jesus intended to teach with this analogy”⁶⁶ Suggesting a solution to this perceived pedagogical problem, he says:

“One possible solution (which for this author has seemed successful with younger children) is to interchange the terms ‘father,’ ‘mother,’ and ‘loving parent’ for God. Then, when teaching a traditional prayer like the ‘Our Father,’ teachers can take care to explain in the catechesis which follows that Jesus intends us to approach God as a trustworthy, forgiving and loving parent.”⁶⁷

Suggesting how we might use inclusivist language to address the Persons of the Holy Trinity, Groome says:

“Terms like ‘Creator, Savior and Sanctifier’ seem worthy candidates, at least when speaking of the Trinity’s relationship to us...A formula that might more adequately represent our faith in the triune relationship within the Godhead...is suggested by an inclusive language breviary text which prays ‘Glory to you, Source of all Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit’.”⁶⁸

Groome’s difficulty with referring to God as Father extends into the Mass. After saying that “the present ‘typical edition’ of the Roman Missal was composed before consciousness about inclusive language,” Groome goes on to add:

“I’m convinced that: *All presiders and ministers at mass or communion services can address and lead the assembly in prayers that are gender-inclusive for both God and ourselves. Likewise, people can pray their common prayers and responses inclusively. No presider need address God only as ‘Father’ in the collects.*”⁶⁹

⁶² Thomas H. Groome, *Language for a Catholic Faith* (Revised and expanded edition), Sheed & Ward, Kansas City 1995, p. v.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 25.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 26.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 26.

⁶⁶ Ibid. pp. 38-39.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 39.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 53.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 63 (emphasis in original).

Suggesting how the community can be conditioned to adopt inclusive language, Groome says: “Engaging people to pray and participate at liturgy with inclusive language will clearly take some educational efforts and perhaps printed suggestions for the congregation. For example, the presider can readily say, ‘Pray my sisters and brothers, that my sacrifice and yours will be acceptable to God our loving parent.’”⁷⁰ The offending words in the Roman Missal which Groome here wants to expunge are: “may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.”

In WMUC, Groome again takes up the question of adopting inclusive language when he says:

“Once, having seen Jesus in prayer, the disciples requested, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’ Jesus taught them first to address God like a Loving Parent [footnote inserted here], then to reverence God’s holy name, to pray that God’s reign might be realized as God’s loving will on earth as in heaven...” (WMUC 186).

The footnote inserted by Groome after the expression ‘Loving Parent’ in the passage quoted above reads:

“The texts of the New Testament make it clear that Jesus addressed God as ‘Father.’ It is also evident, however, that Jesus’ sense of father included many characteristics that, even today, would be associated culturally with a mother. It is certainly true that by referring to God as father Jesus never intended to legitimate patriarchy or male superiority” (WMUC 304).

At the centre of the Gospel message is Jesus’ communion with the Father and his awareness of himself as the eternal Son. In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI refers to this when he says: “This is also the point around which I will construct my own book. It sees Jesus in light of his communion with the Father, which is the true centre of his personality; without it, we cannot understand him at all, and it is from this centre that he makes himself present to us still today.”⁷¹ (p. xiv).

Jesus speaks of his ‘Father’ as a distinct divine Person, someone to whom he prays, and whose will shapes his words and actions. At the same time, he speaks of a unity between himself and the Father: “I and the Father are one” (Jn 10:30). Jesus’ claim to divine Sonship led to the accusation against him of blasphemy and a call for him to be put to death: “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (Jn 5:18).

Jesus also speaks of a third divine Person whom he will send: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (Jn 14: 25-27). Indeed, the revelation of the Blessed Trinity appears early in the Gospels: “The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (Lk 1: 34-36).

The mystery of three divine Persons in one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – “is the central mystery of Christian faith and life...the mystery of God in Himself...the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them” (CCC, 234). The terms Father,

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 64.

⁷¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Bloomsbury, London, 2007, p.xiv

Son and Holy Spirit describe the eternal relations of the three divine Persons in the Holy Trinity. They are not biological or gender categories but theological. They are not arbitrary terms but rather are revealed by God himself. In the relationship of Jesus to the Father, of the Father to the Son, and the love that binds them together in the Person of the Holy Spirit, there is revealed the ultimate origin of all life and of all that is good. To come to know “the Father” is to come to know something of the very depths of God: “Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied” (Jn 14:8).

In *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II stated that God chose to reveal to us “the purpose of his will,” which is that “through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature.”⁷² Referring in *Fides et Ratio* to the connection between faith and knowledge, Pope John Paul said that in the free act of faith, the human person “reaches the certainty of truth and chooses to live in that truth.”⁷³ He added however that “the knowledge proper to faith does not destroy the mystery; it only reveals it the more, showing how necessary it is for people’s lives.”⁷⁴

While acknowledging that “human language may be conditioned by history and constricted in other ways,” Pope John Paul II nevertheless stated in *Fides et Ratio* that “the human being can still express truths which surpass the phenomenon of language.”⁷⁵ He said the “word of God refers constantly to things which transcend human experience and even human thought,” but that these mysteries “could not be revealed,” nor could theology render them “in some way intelligible,” were “human knowledge limited strictly to the world of sense experience.”⁷⁶ Consequently, added Pope John Paul II, “faith clearly presupposes that human language is capable of expressing divine and transcendent reality in a universal way - analogically, it is true, but no less meaningfully for that.”⁷⁷ Hence, what we have in the texts of Sacred Scripture is “human language” that “embodies the language of God, who communicates his own truth with that wonderful ‘condescension’ which mirrors the logic of the Incarnation.”⁷⁸ The key truth of Christian faith that is revealed in the language of Revelation is, as Pope John Paul II expressed it, that through grace Christians are enabled “to share in the mystery of Christ” who “offers them a true and coherent knowledge of the Triune God.”⁷⁹

One of the great spiritual writers of the last century was the Irish Benedictine Abbott Blessed Columba Marmion (1858-1923) who was beatified by Pope John Paul II on September 3, 2000. Blessed Marmion stated that Christ brings us truth “from the bosom of the Father where He ever dwells,” and that “he reveals to us divine secrets which we possess by faith.”⁸⁰ In light of this, we can say that Groome’s assertion in WMUC that Jesus in teaching his disciples to pray the Our Father was thereby teaching them “first to address God like a Loving Parent” is at minimum a short-changing reductionism.

⁷² Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, n. 7

⁷³ Ibid. n. 13.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. n. 95.

⁷⁶ Ibid. n. 83.

⁷⁷ Ibid. n. 84.

⁷⁸ Ibid. n. 94.

⁷⁹ Ibid. n. 33.

⁸⁰ Blessed Columba Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, translated from the French by Mother M. St. Thomas, Sands & Co. London, 1939, p. 9

Before all else, the Our Father is a Trinitarian prayer. When we say “Our Father,” we are personally addressing the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are able to do so because through Baptism we become “a member of Christ and a co-heir with him,” we are granted a share in the divine nature whereby we become an adopted son of God: “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman...so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:5-6; cf. 1 Cor 6:15; 12:27; Rom 8:17). As a consequence of this participation in Christ’s condition as Son, we are able to address the First Person of the Holy Trinity as ‘Father’: “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6).

After saying in *Jesus of Nazareth* that “Luke places the Our Father in the context of Jesus own praying,” Pope Benedict XVI adds: “Jesus thereby involves us in his own prayer, he leads us into the interior dialogue of triune love...This also means, however, that the words of the Our Father are signposts to interior prayer, they provide a basic direction for our being, and they aim to configure us to the image of the Son.”⁸¹ By empowering us to address the Father personally, the Holy Spirit forms us according to the mind of Christ: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

In reference to the Trinitarian meaning of the Our Father, the CCC says: “We can invoke God as ‘Father’ because the Son of God made man has revealed him to us. In this Son, through Baptism, we are incorporated and adopted as sons of God” (CCC, 2798). Consequently, “When we say ‘Our’ Father, we are invoking the new covenant in Jesus Christ, communion with the Holy Trinity, and the divine love which spreads through the Church to encompass the world” (CCC 2801).

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI says: “When we pray the Our Father, we are praying to God in words given by God, as St Cyprian says. And he adds that when we pray the Our Father, Jesus’ promise regarding the true worshippers, those who adore the Father ‘in spirit and in truth’ (Jn 4:23), is fulfilled in us. Christ, who is the truth, has given us these words, and in them he gives us the Holy Spirit.”⁸²

Encouraging catechists and religious education teachers to use distorted forms of prayers addressed to the Holy Trinity is a profound evil for it impedes the growth of the prayer of Jesus in the minds and hearts of the faithful. Further to this, it gives rise to an inaccurate understanding of the divine nature of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, as well as of their unity and their proper relations.⁸³

In speaking of “central themes for the hearts of Christian religious educators,” Groome in *Sharing Faith* goes on to list some as: “the human person, God the **Father/Mother**, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, one’s attitude toward Christian Story/Vision...” (*Sharing Faith*, 427, emphasis added). After the term ‘God the Father/Mother’ in this passage, Groome inserts the following footnote: “This is an awkward construct and perhaps a temporary one until Christians **can solve the problem of how to name the First Person of the Blessed Trinity**, while honoring our Trinitarian doctrines, now that we are well advised to avoid exclusively male imagery for God (see my *Language for a ‘Catholic’ Church*, chapter 3)” (*Sharing Faith*, pp. 533-34, emphasis added). Elsewhere in *Sharing Faith*,

⁸¹ Pope Benedict XVI, op.cit., 132

⁸² Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, op.cit., p. 131

⁸³ On this point of tinkering with the revealed proper names of the Holy Trinity, see statement by Archbishop Hughes of New Orleans titled *The State of High School Catechetical Texts*, Origins, Vol.33: No. 24, November 20, 2003.

Groome says: “One traditional (since Augustine) imaging of the inner life of the Trinity poses the Holy Spirit as the Love between God the **Father/Mother** and the Second Person, revealed in Jesus Christ” (pp. 442-43, emphasis added).⁸⁴

I wonder what “traditional imaging” Groome has in mind when he refers to the First Person of the Blessed Trinity as “God the Father/Mother”? Following the gnostics, the Arians of the fourth century challenged the traditional Christian doxology for God - “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” They too wanted to change the name for the First Person of the Blessed Trinity. One of St. Athanasius’ great contributions to the defeat of Arianism was his defense of the traditional names of the Trinity.

In *Jesus of Nazareth*, Pope Benedict XVI points out that “God is never named or addressed as mother, either in the Old or in the New Testament.”⁸⁵ Beyond this, there is another profound reason why we cannot refer to the First Person of the Blessed Trinity as “God the Father/Mother.” The Catholic Church teaches as a matter of dogma that the one who was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the same Person who has existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity. The Council of Ephesus dogmatically defined as a truth of Catholic Faith that “Mary is the Mother of God.” Jesus has one Mother: Mary the *Theotokos* (God Bearer).

One last point on the Mother of God. In WMUC, Groome gratuitously insults Catholics when he casts the following slur on their love for Mary and their devotion to her. He says:

“Over history, the more the Church preached a punitive and patriarchal image of God, the more devotion to Mary increased among the common people. She reminded them of the mother-love of God. And Mary’s own image of God now inspires the struggles for liberation. For her, God ‘puts down the mighty from their thrones and raises up the lowly, fills the hungry with goods things and sends the rich away empty-handed’ (Luke 1:52-53)” (WMUC, 130).

In the passage above, Groome has employed his favoured radical feminist narrative to give a distorted account of how the Church’s doctrine regarding Mary’s place in salvation history shaped the Marian devotion of the faithful. Love for Mary and devotion to her springs spontaneously from the hearts of the faithful, provided it is not smothered by defective catechesis. It is but the flowering of that love which Jesus enjoined on us from the Cross: “When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother! And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home” (Jn 19:26-27).

Several Catholic religious education curricula in Australia explicitly based on Groome’s Shared Christian Praxis methodology have promoted his ideas for inclusive language. The first such curriculum, one that inspired many of the others, was the 1991 Parramatta Diocesan Religious Education Curriculum titled *Sharing Our Story*. Sr. Patricia Malone and Maurice Ryan have revealed that an ex-student of Groome’s “was a key influence on the development of the first draft of *Sharing Our Story*.”⁸⁶ When it came to teaching about the Holy Trinity, the topic was introduced as follows:

⁸⁴ Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith*, op. cit. p. 442-43 (emphasis added).

⁸⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, op.cit., p. 139

⁸⁶ Sr. Patricia Malone and Maurice Ryan, *Sound The Trumpet: Planning and Teaching Religion in the Catholic Primary School*, Social Science Press, Wentworth Falls (NSW) 1994, p. 54. As was pointed out in Chapter 1,

There is one God.
 There are three persons in the one God:
 Father - Creator
 Son - Redeemer
 Spirit - Sanctifier.⁸⁷

Elsewhere in the 1991 *Sharing Our Story* curriculum, in speaking about the Persons of the Holy Trinity, it stated “God is revealed as Creator, Son and Spirit.”⁸⁸ On many occasions when *Sharing Our Story* used quotations from Sacred Scripture and Magisterial documents which contained male pronouns to refer to God or which referred to the Church as “she”, it inserted the word “sic” at the end of the quotation.⁸⁹ For example, in the introduction to the Year 5 component 1 John 1:3 was quoted as follows: “We are declaring to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may share our life. Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (sic).”⁹⁰ In A. J. Bliss’ *Dictionary of Foreign Words and Phrases in Current English*, the word “sic” is explained as follows: “sic. (Lat. ‘thus’) ‘thus in the original,’ a parenthetic insertion in a printed quotation and citation, indicating that an error or anomalous form is exactly reproduced from the original. Sometimes used as a discreet method of calling attention to the ignorance or carelessness of an earlier writer.”⁹¹

In the early 2000s, the Archdiocese of Canberra-Goulburn adopted a new religious education curriculum titled *Treasures New and Old*. Modeled on Parramatta’s *Sharing Our Story*, it too prescribed Groome’s *Shared Christian Praxis* as its overarching methodology. A problem with its Core Document and Syllabus statement was that the only time the Holy Trinity was designated as Father, Son and Holy Spirit was in an appendix to the Core document. In every other instance, from K-12, wherever the Holy Trinity is referred to, it is always as: “God: Communion of Love, Source of all Being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit.” This de-facto suppression of references to “the Father” when talking about the first Person of the Holy Trinity is not surprising given the influence of Groome’s ideas on this curriculum.

Ideas have consequences, bad theology and contradictions of Church teaching leads to bad outcomes for both individuals and communities. For several years going back to at least 2004, people have been baptized in at least one Catholic parish in Brisbane (Australia) without use of the words ‘Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’. Instead, two so-called ‘inclusive’ terms were used: “I baptise you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier” and “I baptise you in the name of the Creator and of the Liberator and of the Sustainer.” On February 1, 2008, the CDF intervened and issued a direction approved by Pope Benedict XVI to the effect that all baptisms conferred with the inclusive terminology were invalid and that any subsequent sacraments received after such invalid baptisms were also invalid. It ruled also that all such persons would have to be unconditionally re-baptised with the correct and traditional formula.

Malone is Associate Professor of Religious Education at the Australian Catholic University in Sydney while Ryan lectures in Religious Education at the ACU in Brisbane.

⁸⁷ *Sharing Our Story*, Curriculum Document, Catholic Diocese of Parramatta, Rotary Offset Press, Sydney 1991, p. 198.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 221.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Sharing Our Story*, pp. 39, 89, 120, 126, 171, 172, 175.

⁹⁰ *Sharing Our Story*, p. 129.

⁹¹ A.J. Bliss, *Dictionary of Foreign Words and Phrases in Current English*, p. 323.

In an official commentary on the CDF ruling regarding invalid baptismal formulas published in the March 1, 2008 edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*, Cardinal Urbano Navarette, S.J. wrote that a person invalidly baptized with the rejected formulas is incapable of receiving any other sacrament, including marriage. In another official commentary, also appearing in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Monsignor Antonio Miralles, a consultant to the CDF, explained that the unorthodox baptismal formulas misrepresents the nature of the Holy Trinity by attributing exclusive roles to each of the three divine Persons: “All three divine Persons are Creator, Sanctifier, Liberator, Sustainer” he said, adding that “even redemption is the work of the Trinity as its first cause.” Mgr Miralles stated that the deficient formulas were devised by proponents of “so-called feminist theology as a way to avoid saying Father and Son, words considered male chauvinist.” He added that those who administered baptism with such formulas “defraud the one who receives such action.”

To convolute the Trinitarian formula given to us by Our Lord Jesus Christ to name and address the Persons of the Holy Trinity is to promote a different view of God in a matter that pertains to revelation. C.S. Lewis pointed to this corruption of Christian revelation when he said:

“Suppose the reformer stops saying a good woman may be like God and begins saying that God is like a good woman. Suppose he says that we might just as well pray to ‘Our Mother which art in Heaven’ as to ‘Our Father’. Suppose he suggests that the Incarnation might just as well have taken a female as a male form, and the Second Person of the Trinity be as well called the Daughter as the Son...Now it is surely the case that if all these supposals were ever carried into effect we should be embarked on a different religion.”⁹²

With regard to the Sacrament of Baptism, to convolute the Trinitarian formula with a substitute term is to say ‘NO’ to the direct command given to us by Our Lord: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). Similarly, to corrupt the understanding of children and others who are being catechized by teaching them to address the Persons of the Holy Trinity in terms other than the revealed ones is to do them great spiritual harm.

St. Hilary of Poitiers cautioned that we “must not measure the Divine nature by the limitations of [our] own, but gauge God’s assertions concerning Himself by the scale of His own glorious self-revelation.” St. Hilary added that “the best student is he who does not read his thoughts into the book, but lets it reveal its own; who draws from it its sense, and does not import his own into it, nor force upon its words a meaning which he had determined was the right one before he opened its pages.” Finally, St. Hilary said: “Since then we are to discourse of the things of God, let us assume that God has full knowledge of Himself, and bow with humble reverence to His Words. For He Whom we can only know through his own utterances is the fitting witness concerning Himself.”⁹³

⁹² C.S. Lewis, ‘*Priestesses in the Church?*’, *Time and Tide* XXIX, August 14, 1948.

⁹³ St Hilary of Poitiers, *On The Trinity*, 3.1 and 1. 18, cited by Roland Mushat Frye in *Politics and Prayer: Feminist Language and the Worship of God*, edited by Helen Hull Hitchcock, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1992, p. 227.

8. Neutering Christ in Order to Diminish the Priesthood

In the first edition of *Language for a Catholic Church* which was published in 1991, Groome stated that Christ's maleness was merely one of "the 'accidents' of his life."⁹⁴ Continuing with this absurd notion in the 1995 edition of the book, he stated that it "is helpful to reduce reliance on gender-based pronouns" when referring to Jesus in order "to emphasize his humanity rather than his maleness."⁹⁵ He added:

"As for all human beings, Jesus had to be one gender or the other, and the Gospels give no indication of any particular significance in his being male. Better, then, to treat this as one aspect of the 'scandal of particularity' that was his life: as a person, Jesus was a man, a Jew, a carpenter, from Nazareth, etc. It is through his divinity and humanity, not particularly his maleness, that Jesus is our Saviour and Liberator."⁹⁶ (ibid, pp. 26-27).

Groome's statement above illustrates how far he has moved away from the Catholic tradition which depends entirely upon the nuptial One Flesh union of Christ the Bridegroom with his Bridal Church, the New Covenant. This tradition is at once liturgical, doctrinal and moral. The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the Eternal Father, assumed a human nature in the male form. In consequence of this, "Christ himself was and remains a man" (*Inter insigniores*, n. 5). This truth, regarding the Incarnation of the Word according to the male sex, controls what we believe about the mysteries of the redemption and the sacramentality of the Catholic Church.

In 2004, the CDF issued with the approval of Pope John Paul II, a letter to the Bishops of the world on *The Collaboration of Men and Women In The Church and In The World*. In part, this letter dealt with erroneous attempts to apply inclusive language constructs to essential data of divine revelation, including any attempt to neuter Christ. In reference to "the human attempt to be freed from one's biological conditioning" and to other tenets of the unisex agenda, the CDF letter said:

"According to this perspective, human nature in itself does not possess characteristics in an absolute manner: all persons can and ought to constitute themselves as they like, since they are free from every predetermination linked to their essential constitution. This perspective has many consequences. Above all it strengthens the idea that the liberation of women entails criticism of Sacred Scripture, which would be seen as handing on a patriarchal conception of God nourished by an essentially male-dominated culture. **Second, this tendency would consider as lacking in importance and relevance the fact that the Son of God assumed human nature in its male form**" (n. 3, emphasis added).

Groome's deconstruction of Catholic doctrine on the ministerial priesthood extends to how he perceives of the presence of the Risen Christ in the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In *Sharing Faith* he says: "'Vatican II explains that the Risen Christ is sacramentally present in the community assembled, in the word proclaimed, and 'especially under the Eucharistic

⁹⁴ Thomas H Groome, *Language for a Catholic Church*, Sheed & Ward, Kansas City 1991, p. 27.

⁹⁵ Thomas Groome, *Language for a Catholic Church*, 1995, p. 28

⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 26-27.

species' [here Groome provides a footnote referring to page p. 141 of the Abbott translation of Vatican II documents]" (p. 341). Dealing with the same question in WMUC, he says: "Here [Eucharistic celebration] by the power of the Spirit, the faith community can encounter the Risen Christ in its assembly, in the scriptures proclaimed, and climactically in the consecrated bread and wine as Jesus' 'body and blood' presence" (WMUC, 101). In both these passages, Groome omits to say that when Vatican II listed the ways in which Christ is present in the Eucharistic celebration, it included his presence in the person of the ordained priest.⁹⁷

In positing that gender is irrelevant to the person who sacramentally represents Christ in the Mass, Groome states that "it is unfortunate and misleading when the maleness of Jesus is used to favour men and exclude women in any way" - something which he claims "the Church appears to do...when it uses what is called 'the iconic argument' against the ordination of women: that the one who represents Jesus in the moment of eucharist must have a 'natural resemblance' to him."⁹⁸

The words, actions and elements used in the sacraments constitute what is called the 'sign' of the Sacrament.⁹⁹ The visible sign of each sacrament signifies the gift of grace conferred by Christ in that sacrament.¹⁰⁰ Hence, the sacraments are said to signify what they effect and to effect what they signify.

In regard to the ministerial priesthood, Vatican II stated that through the anointing of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Holy Orders, priests "are signed with a special character and so are configured to Christ the priest in such a way that they are able to act in the person of Christ the head [*in persona Christi Capitis*]."¹⁰¹ This means that "in the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth."¹⁰² Consequently, it is through the ministerial priesthood that "the presence of Christ as head of the Church is made visible in the midst of the community."¹⁰³

The priest offers the Sacrifice of the Mass *in persona Christi* which, according to Pope John Paul II, means "in specific sacramental identification with 'the eternal High Priest' who is the Author and principal Subject of this Sacrifice of his, a Sacrifice in which, in truth, nobody can take his place."¹⁰⁴ Consequently, in the Mass, it is Christ who is "the offerer and the offered, the consecrator and the consecrated."¹⁰⁵

The efficacy of a sacrament depends on the integrity of the sign. For example, we could not use rice and lemonade in the Eucharist instead of bread and wine since it was the latter that Christ singled out as the signs of his Body and Blood. *Inter Insigniores* states that "the whole sacramental economy" is "based upon natural signs, on symbols imprinted upon the human psychology."¹⁰⁶ Quoting St. Thomas Aquinas, it adds that sacramental signs "represent what they signify by natural resemblance," something which it says "is required

⁹⁷ Cf. Vatican II, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, n. 7

⁹⁸ *Language for a Catholic Church*, 1995, p. 27.

⁹⁹ CCC, n. 1146.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. CCC, n. 1149.

¹⁰¹ Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 2.

¹⁰² CCC, n. 1548.

¹⁰³ CCC, n. 1549; cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 21.

¹⁰⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Dominicae Cenaes*, n. 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Inter Insigniores*, n. 5.

for persons as for things.”¹⁰⁷ Coupled with this, St. Thomas pointed out that since a sacrament is a sign, then “what is done in the sacrament requires not only the reality but also the sign of the reality.”¹⁰⁸

In the Mass, the ordained priest “takes the part of Christ, lending him his voice and gestures.”¹⁰⁹ As such, he is a sacramental sign acting in the person of Christ “to the point of being his very image” when he pronounces the words of consecration.¹¹⁰ This means that in the Mass, the ordained priest serves as a sacramental *sign* of Christ who now offers in an unbloody manner the same sacrifice as he once offered on Calvary.¹¹¹

From all that has been said above, it follows that in the Mass there is a need for a “natural resemblance” between Christ and the person who is his sign.¹¹² If Christ’s role in the Mass were taken by a woman, there would not be a “natural resemblance” between Christ and his sacramental *sign* since “Christ himself was and remains a man.”¹¹³

Dissenting theologians argue that since Christ is now in his glorified state, then it is of no sacramental significance whether he represented by a woman or a man at the consecration of the Mass. This question was addressed in *Inter Insigniores* when it said:

“Could one say that, since Christ is now in the heavenly condition, from now on it is a matter of indifference whether he be represented by a man or by a woman, since ‘at the resurrection men and women do not marry’ (Mt 22:30). But this text does not mean that the distinction between man and woman, so far as it determines the identity proper to the person, is suppressed in the glorified state; what holds for us holds also for Christ.”¹¹⁴

Since Christ is both head and spouse of his Church, then the model for the relationship of the ordained priest to the Church is the sacrificial and spousal relationship that Christ himself has to it. In speaking of this, Pope John Paul II said: “Christ’s gift of himself to his Church, the fruit of his love, is described in terms of that unique gift of self made by the bridegroom to the bride, as the sacred texts often suggest. Jesus is the true bridegroom who offers to the Church the wine of salvation (cf. Jn. 2:11).”¹¹⁵ Pope John Paul added that the Church is “the bride who proceeds like a new Eve from the open side of the redeemer on the cross,” and before whom he is ever standing in order to “nourish and cherish her” (cf. Eph. 5:29) by “giving his life for her.”¹¹⁶ In similar fashion, said Pope John Paul, the ordained priest “is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the spouse of the Church.”¹¹⁷

As the Sacrament of our Redemption, the Eucharist embodies the spousal relationship between Christ and the Church whereby Christ continues to sacrifice himself for his spouse.

¹⁰⁷ *Inter Insigniores*, n. 5; cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, dist. 25, q. 2, quaestiuncula 1a ad 4um.

¹⁰⁸ St Thomas Aquinas, cited in Official Commentary on *Inter Insigniores*, published in *L’Osservatore Romano*, February 3, 1977.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Official Commentary on *Inter Insigniores*, published in *L’Osservatore Romano* on February 3, 1977.

¹¹⁰ *Inter insigniores*, n. 5. Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 83, art. 1, ad 3.

¹¹¹ Cf. CCC. n. 1367. See also: Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 7; Council of Trent, Session 22: Doctrine on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Ch. 2; *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, n. 12.

¹¹² Cf. Official Commentary on *Inter Insigniores*, published in *L’Osservatore Romano*, February 3, 1977.

¹¹³ *Inter Insigniores*, n. 5.

¹¹⁴ *Inter Insigniores*, n. 5.

¹¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 22.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

It is, said Pope John Paul II, “the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride.”¹¹⁸ As such, the Eucharist “makes present and realises anew in a sacramental manner the redemptive act of Christ, who ‘creates’ the Church, his body” - an action in which “Christ is united with this ‘body’ as a bridegroom with the bride.”¹¹⁹ All this, said Pope John Paul II, is contained in the Letter to the Ephesians where the “perennial ‘unity of the two’ that exists between man and woman from the very ‘beginning’ is introduced into this ‘great mystery’ of Christ and the Church.”¹²⁰

Pope John Paul II said that in instituting the Eucharist, Christ “linked it in such an explicit way the priestly service of the Apostles” that it is “legitimate to conclude that he thereby wished to express the relationship between man and woman, between what is ‘feminine’ and what is ‘masculine’” - a relationship “willed by God both in the mystery of creation and in the mystery of Redemption.”¹²¹ In so doing, Christ thereby guaranteed that those who were destined to sacramentally represent him in the Eucharistic Sacrifice would be able to do so fully in terms of his masculine identity which includes his spousal relationship to the Church - as Bridegroom to Bride and as the New Adam to the New Eve. In regard to this, Pope John Paul II said:

“If a reason is sought as to why Jesus reserved admission to the ministerial priesthood to men, it can be discovered in the fact that the priest represents Christ himself in his relationship to the Church. Now this relationship is spousal in nature: Christ is the Bridegroom (cf. Mt 9:15; Jn 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25), the Church is the bride (cf. 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-27, 31-32; Rev 19:7; 21:9). Because the relationship between Christ and the Church is validly expressed in sacramental Orders, it is necessary that Christ be represented by a man. The distinction between the sexes is very significant in this case and cannot be disregarded without undermining the sacrament. Indeed, the specific nature of the sign used is essential to the sacraments. Baptism has to be performed with water which washes; it cannot be done with oil, which anoints, even though oil is more expensive than water. Analogously, the sacrament of Orders is celebrated with men, without questioning the value of persons.”¹²²

Returning now to Groome’s 1995 edition of *Language for a Catholic Church* which was published a year after *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* was promulgated. Despite the definitive nature of the doctrine proclaimed in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* regarding the impossibility of conferring priestly ordination on women, Groome nevertheless insisted in *Language for a Catholic Church* that “the continued exclusion of women from ordained ministry in the Catholic Church is seen by fair-minded scholars as without theological or biblical warrant.”¹²³ Having stated this, he went on to add:

“Official Catholic statements usually offer three arguments against the ordination of women: 1) that there were no women among ‘the twelve,’ 2) that it would be contrary to the tradition; 3) that to represent Jesus, a priest must be male (the ‘iconic argument’). For

¹¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 26

¹¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 26

¹²⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 26

¹²¹ Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 26.

¹²² Pope John Paul II, *L’Osservatore Romano*, August 3, 1994.

¹²³ Thomas Groome, *Language for a ‘Catholic’ Church*, 1995 edition, op.cit., p. 31.

a fine, balanced and scholarly refutation of these arguments, see, for example, Rahner, *Concern for the Church, Chapter 3*.¹²⁴

In the passage above, Groome's rejection of what he terms the "iconic argument" favouring an all male ministerial priesthood is the logical outcome of his refusal to grant due significance to the gender specificity of Jesus Christ and its implications for the sacramental life of the Church.

At issue in the debate over the Church's no to women's ordination is the question of fidelity to the ministerial priesthood as it was instituted by Christ. Pope Pius XII referred to this when he said that the Church must accept Christ's "practice of conferring priestly ordination on men alone" as normative on the grounds that "the Church has no power over the substance of the sacraments, i.e. over anything that Christ the Lord, as attested by the sources of Revelation, wanted to be maintained in the sacramental sign."¹²⁵

To strive to end all unjust discrimination is not equivalent to abandoning recognition of the complementary nature of "male and female" and its implications for the orders of creation and redemption. Hence, discrimination is not operative in the Church's teaching on the different gifts and roles of men and women in Christ's mission and message. Dissenters tend to romanticise about a utopian future when a new egalitarian church made in their image will appear. Perhaps they should dwell for a time on the experience of the heretic Marcion who believed that the Church would one day throw out the Old Testament.

9. Did Christ Have Faith?

In WMUC, Groome says:

"Christian faith holds that the divine and human natures in Jesus never interfered with each other. So, as human, Jesus had to be reared and taught like any person. Luke's Gospel explicitly states that Jesus 'grew in wisdom, age, and grace before God and all the people' (Luke 2:52)" (WMUC, 129).

I wonder what exactly Groome means when he says the divine and human natures in Jesus never interfered with each other? It is important to note that while Luke 2:52 tells us that Jesus "grew in wisdom and in stature," it does not follow from this that from the first moments of his earthly life Jesus did not know that he was the Son of God or that he lived by faith.

While the CCC teaches that the "human soul that the Son of God assumed is endowed with a true human knowledge" (n. 472), nevertheless in the next paragraph it adds:

"But at the same time, this truly human knowledge of God's Son expressed the divine life of his person. 'The human nature of God's Son, *not by itself but by its union with the Word*, knew and showed forth in itself everything that pertains to God.' Such is first of all

¹²⁴ Ibid. page 70 footnote n. 10. Groome's reference here to Karl Rahner's dissenting statement from *Inter Insigniores* as "a fine, balanced and scholarly refutation" of the Church's doctrine is more a reflection of Groome's lack of understanding than anything else. Notable however is the fact that Rahner's dissent on this and other questions set a very bad example for others, and was a significant factor generating the crisis of identity which has afflicted many Jesuits over the last few decades.

¹²⁵ Pope Pius XII, cf. AAS 40 [1948], p. 5. Cited by Pope John Paul II, *L'Osservatore Romano*, August 3, 1994.

the case with the intimate and immediate knowledge that the Son of God made man has of his Father. The Son in his human knowledge also showed the divine penetration he had into the secret thoughts of human hearts” (n. 473).

Paragraph 474 of the CCC goes on to say: “By its union to the divine wisdom in the person of the Word incarnate, Christ enjoyed in his human knowledge the fullness of understanding of the eternal plans he had come to reveal. What he admitted to not knowing in this area, he elsewhere declared himself not sent to reveal.”

These citations above from the CCC indicate that in Christ there existed a *communicatio idiomatum*, meaning that properties of his divinity can be referred to his humanity as a consequence of the unity of the divine and human natures in the one Person of the Word Incarnate. In consequence of this, throughout his life Jesus was in possession of the Beatific Vision.

Being in possession of the Beatific Vision throughout his earthly life, Jesus did not therefore live by faith. In WMUC, Groome says: “Echoing his Hebrew faith, Jesus preached such radical love as ‘the greatest commandment’ (Mk 12:31)...” (WMUC, 66). Continuing to attribute faith to Jesus, he adds: “For more than two hundred years, critical scripture scholars have attempted to describe ‘the historical Jesus’ – the kind of person he was, how he lived, what he preached. From this scholarship we can now glean a reliable picture **of the faith that Jesus modeled** for disciples” (WMUC, 176, emphasis added). Again he says:

“No matter what ‘hat’ Jesus wore – wisdom *teacher* of love and happiness, *prophet* of peace and justice, *miracle* worker restoring health and feeding the hungry, *liberator* from sin and oppression – they all had this defining purpose: that God’s rule of peace and justice, love and freedom might come and God’s will of fullness of life for all be realized on earth as in heaven. **This was the core of Jesus’ own faith: living for the reign of God**” (WMUC, 176)

Earlier I referred to Blessed Columba Marmion as one of the great spiritual writers of recent centuries. Pope Pius XII said that the works of Marmion are “outstanding in the accuracy of their doctrine, the clarity of their style, and the depth and richness of their thought.” At the ceremony for the beatification of Blessed Marmion, Pope John Paul II referred to his published work as “an authentic treasury of spiritual truth.”

In reference to Christ’s possession of the Beatific Vision, Blessed Marmion said: “The Humanity of Jesus was predestinated to be united to the Eternal Word; that is why the soul of Christ, from the first instant of its existence, possessed, as the privilege resulting from this union, as the ‘connatural attribute,’ the Beatific Vision.”¹²⁶ He added: “You know that in Christ, the soul, created like ours, was not however subject to the progressive development of the corporal organism for the exercise of the faculties proper to it, intelligence and will: His soul had, from the first moment of its existence, the perfection of its own life, as befitted a soul united to the Divinity.”¹²⁷

Describing the Beatific Vision, Blessed Marmion said: “The Beatific Vision is the blessed contemplation of God such as He is in Himself. They to whom this grace is granted can nevermore separate themselves from God, because they *see* that God is the Sovereign

¹²⁶ Blessed Columba Marmion, *Christ in His Mysteries*, op. cit. p. 192

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 79.

Good...”¹²⁸ However, in pointing out how we in this earthly life must live by faith, Blessed Marmion said: “Here below, it is not given to us to abide perfectly in this sanctuary of the Divinity. But what is it that takes the place of the Beatific Vision for us on earth. It is faith. Through faith we have God ever present...”¹²⁹ Referring to Christ’s possession of the Beatific Vision from the moment of his conception in the womb of Mary, Pope Pius XII said:

“For hardly was He conceived in the womb of the Mother of God, when He began to enjoy the Beatific Vision, and in that vision all the members of His Mystical Body were continually and unceasingly present to Him, and He embraced them with His redeeming love...In the crib, on the Cross, in the unending glory of the Father, Christ has all the members of the Church present before Him and united to Him in a much clearer and more loving manner than that of a mother who clasps her child to her breast, or than that with which a man knows and loves himself” (*Mystici Corporis Christi*, 75).

In November 2006, the CDF issued a *Notification* formally approved by Pope Benedict XVI and signed by Cardinal Levada censuring the erroneous ideas about the Person of Jesus Christ that had been propagated by the Spanish Jesuit theologian Fr. Jon Sobrino. Fr Sobrino is representative of a body of theology that over the last century sought to separate what it believed to be the ‘real’ Jesus of history from what it considered the fabricated Jesus produced by the Church’s Christological doctrine.

In a section headed the “Self-Consciousness of Jesus,” the CDF *Notification* referred to above said: “Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, enjoys an intimate and immediate knowledge of his Father, a ‘vision’ that certainly goes beyond the vision of faith. The hypostatic union and Jesus’ mission of revelation and redemption require the vision of the Father and the knowledge of his plan of salvation” (n.8). In stating this, the *Notification* cited the passage quoted earlier from Pius XII’s *Mystici Corporis Christi* which teaches that Christ was in possession of the Beatific Vision from the first moment of the Incarnation. In harmony with this, it rejected the notion that Jesus had or needed the theological virtue of faith. To this end the *Notification* cited the Gospel of John: “Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father” (Jn 6:46), in conjunction with which it cited paragraphs 473 and 474 of the CCC which I referred to earlier.

On the basis of what has been said above, we see that Groome has slipped out of the zone of orthodox Catholic faith when he refers to “**the faith that Jesus modeled** for disciples,” and when he says that living for the reign of God “**was the core of Jesus’ own faith**” (WMUC, 176). Such language could be interpreted as a veiled attack on the Divinity of Christ.

10. Catholic Church is not Homophobic!

Western societies are now in a deep crisis of religious and moral consciousness. A key indicator of this is the increasing rupture of the natural linkages which bind marriage, love, sexuality and procreation together. The growing acceptance of homosexual relationships as the equivalent of marriage is expressive of a rejection of marital symbolism

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 192

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 193

as this has been stamped on our human nature in God's good creation of man as "male and female" (Gen 1:27).

This failure in moral and religious consciousness has given rise amongst 'progressive' Catholics to a litany of objections to certain aspects of the Church's teaching – particularly its teaching on sexuality and marriage, its prohibition against the reception of the Eucharist by the divorced and remarried, as well as its doctrine on a male-only ministerial priesthood. It is striking that in general we will be able to predict what a Catholic will hold on any of these matters once we know what he or she holds on any one of them. Why should this be so?

Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out that the above litany of objections to the Church's doctrine is rooted in a faulty vision of man. He says that this faulty vision is "closely associated with the inability to discern a spiritual message in the material world."¹³⁰ He added that men and women of today cannot understand that "their bodiliness reaches the metaphysical depths and is the basis of a symbolic metaphysics whose denial or neglect does not ennoble man but destroys him."¹³¹ For those whose vision of man is based on such a faulty anthropology which fails to recognise in the "being" of the human person the handiwork of the Creator, there is "no difference whether the body be of the masculine or the feminine sex: the body no longer expresses being at all."¹³² Consequently, the difference "between homosexuality and heterosexuality as well as that between sexual relations within or outside marriage have become unimportant."¹³³ Likewise divested of "every metaphysical symbolism" is the "distinction between man and woman" which is to be "regarded as the product of reinforced role expectations."¹³⁴

Gnosticism, which plagued the early Church, rejected the metaphysical symbolism the Creator has stamped upon the nature of man as 'male and female'. Consequently, it tended to be marked by an androgynous anthropology whereby the differences between the sexes were seen in some instances as a limitation from which it was necessary to be liberated. Many gnostic cults worshipped an androgynous deity who was addressed as "Mother and Father God." In the so-called eucharistic celebrations of several gnostic groups, the Holy Spirit was regarded as the "mother of all" and praise of "God as mother" constituted the theme of many of their chants and invocations.¹³⁵

In his outstanding work titled *The Early Liturgy To The Time of Gregory the Great*, Josef Jungmann, S.J. devoted an entire chapter to the way in which the early Church had to struggle to protect its doctrine and liturgy from contamination by gnostic concepts and practices.¹³⁶ Cardinal Francis Stafford has stated that gnosticism in all its varied presentations consists "in a reversion to paganism under pseudo-Christian auspices."¹³⁷

¹³⁰ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 24, 1989.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Cf. Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood: A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1988, pp. 161-164.

¹³⁶ Cf. Josef A. Jungmann, S.J., *The Early Liturgy To the Time of Gregory the Great*, Chapter 10 entitled *The Defense Against Gnosticism*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana 1959.

¹³⁷ Archbishop J. Francis Stafford, *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 27, 1993. In this excellent article, Archbishop Stafford examines the relationship between contemporary attacks on Catholic doctrine and New Age religious syncretism which he sees as a contemporary expression of ancient Gnostic heresies.

Returning now to WMUC. Here Groome makes a statement that could easily give the impression that the Catholic Church is homophobic. He says:

“The Catholic church often sins egregiously against *catholicity*. Both insiders and outsiders can experience it as a hierarchical club, marked by inhospitable signs of sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia. Its dominant culture – patterns of thought, symbols and rituals, structures and laws – all are distinctly Western, or even European parochial...For all its claims to *catholicity*, Catholicism is struggling to become an inclusive church” (WMUC 241).

If anyone experiences the Catholic Church as homophobic it is probably because they do not understand its teaching on why homosexual acts are intrinsically evil, or if they do, they don't agree with it. Given this fact, Groome as a Catholic theologian should be explaining the richness of Catholic teaching on sexual morality rather than suggesting it is in some regards oppressive.

In 1996, a statement on “Same-Sex Marriage” was issued by the U.S Bishops opposing the granting of the status of “marriage” to homosexual couples. In November 2002, the CDF issued with the approval of Pope John Paul II a *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Involving the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*. It stated that there existed “*fundamental and inalienable ethical demands*” that obliged Christians to seek to safeguard the family “based on monogamous marriage between a man and a woman,” adding that “in no way can other forms of cohabitation be placed on the same level as marriage, nor can they receive legal recognition as such.” In 2003, another CDF document approved by Pope John Paul II titled *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons* stated that allowing children to be adopted into same-sex unions is “gravely immoral” and “would actually mean doing violence to those children” (n. 7).

Boston College is a Jesuit-run university. Its theology department has come in for trenchant criticism because of the heterodoxy of some of its teachers and professors. Referring to this in an article titled *Questions for Father General* published in the February 20, 2008 edition of the *Denver Catholic Register* (official newspaper of the Denver Archdiocese), George Weigel, official biographer of Pope John Paul II, said:

“What will Father Nicolas [new General] do about Jesuits who are manifestly not obedient to the Pope or to the teaching authority of the Church? Take, for example, the case of Father James Keenan, S.J., of Boston College. Several years ago, Father Keenan testified before the Massachusetts Legislature, arguing that the principles of Catholic social doctrine did not merely tolerate ‘gay marriage,’ they demanded it. That position is manifestly not ‘in communion’ with the teaching of popes past and present on the nature of marriage; now what?...Will Jesuit vocations offices and novitiates obey the 2005 Vatican instruction which states that ‘those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called ‘gay culture’ must not be admitted to seminaries or to holy orders’?”

In May 2003, the Massachusetts Legislature’s Judiciary Committee in the U.S was considering a *Marriage Affirmation and Protection Amendment* which stated that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts understands “marriage” to be a union of one man and one woman. The amendment’s purpose was to preempt a possible favourable judgement by the Supreme Court of Massachusetts in regard to an application before it seeking to have

marriage licenses granted to homosexual couples. On 28 May 2003, the Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts issued a joint statement calling on Catholics to support the *Marriage Affirmation and Protection Amendment*. The bishops' statement said that any judgement by the Supreme Court redefining marriage so as to include homosexual couples "would have devastating consequences."

In June 2003, Groome prevaricated about the need for legislation to defend the meaning of marriage as a union of one man and one woman. In an interview with the Boston Globe on 26 June 2003, he was asked the following question: "That official (church) voice recently was used in the Massachusetts bishops' letter regarding gay marriage. Catholics by a majority have told pollsters they don't think homosexual behaviour is immoral. What's your position?" In reply, Groome said:

"I think the bishops are entitled to speak out on issues of public morality. There will always be a distinction between what is moral and what is legal. I don't know where I come down on whether or not the law before the Massachusetts Legislature (that would define marriage as heterosexual only) is wise."

A pity Groome's answer above was rather evasive, he missed out on an opportunity to explain to a large audience the reasonableness of the Massachusetts bishops' call on legislators to defend the true meaning of marriage. However, Groome went on in the interview to really muddy the waters. When asked by the Globe "how independent can Catholic teachers be from church orthodoxy," he answered:

"It all depends what we mean by orthodoxy. I don't know of any Catholic theologian who doesn't want to teach what is orthodox Catholic faith. The difficulty is that the official church at the moment has a narrower view of what is orthodoxy than I have. Take an issue like ordination of married men, the notion of optional celibacy. The present church's legislation requires celibacy, and many of the bishops and the present pope would see that as close to being divinely inspired. That wouldn't be my sentiment at all. I think it's a human regulation that we should dispense with. It should be optional. I would have a similar sentiment on the ordination of women."

Doctrinally speaking, Groome has here placed two questions on the same plane which should not be treated as such. While the Church is committed to maintaining mandatory clerical celibacy in the Latin Rite, something for which it has very good reasons, the question of the Church's doctrine on the male-only ministerial priesthood however pertains to something instituted by Christ over which the Church has no power. In his statement above, Groome is basically depriving "orthodoxy" of its concrete content: the "official church," by which he means the teaching of the magisterium, is no longer seen by him as authoritative.

During July/August of 2007 and 2008, Boston College's IREPM, which as I pointed out earlier is directed by Groome, ran courses on Pastoral Ministry. According to Boston College advertisements, one of the subjects offered in this course was Introduction to Pastoral Care and Counselling. The teacher of the course was Dr John McDargh who is a Professor of Theology at Boston College. When the Supreme Court of Massachusetts sanctioned same-sex marriage in 2004, Professor McDargh was one of the first to take advantage of the change in the law by 'marrying' his gay partner, Tim Dunn. According to an article authored by McDargh and published on the website of MassEquality, an organisation

promoting equal marriage rights for same-sex couples, Dunn and McDargh have a son they adopted from Russia.

In July 2006, Cardinal Martino, head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, referred to the granting of legal recognition to same-sex unions as an “ugly turn”. He cautioned that “Western society is on a slippery slope. The sense of God is being blurred.” He stated that such legislation is disastrous because it questions the “meaning of being man or woman, the characteristics of love and sexuality.” In his New Year Peace Message for 2008, Pope Benedict XVI stated that “everything that serves to weaken the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman...constitutes an objective obstacle on the road to peace.”

The February 2005 edition of AD2000, an Australian journal of religious opinion, carried a report drawn from an article published in the *Irish Catholic* about two women – a Miss Gilligan and a Miss Zappone - who took a case to the Irish High Court seeking to force a review of Ireland’s marriage laws that would grant legal recognition of homosexual unions. Both Gilligan and Zappone had taught at St Patrick’s College of Education in Drumcondra (Dublin) which conducts courses in religious education. The AD2000 report stated that “it was while studying under well-known pedagogue Thomas Groome at Boston College in the US that Miss Gilligan met Miss Katherine Zappone.” I wonder how well their course at Boston College enhanced their understanding and appreciation of Catholic teaching on faith and morals?

11. Catholic Church Did Not Kill Millions of Women?

In a most unjust allegation against the Catholic Church, Groome in WMUC says:

“Though very embarrassing, evidence abounds of slavery and racism, of hatred of women and sexism, of intolerance and bigotry in the Church’s beliefs, practices and worship throughout its history” (WMUC 28).

Over history there would have been and still are Catholics guilty of the injustices Groome lists above. This does not however mean that “hatred of women” was an element “in the Church’s beliefs” or a factor in its “worship”. The Church’s doctrinal teaching on faith and morals is guided by the Holy Spirit and it is this teaching which constitutes the “beliefs” of the Catholic Church.

In WMUC Groome presents the Church as one of the worst tyrants in history when he says: “It participated in the destruction of millions of innocent women who were put to death as witches” (WMUC 28). Repeating this accusation later in the book he says: “The pages of history are strewn with evidence that the Catholic church has failed – often miserably – to live by the faith that does justice...It has executed countless people for dissent by its Inquisition, and conducted witch-hunts, using horrible misogynist rhetoric to justify destroying millions of innocent women” (WMUC 228)

Groome’s assertion that the Catholic Church participated in the putting to death of “**millions**” of women is false. There is now a growing consensus among historians of all stripes that this anti-Catholic “Black Legend” has no foundation in the historical record.

In the Jubilee Year 2000, the Vatican issued a document apologising for sins committed by members of the Catholic Church throughout history. Titled “*Memory and*

Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past,” the document was produced by the International Theological Commission (ITC) and its publication approved by Cardinal Ratzinger. On March 12, 2000, a Day of Forgiveness was celebrated with a Mass in St Peter’s Square during which Pope John Paul II asked forgiveness “for the errors committed in the service of the truth when unethical methods were used.” At the same time, in commending the ITC’s document *Memory and Reconciliation*, Pope John Paul II said: “It is very useful for correctly understanding and carrying out the authentic request for pardon, based on the *objective responsibility* which Christians share as members of the Mystical Body, and which spurs today’s faithful to recognize, along with their own sins, the sins of yesterday’s Christians, in the light of careful historical and theological discernment.”

In accusing the Catholic Church of having participated in the killing of millions of women, Groome has failed to make the necessary historical discernment called for by Pope John Paul II in the passage quoted above. The purpose for which the Catholic Church instituted the Inquisition was justifiable to the extent that out of observance of divine law (cf. Mt 18:18; 2 Tim 1:14) it sought to defend the faith of the Church against heresy. However, the actions taken by some members of the Church to achieve this objective were deplorable, including torture and burning at the stake. However, on the basis of all the available historical data, it is a gross falsification to assert that there were millions of women put to death.

In 1998, Pope John Paul II requested the Historical-Theological Commission of the Committee of the Great Jubilee Year 2000 to hold a congress on the Inquisition to prepare for the Day of Forgiveness in 2000. To this end, an International Symposium was held in October 1998 attended by historians from around the world – Catholics and non-Catholics – whose scientific competence was universally recognized. In 2004, a 783-page book titled “Minutes of the International Symposium: The Inquisition” was published containing all the addresses delivered at the Symposium. The editor of the Minutes was historian Agostino Borromeo, a professor at Rome’s La Sapienza University and an expert on the Inquisition. In giving an evaluation of the book at a June 15, 2004 press conference, he said: “Historians no longer use the topic of the Inquisition as an instrument to defend or attack the Church.” He said there had been a “great step forward” in 1998 when Pope John Paul II ordered the opening of the secret archives of the CDF, formerly the Holy Office. Borromeo added that the Minutes “are a point of reference for studies on the Inquisition; in the first place, for the scientific rigor of the reports, exempt from controversy or an apologetic nature which is typical of recent historiography.”

Borromeo pointed out that the Spanish Inquisition held 44, 674 trials between 1540 and 1700. Of these 1.8% were condemned to death, including 1.7% condemned in “contumacy,” meaning dummies were burned or hanged in their stead.¹³⁸ The most reliable estimates of the number of witches hanged or burned throughout Europe between 1450-1750 puts the figure at between 40,000 and 60,000. Estimates cited by Borromeo include Switzerland 4000, Poland-Lituania 10,000, Germany 25,000, Denmark-Norway 1,350. In the Spanish Inquisition’s history, said Borromeo, 59 witches were condemned to death, while in Italy the figure was 36 and in Portugal it was 4. Borromeo pointed out that civil tribunals rather than ecclesiastical ones accounted for the vast majority of these killings. Also, much of the killings were carried out in areas under Protestant domination. On the basis of data like this, it appears that Groome’s assertion that the Catholic Church was instrumental in destroying millions of women is historical fiction.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Balanced History of Inquisition is Possible*, Zenit.org. June 16, 2004

12. Upstaging Heresy

Not only does Groome himself spread dissent, but he also heaps praise on the work of others who do likewise. Here I will cite but two examples. The first being Fr. Richard McBrien who is the Crowley-O'Brien Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame, the second being Fr Michael Morwood author of the book *Tomorrow's Catholic: Understanding God and Jesus in a New Millennium*.

Regarding McBrien, in 1996, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine in the United States censured the 3rd edition of his book *Catholicism* for "certain shortcomings." The committee was concerned about his treatment of the Virgin Birth of Jesus, the perpetual virginity of Mary, the ordination of women, his treatment of moral issues such as homosexuality and contraception, and about his tendency to place the teaching of the Church on the same level as the opinion of dissenting theologians.¹³⁹

In an article published in the April 19, 1996 edition of the *National Catholic Reporter* dealing with the censuring of McBrien's book, Groome was quoted as saying: "It [*Catholicism*] very accurately reflects core doctrine and offers an imaginative presentation of areas of Catholicism under consideration and far from being settled. There is no better theological textbook for under graduate courses."

Turning now to Michael Morwood's book *Tomorrow's Catholic*, the foreword to which was written by Groome. A 'Notice' regarding the book was issued by Archbishop Pell in Melbourne in 1998 which said that it "must not be used as a text in any of our Catholic schools and is not to be displayed, sold, or distributed in any of our churches." The official *Report On The Doctrinal Content of Tomorrow's Catholic*, issued by the Archdiocese of Melbourne, listed Morwood's major doctrinal errors as follows:

1. A denial of the Incarnation of the pre-existent Eternal Word, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity;
2. A denial of the Divinity of Jesus Christ, by referring to Jesus as a "human person" and redefining divinity;
3. A belittling of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity;
4. A denial of Original Sin;
5. A distortion of the doctrine of the Redemption through the saving death of Jesus Christ for our sins.

Despite Morwood's grave errors on questions pertaining to the very foundations of the Christian faith, Groome nevertheless had no compunction about penning the following comments in his foreword to the book:

"He [Morwood] is convinced, and rightly so, that the 'package' of Catholicism we received from the previous era is no longer adequate to the challenges of this age — To refashion Catholicism to meet the challenges of this new era requires imagination and courage, and Morwood demonstrates both...*Tomorrow's Catholic* invites us to take some bold steps in the right direction."

¹³⁹ The review of McBrien's book by the Bishops' Committee On Doctrine was published in the April 18, 1996 edition of *Origins*.

Conclusion

In 2006, the Spanish Bishops issued a 'Pastoral Instruction' titled "Theology and Secularisation in Spain, Forty Years after the End of Vatican Council II." Among the various causes it listed contributing to a loss of faith was the following: "Raising doubts and mistrust toward the magisterium of the Church, placing the authority of certain writers before that of the magisterium, or considering the guidelines and documents of the magisterium simply as a 'barrier' that blocks the progress of theology ..." (n. 17).

I have pointed out in this paper that Groome's theological project is predicated on a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture. I have demonstrated that he spreads dissent by the method of suspicion, a device appropriate for limited purpose in literary exegesis has been elevated by him to a world view, a way of examining all aspects of reality irrespective of the data. This leitmotif infects much of what he writes. Decisions made by the teaching magisterium are often dismissed as overly dogmatic, an ossification of thought and not open to further development. Others have adopted his views and ended up fostering dissent among those they were commissioned by the Church to catechize.

I have shown in this article that Groome is a dissenter who shows no sign of recanting or amending his ways while at the same time claiming to be a Catholic theologian. Most notable in his work is an ongoing assault on Catholic doctrine pertaining to the ministerial priesthood. I have shown that he does not accept the authoritative role of the hierarchical magisterium by his continued criticism of its teaching on the reservation of the ministerial priesthood to men. His stated views on the ministerial priesthood show conclusively that he has at best a Protestant understanding of it. Since doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church in regard to the ministerial priesthood is part of its teaching on the origin and nature of the seven sacraments, then this teaching pertains to the Magisterium's authoritative interpretation of Divine Revelation itself. That Groome has encouraged rejection of this teaching is all the more regrettable given that he himself received ordination to the ministerial priesthood.

In dissenting from the teaching of the magisterium and by inciting others to do likewise, Groome is in effect constructing a new church as did the protagonists of the Protestant Reformation. Those who promote his work are aligning themselves with him in his assault on the Church, they are his disciples. They praise his work, they recommend his books to others and thus do they feed his error to unsuspecting souls within Catholic precincts. When the salvation of souls are in danger, St. Catherine of Siena branded any undue tolerance of mediocrity as a concession to cowardice. "*Enough of this soft soap!*," she exclaimed. "*All it does is cause the member's of Christ's Spouse to stink!*"¹⁴⁰

Catholic diocesan offices should not upstage dissenters by giving them public platforms in Catholic precincts. By feting dissenters in this way, they create a situation where unwary students and others are easily led to accept ideas for the reform of the Church which are in fact irreconcilable with received Catholic doctrine. Hopefully, those in charge of the Office of Pastoral Renewal and Family Ministry in the Archdiocese of Armagh will now take whatever steps are necessary to undo the spiritual damage that may have been done to those good and unsuspecting Catholics in Armagh and beyond who enrolled in Groome's course.

¹⁴⁰ St Catherine of Siena, cited by Francis Fernandez in *Conversation with God*, Volume Six, Scepter, London, 2000, p.203

About the author.

Eamonn Keane is married with five children and has three grandchildren. He was born and raised in Ireland. He studied Commerce and Education at the National University of Ireland as well as Religious Education at the Catholic Teachers Training College in Sydney. Since 1976 he has been teaching in Catholic High Schools in New Zealand and Australia. He has addressed conferences in various countries and conducted courses on Catholic Social Teaching and Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* at the Catholic Adult Education Centre in Sydney. His articles have appeared in many newspapers and journals. His major publications have been:

1. ***Population Control:*** Launched by the late Cardinal Lopez Trujillo who at the time was President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, 1993.
2. ***Population and Development:*** Foreword by Bishop George Pell. Published by Human Life International Australia, 1993.
3. ***The Ordained Priesthood: The Real Issues!*** Foreword by Fr Matthew Habiger, O.S.B, PhD. Published by *Human Life International*, Australia, 1996.
4. ***Humanae Vitae: Wisdom For All Ages:*** Published by *Human Life International*, Australia, July 1998. Foreword by Fr Paul Marx, O.S.B
5. ***The Brave New World of Therapeutic Cloning:*** Preface by Lord David Alton. Published by the *Population and Environment Research Institute Inc. Australia*, 2002.
6. ***A Generation Betrayed: Deconstructing Catholic Education in the English-Speaking World:*** Preface by Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz, foreword by Donna Steichen, introduction by Monsignor Michael J. Wrenn. Published by Hatherleigh Press, New York, 2002.
7. ***Crisis in Religious Education:*** Published by *The Association For the Renewal of Religious Education*, Sydney, 2003.