

Because Sometimes True Fidelity Lies in the Courage to Dissent

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EQUAL

**Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women
and Men in the Philadelphia Area**

Vol. XXX No. 1

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WRITES

MISSION STATEMENT - *As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry. We are committed to church renewal and to the transformation of a structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry.*

WOMEN CHANGING THE WORLD

By Marianna Pulaski Sullivan

There is much to complain about these days as a Catholic in Philadelphia. The latest grand jury report and the limp reaction of the archdiocese are discouraging. Clearly the hierarchy is in denial about what's going on in the church and in the world. The changes many of us would like to see coming seem a long way off. Luckily, we don't have to wait for them. We can find ways to emulate Christ in building community and working with others.

A case in point is my friend and neighbor Melanie Gavin, mother of four, grandmother of three. Educated as a Catholic from grade school through graduate school, Melanie has worked professionally and in a volunteer capacity as a nurse in community settings. While her work has sometimes been connected with Catholic organizations, including La Salle's Neighborhood Medical Centers, Melanie has forged her own path to put her talent to work where there is need. A former school nurse, Melanie wanted a more active role in helping people to improve their quality of life. As part of her graduate study in nursing, she volunteered at Face to Face, an independent corporation that runs a dining room, legal clinic and health clinic in the parish center of St. Vincent de Paul parish in Philadelphia's Germantown section. Currently Melanie works at Einstein Hospital doing home visits for a population with various needs. While she sees social change as a positive outcome of this work, Melanie declines to see herself as an activist. Her motives spring from awareness, not activism.

This awareness has led Melanie to be involved in Dining for Women (<http://diningforwomen.org>), a national organization

founded by Marsha Wallace in 2003. Each month, local groups of women in the U.S. meet for a dinner they have prepared and hear a presentation about an international organization that benefits women and children. Members then donate a check roughly equal to what they would have paid in a restaurant for the meal they have eaten and the proceeds go to that month's organization. In 2010 DFW raised \$310,000 nationwide.

What an ingenious idea. Dining for Women's motto is "Changing the World One Dinner at a Time." It's a simple solution to underdevelopment since studies have shown that educating and empowering women has many positive effects on economic development. DFW is a perfect example of women working to improve the lives of other women outside the official foreign aid policies of governments or the activities of large charitable organizations. As Melanie told me: "It's an easy way to help people improve their lives." This seems so clearly related to Melanie's professional career in public health.

One of the organizations supported by Dining for Women in 2010 was Bead for Life (<http://www.beadforlife.org>). Last year, under DFW's auspices, Melanie visited the Bead for Life Headquarters outside Kampala, Uganda in East Africa. Bead for Life was created by three American women, Torkin Wakefield, Ginny Jordan and Devin Hibbard, who happened to meet a woman in Uganda who made beads and had no place to sell them. Melanie's visit to Uganda included visiting the village where local women recruited from a slum in Kampala spend about nine months learning how to make beads from recycled paper. They then sell the beads to Bead for Life which distributes them around the world. With their earnings, many of the women become homeowners and business owners. Thus, they can support themselves and their

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WOMEN CHANGING THE WORLD

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families, providing more opportunities for their children. Melanie described the warm welcome she received when she visited and how enriched she was from encountering the women she met working to improve their situation.

Where does faith come into this picture? To what extent do Melanie's life choices reflect her membership in the Catholic Church? Like many of us, she believes that the current state of the church creates barriers to lay participation, especially by women. Categorically she stated, "If we had women priests, I would be a more active person (in the church)." She credits her 37-year career as a nurse with inspiring her concern for social justice. In her words, "How fortunate I have been to work/minister as a nurse."

As I think about her life, the path she has chosen resonates with me. She lives in a way that puts into practice what Jesus taught us about love and community. She seeks out ways to be more involved with individuals and to make a difference, emphasizing how much she gains and learns from others. Impatient with the organizational church, she notes that "faith carries us." This is the modern Catholic woman, active and forward looking, not hindered by the backwardness of the hierarchy. I am optimistic about the future. It's in our hands.

Marianna Pulaski Sullivan is a Professor Emeritus of Political Science & International Studies at the College of New Jersey. Like Melanie Gavin, Marianna belongs to St. Vincent's Parish.



Melanie Gavin with women and children of Uganda during her trip to Kampala in East Africa.

More about Bead for Life

Bead for Life reflects several fascinating trends in the battle against global poverty. One is the increasing interest in using businesses and entrepreneurship to create jobs and a more sustainable economic liftoff. A second is a focus on women, because of evidence that they are more likely than men to invest business profits in their children's education and health. A third is the growing attempt to engage American supporters by asking them to do something other than just writing checks.

Nicholas Kristoff *New York Times* 3-13-

Celebrating the Spirit of Vatican II

Please consider attending this important conference in Detroit on **June 10 – 12, 2011**.

Sponsored by the American Catholic Council, the conference will focus on "re-energizing the Catholic Church" in light of the results of nationwide listening sessions, in which many of you have participated. The goal is to "explore how to work toward an inclusive, responsible, and open Church" and, most importantly, create an action plan "to realize more fully the ecclesial vision of Vatican II."

Keynote speakers include such luminaries as Swiss Theologian, Hans Kung, Joan Chittister, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, James Carroll, Jeanette Rodriguez, and Anthony Padovano. Details are at: www.americancatholiccouncil.org. It's not too late to register and be part of this momentous impetus for positive change.



Cry Out with A Million Voices

FutureChurch's newest project provides ordinary Catholics with tools both to discuss pressing issues facing the Church and resist unjust suppression of that discussion by some officials.

FREE download at www.futurechurch.org : *Twelve Steps of Gospel Nonviolence, Basics of Community Organizing, a Three Part Education Program on Women's Ordination, Discerning a Response to Common Abuses of Authority* as well as prayer, advocacy and media resources.

Special companion CD of Georgetown University debate "Can a Woman Receive the Sacrament of Orders" with Fr. Joseph Fessio and Sr. Maureen Fiedler also available for \$ 8.00 (includes s/h)

Two Spiritual Tools for Transformational Change

By Sharon Browning

Although attempting to bring about world peace through the internal transformation of individuals is difficult, it is the only way. The Dalai Lama

How can you think of saying, 'Friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Luke 6:42

The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. Audre Lorde

I was reminded of these sayings recently in a number of settings: while attending gatherings of earnest and dedicated individuals seeking a more just and inclusive Church, and while reading vitriolic email exchanges between good and loving people who are understandably outraged by the latest revelations in the clergy abuse scandals. It's clear that a great deal of time, effort, and expertise have been marshaled for the cause and that these efforts spring from a deep well of desire for a church that more clearly mirrors the Gospel. There is a tangible hunger for an institution that nurtures individuals who are, and which is itself, Bread for the World.

Often, though, despite all of the hard work and expectation, there is no transformative energy moving us forward. It feels flat and stuck, yet another meeting or communication that may advance the enterprise, but at a lackluster, snail's pace. What's often missing is the fire of the Spirit, inspired ideas and planning that arise only when we are connected to the Source of all wisdom and allow that energy to move through us and into the world.

At the conclusion of one of these meetings, I approached one of the planners to discuss the possibilities for a more intentionally spiritual process. Perhaps in the future, the proceedings could be punctuated by intermittent reflective, prayerful pauses, a muezzin-like, bell-of-mindfulness-Angelus-ringing-type call to prayer, some mechanism for periodically bringing all of those assembled back to the moment, back to connection with the Divine within each and all. Such a process would ensure that those assembled stay rooted in the Spirit and make consistent efforts to bring Divine Light to shine on their endeavors. The planner looked surprised, and then said, "But that's not what we're about here. We're trying to change structures."

Uniting Head and Heart

This separation of head from heart, intellect from spirit, is precisely what has landed us in the precarious place in which we currently find ourselves- a rigid, hierarchical, alienating church so increasingly lifeless that hordes of deeply spiritual people flee from it, disaffected, discouraged, some trying to create alternative vibrant faith communities, others just giving up altogether. And for some of us, anger has turned to rage and we have gotten stuck there, unable to digest our powerful emotions and harness the resulting energy into

passionate, inspired action for transformative change. We continue to spew negativity out into the world, creating even more of what we so desperately want to heal. Too often, our good intentions become tainted and lost in blame and judgment about 'them' and 'their' failings. It's always someone else who needs to change.

Ah, we humans. Complicated creatures that we are, with our left and right brains frequently at odds with each other, no wonder we get stuck. How can we move forward with hope, and joy, and freedom? What to do? How to be? How discern next steps in our individual and communal quest for the reign of God, anchored to earth through us? As the Dalai Lama suggests, our own inner transformation is the key; can we undertake the difficult and painful task of changing our own hearts? In Jesus' formulation of this universal truth, we must first remove the log from our own eyes. So much of our effort is filled with ego and a lack of reflective prayerfulness; no wonder transformational change eludes us. Ego-centric, unreflective behaviors are precisely what created the patriarchal church, and as Audre Lorde famously observed, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

There are a few simple things we could do to break this impasse...simple in concept, but very difficult in practice. Here are two suggestions, one communal, one personal:

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THE COMMUNITY OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE AND SEPAWOC INVITE YOU TO A PRESENTATION BY

DR. PATRICIA FRESEN

"Transformation by Compassion"

**Friday, April 15 at 7:30pm
Collenbrook United Church
5290 Township Line Road, Drexel Hill, PA
(near the junction of Route. 1 and State Road)**

Patricia Fresen cites two main sources for her talk: "The remarkable icon, Hildegard of Bingen, and the writings of our wonderful contemporary, and one of the most brilliant minds of our age, Karen Armstrong." Patricia Fresen is quite an icon herself. Her journey from 45 years as a Dominican nun to her secret ordination as first a deacon, then a priest and, finally, as a Roman Catholic bishop is filled with dramatic – and inspirational - moments. After her ordination, Patricia Fresen was forced to leave the Dominican Order, but she has forged a new life as a bishop dedicated to preparing and ordaining Catholic women (and a few men) in the U.S., Canada, and Europe and continuing women's ordination worldwide.

Two Spiritual Tools for Transformational Change

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Communal Reflection

Build reflective, prayerful pauses into every meeting, reform gathering, protest and demonstration... any and every group meeting intended to hasten change in the church. I'm not talking about rote prayers, petitions, or words aimed at changing the hearts of anyone other than ourselves, although those have their place and value. Rather, how would things shift if we were intentionally to create empty spaces, silent, creative moments to allow ourselves to listen to the still, small voice within us, to seek divine guidance?

Some conferences and meetings utilize a process where a 'spiritual reflector' is given the task of listening intently throughout the gathering, and then of intermittently holding a mirror up to all in attendance, summarizing what has transpired, and then posing questions for reflective, prayerful consideration. Everything stops while all present pause, breathe, reflect, listen to and share the inner wisdom that is found in every human heart. These gatherings are vibrant, charged with energy. Such deep listening to ourselves and each other is transformative.

Personal Reflection

Another obstacle to transformational change is our unhealthy egos... the part in each and every one of us that wants to feel superior to another, that is more concerned with self promotion than with the Common Good. All of us suffer from what Eckhart Tolle calls "Unconscious Manifestations of Ego," behaviors of which we are largely unaware but that impede us, preventing us from being conduits for the Spirit. If I am full of myself, there is no room for the indwelling God to be expressed through me.

Tolle's list is illuminating; this is foundational self-knowledge, essential subject matter for our personal reflection and prayer. It's a list to be reviewed with gentleness toward ourselves and each other; every single one of us has adopted some or all of these behaviors over the years in order to feel safe and loved, and we unthinkingly do these things day in and day out. It is our unexamined repetition of them that creates so much harm in the world. Awareness of how and when we resort to these strategies is spiritually and emotionally freeing.

Here's the list, adapted from Tolle's *A New Earth*, for your careful consideration and reflection.

- Desiring, seeking, or demanding recognition for something you did. Being upset, disgruntled, angry, or 'holding on' if you don't get it.
- Trying to get attention by talking about your problems, the story of your life, issues, etc. Interrupting, pulling attention to yourself rather than listening to the other person.
- Giving your opinion when nobody has asked for it and it makes no difference to the situation.
- Being more concerned with how the other person

sees you than with the other person.

- Trying to make an impression on others through knowledge, status, possessions, etc. For some, boasting of the OPPOSITE, e.g. a simple lifestyle, lack of possessions.
- Bringing about temporary ego inflation through angry reaction against someone or something. (Think cable news shows, and then think of your own personal version.)
- Taking things personally, feeling offended.
- Making yourself right and others wrong through futile mental or verbal complaining, gymnastics, explaining. Constant judging of others. Being sure you are right.
- Wanting to be seen, or appear important.

Which of these behaviors do we engage in? When? Why? How did these behaviors serve us in the past, and can we now see them for the dysfunctions they are, and gently let them go? Can we choose to simply Be, quiet our minds, open our hearts, wake up and be conscious of the Spirit ever waiting in the wings to blow past our ego dysfunctions and work her wondrous miracles in the world through our uniquely-gifted selves?

How often are we in meetings or situations where we see these behaviors, and know them to be obstructionist and counter-productive? More importantly, which can we claim as our own? It is easier to see them in others than to acknowledge these habitual behaviors ourselves. Yet all of us share these human tendencies and are capable of bringing them to consciousness, recognizing their destructive power, and choosing not to engage in them. This self-reflective practice is essential if we are to bring about our own individual internal transformation and is the *sine qua non* of widespread social change and transformation. This is how we remove the log in our own eye.

The fruit of this practice is compassion; when we claim these behaviors as our own, we don't judge others when we see these actions in them. Knowing that we share the same frail tendencies, we recognize our unity with others and are moved to compassion for them...and for ourselves. Energy freed from self-absorption, blame, and judgment is available to do the work of the Spirit. Imagine. A New Pentecost.

Lent is the perfect time to practice these reflective skills. We are blessed with a liturgical season specifically intended as an opportunity to slow down, engage in some crucial self-reflection, do the work of internal transformation, and begin anew. Let's change the world by changing ourselves.

Sharon Browning is currently working with the Philadelphia-based Just Listening Project which fosters personal and social change through the practice of non-judgmental listening skills. Browning is an attorney and a spiritual director and supervisor, and facilitates retreats and workshops on a variety of topics.

Sister Trouble: The Vatican Investigations of U.S. Catholic Sisters

By Marian Ronan

In 2009 the Vatican began an “apostolic visitation” of active, as distinguished from contemplative, congregations of Catholic sisters in the U.S. and a “doctrinal assessment” of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), an organization comprising the leaders of approximately 90% of those same active congregations. In this article I refer to these two processes as “the investigations.”

While relations between Catholic sisters and the Vatican have been especially contentious since Vatican II, it’s difficult to understand the current investigations without reading them in the context of a series of conflicts throughout the history of the church between groups of celibate women striving to live an intensely Christian life and various bishops and popes. Historian Kathleen Sprows Cummings connects these conflicts directly to the question of gender: “The institutional church,” she writes, “has never quite known what to do with women who step out of traditionally female roles, and there is no question that by becoming collectively more professional, more educated, and more likely to challenge those in positions of power in both church and state, the majority of sisters in this country have grown progressively less ‘feminine’ over the past four decades.” Indeed, I would argue that the current investigations, and many of the ecclesiastical efforts to control, confine to cloister, or abolish groups of women religious throughout history, have to do with those women not merely failing to act sufficiently feminine but actually destabilizing, or subverting, the gender roles assigned to them.

Central to this argument is the work of theorist, Judith Butler, who questions notions of sexuality and gender as stable and contained. Specifically, Butler maintains that while sex and gender are constructed through the repetition of norms, as Michel Foucault has argued, it’s simply not possible to repeat those norms the same way every time. Slippage in—deviant re-citations of—gender norms have the potential to subvert or transform gender.

Catholic feminist theologian Karen Trimble Alliaume applies Butler’s understanding of the destabilization of gender to the phenomenon of Catholic women priests. For Alliaume, women are excluded from priesthood because the institutional Catholic economy of salvation is one of imitation: Christians must resemble Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Central to this economy is the requirement that signs resemble what they signify. Jesus was male, and since women aren’t, they don’t

resemble Jesus, so they can’t be ordained. Women’s inordinate bodies do not exist in the economy of salvation, except in an entirely complementary fashion. They receive salvation only through those conduits who are literal signs of the divine by virtue of their maleness.

In contrast to this imitative economy of salvation, Alliaume understands women and men as well) to be constantly constructing and reconstructing together the Church, the Body of Christ, in their performances, or re-citations, of the norm Jesus Christ. Following Butler, who explains the way in which gays destabilize heterosexuality as “gay is to straight not as copy is to original but as copy is to copy,” Alliaume understands Christ’s relation to the Church not as original to copy but as copy to copy.

Alliaume can seem to be saying here that Christ is nothing but a copy, just like the rest of us. I would suggest, however, that her argument that Christ is the norm but not the literal original to be imitated under all circumstances helps to undercut certain idolatrous tendencies in the institutional church. It is also offered in the service of the Church, since the current elimination of fully half of the bodies capable of performing Christ clearly diminishes that Body.

Alliaume turns to the growing number of women being ordained Catholic priests to illustrate the performative economy of salvation. To do so, she draws on a 1993 article in which theologian Eleanor McLaughlin portrays the woman priest and Christ himself as transvestites—God as a “man” dressed in “female” flesh, and the woman priest as a “woman dressed as a man dressed as a woman.” Both figures, according to Alliaume, undermine the gendered economy of salvation by shocking those who encounter or even hear about them. Seen from this point of view, it’s hard to deny that many of the conflicts between the Vatican/hierarchy and Catholic sisters throughout church history were intimately linked to questions about the gender and power of the ordained priesthood.

Historical Perspective

Already by the end of the second century Christian women in Europe and North Africa perceived themselves as transformed into men through their experience of martyrdom. According to Eusebius, as the virgin Blandina hung from the cross during the persecution in 177, she “put on Christ, the invincible athlete,” while in 203 the married woman Perpetua, after stripping herself of her female qualities in preparation for her impending martyrdom, dreamt that she had become a man. Eventually, virgins claimed that it was their virginity

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Sister Trouble: The Vatican Investigations of U.S. Catholic Sisters

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itself, not martyrdom, that enabled them to transcend their gender. This notion called into question the notion that only biological men were capable of functioning as priests. Male church leaders defended themselves against such subversion by teaching that even the highest degree of virginal purity could not free women from sexual taint, and introducing the metaphor of the virgin as the bride of Christ, not a man, or Christ himself.

Now, as we have seen, there's no guarantee that performances by Catholic women priests necessarily subvert gender. Sometimes performances reinforce current norms, and this insight could apply to the performances by early Christian virgins that I've just mentioned; their claims to be male, or to have transcended their gender could reinscribe male superiority. But if so, why were church leaders so hot to get these women back into their gendered location, and why has the exercise of power by Catholic sisters throughout church history continued to be such a fraught issue for church leaders? In point of fact, the manly bodies of those virgins and martyrs were at the same time female ones.

As Christians began moving into the desert, women once again began assuming the athletic and military imagery of the female martyrs that undercut episcopally-mandated bride imagery. And the monasticism of later years seemed also to move in this direction: nuns as well as monks were laypeople, governed under a basic rule, garbed similarly, and engaged in the non-clerical divine office. By the 8th century, however, bishops began singling out female monasteries for control, and the ordination of monks drove a wedge between male and female monastics.

Nonetheless, by the year 800, groups of canonesses, dedicated to religious life as well as active ministry, arose. These women took only temporary vows and retained the freedom to own goods and marry later if they chose. The reforms of Charlemagne tried to get these women under control, but by the 13th century, a new group, the Beguines, also began living a common religious life while retaining the right to own property and marry if they wished. And while the decline of women's power in the Middle Ages could have marked the end of this trajectory, with popes and clericalized monks imposing rigid cloister on what they perceived to be out of control nuns, other forms of religious life continued to emerge, in which beatas and recluses, without vows, lived together in anchorages, giving spiritual advice to the faithful, and running dispensaries. And in the 13th century, female as well as male mendicant orders emerged around Francis, Clare, Dominic and others. Through it all, popes, bishops and theologians struggled to control these women, especially to protect the image of the celibate priest from the taint of female contact.

In summary: celibate Christian women—women religious—throughout church history have destabilized the clear boundaries between genders, and especially between women and the clergy, by their ministries, their claims to agency, their scholarship, their heroic virtue. This dedication to a Christian life not limited by gender has repeatedly elicited papal denunciations and “apostolic” visitations. More recently, the separation of church and state has also served to blur distinctions

between sisters and priests by dint of their apparently-shared ecclesiastical garb and institutional identity. Clerical interventions cannot remedy these gender destabilizations, however; they are rooted in sisters' structural oscillation between the celibate male clergy and the symbolically female non-celibate laity.

Current Investigations

In one respect, the current investigations may turn out to be even more repressive than previous Vatican attempts to control women religious. This is so because, as Gene Burns has argued, the church, by making certain concessions to the modern world at Vatican II—acknowledging freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, for example—did not so much abdicate its claims to absolute truth as shift that claim from the arena of doctrine to that of morals, that is to say, gender and sexuality. The investigations since 2009 may then be understood as a perfect storm in which this increasingly gender-focused post-Vatican II economy of salvation collides with the prompt and enthusiastic implementation by Catholic sisters of Vatican demands for renewal even before the Council, particularly their massive educational upgrading. At the center of this storm is the Vatican desire to force the only female bodies over which they any longer exercise control to conform absolutely to this increasingly gender-imitative economy.

One way of thinking about the current Vatican investigations of US women religious is to consider the question of the traditional habit. Critics of the post-Vatican II renewal of U.S. women's religious life use the abandonment of the habit as a prime instance of the harmful changes that took place beginning in 1965. This focus on common dress betrays the functioning of an imitative economy in which truth is conveyed by the natural or agreed upon meaning of signs. To the Vatican, a nun's habit and veil signify her relationship, and that of the wider church, with their male spouse, Christ. But the uniform habits worn by the nuns who educated many of us did not only remind us that they were brides. They also made the sisters look like members of the military, as did the title of their superior, Mother General. And let me assure you, being

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Roman Catholic Womanpriest at
emdifranco@aol.com.

Sister Trouble

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educated by strong assertive captains and generals had an impact on many of us, though most of those sisters probably did not intend the gender destabilization they effected. In a performative economy, signs have more than one meaning.

It may seem that Catholic sisters' destabilization of gender binaries and the all-male priesthood is limited to the "liberal" U.S., but don't you believe it. In his theology of the church in East Africa in the context of the massive social problems there, Angbokkhanmeghe Orobator S.J., discusses the roles of indigenous priests and Catholic women, primarily Catholic sisters, in the AIDS epidemic in East Africa. The question of the ordination of women in the Catholic Church would seem to be settled, Orobator notes. But priests in East Africa are almost never involved in ministry to people with AIDS. Only the women engage in such ministry. The deepest desire of Catholic people with AIDS as they near death is to receive the sacrament of reconciliation, but since there are no priests to administer the sacrament, these men and women die without it. Clearly the Catholic sisters and their female lay co-workers fall outside the gendered Catholic imitative economy of salvation. By their performances of mercy, their ministry to the dying body of Christ, these women subvert the all-male priesthood, whether they intend to or not.

Marian Ronan is Research Professor Catholic Studies at New York Theological Seminary. This article is the revision of a paper delivered at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion.

SEPA WOC Financial Statement 2010:

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SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE CHURCH LET US NOT BE SILENT

A recent publication noted, "We are One in the pain caused by the sexual abuse of our victim members. All are angry; how are we to respond? Let us make a prayerful response grieve the pain and injustice, lament the oppressive abuse and cover-up and pray for the healing of wounds and from sin. Let us cry out in one voice: Stop the abuse! Let us act: All of us can write our Pennsylvania legislators to support HB878 and HB832 removing the Statute of Limitations for civil and criminal cases for child abuse and provide a window for civil suits for past offenses." These bills must first go through the Judiciary Committee. You can write or phone the chairman, Hon. Ron Marsico at 218 Ryan Office Bldg., P.O. Box 202105, Harrisburg, PA 17120-2105, 717-783-2014.

Ellie Harty

PAUL HAD IT RIGHT!

By Jim Plastaras

There is an obvious conflict between what Paul held in theory about gender and social status equality in Christ with his advice on various practical issues, such as allowing women to speak at Church assemblies. On the one hand, he tells the Galatians:

There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

But then he advises the Corinthians:

As in all the churches of God's people, the women should keep quiet in the meetings. They are not allowed to speak; as the Jewish Law says, they must not be in charge. If they want to find out about something, they should ask their husbands at home. It is a disgraceful thing for a woman to speak in a church meeting. (I Cor 33b-35)

At one time, I attributed this inconsistency to a simple matter of “cognitive dissonance.” People may hold values – hold them even passionately – without necessarily accepting the implications of those beliefs. After reading John Dominic Crossan’s *In Search of Paul*, I realized that there was a strong case to be made for placing Paul on the side of the angels. In the letters written by Paul, there is no acceptance of either slavery or gender inequality. He never wavers from his belief in the equality of all the baptized in Christ Jesus.

I had always assumed that the authors of the non-Pauline canonical epistles (Timothy I & II, Titus, Colossians, Ephesians, II Thessalonians) were the next generation of disciples just doing their best to capture what Paul would say to us today — if he were still with us. The Pastoral Epistles (Timothy & Titus) offer advice to the *episcopoi* and *presbyteroi*, who had yet to arrive on the scene while Paul was alive. The author(s) of Colossians and Ephesians developed in greater depth Paul’s original insights regarding the Church as the Body of Christ. The anonymous non-Pauline authors saw themselves as continuing the Pauline tradition.

On the issues of gender equality and slavery, however, the post-Pauline authors did more than simply tone down Paul’s proclamation regarding equality in Christ Jesus. They said something entirely different in the advice they offered on various issues:

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silence. (I Tim 2:11-12)

If a man is eager to be a church leader, he desires an excellent work. . . he must be able to manage his own family well and make his children obey him with all respect. (I Tim 3:1,4)

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. Just as the church is subject to Christ,

so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. (Eph 5:22,24)

Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, for that is what you should do as Christians. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents always, for that is what pleases God. Parents, do not irritate your children, or they will become discouraged. Slaves, obey your human masters in all things, not only when they are watching you because you want to gain their approval; but do it with a sincere heart because of your reverence for the Lord. (Col 3:18-22)

Why did these authors of the next generation consistently emphasize *submission* (albeit *as to the Lord*), and by so doing, validate the prevailing domination structures of patriarchy and slavery? Their motivation, as Crossan explains it, was to tone down the more threatening aspects of Paul’s beliefs regarding freedom and equality in Christ. The Augustan age — the ‘Golden Age’ of the Roman empire — prided itself as a well-ordered society supported by public morality and *family values*. The social structure was characterized by domination, but a supposedly benign and beneficial domination. Paul’s viewpoint on freedom and equality in Christ must have seemed subversive and extreme by the people who wanted to come to an accommodation with the Empire. The author of 1st Timothy exhorts:

I urge that petitions, prayers, requests, and thanksgivings be offered to God for all people; for kings and all others who are in authority, that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence toward God and with proper conduct. (I Tim 2:1)

The picture of Christianity presented in the Pastoral Epistles, Acts, and Ephesians-Colossians is Empire-friendly rather than subversive. Believers are exhorted to submit to the powers-that-be. Submission was to the Lord, rather than to man, but submission, nonetheless.

But are there not a number of passages in the genuine Pauline epistles which appear to be inconsistent with his central vision of equality in Christ? First and foremost is the passage from 1st Corinthians, already alluded to which demands women keep silent and never be allowed leadership in church meetings. The Pauline authorship of this passage is, however, seriously suspect. In early manuscripts, the passage appears at the end of the chapter, and in all Greek manuscripts, it appears as a separate paragraph. Because of these considerations, and because the content represents an abrupt change of perspective, many scripture scholars regard the passage as a non-Pauline insertion.

But what about 1st Corinthians 7 where Paul talks about his preference for virginity over marriage? Whatever we might think about his views on this issue, there is no suggestion of male superiority. His advice is offered even-handedly — first to men, and then to women.

Then there is the chapter in which Paul explains why men

Paul Had it Right

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should pray with head uncovered, and women with head covered (I Cor 11). He did want different protocols for the different sexes in the prayer assembly, but there is absolutely nothing to suggest gender-related superiority. Paul may have realized that his arguments were not be altogether convincing. He concludes by saying:

But if anyone wants to argue about it, all I have to say is that neither we nor the churches of God have any other custom in worship. (I Cor 11:16)

There is ample positive evidence from Paul's writings that he regarded men and women as equals not only in the family and the worshipping community, but also in the apostolate.

- **In the family:** Regarding Paul's discussion of celibacy and marriage in 1st Corinthians 7, Crossan observes: "Whatever he says of one spouse, he than says of the other; the wife does this, the husband does the same. . . Paul speaks deliberately and overtly in terms not just of mutuality, but of equality." (*In Search of Paul*, p.111)
- **In the worshipping assembly:** His convoluted discussion about head covering in the assembly 1st Corinthians 11 takes for granted that custom allowed women to prayed aloud and prophesy in the Corinthian assembly. The prohibitions calling for women to remain silent clearly belong to a later period.
- **In the apostolate:** The most fertile source of information about Paul's companions in the apostolate is Romans 16, where he sends personal greetings from his co-workers to named individuals in Rome. Of the 17 named co-workers who were known to Paul by direct contact, nine are men, eight are women. He uses the verb *kopiao* (to work hard) to praise the efforts of four co-workers, all women (Mary, Triphaena, Tryphoas, and Persis). Then there is the notorious case of the woman *Junias* whom Paul praises as one of his fellow prisoners who "*are prominent among the apostles, and became Christians before I did.*" (Rom 16:7). *Junias*, who was identified as woman for many centuries, would later undergo a sex change, and become *Junian*. The reason was obvious: how could a woman be an apostle!

The Paul of the genuine Pauline epistles advocates consistently for gender equality. But this suggests another problem. How do we reconcile the disagreement between Paul and his Revisionists with our belief in the inerrancy of the Scriptures? If what Paul holds is true, the revisionists are in error, at least on this issue. This is one of a number of instances where different New Testament witnesses conflict with each other. When this happens, the rule is to apply the *analogy of faith* — what is said by any one witness needs to be interpreted within context of the entire revelation. The fact that post-Pauline revisionists came later in time and intended to correct or improve upon Paul, does not mean that their view should prevail. For the most of 2000 years, a predominantly patriarchal Christian culture would hear the witness of the

revisionists rather than that of Paul himself. This does not make their viewpoint right.

In our time, wider society — and somewhat belatedly even faith communities — have come to the awareness that patriarchal structure are unjust and anachronistic. It is probably because of this awareness that scripture scholars decided to give the unrevised Paul a more careful examination. What do you know? Paul had it right on issues of equality!

Jim Plastaras is the author of *The Witness of John: A Study of Johannine Theology* and *The God of Exodus and the Creation and Covenant*.

What would Jesus do? What would He want US to do?

Having read the previous article by Jim Plastaras, I am thinking about Paul and Jesus and how they responded to those who held power over others. It is well and good to study the Bible and tease out the meaning of their words and actions in their historical settings. However, if their message is timeless and universal, we must apply it to the times in which WE live. Do we act accordingly? Do we speak out in the belief that all voices should be heard, all persons respected and no one is harmed? Should we, for example, use our voices to contact our legislators about the extension of the Statute of Limitations for civil and criminal cases of child abuse (see page 7)? Do we show up as witnesses on Holy Thursday (see page 1) to stand in solidarity for the full inclusion of women in the life of the church? Will we come to hear and support the brave individuals who publicly risk all to speak truth to power, such as Patricia Fresen (see page 3)?

Recently two hundred and twenty-five courageous theologians from Austria, Germany and Switzerland showed they could not remain silent. Issuing a statement in February, they sent an open letter to the church hierarchy saying they had to speak out about ending celibacy requirements for priests, opening the priesthood to women and introducing significantly more democracy into the church's structures.

No, we do not always have the power to change things. But we do have the obligation to speak and act from where we stand. Quoting Judy Heffernan who quotes Dorothy Day (see page 12), "We may never see the outcome of the good we do, but we must do it anyway."

Mary Whelan

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Book Reviews

Women of Faith: Women of the Catholic Church Speak. A film by Rebecca M. Alvin. New York: Women Make Movies, 2009. 60 min. Available for home viewing from Belly Girl Films, \$29.95. Copies for group use for sale or rent from Women Make Movies.
Reviewed by Marian Ronan

Women, it's fair to say, don't get the coverage they deserve. A letter to the *New York Times* lately asked why the paper didn't run more obituaries of women. The editor responded that among the majority of people dying these days, in their eighties and nineties for the most part, men had just accomplished more.

If women don't get enough coverage, religious women get even less. And as for Catholic women... in the much-lauded new book on the 1960s by Mark Massa S.J., *The Catholic Revolution*, a quarter as many women as men appear in the index, and some of these distinguish themselves, for example, by being Avery Dulles assistant. So Women Make Movies and the filmmaker Rebecca M. Alvin deserve credit for their new documentary about Catholic women, *Women of Faith*.

For the most part, *Women of Faith* comprises a series of interviews by Alvin with six or eight American Catholic women. It opens with a visit to the convent of the Poor Clares, a contemplative congregation in Jamaica Plains, Massachusetts. Alvin crosscuts between interviews with several of these women and interviews with a trio of Maryknoll sisters at their motherhouse in Ossining N.Y. *EqualwRites* readers may be interested in a segment that begins with a WOC demonstration led by Aisha Taylor outside a meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C., and then cuts fairly quickly to a conversation between the filmmaker and Roman Catholic Womenpriest Marie David. A lesbian who is a former Daughter of Charity is also interviewed.

Alvin poses questions that enable viewers to get to know the various subjects of her film. I personally was most involved in her exchanges with the Maryknoll sisters, in particular the story one of them told about the churchwomen raped and murdered in El Salvador in 1980, two of whom were Maryknollers. The sister observes that this event ended her naïve inability, and that of the other Maryknoll sisters in Central America, to imagine that they, as Americans, would ever suffer such violence.

In the second half of the film, Alvin zeroes in on the question of why the various interviewees remain in a church in which women are so clearly unequal, and most particularly, excluded from ordination. By and large, the Poor Clares are accepting of the situation, or at least, they believe that charity requires not moving more quickly than the larger community. The Maryknollers, on the other hand, express no interest in being ordained until the church changes radically. Paradoxically, that position seems no more to push them toward leaving the church than the alternative position pushes the Poor Clares. The lesbian former sister no longer considers herself Catholic but expresses

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at Time. By Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin. Penguin 2007. Paperback. \$16. 349 pp.

Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Education in Afghanistan and Pakistan. By Greg Mortenson. With a foreword by Khaled Hosseini. Penguin, 2010. Paperback. \$16. 448 pp.
Reviewed by Aileen Hayes

As people who are passionate about justice, we know that women (Catholic and non-Catholic) still have not broken through all the ceilings preventing them from reaching their full potential. With this in mind, it is good for us to become aware of tales of hope for women around the globe and of men who brave danger for women's rights. In *Three Cups of Tea* and its sequel, *Stones into Schools*, we find just such true stories.

The first book, *Three Cups of Tea*, published in 2006, introduces us to the author of both books, Greg Mortenson, an Indiana Jones who crosses the roughest terrain and deals with the roughest of men to build schools for girls in Pakistan. Mortenson starts out as a mountaineer attempting to climb to the summit of K2, the world's second highest mountain, in the Karakoram region of Pakistan. After struggling through brutal weather and terrain, he realizes he is not going to get there this time. Exhausted, lost, and alone, he heads back in the other direction hoping to return to some semblance of civilization to regain his strength.

Fearless Greg Mortenson eventually stumbles on a small, remote village named Korphe. The village chief greets this "strange white man" with the warmest of welcomes and gives him a place to rest, food to eat, and much tea to drink. This is where the title of the book comes in: three cups of tea. According to Pakistani tradition, you drink three cups of tea when you do business. As Haji Ali, the Korphe Village Chief says, "The first you are a stranger, the second you become a friend, and the third, you join our family, and for our family we are prepared to do anything—even die." Mortenson has enough tea to be a blood relative to everyone in Korphe village and before he leaves, he makes a promise to the Chief and to the village children to come back someday and build a school for them.

Greg Mortenson does not forget his promise. It results in a whirlwind of fundraising, material-finding, friend making and enemy-making that leads him back to Pakistan on a journey that has not ended to this day. He meets with tribal leaders and religious leaders, gets kidnapped by the Taliban, crosses mountains and virtually impassable passes, and leaves a trail of schools in his wake.

Eventually Mortenson is approached by one of the most well respected Mullahs in Afghanistan, and six years after its illustrious beginning, *Three Cups of Tea* turns into the sequel, *Stones into Schools*. This second story takes place, for the most part, in Afghanistan which, as we know too

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no regret for her years in the convent. Perhaps most intriguing of all, Womanpriest Marie David says that she simply has to keep connected to the Catholic tradition—quite a different perspective from the one the Vatican would seem to project onto her.

Having said all this, I must admit that there is something about *Women of Faith* that I find a little depressing. I am pretty sure I read somewhere that the filmmaker, Rebecca Alvin, grew up Catholic, but isn't Catholic any longer. Perhaps that explains why she chose to focus on two sets of nuns, an ex-nun, a priest (albeit a woman priest) and only briefly on one laywoman. Perhaps when Alvin was growing up, nuns and priests were the church. But that isn't the case any longer.

And probably she chose to interview the nuns and priest she did because they live near her in New England and independent films are made on notoriously low budgets. I personally know many nuns, even those opposed to women's ordination, who are a lot more interesting than the women Alvin chose to interview. Not to mention Catholic laywomen.

Why didn't Alvin interview our own Regina Bannan, for Pete's sake? Or Chris Schenk? Or Theresa Kane, who lives not far from Ossining and all by herself could fill up a mesmerizing hour on why she remains a Catholic? Why not include more younger Catholic women in the film—Jamie Manson, maybe, or our own Aileen Hayes?

It's hard not to come away from *Women of Faith* thinking that Rebecca Alvin's choice of interviewees answers her "Why remain a Catholic" question before any of them utters a word.

Marian Ronan is *EqualwRites* Book Review Editor.

Hayes *continued from page 10*

well, has an unsteady relationship with Americans and the United States. Mortenson sows a field of education, particularly for girls, in the heart of a land of terrorism. In *Stones into Schools* even the United States Military realizes that this gentle yet fearless man from Montana is fighting terrorism better with his books and pencils than they are with guns and bombs and intimidating tactics. One entire chapter in *Stones into Schools* discusses the effects of Mortenson's first book on military strategy in Afghanistan and how military leaders work better with local leaders because of his work.

Both of these books are exciting, inspirational reading. They are a testament to the process of peace making. The words and actions of Greg Mortenson, and the Central Asia Institute he leads, have given hope to countless numbers of girls and women in an area of the world that often forgets them. The women who have gained opportunities through Greg's efforts have gone on, and will continue to go on, and be great leaders in their communities. These are seeds that have been planted which will spread for years to come, and we will see the global effects of this simple yet deeply effective strategy of educating women to promote peace and justice in the world.

As advocates for women in the Catholic Church, we are connected with women all over the world who are forgotten or oppressed for one reason or another. These books are not the story of women's ordination, but they are the story of all women everywhere. The girls who are being educated in these schools in one of the world's roughest political atmospheres, on some of its roughest terrain, are our partners and can be our greatest inspiration to keep fighting no matter how rough it gets for us. If you believe in women, justice, peace, love, life and hope, then you must read these books.

Aileen Hayes is a member of SEPAWOC and a national board member of the Women's Ordination Conference. Contact her at ahayes@womensordination.org.

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Scripture Reflections

Lent/Easter 2011

Jn 4:5-42; Jn 11:1-35

By *Judith A. Heffernan, M.Div.*

This Lenten Cycle of Readings contains two of my favorite Gospels.

When I read of the Samaritan woman at the well asking Jesus where God is to be worshipped, I fondly remember Joan Morris in *The Lady was a Bishop* telling us that Jesus did not respond that she should leave the Liturgical questions to men! This year when I read of Mary and Martha grieving for their brother, I understand differently than ever before, because I have just lost my oldest brother. Hearing Jesus say, "I am the Resurrection and the Life", hearing His promises, hearing Him weep for someone he loved so deeply is a great consolation now. My brother's life and death, along with visiting a close friend in a rehab/ nursing home have brought me to reflect on life and death differently than ever before. I see more clearly that we need to do better in our society about care for the sick, the suffering and the elderly. A person's beautiful life should be honored with dignity and compassion.

This became even clearer to me, when I read that Rev. Iris Mueller recently died. Many of us had only met her when she was quite ill and frail. To read her life story, as told by her friend Rev. Ida Raming, is painful, but also inspiring. Iris was a Protestant theologian who felt called to ordained ministry. However, she then converted to Catholicism, so there was a

little glitch on her path to ordination! Iris hoped that it would be possible to convince those in authority in the Roman Catholic Church that the exclusion from Orders was based on unacceptable and unjust theological arguments. During her doctoral studies at the University of Munster in the early 1960's, Iris was the first woman at the University to speak out openly for women's ordination, and she did it at great personal risk. Ida feels that Iris was a prophet for many who were afraid.

In 1963, Iris and Ida wrote a petition to Vatican Council II calling for women's ordination; Iris dedicated her life to eliminating discrimination against women in all religious traditions. Eventually Iris, with six other women, decided to take public action against the official law of the Church and were ordained on the Danube in 2002.

This year as Lent flows into Holy Thursday and we are standing outside the Cathedral witnessing for women's ordination, I will think of Iris and her courage to speak out, live out that same message. I will also remember Daniel Berrigan, S.J. who recently reflected on life long efforts for justice and peace. I will hear him say that we may not know the outcome, but we must persevere: let our witness go into history, let it go into Christ, let it go into generations... and quoting Dorothy Day, "We may never see the outcome of the good we do, but we must do it anyway." As Holy Thursday flows into Easter, I will remember what Iris wrote about death: "In death what happens is the miracle of transformation... I surrender to God everything that I am... and God gives it back to me, transformed." Alleluia! Let it be so!

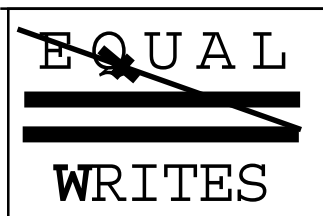
Judith Heffernan is a member of the Community of the Christian Spirit and SEPAWOC Core Committee.

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