

# Implications

by Father Daniel Callam, C.S.B .

**Y**OU COULD DETERMINE the philosophy of life of the most pragmatic financier on Bay Street in the course of a day or two by noting his actions and decisions at work, at home, and at leisure. “Forget about abstract reasoning,” he may say, “and just get the job done.” But whatever he claims, his behaviour will reveal a worldview that is definite and coherent, albeit largely implicit. Actions point beyond themselves.

Such thoughts came to mind when I read about a meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy, which met in Philadelphia a few years back. Although the large majority of participants were Catholics, the presider at the single Eucharist celebrated during the conference was Gordon Lathrop, a Lutheran. There were no concelebrants, but the role of deacon was assumed by a Benedictine nun. Everyone received communion under both species. To me, the following implications are obvious, although not many people present seem to have drawn them.

First, sacramental ordination is not required to say Mass. According to Luther’s theology there are only two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism confers on every believer the possibility of administering the sacraments, although a mandate or a commission from a congregation, as seems to have been the case here, may be required for someone actually to do so.

The second implication is that there is no authoritative magisterium in the Church. The Catholic view is that all the powers and prestige of bishops, including the bishop of Rome, flow out of their presiding over public worship in person or by proxy. There they function pre-eminently as priests and teachers of the Church and therefore as the legitimate successors of the Apostles. Once the Lutheran position—that the episcopate is at best a convenience for the Church and at worst a corruption—is accepted, all the solemn teachings of the popes, of the general councils, and of local ordinaries, become relativized. In Luther’s words, “General councils can and have erred.” The immediate consequence of this is to reduce the solemn teaching of the Church to theological opinion, to be accepted or rejected by the same criteria that apply to history, sociology, and the like. In particular, belief in the Marian dogmas is reduced to something more akin to praying to

Saint Anthony than to entering the mystery of salvation. The debate about theologians' exercising an alternate magisterium becomes an alternative to the academically more respectable professional theologians. As there is no practically no Catholic teaching that has not been challenged—purgatory, transubstantiation, infallibility, the canon of Scripture, the resurrection itself—I do not see how one can require a public profession of faith of a convert to Catholicism. Here, however, there is a happy solution to the difficulty, because there is now no longer any need to become a Catholic anyway, since another implication of such a liturgy is that Christ did not found a Church. In short, the Church in her most solemn pronouncements has been fundamentally, egregiously, and continually wrong about the significance of Jesus Christ.

The same distressing conclusion arises from a consideration of the other area of human activity in which the Church has claimed to teach authoritatively: morality. There are vociferous challengers to the condemnation of direct abortion and to the strict sexual morality that forbids fornication, active homosexuality, and artificial contraception. The common element in all of these is that the procreative aspect of sexuality can be consciously eliminated. If this is so, the Church stands revealed as the greatest oppressor of humanity in history, doing everything in its power to block the natural flowering of the human person in deep interpersonal relationships, etc. In short the Church is, again, wrong. Militant feminism implies the same judgment about the Church. Once it is granted that women have been oppressed over the centuries, the Church is easily identified as the major agent of an oppression that continues into the present. In her *Beyond God the Father* Mary Daly had a typically pungent way of expressing this view of Catholicism: the Church is “the anti-fem,” a term to be understood analogously to “the anti-Christ.”

There is a question that arises ineluctably from the above discussion. Why would anyone want to be a member of a Church that is wrong in principle and right only when it repeats what has been more cogently expressed elsewhere? That there are people who do so suggests another implication, *viz.*, that they continue to identify themselves as Catholics because they believe their mission is to preach the Gospel *to* the Church herself. They constitute a sort of fifth column acting from within to bring down the *ancien régime* and so liberate the Church from herself. If this is actually the case, they might well consider another implication: schism. ☩