

The Vatican and the Nuns: Episode 973
By Marian Ronan

A few weeks back, in my article on Pope Francis and women’s ordination, I told a story about meeting Sister Helen Prejean at an event celebrating the publication of the twentieth anniversary edition of *Dead Man Walking*. I gave Sister Helen a copy of my book, *Sister Trouble: The Vatican, the Bishops, and the Nuns*. She replied that with the new pope, all of the trouble between the Vatican and American sisters was going to go away.

I had my doubts. As I explain in the central article in *Sister Trouble*, popes, bishops, and theologians have been attempting to get celibate Christian women under control since just after the Roman persecutions. The history of sisters (women religious) is studded with stories of famous mother foundresses running from one diocese to another to escape the local bishop’s crack-down on their congregations. Some of these women were subsequently excommunicated. Some of them were then, ever more subsequently, canonized.

So when the address by the head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Gerhard Müller, accusing the U.S. Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) of disobedience, was posted on the Vatican website on Monday, I was sorry, but I was not surprised. Good Pope Francis never retracted the hostile doctrinal assessment against the LCWR issued by Müller’s predecessor, Cardinal William Levada, in 2012. And Pope Benedict XVI had appointed both Levada and Müller, after which Pope Francis made Müller a cardinal.

The two emphases in Müller’s address are that the LCWR had decided to give an award to the nun-theologian Elizabeth Johnson CSJ, whose book, *Quest for the Living God*, was condemned by the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2011, and that they have persisted in publishing material about “Conscious Evolution,” the discourse spearheaded by Barbara Marx Hubbard. In his address, Müller compares Conscious Evolution to Gnosticism.

I plan to write at further length regarding this latest episode of the Vatican and the bishops trying to bring the nuns to heel. At the moment, however, I will put aside the sheer idiocy of Müller resurrecting the pitiful business of the USCCB condemning a book by as orthodox and middle-of-the-road a theologian as Elizabeth Johnson (though it is worth noting that the head of the Committee on Doctrine at the time of the

condemnation of Johnson’s book, Rev. Thomas Weinandy, has a reputation for being one nasty, hostile human being). And as for U.S. Catholic sisters integrating “Conscious Evolution” into their ministry and spirituality, has anybody read Teilhard de Chardin or Thomas Berry lately? Teilhard’s works were, in fact, censored by the Vatican, but in 2009, a Vatican statement made all of that seem ridiculous (sort of like canonizing previously excommunicated Mother Foundresses). As for Berry, by applying his “New Story of Creation” to the Christian faith, he took far greater risks, it seems to me, than Hubbard’s freestanding discourse does.

The real issue between the nuns and the Vatican is gender, plain and simple. However benign Pope Francis may be, he shares, as I have argued, the embarrassingly medieval theology of gender that his predecessors promoted. Indeed, the institutional church has been using control of women and sexuality as a weapon against the modern world since at least the liberal revolutions of 1848. Women—and sexuality—are the only things the popes were able at least to try to keep under control as the separation of church and state, the loss of the Vatican territories, etc., took away their ancient “secular” powers. Hence the Vatican condemnation of contraception after Vatican II, when the bishops had finally accepted “the modern world.”

Today, in 2014, the Vatican and the bishops can’t even keep the vast majority of Catholic women under control. During the (unfortunately ongoing) uproar over religious freedom and the ACA contraceptives mandate, 97 percent of U.S. Catholic women surveyed reported having used contraceptives at some point. And it’s not just in the U.S.: several years ago, in an on-line chat, an African (Kenyan) Catholic (lay) woman studying for an MA in international relations in Nairobi said to me, “Who are these Catholic bishops that they think they can tell us women what to do with our sexuality?”

This leaves nobody but the nuns for the bishops and the Vatican to control. According to Pope Francis’s theology of gender, women—but today, really, only nuns—are supposed to exhibit the “feminine genius”—to be warm, sensitive, intuitive, and complementary. Kneel down and kiss the bishops’ feet, that is. But as I argue in a variety of ways in *Sister Trouble*, the boys made a big mistake. After World War II, they used the sisters’ commitment to obedience to force them to get educated; they did this to avoid making the church look bad if secular counterparts were better qualified than the sisters were. And the sisters obeyed.

What the men in authority got for their trouble was women
continued on page 3

WOMEN LEADERS IN THE EARLY CHURCH A Tour to Uplift, Inspire, and Help Us Remember By Regina Bannan

In 2004, I shared a room in Gananoque, Ontario, with Dorothy Irvin before the Roman Catholic Women Priests ordinations on the St. Lawrence River. Dorothy spent some of the downtime with Christine Schenk, SSJ, planning a trip to Rome to tour the sites Dorothy had identified that show women officeholders in the early church. Did I want to go on this tour? Absolutely. Could I? No. The first three times it was offered, I was teaching. When my course was cancelled this spring, I was depressed for about 36 hours. Then I thought, "I can go to Rome!" My sister Helen joined me for this FutureChurch tour March 22 to 27, and for a week before around Rome.

On our first day, we are sitting in a side chapel in the Basilica di S. Maria Sopra Minvera for a prayer service. We have just viewed the tomb of Catherine of Siena, courageous woman who challenged Popes. We can look across the church and see the fresco of the Annunciation by Fillippino Lippi in the fifteenth century. Mary is the central figure, but almost as tall is St. Thomas Aquinas, with his hand on the shoulder of the kneeling Dominican Cardinal Carafa, whose will paid for the frescoes. Mary seems to be blessing him. The angel is feminized, holding a lily, of course. But all that detail can't be seen from the distance. From far away all I can think of is "why are these men in this painting?" Must they invade every private women's moment? We are singing "We Are Called," which was sung around the U.S. two years ago as part of the NunJustice response to the LCWR reprimand. I start to cry. I am overwhelmed with the action of Catherine, facing a society that would put a male theologian and a bishop with the woman who was soon to give us the Magnificat: "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly." Challenging the papacy is what we are called to do.

Catacombs are nothing to fear, even for the somewhat claustrophobic like me. Maybe the ancient Romans, who were shorter than we are, also suffered and did not like low ceilings. The scholar lecturing on this tour, Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ, gives us many insights into the images and tombs we see. In the Basilica Inferiore di S. Clemente, we see what the postcard says is "Byzantine Madonna and Divine Child (4th century). The hyphen is not the only thing that's missing. An early 4th century woman prophet was painted over in the 8th century to become Mary and to include the "Bambino." Another day, we go down to the catacombs of Domitilla, where I notice how prevalent the dove is in the early iconography around Christ. We learn how the wealthy included their servants in their family tombs. Two women of different eras, Petronella and Veneranda, are pictured with a basket of scrolls and a codex, indicative of their roles as teachers of scripture. A third day, we go down to the catacombs of Priscilla, where the frescoes include the one of seven women at a Eucharist

(web site says one woman, six men) and of Priscilla orante, praying. We go around a corner and see a totally different view of the open space, known as the Greek chapel; what it must have been like to pray there! We had a prayer service in a somewhat less decorated chapel in these catacombs. We go outside as well. We walk up the Aventine Hill to the Basilica of S. Sabina, commemorating a martyred pair, Sabina and her servant Seraphia. We hear an explanation of the 4th century doors by a scholar who has just published a paper on the images of women there. Five people on this tour were affiliated with the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, so we had the benefit of their studies. The most famous image on the door is the earliest depiction of the crucifixion with Christ and the thieves on the cross. Remember that this is the 4th century; earlier images are of the Eucharist, important for our theology of the Mass.

We walk or taxi to the Vatican Museums and then St. Peter's Basilica. Best for me was being in that huge church with a Lutheran pastor, a graduate of Iliff, wearing her Roman collar. The Pio Cristiano museum had sarcophagus after sarcophagus, often picturing women in leadership roles, plus collections from the Jewish catacombs. My sister and I had been able to attend the papal audience the week before with about 60-80,000 people. It was hard to count, but it was nice to see the warmth of Pope Francis from about 20 feet.

There are plenty of other churches in Rome; you need to know which ones feature women. We tour the Basilicas of St. Pudentiana and of St. Praxedes. At the latter, I try to send a photo to the SEPAWOC list because I am so touched by the Theodora Episcopa mosaic. It's absolutely beautiful, with gold leaf, kept in perfect condition. Sisters Praxedes and Pudentiana are better documented as early converts of Peter. I wonder what Pope Paschal I intended when he decorated this church in the 9th century and featured his mother along with these saints and Mary, but the image is powerful. "The glory that was Rome" – the glory of women commemorated! We wind up at St. Mary Major, a huge church with 36 5th century frescoes of Hebrew bible and New Testament scenes, prefiguring or featuring Mary, mostly. Absolutely fascinating but better if one could lie on the floor and look.

FutureChurch is led now by the enthusiastic Deborah Rose-Milavec, who shares this tour on her blog. Chris Schenk, director emerita, has posted a lovely article on her blog, and Carolyn Osiek has many publications that develop the topics of her lectures that were so informative that my sister and I took more notes than we have in this century. She gives a richness to the experience that goes beyond what we see to expand the context of women in early Christianity as Jews and Greeks and Romans in a Roman world.

Regina Bannan, *SEPAWOC President, has retired from teaching at Temple University*

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SEPAWOC Joins Nun Justice Coalition
By Regina Bannan

In early May, the Core Committee of SEPAWOC voted to support the letter sent to Pope Francis by 16 Catholic reform organizations asking him to disavow the instructions sent by Cardinal Gerhard Müller to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Individuals can sign a version of this letter on the web site, nunjustice.org, and take other actions. As I write this in late May, there are almost 10,000 signatures. I hope as you read this in mid-June, there will be another 5,000. Pope Francis has shown himself able to lead the church in new directions – impress on him the need to do it about women! Here is the title of our press release followed by the letter itself.

16 Catholic Organizations Pen Open Letter to Pope Francis, Launch Petition Calling an End to Attack on U.S. Nuns:

Dear Pope Francis

We write with respect and gratitude for your extraordinary leadership in our Church.

Sadly, we also write with concern and dismay at the behavior that Cardinal Gerhard Müller recently exhibited toward women leaders of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and especially toward Dr. Elizabeth Johnson CSJ.

Cardinal Müller's preemptive public criticism of LCWR leadership and Dr. Johnson, one of the most beloved and respected theologians in the world, eclipsed any opportunity for public dialogue.

This communicates that faithful Catholic female leaders are disrespected and discounted in our Church.

On numerous occasions you have expressed a desire to expand leadership opportunities for women. We respectfully suggest that the place to begin is to listen to faithful women who are already exercising leadership.

We ask you to personally intervene with Cardinal Müller and Archbishop Sartain and remove the unjust mandates imposed on LCWR over two years ago.

In addition, a public apology to Dr. Johnson and LCWR leadership would speak volumes about the institutional Church's intent to truly listen to women and honor their voices.

In closing, we express our love and solidarity with you as together we joyfully proclaim the rich diversity revealed in the Good News of Jesus Christ, a message ever ancient yet ever new.

Sincerely yours,

The Nun Justice Project

Vatican and the Nuns *continued from page 1*

like Sister Elizabeth Johnson. But they never give up. Johnson's book, in my opinion, was condemned, in part at least, because Johnson dared to publish it without an *imprimatur*, an official statement of permission. And now the idiots in Rome are resurrecting the whole episode, and criticizing some of the smartest women in the history of the church, the LCWR, for not asking permission before publishing material regarding a line of thought that seems fruitful to them. And they wonder why American Catholic women aren't rushing into religious life?

Marian Ronan *blogs at: [Marian Ronan,wordpress.com](http://MarianRonan.wordpress.com) in which this posting first appeared.*

The Saint Mary Magdalene Community

invites you to celebrate

The Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene

Sunday, July 20, 2014
Mass at 9am

Drexel Hill United Methodist Church
600 Burmont Avenue
Drexel Hill, PA. 19026

**St. Mary Magdalene Community
Mass schedule**

**Every Sunday at 9AM
Drexel Hill United Methodist Church
McBurney Chapel
600 Burmont Rd
Drexel Hill, PA 19026**

We have two satellites:

**Second Saturday of the month at St. Luke's
UCC Church, 125 North Main St.,
North Wales, PA 19454 at 5PM.**

**Second and Fourth Sundays, 10:30 AM at
Holy Innocents St. Paul Episcopal Church,
7001 Torresdale Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19135**

Women's Rights and Food Justice

By Lucy Jones

In the most universal ritual in the Christian church, Jesus is represented—even becoming—bread that we eat and wine that we drink. The presence of God is made palpable in sustenance from the land. In earlier times, the wheat for that bread and the grapes for that wine would have grown locally and been processed by local people. Today, though we have faith that God is in the bread, we have little assurance that we can know what exactly makes up that loaf, even if we were to make it ourselves.

Food justice is especially a woman's issue because women are largely responsible for feeding their family and are closest to those needs of quantity and quality of the food they provide. When I was an environmental educator in my early career, I was amazed and dismayed to find that children, especially urban children, often had no idea that milk came from cows. Now it seems that most of us, responsible but harried citizens and consumers, are so disengaged and disassociated not only with the land, but with the processes that create the foods we eat every day, that we understand little about what is in our food, where it really comes from, and what political and industry maneuvers have been at work that endanger our health and the health of the planet.

Today it is not only a matter of making a connection to the source of what we put on our kitchen table, but a vital matter of what is being put into the soil, water and atmosphere for current and future generations.

Many of the multi-national corporations responsible for our concerns about food quality have become big players in the organic market—in production as well as distribution. Combined with the USDA's failure to manage them, organic certifiers exacerbate the weaknesses of the federal standard. "Today, fourteen of the twenty largest processors of food have acquired organic brands or introduced organic versions of their products. Whole Foods Market dominates the U.S. natural food retail sector, and one company, United Natural Foods, Inc. controls distribution." (*Foodopoly* by Wenonah Hauter, p. 101)

The acquisition of the organic label has been a public relations boon to the big food purveyors, whose consolidated power has been used to further weaken organic standards. The new guidelines also allow producers to source products anywhere in the world, wherever they are cheapest, so that large companies, such as Stonyfield Farm, buys milk powder from New Zealand to produce its organic milk. This kind of long distance sourcing is the antithesis of the original movement toward organically grown and produced foods, and is not sustainable for the planet. Global trade agreements have made it possible for more and more imported food from countries, such as China, with poor records of food safety, environmental protection and fair wages.

The situation with food in the U.S. has been forming for decades. Deregulation and consolidation began in earnest during Reagan's administration, and has continued through Democratic and Republican administrations alike. Meat inspection systems, considered too slow for the large mechanized slaugh-

terhouses, have been converted to a system whereby meat is irradiated or treated with chlorine to kill bacteria, part of a system called HACCP or Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Points system—nicknamed by some long-time government inspectors as "Have a cup of coffee and pray." Inspectors have been removed from the front of the production line where at one time they had the power to remove suspect animals. Even further, they have been delegated to looking over the records of the industry rather than working in the plants and factories on production lines to check carcasses as they move through. Even more disturbing, the seeming miracle of irradiation (using radioactive materials such as cobalt-60 and cesium) to kill bacteria in meat was used to feed soldiers between 1963 and 1968 until the FDA rescinded the army's permission after finding that irradiated foods produced a number of health problems in lab animals, including premature death, a rare form of cancer, tumors, and reproductive problems. Nevertheless, this has become a major part of our food safety system.

Access and availability of food for poor families has forever been a concern of church and other faith communities who minister through food pantries, soup kitchens and other feeding programs. Still, hunger and malnutrition plague this richest of countries, much to our shame. The average SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly Food Stamps) recipient receives only \$3 per day; still Congress cut \$1 billion from the program in the latest Farm Bill. A great deal of activity from advocates to end hunger kept the proposed Republican bill to cut aid by \$40 billion. As anyone who works directly with hungry people in this country must know, charitable efforts cannot fill the gap.

[A Place at the Table](#) by Peter Pringle is a companion book to the documentary of the same title by Kristi Jacobsen and Lori Silverbush. It states that 49 million people—including one in four children—go hungry in the U.S. every day, despite our having the means to provide nutritious, affordable food for all. Billions of **dollar in** subsidies go to agribusiness corporations which have routed out the family farm as we once knew them. These corporations have the means to lobby a Congress also hungry for campaign funds. Where is the voice of the people heard?

People of faith give voice to the "least of these" in all the many justice ministries to which we are called. As citizens, we must advocate for inclusion of all people in the American dream of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." In the Judeo-Christian tradition, we are called to "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God." As followers of Christ, we want to be on the side of justice and mercy when we hear ourselves saying, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?" The fight for economic justice, gender justice, marriage equality and food justice are all connected. In his letter to white clergyman in Birmingham, Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote from jail: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Lucy Jones coordinates the U.S. Grail's Food Justice Group, is on staff at the Grail Center in Cornwall, New York and is a United Methodist clergywoman.

DID YOU KNOW? 20th Anniversary of Papal “No”

May 22, 2014, was the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* in which was written: “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.” The Declaration goes on to conclude, based on reasons expounded by Pope Paul VI, that the Church “does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination.”

Mary was not given the ministerial priesthood but this does not mean that women are of lesser dignity. This is seen as the “faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe.”

Lastly, we are told that these teachings have been preserved by the “constant and universal Tradition of the Church and firmly taught by the Magisterium...[A]t the present time in some places it is nonetheless considered still open to debate.” The document ends with this: “...in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance...I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.” (All quotations from the original document).

While this judgment continues to be held by the Magisterium, I would doubt that it is definitively held by all the Church's faithful.

And Now for some Better News

I am compelled to report good news when I hear it. On May 22, 2014, representatives from National WOC knocked on the door of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and were invited to enter! A top Vatican official accepted over 700 letters calling for discussion of women's ordination stating, “This is amazing.”

At a press conference WOC leaders said, “Women's Ordination Worldwide encourages Pope Francis to stop making Jesus the Vatican's partner in gender discrimination. *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* is an outdated, fallible and painful document created by his predecessors to diminish the leadership of women. We are asking Pope Francis to open the doors of dialogue to talk with us about women's ordination.”

Another Anniversary of Note

2014 marks the 40th anniversary of the ordination of the “Philadelphia Eleven”, who became the first Episcopal women priests. On Saturday, July 26, a Symposium is scheduled at Temple University with Holy Eucharist celebrated later in the day at the Church of the Advocate. Dr. Fredrica Harris Thompsett will deliver the Keynote Speech and Reverend Dr. Nancy H. Wittig will lead Meditation. Reverend Dr. Katharine Jefferts Schori will preside and preach at Eucharist. For more information and registration to go www.40yearsordained.com.

Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) Schedules Conference in Philadelphia

In September, 2015, WOC, Women's Ordination Conference, will host the third international gathering of WOW. Advocates for women's ordination from around the world will gather to celebrate, be inspired and go forward. The theme is: Gender, The Gospel, and Global Justice. We will offer updated information as it becomes available but suggest you also visit womensordinationworldwide.org.

Female Voices Heard For the First Time in 1000 Years

And while we are discussing milestones, in January of this year a girls' chorus put an end to more than a thousand years of all-male tradition by singing at Canterbury Cathedral in England. As far as we know the Cathedral is still standing.

Canterbury is not the first British cathedral to have a girls' choir - others took the lead some 20 years ago - but the move has special resonance as Canterbury is the mother church of the world's 80 million-strong Anglican community.

It is also another sign of change in an institution that's struggling to achieve consensus on the divisive issues of female bishops and gay clergy. (*The Telegraph*)

SAVE THE DATE:

Friday, October 24. Tony Flannery, Catholic Tipping Point II.

Remember Helmut Schuller last year? Tony is the Irish equivalent. He will focus his presentation on the real prospects for reform in the church in light of the Francis papacy. He will discuss the areas where reform is urgently needed and how these reforms might be brought about. He will also highlight some of the obstacles facing the reform movement and the crucial importance of the various reform movements continuing to press for change. He believes we cannot realistically hope for too much from Church authorities (bishops, etc.), so the real movement will have to come from the grassroots.

For updates: sepawoc@sepawoc.org.

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Book Reviews

A Question of Conscience. Tony Flannery. Dublin, Ireland: Londubh Books, 2013. 160 pp. \$15.99 (paper); \$6.99 (ebook).

Reviewed by Regina Bannan.

Conscience – and compassion. That’s the way I’d headline this review, if we had such headlines. Tony Flannery is an Irish Redemptorist priest who preached at retreats, missions, and novenas, heard confessions and served parishes until the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) silenced him.

Such a dramatic action inspires self-reflection in a sensitive person. How did this happen? What factors led to it? Flannery suggests many possible causes:

Maybe Vatican II, which influenced his seminary days and early priesthood. The Redemptorists changed their preaching from the eternal consequences of sin to “the human person fully alive.” Flannery really listened to the confessions he was hearing and realized that *Humanae Vitae* was losing “young married women,” and general moral inflexibility was losing the students he worked with.

Maybe the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP). So committed to his own priesthood, Flannery was distressed at the suspicion that all priests were secret pedophiles as the sex abuse crisis took over Ireland. “Shame and anger” were his responses, shame at the perpetrators and anger at the hierarchs who covered up. He notes that the initial response of the Vatican was to blame the culture of the times, not the culture allowed to thrive secretly in the church. He also was appalled at the increasing centralization of power in the Vatican over religious orders like his as well as over dioceses. He and friends decided to form an independent organization that could speak for priests who favored the renewal of the church and soon had several hundred members.

But this is when the story gets complicated. It surprised the ACP that they “quickly had requests for help from priests against whom allegations of various types had been made, mostly to do with child sexual abuse.... Although we were initially very ambivalent about this we came around to thinking that, even when priests had done wrong, as followers of Christ we needed to show compassion to the sinner and provide some type of support for them, as they told us they were getting little or no support from their bishops, or often, indeed, from religious superiors.” They assembled a legal team to provide defense. This is not the dominant narrative when it comes to child sexual abuse, but it exemplifies the compassion that inspires Flannery at key moments in his story. Flannery suspects the Vatican wanted to break up the leadership of the ACP.

Or maybe what set the Vatican off were Flannery’s writings in *Reality*, the magazine of the Irish Redemptorists. (I love the title of the magazine – grounded.) That’s what the CDF said at first. He was summoned to Rome and did not keep it a secret, though the accusations were not revealed to him until he met in person with the CDF. In his column for the magazine, he had questioned whether Jesus “intended the type of system we now have in the Church.” He had described the priesthood as created later by “a select and privileged group ... in a manner that suited their own agenda,” and said that “now I believe that the Word of God and the

sacraments belong to and are already within the whole community, the Church, rather than the priest alone.” He objected to the new English translation of the missal and suggested that compulsory celibacy and the exclusion of women were problems. In this meeting, the CDF instructed Flannery’s superiors to restrict his activities, “impose” a period of reflection, and “instruct” him to withdraw from ACP leadership.

Or maybe it was the publicity that Flannery’s silencing received that caused the trouble. Flannery disavows making it public beyond his friends and colleagues; he suspects a Vatican leak when the story broke. Then the ACP issued a strong statement in response to the CDF’s silencing; in its reply the CDF mentioned the penalties for heresy, including excommunication; it especially objected to “malicious interpretations” in the ACP document and in the media which characterized the CDF’s procedures as secret. With the assistance of a theologian, Flannery developed a response. “I believe and accept that the Eucharist was given to us by Christ Himself ... that the Eucharist cannot be celebrated without a validly ordained minister ... that the origins of the Eucharist and the priesthood can be found in the Last Supper, where, as Sacred Scripture tell us, Jesus gave the command to the apostles gathered around the table to ‘Do this in memory of Me’ ... that the call to priesthood, indeed to all our Church’s ministries, comes from God through Jesus Christ.”

Or maybe the media speculation about the “real” causes of Flannery’s silencing was what did it. The CDF received the statement above and at a subsequent meeting in Rome expanded the issues that needed “clarification” to include “that the Lord Jesus chose men (viri) to form the college of the twelve apostles and that the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry; and that the Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself and for this reason the ordination of women is not possible.” Also added was the exceptionally broad statement that Flannery accept “the whole teaching of the church, also in regard to moral issues.” Flannery’s response expanded on what he wrote previously about the Eucharist and the priesthood and argued that the teachings on women’s ordination and moral issues have not been received by the faithful. In this statement, he consciously wrote what he believed. He detailed the Pontifical Biblical Commission’s judgment that there is no scriptural bar to the ordination of women, and noted that some sexual teachings seem imposed without pastoral understanding. The CDF rejected Flannery’s statement and insisted that the Redemptorists issue a “formal precept of obedience.” They did and Flannery decided to go public.

I loved reading this book. Tony Flannery is a real human being, an excellent writer, and a challenging person. He is nuanced in many areas, which I judge to come from his pastoral experience. Hard and fast is not his style; listening, evaluating, thinking of new ways is. That’s my kind of priest, or person, actually. Next fall, Flannery is doing a national tour in the United States, called, at least for now, Catholic Tipping Point II. I look forward to meeting him and to a lively discussion.

Regina Bannan is our SEPAWOC President.

Book Reviews

***Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis.* By Christiana Z. Peppard. Orbis Books, 2014. 230 pp. \$28 (paper); \$13.50 (eBook).**

Reviewed by Marian Ronan

I began working on the world water crisis in 2002, after hearing some really scary lectures by the great Canadian water activist, Maude Barlow. In the years that followed, I preached, taught, and wrote about the crisis. What I would not have given in those days for a copy of Christiana Peppard's *Just Water*.

At one level, Peppard's book is an up-to-date overview of the world water crisis itself. Her second chapter, "A Primer on the Global Fresh Water Crisis," provides invaluable information about the scope and seriousness of the situation. Peppard's 70-22-8 formula, shorthand for agriculture using more than twice as much water as industry (22%) and households (8%) together, puts any guilt over long showers into perspective; it's industrial agriculture that's really out of control. The terrible implications of the "hydrological optimism" of the second half of the twentieth century—huge dams, industrial irrigation, the draining of aquifers—also become clear. Further chapters are likewise invaluable: the one on hydraulic fracturing will force all liquefied natural gas believers to think twice. The chapter on industrial agriculture will give you indigestion. And the one on water and climate change confirms something I have long suspected: today, climate change *is* the world water crisis.

But *Just Water's* real strength is that it examines water scarcity in light of contemporary Christian theology and ethics and, in large part, contemporary *Catholic* theology and ethics. Two arguments about theology and ethics underpin *Just Water*. First, Peppard traces Catholic theology from Vatican Council II through liberation (political) theology and the preferential option for the poor (including women) to the current issue of water scarcity. She concludes that an overlap between theology and ethics, between the universal and the particular, is fundamental to contemporary Catholicism, with environmental theo-ethics a pivotal example of this dialectic. Then, in chapter four, Peppard shows social justice, especially regarding water, to be an essential part of official Catholic teaching, making her point using papal encyclicals, statements from the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, documents from bishops conferences, and more. Water justice is, Peppard tells us, a Catholic "right to life" issue.

I had mixed feelings about these arguments. I thought about sending Peppard a copy of Gene Burns's book, *The Frontiers of Catholicism*, which argues compellingly that since Vatican II, sexual teaching has occupied the top of the Catholic ideological hierarchy and is mandatory, while Catholic social teaching has fallen to the bottom and is entirely optional. (And she should ask Ernesto Cardenal about the Catholic Church and liberation theology.)

On the other hand, it doesn't hurt for a rising young Catholic theo-ethicist to tell her students and readers that Catholic teaching on water and other social issues is as central to the magisterium as the condemnation of contraception and abortion. And Peppard admits, more than once, that the average

Catholic knows none of this. This is surely part of her reason for writing *Just Water*. Then too, Pope Francis would seem to agree that justice for the poor is central to Catholic teaching.

But for me, the most galvanizing parts of *Just Water* are not Peppard's arguments about liberation theology or Catholic social teaching *per se*, but her interdisciplinary readings of two pivotal symbols of water in the Jewish and Christian traditions: the Jordan River, and the "woman at the well" (John 4:4-42). In the first case, Peppard compares the extraordinary religious significance of the River Jordan—there are more than eighty biblical references to it, not to mention all those hymns—with the river's current ecologically degraded and politically conflicted condition. Specifically, the river's flow decreased by 90 percent between the mid-twentieth century and the present. What does it mean, Peppard asks, that "the river itself is beleaguered while its symbolism—its mythic stature—remains robust"?

Then, in chapter nine, Peppard draws on current biblical scholarship to undercut the traditional interpretation of the woman at the well: instead of a foreign slut too dumb to grasp Jesus' spiritual understanding of water, the Samaritan woman becomes, along with Hagar, a figure for the millions of women around the world whose lives are incalculably harmed by water scarcity and pollution.

In the light of these two deeply moving interpretations, the guidelines for action Peppard offers in the last chapter of *Just Water* become all the more compelling.

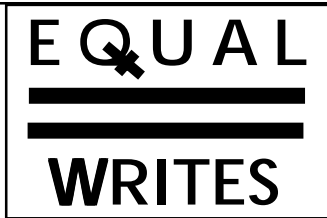
Marian Ronan is EqualwRites book review editor and the author of *Sister Trouble: the Vatican, the Bishops, and the Nuns* (Amazon 2013). She blogs at marianronan.wordpress.com, where this review first appeared.

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Scripture Reflections

July 20, 2014

Romans 8:26-27

By Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.

Although there are different interpretations of this verse, I hope that it means that the Holy Spirit turns our groanings into prayer; for when I saw the latest criticism of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious by Rome, all I could do was groan.

It reminded me of my reaction twenty years ago when *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (in English- "On reserving priestly ordination to men alone") was issued by Rome. This was also the document that was interpreted to mean that no one in an official position could discuss women's ordination. (Of course, I always point out that all seem able to discuss women's ordination freely if they are against it!!)

In reflecting on this document's implications, Jamie Manson in *NCR* points out that the women's ordination movement seeks to shine light on the truth that the denial of the full equality of women has global consequences. The movement seeks to dismantle the worldwide poverty, abuse and violence that are intricately tied to the systemic belief that women and men are not equal and seeks to help official church leaders recognize that including women everywhere could be a powerful witness for justice.

However, our church leaders would have to acknowledge the radical injustice inherent in the idea that gender dictates

who can and cannot be ordained or have official leadership in the church. They would have to stop mistakenly blaming Jesus for their own refusal to see that women have equality.

Recently Tom Roberts spoke at Mercyhurst College at the Joan Chittister OSB archive opening. He reflected that the integrity of any organization, religious or otherwise, is seriously diminished if it ignores, demeans or subjugates half of humanity. He shared that Joan Chittister wrote in *Called to Question* that to be treated as a full human being, an adult, a peer, you must claim it for yourself and let them all deal with it later!

As the Spirit turns our groanings into prayer, we remember Sr. Elizabeth Johnson who wrote: "It is blazingly evident by now that women are capable of serving in ordained ministry...do not quench the Spirit!"

Judy Heffernan is on the SEPAWOC Core Committee.

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