

EILEEN'S REACTION TO THE DECREE

by Eileen McCafferty DiFranco

editor's note: Eileen DiFranco was ordained a priest in July 2006 by the Roman Catholic Womenpriest movement. This summer she was informed by a eucharistic minister(!) of the parish of which she had been a member for twenty years that it could no longer offer her Eucharist. In response to that action, and to the May 2008 Vatican decree which presumably was the reason for it, Catholics for Women's Equality (see article below) was formed. Please sign and circulate their letter to the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, found as a central insert in this issue.

My friend, mentor, and colleague, Marguerite Sexton, remarked a couple of years ago that priests and members of

the hierarchy who deny others communion cannot possibly believe that the Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ. Otherwise, she said, they would not presume to use Jesus Christ as a weapon against their sisters and brothers. Can you imagine the Jesus who said that prostitutes and tax collectors would enter the realm of heaven before the righteous would forbid the feeding of even one of his lambs? Can you imagine the Jesus who directed each and every one of us to forgive seventy times seven depriving his sisters of the bread of life? Does the one who lived among us as Emmanuel, God with us, need protection from any of us? Surely these are the words—and not excommunication and punishment,—that we acknowledge as “the Word” during mass.

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	EQUAL	Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area
Vol. XVII No. 2		OCTOBER 2008 - JANUARY 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.

GROUP RESISTS EXCOMMUNICATION OF WOMEN SEEKING ORDINATION

“Excommunicate women seeking ordination as Catholic priests? We say No. We will not cooperate with our church leaders’ attempt to exclude such women. We love our church and respect its leaders’ teaching authority, but in conscience we must say that this is wrong! We won’t go along with it.”

These were the feelings of a group of nearly fifty Philadelphia-area Catholics from several parishes who met this summer and formed “Catholics for Women’s Equality.” The unconscionable act that sparked this group’s formation was a May 30 2008 decree from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by Cardinal William Joseph Levada, which stated that women who seek to be ordained as Catholic priests—and those who assist them—are automatically excommunicated.

At first blush, this decree might look like just another in a long line of Vatican efforts to bar women from the priesthood. But those who met began to see it as a major escalation of our (male) church leaders’ pressure against women who believe that God calls them to the Catholic priesthood. As of the May 30 decree, few if any priests will offer communion to such women. To go ahead and serve them not only would be a clear act of disobedience to church teaching; it also would likely get the priests fired. Even those who are sympathetic to women’s ordination (and there are many) would find it hard, probably impossible, to commit such disobedience and to face such sanctions. What can we do in light of our priests’ feelings that they have to go along with the Vatican decree?

Some of those who met know and respect Eileen DiFranco, ordained by the Roman Catholic Womenpriest movement in July 2006, one of the now-excommunicated women. “What if she (or another woman in her position) comes to our parish and approaches the altar?” the gathering asked. “What if our priest refuses her communion? Do we just stand there and do nothing? Wouldn’t that make us complicit in a profound injustice? How could we suddenly exclude someone who maybe has been a member of our parish for years, has

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ROLLING, ROLLING

Equal wRites keeps rolling along, thanks to the generous support of our many friends. We are happy with our new publication schedule, and hope you are, too. Now we will turn our attention to the web site, www.sepawoc.org, to keep it up to date between issues. But the most current communication will always be through our listserv, which is so well managed by Gaile Pohlhaus. Contact her if you want to be on this list with moderate but interesting (we hope) traffic: gaile.pohlhaus@villanova.edu.

And if you responded last year in September, please contribute again this year to SEPA/WOC, c/o Marianne Jann, Treasurer, 49 Driscoll Drive, Ivyland, PA 18974. We have a rolling contribution base, too, and we thank you as always for your part in it.

Regina Bannan, President

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Eileen's Reaction

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The really sad part about my excommunication and the resultant directive by the vicar to the pastor of my former parish to deny me Eucharist is the fact that not one of these men had enough pastoral concern to contact me directly either by letter or by telephone. I learned about my status second- or third-hand. To date, I have received exactly one letter of support from the many priests who passionately preached justice from the pulpit of my former parish. To be honest, I expected better. Silly, foolish me! Those words now sound like hollow cymbals signifying a lot of hot air. In the end, neither charity nor love prevailed. They have treated the wounds of their sister carelessly.

I feel heartily sorry for my brothers who believe that they have been placed in charge of a mighty God, whose grandeur, as poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "flames out shining like shook foil." I forgive them their ignorance about women. I forgive their reduction of me to a thing who is talked about rather than talked to. I forgive them their fear; their blind obedience to other frail men whose sins have been writ large for all to see. I forgive them for the pain they have caused me. I know that they are capable of bigger and better things because I have seen it.

I look forward to the day when the holy words we acknowledge as "the Word of God," are honored. "You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized have put on Christ Jesus. There is neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus." (*Galatians 3*)

The Holy Ghost, according to the poet Hopkins, broods over the world with her warm breast and her bright wings. She is waiting.

Group Resists Excommunication

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raised her children in the church, gone faithfully to mass and taken on many responsibilities in parish life? Would Jesus, friend of the marginalized and the oppressed, whom we hold in our hands as Eucharistic Bread, withhold himself from her or from women in a similar position? If he would not withhold himself, how can we?"

Many of those who gathered decided, "We can't stand aside; we must act." But how to act in conscience without disrupting the sacred time of the mass, with its emphasis on unity with God and one another? Several ideas were discussed. For example, we could practice a "eucharistic fast," refusing to take communion ourselves so long as our sister is barred from receiving. If a priest refuses her, a eucharistic minister might serve her. Or, a person who has received the host might break it and share it with her. Or, everyone who supports the excluded sister might wear something symbolic (like a purple stole) to show solidarity with the person being excluded.

A proposal was made that we not just do this quietly in our own parishes, but more openly, drawing in others who may feel the same way and who themselves are looking for a way not just to talk, but to act. It was further proposed that a letter be sent to Cardinal Levada, stating our disagreement with the decree and our commitment to action. Once we have done this in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, we could spread it to other dioceses through organizations like national WOC.

What would it be like if hundreds of Catholics from dozens of Philly parishes were to sign the letter? What if our simple action in Philadelphia spread across the country, igniting similar efforts and perhaps thousands of similar letters to the Vatican? What if people did similar actions in other parts of the world? What if, all across the country and around the world, women priests found themselves welcomed at parishes rather than excluded? In this time of women prime ministers and heads of state, what if the media began covering the story of courageous Catholics taking risks to stand up for women's equality, even in the church?

Given its intransigence on women's ordination, the Vatican still might not move on the issue. It might continue to rebuff us, even if it began getting not only letters, but reports of excommunicated women being welcomed in parishes and continuing to receive communion, this time from the laity. It might try to spread the excommunication net even farther or find other ways to sanction those who say that male gender should not be a qualification for the priesthood.

If punitive measures do fall on us, we can find comfort and strength in Jesus' admonitions about taking up our cross and following him. We can remember his words about being blessed "when they revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you in my name."

Even if we do not reach our goal this time around, at least we would have the satisfaction of doing what's right and acting strongly in the face of profound injustice. And at least women priests, whom our church leaders want to exclude from the Eucharist, would know there are many places where they would continue to be welcomed and received at the Table of the Lord. And what a statement of conscience it would be, something to inspire future generations in the struggle. And what an image it would be of the Lord Jesus reaching out to the marginalized and the oppressed, in spite of the opposition of religious leaders, just as he did in his own day.

TWO NOTES TO THE READER: (1) *The letter to Cardinal Levada (with places for signatures on the back) appears as an insert in this newsletter. If you agree with it and want your signature to appear on it, sign it and send it to Catholics for Women's Equality, P.O. Box 965, Southampton, PA 18966-0965 by December 10, Human Rights Day. Please feel free to make copies and circulate it among your friends and anyone you think might also want to sign it.*

(2) *You will note that this article is not signed. It comes from members of Catholics for Women's Equality who want to take prudent measures to avoid, if possible, being targeted by Vatican representatives looking for "leaders" to punish as an example. However, all of us have said that we are willing to risk excommunication in support of this cause, as have other members of CWE.*

SEPA/WOC E-MAIL LISTSERV

If you would like to receive and share information related to the women's ordination movement, and engage in dialogue with others committed to the cause of full equality in ministry in the Roman Catholic church, you are invited to join the SEPA/WOC listserv. To do so, contact Gaile Pohlhaus at gaile.pohlhaus@villanova.edu.

NO TURNING BACK

ON TAKING BACK THE EUCHARIST AND A FEW OTHER THINGS

by Karen B. Lenz

Equal wRites is delighted to report the story of the formation of Catholics for Women's Equality and the groups's bold and unequivocal response to the Vatican decree which automatically excommunicates women who seek ordination as Roman Catholic priests, as well as anyone involved in those ordinations (whatever that means).

The deliberate cruelty and astonishing arrogance of the decree hits close to home as we learn from our friend and SEPA/WOC colleague Eileen DiFranco, ordained by Bishop Patricia Fresen of the Roman Catholic Womenpriest movement, that she has been informed by a representative of the parish of which she was a member for twenty years that it can no longer offer her communion, effectively, one might assume, excommunicating her. The parish, many of whose members have been supportive of Eileen on her journey to the priesthood, acted on instructions to the pastor from an archdiocesan vicar.

Many of us from SEPA/WOC and Eileen's parish were present at her July 2006 ordination in Pittsburgh, or actively cheered her on. What exactly is the definition of "involved?" Or, as Marian Ronan asked in the last (June-October) issue of *Equal wRites*, "Are we [all] excommunicated?"

Making the whole business even more interesting (or sillier, depending on your point of view) is the fact that there is no agreement on how the Vatican's perhaps deliberately vaguely-worded decree is interpreted. According to a joint statement issued by the Maryknoll order and Fr. Roy Bourgeois after his participation in a woman's ordination ceremony (see story on pp. 7-8), "Contrary to popular understanding, participants in the ceremony, such as Father Bourgeois, were not automatically excommunicated." The reason for this conclusion is unclear; we are hopeful it does not signify that only the female participants were excommunicated.

It is the most patent nonsense, of course. If the contemporary (male) Catholic priests who egregiously violated the trust of their office by repeatedly sexually abusing young children, and the crazed mass murderers and torturers of the Crusades and the Inquisition and the leaders who gave them their marching orders (did you know there was a plan during the Inquisition to kill three million inhabitants of the Netherlands because they had become Protestants!?) were not excommunicated, how can we take seriously such action di-

rected at dedicated and courageous women seeking only to serve the church which, despite everything, they continue to love and claim as their own? It's not only shameful; it's downright embarrassing. Cardinal Law is rewarded with a cushy post in Rome for decades of protecting sexual predators by shuffling them around. And Eileen DiFranco is banned from the Lord's Supper.

The decree, and the myriad other actions of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to dictate and control (presuming to offer and withhold the Christ present in the Eucharist as through they owned him) is directly related to the benighted notion that the Catholic church is the **only** true church (see Eva Fleishner's fine review of Michael Kogan's *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity*, on p. 11 of this issue) and that the power of its largely self-appointed clergy is unique and absolute.

What needs to happen, I think, is for the current-day disciples and followers of Jesus (who don't need to be told who they are) to reclaim a profoundly beautiful and meaningful ritual—Eucharist—and begin celebrating it everywhere, routinely, as we do at the Philadelphia Catholic Worker house on Wednesday evenings (please join us)—usually led by a female or married priest—and as we do here daily, feeding whoever knocks and asks for lunch at the door. "Do this as oft as you do it, in memory of me."

I've been reading Elaine Pagels again (*The Gnostic Gospels; The Gnostic Paul*) and Freke and Gandy's *The Laughing Jesus*, fascinated by their portrait of the church in the first centuries of the common era as diverse in practice and beliefs, with the literalist and orthodox view we know today as Christianity representing only one (and, Freke and Gandy suggest, a minority one) interpretation of the meaning of the Jesus story.

Today's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith seems a direct descendant of second-century Bishop (and Saint!) Irenaeus, remembered for, among other things, his five-volume rant against the "heresy" of the non-literalist Christians called Gnostics (at whose services, incidentally, women often presided).

I am still a Catholic because I find the inclusive and welcoming message of Jesus, based on love, clear and transformative. How very sad that it has been twisted into a deliberate and organized system of exclusion and oppression, based on fear.

Karen B. Lenz, editor of Equal wRites, lives and works at the Philadelphia Catholic Worker, where everyone of good will is welcome to participate in weekly Wednesday eucharistic liturgies.

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BEING GOOD CATHOLICS

by *Marian Ronan*

If an interview in the *New York Times Magazine* is any indicator, the next big thing in publishing on American Catholicism is Kerry Kennedy's *Being Catholic Now*. Kennedy is the seventh of Ethel and Bobby Kennedy's eleven children. *Being Catholic Now* is a collection of essays by a wide range of America Catholics—"from Bill O'Reilly on the right," as she tells us, "to Bill Maher on the left, to someone like Frank McCourt who claims he is no longer a Catholic" (*NYT Magazine*, 9/14/08, p.12).

I find it interesting that because of the range of Catholic authors included in *Being Catholic Now*, Kennedy claims that it is "not a political book." At one point she even considered titling the book *We Are All Good Catholics*.

On one level, such an assertion is nonsensical. In point of fact, "We are all good Catholics" expresses a highly political vision of reality: liberal inclusion. Perhaps Bill O'Reilly just wanted to get an essay published, or perhaps he and Ethel are old friends, but by and large, conservative Catholics would not repay the divorced Kerry Kennedy's willingness to include everybody in the church. As a conservative priest once explained to me, there are only six million "real" Catholics in the US, and the church would do well to disencumber itself of the fifty-five or so million fakes as quickly as it can. Being inclusive of those who want to run you out of town may be truly virtuous, but Jesus understood quite well that those he wants us to love mean us little good—that's why he called them "persecutors."

On another level, though, the title Kennedy didn't go with reminds us of the kind of Catholicism James Joyce had in mind when he described the church as "Here comes everybody," or Peter Occhiogrosso intended when he titled his 1987 collection, *Once a Catholic, Always a Catholic*. I'm willing to wager that many of us have experiences or have heard stories that illustrate this kind of "big tent" Catholicism.

My great-grandmother, Hannah Kelly, an Irish Catholic domestic, married a Protestant guy with a good job, and said the rosary as she rocked in her rocking chair every Sunday morning while he took their five kids to the Episcopal church. But West Philadelphia being the kind of place it was, significant numbers of her descendants went right back and married Catholics, some of them converting, others not. The fact that I had trouble keeping track of which cousins were which considerably undercut the assertions of the Immaculate Heart Sisters at St. Joseph's parochial school in Collingdale that all Protestants were going to hell.

It seemed pretty clear to me, though, that the Italian families of my grade school buddies were better than many of the Irish at taking the absolutist truth claims of the institutional

church with a fifty-pound salt lick. This was probably because their ancestors had for centuries been forced to witness the behavior of the popes at first hand, while many of the Irish fantasized the pope as the triumphant hero who would defend them against English oppression. Be that as it may, at the height of the Vatican's campaign against communism, millions of Italian Catholics voted with the Italian communist party. And here in the states, the fathers and grandfathers of my Italian classmates did not seem to feel any the less Catholic for tending their gardens on Sunday mornings. (Sorry, Cardinal Rigali.)

The appearance of Kerry Kennedy's collection just now may be helpful precisely because it does seem that this "we're all good Catholics" attitude has fallen into decline in recent years. In point of fact, European Italian Catholics that I have known have seemed a bit bemused by the intense seriousness with which many of us American Catholics take various papal and episcopal pronouncements. Some of them even have suggested to me that this behavior is rather Protestant; you're enhancing the bishops' sense of self-importance by paying so much attention to them, my friends would say.

The American Catholic in me disputed this assertion, and indeed, I am deeply impressed by the efforts of groups like Catholics for the Common Good to fight against statements by the American bishops that have grave political implications. And I also believe that when some of us feel called to claim our baptism by standing up against Catholic misogyny and homophobia, we have no choice but to do so.

But as the feminist political scientist Mary Fainsod Katzenstein has argued, institutions can only be changed by strategic alliances between people on the outside, raising hell, so to speak, and sympathetic people on the inside who can make the incremental changes that will someday tip the balance. In order to bring this about, it seems to me, some of us need to go right on witnessing to the fact that there are a great many more "good Catholics" than the bishops seem to grasp.

Marian Ronan's new book, Tracing the Sign of the Cross: Sexuality, Mourning, and the Future of American Catholicism will be published by Columbia University Press this coming spring.

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REGINA BANNAN AT 65: SISTER, CARRY ON

by Karen B. Lenz

Regina Bannan, "Dr. Bannan" to the students in her American history and women's studies classes, president of SEPA/WOC, founding editor of this newsletter, and my friend and colleague, simultaneously celebrated her sixty-fifth birthday and her retirement from Temple in May. I had offered, and been encouraged, to say a few words (and invite those present to share their Regina stories) at the party that marked both events, and had spent a good part of the day preparing for this, but as it turned out I was preempted by someone who undeniably had more right to deliver such an appreciation. Since there are, however, a few things I would like to say to and about Regina, and since it's unlikely that either she or I will be around for me to say them at her memorial service (which, judging from the sight of her bounding across the dance floor at her party, is years and years away), I offer them here.

If it is true, as Maria Myers asserted in a recent issue of *Equal wRites*, quoting Teilhard, that context is everything, it is perhaps significant to our relationship that Regina and I share a context. We were—although we didn't know each other then—in formation together, not in the secluded novitiate of a religious order, but in the heady cauldron of a time unprecedented (perhaps this is an overstatement, but I think not) in modern history—the sixties. The importance of this will be immediately apparent to those who were there with us, and impossible to explain to those who were not.

Many of the qualities I most admire in Regina Bannan are closely related to the ideals which seemed to permeate the very air we breathed during that incredible decade, and the fact that she continues to live them four decades later is a convincing rebuttal to the commonly-held wisdom that the children of the sixties grew up, smelled the coffee, dropped back in, and allowed themselves to be quickly and completely co-opted by a ruthlessly pragmatic and intensely self-centered consumerist society.

Chief among these sixtyish qualities is Regina's firm but blessedly nonaggressive insistence on her right to think for herself—and, happily, to freely share with her students the importance of claiming that right for themselves—and her adamant refusal to accept the status quo simply because (often self-appointed) authorities declare that's just the way things are.

The determined young idealist who was in Mississippi, engaged in the risky business of empowering minority citizens by registering them to vote when the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, and who actively opposed the War in Vietnam, has worked indefatigably for many of the years since for the reform of the church she stubbornly refuses to abandon, and particularly for the rights of another minority—women—in that church. She also has been outspoken in her opposition to the Bush regime's continuing debacle in Iraq, and was delightfully in character when she arrived at the last SEPA/WOC core committee meeting with a handful of Catholics for Obama buttons and bumper stickers.

Speaking of SEPA/WOC, Regina has steered the group on a steady course for the ten years or so that I have been involved, and for some time before that. It is remarkable, I think, that SEPA/WOC has even managed to survive for so

long, let alone been faithful to major witnesses each Holy Thursday and Ordination Day, and sponsored several major events, considering the small size of the active group that constitutes its core committee (which, true to Regina's inclusive approach to things, is open to anyone who wants to come to monthly meetings). It's less remarkable, however, as you begin to understand just how tenacious Regina Bannan is.

In addition to SEPA/WOC and a full-time teaching job, she has been active in a number of other church-reform groups (this list is necessarily incomplete): she served a term as president of national WOC, is active in national COR and was instrumental in the re-formation of COR/Philadelphia, and in her role as newsletter editor—for eight years!—before turning the job over to me, is the sole reason that what we hope is a tiny beacon of light in a dark time—*Equal wRites*—has managed to survive, and that you are reading it now.

It is one thing to identify and deplore injustices in the institutions of our time—many of us regularly do that—but it's another thing entirely to take personal responsibility, and devote considerable time, energy and resources to the effort to make things better, staying in for the long haul, even when the light at the end of the tunnel seems far away indeed. This Regina not only has done herself, but taught and inspired others to do, both by informing them and, more importantly, by showing them through the example of her life. (Regina is a quintessential teacher. At times, after having said or done something of which she disapproved and been taken to task for it, I've thought that Regina sees all of us as her students).

If every one of us who knows within his/her own heart how wrong things are, particularly the folks who spend considerable time moaning about the situation(s) to like-minded friends and acquaintances, had devoted half the effort Regina has all her adult life to putting them right, our church and our country would be very different today. As another committed friend often says, "The first requirement for getting things done is simply to show up." Regina Bannan shows up.

Another striking attribute of hers is her deep belief in community, which for her, it goes without saying, means inclusive, everybody welcome, c'mon y'all community. The Catholic Worker strives, often unsuccessfully, to be that sort of community, so I know from experience that this approach carries significant risk.

I once heard Regina say, perhaps not entirely in jest, that she wasn't so sure about God, but she believed in community. She has been a regular member, strongly supportive of and supported by the others, of the Community of the Christian Spirit, a small faith community "in the Catholic tradition," for as long as I've known her. The group feels to me, as I imagine some of the earliest Christian congregations to have been, a sort of extended family. I've been able to get to their Jenkintown! liturgies only occasionally, but I've always been made to feel most welcome.

There are a couple of other things I want to mention about Regina—one important, one less so. The important one (I'm joking) is that she has an impeccable taste in music, by which I mean that nearly alone among my friends and acquaintances she shares my enthusiasm for guitar-strumming protest singers like those who held sway in the—you guessed it—sixties. I once opened a core committee meeting with a recording of a Phil Ochs song; Regina one evening got us started, and working together, with Pete Seegar.

Regina, a friend and I once went to a benefit Arlo Guthrie concert for the Hebrew Y on Broad St. After the concert, going down to the side entrance in the small elevator, the door started to close and then reopened as three men good-naturedly squeezed in and turned to face the front, affording me, from my position in the wheelchair, a good view of their (aesthetically pleasing) backsides.

On the way back to the car, Regina said, 'I almost said something to him.'

"Who?" I asked obliviously.

"Arlo."

"Oh, did you run into him?" I asked, interested.

"Karen," she said, "that was Arlo in the elevator with us just now."

The story illustrates another delightful and very human side of the serious and competent national organizer who would not hesitate to speak her mind to political or church leaders of any level. In the unexpected presence of an entertainer she had admired since her youth, with the opportunity to tell him so, her child took control and she was silent.

In the end, though, the strongest sense I have of Regina Bannan is of a skillful facilitator, group leader, diplomat and peacemaker. She is far more likely to find something to support in opposing viewpoints than to criticize or attack a position with which she does not agree. Her public persona-I have no reason to think her private one is different-is patient, calm and eminently reasonable, which, I must admit, can be both admirable and infuriating. I have seldom seen her "lose it," even in heated discussions of issues about which she has strong feelings. I am particularly awed by this, since my own style, far less deliberate, tends toward the highly emotional, even impassioned.

Regina is usually present at SEPA/WOC core committee meetings, which is a good thing, because I clearly remember one meeting which she missed due to a scheduling conflict. Without her at the helm, it deteriorated into a series of angry exchanges and hurt feelings. It is surely a fine thing to talk and pray about peace in the world, and even to occasionally demonstrate or protest, but to be able consistently to make peace in the spaces around oneself, is to bring the notion of peacemaking to a new level, from which, one hopes, a rippling out can truly change the world.

So, as Regina Bannan begins the next leg of a remarkable journey, I say happy birthday, and thanks. In the words of a song she likes (we do not agree on this one), Sister, Carry On!

FROM STUDENT TO ACTIVIST

by *Stephanie Bilinsky*

My first encounter with feminist theology was in college in Women in Religion and Society, a course that discussed women in religious groups around the world. Here I encountered classic feminist texts. Many of these works argued that traditionally patriarchal religions must be abandoned to achieve women's liberation, but I felt that this view did not account for some of the most important social aspects of religion. Rather than dismissing tradition, I wanted to know how theorists were conducting feminist movements within their religious traditions.

Soon I had a class with Dr. Regina Bannan. She and a couple other professors directed me to books by feminist theologians who are rethinking what it means to be Catho-

lic. Ordination appeared to be the topic of many interesting debates, and as the path to leadership in the Roman Catholic church, it is integral to the feminist movement in the church. I decided to approach Dr. Bannan, who agreed to take me on as an intern with SEPA/WOC. At the start of the internship, I was idealistic about organizing a group of students on campus. I soon realized the difficulties of grassroots organizing, and I saw the urgency in getting young people involved in this cause.

While I worked with WOC, the importance of feminist activism in the Roman Catholic church became real to me in a much more material way. On Holy Thursday of 2008, I took part in the annual witness across the street from the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul where the cardinal of the diocese would be presiding. I left feeling good about our work and the people involved in WOC. I looked forward to seeing the cathedral decorated for the mass. When I tried to enter the cathedral before mass started, however, my entry was barred by a Philadelphia police officer. I was confused and furious. I wondered how or why anyone would want to keep me from mass. Eventually, I realized that the police officer was there at the request of the diocese, and the issues surrounding my being kept out of the church were complex. That day I knew for certain that I wanted to pursue research about gender and ordination in my graduate studies in order to effect change.

During my internship with WOC, I realized that non-profits and activist work do not reflect the romanticized vision of social crusades that I previously held. Grassroots organizing is far from simple, and the problems that interest me are complex. Rather than discourage me, however, the experience pushed me to consider how important these issues really are. I want to dedicate my graduate education to research that will engender a better understanding of race, class, gender, and ordination in Roman Catholicism in hopes that my contributions will help make genuine progress.

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AT ACTIVIST ORDINATION ANOTHER KIND OF PRIEST SPEAKS OUT

by Karen B. Lenz

Fr. Roy Bourgeois is a different kind of Catholic priest—one unafraid to take personal risks to speak truth to power, one who has walked the walk in years of leading protests and doing time instead of merely talking the talk from a safe perch in a church sanctuary. A member of the Maryknoll order for forty-two years, Bourgeois is best known for his faithful leadership of the nineteen-year campaign to close the United States' infamous military training School of the Americas (now euphemistically renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, but conducting its deadly business as usual, thank you.)

Bourgeois' response to another injustice was different, too, when in July he openly and actively participated in the ordination service of his friend (and ours) SOA and women's ordination activist Janice Sevre-Duszynska, in a Unitarian Church in Lexington, Kentucky. Bourgeois concelebrated the mass with presiding Roman Catholic Womenpriest Bishop Dana Reynolds, laid hands on Sevre-Duszynska and delivered a stirring homily and call to arms, reprinted in its entirety below. With his participation, Bourgeois became the first Catholic priest in good standing (and, please God, not the last) to break ranks and clearly demonstrate, in defiance of official church prohibitions, his support for the cause of women's ordination.

Sevre-Duszynska has said that her "heroes as priests are on the fringes...they need to challenge the government and the Vatican"—which is undoubtedly the type of priest she will be. She defines her projected role as that of an itinerant cleric, "speaking out for the voiceless and challenging the powers that be to hear the call of nonviolence and cooperation in our world community."

Bourgeois' actions did not come as a complete surprise. In a visit to Rome, he took the opportunity of a live interview on Vatican Radio to freely express his views about the role of women in the church. After talking for the first part of the program about his SOA activities--the scheduled topic--Bourgeois changed the subject to address what he called "Jubilee justice." He said, "I think it's time the church tried something new. For two thousand years the men have been in charge and the men haven't done the job. We need to bring the women into the church. We can't be healed unless we get out women to address the suffering of the poor. We need women priests, we need women bishops to take leadership positions in every church office. When we get their voice in the church, we will have more justice in the world."

The several translators present were clearly startled. The young man translating into Italian omitted the line about needing women priests and bishops, and the interview was over. Recorder music filled the remaining fifteen minutes of air time.

Following media reports of Bourgeois' participation in the ordination ceremony (according to Maryknoll spokeswoman(!) Betsey Guest, the order had not been informed of Bourgeois' plans prior to the event, nor would they have been condoned) he was summoned to an August 18 meeting with Maryknoll's general superior, Fr. John Sivalon, and the other two members of the order's general council, to discuss the

incident. The fear of severe reprisals generated a flurry of calls and e-mails, most strongly supporting Bourgeois and his stand.

The outcome of the four-hour meeting, while it stopped far short from expressing support or approval for Bourgeois' stand, was generally perceived to be more positive than might have been expected.

According to Guest, after the meeting Bourgeois and Maryknoll issued a joint statement which said: "An investigation has been carried out as to the true facts of the August 9 event in Lexington, Ky. A report of that investigation will be sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. In the meantime, Fr. Bourgeois has received a canonical warning.

"Contrary to popular understanding, participants in the ceremony, such as Father Bourgeois, were not automatically excommunicated.

"Going forward, Society leadership and Fr. Bourgeois will be more involved in collective discernment over issues of justice, including the role of women in the church."

Bourgeois said Maryknoll asked him not to participate again in similar ceremonies. When he was asked by the order whether he would recant for his actions, according to NCR, Bourgeois reported he replied, "No way."

Bourgeois said that he felt support from members of his Maryknoll community, "but has no idea how Rome will respond." He said he realizes there could be further sanctions from the Vatican. (various news services)

ROY BOURGEOIS:

CONSCIENCE IS SOMETHING VERY SCARED

Following is the complete text of the homily Maryknoll Fr. Roy Bourgeois delivered at the ordination of Janice Sevre-Duszynska on August 9.

When I met Janice Sevre-Duszynska years ago in the SOA Watch movement, she spoke about her journey of faith and her call to be ordained in the Catholic church.

That day has arrived. And we are here to share in her joy and to support Janice in her call to the priesthood.

As we know, the ordination of women in the Catholic church is a controversial issue. Ten years ago I wrote the following letter to my Maryknoll community about why women should be ordained. It was published in the Maryknoll newsletter under the headline "No One Likes a Bully."

In prison one has a lot of time for long thoughts and long prayers. Among my thoughts has been the issue of the ordination of women in the Catholic church.

Years ago, while in the military, I felt called to the priesthood and entered Maryknoll. Today I have women friends who say God is calling them to the priesthood. Who are we to judge their calling? As people of faith, we believe that a person's call to ministry is initiated by God and is something sacred. Who among us has the right to tamper with God's call?

In my 26 years as a priest, it is my experience that we need the wisdom, sensitivity, experiences, compassion and courage of women in the priesthood if our church is to be healthy and complete.

Sexism is a sin. However, [according to] the idea of Joan Chittister, the problem is not so much with sexism as it is with the perception of God held by those who oppose the

ordination of women. As people of faith we profess that God is all powerful and the source of life. Yet, when it comes to women being ordained, it seems that opponents are saying that this same God who is all powerful and created the heavens and the earth and can bring the dead back to life, somehow, cannot empower a woman to be a priest. Suddenly, we as men believe God becomes powerless when women approach the altar to celebrate Mass.

I am in prison for protesting the training of Latin American soldiers at the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA). The SOA is about men in Latin America who abuse their power in order to control the lives of others. They cause people to suffer and are seen as bullies. There are also bullies in prison who cause fear and threaten to punish those who speak out.

Just as soldiers in Latin America and inmates in prison abuse their power and control others, it saddens me to see the hierarchy of our church abusing their power and causing so much suffering among women. Jesus was a healer, a peacemaker, who called everyone into the circle as equals.

The ordination of women in our church is a moral issue and will not go away. A growing number of people of conscience and faith feel a responsibility to address this issue. I would very much appreciate knowing how my brothers and sisters in our Maryknoll community feel about women being ordained and respectfully ask that you write Maryknoll News and express your views. In peace, Roy Bourgeois, MM.

Now I have been a Catholic priest for thirty six-years and I must say, more than ever before, I am convinced that women should be ordained in the Catholic church.

The hierarchy will say, "It is the tradition of the church not to ordain women." I grew up in a small town in Louisiana and often heard, "It is the tradition of the South to have segregated schools." It was also "the tradition" in our Catholic church to have the Black members seated in the last five pews of the church.

No matter how hard we may try to justify discrimination, in the end, it is always wrong and immoral. As Reverend

Nancy Taylor of Boston put it, "Prejudice in liturgical clothing is still prejudice."

We can go to the Scriptures and find numerous passages that support the ordination of women in the church. In *Romans* 16:7, we read that in the early church of Rome, a woman named Junias is described by Paul as "an apostle" who was imprisoned for spreading the faith. In *Galatians* 3:26-28, we read, "It is through faith that you are God's sons and daughters. ... There is neither male nor female. In Christ Jesus you are all one." And in the Gospels we read that after Jesus was crucified, he chose to appear first to Mary Magdalene and other women. Jesus told the women to go and bring the news of resurrection to the men who, out of fear, were hiding behind locked doors.

Janice has been very active in the SOA Watch movement. As a high school teacher, she participated in a nonviolent protest against the SOA and was sent to prison for three months. Janice and the more than 250 others in our movement who have gone to prison are called, "Prisoners of Conscience."

Conscience is something very sacred. It gives us a sense of right and wrong and urges us to do the right thing. Conscience is what compelled Franz Jagerstatter to refuse to enlist in Hitler's army. On this day, August 9, 1943, this humble farmer was executed for following his conscience. Conscience is what compelled Rosa Parks to say, "No, I cannot sit in the back of the bus anymore." Conscience is what compels Janice Sevre-Duszynska and the other women to say, "No, we cannot deny our call from God to the priesthood." And it is our conscience that compels us to be here today. How can we speak out against the injustice of our country's foreign policy in Latin America and Iraq if we are silent about the injustice of our church here at home?

Janice, all of us present in this church today, and the many who cannot be here, support you and walk in solidarity with you in the struggle for peace, justice and equality.

May our loving God bless you in your ministry and journey of faith.

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IN WHICH DIRECTION HAVE WE MOVED FROM EXCHANGE OF 30 YEARS AGO?

by James A. Ratigan

editor's note: More than thirty years ago, the March 4, 1977 issue of the Catholic Star Herald, the paper of the Camden diocese, published an article by Bishop Patrick Ahern, "The Ordination of Women;" which was in many ways supportive of the role of women in the church, excepting that it was primarily an argument that women could not be ordained because Jesus, for reasons known only to him, deliberately did not choose women, including even his mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, "to be priests."

SEPA/WOC friend and supporter (for many years) Jim Ratigan, who was living in New Jersey at the time, wrote a response, excerpted at length below, which the paper printed.

Perhaps even more interesting is the bishop's reaction. In a letter to Jim, thanking him for forwarding a copy of his response, Bishop Ahern said, "I was very pleased that the paper printed it. It represents a different viewpoint from my own, but surely there is room for many viewpoints on issues, particularly one so controversial as the ordination of women to the priesthood."

As Jim said, "I wonder how many bishops today would do the same thing!"

An article by Bishop Patrick Ahern in the *Star Herald Writers' Forum* (Feb. 18, 1977) again presented the theme that men and women are equal in the church but only men can be ordained.

I recall as a boy growing up in the 1940s and 1950s that priests whom I knew in the various parishes in Philadelphia use to have an expression: "The nearer to Rome the farther from God!"

At that time this statement seemed distant and not very important to me. The full meaning and pervasiveness of that phrase, however, has been continually clarified as the years have passed.

Priests whom I knew who were stationed in Rome told of the persuasive arguments presented by numerous of the hierarchy to maintain the Friday abstinence because to change this discipline would have a bad economic effect on certain interests.

I recall vividly making a retreat (eight days) in which one of the retreatants was a young priest recently returned to the States from studying in Rome. What he shared and what permeated his conversations was not what theology he had learned but all the political strategies he had learned in order to gain political power in the church and to rise through the hierarchical ranks.

My own first visit to Rome and to Castelgandolfo (for a papal audience) was rather lacking in the religious tone I expected. My memory only faintly holds the image of Paul IV but rather is full of the merchants and vendors, which were ever present. The whole atmosphere made it very easy to buy a medal (or anything else) but almost impossible to say a prayer.

There experiences have not made me feel that the Eternal City is the source of all the imperfections in the church—rather I now have a more realistic, more balanced and appreciative understanding. I regard Rome now more highly than ever before. And although I would not prefer to live there, I would be happy to visit it any time. However, it has also become much clearer to me that Rome might be the home of the

Pope but only the whole world is the home of God.

The realization I achieved over a period of years through travel, years of study and shared experiences with many friends has brought me out of the rather singular impressions I had while growing up.

Today, however, through communications and the media, most people have a much more comprehensive set of facts immediately on which to base their opinions or judgments. Therefore most of the people I know (including people younger than I and people of other deep religious convictions) are not able to agree with either the conclusion and more especially with the presentation which Bishop Ahern makes.

Friends present me with questions concerning the church's following the example of Christ in regard to priesthood. I am asked:

Since the Pope whom Christ chose had a mother-in-law, why don't all popes have a mother-in-law?

Since Christ chose only Jews why aren't all priest Jews?

Since the Apostle Christ chose kept their own trades, why don't priests also have their own independent livelihood.

Of course the answer from the bishop's article is that tradition must also be considered along with what Jesus willed as well as his immediate example to understand legitimate development in the church from its first days until the present.

Bishop Ahern quotes Paul that in Christ "there is neither male nor female" yet they did not ordain women. The bishop assumes this adequately settles the issue.

However, in the same text Paul also says "that in Christ there is neither slave nor free." Yet 1,800 years later the Catholic Church (yes, in the United States) still held, maintained and sold slaves. Only in the very recent past has the text of Paul been interpreted to mean that slavery itself (as well as racial, ethnic discrimination) is contrary to the example of Christ, is morally wrong and must be changed.

At the same time we still have the bishop's other point of "the will of Christ." Just why Jesus willed that men and not women should be priests may not be entirely clear. He did not always give his reasons for the things he did. But this much we know for certain: whatever his reason was, it was not because he thought women inferior to men.

If I had read this statement in 1950 I would have simply and completely accepted it at face value. However, one of the most appalling facts in all human history is the continuous, cruel and almost unbelievable list of horrors that have been committed in the name of doing Christ's will.

How many people have been burned at the stake, hanged in the night, slaughtered in the fields by those who claimed (hopefully for them, with sincerity) that they were acting in accord with Christ's will.

Sadly those who do have religious faith and do care for the Lord must acknowledge that the invocation of "Christ's will" has apparently been done in many cases either as a mistake or else an exercise of power, not an exercise of faith.

So although I am not (nor ever have been) a bishop, or an ordained priest, I (as a man) do feel a special need to respond to the Vatican statement (issued by men) and the comments of Bishop Ahern.

The question of the ordination of women is not a problem for women. It is primarily a problem of and for men.

True and open dialog toward an honest, thoughtful and prayerful solution will be an increase and growth and further freedom for all members of Christ's Body.

Book Reviews

Gays and Grays: The Story Of The Of The Gay Community At Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Parish, by Donald Godfrey. Lexington Books, 2008. 195 pp. Paper. \$24.95.

reviewed by *Dugan McGinley*

As the subtitle of Godfrey's book reveals, *Gays and Grays* tells the story of Most Holy Redeemer Catholic Church (MHR) in San Francisco. Like so many urban parishes in America, MHR stands in a neighborhood far different from the one that surrounded it when it was founded over one hundred years ago. Originally a stronghold for Irish Catholics, the parish is now in the heart of the Castro, the center of San Francisco's gay community since the 1950's. The first part of the story is similar to that of many "inner-city" churches: parish membership declined in the 1960s as the white middle class moved out of the neighborhood to seek suburban living and to escape the "invasion" of seemingly threatening others (in this case "hippies" and gays) from adjacent neighborhoods. By the time the 1970s arrived, the parish was dying and little was done to adjust to the changing demographics, much less to reach out to the ever-growing gay population.

Enter Fr. Anthony McGuire, appointed in 1982 by the very wise and visionary Archbishop John Quinn, and the story becomes much less predictable. McGuire convened a council to discuss ways of reviving the parish. The group of ten old-timers (the "grays" who had not left the parish) and two gay men (who were among only a handful of gay parishioners at that point) unanimously agreed the parish needed to start a gay and lesbian outreach. The rest, one might say, is history! Suffice it to say the parish would thrive once again and today remains one of the most popular gay-inclusive parishes in America.

The gays and grays found some common areas of concern: unmarried widows and gays both struggled to live according to the church's teachings on sexuality and both groups felt marginalized in society. This gave them a foundation for understanding. Many of the challenges are very familiar to church reformers who are always having to balance our sometimes radical push for change with the realities of Rome and the everyday needs of rank-and-file Catholics. If this parish were to succeed in reaching out to gays and lesbians, it had to navigate the fine line of speaking out enough to satisfy one constituency while being cautious enough to satisfy another. Interestingly, these constituencies were often defined less by sexual identity, but rather by what people were willing to risk.

One of the most moving and compelling aspects of Godfrey's book is his discussion of AIDS and the central role it plays in the narrative of these gays and grays coming together. The appointment of Anthony McGuire as pastor in 1982 coincided with the beginnings of the AIDS epidemic in this country. In those early days of the illness, being gay and having AIDS were often conflated in the public imagination. This further stigmatized both groups of people. One might think this would have caused an even more formidable wall between the grays of MHR and their surrounding gay neighbors.

It turns out that AIDS provided the fulcrum around which these communities finally coalesced. The gays needed compassion and the grays had compassion and life perspective to share. Both groups were largely separated from their natural families—for divergent reasons of alienation or retirement—so they became surrogate families for each other. The words of one gay member speaking many years later sum up this bond: "My experience of the last fifteen years was more like my

grandmother's than my parents'. I've seen my peers' health go down and die; my parents haven't had that experience. Watching person after person die. This hasn't impacted their spirituality or faith life. It affects my grandmother; we could talk about this." (81)

One courageous woman named Marie Krystofiak was one of the first to reach out: "She was the one who stepped across the aisle, and gave permission for others to follow." (80) She and her fellow grays became surrogate mothers for a gay population suffering tremendous loss and alienation. The church had already started an AIDS support group when this remarkable woman suggested converting the old convent into an AIDS hospice. Coming Home Hospice became renowned in San Francisco for its services and remains in operation today.

MHR became a beacon of reconciliation in the neighborhood. As Godfrey says, "Somehow God brought hope and grace to marginal people in the midst of a holocaust through a very unexpected source. ...The attitude of most gay men and women in the Castro towards the Catholic Church continued and often continues to be ambivalent, even hostile, but they recognized that something good was happening at Most Holy Redeemer." (74)

This was a very timely read for me. I am starting a gay and lesbian outreach group at the parish in New Jersey where I am currently director of music and liturgy. We are in a suburb of New York that is sometimes referred to as the gay parenting capital of the US, so it makes sense to reach out to this population. Yet I've been confronted with the usual frustrating set of concerns: worries about whether someone will "write the bishop;" caution not to jeopardize the parish by saying anything too radical to the press; concern that the pastor might get in trouble; and some members' fears about a lack of confidentiality.

Godfrey does an excellent job chronicling the various tensions and debates that ensued at MHR. Needless to say, it was not all smooth sailing, though Godfrey's overall optimistic tone and personal admiration for this community make it sound perhaps a bit smoother than it was. He does allow space for dissenting voices, but they naturally drop away as each new challenge is resolved. To his credit, Godfrey allows numerous voices to speak through his extensive use of first-person accounts; however, he does not always provide sufficient analysis of them.

A few questions haunt me: Just how many straight people remain in this parish? Has Most Holy Redeemer become a gay parish more than a mixed one? Early on, Godfrey states that the gay and lesbian outreach group eventually withered away "when the entire parish had taken on the work it was formed to begin." (29) Later on, he admits that gay people themselves sometimes find it "too gay." By the end of the book, it feels like the gray voices have almost disappeared. It seems that truly inclusive communities are fragile and subject to so many social and religious whims. But I get the sense some younger straight families are now moving into the neighborhood, so it will be interesting to see what future demographic shifts bring to this community.

Dugan McGinley is a part-time lecturer in the department of religion at Rutgers University, and an adjunct professor of religious studies at Manhattan College. He is the author of Acts of Faith: Acts of Love: Gay Catholic Autobiographies as Sacred Texts (Continuum 2004).

Opening The Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity,
by Michael S. Kogan, Oxford University Press, 2007. 304 pp. \$29.95

reviewed by **Eva Fleischner**

Michael Kogan is chairman of the department of philosophy and religion at Montclair State University in New Jersey. In reviewing his book I do not claim to be unbiased. He and I were colleagues for almost twenty years—he as chairman part of that time, I as a member of the religion faculty. I came to know him as a friend, as one passionately interested in Christian as well as Jewish theology, and as an extraordinarily gifted teacher, deeply committed to his students, who loved and admired him. This book reveals him, further, as a brilliant, wide-ranging scholar, whose views concerning the relationship between Jews and Christians go beyond where most of us engaged in the Jewish-Christian dialogue have gone thus far.

Kogan describes the extraordinary progress in Jewish-Christian relations which began with Vatican II and has continued over the past forty years. He provides helpful analysis not only of *Nostra Aetate*, the ground-breaking Vatican II document in which the Catholic church began to set forth a new vision of Jews, but also of major documents published by other Christian churches, as well as of *Dabru Emet*, the unprecedented Jewish statement on Jewish-Christian relations, and the response to *Dabru Emet* from a group of Christian scholars.

The progress has been astounding, and would have been unthinkable even a generation ago. It can be appreciated fully only against the backdrop of what went before: almost 2000 years of defamatory teaching about Jews by Christians—what is known today as the Teaching of Contempt. I am not aware of a more devastating summary of this teaching than that given by Kogan:

The picture of Jews and Judaism painted by church fathers and reflected in church councils was so extreme and so unique in its malevolence that Christian people could only conclude that no level of persecution was so cruel that it could not be visited on this reprobate people rejected by God.... Were not the crucifiers of the Lord also poisoners of wells, murderers of children, and followers of "their father the devil" (John 8:44)? Is it possible that the church did not envision the profound impact such teachings were to have on the popular imagination or the ghastly consequences for the Jews of Europe? (p.121)

It took the enormity of the Holocaust (the *Shoah*) to awaken the churches to these "ghastly consequences." (I highly recommend James Carroll's *Constantine's Sword* for its history of this pernicious teaching.) Kogan gives full credit to the soul-searching and resulting changes that have taken place among Christians in this regard. His main concern, however, is with the future: how can Jews and Christians move beyond the mutual respect we have achieved at last? His vision is nothing less than a Jewish theology of Christianity, the subtitle of his book.

True dialogue requires more than the move from mutual hostility to friendship. It demands what Kogan calls "self-transcendence": I must be willing to let go of my absolutist and exclusivist view that my own faith is the only authentic revelation from God and open myself to the possibility that other religions are also authentic revelations. If this is admittedly difficult, why should this surprise us? After all, every revelation is of necessity partial and finite, not because God is finite, but because we are. I am tempted to say, "But of course! How could the finite ever fully contain or hope to understand the

Infinite?"

To see other traditions in this light does not mean that I give up or water down my "self-affirmation," the core beliefs in my own tradition, but that I open myself to self-transcendence. Both self-affirmation and self-transcendence are necessary for true dialogue. The other tradition may have something to give me, it may see something that I have missed, it may show me another facet of Divine truth. The movement goes both ways, of course. "From mutual respect to mutual influence" is how Kogan puts it.

Self-transcendence does not come easily to traditions that have always claimed to be the only and unique access to divine truth. For Christians this has meant Christ as the only way to salvation. For Jews it has meant seeing themselves as the only chosen people of God, and the Sinai covenant as the only true covenant God made with humanity. Kogan's commentary on this point is one example of the wit that we occasionally encounter in his book:

Christians and Muslims are together more than 3 billion strong. If they take it into their heads to think that they are the only bearers of truth, they are narrow-minded and egocentric; but if we Jews, with at most 15 million people, insist that we are the only bearers of truth, not only are we narrow and egocentric, we are indulging in a kind of theological madness (p.139 f.).

The author calls for religious pluralism, for the acceptance of multiple revelations. In this he joins Paul Knitter and other contemporary theologians. But his concern is specifically with the dilemmas and possible solutions such a view entails for Jews and Christians as they seek to enter into a deeper and more authentic relationship with one another. The required change may appear small. For Christians: instead of the church as *the* true church, the church as *a* true church. For the Jews: they are not *the* chosen people, but *a* chosen people. In reality, however, such a change is a sea change, a giant step forward. "Nothing has changed in my devotion to my tradition. Yet everything has changed because the world in which my tradition functions is [now] recognized as filled with chosen peoples and true churches" (p. 241).

This is an important book. It sets the agenda for Jewish-Christian dialogue for the twenty-first century. It is also profoundly hopeful. Unfortunately, I must conclude with a word of warning. There are alarming signs in recent months that some authorities in the Catholic church may be trying to turn back the clock. This past summer two hundred US Catholic bishops voted to delete a reference to the Sinai covenant in the new *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. The sentence to be deleted reads: "Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them." Some see this deletion as only the latest "in a long line of mixed symbols. It's very troubling." ("Jews Perplexed by Change to Catholic Catechism," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 19, 2008.) Are the bishops trying to undo the changes begun by Vatican II, to deprive the Jews of their hard-won recognition by Christians, expressed already by Paul in *Romans* 9:4-5, that the Jews are still people of God, that the covenant remains valid because God is faithful? It would be a scandal as well as a tragedy if this were so.

Eva Fleischner is a Holocaust scholar, a member of the Grail Movement, and professor emerita of religion at Montclair State University in New Jersey. She lives at Pilgrim Place, the ecumenical retirement community in Claremont, CA.

Scripture Reflections

Thanksgiving Day, 2008

1 Thess. 5:18, Sirach 50, 1 Cor.1, Luke17

by Judith A. Heffernan

"In all circumstances give thanks...bless the God of all...give thanks to God always..."

We do love this special day of thanks, and being together around a table can be delightful.

I'm thinking about some delightful meals I recently shared and for which I truly give thanks.

I had breakfast with Matthew Fox (well, I was drinking coffee during his keynote address!), I had lunch with Theresa Kane and I had dinner with the folks at Spiritus Christi on the occasion of their tenth anniversary.

Rev. Matthew Fox was silenced by the Roman church for, among other things, being a feminist theologian, calling God "Mother" and not condemning same-sex relationships. (He did not think silencing was a good idea, and decided to keep on teaching and preaching.)

Matt Fox has reminded us to count our blessings, celebrate the gift of life and remember Meister Eckhart's words, "If the only prayer I say in my whole life is 'Thank-You', that would suffice."

Lunch with Theresa Kane (yes, the one with 98,500 google references!), and she was terrific—joyful, wise, reflective, listening, interested, dedicated and still working!

I was so grateful that I could tell her personally that she was truly an answer to my prayer on that remarkable day in 1979, when she said to John Paul II that women should be included

in all ministries of the church.

She has said that she'd do it again, but this time with more urgency and passion!

She has written in *U.S.Catholic* that the threefold call for our church in the twenty-first century is to hear and respond to the voices of women, the cry of the poor, and the quest for peace and nonviolence, coupled with deep respect for our earth and the environment...This is holy work.

Dinner with Spiritus Christi—Mary, Jim, Denise, Margie, Myra, Chava, the entire inspired community, celebrating ten years of courage, moving toward Vatican III. The all-embracing joy and prayerfulness at every liturgy there makes faith and hope as real as I have ever experienced. Their outreach programs and generosity are well documented—giving over \$1,000,000 to various and assorted people and places in need. They practice what they preach. They witness to the truth of the Salvadorian proverb, "You can cut back some of the flowers, but you can't hold back the Spring!"

And at every meal this Thanksgiving I will toast Roy Bourgeois who said, "As a Catholic priest—and this is important—I cannot possibly speak out about the injustice of the war in Iraq, the School of the Americas, and the suffering they cause, and at the same time be silent about this injustice in my church...I belong to a huge faith community where women are excluded, and I have a responsibility to address this."

Let us give thanks, refuse to be silent and do holy work with joy.

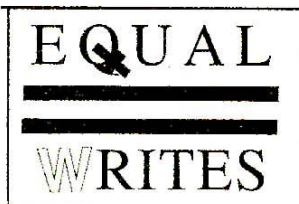
Judy Heffernan has a Master of Divinity degree from a Catholic seminary. A member of the Community of the Christian Spirit, she is an original member of the Women's Ordination Conference.

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AFFILIATION: *Equal wRites* 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 *Equal wRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be February 2009. Final deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2009. Send to the editor: Karen B. Lenz, 430 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia, PA 19122, or e-mail her at pclaverhouse@aol.com.

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Cardinal William Joseph Levada
Prefect, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
Piazza del S. Uffizio 11
00193 Rome, Vatican City
Italy

Dear Cardinal Levada:

We are faithful Catholic men and women from several different parishes in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Many of us serve as Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, committed volunteers or in other responsible positions in our parishes. Our Church teaches us to oppose what seems wrong and to stand up for what is right, even if it is costly to do so. Therefore, we are writing to express our deep concern about the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's decree of May 2008 which imposes automatic excommunication upon women who seek ordination as Catholic priests and upon anyone who assists them.

We realize that this decree is but an extension of a long-standing policy barring women from the priesthood. However, because it has received such extensive publicity and because it pertains to automatic excommunication, its impact has been profound. Multitudes of Catholic women have been deeply hurt by this excluding policy. They along with Catholic men who believe in the dignity and equality of women see this policy as unjust discrimination. Since only ordained men have power of governance in our Church, this stance also sends the message, "Men must rule," to a world where women still are oppressed. Thereby, it weakens the Church's witness in the world. We respect the Church's teaching authority, but the rationale for barring women from ordination seems strained, even illogical; clearly, it has not been received by or persuasive for the majority of the faithful. We ourselves believe that our Church leaders are tragically mistaken when they make gender a criterion for the priesthood.

In conscience, we cannot let this momentous event go by without registering our protest. Therefore, we are writing you in accord with Vatican Council II's statement that "the laity are empowered—indeed sometimes obligated—to manifest their opinion [to Church leaders] on those things which pertain to the good of the Church" (*Lumen Gentium* #37). Because we disagree so deeply with this policy and decree, we want you to know that, if such women approach the Altar in our parishes, we will welcome them. We will reverently do what we can to support them in receiving Communion, for example, by sharing with them the Host we have received, by entering into a Eucharistic fast or by other supportive acts. Our Church leaders believe they must exclude ordination-seeking women from the Table, but we cannot. We cannot believe that Jesus, whom we hold in our hands as Eucharistic Bread, would withhold himself from these women.

We realize that we are taking a step that may have serious consequences for us. However, we remember the courage of St. Paul, a layman, who had the courage to oppose Peter "to his face because he clearly was wrong" (Gal. 2:11). We are inspired by such faithful women as St. Catherine of Siena whose outspokenness to Church authorities in her day brought new life to the Church. We pray that our Church leaders will be as open to reconsidering their views as was Jesus, who at first rejected the Syrophenician woman's request, then welcomed her in response to her beautiful plea for inclusion (Mk. 7:25-30). We hope that our words and actions will help our beloved Church reflect more fully the face of this Jesus, friend of the marginalized and the oppressed.

Sincerely in Christ,

Catholics for Women's Equality, P.O. Box 965, Southampton, PA 18966-0965
(See the reverse side of this letter for signatures)

cc: Cardinal Justin Rigali, Archdiocese of Philadelphia