

Because Sometimes True Fidelity Lies in the Courage to Dissent
JOIN US AS WE WITNESS FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN MINISTRY

Holy Thursday

April 9, 11am

PRAYER SERVICE AND WITNESS

MARY MAGDELENE AWARD TO ROY BOURGEOIS AND AISHA TAYLOR

Across from Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul

18th and Benjamin Franklin Parkway - Philadelphia

For information call 215-545-9649

EQUAL

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

Vol. XVII No. 3

MARCH - MAY 2009

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.

FAITH JOURNEY

by *Mary Ann McCarthy Schoettly*

My faith journey goes back as far as I can remember. My foundation is in the Roman Catholic tradition, which I value for its strength of commitment to teach the message of Jesus, but I fault it for its blindness as an institution in transmitting laws at the expense of love.

I loved "going to Church" as a child. I imagined my family in the image of the "Holy Family" - mother, father and child - even though I wasn't the "right" gender! I also remember announcing to my mother before age eight, that I planned on being a priest. She, of course, responded that it was impossible, that only men could be priests, and that was the end of that.

I believe that was an early call to priesthood which was smothered. I ultimately chose to be a biology teacher, and I absolutely loved my work. I found it very enjoyable, but it never totally filled my heart.

I remained strongly connected to the Church throughout my life. My uncle was a priest and my great aunt, a nun. I raised my children in the Church, taught CCD, Confirmation classes and most recently, adult education in the RCIA program. I was the first woman to serve as Eucharistic Minister and also as Lector (1975) in my parish. Because of my desire to reach out to others, my husband and I opened our home to women placed with us through Birthright, and we also took in some foster children.

After my divorce in 1993, and as my children left home, I

continued on page 2

READY & WILLING

by *Chava Redonnet*

I'm a single mother of three grown daughters, the youngest of whom is a Junior in college. I worked as a research technician at the University of Rochester for fourteen years, during the last seven of which I attended Divinity School at night.

I'm a long time member of Spiritus Christi Church in Rochester, NY, so already have plenty of experience with excommunication! I was a parish community forum facilitator for fifteen years including during our 1998 crisis that led to the formation of Spiritus. I wrote a book about that experience called *Standing in the Light* and have also published two collections of essays for the Spiritus community; they are largely about community-building titled *Don't forget to Breathe Glory* and *Bound in a River of Light*.

I also have had the grand experience of having been to El Salvador three times and have an on-going relationship with a Baptist community there.

I am currently working as a chaplain resident at Strong Memorial Hospital, doing a year of Clinical Pastoral Education. I am also youth ministry coordinator at First Unitarian Church.

Also, since 1997 I have been part of the Saint Joseph's House of Hospitality Catholic Worker Community in Rochester. I serve as chaplain and this Catholic Worker community is calling me to priesthood.

This is so important to me, as I feel my call to be to those on the margins. I am ready and willing!

Roman Catholic Womenpriests
announces
the **ORDINATIONS** of
Mary Ann Schoettly and
Chava Redonnet
April 26, 2009 at 3:00 pm
at Mishkan Shalom
4101 Freeland Ave. at Shurs Lane
(Manayunk/Roxborough Section
of Philadelphia)

INSIDE:

Holy Thursday 3

Marian Ronan
An Interview 5-6

Book Reviews 9

Faith Journey *cont. from page 1*

began to pay more attention to my spiritual life – and the life of the church. I found a spiritual director who has – to this day – been a great source of strength and consolation.

In my growing awareness of my faith and my many questions about it, I returned to school for a Masters Degree in Theology. I had no idea where the degree might lead, if anywhere, but I was interested. It was simply a degree that I got for myself. (It is probably noteworthy that upon graduation, I received an award for achievement in Theology, and also gave a graduation address, representing the School of Graduate Studies.)

While still in the Masters program I took on additional roles in my parish. I gave educational talks to adults, organized Renew 2000, and volunteered to be on a Confirmation Team, taking on responsibilities for both organization and education.

I began volunteering at a local retreat center, where I remained a part of a retreat team for ten years. I have provided retreats for both elementary and high school students, as well as for adults. Both in association with the retreat center and on my own, I have been invited to give both Lenten and Advent talks in local parishes.

After retirement from public education, I returned to the College of St. Elizabeth as an adjunct faculty member in the Theology Department. I also served on the Lay Ecclesial Ministry Board for the Center for Theological and Spiritual Development at the College of St. Elizabeth, and I taught biology to religious sisters from developing countries at Assumption College in Mendham, NJ. For the last year and a half I have been a volunteer in the Pastoral Care Department at Newton Memorial Hospital. I also facilitate a weekly spirituality group for mental health out-patients at the hospital.

In the last fifteen years I have wrestled with issues and processes in my own spiritual life, as well as within the institutional Church. I feel very spiritually healthy, but I cannot say the same for the Church. I find the leadership more and more out of touch with the people, certainly more and more out of touch with me!

Fortunately, for about the last twelve years, I have been a member of a very informal small faith community. We don't even have a name! However, we meet once a month and are a means of support and connection to church. Our issues are those echoed by thinking people universally, and we find great strength in our common vision of the Creator, of Jesus, and of the Spirit.

I now facilitate the newly forming "Catholic Community of Sophia," which is an intentional, inclusive, eucharistic community practicing a discipleship of equals. We have been gathering monthly since September 2008, and have a membership list of over fifty people.

I have spent years in the process of "growing up," becoming an adult, and thinking for myself – and *not* believing that if my conscience is contrary to church teaching that it must be I who am mistaken. Well, my conscience tells me that to deny ordination to women and married people, or those in the LGBT community is absolutely unjust. My conscience also tells me that I need to "step up to the plate" when there is an injustice about which I can take action.

In 2006 I became aware of the possibility of ordination through Roman Catholic Womenpriests. After two years of discernment, I was as certain as I could be that I am "called" to the priesthood. Therefore, I was ordained a Deacon in Boston on July 22, 2008, and will be ordained a Roman Catholic Womanpriest on April 26, 2009, in Philadelphia.

Thank you, Marianne Jann!

Marianne, first of all, everyone on the Core Committee wants to thank you for all the work you have done over the years for SEPA WOC. We have relied on you for so long, with so little acknowledgement.

One measure of your contribution is the number of people required to replace you as you move on to taking care of other responsibilities, especially your family which you served so well and whom you brought to our service. We will especially remember how years ago you recruited your brother to do the web site and your mother to help at the May 3 event.

Your role as treasurer will be assumed by Bernard McBride. I will keep the membership list and Judy Heffernan will write the thank-you notes. Marianne Tucker will do the web page.

Thank you for continuing with this throughout all of 2008 – that was not easy, given your circumstances, and, as always, you did it cheerfully.

We most especially treasure your deep commitment to your sister, Eileen, as she pursued her path to the priesthood. You have been a sister to us as well – you will always be in our hearts.

Regina Bannan and SEPA WOC

Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference


As of December 31, 2008

Beginning Cash Balance 1/1/08	\$1,996
Revenues received	4,798

Expenses:

Bank Charges	160
Donations	50
Postage & Delivery	368
Printing	4103
Web Hosting	130

Expenses as of 12/31/08	4,811
Ending Cash Balance as of 12/31/08	1,984



New! Women and the Word
Holy Week and Easter
Resource Packet

with PowerPoint and CD

Packet contains tested prayer resources and concrete suggestions to put women like Mary of Magdala, the anointing woman and the women from Galilee who stayed with Jesus through crucifixion to resurrection back in the biblical picture during Holy Week and Easter.

Available from FutureChurch • www.futurechurch.org • for \$12

Holy Thursday: Why am I out here in the cold?

Why do we gather at the Cathedral Basilica of SS Peter and Paul every Holy Thursday? Do we do it to protest against the Catholic Church for excluding women from ordination? Do we do it as our annual Catholic spring rite? Why do we go out there, in the morning, usually a cold morning, sing songs, wave our banners, and have a service for members of WOC and their supporters? Do we really think the Church will embrace us and in due time ordain "a few good women"? Why do we keep banging our heads against this Vatican wall? What is wrong with us?

I started going to the Holy Thursday service outside of the Cathedral several years ago. As a member of Dignity Philadelphia, I used to ask myself these questions (freezing my derrière off) while supporting my Dignity brothers and sisters, who were there supporting their WOC sisters. When I first started going to the Holy Thursday service, I was doing it as a form of protest since I was angry at the church for excluding my friends due to their sexual orientation. Did the church not see the values, compassion, generosity, and love these Dignity members bring to the religion? And then the epiphany - similar to the cold air - hit me in the face: in addition to being homophobic, the church was also misogynist! This is a church that fails to see the value and contribution of having women in their ranks! And then my feminism kicked in!

I always credit the nuns for making me a feminist. I grew up with the Good Shepherd nuns who did everything: they gardened, cooked, cleaned, washed, painted, hammered, constructed, rebuilt and took care of all the physical work that needed to be done - plus still took care of our needs in the orphanage. There was nothing they couldn't do! Except celebrate Mass and preside at the sacraments. This was the only time we saw a male come into the orphanage - every morning at 5:45 a.m. - and promptly leave in an hour; that was it. This, and weekly confessions, were his contribution to my young orphaned life!

Sometimes, 2-3 times a year, a priest failed to show up. This was not a problem in our orphanage - a nun would get up on the altar and have a service. (This memory came back to me when we had a concelebration service at Dignity. It seemed so natural to see a female up on the altar.) The lesson I learned at The Good Shepherd Home was that women could do anything!

At fourteen I was introduced to the Sacred Heart nuns at my boarding home, and the Loretto nuns at school. And amazingly, the same routine followed: these women did everything! Except say Mass in the mornings! And again, a nun would substitute for the absent priest; again, no problem for the nuns. They solidified my belief that women are remarkable - they can do anything they wanted to do when given the opportunity. My strong sense of self is due to these incredible religious women.

Given my belief in women, you can only imagine my pride at actually voting for a female in the presidential primaries. Oh boy, oh girl, was I in seventh heaven?! Our time had come - when given the opportunity, a woman could run for President of the United States. But...

The year 2008 will be remembered for many reasons. For me, it was voting for a woman in the primaries and then voting for an African American male in November. My whole presidential voting career, I had voted for white males! This year taught me that nothing is impossible. We live in a

country that is changing, moving forward and recognizing the value of diversity in all aspects of our lives; what a wonderful time for us.

So given all the above history of my feminism, I, too, am hopeful that one of these days women will take their rightful place in my Roman Catholic Church. I believe this with all my heart. I believe God made us equal members of society. And it is with this belief that I proudly stand in the cold weather across the street from the Basilica of SS Peter and Paul every Holy Thursday. As a Catholic woman, I am physically protesting against the Catholic Church for excluding women from ordination.

Are the Church/men threatened by our potential? What is it about women that intimidates the Catholic Church? We are readers, Eucharistic ministers, acolytes, and nuns. And this is where it STOPS. As a woman I can clean the church, polish the pews, replace the candles and sing, sing, sing. In their eyes, women can do anything - except say Mass and preside at the sacraments.

I strongly disagree with this view and pity the Church for being so narrow minded. It is denying more than 50% of the population the right to be equal partners in ministry. In excluding women, the Catholic Church is insulting the millions of women who work in the church to keep it functioning on a daily basis: "You are good enough to serve God, but not good enough to join us (men) in full and equal partnership based on your gender." I refuse to believe this since deep in my heart, I know I was made in God's image. And as a model of this image, I need to be included in worshipping God at the altar. It is my right to believe this and make it happen.

Women deserve to be full and equal partners in worshipping the God who made us. There is no valid reason to exclude women from ordination and millions of reasons to include them. The gifts women will bring to their full acceptance into the priesthood can only enhance the church itself. By excluding women from this priesthood rite, they (men) are doing an injustice to the Church and to the people of God.

So, yes, I will continue to perform my annual Catholic spring rite as a reminder to the priests and the bishops that they are discriminatory homophobes and misogynists! I will continue to go out there, stand in the cold and sing my songs; I will wave my banner - Ordain Women or Stop Baptizing Them - and participate in the WOC service.

Just as I have seen the changes that occurred in 2008, I know that the church will embrace more than "a few good women" into their ranks - soon and very soon - because it is the right thing to do. I will keep banging my head against the Vatican wall because I know change does happen. And there is nothing wrong with me in believing that the church needs to change.

Look for me to be in front of the Cathedral on April 9, 2009, at 11:00 a.m. I will be the Catholic woman who was taught by the nuns that women could do anything when given the opportunity!

M. Dolores Vera
Editor, *The Independence*
Dignity/Philadelphia

A PROPHET STANDING FOR WOMEN'S ORDINATION

by Alice Foley

The Quixote Center hosted an evening in D.C. on February 13, 2009, entitled "Defying Rome, Finding Peace: An Evening with Father Roy Bourgeois, MM." A roomful of persons from Boston to the Maryland-D.C. area, including five of us from SEPA WOC, gathered to listen to this eloquent, humble activist.

Roy spoke about his personal journey in support of women's ordination. On August 9, 2008, Father Roy was one of the concelebrants and homilists at the Roman Catholic Womenpriests' ordination of Janice Sevre-Duszynska, in Lexington, Kentucky. Roy had known Janice for years through their "SOA Watch" work and was pleased to be invited.

Following his participation in the ordination, Father Roy received a letter from the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith asking him to "recant his position or be excommunicated."

Soon afterwards he was called to New York by the Superior General of the Maryknolls and he spent a weekend with their Council. They listened to his presentation of his reasoning in support of women's ordination ending with Roy's question to them, "Who are we to say our calls to ordination are valid and women's are not?"

He took some time by himself to pray and then traveled to New Orleans to meet with his brothers, sisters and parents and discussed the situation with them. Most gratifying for Roy was the love expressed by his ninety-five year old father. "We need to support Roy!" his father announced to the family and then gave Roy a bear hug.

On November 7, 2008, Father Roy sent a loving, moving letter to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith explaining his position regarding women's ordination, but has not yet received a reply from them.

The National Coalition of American Nuns has written a letter to the Vatican signed by a hundred sisters in support of Father Roy.

Early this year his order of thirty-six years informed Father Roy that they are with him regardless of the final position of the Vatican Congregation. Roy will continue to remain a member of the Maryknoll community.

At the Quixote Center gathering Father Roy also discussed his eighteen years speaking out for justice against the atrocities and suffering caused by the School of the Americas. He also recalled while speaking on Vatican radio eight years

ago he spoke about the "SOA Watch" as requested, but then talked at the conclusion about his coming to believe in the justice issue of the ordination of women. The interview was then cut off and Gregorian chant was played in its place!

Others speaking at the event voiced their belief that people need to stand with communities of believers in women's ordination regardless of what persons at the Vatican may decree or decide.

Whether you choose to stand with SEPA WOC each year on Holy Thursday at the local Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul or do so in another city, let us all continue to stand with and pray for Father Roy Bourgeois remembering his words "Who are we to say our calls to ordination are valid and women's are not?"

Alice J. Foley is a member of the Core Committee of SEPA WOC, a member of Dignity, Philadelphia and St. Vincent De Paul Parish in Philadelphia.

SUCCESS FOR WOMEN'S ORDINATION SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN: A REPORT

Readers of EqualwRites will recall the last issue's article, "Group Resists Excommunication of Women Seeking Ordination." It described the July 2008 formation of "Catholics for Women's Equality", an effort by some forty-five Philadelphia-area Catholics from several parishes. It was sparked by the May 30, 2008, decree of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith declaring that any woman seeking ordination-and anyone who helps her-incurs automatic excommunication.

We decided to seek signatures on a letter to Cardinal William Levada, CDF prefect. The letter not only took issue with the decree and with the Vatican's whole stance of denying ordination to women, it also stated that, if an excommunicated woman comes to their parishes and is refused Communion by the priest, they themselves will make sure that she is served, e.g., by sharing their own Communion with her. A participant in one of the meetings said: "Our Church leaders seem determined to exclude ordination-seeking women from the Catholic community, but we cannot and will not."

Gratifying results:

- (1) The letter with 685 signatures was sent to Cardinal Levada (with copies to Cardinal Rigali) in December 2008.
- (2) Most signers are from the Philadelphia archdiocese, but 60 signatures are from concerned Catholics in places like San Diego, St. Louis, Atlanta, Detroit, Winona, and Naples.
- (3) International support was shown by signatures from Germany, Japan, South Korea, Canada and Bolivia.

This initiative is somewhat unique in that it is not pleading with church leaders to change their minds or to do-or not do-something. Instead, it spells out not only why concerned Catholics disagree with church leaders, but what they will do to resist and refuse to cooperate with an unjust decree. In a sense, it is nonviolent non-cooperation in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Catholics for Women's Equality hopes that groups in other U.S. and international dioceses will organize their own campaigns. What would it be like if Cardinal Levada's office begins to receive thousands-and then tens of thousands-of similar letters from all over America and many parts of the world? Might the issue of women's ordination be moved closer to the Church's front burner? Whatever happens, a major value of the campaign is that it shows that Catholics don't just have to complain about injustices in the Church. They can oppose them and refuse to be part of them, and do something themselves.

Spirituality and Healing Workshop **Level 1**

***Understanding and Benefiting from the
Connection between the Spiritual and the Physical***
(Only prerequisite is a willingness to learn)

Whether you are a professional in a "helping field" (health care, counseling, teaching, clergy, for example) or are on a journey for personal growth, this workshop is for you! We will be exploring Ancient Traditions and learning contemporary applications for everyday living.

Presented by:

The Time Out Center

Jenny and Jim Ratigan, Facilitators

If you would like further information or if you would like registration materials please contact us at 610-695-9780 or info@thetimeoutcenter.com.

TRACING THE SIGN OF THE CROSS: AN INTERVIEW

with Marian Ronan

On May 1 Columbia University Press will publish Marian Ronan's fourth book, *Tracing the Sign of the Cross: Sexuality, Mourning, and the Future of American Catholicism*. Marian has been writing for *EqualwRites* for fifteen years, and it seemed appropriate that we take this opportunity to talk with her about her book and related matters.

EwR: Congratulations on the publication of your new book. Can we begin by asking the significance of its title, *Tracing the Sign of the Cross*?

MR: The title, *Tracing the Sign of the Cross*, refers to the centrality of the cross in the Christian faith, but also, in the white ethnic immigrant American Catholicism in which I and many other Catholic women's ordination activists have our roots. The word "tracing" calls to mind "making" the sign of the cross, but also suggests that in our time, that is, during the years since Vatican II, there has become something elusive about the cross, something demanding our attention now.

EwR: And the subtitle elaborates on that "something"?

MR: Yes. The subtitle: "Sexuality, Mourning, and the Future of American Catholicism" expands on this theme. "Mourning" is the word most obviously linked to the cross. But it also signifies the wider approach that I use in my book, a way of understanding human experience. According to this approach, engaging or working through loss is so painful that human beings (and groups) undertake all kinds of defenses to avoid it. They become enraged, they become depressed, they get stuck and repeat the same actions over and over. The cost of this "inability to mourn" is very high.

In line with this approach, I argue in *Tracing the Sign of the Cross* that at the beginning of the 1960s, white ethnic American Catholics were poised to achieve the idealized way of life our immigrant forebears had struggled to attain. Many of us were also convinced that with Vatican II the democratic vision of the church we had long favored was going to become dominant. Yet by the end of the decade, the "American dream" had exploded into social conflict and the Vatican was fighting our much anticipated liberalization of the church with increasing ferocity. Then came the economic downturn of the 1970s and the refusal of women's ordination. Our losses were enormous.

Yet for reasons that I explore in *Tracing*, many American Catholics did not engage and work through those losses. Instead, we—conservatives and liberals alike—threw ourselves into the Catholic culture wars. Central to this development was the decision on the part of the episcopacy and the Vatican to shift the center of the Catholic faith from doctrine to sex and gender prohibition, a shift that contradicted what many of us had come to believe about the church. In truth, the Vatican had been focusing more and more on abortion and contraception since its massive losses in the liberal democratic revolutions of the nineteenth century.

But after Vatican II, the gloves came off. Sexual prohibition replaced doctrine as the heart of the Catholic faith, and although the governance structure after Vatican II remained monarchical, so that we still have little or no impact on what the bishops and the Vatican do, many of us have spent much of our lives fighting against it. And let me be clear, I include myself in this "we." We believed this was the right thing to do, but it also protected us from mourning our enormous losses.

EwR: This doesn't sound very cheerful. Why would anyone want to read your book?!

Now—read and write and give!

There is so much going on now! There is such a need to write about it! If you have a need to read about it, send your annual contribution to *EqualwRites*. As I assume the membership function, I look with wonder at the number of people who have supported us over the years, and I ask you to continue to do so: Now, more than ever.

Twenty years ago, I said that if we had \$100 for every priest who told us privately that he supported women's ordination, we'd be rich, and now we even have another priest who supports women's ordination publicly.

More than twenty-five years ago, others looked askance as our small faith community ordained a woman. Now many women priests are ordained and accepted.

But still, women who worship in parishes do not hear our message of hope in a church of silence. We are one voice, always searching for ways to reach our sisters and brothers. And every year, new people attend our witnesses or find Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference on the web or read *EqualwRites*. Help us continue.

Send your check made out to SEPA WOC in the enclosed envelope to Bernard McBride, Treasurer, SEPA WOC, PO Box 27195, Philadelphia, PA 19118.

Regina Bannan is president of SEPA WOC

MR: Well, I suppose it would be silly to try to convince you that a book about mourning is cheerful! But I definitely delineate in the book what I believe to be the path toward a more faithful and productive American Catholic future.

EwR: Tell us more about that part.

MR: Well, first of all, instead of making an abstract theological or sociological argument, my book draws on fiction, memoirs, and essays by four American writers with distinctively Catholic imaginations. I use this material to illustrate not only the ways in which post-Vatican II American Catholics have resisted mourning their losses, but also to discern an emerging engagement with those losses, the beginning of a new vision for American Catholicism.

EwR: Which writers do you deal with?

MR: The work of James Carroll, the archetypal liberal American Catholic, forms the basis of my exploration. Carroll's writings, especially his memoir, *An American Requiem*, seem to embody the very engagement with loss that concerns me, but when we turn to his novels, we find a highly gendered pattern of resistance to mourning. We see a similar Catholic "inability to mourn" in the early works of the novelist Mary Gordon, the feminist philosopher of science, Donna J. Haraway, and the essayist and television commentator Richard Rodriguez. But we also see something else: Gordon's characters increasingly engage their profound losses, Haraway's female cyborg begins to wear a crown of thorns, and Rodriguez confronts the pain of his own gay/brown identity, pointing in all three cases toward a new and chastened vision of the church.

EwR: If you don't mind us asking, what on earth led you to write about these things?

MR: I don't mind you asking at all. As a Catholic teenager growing up in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in the 1960s, I honestly thought that the election of John Fitzgerald

continued on page 6

Kennedy and then the Second Vatican Council were the most exciting things that had ever happened. I did an undergraduate degree in theology and religion and joined the Grail Movement because of that enthusiasm, but of course, by the early 1970s, things weren't going nearly as well as I had expected. I postponed dealing with these losses by joining the staff and residential community at Grailville, the Grail's national center outside Cincinnati, and specifically, throwing myself into feminist theology, which literally had its origins at Grailville in those years. (See Janet Kalven's memoir, *Women Breaking Boundaries* [SUNY 1999] for one take on all of that). I actually wrote the first of my books, *Image-Breaking, Image-Building* (Pilgrim 1981), a Christian feminist worship handbook, with two other Grail women, based on a weeklong program we lead at Grailville in 1978. And my next two books, *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality* (Harper and Row, 1986) and *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration* (Sheed and Ward, 1996), which I wrote with two United Methodist clergy, Sue Cole and Hal Taussig, also were, in part, based on work done at Grailville as well as in my co-authors' research and ministry.

But by the 1980s, I began to have big questions about the feminist theology that had shaped me, and in 1985, I went to graduate school, to find resources for thinking through these questions. *Tracing the Sign of the Cross* is based on the dissertation that I wrote at the end of my Ph.D. studies in the Religion Department at Temple.

EWR: What problems are you referring to?

MR: Well, for one thing, that second wave feminist theology was so upper middle class and liberal. I came from an extremely working class background—I'm a second generation Irish immigrant, and my father was a shift-worker who dropped out of high school to join the Civilian Conservation Corps. Hearing feminists from Ivy League institutions make generalizations like "Men write history and women don't," when, in fact, most men don't write history either began to really get me down. Then after I enrolled at an African American seminary in New York because it was a night school and I had to work in the daytime to support myself, I realized how extraordinarily white feminist theology was in those days. So I began to go through my own process of mourning the optimistic vision of the world I had carried from Vatican II through my love affair with feminist theology. Gradually, my attempt to engage my own distinctly white, ethnic American Catholic losses led me to read Carroll, Gordon, Haraway and Rodriguez. Hence the book.

EWR: So how does it feel to have the book coming out, and from such a distinguished academic publisher?

MR: Well, to say I'm happy is to vastly understate the case. But I am also really hopeful that *Tracing the Sign of the Cross* will lead to some productive discussions among us about the future of American Catholicism, and particularly about how, once we begin to come to terms with our losses, we may be freed up to engage more with God's mission in the world, especially among our deprived brothers and sisters here in the U.S. and in the global South. I'm hoping to have a book talk here in the Philadelphia area in the fall, and I'm really excited at the prospect of engaging in this conversation with *EqualwRites* readers, members of the Philadelphia Grail Community, and others.

EWR: We look forward to that, too, Marian. Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us today.

MR: Oh, dear friends, I'm the one who's grateful!

Tracing the Sign of the Cross: Sexuality, Mourning, and the Future of American Catholicism

Available May, 2009

Cloth, 208 pages, Columbia University Press

ISBN: 978-0-231-14702-6

\$40.00

Following World War II, millions of U.S. Catholics were poised to attain the American dream, while at Vatican Council II, the liberal vision of the church seemed finally to triumph. Yet by the end of the twentieth century, American Catholicism was in a crisis. In *Tracing the Sign of the Cross*, Marian Ronan draws on the work of four writers with distinctively Catholic imaginations—James Carroll, Mary Gordon, Donna J. Haraway, and Richard Rodriguez—to argue that endless battles over sexuality have postponed working through the devastating Catholic losses of recent years. Such mourning is, however, essential to the future of the church.

The works of James Carroll, the archetypal liberal American Catholic, form the basis for Ronan's exploration of the church in the decades following Vatican II. Carroll's writings, especially his memoir, *An American Requiem*, seem to embody the very engagement with loss Ronan calls for. Yet a highly gendered pattern of resistance to mourning emerges throughout Carroll's writing. Ronan discerns a similar Catholic "inability to mourn" in the early works of the novelist Mary Gordon, the feminist philosopher of science Donna Haraway, and the essayist Richard Rodriguez. Yet Gordon's characters gradually engage their profound losses, Haraway's female cyborg wears a crown of thorns, and Rodriguez confronts his own gay/brown identity—contributing in all cases to a new and chastened vision of the church. Framed by the author's own personal experience, *Tracing the Sign of the Cross* is an intimate and persuasive study of the possibilities of faith and hope in the postmodern world.

SEPA WOC and COR

As members of national COR (Catholic Organizations for Renewal), SEPA WOC is often invited to sign on to statements addressing issues brought by one organization or another. The process that we use is to poll the Core Committee; if there is significant disagreement, we discuss it at the next monthly meeting. Everyone is invited to join us in planning and policy for SEPA WOC; contact sepawoc@sepawoc.org for information.

In the last few months we have had what seems to be a flurry of endorsements. In reverse order, they are:

- The American Catholic Council in its call for a representative assembly of the Catholic Church in the U.S. <http://americancatholiccouncil.org>.
- A letter to the *National Catholic Reporter* urging them as "the independent news source" to use the Religion News Service more and the Catholic News Service less.
- A paid ad organized by the Quixote Center which was an open letter of support in the 12/26/08 NCR for Fr. Roy Bourgeois; SEPA WOC was a co-sponsor.
- A sign-on COR statement asking the U.S. bishops to support marriage equality for same-gender couples.

Regina Bannan represents SEPA WOC and the whole Philadelphia region at COR meetings.

Intentional Eucharistic Communities

As cumbersome as it is, I like this name, because it describes so well the phenomenon that I have been part of for thirty years. Other communities have been formed more recently, which is the only quibble I have with the following definition: "Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IECs) are those small faith communities, rooted in the Catholic tradition, which gather to celebrate Eucharist on a regular basis. Born in the enthusiasm flowing from Vatican II for a church of the people, some IECs were instituted in parishes, some were created as alternatives to the parish, some retain close ties with the institutional church, and some function independently. All are characterized by shared responsibility for the governance and life of the community. Through sharing liturgical life and mutual support for one another, members are strengthened to live Gospel-centered lives dedicated to spiritual growth and social commitment."

I especially like the last two sentences, because they describe the guts and the glory: responsibility and growth. Everyone shares both. But one of the dangers is insularity, especially for free-standing communities. A group of IECs in the Washington, DC, area is gathering others from across the country May 15-17 to share experiences and ideas. It should be wonderful. <http://www.intentionaleucharisticcommunities.org> is the web site, with the full schedule under the link for registration.

Bob McClory is doing the keynote, relating his research on the early church to his experience with the Dutch Dominican theologians and to the transforming presence of IECs. Many of you may have heard him a few years ago at a CTA-Phila workshop in Drexel Hill; he's a respected Catholic journalist and author of *As It Was in the Beginning: The Coming Democratization of the Church* (2007). The other sessions focus on Women in Ministry, Religion and Spirituality, Social Justice and IECs and Young Catholics and the Future of IECs. There is plenty of time to share about these themes as well as with communities all over the country. The latter is what is most memorable to me from the prior meeting in 2001: the energy, the liturgy, the social action that these creative groups have devised. Some speakers that I am especially eager to hear are Michelle Dillon, Simone Campbell SSS, and Christine Vladimiroff OSB, but there's a full lineup of young and old to challenge everyone.

Some of us in the SEPA WOC orbit are going already. Judy Heffernan and I are representing the Community of the Christian Spirit, which meets weekly in Elkins Park. We are one of those products of Vatican II enthusiasm and we've moved from that through a base community stage and into a near-

family. You can see our web site at www.communityofthechristianspirit.org or call Judy at 215-673-5006

Mary Byrne and Peg Murphy are the prime movers of Peace House, which meets every third Sunday of the month in Central New Jersey or Bucks County, Pennsylvania. They "are a small, religiously diverse group drawn together by a mutual desire to strengthen and serve out of our spiritual lives. Our way is eclectic with a strong Celtic spiritual bent—grateful to the Creator for creation and aware of ourselves as part of that larger event. We celebrate the natural world, the seasons and the spiritual lessons that getting out of our heads and putting our hands in the dirt offer. Our structure for community prayer and contemplation derives from many spiritual traditions and includes readings, prayers, symbolic offerings and shared bread. The readings are from Judeo/Christian scripture, Eastern religious sources and contemporary spiritual writers." For further information regarding date, time and place, contact Mary at 609-558-6677 or Peg at 215-321-1484 – or look for Mary at the IEC conference!

Eileen DiFranco and Maria Marlowe minister as priest and deacon to the growing Community of St. Mary Magdalene in Drexel Hill. A recent statement, says "Try this catholic community where possibility is truly a possibility. It's welcoming in listening, it's small, it's different, it's real. It's up to you." Contact Eileen – who plans to go to the IEC – at emdifranco@aol.com or 267-258-6966.

Those Catholic reform organizations which also worship together qualify in my book as IECs. The CTA-Philadelphia Eucharistic community meets on the first Sunday of each month at 10:00 at the Jean Donovan house in Overbrook. The liturgies are informal, with members rotating the presider role each month. Some presiderees follow the readings of the day, while others focus on a particular theme. The most meaningful component is the shared homily. CTA's informative web site is www.cta-philadelphia.org. And of course, Dignity/Philadelphia celebrates mass every Sunday at 7 pm at St. Luke and the Epiphany church in Center City. Dignity shared its August 50/50 with SEPA WOC and continues to support everything we do; their web site is www.dignityphila.org.

There are other small faith communities in our orbit, from Sanctuary of Peace in the Philadelphia area to Spirit Rising at the New Jersey-New York state line. From these brief descriptions, you should have an idea of the diversity of this movement. Join us outside of Washington – not outside of the true church.

Regina Bannan teaches at Temple.

Community of the Christian Spirit

Committed to peace and social justice, CCS welcomes you to join in our Sunday morning celebrations, liturgies in the Roman Catholic tradition which explore Scripture and contemporary readings.

For information, call Roberta Brunner or Margaret McLaughlin, (215) 572-5623, or write P.O. Box 353, Abington, PA 19001

www.communityofthechristianspirit.org

THE FOURTH GOSPEL AND GOD'S WILL TO SAVE

by Jim Plastaras

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

This is probably the most frequently cited passage in all of Scripture. Cryptic roadside signs read "John 3:16," on the assumption that everyone will know the text. It is something of a paradox that these comforting words come from a section of the Christian Scriptures that placed the most emphasis on excluding people from salvation.

Fourth Gospel and the Epistles of John envision a community turned in upon itself. The command to love one's enemies (as in Lk 6:27-28, 32-36) does not appear in John. The love commandment is about love of the *brethren*. The command to love *one another* would seem to be addressed only to the circle of believers, and not to humankind at large. The Johannine writings suppose a moral dualism. Mankind has already been divided into two camps. On the one side there is the *world*, which has never known God and refuses to believe. On the other side are the believers who have been "drawn" by the Father (Jn 6:37,44). John does not expect the world to change; it cannot. Johannine eschatology supposes that the decisive judgment *has* taken place, or is *now* taking place. It is a closed system which allows for only apparent exceptions. False teachers had appeared within the Johannine community and had fallen away from the true faith, but this for John indicated only that these people had never really belonged to their number: "*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out, that it might be plain that they all are not of us*" (1 Jn 2:19). John insists that those whom the Father has entrusted to the Good Shepherd simply cannot fall away (Jn 10:28-29).

How do people who look to the Fourth Gospel as a favorite source of spiritual nourishment deal with this unrelenting emphasis on Divine Predestination? The easiest way out is to invoke the "Analogy of Faith." What John teaches must be interpreted – or dare we say re-interpreted – in light of the entire body of truths coming to us from Scripture and Tradition. This approach, at least for Catholics, makes it easier to discount the passages that do not quite fit in with what we believe to be true. In this commentary, I will, before invoking the "Analogy of faith," examine more closely some of the difficult passages of the Fourth Gospel dealing with the question, "Who can be saved?"

John states in 3:18: "*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*" The same theme recurs throughout the Fourth Gospel, but the context always deals with those who have the advantage of knowledge and exposure to the truth, but still refuse to believe. Jesus says to the Pharisees, "*If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains*" (Jn 9:41). Clearly, the passages have nothing to say about the millions upon millions of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and other varieties of "non-believers" who never had the opportunity to hear the Good News in a credible way. The condemnations are directed toward those who, in "bad faith," refuse to believe.

Perhaps the most difficult passage regarding outreach to non-Christian religions are the words of Jesus to Thomas in Jn 14:6: "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (Jn 14:6). The words, at least taken in isolation, appear to exclude all possi-

bility of salvation for non-Christians. Placing these words in the larger context of Johannine teaching suggests a more nuanced meaning.

The narrative of John 14 continues with Philip following up with this request of Jesus: "*Show us the Father and that will be enough for us.*" Jesus answers: "*Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?*" (Jn 14:8-9)

These words further reinforce the message that the humanity of Jesus is the only avenue available to us for communication or contact with God. But how are the disciples of later generations – which includes us – who were not at the Last Supper, to be able to *see Jesus* – and by seeing Jesus, *see the Father*? John provides us an answer in his First Letter: "*If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.*" (1 Jn 4:20) The only avenue of contact with Jesus – and through Jesus to the Father – is "the brethren." John, unfortunately, does not spell out for us whom he includes in the circle of "the brethren." Only believers? Or all humankind? The Gospel tradition is quite clear about the identity of the *neighbor* and the *brother*. In Luke, the scribe asks, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan, ending with the admonition, "Go and do likewise!" (Lk 10:29) Matthew presents a picture of the final judgment, where the righteous ask: "*Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? . . . or see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?*" The Son of Man tells them: "*I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.*" (Matt 26:37-40)

The parallel between Matthew 26 and Johannine teaching about Jesus as the only way to the Father is illuminated:

- In Matthew, the righteous, even though they don't recognize Jesus, minister to him in the person of the hungry, the homeless, the sick, and those most in need,
- In 1 Jn 4:20, the Elder reminds the disciples that the *only* way available for them to *see God* and love God is through the brother. John characteristically reduces the double command to love God and the neighbor to the single command, "Love one another."

John 14:6 does make an exclusive claim relating to Jesus as the *only* way to the Father, but what he excludes are the various forms of Gnosticism and mystery religion that promise to put its devotee in direct contact with God. John tells us that God "up there" is not accessible to humankind. The only way to meet God is "down here" through loving service to the brethren, and this is an avenue of contact available to all humankind.

My commentary to this point has been aimed at taking some hard edges off the sectarianism of the Fourth Gospel, but there undeniably remains a strong tendency toward exclusiveness. John offers a beautiful catechesis on the fraternal love which ought to flourish within the Christian community, but the tendency toward exclusion remains the blind spot of Johannine spirituality. It is difficult to be "church in the world," ministering to the needs of the world, if the community sees the world as already consigned to outer darkness. The message of John is incomplete, and needs to be supplemented, even corrected, by the insights of a Paul, who saw the entire cosmos as destined for redemption. The Gospel and Letters of John are the *Word of God*, but they are not the entire Word of God.

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

Book Reviews

The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection by Andrea Bieler and Luise Schottroff. Fortress Press, 2007. Paperback. 248 pp. \$23.00.

by Marian Ronan

One of the most significant effects of Vatican II was the renewal of the Eucharistic liturgy. The Eucharist became the communal meal celebrated by the whole Body of Christ, not a remote ritual performed in Latin by a priest with his back to us. But in the years that followed, as we women's ordination activists well know, the Eucharist seemed, in some respects, to slip back into the control of the institution. It could also be argued that in response to institutional stasis or backsliding, the liberal American Catholic understanding of the Eucharist has also not moved much beyond Vatican II liturgical theology. But the world and its needs have certainly changed since then.

In *The Eucharist: Bodies, Bread, and Resurrection*, German feminist scholars Andrea Bieler (a liturgist) and Luise Schottroff (a New Testament scholar) offer an understanding of the Eucharist for the twenty-first century. Drawing on current biblical scholarship, ritual studies, and the growing reality of global Christianity, Bieler and Schottroff remind us that the Eucharist is a celebration of God's abundance and justice in the whole world, not just in the privileged countries of the North and West.

In some respects, Bieler and Schottroff reinforce post-Vatican II Catholic notions of the Eucharist as a communal event, stressing that the Eucharist (and the other sacraments) are relational, not merely theological, statements. But in other ways, they challenge not only the institution's notions, but those of liberal American Catholics as well.

Central to this challenge is their stress on the ambiguity of the Eucharist. Using the term "sacramental permeability," Bieler and Schottroff argue that on the one hand, the Eucharist is the place where common life—our daily meals—are integrated with God's revelation, where "eating and drinking can become vehicles that make transparent the Holy One". Yet that ambiguity also means that the physical/sacramental life is the place where human alienation and violence become visible.

Feminists of an earlier generation may be surprised to find that one way in which Bieler and Schottroff illustrate this notion of "sacramental permeability" is by stressing the Eucharistic centrality of Jesus' death as well as of his resurrection. Some of us Catholics will remember that the death of Jesus was emphasized almost to the exclusion of the Resurrection in the period before Vatican II. Yet since then, there has been a tendency among some—particularly white Euro-American feminists—to reverse this over-emphasis. The death of Jesus, and the cross that symbolizes it, are now characterized by some as sado-masochistic, causing much of the violence in Western history.

Yet Bieler and Schottroff show the indivisible link between death and resurrection in the Eucharist. The common meal of the messianic movement gathered around Jesus became a place to remember Jesus' murder by the Roman empire and to announce in turn the defeat of such violence. But because

of the ongoing centrality of Jesus' murder by powerful imperial oppressors, the Eucharist also highlights that we—Western Christians, and perhaps especially Americans—are complicit in that violence even as we pray to be part of Christ's victory over it. "The Eucharistic life....," the authors write, "invites us to be honest with ourselves and to inspect our privileges and the disastrous influence they have on the social and ecological environment".

Bieler and Schottroff's other invaluable contribution to our understanding of the Eucharist is their emphasis on it as a celebration of eschatological hope. Eschatology is something that has been too little emphasized in post-Vatican II Catholic theology. For many of us, "eschatology" means the pre-Vatican II otherworldly focus on death, judgment, heaven and hell. Or worse still, it calls to mind the repellent obsession with the Rapture and the End-Times by right-wing Christians in the Left Behind series and elsewhere. But for Bieler and Schottroff, the eschatological imagination makes the Eucharist a window onto unrealized possibilities for life's flourishing. Hope is at the heart of this revisioning, rather than the humanist confidence in progress that the catastrophes of the twentieth century have shown to be foolhardy. The Eucharist then becomes a ritual of critical otherworldliness that orients us toward justice, not escape. Such a Eucharistic theology is badly needed in our time.

Marian Ronan was recently appointed Research Professor of Catholic Studies in the Center for World Christianity at New York Theological Seminary. *Tracing the Sign of the Cross: Sexuality, Mourning, and the Future of American Catholicism*, will be published by Columbia University Press in May.

LOOK WHO'S ON THE WEB!

For information about women's ordination, and updated information about SEPA/WOC activities, check out our website: www.sepawoc.org.

Editorial Staff of *EqualwRites* A Publication of SEPA WOC

Editor: **Karen B. Lenz**
(Acting) Book Review Editor: **Marian Ronan**

Regular Columnists: **Judith A. Heffernan, Jim Plastaras, Marian Ronan**

Proofreader: **Regina Bannan**

Editorial Assistants: **Magda Elias, Mary Whelan, Judy Heffernan**

Scripture Reflections Holy Thursday Chrism Mass Luke 4

by Judith A. Heffernan

As SEPA WOC and friends gather outside the Basilica to prayerfully witness for women's ordination, the assembled inside will hear the Gospel proclaimed from Luke 4.

Jesus reflects on Isaiah 61 that God's Spirit has anointed him to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to let the oppressed go free.

Recently I have been reflecting about how blessed SEPA WOC has been throughout our history to have wonderful local theologians of great faith to guide our journey to freedom. One of these holy ones is Jenny Ratigan, who has led great discussions about Thomas Merton. So, when reading February's *US Catholic*, an article by Jim Forest, long-time peace activist and Catholic Worker, caught my eye.

A shared letter of Merton's to Jim about his work soothed this long time SEPA WOC member's soul about our work. "Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on...you may have to face the fact that your work will apparently...achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect...then you start more and more to concentrate not on the results,

but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself."

Not long after Holy Thursday this year, Orbis Books is publishing the *Essential Writings of Dom Helder Camara* (1909-1999) by Francis McDonagh, publisher Robert Ellsberg tells us. Dom Helder Camara was the Bishop of Recife, an impoverished region of Brazil.

He began his ministry as a conservative priest, but his work with the very poor inspired a conversion. He came to believe that social services were not enough—the poor need social justice, and he became a champion of human rights.

He believed in the "Abrahamic minority"—the small community that keeps hope alive, and is willing to risk security and comfort to seek the promised land, to lend God's voice to those who have no voice.

On Holy Thursday our small community of SEPA WOC and friends will pray and sing and witness for those who have little voice in the Church.

Please join with us, a people of faith, hope and love, in pain yet joyful, inclusive and listening. We are believers in what Robert Ellsberg also shares with us from Dorothy Day's diaries "... each of our lives is spiritually significant".

Judy Heffernan has a Master of Divinity degree from a Catholic seminary. A member of the Community of the Christian Spirit, she is an original member of the Women's Ordination Conference.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: To begin or continue receiving *EqualwRites*, please send a contribution and your name and address to our treasurer, Bernard McBride, P.O. Box 27195, Philadelphia, PA 19118. We deliberately did not set a specific fee because we wanted people to feel free to contribute what they felt they could afford: \$5, \$10, \$15, or more. If that's really impossible for you, just send your name and address and we will start your subscription. When you join WOC as a national member, you do not automatically join us, so if you want to support us both, you need to contribute to us both.

AFFILIATION: *EqualwRites* is published by the Core Committee of the Southeastern Pennsylvania chapter of the Women's Ordination Conference. We are inspired by, but independent of, the national office of the Women's Ordination Conference.

MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE: If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *EqualwRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be July, 2009. Final deadline for submissions is June 15, 2009. Send to the editor: Karen B. Lenz, 430 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia, PA 19122, or e-mail her at pclaverhouse@aol.com.

ADVERTISING: Advertising helps us support *EqualwRites* and helps you find people who support us. Our ad rates are \$25 for a 3 1/2" x 3 1/2" ad (\$75, four issues) and \$15 for a business-card size (\$45, four issues). Additional rates on request. To place an ad contact Bernard McBride P.O. Box 27195, Philadelphia, PA 19118, or e-mail the editor at pclaverhouse@aol.com.

EQUAL
WRITES

SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA
WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE

SEPAWOC
P.O. Box 27195
Philadelphia, PA 19118

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Philadelphia PA
Permit NO. 5892

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED