

SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

ACTS 2; MARK 2:18-19

by Judith A. Heffernan

Recently in Rochester, New York, I joyfully attended the 35th Anniversary Conference of the Federation of Christian Ministries (FCM).

Bridget Mary Meehan, FCM president, wrote in *New Woman, New Church* that FCM was founded by Roman Catholic priests who chose both priesthood and marriage.

Through the years FCM has evolved into an inclusive community for ministers striving to be true to the vision of Jesus. FCM members are reform-minded Catholics on the edge of the institutional church with a vision of new models of ministry.

The keynote speaker was FCM member Rev. Mary Ramerman of the Spiritus Christi Community. I love what Mary says, the way she says it, all the reflection, dialogue, work and prayer that go into her life and the courage with which she lives.

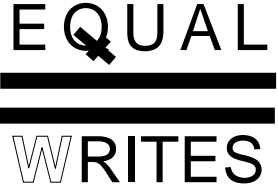
On the very day of the 155th anniversary of the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, just down the road from Rochester, Mary told us of Sojourner Truth who was willing to speak the truth at the convention when no one wanted to hear it.

Mary also told us that in a world dying for ministry, we don't need one more needs assessment. Just do it!

Also at the conference, Rev. Enrique Cardena, himself an important part of the history of Spiritus Christi, reminded us that, as children of Vatican II, we are called to continue the dream, even though the institution is not dreaming with us. The institution is moving backwards to a different model of church. In fact, all of Enrique's heroes are suspended, fired or expelled!

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	SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA WOMEN'S ORDINATION CONFERENCE
	c/o Jann 49 Driscoll Drive Ivyland, PA 18974

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Enrique told us we can't wait for the institution, that it is our duty to give root to the next generation, to keep the dream alive--to go forward to Vatican III.

There is a paradigm shift from church as pyramid to church as circle; church rooted in spirituality, service and compassion. This is the Gospel tradition!

One of Enrique's heroes is also one of mine--Rev. Jim Callan. Jim told of being called to explain himself to the Bishop of Rochester. Jim said he had to ask himself, "Am I with the system or am I with the women, the persecuted, the misunderstood?"

His answer resulted in his suspension from the diocese. As I do every time I leave Rochester, I began to cry. When I hugged Jim goodbye this time I said: "Thank you for all you've done for the women of the church." Jim replied, "Thank you for all you've done" Then I really began to cry!

I want to thank all of you for all you've done, too.

Upon my return from Rochester I realized there is much work still to be done, when I read the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and saw the reflections of our newly-assigned archbishop. Christ is presented to us in the Scriptures as the bridegroom of the church. The church is the bride...the intimacy must always be maintained...This is why the church, rightly, maintain(s) a male priesthood to represent Jesus...

I looked up the scriptural commentaries and I did not find these reflections supported. The Gospel stories of Jesus as bridegroom have to do with his presence among us as a source of joy. There is no reference to a male priesthood.

There is much work to do. Just do it!

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.

MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE: If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *Equal wRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be December 2003. Final deadline for submissions is October 15. Send to the editor: Karen B. Lenz, 430 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia, PA 19122 (215) 232-7823.

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You're Invited to a Dialogue

The core committee of SEPA/WOC is still riding high from our Grand Event on May 3. The enthusiasm and sheer joy generated that day were palpable. We were truly gathered in His name and, as promised, He was indeed there in the midst of us.

As positive as the whole experience was, however, it leaves the core committee with a challenge. There is an enormous amount of energy and momentum flowing among the laity now. The key question is, what do we do with it all? How do we harness what we have gained and use it to create something positive, forceful, and effective?

After tossing around a few ideas, we came up with something we think is worthwhile: Let's put this challenge to the readership of *Equal wRites*. Let's involve our readers in a brain-storming session and find out what their thoughts are on how Catholic reform should proceed.


And so we ask you: How should Catholic reform proceed? Where do we go from here? What should our goals be? What should we be envisioning and how do we work toward it? Do we approach the laity, priests, religious, the hierarchy, all of the above? And, most critical of all, how?

You likely are a reformer (you are a subscriber) or you wouldn't be reading this now. We need you to pray, think hard, and then put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. We encourage you to follow the awesome experience of May 3 (either you were there or you read about it in *Equal wRites*) by sharing your thoughts with us. We need to hear from you.

Don't think any idea is too insignificant, too outrageous, too radical to be considered. We promise you the core committee will read and consider everything.

One of you, perhaps several of you, will light the spark that will light the flame that will light the fire. We all know what the Holy Spirit can do with a spark. The possibilities are endless.

Contact us at the following address: SEPA/WOC Core Committee, c/o Equal wRites, 430 W. Jefferson St., Phila., PA 19122, or e-mail mejann@aol.com..

		Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area
Vol. XII No 2		SEPTEMBER — NOVEMBER 2003
		MISSION STATEMENT - <i>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.</i>

A BEGINNING: TWO VIEWS

WAKE UP, CATCH FIRE, PULL OUT

by Maria Marlowe

The approach I think Catholic reform should take is to shake and wake a near-comatose Catholic laity and challenge its members to take back their church. I believe reform will arise from a ground swell stirring at this, the most local, the most grassroots level. I believe the laity has more strength than it knows and it's the job of the reformers to make the laity aware of it.

I used to be a dead inside Catholic until the Holy Spirit lit a fire under me and nothing has been the same. Now I pray the Holy Spirit will light a fire under my fellow congregants when, at virtually every conventional mass, I observe them in a trance that only television, the plug-in drug, can rival. We sit, we stand, we kneel. The priest/deacon/lector says this and we answer that. Welcome to the stale, stagnant world of perfunctory Catholic worship.

This coma-like existence at mass is a microcosm of the larger coma into which the laity has been lovingly induced. The clergy are the doers and we are the doers. They say and we obey. They

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NEEDED: A NEW CHURCH IN THE SHELL OF THE OLD

by Karen B. Lenz

Unlike some of my colleagues, who say things like, my only issue with the church is women's ordination (or the sexual abuse crisis, or the treatment of gays and lesbians, or whatever) I don't believe that the church's mistreatment of women is a problem that can be meaningfully considered, let alone confronted and solved, in isolation. The outrageous denial of the Sacrament of Holy Orders to more than half of the Body of Christ--the female half--is only one symptom (and, I submit how's this for heresy? -not even the most important one) of a critically ill, perhaps moribund, institution.

What to do now? Band-aids are useless to a patient whose systemic disease is causing multi-organ failure. One of the founders of the Catholic Worker movement, speaking about the American socio-economic system, said the task before us is to construct a new society within the shell of the old. The word shell is key to the vision--evoking as it does a structure gutted of all the accumulated injustices and inequities and misplaced and mishandled power and authority--an emptied shell, rebuilding itself from the ground up within the (still-standing) walls of its finest and most noble ideals.

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TWO VIEWS Needed: A New Church

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Where should the women’s ordination movement go now? Down the long hard road that must be travelled by everyone who has heard her/his own name attached to the simple request of Jesus: Come, follow me--the road to a new church of mercy and justice and love (they are the same) that must be constructed within the shell of the old; an institution (community?) that will be able to call itself the church of Jesus without apology or shame.

How do we begin? First by understanding--really understanding that if God is with us, there is nothing (or no one) we need fear.

And then, by starting with the Gospels - all of them, please; (who decided that only four of them were inspired by God?) and letting the very clear and simple (which is emphatically NOT the same as easy) expectations of the Jesus who was totally unconcerned with voluminous theologies, councils, encyclicals and canon laws, the Jesus who said, “Call no man Father (or woman?)” Sear their radical message into our souls.

Matthew :25 and the Sermon on the Mount are good places to start.

And finally, by joining hands and hearts (this is no one-woman job) and just beginning. As Malcolm X said in another context, by any means necessary I would add any nonviolent means necessary. The exact route will become clear as we proceed. Our mission is: I am afraid nothing less radical will suffice to build a new church within the shell of the old, letting ourselves feel with every step how closely God is walking alongside us.

Karen B. Lenz, editor of Equal wRites, is a member of the Brandywine Peace Community and the Community of the Christian Spirit. She lives and works (and plays Scrabble) at the Philadelphia Catholic Worker.

when liberal French priests were still passing through regularly; my mentor there, the Francophile intellectual, Eleanor Walker, had entered the Catholic church during World War II as the godchild of Jacques Maritain and went to the Dutch Grail from Daniélou’s Cercle St-Jean-Baptiste in postwar Paris.

But French Catholicism impacted American Catholicism long before Vatican II, especially because of the strong historical bonds between the churches in France and in Ireland. While before the French revolution, young Irish men who wanted to enter the priesthood went to France for their training, during the Revolution French priests and nuns emigrated to Ireland to escape the Terror. French priests in Irish seminaries trained Irish seminarians who eventually served the American mission territories. The Sulpicians, a French order, staffed a number of the earliest American seminaries, disseminating the rigid Jansenism that shaped Irish-American Catholicism.

Some of the earliest houses of women religious in the US were likewise French. French-speaking Ursulines opened a convent in New Orleans in 1727, and staffed the convent burned by a Protestant mob near Boston in 1834. Two of the largest women’s religious congregations in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia are also French in origin. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill evolved from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, a French order whose first missionary members sailed up the Mississippi from New Orleans in 1836. Similarly, the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary were founded by a Francophone mulatto, Theresa Maxis Duchemin, who had grown up in the Haitian Catholic immi-

Wake Up, Catch Fire

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tell us how far we can go and we go no farther. They are the active voice in the church and we are the passive.

I envision a laity who rises up and demands meaningful influence in its church. I envision a laity who recognizes that it has a greater role in its church than the privilege of writing a check. I envision a laity who is no longer satisfied with being told, with being submissive, with being held within very defined borders. I envision a laity breaking down borders and creating a seamless church where, as Paul said, “we are all truly one in Christ”.

I envision a vibrant, alive, fearless laity which uses the leverage it has (money and, to a certain extent, time) to force the hand of the Catholic hierarchy into creating, within itself, the church of Christ’s beloved Way, the kingdom of God on earth.

I have in mind an event that I call a month of Sundays. It begins with one Sunday a year when a newly awakened, energized laity does something unprecedented - it pulls out. We withhold our checks that Sunday, send that donation to a worthy charity, and tell our pastors exactly what we are doing and why. On that Sunday all volunteer laypersons (choir, lectors, eucharistic ministers, ushers) pull out. They tell their pastors what they are doing and why. If one Sunday doesn’t produce results, we advance to a month of Sundays. We begin with a quiet month like June or July. If that has no effect, we switch to December.

If we must dismantle this structure to build it anew, then so be it. If we must tear down the man-made pyramid in order to form the Christ-like circle, then so be it. It’s worth it. Jesus is worth it.

Maria Marlowe is a core committee member of SEPA/WOC.

Letter from Paris

by Marian Ronan

In a burst of extravagance, my husband and I recently celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary with a long vacation in Paris, supplemented by a side-trip to Siena. Much that we did was nonetheless delicious for being described to death in the Sunday travel section—watching the sun set from the Eiffel Tower, eating long intimate dinners on cobble-stoned *places*, riding *bateaux-mouches* along the Seine. I also indulged some of my earliest Catholic schoolgirl fantasies, standing in the marketplace at Rouen where Joan of Arc was burned, visiting Thérèse’s tomb in Lisieux, climbing a Sienese hill to the basilica that houses the shrunken head (!) of that city’s patroness, Catherine. By now my husband may have the most highly-developed taper-lighting skills of any Baptist minister in the world.

During our month in France I also spent time catching up on French Catholicism. Some of us who lived through the Second Vatican Council still feel warmth and gratitude toward the French church so many of whose theologians—Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou—made critical and costly contributions to the “new theology” that undergirded the work of that council. The beautiful, austere French liturgical tradition was an invaluable part of the mid-century liturgical renewal as well, as those of us who once sang the Gelineau psalms well remember. I myself feel especially sutured into this tradition for having spent much of my twenties at Grailville

pute or of dubious doctrine from whom the shepherds of his own time barricaded themselves by purity rules and regulations.

One of the strongest, highest, toughest, and most invincible barriers ever erected by the shepherds is the one that was built to shut out women from participating in the life of the church. These walls are concentric rings, with one wall higher than the other. They crawl with defenders whose job is to concoct as many farfetched, untrue, unchristian, and ultimately cruel falsehoods about their sisters as they can. Many people continue to believe this, including our Brother Anthony, who retired last week, and who once said that women cannot and will not be ordained not only for a thousand years, but for a million years.

Mary Magdalene is an example of a woman who was made a prisoner behind these man-made walls. All of the canonical gospels regard her as the primary witness to the resurrection. Luke describes her as one of Jesus’ closest friends who followed him from the very beginning of his ministry in Galilee. Luke 8 says that when Jesus went to the towns and villages proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, the twelve were with him, as were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susannah. I would like to suggest that the ancient writers did not possess the language to describe a group of unmarried, unaccompanied women disciples who followed their male teacher all around the country. This was the very best that Luke could do to describe the presence of women disciples in a male world.

While those who were later to be regarded as shepherds were arguing among themselves as to who would be the greatest and sit at the right hand of the lord in heaven, Mary served as an example of discipleship by ministering to the fledgling Christian community. As a disciple, she was willing to give her all, even her life at the foot of the cross, if necessary, to be with the one who transformed her and changed her life.

While the canonical Gospels are restrained in their stories about Mary, the Gnostic gospels portray her, along with his mother, as the ones who walked with him always. She was the woman who "knew the all." Only Mary, in both the canonical and the Gnostics, seemed to "get it." When Mary and the other women meet with the angel at the empty tomb in Luke 24, the angel reminded them of what Jesus had taught them in Galilee, that he would rise. If you look back at Luke 9, you will find a passage that says that Jesus retired to a quiet place with his closest disciples, telling them about his death and resurrection. Mary Magdalene and the other women must have been privy to this information since they knew exactly what the angel at the tomb was talking about. The men, who had received the same information, at first refused to believe the good news because it was Mary who proclaimed it.

Later Gnostic gospels in the second and third century continued to portray Mary as a disciple designated to receive and transmit special knowledge and revelations. These gospels also indicate the tension, jealousy, and outright animosity of Peter towards Mary. Peter complained that Jesus seemed to love Mary better than he loved the rest of them, never considering that Mary, along with Martha, understood before the resurrection that Jesus was the resurrection and the life, while he, Peter, remained clueless.

In orthodox communities, the structures of domination, the walls and barriers that separate people according to their outward characteristics, had snapped back into place by the end of the first century. Women who were originally freed from societal strictures by Jesus were told to put up, shut up and sit down. Church tradition began to

teach that women had no role in the church, from the beginning. The patriarchal church, forced to disguise and diminish the prominent role a woman did have in the days of early Christianity, re-configured Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the apostles, the friend and faithful disciple of Jesus, as a prostitute. Her past became more important than her presence to Jesus. Her future in the church was distorted.

The characters of all women save one were distorted and mangled by the church and its shepherds. Instead of being remembered and considered co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord like Mary and the many women in Paul's epistles, women were recast as the gateway of the devil, creatures of insatiable lust; as evil, ignorant, unworthy, and impure by virtue of their menstrual cycles and child bearing. Lately, the daughters of Mary Magdalene have been forever banished from the altar because of an imagined inability to image the Lord. These barriers, the ones that Jesus our Emmanuel, "One of us," died to break forever and ever for all of us, stand as high today as they did two thousand years ago. Fences do not make good neighbors and baseless barriers between God's children do not make good Christians.

In his homily last week, a Vincentian by the name of Charlie talked about the difference between authenticity and authority. Jesus, who walked this earth as true God and true human being, had both. In more common parlance, Jesus practiced what he preached. He used very simple language to lay the bedrock foundation of discipleship. Love God and neighbor as self. Treat every person as you would like to be treated. See the face of Jesus in all of your sisters and brothers. Don't lord it over another. Live simply. Do not succumb to idolatrous practices that substitute the glory of men and women for the glory of God. Proclaim and preach this good news that the kingdom of God is available and present for those who take these principles to heart and act in a manner reminiscent of Jesus. This is authentic Christian behavior and gives meaning to the word, Christian, as "follower of Christ." This is what disciples of Jesus believe in. This is what disciples of Jesus hope for. This is how disciples of Jesus act. This is how disciples of Jesus love. This is the type of behavior that gives authority to shepherds to teach and to lead. This is what it means to act authentically according to gospel values.

Mary Magdalene must have had this type of authentic authority in the early church or else it would not have been necessary to minimize her role and maximize a bogus sin. Many women throughout the ages have also possessed the authority that comes from living authentic Christian lives that mirror that of Jesus. Many people know that women can and do, like Mary Magdalene, image Christ in the church and in the world.

There are signs and portents that the Holy Spirit is at work. The Spirit watches and she waits. She moves. And, if necessary, she allows things, like man made barriers, to fall apart. The center cannot hold for those thousand, million years because God's children are being harmed.

Mary Magdalene, her reputation restored, has already been released from the dark glass through which we once dimly perceived her. Her daughters are stepping up and over the myths of misogyny. May the walls so tenaciously built up by human sin to keep people apart come tumbling down by the authentic Christian behavior of men and women who understand what God meant when Paul wrote "that all are one in Christ Jesus." And, please God, may our shepherds become the leaders the church so desperately needs and wants them to be in God's barrier free kingdom.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a member of the SEPA/WOC core committee.

Sermon Preached at Dignity in Honor of St. Mary Magdalene

By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

Good evening. I am very happy to be with all of you at Dignity again on this Sunday as we remember our foremother in faith, Mary Magdalene. When I first read the lectionary selections for today's Mass, I almost laughed out loud. What could be more perfect than a homily about the apostle, Mary Magdalene, leaderless flocks, and problematic shepherds?

After reading Jeremiah and Mark, one does wonder. Why are the People of God so often without a shepherd? Our newspapers are full of stories about shepherds abandoning the scene of a crime and going to jail; of shepherds resigning for alleged misdoings. We hear about shepherds being unable to discern the difference between right and wrong; of shepherds who abuse and misuse their powers; of shepherds who insist upon having the best seats at table and being fed before they feed their flocks; of shepherds who are willing to sacrifice their entire flock in order to preserve the institution from which their power is derived; of shepherds who have appointed themselves judge and jury, thereby erecting barriers that exclude and divide; of shepherds who publicly castigate those of God's children who might be different or who have different ideas. How can this be so in the church of Jesus Christ?

In our first reading today, Jeremiah uses the word "woe" to express his dismay at the leaders of his time who have exercised their power unjustly. Woe is not just a word of profound sadness. It is a word of judgment. Leaders are responsible for the administration of justice as well as for the maintenance of order. Justice, which must roll like a river and, if necessary, wash away oppressive systems, leaving something entirely different in its place, can never be sacrificed for the sake of order and institutional preservation. The Way of God was founded upon principles of justice. Those who lead according to the precepts of justice do not erect barriers and place some of God's people beyond the pale where they are treated with injustice.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote a hundred years ago that what is preached by shepherds from the pulpit and altar is carried out by the men and women in the pews. The German theologian Gerd Theissen wrote that respected German theologians sowed the seeds and set the stage for the German imperialism that led to the carnage of World War I. Northern and Southern shepherds provided the scriptural justification for slavery. Until the 1940's, African American members of my own parish were forced to sit in the back of our church and receive Communion after all of the white people had received. In our own time, shepherds publicly denigrate and marginalize homosexuals. They deny gay people both ordination and marriage because of their refusal to reconsider their medieval understanding of love, sex, and procreation. Is it any wonder that gay students in the high school where I work are often thrown out of their own homes and harassed in school to the point that many of them become depressed and despairing?

Modern shepherds also deny ordination to women. Women cannot, according to the head shepherd, "image" Christ. Jesus didn't choose women to be among the twelve. Women lack the requisite equipment to "sow the seeds." At the present time, the church of Jesus Christ is neither an equal opportunity employer nor a respecter of persons. It insists upon a separate and inherently unequal status for men and women, and teaches and insists that this teaching is

good. Is it no wonder, then, that women remain second-class citizens, subjected to violence and victimized by poverty in many areas of the world?

Today I want to talk about barriers that divide God's people, sometimes into armed camps. These divisions or walls or barriers separate people from one another and, therefore, from God. Jesus recognized these savage divisions, saw the damage that they did to both those on the outside as well as those on the inside, and broke them, bought them with his blood, as Ephesians says today. Listen again to the words of today's epistle. "For Christ is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart. In his own flesh Christ abolished the Law with its commands and ordinances in order to make the two into one new person, thus establishing peace and reconciling us both to God in one body through the cross, which put to death the enmity between us."

While I was reading Ephesians, I thought about the Great Wall of China. I read somewhere that the Great Wall is the only human structure that can be viewed from space. It's rather sad to think that this 4,500 mile barrier, built to keep two racially and culturally similar peoples separate, would be the first thing that extraterrestrial visitors might see upon entering earth's orbit.

This wall made me think of other visible, tangible walls: the Walls of Jericho, the wailing wall, castle keeps, barbed wire, forts, checkpoint Charlie, the Iron Curtain, the Berlin Wall, altar rails and rood screens; and of invisible barriers like racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, classism, elitism, and religious intolerance, intangibles that are more formidable than the walls around the Alamo. Soldiers with battering rams, pikes, catapults, grenades, tanks, and bombs eventually break down the walls of brick and mortar. When eyes fail to see, ears refuse to hear, consciences remain silent, and courage fails, barriers, walls, and exclusion remain securely in place, hurting the most vulnerable members of God's family. The barriers were supposed to be broken once and for all by the blood of Christ who had imagined a barrier free kingdom. Human pride and human sin build them right back up again, almost from the beginning. So quickly did shepherd and sheep forget who was hanging on that cross and why he hung there!

What is it about humans that they want to erect a wall? Do fences, as Robert Frost asked, ensure neighborliness? Abraham and Sarah erected a barrier between their son and the son of Hagar because they didn't want to share their wealth with Abraham's own flesh and blood. Pharaoh divided up Egyptian society into slave and free. Upon gaining their own freedom, the Hebrews ruthlessly murdered the indigenous inhabitants of Israel who did not share their religious and cultural beliefs. The Jews hated their own cousins, the Samaritans, refusing to eat or worship with them. Orthodox Christians excommunicated their heterodox sisters and brothers for slight variations in dogma. Christians engaged in holy wars against Jews and Muslims. Protestants and Catholics massacred one another in the name of Jesus, in whom both sects professed belief. Today, the shepherds announce and proclaim sometimes during the holy sacrifice of the mass where Christians believe that Jesus died to for all human beings, that certain people with certain beliefs or certain lifestyles may not approach the altar of Jesus because of man-made barriers. Jesus, if you will remember from the gospels, had no problem touching or being touched by both men and women of ill re-

grant community in Baltimore. Given this genealogy, the unconscious of a great many Philadelphia Catholics above a certain age were shaped by implicitly French Catholic spirituality.

I gathered my impressions of contemporary French Catholicism from attending liturgies and reading newsletters and bulletin boards of parish churches in and around Paris. One of the more memorable liturgies was the Pentecost celebration in Notre Dame Cathedral at which the impressive cardinal-archbishop of Paris, Jean Marie Lustiger, preached and confirmed 150 adult Catholics. In this case, of the enormous crowd—I stood up the whole time—and the beauty of the liturgy suggested a certain ecclesial health and vigor. Liturgical music in all the churches I visited was better than what one encounters in many American parishes. Cantors seemed better trained than (at least) those here in the diocese of Oakland, and rehearsed their congregations with impressive enthusiasm.

The marks of John Paul II's regressive papacy were also frequently in evidence, however. A number of parishes were celebrating the centenary of the papacy of Pius X, whose chief claim to fame was twisting Leo XIII's Thomist revival into an anti-modernist witch hunt. Posters announcing new pilgrimages and devotions in light of the addition of five new decades of the rosary by John Paul II were also widespread. Even more disturbing, for me, was a program to recruit new candidates to the priesthood. Posters, flyers, and donation envelopes in every parish proclaimed, "The formation of future priests, that's everybody's business!" Posters announced all night youth vigils to pray for vocations. Photos of a large group of young smiling white male clerics in red vestments marked all of this publicity. Also striking was the apolitical piety of the sermons to which I listened. Perhaps the mediocrity of my French prevented me from hearing their call to a gospel-inspired struggle for justice, but I don't think so.

I felt all of this most intensely at the Corpus Christi Mass in the Church of Saint Germain des Près on the Left Bank. Arguably the oldest church in Paris, Saint Germain is illumined by the aesthetic austerity of fifteen hundred years of French Catholicism. As the seat of the Institut Catholique it was also once a center of Vatican II theology. Crowded with young people from the University of Paris nearby, the service reminded me of the exquisite post-Vatican II liturgies that I attended at Trinity College and at various Grail venues in the late 60s and early 70s. But the Mass was concelebrated by seven priests, six of them quite young, and assisted by five or six more seminarians and two young male altar servers. All of them wore strikingly elegant white vestments. Much of the congregation knelt through the consecration, and at communion, only those on the altar took/received under both species. A Parisian friend explained that the French church has stopped giving communion under both species because of the fear of AIDS. If this is true, why don't they use intinction?

In a new book, *Dieu en France: Mort et Résurrection de Catholicism*, Henri Tincq, the religion columnist for the liberal French daily, *Le Monde*, documents the many problems facing the French church, including the decline in its once vibrant intellectual tradition, but finds new life in communities of young French Catholic laypeople. I have only begun to read the book in depth, and will report on it in a future issue of *Equal wRites*. In the interim, one can only hope that he is right.

Marian Ronan is at work on a new book, Sexuality and Mourning in US Catholicism: Voices of the Postwar Generation.

— NO TURNING BACK —

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE

by Karen B. Lenz

One of the things I admire most about the writings of activist novelist and poet Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*); (*The Temple of My Familiar*) is that, unlike some of her fellow African-American authors who seemed to find their voices only to raise them in an enormous collective howl of rage during the 60's, she takes the time to recognize and acknowledge her generation's debt to the generations of strong African-American women, their mothers and grandmothers, who came before them, holding families together, loving and nurturing and teaching their children, raising them up, often surprisingly straight and strong in an unfamiliar, not altogether friendly place hardly of their own choosing.

Her attitude is refreshingly different from the seemingly more fashionable, but certainly more adolescent, tendency of others to be embarrassed by, to apologize for, or even to dismiss altogether, the gifts of those predecessors judged somehow less aware or enlightened, on whose shoulders (they have failed to notice) their feet are squarely planted.

I was educated by Sisters of Mercy at a small women's college in Connecticut, dragged there on a picture-perfect summer day nearly forty years ago (I remember it clearly) by my increasingly desperate father, holding fast to the hope that somehow the nuns could do something with the daughter, bright but unruly, he was unable to control.

In one of those sometimes delicious ironies of life, he got more than he bargained for.

For reasons still not entirely clear to me, something compelled Sister M. Consolata, dean of students at St. Joseph College, to look up from a dismal academic record to face a rebellious and self-destructive teen, floundering in a tumultuous- we're talking early 60's here (decade), and find some reason to accept her not entirely enthusiastic application. It was a decision that forever altered, and perhaps even saved, my life.

Without the energetic intervention of the small community of Mercies who taught at St. Joe's during those years, several of whom remain my friends to the present time, I surely would not be what I am today, a committed, oft-arrested (perhaps still unruly) Catholic activist, happily (for the most part) living and working in a sprawling Catholic Worker house that needs a roof, smack in the heart of inner-city North Philadelphia.

Lest this all seem just a tad too idyllic, let me hasten to add that some of the good sisters did not then, and do not now, endorse everything I am and for which I stand. I recall some stern rebukes for several articles I wrote for the college paper; more recently the nun, a professor of English, who was my advisor, responded to the first issue of *Equal wRites* which I edited by saying she found it well-done, but as I expected, she thought less of the content.

I cherish the relationship, now nearly four decades old, that is big enough for this sort of honest exchange.

What follows is an article different from those that usually appear in these pages, though not far removed in spirit from Marian Ronan's wonderful pieces on her nuns, which I wrote recently for a Festschrift, celebrating the life of one of those Connecticut Mercies, still vibrant and active as she begins her eighties. It is my sincere trib-

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

ute to her, and by extension to all of them: Sisters Ancilla, Joan, Beatrice, Bertille, Felita, Justin, Theodore, and the afore-mentioned Consolata, to call by name a few of those who had the greatest impact on me. Perhaps somewhat whimsical and sentimental, the piece just feels right (and somewhat overdue) and so I'd like to share it with you.

OF A SNOW SQUALL, A FLUTIST, AND SISTER CLAIRE

By all accounts, none of which I have any reason to doubt, Sister Maria Claire Markham is a gifted teacher (I never had her in class); a brilliant scientist and researcher (I am a former English major and wannabe poet, totally unable to evaluate that claim); and a thoroughly competent administrator and politician who has deftly and efficiently worked with a variety of bureaucracies: her religious order, the college administration, the broader church, and any number of state and federal projects and committees and commissions, all without breaking stride. (I am a Catholic Worker and an avowed anarchist, completely lacking the inclination or ability to work with or within bureaucracies or hierarchies, especially authoritarian ones.) It is even possible that Sister's desk is as orderly and organized as her curriculum vitae.

The Sister Claire I know is considerably less formidable than the foregoing list of accomplishments might lead one to expect. An unpretentious, gentle and gracious woman, she seldom (if ever) needs to raise her voice to make a point or take a stand, which she does not hesitate to do when the occasion demands. Above everything else, though, Sr. Claire is kind. And improbably enough, she is also my friend.

In lieu of a list of her acts of kindness which I have personally witnessed or experienced, a list which would include trimming their tree, at Christmas time, with the family of a recently-deceased colleague; supporting, encouraging and urging on generations of clueless college students, including me, appearing, some 25 years after I'd left St. Joe's, in the pew of an old Lutheran church in Hartford for my mother's funeral; and sending a note of support (the first mail I received at my new address) when I joined a Catholic Worker community six years ago or so, I want to tell you a story.

It was a winter morning, perhaps 1995 or 96. I had gotten off duty after working the 11 o'clock shift as part of a mental health crisis intervention team, and was walking through Center City Philadelphia to catch the subway home (my car being in the shop), all the while thinking about Sister Claire. She had recently retired from teaching and there was to be some sort of affair at St. Joe's in her honor; despite an intense dislike of scripted celebrations of any sort (this from someone who once lived uncomfortably close to the Crystal Ballroom in Mercy Hall) I was planning to drive to Connecticut for this one.

As I walked the few blocks to the station, the crisp air suddenly came alive, filled with a slow dance of thousands of large, intricately patterned, soft, white flakes, frolicking and twisting and twirling their way to the frozen ground. Without warning, a routine weekday morning became enchanted, otherworldly, magical, all without a sound. I had never ever experienced snow like that.

I stood and watched, spellbound, until the chill air prompted me to resume my trek to the train. As I descended the steps-ever so cautiously, since they were by now snow-covered and treacherous underfoot, leading into the grimy and malodorous concourse, filled with an early morning crush of humanity on its way to work (how

sharply every detail of that morning is etched in my memory) my progress toward home and the warm bed that awaited me was again arrested, this time by haunting strains of music, lovely high notes, completely different from the usual urban boom-box racket cascading out from somewhere within, each note as clear and distinct and somehow fragile as if frozen in crystal. The sound, out-of-place and unexpected as the unpredicted snow squall, enhanced the morning's sense of enchantment, as, curious, I followed the music to its source: a tall, thin man of indeterminate middle age, rather formally dressed in a full-length frock coat, top hat, and long brightly patterned woolen scarf, he could have just stepped out from the pages of a novel by Dickens, leaning against the station wall, his long fingers nimbly moving up and down the shiny flute-like instrument he held to his lips.

Swaying gently with the music, he was entirely engrossed in his task, seemingly oblivious to the reactions of the passersby, some of whom stopped briefly to listen, but most of whom scurried on about their Very Important Business without a backward glance.

Mesmerized, I stood off to one side, watching and listening for an hour or more, experiencing each note of what seemed to be succession of stately old English carols as an unusual and very precious gift. When the piper stopped briefly to rest, he glanced around, seemingly surprised to discover me standing there. Our eyes met, he gave a small but courtly bow, and a slight smile played across his lips before he solemnly lifted his instrument and resumed his performance. Only the undeniable reality of my fatigue, the cold, and the feel of wet clothes against my skin, made me sure I was not dreaming.

Riding home on the nearly empty subway car, my thoughts, punctuated only by the piercing metal squeals of the car's brakes, returned to Sr. Claire. How like the music of the street musician was her life, I thought, an unexpected gift of incredible sweetness, clear (her name means clear in Italian), and purposeful, lovingly offered for the benefit of so many of us, not with any thought of reward or payment but simply because that is who she is and what she does, whether or not anyone ever pauses to appreciate and acknowledge the gift. I am grateful to have this opportunity to do so.

Considerably less well organized than Sr. Claire, I did not, despite the best intentions, make her retirement party at St. Joe's. However, whenever I think of Claire now, I remember that magical morning and the solitary subway soloist, filling a dirty urban station with unexpected charm and grace.

I returned to the concourse on a number of occasions in the months that followed, hoping to hear a few strains of an old English carol, or to catch a glimpse of a tall figure in long coat and top hat but, not surprisingly perhaps, I never saw or heard him again.

Thank you, dear Sr. Claire, for the sweet music that has been your life. May you play on and on.

Karen B. Lenz is editor of Equal wRites.

JOURNEY OF THE HEART
Non-Denominational Officiators and Ministers
Weddings, Commitment Ceremonies, Funerals,
Baby Namings, Renewal of Vows, Home Blessings
Ministers of all occasions.



Marguerita H. Sexton and Associates

Viewing the Anchoress, Viewing Ourselves "Anchoress" (1993). A film. With Natalie Morse, Gene Bervoerts, and Christopher Eccleston. Directed by Chris Newby. Distributed by Vanguard. Black and white; 105 minutes. (Available at some Blockbuster rental sites.)

Reviewed by Joseph W. Ruane

My question after viewing this film is "How has it taken ten years for my feminist friends and me to learn of this gem?!" Though it takes place in 14th century England, the issues it confronts are as contemporary as our daily lives: women's place in society, in church and in interpersonal relationships. But its deeply classic nature arises from the universality of its specifics: development of the central figure from childlikeness to maturity, from Jansenistic to incarnational spirituality, from membership in a group—the village—to solitariness, and back again. In its processes, the film pits women's spirituality against men's religion, and internal against external authority.

Your question may be "What is an anchoress?" and that question deserves an answer. Briefly, an anchoress was a woman leading a contemplative life in a very small room structurally attached to a church. Generally the room had a window at which the anchoress sat

and offered counsel to those who came to her, or through which they passed items for her meals, for her needlework, for her writing. Another window into the church itself allowed her to observe the liturgies and rituals without leaving her room. Being an anchoress was considered a life-long commitment, and the woman was not to leave her room for walks, for visits to villagers, or for any other reason.

An anchoress who is familiar to many contemporary Christian women is Julian of Norwich, who had a medium-sized room with a hearth for simple cooking. Some anchoresses even had a tiny enclosed garden and chicken run attached to their cells, in order to provide their own food. Men, too, live this life-style even today as Camaldolese monks or as hermits on the property of a community of monks. Thomas Merton was an example of that at a certain period in his life.

Christine, the central figure in this film, is a teenaged girl living in rural, 14th century England. The daily lives of the women and girls of the area give rise to an earthy, active spirituality that is very close to the seasons and the soil. They seem to feel no conflict between this and their Catholic identity. This nature-entered spirituality is easily (perhaps deliberately?) misconstrued by the local church authorities as witchcraft. At the same time, Christine's utter devotion to Mary clearly places the latter in the position of God(dess), which does not trouble the church authorities at all, except when they debate the color of her cloak.

In the film, Christine, the eventual anchoress, may be deeply spiritually motivated to become a walled-in recluse, or she may be running away from the unwanted romantic attentions of the village sheriff. She may be seeking solitude as a spiritual discipline, or she may be escaping from her family's home where they sleep four to a bed. She may be drawn to a life of prayer, or she may be drawn to the esteem in which the villagers hold her as their intercessor with God. Conflicting possibilities like these are the stuff of every human decision, but Catholic culture is generally unwilling to accept this mixture of divine and human when it comes to religious and priestly vocations. This film does a favor to that culture by its clear illustration of Christine's choices.

The particular power of the film is its period authenticity, filmed in grainy black and white, filled with vast silences and minimal dialogue, and resembling at times a Vermeer painting. Imagine, if you will, a film that was co-directed by both Bergman and Fellini, and you will come close to the style and content of this one.

The film's accurate reproduction of the period in question makes its statements all the more powerful. Somehow, the very fact that we see women of such a different time struggling with the issues we struggle with validates those issues, and lets us see the cruel repression that lurks within them.

Mary Jeremy Daigler, RSM is a member of the national WOC Board of Directors and was active in SEPA-WOC from 1987-90. She worked in Catholic higher education for many years and is now in the Development Office at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore.

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Book Review

Take Back the Truth: Confronting Papal Power and the Religious Right by Joanna Manning. Crossroad Publishing Company, NY, 2002, 176 pages. \$16.95.

Reviewed by Joseph W. Ruane

Take Back the Truth is first of all a book by a woman of faith. One might add a woman of hope and charity. A one-time principal and head of religious education in a Roman Catholic Canadian high school, Manning weaves a story that pulls the reader into the mire of the last thirty-some years. A one-time victim of clergy abuse, Manning sees the pedophilia crisis as only one of many abuses of power and authority by the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The strengths of the book are the weight and seriousness of the facts and charges put forth, and Manning's ability to tie the pieces together to suggest the world stolen from the Vatican II faithful while presenting a powerful expose of the church's historical workings against women's sexual and reproductive rights and its protection and encouragement of the religious right.

Manning further identifies the racist implications of some in the church and in the Christian right in their formulation of immigration and anti-abortion policies. This willingness of Catholic leaders to cooperate with the Protestant religious right in order to protect the power of a male-dominated society is most revealing.

A weakness is the too-frequent use of questionable right-wing publications containing frightening half truths and more frightening threats. My concern is that such minority authors, albeit with dangerous ideas, receive more publicity here than the overall public has been willing to give them. As George W. Bush listens to them, but holds them at arm's length for his own political reasons, so also too much attention to their work gives the right wing reason to continue.

Likewise, the anger that seems to occasionally jump off the pages challenges objectivity, yet it helps establish the important political dimensions of the book. These political implications enlighten the reader to the narrowness of the so-called truths that the church professes as it aligns itself with the Christian right exemplified by men like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell and their teachings.

Manning explains contradictions put forth by Vatican officials regarding just war, sexuality, liturgy, women, priesthood, money and jurisdiction in pedophilia cases and gay rights, to name a few.

In describing more recent attempts at control she offers a list of church members excoriated, excommunicated, or suspended for actions associated with ideas of renewal movements seeking fulfilled visions of Vatican II promises, most occurring since 1998. She sees the current teachings of Rome to be the last gasp of the culture of patriarchal dominance threatened by the newly-emerging postmodern consciousness of global solidarity and inclusiveness. She identifies an interesting parallel between Poland and the rest of the world; paternalistic rulings, she argues, are intended to protect especially Poland and concomitantly the world from the evil influences of Western society.

Take Back the Truth provides a lengthy exegesis of the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (The Splendor of Truth) published in 1993, arguing that its teachings comprise an attempt by John Paul II to draw secure and impenetrable boundaries around the truth that supposedly only the Pope and bishops can pronounce for all to follow. A major point of the encyclical concerns sexuality and its control by the church.

A similar lengthy discussion of abortion and the history of the church today holds one's interest. By placing emphasis on the con-

trol of power in the abortion debate the church has withdrawn from its prophetic role by relinquishing its say on the ravages of rampant capitalism and of the environment to the forces on the right with which it is aligned.

Manning reminds her readers frequently that whenever Jesus spoke the truth it was in the context of life and experience, not for the purpose of thought control through abstract dogma rigidly held until the truth becomes too obvious to suppress, as in the cases of Galileo and slavery.

Today's church actions receive their critique from ordinary Catholics withdrawing their consent from the truths the church teaches on contraception, homosexual relationships, divorce, and Sunday mass obligations by simply abandoning the practice in their lives. Further, disagreement with the hierarchy's ban on married clergy, ordination of women priests, and with increasing disdain of the church over its cover-up of the pedophilia crisis, the ordinary Catholic gives less and less credence to any announcement from the hierarchy. Our lived experience tells us that the love that Jesus taught would not permit such outrageous attempts at domination.

In a thorough chapter on the deconstruction of divinity, represented by the life, death and resurrection of the God who is in Jesus Christ, Manning writes that Jesus did not grasp or personify divinity by domination or violence. Rather the intimate movement of Christ's incarnation is one that eschews transcendence of power over humanity in favor of partnership and solidarity, giving welcoming attention to the marginalized in history.

The realization of the feminine in God and the reversal of the sacrificing victim theory as women struggle for equality in the political worlds of church and state are adequately explicated in this chapter and the following that analyzes the reign of John Paul II as a product of his tragic life experiences. A chapter on the New Catholic and the Protestant Religious Right, gives a good glimpse of the ultraconservative Catholic organizations Opus Dei and Human Life International and their nefarious workings in the Vatican, Europe and the United States, and why Cardinal Ratzinger and such organizations connect in their interests. In these chapters the scholarship of Manning comes through clearly. A chapter dissecting the pedophilia crisis gives the reader not only an increased understanding of the cover-up by U.S. bishops, but an even better understanding of the politics of the pedophilia crisis through an extensive examination of the crisis in Canada.

Manning sees us able to restore the church to wholeness through a universal consciousness, no matter how diverse people may be. The resurgence of religious fundamentalism is a sign of desperation and regression to the past rather than risking change in the future. Christ was executed for proposing change in the religious and political structures of his day as he portrayed the possibilities of new relationships in family and institution. Today's turmoil is a legacy of the crucifixion.

As Pilate asked, "Who are you? What have you done?" or "What is the truth," our challenge is to take back the truth and discover the answer to these questions put to Jesus, as Manning prays, to be part of a Christian community open to the world, rooted in vulnerability, not power...

Joe Ruane is professor of sociology and health policies at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, and is a married priest.

The Federation of Christian Ministries: Affirming a Creative, Inclusive Priesthood

by Joseph W. Ruane

In 1968 the historic revolution of ideas generated by Vatican II propelled the organization of the Society of Priests for a Free Ministry (SPFM) to give voice to creative Roman Catholic priests looking to implement the council's changes, and primarily to the thousands of priests who were resigning. SPFM addressed issues that affected issues of church reform such as celibacy, jurisdiction, and experimental liturgy.

SPFM changed its name to Fellowship of Christian Ministries (FCM) in 1973 to reflect the collective experience that the roots of ministry are in small communities, as well as to enable the wives of the priests to have a legitimate voice in organizational deliberations. FCM became a more ecumenical religious community and a more professional organization with its own certification program at that time. The certification program became an important instrument in enabling the young organization to grow. Certification is considered an affirmation of one's ministry but not an elevation to a new level of ministry. Rather it is seen as a strengthening of one's baptismal priesthood and calling to minister confidently. It acknowledges the member's charism, and that recognition can have a public and civil dimension as well as an ecclesiastical aspect. FCM ministers preside at liturgies, conduct funerals, and provide pastoral care in nursing homes and hospitals and it is to exercise the charism to counsel couples and to officiate at their weddings that

Philadelphia at FCM Assembly In Rochester: Ruane Honored

by Regina Bannan

Of the 120 attending the Federation of Christian Ministry's National Assembly in Rochester, NY, twenty were from the greater Philadelphia area and four were on the program; not only us four CCS stalwarts, Roberta Brunner, Margaret McLaughlin, Judy Heffernan, and myself; but Chris Hearn and Mary Byrne, long-time WOC supporters (and Mary's husband Les Vivian); and CTA friends Larry DiPaul, Sue and Jim Plastaras, Paul and Pat Steubenbort; and faithful FCM members Ann and John Gallagher, Bill and Donna McDonough, Mary Ann and Les Lenick and Nancy and Joe Ruane.

Joe and Nancy Ruane! They received the federation's Anthony Soto award, given annually to honor someone exemplifying Soto's values in life and ministry. Gerald Grudzen presented the award, which was a complete surprise to all of us, and noted: "Without Joe's steady vision and Nancy's warm and generous heart, FCM might not have had the wisdom to move steadily forward with its mission." As members of the Community of the Christian Spirit, Joe and Nancy feel like family to me, and they have supported and been supported by our small faith community through many personal toils and tears. Joe and Nancy model for us all being content with the life God has given us, content enough to make the most of it. And some of my best discussions with Joe were about the challenges facing our respective post-Vatican II national organizations during our presidencies.

Grudzen acknowledged Joe's role: Joe's leadership style has been inclusive and affirming of the gifts of others in FCM, particularly

many men and women have sought certification through FCM.

At the 1981 gathering, the name fellowship was changed to federation to recognize the growing number of small faith communities who were associated with FCM in a somewhat federated system, and to remove any connotations of sexism in the word "fellowship" since more than ever women were partners in ministry by that time. FCM no longer saw itself as catholic in the narrow sense of Roman Catholic, but, rather, in the fuller sense of catholic, embracing the traditions of its roots but expanding its wings to embrace other traditions. This new FCM encouraged the formation of basic faith communities that would allow for new expressions of faith within a more intimate and closer atmosphere. FCM had diversified its membership and allowed for a variety of faith expressions in community, ministry, and worship.

FCM is now a Faith Group member of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. (ACPE) and is listed in the Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches. It has a national Circle of Directors, a quarterly newsletter, *Diaspora*, a website, and continues to hold an annual national assembly. (See article "Philadelphia at FCM Assembly" following.) Through its online programs, FCM now offers continuing education through FCM Online Academy and offers internet-based bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees through Global Ministries University. FCM also has a process called Endorsement for Specialized Ministry for certified members through which FCM attests to an employer or educational institution that the FCM member has met specific criteria to be recommended for a particular specialized ministry, e.g., chaplaincy or clinical pastoral work.

Joe Ruane, professor of sociology and health policy at the University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, is a married priest.

our women members. He helped steer FCM during many difficult periods in our history. He held steady to the founding vision of FCM that encouraged new forms of ministry and community within the larger context of ecumenical Christianity. As FCM has expanded its original vision to encompass a great variety of spiritualities and expressions of faith, Joe has helped FCM to incorporate these new expressions but also remain faithful to its original charism.

We were so happy to have been there to share this celebration and look forward to many more years of active collaboration.

Regina Bannan is the former national president of WOC.



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TURNING CELEBRANT AROUND A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE

by Bud Bretschneider

The Second Vatican Council states that the liturgy of the mass is the "primary and indispensable source for the faithful of the Christian life." In the light of this guiding directive, we review our understanding of this fundamental action of worship.

We have often heard the expression, "the altar is turned around." In fact, the bishop/priest/presider has turned around. There is profound significance to this gesture. The relationship between God, the priest/presider and the community changes dramatically. Let us examine our Catholic relationship to God when the altar was against the wall. In this view, the altar is at the foot of Mt. Sinai, as it were. God in all his majesty is atop the mountain and none dare to approach that sacred height. The priest as the representative of Christ, our sole redeemer and mediator, is the only person worthy to present our gifts of propitiation and appeasement, satisfaction to an all-powerful and just God. We adore on our knees before this awe-inspiring God. This is a theological understanding of God as just, righteous and demanding of restitution for wrongs committed. It should be noted that this ritual also reflects a monarchical society.

This notion of God as awesome was prevalent for many centu-

ries. However, the twentieth century Catholic scripture scholars and early church historians began to come up with a different picture of the early Christian relationship to God. As they studied more carefully the events at the Last Supper and the house masses of the early Christians, a eucharistic liturgy emerged that emphasized the community and its participation in a meal of salvation.

This God of the New Covenant and the early church so loved the world, that he sent His only Son, who sat down at supper and offered himself to his dearest friends: "Take and eat," and invited them to do the same: "Do this in memory of me. Wash each others feet". God is now a God of love, a God of community, communion and participation with us.

Now the priest/presider turns away from the altar of sacrifice that imitated pagan immolation of animals and humans to appease capricious and vengeful gods. It is no longer a moment of magic (hocus pocus) where the efficacy of our sacrifice is unaffected by the manner in which we take part. Our understanding of the sacrifice of the mass undergoes a radical change as the presider turns and joins with the community at the table in a meal of adoration, commemoration, thanksgiving and commitment. He joins with his fellow women and men as the representative of the God-man who as bread and wine transforms those present. It is priest and community spiritually receptive being mystically transformed by Christ as bread and wine.

The Last Supper meal and the cross of Calvary are not merely linked by the words of memorial. The call to "Do this in memory of me," is much more than remembering. It is the call to serve one another in the fullness of love, which is modeled for us by Christ with his arms fully extended on the cross. His death is a true sacrifice, "sacrum facere," "to make holy" because he pleased the Father by his faithful and total commitment to the will of his Father, who is truth, goodness and love.

The sacrifice of Jesus cannot be confused with the sacrifice of Abraham that Yahweh rejected. The sacrifice of Jesus is not the suffering of punishment for the sins of all mankind. Our God is the forgiving Father of the parable of the prodigal son.

Let us return to our consideration of the priest/presider now as a participant with the community at the altar/table of the Last Supper. Although the priest now is engaged with the eucharistic community, is part of a communal meal (agape) we have to ask why he continues to feed himself first? In pagan and Old Testament practice, the priest alone was worthy to enter the holy of holies (demarcated by our altar rail). He ate of the first fruits and the best meats as a benefice for his role in those communities. But this concept, this understanding is contrary to the words of Christ and the spirit of Vatican II. It would appear that the communicating of the presider first is an erroneous understanding of the eucharistic celebration and a relic of pagan and Old Testament understanding of sacrifice.

The priest/presider shares in the eucharistic meal as the visible representative of Christ. His ritualistic actions should make present for the community the person, spirit and intention of Jesus. The altar is turned around and the altar rail has been removed. These elements of a privileged class have been rejected and it follows that other elements of the mass based on this erroneous notion of sacrifice should be eliminated.

Bud Bretschneider is a parishioner of St. Vincent de Paul's in Germantown, and a member of Voices of the Faithful.

DID YOU KNOW?

Compiled by Mary Whelan (with a little help from her friends)

A Disappointing Beginning

Consider the following introductory sentence from a story by Jim Remsen and Frederick Cusick on the first page of the Local News Section of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of July 17: A day after learning whom their next archbishop will be, area Catholics reacted yesterday with a mix of optimism and wariness.

As a Philadelphia Catholic who loves the English language, I could not help being disappointed when I read that - which is all I have to say on the subject.

Karen B. Lenz

Bishops Today, Who Knows What Tomorrow

Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger and Gisela Foster, two of the women ordained priests in a historic ceremony on the Danube in 2002, have been ordained Roman Catholic bishops, according to the Women's Ordination Conference.

The announcement, made at a press conference held in Munich, Germany, on June 26, said the consecrations took place secretly and the names of the ordaining bishops (presumably Roman Catholics in good standing) have been withheld to prevent repercussions by the Vatican.

Until we have a female Pope, anyway.

Of Elephants and Oppression

From the literature of a present-day Indian saint and mystic comes the lesson of the elephants. In rural Indian villages, she says, where the animals are used for farming and transport, newborn elephants are tethered to large trees with massive chains. Because it is the nature of elephants to roam free, they struggle and strain and pull at their bonds until, exhausted, they give up. As adults, having learned they cannot free themselves from their man-made shackles, they submit docilely when secured to the slenderest of saplings by the thinnest of ropes.

Which brings us, if you follow, to the Chinese proverb that says: when sleeping women wake, mountains will move.

Nuns Sentenced

Dominican Sisters Ardeth Platte and Carol Gilbert of Jonah House, and Sister Jackie Hudson were sentenced in Colorado on July 26 to 41 months, 33 months and 30 months in prison respectively for breaking into a federal missile silo, pounding on it with hammers and smearing it with their own blood. The nuns said their action symbolized the fact that they would rather spill their own blood than stand by while US weapons took the blood of others.

During a statement outside the courthouse on the morning of sentencing (the sisters declined to speak in court) Sr. Ardeth quoted from the church's social justice document, *Gaudium et Spes*, #16: Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves and which they must obey. Its voice, ever calling them to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil tells them inwardly at the right moment: do this shun that for they have in their hearts a law inscribed by God. Their dignity rests in observing the law, and by it they will be judged. Their conscience is people's most secret core and their sanctuary. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths.

We all can feel much safer now that they're off the streets!

Episcopals Take Action

We need to say a few words about the recent decisions of the Episcopal General Convention meeting in Minneapolis to approve bless-

ing ceremonies for same-sex couples and to ratify the election of the church's first openly gay bishop, the Rev. V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire.

Would "Way to go, guys" do it?

Canadian Manifesto

Femmes et Ministeres, an independent network based in Canada of committed Catholic church women, issued a strong manifesto in Montreal in March. (I apologize if this sounds like old news, but I only just learned of it.)

The manifesto expresses the determination...not only to reject the current status quo in the church but also to live and work at establishing a church as discipleship of equals.

Did you know there are about 1300 salaried women pastoral assistants in the province of Quebec alone? Do you think the church should listen up?

(Thanks to Marie Bouclin, a presenter at SEPA/WOC's May 3 Grand Event, for this information.)

If you would like a copy of the complete manifesto, contact Mary Whelan, c/o Equal wRites

Papal Accolade

On his recent trip to Croatia, Pope John Paul II dedicated the highpoint celebration to women, saying they could help the country survive modernization by rediscovering the genius which belongs to women and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance.

Thanks for the kind words, but could you just ordain us instead?

Ratings, Ratings, Ratings

Godtalk, a series of television programs designed to draw people of different faiths together to discuss pressing social, moral and spiritual issues, and to discern common ground, has come out higher in the ratings than Vatican Television Center and even Mother Angelica, according to Media Channel's list of popular spiritual programming.

Dr. Bridget Mary Meehan, the show's producer, aims to build bridges of understanding among people of diverse religious backgrounds and spiritual perspectives, which will help them develop the global vision they will need in the 21st century. (www.mediachannel.com)

Mary Whelan is a member of SEPA/WOC core committee.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

- * A process of one-to-one spiritual guidance
- * Fosters growth in freedom and intimacy with God, self and others
- * Focused on one's relationship with God
- * Meet monthly

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