

**NOTES FROM THE WOMEN'S ORDINATION
WORLDWIDE CONFERENCE (WOW)
SEPTEMBER 18-20, 2015**

Recorded and selected by Ellie Harty

Note on the Notes below: I did not put most of these various speakers' words in quotes since I was not sure I captured every word and thought completely. I did, however, try to capture and compress into short excerpts some of the essence of their thoughts. Please consider exploring their writings and talks more extensively to gain the full richness of all they have to say. I hope these few tantalizing bits encourage you to do so!

Black oblates setting up schools in the 1860's were harassed and their habits pulled off. More recently, Black nuns were barred from many orders and entering others meant they had to cease being Black: "You could do the Irish jig but anything African was taboo." Even within these orders, they were segregated, often having to eat separately and last and forced to go into the mother house by the back door. They experienced verbal abuse and isolation daily; some were even called 'nigger'. Their sheets were burned when they left."

- *Shannen Dee Williams, author of The Forgotten Among Us: Black Catholic Sisters and the Feminist Struggles for Justice in the Catholic Church*

A major challenge to church reform will occur if the Catholic Church allows women to be deacons. The deaconess offer is touted as a foot in the door, but won't accepting it mean we have low expectations? Instead we should offer a polite, sincere 'no thank you' and move on to demanding full inclusion for women rather than half measures.

- *Mary Hunt, Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)*

If we mention ordination, we will lose all other feminist gains. Is it worth it to be able to enter into a rigid hierarchy? Women should make use of the institutional church while maintaining their autonomy.

- *Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, The Gender Policy of India: A Blueprint for Partnership*

The Church has committed the greatest of sins, that of 'false piety' in refusing to call the past past. It is the God of the future, not of the past, whom we follow with all our hearts.

- *Joan Chittister*

Our bodies make visible what is invisible – the spiritual, divine; we are living sacraments. Women, through their bodies, already perform transubstantiation in pregnancy, transforming food and drink into new life. The baby is fed by the woman's body and blood. Isn't this the beginning of the argument for the ordination of women in the church?

- *from "Theology of the Body-Friend or Foe?"*

Church thinking on men only as priests goes something like this: The 'formative' power of the father (through his semen) is what actively creates life in the passive 'matter' of the mother. Since matter cannot act upon matter - only form can act upon matter - it follows that only males can consecrate and create the Eucharistic transubstantiation. (Hmm. Aren't seminaries appropriately named!) This leaves both a closed door (With regards to women's ordination, the Pope said, "That door is closed.") and an open wound (Notice how the open wound of Christ on the cross is vaginal in appearance.)

- *from Tina Beattie's presentation "Her Dark Materials"*

Do men and women experience the Mass differently? Does the male priest? Body and blood in men are associated with wounds and death; in women with fecundity and life.

- *Tina Beattie*

"Ordain Women or Stop Dressing Like Them"

- *bumper sticker held up by Roy Bourgeois*

In the face of injustice, silence is complicity.

- *Panel of current and former priest discussing "Break the Silence"*

We want to move from a Theology of Atonement to a Theology of Blessing, more holistic, inclusive, sacramental, and liberating!

- *Panel of Roman Catholic Women Priests*

Is the sacrament of Eucharist holier than the sacrament of Baptism? The latter women can perform if there is no priest, but the former, never! We do not need appointments and ceremonies for the priesthood of all baptized believers. Ordination is a commission by the community; sacrament means no hierarchy nor space for only a few people but active love and freedom for all.

- *Sr. Teresa Forcades called "Europe's most radical nun"*

"Are you calling Jesus a sexist? Because the apostles he chose were all men."

- *Hostile comment overheard during the WOW prayer witness outside the cathedral*

Many spiders weaving a web together can contain a lion!

- *Anonymous quote cheered by all at the WOW conference*

Ellie Harty is co-editor of EqualWRites.

WOW Honors Four Women for Leadership

By Mary Whelan

On Friday evening of the Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference a special 40th anniversary celebration took place. It began with Sister Theresa Kane presenting the Women of Vision and Courage Awards to four women who are well known to all of us involved in WOC, two of whom are especially beloved by us in SEPAWOC. WOW members nominated the women who, "like Theresa Kane, prophetically live out their visions of an inclusive, equal and just Roman Catholic Church."

Awards were given to **Patricia Fresen, Jamie Manson** and our own **Regina Bannan and Judy Heffernan**.

Regina, who is president of SEPAWOC and a former president of WOC has been involved in WOC since 1984. Judy Heffernan attended the first WOC conference in Detroit in 1975 and was friends with early WOC organizers like Mary B. Lynch.

We are sharing some of the words of Judy's acceptance speech which sketch a few details of the early WOC history. It is also to be noted from her speech that SEPAWOC presented the Mary Magdalene award, honoring "courageous and prophetic leaders" to WOC's current leaders, **Erin Saiz Hanna** and **Kate McElwee**. It is noteworthy that younger WOC leaders honor the work of those who came before them and that more senior WOC members acknowledge the younger members with having a vision for the future that we all hold dear.

"To say the least, I was very surprised when Erin called to tell me about this award— I am VERY grateful... and an award named for Theresa Kane, a living answer to my prayers!!! In 1979 when Pope JP II was in Philadelphia, some of us went to see him. I carried a sign that read, "I am ready and willing, please ordain me." My Mom carried a sign, "Perform a miracle- ordain my daughter!!" and my friend had one, "God is an equal opportunity employer!" We were at a side entrance to the seminary. The crowds were going in the front gate to a prayer service. We were very close to the Pope and I really thought he was going to hop out of his pope mobile and come over and ordain me. I was very disappointed. Then, after church on Sunday, I heard that Theresa Kane had addressed the Pope, and I knew everything was going to be all right.

I am also very humbled that I could be included with Regina— a remarkable person, teacher and leader. Regina and I have been a team since 1979; in fact, once Regina said of us, that she sometimes feels she is the head and I am the heart—but let me assure you that Regina is all heart, too!!

I am here tonight because my Mom and Dad, my Aunt Gladys and my two brothers honored the dream of a little girl who said she wanted to be a priest. I am here because the Benedictine Catholic Seminary of Indianapolis took a risk and welcomed-truly welcomed and included-

women to study for a Master of Divinity Degree. I am here because the Community of the Christian Spirit, a Philadelphia area Intentional Eucharistic Community decided to move forward to Vatican III, and as a matter of justice, chose to ordain me on Mother's Day 1980. I am here because WOC and all of its glorious people guided my journey forward, and I am here because of Southeastern PA WOC (SEPAWOC) —my beloved companions, mentors, advisers, creative idea sharers and generous, tireless workers for the cause.

From the beginning SEPAWOC heard the call of National WOC. We have tried to be a real discipleship of equals, women and men, committed to Gender, Gospel and Global Justice—especially women's ordination. That is why Regina and I both want to share our awards tonight with you, SEPAWOC.

Speaking of Philadelphia, in 1971, I met Mary Lynch in Philadelphia at the beautiful and formative interfaith meetings of people working for women's ordination. Mary Lynch also became my friend and later was my classmate at the seminary. In 1974, Mary invited me to a meeting with 30 people and asked, "What do we do next?" From that meeting, WOC's first gathering was planned for Detroit in November, 1975. In Detroit, Sister Nadine Foley introduced Mary to all the assembled, so the 1200 of us would know the power of one questioning woman!

Each of us who has been involved these forty magnificent years give thanks for all who have joined with us along the way.

In closing...speaking of those who have joined us, we want to present our Mary Magdalene Award, which thanks courageous and prophetic leaders, to you, Erin Saiz Hanna and Kate McElwee. You have brought enthusiasm, team work, energy, insight - and far- sight - to WOC that have energized us all and kept us going. For all the work you have done, nationally and internationally, we are grateful. For all the work you have done for this marvelous conference, we are grateful, and maybe, most of all, for treasuring the people of our past, integrating our present with real respect for the old, the young and everyone in between and for envisioning our future, we thank you, Kate and Erin, and we all love you. AMEN!"

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**AT PEACE WITH ONE'S CONSCIENCE: IMPRESSIONS
FROM THE 2015 WOW CONFERENCE**

By Marisa Guerin

The depth and beauty of the WOW conference was simply stunning. The program was excellent — rich with outstanding speakers who truly did break open the themes of gender, gospel, and justice. And the conference was beautifully managed, a tribute to the many behind the scenes contributions of local and international leaders. There was even the opportunity to give resounding public applause to our local leaders, Regina (Bannan) and Judy (Heffernan), as they were honored for their incredible dedication!

I am so glad I went. My initial motivation for registering was curiosity and convenience since the conference was right here in my home town and since I had heard of many of the speakers but wanted to experience them first hand. My expectations were more than met, leaving me with a sense of solidarity and even deeper commitment to the ideal of equality for women and men in the Catholic Church.

I was especially appreciative of the critical thinking and careful scholarship that were on display as speaker after speaker unpacked the history and contemporary understandings of gender justice through lenses from theology, archeology, sociology, racial histories, women's studies and human sciences, and from the perspectives of women's experiences across the globe and across religious traditions.

The topic of ordination was itself critically analyzed, making it clear that what is sought by women with this call is a form of service to the faith community that is significantly different from the clerical and hierarchical power structure of the Roman Church. To address the question of women's ordination is to address the roots and heart of patriarchy and systems of oppression of all kinds. It is an exceedingly important cause for this reason, not just because some women in some countries are ready for and desirous of ordination, but because all women and all societies worldwide suffer when women's equality is denied by an institution as significant as the Catholic Church.

In addition to the five-star quality of the formal program presentations, it was exciting to be in the presence of 500 or so women and men from all over the country and the world, including young women who are offering their feminist leadership for today and the future. Like most participants, I was deeply touched by the priest panel, men who risked their status as active ministry priests by standing up against the exclusion of women. It is shocking that such severe penalties are incurred for the simple act of speaking up for justice. I know, women experience these penalties also; I am humbled and grateful for these men and women.

These experiences were grounded in celebration, joy, being at peace with one's conscience even in the midst of discouraging closed doors, hearts, and minds in the Church. I suspect most of us know that this is a lifetime or two of activism, not something that I personally expect to see changed in my own years ahead. But the living experience of the church with the love and intellect and compassion of women is already alive and well. The Spirit moves, and I was grateful to be part of such an outpouring of grace.

Marisa Guerin is a consultant to religious communities and supporter of SEPAWOC.

**Mary, Undoer of Knots and my Hopes for the
Church**

By Mary Whelan

There was a moment during the visit of Pope Francis when my heart skipped a beat. On Sunday, the final day of his visit in Philadelphia he made an unscheduled stop at the Cathedral to view the knotted grotto, a 20 x 13 foot domed public art installation representing his favorite painting "Mary Undoer of Knots," on which Philadelphians in the previous weeks had jotted down their thoughts on ribbons of fabric which were then attached to the structure. The ribbons blew gracefully in the wind, visible evidence of the struggles and prayers of so many.

You see, my heart skipped a beat because **our** petition was part of that installation. The previous weekend, on the final day of the WOW conference, we (representatives of Catholic reform groups) had walked through the streets, meeting at the Cathedral for a prayer service. At the conclusion, Ellie and I went across the street to the grotto and wove a copy of *EqualwRites* into the structure in between the ribbons.

When I saw the Pope on tv standing by the grotto, so close he could have touched our petition, I could have cried. I hoped that the spiritual energy of that grotto would touch his heart in a way that no words have.

I had listened to the Pope's magnificent messaging during his U.S. visit—speaking out on immigration reform, the climate ("our common home"—a beautiful image), nuclear weapons, war and conflict, poverty and capitalism. I saw him embrace prisoners, the homeless, the disabled, and babies, so many babies. I see that he looks to the people on the margins. And yet...

I was painfully aware of those groups on the margins he did not embrace (and I want to say "yet" because I believe he cannot ignore the human pain that is located there). I can safely say some of the human pain is carried by those members of Catholic reform groups who work so relentlessly to make visible the "others" on the margins

But I speak here about the supporters of the women's ordination movement in particular. On the papal plane while on his return to Rome, Pope Francis chose to answer questions. In a response to a question about women priests, the Pope said, "That cannot be done. Pope St. John Paul II after long, long intense discussions... said so clearly. Not because women don't have the capacity. Look, in the Church women are more important than men, because the Church is a woman. (Using masculine and feminine articles in Italian). It is "la" Church, not "il" Church. The Church is the bride of Jesus Christ. And the Madonna is more important than popes and bishops and priests. I must admit we are a bit late in an elaboration of the theology of women. We have to move ahead with that theology. Yes, that's true."

So, indeed, I am confused by the words of this Pope who spoke with pastoral passion when his feet were still on the ground. The "theology" of women was evident at the WOW conference—it has and is being told. That is not the problem. Oh, dear Pope Francis, open your eyes widely—look not to the past of Pope John Paul II. Look to all of us standing on the margins and embrace all of us.

Mary Whelan is co-editor of EqualwRites.

WHAT I DID AT MY WOW CONFERENCE

By Marianne Tucker

When I got the opportunity to attend the Women's Ordination Worldwide conference this September, I thought it would be mostly rehashing the old arguments on why the priesthood should be open to women as well as men. The actual experience was more like "We are so past that!" The opening speakers, Mary E. Hunt, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Shannon Dee Williams gave us a glimpse at the rich culture that is WOW. Mary Hunt listed a top ten of what we can celebrate, including, we are still here! She also warned that we will be offered crumbs and not to be satisfied with that.

Tina Beattie gave a quick explanation of where the church's "gender theory" (ancient Greek "form versus matter" belief) and proceeded to amuse with all of the ways women are defined (I don't remember how many "genders" she says we are given) and raised eyebrows comparing, among other things, the wound in Jesus' side as presented in art with a certain part of a woman's anatomy. Her new book should be an interesting read.

There were talks on early Christian history and archeology, feminist theology and the history of ordination.

There were hard subjects too. In a presentation called "Survivor Justice and Ending violence Against Women" four panelists described their experiences with sexism and racism in the Catholic Church. Barbara Blaine founder of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) spoke of how she was told she was the first and only one abused by a certain priest and only when she started meeting with other victims did she realize "We can't all be the first." Virginia Saldanha, former executive director of the Asian Bishop's Conference Office of laity and Women's Desk, spoke of battling the cultural belief that women are to be owned and used. Even nuns are given that status in some Asian countries. Mari Steed spoke of her search for her Irish birth mother who was imprisoned by the church in one of the Magdalene Laundries for having a child out of wedlock. (She was reunited with her.) Possibly the stories I found most hard to hear was the racism African American women experienced when they wanted to become nuns. Shannon Dee Williams related they were refused admission by some orders, some had to experience a "separate but equal" ceremony when they took vows, they were not welcomed at their assignments, when they left a convent to move to another assignment, some had their bedclothes burned and many could not take the stress and left the convent. The take home lesson from all this is THE STORIES MUST BE TOLD and continue to be told!

We also heard from the men who have spoken in support of women's ordination. This was another hard session to listen to. Fr. Tony Flannery, Fr. Roy Bourgeois and Paul Collins were all disciplined by the church for this open support and have lost their ability to work as priests. Fr. John McClure was an active priest in San Francisco but lost his ability to serve public mass as a result of his attending and speaking at the conference. Roy Bourgeois summed it up when he said that the hurt he felt when his order abandoned him made him know better the hurt that women feel.

Maureen Fiedler moderated a wonderful interfaith panel with Christina Rees, Church of England, Rabbi Rebecca Alpert, Asra Nomani, Muslim, Patricia Fresen, Roman Catholic Womenpriests and Kate Kelly, Mormon. All spoke of the sexism they experience even in the sects that have embraced women ministers.

I am so proud of the work that SEPAWOC did to make this conference a reality and to maintain a visible presence there. You are all great!!! We kept hearing things like "You're from SEPAWOC? I love SEPAWOC!"

At one point a speaker asked all those who have been excommunicated to stand. What an amazing group of women! Strong, intelligent, kind and energetic. I would be proud to stand with them

Marianne Tucker is puppeteer and entertainer with "Tuckers' Tales" (tuckerstales.com), a singer in the group "No Windows" and a member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee.

Pheminist Philadelphia Tour

By Regina Bannan

I am sure this was not a highlight for most attendees at WOW, but I certainly treasure the memory. A certified Philadelphia tour guide, Maki Paulson, designed the tour and we knew it was going to be a great experience. Starting at Christ Church and ending at Independence Hall, we saw or talked about it all: Betsy Ross, the first Women's Medical College site, the ordinations of the first Episcopal women, Deborah and Ben Franklin, Lucretia Mott, the President's House, the Liberty Bell and the Justice Bell. The theme was "We the People" – always changing our country and culture, sometimes through protest, to be more inclusive. Heroes were Judy Heffernan and Sue Leung who got and distributed so many sandwiches and beverages and Tastykakes to all in the twilight of the Saturday dinner hour, and, of course, Maki. It was great fun and I am so grateful.

Regina Bannan is president of SEPAWOC

Our hosting the Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference was such an honor and pleasure. It was also, to be honest, costly. (You all know what it takes to be good hosts and we hope we were!)

We were also gratified to hear peoples' remarks on our outstanding newsletter, and many new subscribers signed up, some as far away as Australia!

Please help us continue by renewing your subscription and support. Please send whatever you can afford to SEPAWOC at PO Box 52046 Philadelphia, PA 19115.

A mailing envelope is attached for your convenience

WOMEN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: WHAT POPE FRANCIS NEEDS TO KNOW

A Report from the July Forum in Chicago

By Ann Zech

On July 25, 2015, I traveled to Chicago to attend *Forum on Women in the Catholic Church: What Francis Needs to Know*. The gathering at the Chicago Theological Seminary was convened by **Call To Action, Catholics For Choice and Corpus**. The Co-sponsors were extensive and diverse: Dignity USA, SEPAWOC, American Catholic Council, Future Church, New Ways Ministry, Quixote Center, Catholics Speakout, Roman Catholic Women Priests, RAPPORT, and National Coalition for American Nuns. I was there to represent SEPAWOC. The meeting culminated with a news conference at which the document “Chicago Declaration on Women in the Catholic Church”.

The four part agenda looked back in history, challenged the present and envisioned the future. The presenters were academic professionals, directors of progressive Catholic organizations, news media columnist, authors, medical professionals - all men and women of faith and courage who choose to envision the Catholic Church as it is meant to be: faith “filled”, inclusive, compassionate, loving, accepting of the different gifts we have been given by the Creator. The sessions were “livestreamed” so most of the individuals physically present were from the drivable geographical area. There were a few like myself who traveled a distance.

The Workshop had four distinct topic headings relating to women’s issues with a distinguished moderator and expert presenters unique to the topic:

“*Always at the Center*”: Deborah Rose-Milavec (Future Church) moderated the historical presentation by Professor W. David Myers (Fordham University) followed by Professor Gina Messina-Dysert (Ursuline College) who emphasized many of the contemporary issues facing women in our church. The one thing that became very evident to me was that women of the early Church were very active in all aspects of forming what was called “The Way” and then Christianity. It was the eventual structural restrictions imposed by the hierarchy and society that started to diminish the “voice” of women in the public institution. Yet, through all these barriers, “women found a way to minister”. Throughout all these centuries, women continued to impact the growth of the Church Community. Professor Messina-Dysert emphasized that we are living in a very progressive (though contradictory) time with Pope Francis. For example – Pope Francis wants to re-examine the roles of women, yet this discussion encompasses few, if any, women’s voices. Pope Francis wants to build bridges to the future, yet struggles to find ways to challenge the historical structures of the past. Not waiting for all this “building” and “listening” and “rediscovering the past” to occur, strong women continue to speak, to act, to minister as they have for centuries — for the need is in the present!

“*Called to Serve...Nowhere to Go*”, led by NCR columnist Nicole Sotelo, zeroed in on discrimination in church service. In the words of Sister Chris Schenk (Future Church), we “need to own our Church for we are not leaving.” Although there is no perfect system in any institution, we need to find a way to involve all individuals. Despite 80% of parish staff

being women, few are in leadership roles. This statement led to an excellent presentation by Laura Singer (WOC) who emphasized that there is no Scriptural reason for denying women full participation in the priesthood of the Church. Given the fact that we do have very gifted and active Roman Catholic Women Priests, we have chosen not to wait for the institutional church to “catch up” since the ministerial need is so great. In the meantime, we still need to speak out and work to eliminate the discrimination in wages that exists in our church. Trish Sullivan Vanni (Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project) presented data from CARA which shows that even though Pope Francis says all should be paid equally, the facts demonstrate a contradiction in this statement. Another issue which demands our voice!

The afternoon presentations focused on the “*Sexual Issues*” still plaguing our Church, with a concluding session on “Family Matters”. Patricia Miller (author) moderated the presentations by Professor Daniel Maguire (Marquette University), Professor Susan Ross (Loyola University) and Ms. Katie Breslin (Catholics for Choice). These excellent presentations discussed the role of “conscience” in all sexual issues (Maguire), along with how our historical understanding on these issues forced church teaching to change - with examples like: when the soul enters the body, the reasons for being married - (Ross) all coming together with a current revisiting of the need for individuals to form a conscience that allows them to make moral choices in times of conflict (Breslin). Thus, we need to consider reproductive health care as a moral good that influences all our lives.

“*Family Matters*”, moderated by Jim Smith (Dignity USA) brought to the forefront, in a very personal way, the need for all Catholics to be inclusive in all our discussions on family life. The family unit can do so much good, but it can “do” damage when individuals are not willing to accept and love each other totally and unconditionally. Marianne Duddy-Burke (Dignity USA) spoke to the need for marriage and adoption equality. LGBTQ persons did not “get half Baptized – we (they) want full participation in the Church.” Living our Faith in diverse families is vital and “life giving” to the entire community.

Professor Anthony Padovano (Ramapo College) inspired presentation, *Spirituality of Separation—Annulments, Divorce and Remarriage*, was so prophetic since we see that the institutional church can seek to change. If it is the couple who is the minister of the sacrament, should not they be the ones to decide when this union is no longer viable? As we know, Pope Francis is challenging the institutional church to open doors to all these gifted individuals who have been cast aside in the past. Christine Haider-Winnett (Equally Blessed) brought the pain-filled story of discrimination full circle with her talk, *Losing the Hearts of the Faithful—Church Teaching in the Light of Real Catholic Families*. Just who is to define the REAL family – institutions or the individuals living the “family life”? With the World Meeting of Families, at that point fast approaching, she expressed hope that all those attending would see and experience the diverse “giftedness” of our Catholic Community. “Thus, through the Grace of God’s Spirit, we will **open** the doors to all ministries, families, institutions, and communities.”

Ann Zech is a member of the SEPAWOC Core Committee.

Catholics and Pretense

By Eileen DiFranco

Catholics and their leaders are very good at pretending. The pretense goes way, way back to the waning days of the Roman Empire. When the Roman Empire disintegrated, the Catholic Church, which had become legal only a hundred years earlier, fell right into the power gap left by the empire. The church had already spent those hundred years accumulating the trappings of power: grand basilicas, senatorial dress for church leaders, entourages and processions that announced the arrival of wealthy bishops who hailed from patrician Roman families.

The leaders of the church came to regard this newly imperialized institution as “the spotless bride of Christ,” a perfect entity, incapable of sin. Of course, an institution ruled by frail human beings who throughout the ages have fallen to the lowest common denominator cannot be perfect or rise to any level of perfection. To say that they follow a poor carpenter who gave away all of his possessions to the poor all the while wearing expensive vestments and living in palaces is a serious misappropriation of reality.

A second pretense is the clerical belief that powers conferred at ordination cause a man to become both “ontologically changed” and the image of Christ, thus contributing to this idea of the perfect church. This belief has added to the mystique of the priesthood and elevated very human men, all of whom have fallen short of the glory of God, to a very high status without their doing anything worthy of record. This mystique puts priests beyond investigation (How dare they treat Father that way?) and beyond punishment for doing truly evil deeds. The sexual abuse of children and vulnerable women is one such sin. The Inquisition and the Witch Hunts are another.

To say that ordination confers some special power upon a human male raises the level of pretense to a belief in magical powers.

A third pretense is the infallibility of the ruler of Roman Catholicism, the pope. Looking back at the history of the papacy turns up some pretty grim people with large egos and urges that are most unpopelike. Popes declared crusades against Muslims, persecuted the Jews, and permitted the rape and pillage of the New World. They broke with their Eastern brethren over one word in the Nicene Creed. To say that a mere man can make no error when he makes a decision about faith and morals- when his moral compass can be so far off target- is to pretend.

Fourth, Catholic popes and bishops pretend that they know a great deal about sex. Throughout the years they have perseverated about sex like teenagers in heat: when and how to do it, who can do it and who can't. Although unmarried, they authoritatively define married love, including sex. If you are not supposed to do it and don't do it, you don't know much about it at all. To think you do is to pretend.

Fifth, although the church fathers have written reams about women throughout the ages from calling women “the gateway of the devil” and a “sewer” to claiming that women can't image Christ, the policy makers of the church know very little about real women. They have an ideal woman,

Mary the mother of Jesus. Since the rest of us women fall short of the ideal mother-virgin, they essentially shut us down. Our words, our desires, our deepest hopes mean nothing to men who feel that they must keep us in our proper “sphere” less we chip away at their “theology of the body” in which women remain second class citizens, in spite of all the mansplaining they try to do to sugar coat their chauvinism. For the pope, his bishops and priests to claim that they know what God wants for women is to engage in pretense.

Sixth, the Roman Catholic Church tries to portray itself as a loving mother who opens her arms wide to all of her children. Nothing can be further from the truth. The church only welcomes those who agree with its platform and former dissidents who beg forgiveness. This has been true almost from the beginning. The church has leveled anathemas and excommunications at anyone who disagreed with it. In the past, they even burned dissidents at the stake or beheaded them. Currently, the church goes after dissidents who believe in women's ordination with a ferocity that is unmatched in any other organization except perhaps totalitarian regimes. This intensity was conspicuously absent in regard to dealing with pedophiles.

This hatred of supporters of women's ordination has seeped down into the People of God. While witnessing with a banner supporting women's ordination outside of the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, I was subjected to disrespect, taunts, hoots, and hisses by both the faithful and clerics as they entered a convention center hung with banners that read, “Love is our mission.” The men with the power who sat upon the altar at the papal Masses speak out both sides of their mouths, sowing the faithful with the seeds of their own hypocrisy.

Seventh, one of the seemingly concrete things that Pope Francis has done is to expedite marriage annulments and make them more affordable. Annulments pretend that marriages never existed. This pretense is not helpful for the children born during allegedly non-existent marriages. Those of us who are married know that when you apply for your marriage license, stand at the altar and then go to bed, the marriage existed. What happens along the way is that the marriage, for whatever reason- and there are many- goes bad as do many human relationships. To say that an annulment is not the same thing as a divorce is an exercise in pretense.

Eighth, members of the faithful like to pretend that their parish belongs to them. They like to think that they are the church even while the Fathers of the church make all the rules and set all of the standards, even when they fly in the face of reason, charity, justice, and science, even when members of their own parishes or their own families are barred by the Fathers from the Eucharist. The fact is that even the nice Fathers have taken a vow of obedience to their bishop and so their allegiance lies with the bishop and not with his flock. If

continued on page 7

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Sunday Mass 11:30am
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Pope Francis Converts *The Nation*

By Marian Ronan

In the face of Pope Francis's recent massively popular visit to the U.S., members of one group are surely turning over in their graves—the American nativists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Nativism is an anti-immigrant ideology that sometimes leads to violence. From the 1840s till the election of JFK, nativism was primarily a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant phenomenon, aimed primarily at Catholic, and particularly Irish Catholic, immigrants. According to the nativists of that period, Roman Catholic immigrants' loyalty to the pope would destroy American democracy. In 1844, nativist mobs burned Catholic churches and community centers in the Kensington and Southwark sections of Philadelphia. And as recently as 1960, the Catholic presidential candidate had to assure denunciatory Protestant ministers that if elected, he would obey the constitution, not the pope in Rome.

It's risky characterizing *The Nation* magazine as nativist, since it's been one of the more liberal American magazines for a hundred and fifty years. *The Nation* did, however, publish a series of articles in the late 1940s that are widely characterized as "anti-Catholic," and sometimes as nativist. Penned by the socialist, former UCC minister and *Nation* associate editor, Paul Blanshard. The articles were subsequently published in book form as *American Freedom and Catholic Power*. It sold millions of copies in twenty-six editions. Historian Philip Jenkins argues that while Blanshard's "plan of resistance against Catholicism" in those pages did not actually call for violence, readers, in the shadow of World War II, would have assumed the word "resistance" to carry such an implication.

Given all that, Blanshard and a number of other former *Nation* editors and readers would have had good reason to turn over in their graves when *The Nation*'s September 29-October 2015 issue appeared. For there we find a drawing of what is presumably Pope Francis with his arm lifted in a raised-fist salute next to a headline that reads "What Does It Mean to Be a Radical Pope?" And inside there are no fewer than three articles about Pope Francis: "The Climate Justice Pope," by climate writer Wes Stephenson; "The Pope's Blind Spot," by feminist columnist Katha Pollitt; and "A Vision So Old It Looks New," by the Occupy activist and religion writer, Nathan Schneider. Admittedly, Pollitt's article is quite critical of Francis's position on population in *Laudato Si*, Francis's encyclical on the environment issued to great acclaim last May. But as Philip Jenkins has also observed, critiques of Catholicism can hardly be considered anti-Catholic if some Catholics are saying much the same thing. And proclaiming that Francis has (only) one blind spot could easily be taken as a compliment!

I began to suspect that *The Nation* had repented of its post-World War II anti-Catholicism when they published their 150th anniversary issue earlier this year. It consisted of some of the best articles from each decade of the magazine's history. But there was nothing in the 1940s section by Paul Blanshard. Indeed, an insert in the Pope Francis issue reminds readers that *The Nation* had published an enthusiastic piece about Pope John XXIII and Vatican Council II in 1963. Actually, *Nation* nativists might have begun gravely spinning back in May when regular *Nation* columnist and author of *This*

Changes Everything, Naomi Klein, began waxing enthusiastic about Francis's environmental encyclical. Klein subsequently attended the July 2015 Vatican conference on climate change.

But *three* articles about a pope in a single issue of *The Nation*? And one of them by an enthusiastic young Catholic convert and Catholic Worker activist?

Pope Francis may not be changing everything, but some things are definitely on the upswing!

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Catholics and Pretense *cont. from page 6*

there is a choice between a member of the flock or even the flock itself and the bishop, the father will opt to follow the bishop, however unreasonable and unsound, even if this decision destroys the flock. And everyone pretends that this way of being church is OK.

Ninth, this month the bishops will meet in Rome for what can only be described as a pretend Synod of the Family. There will be no women who will be involved in any sort of decision making. While all of the bishops grew up in a family, some of them have not lived in one since they were fourteen years old. Instead, they've lived their entire lives in comfortable and well appointed rectories with other men. The women in their lives are those who change their sheets, wash their clothes, and cook their food. On the basis of this very limited experience with women, the bishops at the synod will make declarations and decisions for Catholic women who do live in all sorts of families in every part of the world.

Tenth, there is no sign that the Roman Catholic Church's most peculiar institution of the all male priesthood is going away any time soon. Eliminating the voices of women, denying them a place at the table has led to many of the great excesses I've mentioned above. In the words of Joan Chittister, the all male priesthood forces the church to see with one eye, hear with one ear, and walk on one leg. It also constrains the size of her heart and dampens her spirit. We see this heartlessness in the bishop of Philadelphia, Charles Chaput, who told women priests that he is "confident" that God would not call women to the priesthood. Since neither Bishop Chaput nor any other cleric has an inside track with God, his statement is one of pompous pretense.

Even a good man like Francis cannot see his way beyond the power and glory of the male priesthood. He has insured that the poverty that so obviously pains him will not be addressed in any meaningful way in the near future. 66% of the world's poor are women and they are poor because of the same cultural imperatives which have blinded him. Thus, he has insured that women all over the world will continue to be treated as inferior beings. He can't expect the world to change their actions and clean house when he is not willing to do the same in his own house. Pope Francis went home and we can all pretend that he made a difference in our lives, in the life of the world and in the life of the church. Real change will come, however, only when Christians, the world and the church follow Jesus' message to love our neighbor as ourselves, that

continued on page 9

Book Reviews

Christianity Without God: Moving Beyond the Dogmas and Retrieving the Epic Moral Narrative. By Daniel Maguire. SUNY Press, 2014. 234 pp. \$24.95 (paper); \$14.72 (eBook).

Reviewed by Dugan McGinley

Based on the provocative title and Maguire's reputation as a compelling scholar, I was very excited to read this book. For all the promise of its subtitle as a work of retrieval, however, it ends up feeling mostly like a work of deconstruction.

There are three foundational "rocks" Maguire critiques and ultimately rejects: first, the idea of a personal God; second, the notion that Jesus was an incarnation of the divine; and third, the whole notion of afterlife existence. He sees these as impediments to truly grasping the moral vision offered by the Bible for a "troubled and troubling humanity." (4) While I think it is a good thing to interrogate these deeply held beliefs and I agree with him that it is the theologian's job to go wherever the "truth" leads (as subjective as this is), Maguire's wholesale rejection of these dogmas strikes me as needlessly reductive—throwing out the baby with the bath water.

Even if I don't like where Maguire takes his critique, there is a good deal to appreciate. He utilizes a wide range of academic sources, from traditional to postmodern thinkers, and he does so in an accessible (if at times a too colloquial) manner. For a compelling discussion of scholarship surrounding the problems with God-talk, the divinity of Jesus, and the afterlife, this book is a good resource.

Gods morph over time and place and represent the needs of particular, historically-situated communities. Maguire observes helpfully, "Gods are the poetic art of a community." (47) Drawing on Brueggemann, he calls biblical characters like David and Jesus "constructions" influenced by other myths of the time, with the people's needs superimposed on them. (63) He also demonstrates how many notions about life after death and bodily resurrection do not stand up to even simplistic scrutiny. (112-114)

I also appreciate Maguire acknowledging that we are constrained by the culturally ensconced beliefs that are broadly held in society. Put another way, "Creative thought, whatever its illuminating discontinuities, is a captive to the thought and symbolic paths and patterns of one's culture." (149) But Maguire then suggests that original thinkers like the Buddha and Jesus would have thought outside of their received dogmatic categories if they could have. Thus, we get the stunning assertion that belief in karma and rebirth are not essential to Buddhism (108), and the proposal that belief in God and an afterlife are not essential to Christianity. While I agree that the moral narratives of these prophetic thinkers can be distorted by supernatural dogmas, I just don't think the separation of their moral philosophy from their worldview can be as clean as Maguire wishes. It is certainly true that Jesus the Jew would never have thought of himself as divine; but it is also true that Jesus the Jew of his time would never have imagined the world without God, so I think we have to be especially careful about letting go of that piece of the pie.

When Maguire finally gets to the project of retrieving the moral narrative of Christianity (in his last two chapters), he does so through a very selective and subjective reading of

the Bible. He exalts the Exodus story but manages to disregard the many violent and gory details embedded in it. He quotes the prophets a lot, especially minor ones like Micah, even though the books preceding the prophetic books cover more historical time. He configures the period of the tribal confederacy between the finding of the promised land and the founding of the united kingdom as the halcyon days when an ethical society was established, again ignoring many contrary details. He even characterizes the "bad" stuff in the Bible as "descriptive," and the "good" stuff as "prescriptive." (151)

I do agree there is wonderful material in the Bible for realizing a positive moral vision, but Maguire's approach to recovering it feels random and, again, reductive. It feels too much like proof-texting. Yes, the poetry and metaphor of the Bible represent the best dreams of humanity, but they also portray the track record of human failure. Personally, I would rather move beyond the Bible and focus on other ethical texts which unite people across religious differences. If one is going to jettison central dogmas like the existence of God and life beyond what we see, why not also destabilize the authority of the Bible rather than reinscribe it?

Maguire would say that there is too much wisdom embedded in texts like those in the Bible to ignore. He criticizes modern atheists (and even theists) for missing the poetry and symbolism of the text by reading it too literally. But I think Maguire gets caught in the trap of many popular atheist writers who rely on scientific method and empiricism so much that they do not make room for the mystical/experiential. This aspect of being human is too complex to dismiss outright the possibility of something more than we can ascertain with observation or express in language. Doing away with dimensions of our faith because of our inability to adequately articulate them lacks imagination and does not do justice to those moments in life when we instinctually know something more is going on than meets the eye. Maguire's own definition of religion is "a response to the *sacred*," which he defines as a word to "explain our peak experiences of value." (11) Even though he claims this can be understood either theistically or nontheistically, I think he is too quick to dismiss the theistic possibilities.

In any case, I agree with Maguire that too much concern about the supernatural world has made Christians lose sight of the justice-centered needs of *this* world. We put our faith in dogmas rather than in our ability to take responsibility for the world's wrongs. As he says, "No deity will come to save this gifted and generous earth. It's a challenge for humans, not for gods." (177) Is it necessary to reject our dogmas in order to realize this moral vision? Maguire has certainly opened up this conversation in a big way. Perhaps this kind of provocation is necessary to get us moving!

Dugan McGinley, Ph.D., teaches courses in religion and theology and is also a music director and liturgist. He is the author of *Acts of Faith, Acts of Love: Gay Catholic Autobiographies as Sacred Texts* (New York: Continuum, 2004) and a number of articles and essays.

Book Reviews

***Saint Katherine: The Life of Katharine Drexel*, by Cordelia Frances Biddle. Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2014. Hardcover, \$26.00. 245 pp.**

Reviewed By Regina Bannan

When Pope Francis talked about Katharine Drexel in his homily at the Philadelphia Cathedral last month, I imagine some of you cheered. Others, including my Boston-area friend Pat, said “Who?” If you were nearer to that latter position, Cordelia Frances Biddle last year published the book for you: *Saint Katherine*. You may know that the Biddle and Drexel families were intertwined; Cordelia is a direct descendant of Francis Drexel, Katharine’s grandfather, and (full disclosure) a personal friend of mine. Her interest in Saint Katherine was deepened when she attended the canonization with many family members, and she decided to put her writing talents to this project. I am glad she did because she has a unique perspective on the two parts of Katharine’s life. And, as a novelist and creative writing teacher, Biddle excels at narrative, telling many compelling stories about Katherine and both her family of origin and her religious family.

Katharine was a debutante, took the Grand Tour, lived the life of an elite Philadelphia woman in the last forty years of the 19th century. The Drexels were devout German Catholics and worshipped at Holy Trinity Church in Center City. Reading Katherine’s biography is like reading a Henry James or Edith Wharton novel set in Philadelphia. But there was also tragedy in her early life, including the death of her mother. Her stepmother was Emma Bouvier, whose brother was great-grandfather of Jacqueline. Emma inspired great charity in her daughters – and then she, too, died, followed not long after by Katharine’s father.

And that begins the second part of Katharine’s life. Katharine had already developed an interest in Native Americans when she traveled out West, but she was bereft at her losses. She decided to travel to Rome and ask Pope Leo XIII what to do with this missionary interest and her large fortune. Instead of directing her to others, he said to her “What about you?” This is what Pope Francis quoted in his homily. Katharine’s uncle was Anthony J. Drexel, a man of great managerial ability who founded what became Drexel University. He and Katharine were close, and I infer from this biography that Katharine had similar skills; however, her entrepreneurship and leadership were applied in a very different field.

Pope Francis emphasized that Katharine was a laywoman, and she was when Pope Leo spoke to her. But she needed an institutional structure to do this work – and she had the

resources to found a religious order, despite having misgivings about it. Biddle’s description of the training and experiences of the young elite women who decided to follow Katharine into the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament would be humorous if it were not so sad. Life on the frontier in the late 19th and early 20th century was difficult, but Katharine forged ahead, making commitments and creating missions in the West.

And in the South. Early on, Katharine expanded her mission to include educating African-Americans, and she confronted racism from the opening of the motherhouse in Bensalem through incidents at missions in the Jim Crow South. Undeterred, she founded what became Xavier University in New Orleans, the first and only Catholic institution of higher education for blacks in the United States.

I have not emphasized Katherine’s deep religious faith, which was the foundation of all her activity. Biddle presents her developing spiritual life and sense of mission well; Katharine moves from dependence on male mentors, mainly bishops and priests, to genuine spiritual leadership of her beloved sisters. Katharine Drexel is a model for all of us as we learn to take on a world hostile to our deepest desires.

Regina Bannan, *President of SEPAWOC*, is retired from teaching at Temple University.

Catholics & Pretense cont. from p. 7

is, follow the golden rule that Francis mentioned a couple of times in his preaching. If doors remained closed, people hounded and persecuted for their views, lives destroyed, and mouths taped shut, and a select, autocratic male group continues to pretend that they know what is best for the rest of us, the world cannot and will not change.

The beautiful kingdom Jesus envisioned so long ago where all people sit down at a table to break bread together in the name of one who loves them just the way they are will remain a fairy tale rather than the reality Jesus expected it to become.

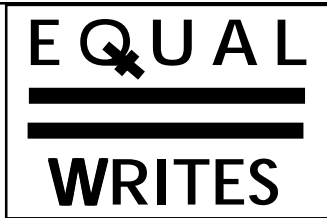
We really can do a whole lot better than this.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a Roman Catholic Woman Priest and a member of the Mary Magdalene Community.

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SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

Advent, Christmas 2015

By *Judith Heffernan, M.Div.*

The WOW/WOC conference was inspiring and energizing for me. The Pope's comments on the plane a week later regarding ordination were painful and paralyzing for me.

I went back and forth between Marge Tuite's remarks at a WOC gathering long ago reminding us of the work we had to do together because the hierarchy doesn't want us, they never wanted us and they may never want us, and Elizabeth Carroll's remarks at the Detroit gathering forty years ago that an embittered female clergy would be an abomination worse than our present situation.

I was very sad. Then a dear friend (another graduate of St. Mary's Academy!), sent me a note which said that being in this work is a long-haul living out of a prophetic role. YES! Onward we go.

So then I thought of the lovely practice of writing to loved ones at Christmas (I'm not very good at sending, but I do love receiving! Do I hear a New Year's resolution??). I thought of the letters of two WOC prophets, Theresa and Joan, as well as the letter with which the WOW Liturgy concluded. Theresa Kane, RSM shared with us at WOW/WOC her new letter to the new Pope as her brother and collaborator. Theresa

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said that she has come to the conviction that anything less than all women in the Catholic community having the possibility of being in all ministries of our church, is a deficit, a wrong and a scandal. Also, that we need to bring a loving, caring, creative God into the center of our everyday lives and eradicate gender inequality. She further urges the Pope to listen to the women of our church and world who cry out in anguish, as women throughout the ages have done.

She spoke to us as well, celebrating that although our journey as WOC has sometimes been difficult, we have endured—which is a quality of prophets and prophecy.

Joan Chittister, OSB hears the call of Pope Francis to see and serve the poor. She writes that women are the poorest of the poor, and to be serious about doing anything for the poor, the Church must pay serious attention to the suffering of women, including that they are ignored and rejected as full human beings in our Church.

Theresa Kane read beautifully and powerfully our closing reading from Phil 1:3-9, and as *EqualwRites* celebrates twenty-three years, I want to share it as my Christmas letter to you, my beloved companions on our journey. "I thank my God whenever I think of you...the One who began this good work in us will bring it to completion...You have a permanent place in my heart".

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