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'Humanity for All: A Pastoral Letter on Men' (draft)

Phyllis Zagano | Jan. 29, 2014 Just Catholic

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

1. Men are called to follow our Lord Jesus Christ and proclaim his Gospel in the midst of a complex world. This reality poses both opportunities and difficulties. Men must be measured by how they protect or undermine the dignity of all persons. Their decisions have consequences and moral content; they help or hurt people, strengthen or weaken family life, advance or diminish the quality of justice in our land. Yet many men do not understand what it is to be human. They do not know who they are.

2. This is why we have written *Humanity for All: A Pastoral Letter on Men*. This letter is a personal invitation to men to use the resources of our faith to shape their lives so that they better protect their own dignity and basic rights as well as the dignity and basic rights of women, both in this land and around the world.

3. The pastoral letter has been a work of careful inquiry, wide consultation and prayerful discernment. We offer this pastoral message to and for men in the hope they will live their faith in the marketplace and at home as truly human persons, rejecting the temptation to be defined by violence, substance abuse, and the misplaced idols of sports, politics and media.

4. We specifically write for men who respond violently to society in general and to women in particular. We recognize that the largest cohort of imprisoned persons are male, many of whom have succumbed to a culture that idolizes weapons, wealth and power. We offer the suggestion that men's idolatry of these often become a cause of inappropriate sexual activity. Such is of particular concern and is connected to increases in human trafficking and spousal abuse, as well as to increases in depression and substance addictions, especially alcoholism.

5. We note that while the majority of men do not evidence outward signs of emotional disturbance, many suffer from an immaturity that causes them to believe they are superior to women. Part of these difficulties stem from familial issues of shame and relationships with parents. Other root causes include inabilities to measure up to so-called "masculine" roles as defined by cinema and other entertainment vehicles, certain sports games, and by the infection of clericalism in some parts of our church. This latter difficulty is exacerbated by uncontrolled access to the media of communication by certain clerics who seek to undermine the enriching influences of the Second Vatican Council.

6. Today is a time of challenge for men as each day, more barriers arise against the recognition of the equality of women before God. We urge the men of the church to work assiduously to deflate all stereotypes for persons of both genders. We recognize that "equal" does not mean "the same," yet we urge all persons to work to open more doors to cooperative ministries between men and women.

7. We know that persons value the recognition that they are vital forces in the world. Those who feel valued and who genuinely are respected embrace the expanded roles given to them since Vatican II. They bring knowledge, education, skills and leadership to both society and the church. May the men of the church see and accept these

gifts, particularly in women.

8. We write this pastoral letter to share our hopes for the dialogue and action it might generate. Our prayers are directed at strengthening the hope of those women whose liberty and humanity have been taken from them by men who have forgotten or who have never known their humanity. May our faith and our concern spur all persons to individual and collective recognition of the humanity of all persons for the transformation of the church and of the world.

[Phyllis Zagano is senior research associate-in-residence at Hofstra University and author of several books in Catholic studies. Her newest books are *Mysticism and the Spiritual Quest: A Crosscultural Anthology* *[1]* and *Ordination of Women to the Diaconate in the Eastern Churches* *[2]*. She will speak Thursday to The Elephants [3] at Ss. Simon and Jude in Detroit; March 13 at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Mo.; and May 6 at St. Francis Xavier Church in New York City.]

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