

CHALLENGE, COURAGE , CONSCIENCE

Father Tony Flannery
Founder of Association of Catholic Priests in Ireland
Author of *A Question of Conscience*

Spend an evening with Fr. Flannery in a conversation about the role of conscience in our lives and the future of reform in the Catholic Church.

Friday, October 24 at 7pm

**University of the Sciences McNeil Science & Technology Building
743 S. 43rd Street, Philadelphia PA 19104**

**Everyone welcome! Suggested donation: \$10 or more at the door.
Please register in advance at sepawoc@sepawoc.org or 610-825-0355.**

E Q U A L

Vol. XXXI No. 4

WRITES

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

OCTOBER 2014 - FEBRUARY 2015

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.

**Why Come to Hear Tony Flannery?
Who Is He? Why is He Important?
By Ellie Harty**

Wouldn't you want to hear more from a priest who published in the journal, *Reality*: "**Whatever Jesus intended, I don't think anyone can credibly claim he intended the type of system we now have in the Church...I no longer believe that the priesthood, as we currently have it in the Church, originated with Jesus**" and was suspended by the Vatican as a result?

Wouldn't you like to hear more from a priest who, when told he would be allowed to return to ministry only if he consented to write, sign, and publish a statement agreeing, among other things, that women should never be ordained and that he would adhere to church orthodoxy on matters like contraception and homosexuality, replied, "**How can I put my name to a document when it goes against everything I believe in. If I signed this, it would be a betrayal, not only of myself, but of my fellow priests and lay Catholics who want change.**"

Wouldn't you like to hear more from a priest who proclaimed, "**I refuse to be terrified into submission.**"

**We Remember Brother Bart Schlachter
By Mary Whelan**

On August 17 we lost a member of the SEPAWOC core committee and a beloved friend. Our readers will recall the articles and poems he contributed to *EqualRites* over the years. We will remember him sitting at our table where we "broke bread" (i.e. Chinese!) and then commenced to pray, plan and listen to one another.

Brother Bart was 83 when he died, active until the end of his life. He was a "collector" of people—and loved to talk about his birth family, Christian Brother family, former students, former teachers (he still corresponded with his fifth grade teacher.) and friends, oh, so many friends. He was an activist, always giving generously of his time, of himself, to any who needed him.

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Wouldn't you like to hear more from a priest who, describing the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's attitude toward him, observed, "**They didn't seem to have the slightest interest in meeting me or hearing my side of the story. I was clearly of no consequence to them as a person.**"

Isn't it of the utmost importance to come out to support, applaud, and cherish such a man? Don't we want to listen and respond to someone with enough courage and conscience to challenge the institution in which he has spent a major part of his life? In which he has pursued his life's work? His sacred vocation?

Father Tony Flannery is a Redemptorist priest who has created and led retreats, missions, and served parishes all his life. He will focus his presentation on the role of conscience in our lives. He will also discuss the real prospects for reform in light of the Francis papacy and how these reforms might be brought about.

We need to be there!

**St. Mary Magdalene Community
Mass schedule
Every Sunday at 9AM
Drexel Hill United Methodist Church
McBurney Chapel
600 Burmont Rd
Drexel Hill, PA 19026**

We have two satellites:

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

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

I tried to remember when Brother Bart first joined in the women's ordination movement. It was many years ago. He was keenly aware of those who were "on the margins" and never hesitated to speak with them and for them when he had the opportunity but more importantly, to make certain they were included in the discussion. He knew that women were not seated "at the table" and he was not comfortable with that.

He was passionate about renewal of the church. I was recently given a copy of a letter he co-signed with Karen Lenz of the Peter Claver Catholic Worker House during the first incarnation of COR (Catholic Organizations for Renewal)/Philadelphia in March, 2005. The letter spoke about "women, women's ordination ... homosexuality, divorce, papal infallibility, married priests, the (sharply constricted) role of the laity..." These were only some of the issues Brother Bart cared about.

He belonged to Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference and Call to Action in Philadelphia. He was part of the re-formation of COR/Philadelphia in recent years. He belonged to St. Vincent parish in Germantown where he participated in the liturgy committee. He attended Sanctuary of Peace, an intentional eucharistic community. (But Brother Bart did not attend church—he DID Church.) He could be found on Wednesday mornings at the House of Grace, Catholic Worker House in Kensington. He "just listened" to the people he met there, occasionally transporting some to their doctors' appointments. He regularly attended Second Tuesdays, a group of men and women who gathered for a meal and "listening" to one another on the second Tuesdays of the month. Oh, he was such a good listener.

He attended lectures, workshops, the annual witnessing in front of the Cathedral — it seems he was always "there" to listen, to support, the causes he believed in. It would be impossible to list all the people he companioned, the organizations he supported.

I tried to think of some of the Bart-attributes that I loved: his honesty, humor, compassion, intelligence; and his ability to be "present", supportive, and open-minded. He never hesitated to share his joys, his sorrows; was never embarrassed to show his emotions, sometimes laughter and sometimes tears, freely giving hugs when they were needed. Bart was one of the most genuine people I have ever met.

Most of all, I am grateful that he spent time with us. We were so fortunate to have known him.

Mary Whelan is co-editor of EqualwRites.

Community of the

Christian Spirit

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

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

Let's Talk Turkey

An opinion piece by Ellie Harty

Turkey references are not just for Thanksgiving, it seems. The Vatican “talks turkey” too, i.e. this summer’s assurance that they, the Powers that Be, “don’t want to gobble up one woman a day.” (I actually think quite a few women – and men – would beg to differ.) The statement was somewhat reassuring since, as we know, bullies usually do like to pick on one person at a time, most often the weakest. But that comfort, alas, is a small one. Obviously those in power think women as a whole are so weak and inadequate, they can safely pick on us all. Even worse, like many abusers, they are prone to use passive aggressiveness; that way the bruises and scars won’t show. But they do, don’t they?

The above remarks are negative, of course, and angry, and, therefore, probably not helpful. The real point in mentioning this gobbling up of a gender and its possibilities is, as always, what to do...what to do...

One of the perpetual debates, for me internally, and I think externally among many of us Catholics or the “sort of” kind is when and how and if we should work to reform or re-form the church. Do we stay and push on all sides from within for reform? Or do we leave and push from the outside while simultaneously saving our minds and spirits from suppression, frustration, hurt, or worst of all, numbness? Or do we do some combination of both?

For some perspective, I’d like to tell a brief – and perhaps a cautionary – story about one congregation, Protestant as it turns out – that went through a similar kind of journey. The congregation, or community as we called ourselves, was part of very mainstream Protestant denomination which, in the 1960’s (when else!) was enlightened enough to realize it was not reaching out or meeting the needs of the younger generation. It, therefore, allowed for the creation and support of one of its branches to act as a “new church for a new day.”

This church community flourished and soon attracted a wide variety of congregants: Teachers, social workers, lawyers, artists and musicians, writers. A local judge was an active member as were some poor, marginalized, and homeless people. Social justice activism was a main focus. Worship “celebrations” as they were called were dynamic, creative, lively, thanks to community members helping to design and actively participate in their creation. The minister, ordained in the main stream church and a graduate of a prestigious theological seminary, nevertheless called himself “coordinating minister” since he, and we, saw all people as ministers of the church.

One of the most important tenets of the church – and this will bring me back to the main topic – was that it was to be a church community “out on the fringes but with roots planted firmly in the center.” That concept was so important it was stenciled prominently on one of the walls.

By the 1970’s, leaders in the mainstream denomination, who had kept a watchful eye all along, began voicing strong concerns that the “fringe” was being too emphasized and the “roots” more and more ignored. They began to demand, as a minimum, that all members publicly announce their belief

that “Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior”. Needless to say, that did not go over big with our Jewish, Buddhist, and atheist members and with those of us who wanted to stand with them in resisting oppressive authority. (Sound familiar?) We did resist but they kept pushing...then they cut us loose. We had suddenly become one of many, many independent church communities, a seemly good ending to a bad situation. Note that word: “seemingly”.

Not long after, the founding coordinating minister referenced above decided he had to leave to pursue a different challenge. He loved, celebrated, and helped create the “fringe” but the “roots” to him were as important, and so he left for another mainstream branch of the church. Those of us left carried on, including hiring new ministers who left in rapid succession, and one who stayed, probably because he strongly, some felt too strongly, embraced - and extended - the “fringe” side. The community quickly attracted many New Age (then in vogue) proponents and grew more and more eclectic in its membership and focus. The “fringe and Christian roots” people, for the most part, drifted away, to temporary house churches, other main steam churches, or stayed lost somewhere in between. I think I can speak for most of those people when I say we were heartbroken. We had left that church (as it had been) but it would never leave us.

When I hear the should-we-stay-or-should-we-go-or-do-something-in-between debate now about a church I equally love, I think of that experience. The breaking apart, the decentralization, the new communities we created at the dissolution, served our individual needs for spiritual expression and connection with others but, purely unintentionally, were exclusive. There were no children, very little economic and racial diversity, and, perhaps most important to me, they had no powerful voice in the world, no - for lack of a better word - stature. I love the small Eucharistic community of which I am a regular participant today; it is invaluable in its nurture and challenge and thoughtful voicing of ideas and reflections, but its impact in the larger community, by its very nature, is limited.

I, therefore, feel as if I have to stay and work within the larger church, too. It is a church that, for all its faults, does have stature, does have power, does have at least the potential to have a huge impact on the world for good. The latest statistics show a major growth in the Catholic church in Africa and Asia, places in which, for example, women are often horribly oppressed and downtrodden. Don’t we have a responsibility to stay in the church and resist its oppression of women in all its aspects? Sure, we can leave and work for women’s rights and against women’s oppression in other arenas, but here is a huge one, one with which we are very familiar, and in which, if we keep pushing, we can make a difference. I wish we had done that with the main stream Protestant denomination back in the 70’s. I wish we had talked with fellow congregations more, sat down with leaders, advocated for our point of view, shaken them up, and learned from them, too. Instead, we caved. We went away, sometimes literally, or, with the more eclectic focus that took over, figuratively.

That main stream church did not have one tenth of the power or numbers of the Catholic church, but it did have stature and a widespread ability to effect change. Imagine, in the days of

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Excerpt from Homily on the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene, July 20, 2014

By Eileen McCafferty DiFranco, RCWP

I would like to dedicate my homily today to my fellow priest, Mary Ann Schoettly, who is suffering from a fatal, rapidly progressing neurological disease. She was ordained a deacon on this day in 2008. She was ordained a priest in 2009 at Mishkon Shalom in Philadelphia. (*Note: Mary Ann Schoettly died on July 22 two days after Eileen's dedication.*)

Mary Magdalene and the rest of Jesus' disciples all had some sort of life before meeting Jesus. We know that Peter and Andrew put down their nets to follow Jesus, even though we learn later on that they did continue to fish for a living. Peter was married and had a mother-in -law. Jesus visited Peter's home, so apparently Peter continued to live there. The gospels say that Mary Magdalene and other women accompanied Jesus and provided for him on his journeys. We know now that Magdala was not a place but rather a title, an exalted one at that. It meant, "tower." How did Mary Magdalene get to that place?

The gospel of Luke tells us a couple of things about Mary's place in the life of Jesus and the early church. First of all, when Jesus visited Mary, she sat at his feet as his student. Luke also relates that when Jesus did travel through towns and cities, Mary traveled along with the rest of the disciples. The non-canonical gospel of Phillip says that Mary was called the "companion" of Jesus who always walked along with him. Phillip also says that Jesus kissed Mary Magdalene on the mouth, making the other disciples jealous. So, it seems as if Mary's place was at the very side of Jesus, every bit as much as the twelve. And while Peter may have been a rock, or "Rocky," as one of my seminary professors used to joke, Mary was the madgala, that is, "the tower," the tower of strength for Jesus and for the rest of the disciples as our gospel indicates.

The gospel of John relates that when Jesus went to Bethany after the death of Lazarus, he asked personally for Mary since she had not gone out to meet him with her sister Martha. When Mary came to meet Jesus, she said to him, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." It was after those words that Jesus became deeply moved and greatly disturbed in spirit. He went directly to the tomb of Lazarus and raised him. Thus Mary was very important to Jesus.

All four of the gospels place Mary at the tomb on Easter Sunday, making her the primary witness of the resurrection and, dare I say it, the architect of what became the Christian faith. In his first post-resurrectional appearance, Jesus is described in John as presenting himself to Mary, calling her by name, and asking her to proclaim to the rest of his followers that he was not, as they believed, dead and buried. This should have earned her a permanent, exalted place in church history, as it did in the Eastern Orthodox Church which refers to Mary as "the Apostle to the Apostles."

Mary's pride of place as the apostle to the apostles and companion of the savior did not persist in the western, Roman church. By the 6th century, Pope Gregory had lumped a bunch of female characters together, I guess because all women looked and acted alike, and were sexual sinners anyway by virtue of their sex. Gregory made Mary into a repentant prostitute, a place the Eastern Church, to their credit, never accepted. I remember reading about Mary in the "Lives of the Saints." Rather than portraying Mary as a powerful apostle

who carried the foundational story of Christianity to the world as we read today in her gospel today, she was, instead, portrayed as living in a cave and repenting her horrible sinful, sexual past until her death. Apparently, her "alleged" sin was more serious than Peter's triple denial of Jesus in his time of need. Unlike Peter, who repented and moved on with his life, allegedly traveling to Rome as the head of a church, Mary had to get herself to a cave because bad, sexy, powerful girls need to be punished in perpetuity. Her steadfast presence at the foot of the cross and her courageous visit to a tomb surrounded by an armed Roman guard would not overcome her reputation as a prostitute until 1969.

Sadly, the place of St. Mary Magdalene in the church and, by extension in the world, has been the place of women for millennia. Mary's journey to castigation and marginalization has been our journey. We all know that history and don't need to repeat it today. And while the place of women has changed a bit, it hasn't changed enough to allow for the full flourishing of both the church and the world. Even in the most progressive parishes, the patriarchy remains alive and well; the altar with its privileges, denotations and connotations, remains an all-male bastion.

It is sad to think that those who lead the institution conduct worship in a place of unhealed wounds and unlivid grace. It's sad to think that in these places, law supersedes love and that the outstretched hand is slapped away rather than grasped and accepted. The ensuing violence- even by good people- is unintended. It is, however, real and echoes throughout the generations. What does it mean, really mean, when an institution you call home regards you and yours as being less than equal in the sight of God- all the while protesting to the contrary? What does this attitude, this image do to children in those places?

I know that I -and I hope- we who worship here at St. Mary Magdalene have found that it is, indeed, as our logo says, a place to grow our spirits. Here, we are both free and safe from harm. Here, we are a community of equals, answering only to the community. Here, there is a place at the table for everyone, no questions asked. Here, our children can see a variety of people doing a variety of jobs, with no job being more valued than another. Here people, and not their gender or anything else, matter. While ordination is hardly the measure of things, in seven short years, three additional people have sought ordination, their calls validated by the community. It is amazing what can happen when the chains are removed from the hands of the Holy Spirit.

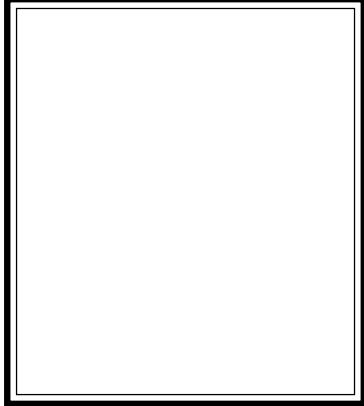
Hopefully, we will always remain a green and growing place, filled with prayer, song, charity, holiness and good will. Hopefully, we will always remain free, safe, and equal, open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. We continue to ask blessings from our God who shows no partiality and sends mercy and love pressed down and overflowing into our laps that we continue to grow and spread and model the good news of the equality of all people before God.

And some additional good news. Mary Magdalene's place in church history is being slowly restored- not by the institution which is content to believe in the myth that there were no women apostles, even as that belief strangles them- but by outlier groups like us who are perfectly content to exist on the margins because that is where Jesus, our Emmanuel, lived.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest.

“Gender, Gospel & Global Justice” Ready? Set? Let’s go!

Actually we don’t have to go very far, only to Philadelphia itself for the very exciting – and very crucial and timely – **International Women’s Ordination Conference on September 18, 19 and 20, 2015** in the very center of South-eastern Pennsylvania! What an amazing opportunity for all of us.



As you probably could not help but notice, we will meet – and rally – only a few days before the Pope’s visit to Philadelphia, September 22-27, 2015. We’ll get to have the first words, and then, hopefully, the last (unless his are “You’ve been right all along. Let’s ordain women.” in which case we’ll first faint and then get up and cheer since no further words – just actions – will be necessary!).

Let’s get back to reality, however, with a few details of the conference:

The venue will be the Hotel & Conference Center of the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown. “We expect,” according to Erin Saiz Hanna, WOC Executive Director, “up to 1,000 participants to attend – a combination of WOW (Women’s Ordination Worldwide) delegates and members, other Catholic reform groups, theologians and students, and supporters and advocates of women’s ordination from around the world.”

Speakers include, so far, Professor Tina Beattie, the British theologian, writer, and broadcaster, Fr. Roy Bourgeois, and Sr. Theresa Kane. “Our aim,” Erin Saiz Hanna emphasized, “is to have a selection of speakers from all corners of the world who are able to reflect on our theme of *gender, gospel and global justice* in whatever way they feel comfortable.” There will also be smaller workshops with guest speakers and facilitators and panels where a variety of speakers will be interviewed by a host and by the audience.

Financial support is in the works as WOW internationally and WOC in America apply for grants and funding from various organizations and donors, including the current member organizations of WOW. Since we want as many people from the developing world as possible to attend the conference, organizers have also set up a Travel Fund to offer financial help to those who meet an established need criteria. The actual conference fee for all attendees has not yet been finalized.

What local SEPAWOC members and supporters can do is join with us in these early preparation strategies. As the ones who know the Philadelphia area, we can help:

- Volunteer to serve on fundraising and finance sub-committees
- Help draft local speakers and facilitators
- Act as a local liaison or contact for national planners to call as needed
- Suggest or, better yet, obtain local restaurant and cultural events discounts for attendees

Regina Bannan, our SEPAWOC President, has already volunteered to work with others to put together a feminist tour and list of things to do in Philadelphia for participants. If you are interested in helping with any of the above suggestions (or have some of your own!), email sepawoc@sepawoc.org.

Let’s Talk Turkey *continued from page 3*

the Vietnam War, the Women’s Movement, the Contra debacle in Nicaragua, Apartheid, just to name a few, the potential impact voices for peace and justice and change could have had. Instead we sought to fulfill our individual spiritual needs, necessary, of course, but at a cost.

I realize reforming and re-forming the Catholic church is a far more daunting task. Protestant churches are, for the most part, more democratic, less encumbered by layers of bureaucracy and traditions, not to mention by a “Supreme Leader”. Just because a mission is incredibly difficult, however, doesn’t mean we don’t take it on. The potential for far-reaching impact is just too compelling. We can do this. They’ve promised they won’t gobble us up, well us women at least, one a day at least. I know that’s a strange sentence to take as semi-comforting, but it opens the smallest possibility that they have heard women’s concerns. They are thinking about them, a bit condescendingly, but the point is our pushing is making an impression. We can only hope, and continue to help ensure, they really are getting ready to talk turkey.

P.S. You have to wonder though, if they are the ones resisting doing the “gobbling”, who are the “turkeys”? Happy Thanksgiving!

Ellie Harty is a co-editor of EqualwRites.

Editorial Staff of EqualwRites

A Publication of SEPAWOC

Editors: **Ellie Harty, Mary Whelan**
Book Review Editor: **Marian Ronan**

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

Book Reviews

Good Catholics: The Battle Over Abortion in the Catholic Church. By Patricia Miller. University of California Press, 2014. 344 pp. Hardback: \$24.47. Kindle \$19.22.

Reviewed by Marian Ronan

As I began writing this review of Patricia Miller's *Good Catholics: The Battle Over Abortion in the Catholic Church*, historian Timothy Kelly's review of Miller's book appeared in the *National Catholic Reporter**.

I agree with much that Kelly says. In *Good Catholics*, Miller argues convincingly that the organization Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC)—now Catholics for Choice (CFC)—“served as an effective counterbalance to the (United States Catholic) bishops in the public arena.” Her analysis focuses primarily on public debates about abortion, though she also explores theology and ethics, popular responses to the abortion controversy, and the history of CFFC/CFC.

In the first part of *Good Catholics*, Miller uses the activities of four early Catholic feminist theologians—Rosemary Radford Reuther, Jane Furlong Cahill, Mary Daly, and Elizabeth Farians—as a platform for the rest of the book. All four challenged women’s subordination in the church as the secular women’s movement was challenging it in the rest of society. They were also founders of the movement for women’s reproductive rights. In 1964, for example, Ruether, identifying herself as a “Catholic mother,” published an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* expressing her belief in birth control. In 1971, Cahill, a Philadelphian, defended the morality of abortion at a state hearing in Harrisburg, after which Archbishop Krol called her “the abortion woman.” Farians and Daly were equally feisty on reproductive issues. All four of them were involved in the founding and early activities of CFFC/CFC. (Three also helped start WOC’s predecessor organization in the U.S., the St. Joan’s International Alliance.)

The passage of Roe v. Wade in 1973 marked a new era in the fight over U.S. reproductive rights, and public challenges to the bishops’ position on reproductive rights by CFFC drew some thousands of U.S. Catholics to the organization. Then, in 1982, Frances Kissling became president of CFFC. But in Miller’s telling, it was the 1984 *NY Times* “Catholic Statement on Pluralism and Abortion” that really set off the battle between the American bishops and the pro-choice movement.

The second half of *Good Catholics* documents the history of that struggle, up to and including the bishops’ recent attacks on the contraceptives mandate of the Affordable Care Act. I found especially sobering Miller’s discussion of the alliance between the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Religious Right, undercutting as it does the church’s emphasis on social justice and the common good since before the New Deal. CFFC/CFC has played a crucial role in opposing this alliance, making politicians and the country aware that the USCCB’s stance is not the only Catholic position.

Miller would seem to draw at least two conclusions from her narrative of “the battle over abortion in the Catholic Church.” The first I agree with as far as it goes: from Cahill and Ruether to the contraceptives mandate, “the debate had really been about women and sex.” I would add that the Catholic institutional fixation on controlling sexuality is also about the church’s loss of secular power since at least the liberal revolutions of the mid-19th century, but that’s another story.

I find Miller’s other conclusion, about the impact of the Catholic reproductive rights movement (and therefore CFFC/CFC) more problematic. In the last chapter she writes

It’s impossible to overstate the importance of this alternative theology (of reproductive rights) to modern Catholics and their ability to grapple with issues of sexuality within the context of their religion—especially because they have been abandoned by the hierarchy on the issue.... (as Louis Utley of Merger Watch said) “... having a progressive voice representing 98% of Catholic women is extremely helpful.”(266).

Let me be clear here: like Miller, I am grateful to CFFC/CFC for providing an alternative Catholic voice on reproductive rights in the public arena. As the hierarchy has moved steadily to the right, identifying contraceptives with abortifacients, for example, I regret not having supported the group financially over the years.

But on the ground, beneath the public conversation, where “modern (U.S.) Catholics” “grapple” with sexuality, the situation is much more ambiguous than Miller acknowledges. Even if 98 percent of Catholic women report having used contraceptives at some time, it doesn’t follow that they consider themselves “represented” by the reproductive rights movement. Indeed, among U.S. Catholics, even liberal/ progressive ones, CFFC and reproductive rights, or at least, abortion rights, have been marginalized for a long time.

Kelly acknowledges this in his NCR review, suggesting at the end that Miller’s book “will likely give off sparks.” I am reminded here of an experience I had on the national WOC board about a decade ago. There had been some kind of crisis—a fire, maybe—in the WOC office, where the board usually met. Francis Kissling, who had been a friend of the leaders of WOC in its early days, offered to let us meet in the CFFC offices nearby. But at least one, and possibly two, board members adamantly refused to use the offices of CFFC for a meeting. Let me be clear here: CFFC had not asked WOC to endorse their position; Kissling had simply offered the space when it was needed. But some members of the Board refused to *set foot* there. And the rest of the board gave in. A friend who’s involved in the national leadership of Dignity also assures me that abortion and contraception are never mentioned at Dignity meetings.

Some of this may be strategic, not wanting to get a single-issue organization off track. Myself, I suspect that it’s more than that. Catholics may well use contraceptives and have abortions at the same rate as the rest of the country, as some polls suggest. And a considerable majority indicate in such polls that they support reproductive rights.

But it’s not just Catholic “attitudes” or what we write in a private poll that’s significant. It’s also what we’re willing to stand up for and speak out about in public. Patricia Miller may argue that we cannot overestimate the impact CFFC has had on “modern Catholics...and their attitudes about sexuality.” But who wants to risk being shamed by the archbishop of Philadelphia, or even by other members of WOC?

*<http://ncronline.org/books/2014/08/catholic-dissonance-abortion>

Marian Ronan is an American Catholic studies scholar. She blogs at <http://marianronan.wordpress.com>.

Book Reviews

Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner & Saint, by Nadia Bolz-Weber. Brentwood, TN: Jericho Books, 2013. Hardcover, \$22; eBook \$10.99. 224 pp.

Reviewed by Marguerite Sexton

“Nadia, the thing that sucks is that every time we draw a line between us and others, Jesus is always on the other side of it.” Here author Nadia Bolz-Weber is quoting her spouse, Matthew, after a frustrated rant of hers, directed toward the (Lutheran) church hierarchy and conservatives in general. It’s one of the many passages in *Pastrix* that revealed to me something I already knew, but didn’t remember that I knew before reading it in Bolz-Weber’s down to earth, often raw style.

Bolz-Weber unflinchingly recounts her spiritual journey beginning in childhood. Her family belonged to the fundamentalist Church of Christ. The suffocating repression of that tradition triggered a rebellion in Bolz-Weber that included alcoholism, drug use, casual sex and intimate relationships with potentially dangerous people. She then gradually transitioned into a stable and loving marital relationship and finally, ordination as a Lutheran minister.

All of these experiences provided excellent fodder for one of Bolz-Weber’s incarnations, as a stand-up comic in Denver nightclubs. Among her many succinct and funny observations is that she cannot imagine how anyone can be a pastor without first being a standup comic. As spiritual memoirs go, *Pastrix* is quite likely the only one ever to begin with an epithet (“S**t!”), perhaps as a warning to the wary reader of what lies ahead. Yet, somehow in Bolz-Weber’s scorched earth approach to looking at life, she sees the possibility of redemption, not just her own, but for everyone she meets along the way.

One reason writers don’t write is because truth is often embarrassing. People they care about are likely to be shocked, disappointed and disapproving. Perhaps worst of all, one day they will have to explain it all to their children. Such possible realities do not inhibit Bolz-Weber, who takes the pain, rage and failures of her life and uses these things without self-pity to come to a deeper understanding of herself, her people and, most importantly, the love and compassion of God through Jesus. In the final analysis, she manages to find Jesus everywhere she turns.

One of Bolz-Weber’s many endearing qualities is her ability to describe her trek from one religion to another to another, describing each with respect and affection while garnering whatever trace of wisdom she was able to find there. She packs it all away in a spiritual picnic basket of sorts, to be opened in later consciousness and to then drink deeply of whatever sliver of holiness each had to offer. In doing so she is able to describe her unabashed love of Lutheran tradition without diminishing Catholics, Quakers or Wiccans (tenderly referred to as “God’s aunts”) each of whom welcomed her into their faith communities at various points on her path. Finally, she learns to forgive and even pays a degree of homage to the Church of Christ of her childhood, honoring the remembered sense of community there.

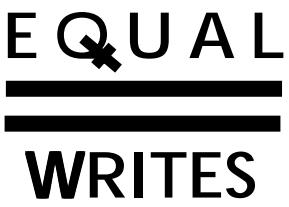
Bolz-Weber is gifted at breaking open the Word through the use of a scripture passage at the beginning of a chapter and then weaving a life experience around it. One example is chapter 4, which begins with Romans 7:15: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” This is the chapter in which Bolz-Weber discusses coming to terms with her addiction to alcohol. She finally recognizes that she had carried bravado about her drinking as if she was a “hero of debauchery,” until she was *suddenly* and painfully stunned into the recognition of the truth of her life. Who among us, if we would have the courage to deeply meditate on that passage through the prism of our own life, could ever judge another? Such a passage begs to be read again and again in the author’s skilled telling of it.

It must be noted that Bolz-Weber’s fundamentalist parents loved her through it all and love her still. In one moving passage she recounts her fear and trembling when she announced to them that she decided to seek ordination as a Lutheran minister. Her father opened the scriptures to the Book of Esther and, theological differences notwithstanding, read aloud, “But you were born for such a day as this,” after which her parents tenderly embraced her and blessed her as she wept with joy.

This spiritual memoir turns tradition (not only Lutheran) inside out and upside down while at the same time holding the deepest reverence for it. This brilliant, funny, tattooed, profoundly spiritual young woman may be a prophet for this generation, drawing into her Denver congregation, *House for All Sinners and Saints*, a wide and divergent group of people, young and old, mainstream and marginalized; it is a place of radical equality where strangers are welcomed as an integral part of the assembly. Bolz-Weber has the revolutionary idea that church should be fun and a natural place of laughter and spontaneity woven throughout the reverence.

Perhaps saints are not those who have lived lives of purity and virtue, or who gave up material things in order to start religious communities, but are people who have suffered through the muck and the mire of life, whose sufferings and sins have even caused others to sin, but who face themselves unflinchingly. In doing so, these folks get to know the heart of a deeply compassionate Jesus, a savior that those with easier paths may sometimes find elusive. One wonders if that’s what sainthood is for a new emerging church for a new generation, as described by Nadia Bolz-Weber in her splendid memoir, *Pastrix*.

Marguerite Sexton is the Founder and Executive Director of Journeys of the Heart, (www.journeysoftheheart.org) a non-denominational ceremonial ministry that serves unaffiliated people. She is a former Catholic who attends mass with the Medical Mission Sisters in Fox Chase, occasionally attends Abington Monthly (Quaker) Meeting and sometimes stays at home to read the Sunday Inquirer.



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Scripture Reflections

All Saints Day, Mt 5:12

By Judith Heffernan, M.Div.

Recently, for our high school reunion, we were asked to write-in a few paragraphs- what we've done the past fifty years! Memories flooded in as I reflected on the grand mosaic of the women's ordination movement, a worldwide community that has tried to be a real discipleship of equals.

Three people from this grand mosaic are especially in my heart today.

Rev. Tony Flannery, an Irish Redemptorist, silenced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, risked reminding them, among other things, of the Pontifical Biblical Commission's judgment that there is no scriptural bar to the ordination of women. Further, Tony has stated that he must be true to what he believes and refuses to be terrified into submission.

Rev. William Brennan, who, as the *National Catholic Reporter* told us, made justice his life's work, died in August at the age of 94—he was a Jesuit for 75 years and a priest for 63. Yet, he spent the last two years of his life under restricted ministry because he participated in a Eucharistic Liturgy with a woman priest. He saw women's ordination as a legitimate question that should not be covered over with spiritual or authoritarian dictates.

MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE: If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *EqualwRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be March 2015. Final deadline for submissions is February 15. Send to echart43@yahoo.com or mail to SEPAWOC P.O. Box 52046, Philadelphia, PA 19115.

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SEPAWOC's own beloved Brother Bart Schlachter, FSC, left for his greatest adventure on August 17th. He was a Christian Brother for 62 of his 83 years. He was teacher, counselor, principal, community director, searcher, prophet and friend. Bart's two recent interviews in *EqualwRites* were so uplifting! Bart beautifully tells of a whole new and wonderful chapter of his life that began when he retired at 65 to PHILADELPHIA!

In the interviews Bart quotes Macrina Wiederkehr: "To break the bread of our lives with one another...is prayer." He rejoiced that he lived to understand this and the deeper meaning of the Communion of saints.

Happy Feast Day, dear friend, and thank you for having the courage to wear your LaSalle jacket to SEPAWOC's Holy Thursday and Ordination Day Witnesses. Thank you for standing with us.

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

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