

A VERY PERSONAL CHRISTMAS REFLECTION

by *Karen B. Lentz*

It was a difficult, even brutal time. Cruel wars raged. Large areas of the known world were occupied by a mighty, ruthless empire, intent only on increasing its own wealth and power, heedless of the cost to the region's citizens.

Organized religion seemed to offer little solace. Houses of worship, surrounded by avaricious vendors and money-changers, were the site of rituals led by an arrogant and privileged priestly class, whose corruption drove many away. The temple was poised on the edge of destruction.

And then, the story goes, a decree went out from the emperor who thought he was God, that all the world should be registered, and thus more easily subject to his will. And they went out, each to his/her own city...

Palestine, two millennia ago. The United States, today.

Now as then, people live in fear and anger, are even tempted

to despair, in desperate need of a light strong enough to pierce the darkness. O come, O come, Emmanuel.

It is well into November as I write this, and *Equal wRites* is past deadline as I struggle to find inspiration for a Christmas reflection, inspiration for myself. I am, frankly, disheartened and discouraged by matters large and small, global and personal. I find it difficult to climb out from beneath the dark shadow cast by the Philadelphia grand jury report; I am weighed down by daily news reports of the continuing holocaust being carried out in Iraq in my name. I am angry at those who claim leadership of country, church and city—the pillars to which I might seek to anchor the sometimes floundering craft that carries me on my personal journey—who have failed their people miserably. I fight the feeling I have been cast adrift.

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	EQUAL	Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area
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	WRITES	MISSION STATEMENT - <i>As women and men rooted in faith, we call for justice, equality, and full partnership in ministry. We are committed to church renewal and to the transformation of a structure which uses gender rather than gifts as its criterion for ministry.</i>

ORDINATION AND APARTHEID

by *Marian Ronan*

On two separate occasions within the past year, women's ordination activists here in Philadelphia have suggested that the oppression of women in the Catholic church is analogous, or even equivalent, to the oppression of black people in society. The first of these was Patricia Friesen, the keynote speaker at the WOC thirtieth anniversary conference last March. Dr. Friesen had, as a Roman Catholic sister in South Africa, participated in the anti-apartheid struggle, enrolling black students in the elementary school she directed although such behavior was forbidden. On the basis of this experience, Dr. Friesen, in her talk, drew a very strong analogy between South African apartheid and the refusal of the Catholic church to ordain women.

More recently a SEPA/WOC member related over the listserv that her professor of systematic theology, an African-American, had said that "the oppression of women is exactly the same as the oppression against racial minorities." She inserted this quote at the end of a post in which she considered with dismay the likelihood that married men will be ordained before women in the Catholic church. She compared such an eventuality to US women being denied the vote until fifty years after men of all races secured it.

I have several thoughts about these two uses of the analogy between racial oppression and the denial of ordination to Catholic women. The first is that this new era, the early twenty-first century, is a time of deep discouragement for many in the movement for women's ordination. We can see the ordination of the Catholic women on the Danube and in Ottawa as causes for rejoicing, but the escalation of rhetoric around the ordination *status quo* suggests otherwise, or at least also. As our hearts' desire, that women should be rec-

ognized as equals in the ecclesial tradition we love and hate, seems less and less likely to be fulfilled in the foreseeable future, our responses are increasingly full of pain and anger.

A second thought is that the use of analogy is one of the strengths of the Catholic tradition. "The analogical imagination," as David Tracy calls it, enables the church to include within its doctrine of revelation all of creation made in God's likeness. This is strikingly different from the notion of God's absolute transcendence that characterizes the Augustinian-Lutheran-Barthian understanding of revelation. The Catholic analogy between God and creation allows room for beauty and sacraments and environmentalism. Our use of analogy is sometimes a very good thing.

Having said this, I find the recent, fairly un-nuanced assertions of analogy between black people in society and women excluded from Catholic ordination troubling. In evaluating the analogy between Catholic women and black South Africans, it helps to clarify what we're talking about. Victims of apartheid who filed a claim for reparations in federal court in New York in 2002 listed as characteristics of apartheid, among others, the following: murder, torture, sexual assault, arbitrary detention, and massive imprisonment. On the face of it, however painful and damaging the exclusion of women from Catholic orders may be, it's only slightly like apartheid.

The use of the analogy with racial oppression on the SEPA/WOC listserv was, in some respects, more sophisticated than Patricia Friesen's claim. The writer didn't say that the oppression of women (and, in the context of the post, the exclusion of women from Catholic orders) is "just like" racial oppression; she said an African-American expert said it. An

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Ordination and Apartheid

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African-American theologian has every right to say this, of course.

Whether a white female writer has the right to appropriate this statement to conclude her own argument is another matter. The SEPA/WOC member's earlier invocation of the exclusion of women from the fifteenth amendment illustrates my point here: between 1870 and 1920, white suffragists used scandalously racist (and anti-Catholic) language to secure the vote for themselves. For a white American woman to invoke this history in a piece that also argues, indirectly, that racism and sexism are "exactly the same" omits, at the least, some significant details.

Here are a few other details: at the March conference in which Patricia Friesen offered her analogy, as far as this admittedly near-sighted observer could tell, there were four or five Asians and Latinas in attendance out of an audience of 150, but not one African-American. When I served as president of the WOC Board of Directors I reached out to involve black Catholic women in our movement, meeting with the heads of the Black Sisters' Conference and the Ladies of St. Peter Claver. Both of these women told me their groups had far more pressing concerns than women's ordination.

At the WOC national conference in Milwaukee in 2000, one of the keynote speakers was black, and a second keynoter addressed the problem of racism in Catholic feminism. There were no black speakers at the March 2005 conference, however, and a participant in the WOW conference in Ottawa last July estimated that one to two percent of the attendees were people of color. If racial oppression is just like, or even somewhat like, the oppression of women in the Catholic church, why exactly is our movement so white? By defi-

inition, women who seek ordination in the Catholic church are highly educated members of the professional managerial class. All of the women ordained on the Danube and in Ottawa were white.

The un-nuanced assertion within WOC of the analogy between racial oppression and (implicitly white) women's oppression is discouraging, in part, because feminist scholars have been struggling with the similarities and differences between racism and sexism for many years. One of the helpful tools to emerge from this conversation is the notion of "intersectionality," the compounding overlap between different dimensions of identity. How might a consideration of the uniquely intersectional—raced *and* gendered—oppression of black Catholic women shed light on the ordination question?

Another helpful way to come at similarities and differences between the oppression of women and the oppression of black people is that of alliance, addressed to great effect by Janet Jacobsen in her book, *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference* (Indiana, 1998). By building alliances instead of asserting identities, we may avoid denying the inevitable interstices between groups which can, nonetheless, be transcended temporarily in the service of a shared goal.

What kind of changes would the women's ordination movement need to make to build alliances with black Catholic women and men? Is this something worth doing, or should we stay "focused" on our single issue? If staying focused on our single issue in effect excludes black Catholics, how analogous are racial oppression in society and the oppression of (some) women within the Catholic church?

Marian Ronan's article, "A Sliver of Dry Earth: Reconfigurations of Catholicism in the Works of Mary Gordon," appears in the forthcoming issue of US Catholic Historian.

Christmas Reflection

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Closer to home, here at the Catholic Worker, a new guest is making regular forays into the basement to throw the circuit breakers and plunge areas of the house into (I resist the temptation to say *metaphorical*) darkness. A language barrier makes it difficult to determine if she is merely malevolent or mentally ill. The after-school kids are restive, severely testing the three young volunteers who are staying with us this winter.

And here at *Equal wRites*, Marian Ronan, who has been my chief collaborator in putting out this newsletter for the past eight years, has announced that next issue will be her last as book review editor and regular columnist.

Indeed, the very time, as a great poet once put it, seems out of joint.

A knock at the door interrupts my somewhat self-indulgent ruminations. Our good friend Jim O'R, frail and white-haired, who grew up in a big Irish family six decades ago in this now-radically-changed neighborhood, has come, as he often does, with day-old bread or cleaning and paper supplies he found on sale, or thrift-store toys for the children.

I think of the others—the South Philly Good Guys, a retired teacher in Reading, the Vietnam Veterans, a working mother who grew up poor, a retired college administrator, Mrs. M. from Doylestown, and a host of others—who choose to spend their leisure time not on cruise ships or in casinos but quietly doing God's work—hosting coffee hours in a nursing home, scouring yard sales for children's clothes and books for our neighborhood kids, making holiday dinners year after year

for the homeless, dressing up as Santa and the Easter bunny to delight the children. Suddenly the millions the institutional church has amassed and hoarded, its imperious and egregious misuse of power, seem less important.

It is time for after school, and someone sets out to collect Doria and Moira, two of four children being raised by a grandmother herself ill with severe asthma and cancer. The children's mother is in jail or detox or a halfway house, which is perhaps just as well since she is usually drunk and abusive when she is home.. The grandmother, whose prayer is simply to live long enough to raise the children—"I give it to God," she says with a serene faith that eclipses my own—was hospitalized last week for exhaustion.

As the children clamor in, I think of Joel, who was with the after school for only a short time earlier this year. An unusually sweet and sensitive boy of nine or ten, he listened quietly the day his mother told us they were being evicted due to the misbehavior of Joel's older, drug-addicted brother,

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and would be leaving the area. As after school began, Joel produced two brand new, brightly colored pencils, their coveted erasers unused, and proceeded, all eyes upon him, to carefully sharpen them. Holding the two pencils up for inspection, he selected one for himself. Then he surveyed the room. "Anybody need a pencil?" he asked with a smile, indicating the second one.

After school goes well today. The neighborhood children are bonding with the three young women, two of whom possess freshly-minted degrees in education, who are staying with us as they discern their future. They seem not to be tempted by the possibility of lucrative suburban teaching jobs, new cars and luxury apartments, but are committed to living in community in our poor neighborhood, working part-time and engaging in peace and social action work. As I write this, they are preparing to travel to Fort Benning for the annual Close the SOA demonstration. I whisper a prayer for the many South and Central American mothers of the murdered and the disappeared, this century's Mother of Sorrows.

The young women have fit in well here, and as the house rings with the sound of their laughter, I am reminded of Teilhard's observation that joy is the most certain indicator of the presence of God.

As after school ends, Peaches makes sandwiches for the folks, mostly men, who come to the door daily for food. Jean finishes reading to one of the children, walks her home, and goes into the kitchen to help with dinner. Jackie is upstairs sorting donations in the clothing room. The three women were all formerly or are currently our guests; each experienced times so rocky she was temporarily without a place to live, and yet all three have emerged on the other side, com-

passionate and generous and ready to give of their time and talents to help others. I cannot help wondering if in their places I would have done as well.

Soon people—addicts, the homeless, undocumented aliens who cannot find work, the hopeless—begin knocking at the door, and Peaches presides over as true a Eucharist as I have ever experienced. The Real Presence is no abstract theological construct here; salami sandwiches, lemonade and cookies are unmistakably his body and blood, offered in memory of him and we are all fed.

And suddenly I understood that I am surrounded by people reflecting the Light that entered our world that first Christmas, and I recognize once more the truth of Merton's declaration that we live in a transparent universe and God is shining through everyone and everything.

My thoughts return to the Christmas story. Of course I had been looking for inspiration in all the wrong places. The Child of Bethlehem was not born in the halls and houses of the rich and powerful of church and state, but in a humble stable to a poor peasant woman who surrendered herself totally to God's will. And I am reminded it was my own clumsy effort to follow the Star that led me to this desperately poor, drug-ravaged neighborhood which suddenly is luminous with the very light for which I had been longing.

For there is born to me this day, in this humblist of places—once again—a Savior which is Christ the Lord. Holy Christmas to you and yours.

Karen Lenz is a member of the SEPA/WOC core committee, and the Brandywine Peace Community, She lives and works at the Philadelphia Catholic Worker

WOC ENDORSES STATEMENTS ON SEMINARIANS, ROE V. WADE

At its October meeting in Washington D.C., Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of autonomous Catholic-rooted organizations and committees which share a feminist viewpoint and are committed to an inclusive and participatory church, issued statements on seminarians and sexual orientation, and on the issue of the obligation of Supreme Court justices to uphold Roe v. Wade regardless of personal religious beliefs.

National WOC representatives, present at the meeting by virtue of WOC's membership in Women-Church Convergence, voted to approve the statements, effectively endorsing them.

Some members of SEPA/WOC, the local (but independent) WOC group, reacted to the national's action in regard to the statement on Roe v. Wade.

The texts of both statements, followed by reactions, are printed below. We at Equal wRites believe important issues are at stake in this dialogue, and invite readers to join the discussion by sending their comments to the address on the back page of this issue.

STATEMENTS

RE: CATHOLIC TEACHING ON SEXUALITY

...In light of recent Vatican rumors regarding seminarians who may be gay, Women-Church Convergence confirms that in Catholic communities sexual orientation, just as gender, is irrelevant to fitness for ministry. All ministers, indeed all members, are called to be responsible agents of their own sexuality. Happily, this results in a wide variety of loving

experiences that we celebrate and encourage.

Women-Church Convergence objects to Vatican efforts to link homosexuality and sex with minors in the minds of people. This is a pernicious and false connection. Indeed most pedophilia and ephebophilia is heterosexual and most same-sex love is healthy, good, natural, and holy. We read the Vatican's efforts as a smokescreen to distract attention from the criminal behavior of some priests and bishops, and the equally culpable cover-ups of criminal behavior by many bishops. It is this kyriarchal culture that rewards duplicity and punishes truth-telling that needs to be eradicated.

Women-Church Convergence calls for well-informed study and discussion that will result in renewed Catholic theologies of sexuality. We pledge ourselves to create communities in which all persons can love and be loved openly as is their birthright. Anything less is simply not Catholic.

RE: WOMEN, JUSTICE, AND ROE V. WADE

Women-Church Convergence calls upon all Supreme Court justices to uphold the principle of *stare decisis* (a Latin term that refers to the principle of applying decisions in a manner consistent with prior court decisions) with regard to the existing body of law established under Roe v. Wade, despite their personal religious convictions. Religious beliefs have no place in adjudication of this nation's laws, and the wall separating church and state must be upheld.

All candidates for the Supreme Court, including Harriet Miers, must be selected and evaluated on the basis of their

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competence and experience, not on the basis of their religious beliefs, which are irrelevant to the judicial task.

Women-Church Convergence reaffirms its principle that “Women are, and of right ought to be, the primary decision makers in matters of reproduction, sexuality and women’s health.”

RESPONSES

PRO-CHOICE AND ANTI-ABORTION

I am pro-choice and anti-abortion. I am pro-choice because I don’t believe it is wise to criminalize abortion and put women and their doctors and health-care providers in jail. I believe we should use our resources to reduce the probability of women having unplanned pregnancies, through education and access to birth control from an early age. We should reduce the probability of women choosing abortion by providing universal health insurance and child care and decent wages so they can see a future in which they can care for the children. I was upset that WOC did not opt out of the Women-Church Convergence action taking a position in support of *Roe v. Wade* because, just as with many other groups, this action will be internally divisive and it was an unnecessary step.

Our issue is women’s ordination. Our focus should be battling sexism in the institutional church and supporting women who follow their vocations both within and outside the institution. In doing that, we will have made a major contribution to church reform. Our supporters are on all sides of the *Roe v. Wade* debate. It is not wise to take on this issue and get involved in debates that will drain our resources, our membership and our finances. There are plenty of other venues for that discussion and we can, as individuals, get involved as we see fit.

...*Peg Murphy*

AMEN

AMEN Peg. Did anyone on the WOC board check with their membership before issuing this statement?

...*Eileen DiFranco*

NOT THE PLACE FOR THIS

I am totally opposed to abortion unless the mother’s physical health is in danger. I believe that the human before birth—even way before birth—is as precious and God-designed as the baby who later will be cuddled in arms. Distinctions should not be made; lines should not be drawn. We tread where we do not belong. I am not without sympathy for women/girls who face the challenges of unplanned pregnancy, which should be avoided at all costs. I just believe that taking the life of an innocent human being is not the solution to their trauma. Surely the human mind can come up with a resolution that is more compassionate toward both. Having said that, I agree that national should not be taking a stand here. Violence before birth is a hot button issue, and it will divide and distract us from our focus. I have pursued the quest of gaining justice for the unborn child in other venues. I want to leave it out of this one.

...*Maria Marlowe*

DON’T SPEAK FOR ME

I take strong exception to national WOC’s recent endorsement of the Women-Church Convergence statement about Supreme Court justices and *Roe v. Wade* for several reasons, the least of which is my own (admittedly complicated) position on the issue.

First of all I am not sure WOC needs to take a public stand on either abortion, about which its members disagree, or on

anything as political as the responsibilities of Supreme Court justices, matters that are related only obliquely to the organization’s mission of promoting full participation in ministry. I would not however oppose a discussion about whether the group should consider taking such a stand.

I believe that it is important not to assume, without thoughtful investigation, that we are in agreement, even when we use the same language. Feminist Catholic means different things to different people. I meet every month with eight or ten members of the core committee of SEPA/WOC, and I am acutely aware we have different visions when we talk about the ordination of women. I have believed for a very long time that as a movement we need to be willing to take the risks inherent in tackling crucial yet sensitive issues like abortion—and *Equal wRites* has tried to foster such discussion in the past—precisely because we do not (and do not need to) agree on this subject.

In addition, I strongly object to leaders of groups of which I am a member (ranging from the Roman Catholic church to the US of A to national WOC) speaking for me without making any attempt to consult me first. Assuming that we know what others’ positions are on any subject is a sure route to disaster, one I have traveled a number of times myself. Group leaders are of course free to speak for themselves on any subject, at any time, anywhere. But speaking for the group without knowing (or caring about) the positions of the group’s members is an authoritarian tactic perfected by the (non-participatory) structures we oppose. We must be really careful not to replicate the tactics of the opposition.

...*Karen B. Lenz*

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRIESTS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

My dear brothers in Christ,

I have probably listened to hundreds of your sermons over the course of my life as a Roman Catholic. While I might have disagreed occasionally with what you preached, I always listened with respect and patience. Now I would like to preach a sermon to you, my brothers. I hope that you will give me the respect that I gave you and read all the way through my “sermon.”

The Roman Catholic church has been going through some pretty tough times lately. Both the laity and the clergy have been shaken to the very core of their beings by the crimes committed by your fellow priests—our pastors—against the least among the Catholic community, our beloved, innocent children. We faithful are having a very difficult time understanding how this could have happened, given the fact that you priests view yourselves as being the *imago Dei*. This likeness to Jesus, I have been told, endows you with an eminence of degree that sets you apart and above the non-ordained and places you and only you at the altar of God. Because of what you have been telling us about this priestly status, we, your flock, expected better of you.

Most of you are probably asking yourselves, “What did we do? We didn’t abuse children.” Thankfully, the vast majority of you did not. However, I have several very tough, but thoroughly honest questions I need to ask you.

First of all, where were some of you when some of your brothers were engaged in criminal behavior with children and teenagers? What did you think about your adult brothers whose favorite companions were children or teens? What

did you think happened when your brothers took children to their rooms or to their shore or Pocono vacation homes? Please don't offer the excuse that you didn't know, or understand, or imagine what was going on because quite frankly, I won't accept it. Neither will the parents, nurses, doctors, social workers, teachers, principals, psychologists, law enforcement personnel, and lawyers know that mature adults do not hang around exclusively with kids. And please don't suggest that you thought that the sexual abuse of children was a sin to be forgiven rather than a crime that needed to be punished. We parents don't accept that nonsense either.

This leads me to my second question. I remember when Philadelphia's former Cardinal Bevilacqua returned from Rome in April of 2002 after he and his brother cardinals met with the Pope concerning the sexual abuse scandal. Our former cardinal waxed eloquent when he spoke about "his priests." He literally crowed with smug satisfaction that the entire problem had been solved in one little meeting as he put himself and his band of brothers on a moral pedestal. He did this knowing full well that over sixty of "his priests" had been involved in criminal behavior with children.

This cardinal, who publicly lied to both his priests and his flock, as well as many of his confreres, have tarnished you and your chosen vocation with their cover-up of the scandal. Our leaders have made all of you look really, really bad. In spite of this fact, the vast majority of you remain strangely quiet about your superiors' role in this scandal. Some of you have even painted Philadelphia's district attorney as anti-Catholic. One of you actually wrote to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* stating that the vast majority of Philadelphia's priests stand firmly behind both the current and former cardinal.

The fact that most of you are so very quiet about the role both Cardinals Bevilacqua and Rigali have played in the cover-up and blanket forgiveness of those who enabled your sinful brothers to continue their criminal behavior, gives me, the mother of four children, little comfort. How can I ever be sure that you would choose the safety of my children over the safety of your brothers and the reputation of the church?

I have read a number of articles reporting that many of you are beaten down and discouraged by the scandal. Many of you have said that you are remaining quiet about your own disgust with your bishops because you fear reprisals. The fate of Father Walter Cuerin in Boston has, I am sure, made the rounds of priestly discussion groups. No one wants to lose his job and pension. No one wants to begin his life all over again. Speaking truth to power, especially to episcopal power, can be daunting to those who have pledged obedience to their bishop and allegiance to their church.

Being the good Catholic that I am, I offer you the example of Jesus Christ crucified to give you courage. Jesus challenged the powers and principalities of his time and, as you all know, died doing it. You all signed on to serve him, not your bishops. You didn't become a priest for job security or a pension. Supposedly you had a vocation to preach the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, to the poor, the broken-hearted, the oppressed, and the enslaved. When Jesus asked his disciples if they were willing to drink from the cup from which he was going to drink, he didn't mean that they should give up sex. People do that all the time. He meant that you, as the leaders of the people, were to preach the kingdom of God in the face of religious and political powers and prin-

icipalities that might threaten both your life and your livelihood.

Mary, a favorite of many priests, was unmarried when she was asked by God to become the mother of Jesus. Being men, you may not understand the implications of God's call to Mary. An out-of-wedlock pregnancy in a patriarchal society posed a threat to a woman's very survival. (It still does in many countries). She could have been stoned to death. She could have been ostracized to the point that she had to resort to prostitution in order to feed herself and her son. Mary understood this, even if you do not. In the face of potential personal destruction by the religious powers of her time, Mary trusted enough in God to stand up for her God-given right to choose personal responsibility for her own actions. I would suggest that you reflect more upon her bravery and less upon her virginity.

Howard Thurman, an African-American theologian and role model for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote, "He who fears is literally delivered to destruction." So, I urge you my brothers, stand up for the people of God and for the little children. Tell your bishops that they have grievously sinned against both their flocks and against you all, my brothers, by their refusal to acknowledge their role, indeed, their sin in this horrifying scandal. At the present, our leaders do not have enough humility to begin to understand the gravity of the sins they have committed against their flocks. Their glib invocation of Christian forgiveness for both themselves and the perpetrators glosses over the restitution and repentance which are necessary ingredients for forgiveness. The granting of forgiveness without an admission of guilt and the acceptance of the consequences of sin is nothing but cheap grace. God know that most dioceses are buried knee deep in that stuff.

Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is a registered nurse and seminar student. She is a core committee member of SEPA/WOC.

AT NATIONAL COR: AN OCCASION OF HOPE

by Regina Bannan

Hope is hard to come by. I got a big dose at the November meeting of Catholic Organizations for Renewal in Milwaukee. Part of it was a realization that Jim Callen of Spritus Christi in Rochester is providing counsel to priests who have stood up to church authority and been punished. If anyone models what courage means—and the blessings that attend to risks—it is he. There was speculation that the hierarchy's handling of the sexual abuse crisis would cause what I have always expected to happen—the crumbling of the institution. Too bad it's a financial crumbling—but maybe that's the way it has to happen. Relying on some sort of layperson revolution seems utopian.

Part of it was that we in Philadelphia are a beacon, not because of the grand jury report, but because organizations like Voice of the Faithful, COR, CTA, WOC, Dignity, SNAP, ARCC can work together in the face of crisis. We have always worked together, I say, and we have. We know each other and like each other. We are not afraid of each other. We are only afraid of apathy and authority: apathy despite the anger of the faithful and authority despite the misuse of it in the past by church officials. Will this blow over, too? Come, Holy Spirit, let it not.

The kind of cooperation that comes easily to us locally
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was reflected in the national COR meeting. It takes a while for organizations to mature, and I felt I was really witnessing the maturity of COR. We planned several joint initiatives, including one action a year for women's equality, an outgrowth of the ad organized by Rea Howarth of Catholics Speak Out. At least seventy-one groups, including SEPA/WOC, signed on; the idea is to have a coordinating committee organize the effort in future years and to have a clear, highly visible action.

Bill Slavick, of Pax Christi, Maine, characterized the church as effectively leaderless in this time of great crisis. We took the initial steps to consider how the reform organizations can step in and fill the gaps. I felt more energy than ever before. Let's see. The homilist at the liturgy Sunday noted that it was a young Bill who worked with Memphis Catholic Workers in the 1950s to challenge the racial segregation that was legal then. So if that system can fall, can the spiritual segregation promulgated by the hierarchy be far behind?

Finally, Mary Ramerman of Spiritus Christi is planning a retreat and training program for women priests. Focusing on "applied theology," the program will develop leadership skills. We had a good discussion about the implications of the RC Womenpriests ordinations and the need for continued support for those ordained. And those ordinations will continue, providing another alternative to the hierarchical church. WOC itself is another alternative, and we learned that Joy Barnes is leaving as executive director and Aisha Taylor will be taking her place. I was thrilled to attend the WOC caucus at the CTA meeting, where there were almost as many young people as grey heads. Wonderful work, Joy, and best wishes for success, Aisha.

Regina Bannan is former national president of WOC.

"BLACK CATHOLICS IN PHILA.: THE EARLY YEARS"

by Regina Bannan

In the last month I have visited two churches, Old St. Joseph's and Old St. Mary's, to leaflet and pray about the sexual abuse crisis. On October 30, I used the afternoon to visit the African American Museum to see the photos, documents, and objects depicting "Black Catholics in Philadelphia: The Early Years." It was odd to move from one scandal to another: now the bishops' sexual abuse cover-up; then the national stain of slavery which even Quaker Philadelphia did not escape.

The exhibit was organized by the archdiocese's Office for Black Catholics to document this minority population that sometimes is invisible to the mainstream of the church in our city. The earliest records indicate the participation of enslaved persons in church life; they were baptized and married in the very parishes I had visited. The captions made clear that the variety of notations in the copied records (Ethiopians, servants) referred to slaves because they generally indicated their Catholic owners.

There were also free people, including the Dutrieuille family, whose ancestor had come from Haiti and whose family operated a catering business for many years. While little was exhibited that documented the struggle to end slavery, here or in the nation, by the end of the nineteenth century Philadelphia was hosting the 1892 Congress of Colored Catholics, which had showcased prominent Catholic African-American speakers. Advocacy as well as faith was the focus of this group, which published its national newspaper here

during that year, an example of the widespread networks common to American black life in this period.

The institutional focus that I expected in an archdiocesan exhibit was not overwhelming. By the end, I understood something about the segregation of blacks, first at Holy Trinity, the German parish given charge of the community in the 1880s, and then at parishes like St. Peter Claver (1892) and St. Ignatius (1920s). The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, founded by Mother Catherine Drexel, thread through the entire exhibit; they took leadership in developing services and schools. There were many photos of school and communion groups, but there were others of a good number of individuals celebrating their weddings and other church-focused events.

Similarly, integration was another unarticulated theme; the exhibit noted the first African-Americans to attend Catholic high schools, among many examples. Eighteen black priests had been trained in the archdiocese before 1950; six gathered for a photo in 2000, the most recent in the exhibit. The Lee-Billings family was featured; William Lee came to Philadelphia from Washington, where he was freed after serving the Jesuits. Down to his great-granddaughters at least, his descendants became sisters who took leadership roles in their congregations.

The most recent object in the exhibit was a gorgeous stole worn at the 1976 Eucharistic Congress; its black, green and red abstract design echoed the black power symbols of that era. Woven through the exhibit was a series of abstract watercolors by Augustina that depicted black faces in various scenes in the life of Christ. They were powerful, too, and provided a subtext to the exhibit: blacks finding themselves in the life of faith. A whole other exhibit could be done on "the recent years," but that would be more difficult, with parishes in the inner city consolidated and many others more truly multicultural.

The exhibit closed November 6. Watch for it if it is presented elsewhere. While there could be so much more said in the interpretive materials, the visual impact of this history is thought-provoking. The participation of African-American Catholics cannot be ignored.

Regina Bannan teaches American Studies at Temple University.

PRAY-ERS, PERFORMERS, PROTESTERS NEEDED

Street theater, colorful prayer and movement flags and banners, outsize puppets, balloons and a protest action involving—or not—planned civil disobedience are among ideas being floated as planning begins for SEPA/WOC's annual Holy Thursday Witness in Support of Women's Ordination, which for twenty-plus years has included a program of prayerful reflection, song and peaceful witness.

We have seen the truly terrible consequences of leaving what belongs to all of us in the hands of a small circle of self-appointed, so-called "leaders." IT IS TIME TO TAKE BACK OUR CHURCH or be resigned to watching as it continues to self-destruct.

Come off the sidelines this year. Consider being a player instead of just a supporter or observer. Involve your prayer or parish groups, your classes, your colleagues, relatives and friends. If any of the above ideas speaks to you—or if you have some of your own—come join the planning. Contact Eileen at LEOTCAT@aol.com, or call 215 232-7823.

It's not the fights you dreamed of. but those you really fought...

HUDSON RIVER ORDINATIONS

by Mary Byrne

The Hudson River begins as a gurgle in Lake Tear of the Clouds in the Adirondack Mountains of New York and winds its serpentine path towards the Atlantic ocean. Along the way it gradually takes on the bountiful repose of a Reubenesque woman changing everything she touches with her full-bodied presence. Anyone who has lived by the great river find it difficult to resist her charm for she does so gracefully what we do so arduously: she simply does what she was created to do and flows.

On the banks of this river, on Pentecost Sunday, May 15 of this year, six women answered the call to do what they were created to do and were commissioned into various ministries by their community. Three women-Celia Langlieb, Millie Gorman and Anna Shankey-were ordained into the priesthood. Mary Anne Nugent and Jane Jendrasiak McElhatton were commissioned into liturgical ministry within the community. Mary Byrne, who was ordained ten years ago by the Catholic community of Union Theological Seminary, was blessed in her continued ministry.

The commissioning was the culmination of several years of discernment by Spirit Rising, an inclusive small faith community founded eight years ago by the six women. During that time, the community moved from being a rotating house church to its current location in a convent basement to accommodate a growing congregation. Along the way, continued reflections on what it means to be a renewed church (or as one member likes to say the "Reformed Catholic church") necessarily provoked discussions on a renewed priesthood. Four years ago, Bishop Peter Hickman visited the community in response to our invitation to regard the possibility of some members being ordained by him. It was a pivotal encounter realizing the unexpected resolve within the community that any commissioning should be called forth and blessed by Spirit Rising in line with the apostolic tradition of the early, non-hierarchical communities of the faithful

So began our journey to Pentecost Sunday 2005-rather unwittingly, I might add. For what began as cautious inquiries were now before us as certain questions: Are some of us called to ordained ministry? What does "ordained ministry" mean in a renewed community? Is ordained ministry inherently hierarchical? Will ordination adversely effect a community founded on the "priesthood of the people?" Just the beginning of many, many ruminations. Looking back, it would have been impossible not to pursue the questions although none of them were easily answered or even gratefully embraced at times. There was always the concern that in changing the way things were we would lose the sense of who we were as an inclusive community.

The glue that held us together was an implicit understanding of ourselves as a "discipleship of equals" and a commitment to protect the integrity of our community as such. In the end, years later, what evolved was a decision to call forth the women into the various ministries that clearly reflected their liturgical and pastoral gifts while keeping in mind that leadership was a shared ministry of the entire community and that the community was held together by a myriad of different gifts contributed by all its members. But in the beginning that was the unknown outcome that gently led us one step at a time.

Initially, a process was established that would provide a time for reflection on the meaning of ordained ministry within a renewed church environment. What became apparent immediately was that each of the six women as well as members of the community had different and often opposing perspectives on ordained ministry. Clearly, we could not entertain a monolithic commissioning ceremony, since our calls were so variant as well as our self-understandings as ministers-or priests. Indeed, even the language surrounding renewed ministry was elusive and controversial. While some women eventually moved towards requesting that the community "ordain" them as "priests" others eschewed both phrases as carrying too much hierarchical baggage. And even within the latter perspective, there was a divergence in terms of public sacramental ministry and liturgical ministry solely within the community.

This, or course, was the moment of the spirit. What seemed to be falling apart on the surface was merely reconfiguring at a deeper level. Somewhere along the way, we recognized that the diversity of our approaches to ministry is essentially and dynamically symbolic of a renewed church. We were imagining a new paradigm for community and priesthood. And so we continued.

Finally, in September of 2004, at a community gathering after liturgy, the women expressed their desire to be called forth into ministry by the community and in preparation to present their ministerial intentions in the spring. In March 2005, the six women came before the community with their individual Statements of Intention which reflected their particular sense of ministry in keeping with the spirituality of the community. The two statements below reflect both the diversity of those intentions as well as the community's willingness to step outside rigid definitions of ordination and allow for the fluidity of the call.

Celia Langlieb: *I come before you today and publicly acknowledge that led by the Spirit and grounded in faith, particularly within this liturgical prayer community, that I be called forth and ordained into public sacramental ministry.*

Jane McElhatton: *I ask your blessing on my ministry in this community. I pray that God will pour out the Spirit upon me, through all of you, that I might be enabled to prepare meaningful liturgies and be an instrument of sharing and unity among us.*

In April, the community responded with overwhelming support. Two of the women in our community spontaneously offered written responses that because they so eloquently returned to us the fullness of our expressed ministries became part of the commissioning service. For the next month, community members met to create the May 15 ceremony that favored communal anointing rather than the ecclesial ordination. Ironically, we were doing it the old-fashioned way-from within not above.

It is impossible to articulate the hope of that day when the six women were commissioned into ministry by the Spirit Rising community in the presence of their family and friends. Most of the sixty people in attendance wept throughout the service. Prior to the moment of anointing, each of the six women was called forth and reiterated her intention to respond to the particularity of her individual call to serve. The

continued to page 8

Hudson River

continued from page 7

six were anointed by a representative (of their choosing) from the community followed by a general laying-on-of-hands by all the members. There was a sense that all participated in the sacramental moment and that all were transformed.

The experience of discerning, calling and commissioning—not just the six women but the entire community—has breathed new life into Spirit Rising. We have unearthed the richness inherent in diverse expressions of ministry. We look around us and rejoice in the multiplicity of the gifts. We give thanks for the presence of the Spirit rising amongst us and calling the entire community forth to witness to a renewed sense of church and ministry.

Spirit Rising meets once a month in northern New Jersey. We welcome your presence. Please contact Millie Gorman at Gorman93@aol.com for information regarding dates, time and place.

Mary Byrne, a founding member and liturgist of the Spirit Rising community, is a Roman Catholic woman ordained to the ministry of writing, teaching and spiritual direction. She is currently writing a book on Catholic women in ordained ministries.

PHILADELPHIA AREA ALTERNATIVE WORSHIP

by Maria Marlowe

“I’ll never set foot in....” “My 85-year-old mother has stopped....” “No priest near my soul....”

The events of the past few months have left even committed Roman Catholics reeling. The feelings of betrayal, rage, and frustration are all painfully obvious to everyone—even those who never turn an eye toward religion in the news.

It is in this spirit of awareness that we offer a partial light of area sites for alternative worship in the Roman Catholic tradition—places which extend an invitation to our readership and those beyond it, to those who already were borderline Catholics and those who have recently become so. It is an invitation to visit a different sort of worshipping community and perhaps find sustenance there.

But before we discuss alternative worship, and lest we be accused of profiting from others’ pain or delighting in our opponents’ troubles, we want to make one thing clear. Our purpose here is primarily to offer options to Philadelphia Catholics, many of whom have been injured by recent events—options which may provide comfort and hope to those dealing with the aftermath of events and revelations that have left many of the faithful hopeless and confused. Jesus was born in the midst of great political tension, poverty, ignorance, and despair. Yet God did not abandon her beloved ones then and she does not abandon them today. In the midst once again of such religion-induced suffering, God offers us another chance. In this holy season, here are some places to join with others in joyous anticipation.

Listed below are three small faith communities which gather in the name of the Child of Bethlehem, intent on pilgrimage, to rejoice and to praise. There are others as well. *Equal wRites* will be happy to print details of other faith communities’ regular liturgies in subsequent issues. To have your community listed, contact Maria Marlowe at 610 526-1320.

COMMUNITY OF THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT

The Community of the Christian Spirit (CCS) began in the late 1960s in the light of Vatican II. An invitation was issued by a local women’s religious order to come together to experience renewed liturgy. Those who came could return and share this experience with their parishes. The people who attended these Sunday liturgies were eventually told by the archdiocese that they could no longer worship at the motherhouse to fulfill their Sunday obligation. Canon Law declared it was a semi-public oratory meant only for the religious congregation. The community then relocated in order not to cause the sisters any difficulty—but members were committed to staying together. Thus began the Community of the Christian Spirit. Thirty-five years later we are much smaller, but we are still an active, worshipping community!

Most of us consider ourselves pre-Vatican III Catholics. We are an intentional eucharistic community, and we value our traditions. But we know we are called to keep responding to a living, moving Spirit. We honor the call of married priests and women priests and welcome them to celebrate with us.

A CCS liturgy is personal and honest. We always have time for sharing with and caring for each other; we respect each other’s faith and integrity; we dialogue, question and act. We pray, share, and celebrate Eucharist. We give thanks for the good news of the life and message of Jesus. We try to be loving people of peace and justice.

We often joke that the only three things we agree on are peace, optional celibacy, and women’s ordination—but that’s okay. Our hearts, minds, and doors are open.

We too are suffering from the recent revelations about our church and archdiocese. We too are angry. However, we realize that anger must take place within love and not take the place of love. We work for dialogue, healing, and change in our church and in ourselves.

Judy Heffernan, a member of CCS since 1977, was ordained a priest by that community in 1980.

Community of the Christian Spirit (215-572-5623)

Worship: Elkins Park; first, second, fourth, and fifth Sundays of the month at 10:15 a.m.; third Saturday at 5:15 p.m.

CHURCH OF THE BEATITUDES

What follows is the statement of Rev. Bernard Callahan, pastor of the Church of the Beatitudes.

The Church of the Beatitudes began when the parish I attended failed to respond to issues that I felt were critical to any follower of Jesus.

The Boston abuse story was ignored as a local issue and the formation of Voice of the Faithful was marginalized in a major way.

The parish would not take a stand on war even though a vast majority had voted to do so, as if Jesus could sit on the fence about it.

The archdiocese changed the liturgy to move laity (spell that w-o-m-e-n) away from appropriate participation; no one thought to defend the parish’s community-developed and beautifully implemented eucharistic participation.

There was a verbal assault on gays and, although the parish had a large gay community, solidarity with them was deemed not appropriate.

I had been ordained a priest in the Old Catholic Church and had maintained for several years a weekly ministry to a

nursing home. Yet there was a call to do more, especially in the formation of a small faith community. The real impetus was the continued failure of the Catholic church to witness for Christ in the public forum, along with the clericalism that gave lay people no voice. Our first liturgy was on August 15, 2004, the Feast of the Assumption.

Spirituality issues forth from the community. We are inclusive and nonjudgmental and we recognize our own weakness and sinfulness. Our liturgy is quite Catholic but recognizes other basics such as the need to honor the feminine aspect of God, general absolution after general confession, and the right of all baptized in good faith to be welcomed to the communion table. Our church ordains women and in doing so enriches its own spirit as it receives the powerful contributions that women offer in our lives.

I enjoy the general feeling of our community—that we are all on a journey and that our strong faith and the healing power of Jesus are always with us on this journey. We try to attend to seeing Christ in all and hope to grow outward as we grow inward to do the work of God on earth.

To those hurt or angered by “crisis” in the church, remember that YOU are the church and no one can take that away from you. Be vigilant but courageous and positive too. Reaction can be.....reactionary and lead down negative paths. Jesus is the Eternal Positive and we are called to follow. Some personalities may be difficult to stomach but we are called to a deeper love than they can imagine. They need our criticism in abundance and our prayers even more. We are called.

www.churchofthebeatitudes.org
fatherbernie@verizon.net

CALL TO ACTION-PHILADELPHIA

Call to Action-Philadelphia (CTA), an organization of lay people and religious, embraces the gospel message of compassion and reconciliation and seeks a church that is open and just in structure and practice, reflecting an inclusive and joyful community.

All are more than welcome to worship with us. The Roman Catholic liturgy of the mass is used but the presider at the Eucharist determines the readings and theme of the homily. All those present are welcome to share their thoughts at the homily. The eight to twelve communicants who generally attend find the experience not only inspiring but also a source of mutual support for our faith. In this time and place it is important that we focus on the true meaning of our lives in the light of the message Christ sends us over the centuries.

Our church is at an impasse today trying to determine how to deal with the trap in which it finds itself. The trap is that over the centuries it has equated the institution with our faith.

They are not the same. The church is a fallible and sometimes venal endeavor. Our faith is not—it lives in each of us. It is wholesome and joyous to sometimes share the Eucharist with fellow Catholics who can separate the dross from the gold

Paul Steubenport, CTA-Philadelphia

Worship: Jean Donovan Maryknoll House, 6367 Overbrook Avenue (second house right off Lancaster Ave); First Sunday of each month, 10am. (Confirm time and date by going to the website or calling the following number 215 752-7493 www.cta-philadelphia.org

Maria Marlowe is a member of the core committee of SEPA/WOC and is a candidate for the diaconate in the Apostolic Church of the Beatitudes.

BRASS ONES

When hot on the heels of the grand jury report, an official-looking envelope arrived in the mail bearing the return address of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, our first—and all too fleeting—thought was that it contained a statement by officials accepting responsibility for the seminary’s role in the events, reports of which, in horrifying detail—with names and photos—had recently been spread across pages of the Philadelphia papers, and expressing their deep contrition and firm resolve to make significant changes in the spirit of atonement.

Dream on.

Inside the envelope, right on schedule, was the annual November appeal for the archdiocesan seminary, with rows of boxes listing the size of donation enclosed, ranging from \$10 to “Rector’s Circle—\$5000 or more.” Oh, yes. The seminary will also accept gifts of securities, and for your convenience, take VISA and American Express.

Some people might find this evidence of incredibly insensitive ecclesial hubris. Our friend Joe shook his head and put it another way. He opined that the monsignor—presumably the rector of the five grand and up box—had “brass ones.”

WHAT DON’T THESE GUYS GET?

If, like most of us, you will not be digging out your checkbook in response to this appeal, consider making a donation instead to one of the many groups working for church reform—Call to Action, FutureChurch, Dignity, Catholic Parents of the Delaware Valley, SNAP, Federation of Christian Ministries, or AARC, to name a few—or to us, SEPA/WOC. Addresses are available from websites or call us at 215 232-7823 and we’ll happily supply any information you may need.

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

MINISTRY OF IRRITATION

On a feast day you came
Spirit-Led, oops
yet another woman of extravagant
Love

A woman who gets things done
You did it—Spirit-Led
you crossed the line
and entered *their space*
spashing him, rebaptizing him
dangerously
the oil flowed alive,
moving in dynamic Spirited
rhythms
perfuming, scented, alluring
you drew us in—anointing him

Oh woman who dared to bring him
Beauty

Oh woman who dared to feed his
soul

who heard the Voice
who named the Truth
reminding him, reminding, him,
naming, calling him in your
poetic display of divine madness
Mary of Bethany

an Easter Morning woman claiming
The Easter Morning Man...
freeing woman
we remember you

. . . Janice Sevre-Duszinski

WE ARE CHURCH REACTS TO VATICAN STATEMENT

We Are Church, an international Roman Catholic church reform group which aims at renewal in accordance with the Second Vatican Council, issued the following statement in early December.

The fact that one of the first documents licensed by Pope Benedict XVI discriminates homosexual men entering the priesthood is very disappointing to many Catholics, not just those who are most directly affected, says Christian Weisner, chair of the international We Are Church movement.

The Vatican Instruction on “Homosexuality and Ordained Ministry” ignores the consolidated findings of human sciences, historical sciences and social sciences.

It also ignores Jesus’ own teachings and explicit behavior towards marginalized persons and the prevailing purity codes of his time.

The instruction does not eliminate the ordination of homosexual men in principle. Nonetheless, it betrays an alarming lack of comprehension. The description of “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” as “objectively disordered” is scientifically wrong and is a clear discrimination against all homosexual humans.

“Once again this instruction shows in an appalling way the ignorance and helplessness of the Roman Catholic Church in the handling of questions of sexuality”, says Weisner.

“It is also hypocritical. The instruction speaks of homosexual tendencies as a transitory problem ‘for example, that of an adolescence not yet superseded’. But the rigid sexual ethics of the Roman-Catholic Church make a positive integration of sexuality into one’s personality rather more difficult than promoting it.”

The International Movement We Are Church is committed to change in the Church’s official and theological approach to homosexual people. We advocate for the Gospel imperative toward marginalized persons, so that they are regarded as fully human and equal members of the church, able to have their call to ministry tested, and considered trustworthy members of our church.

National Women’s Ordination Conference Membership Application

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EUCCHARISTIC SYNOD FAILS TO ADDRESS BIG QUESTIONS

by Regina Bannan

Most of the month of October at the Vatican was devoted to the Eucharistic Synod. It got Cardinal Rigali out of town at what was probably a good time for him to be away. Not much was reported about his interventions, however. There were fourteen women auditors who did not get to say anything—but they did not have the opportunity. The fabulous Sylvia Poggioli of NPR covered the synod in two reports which quoted Christine Shenk, CSJ, of FutureChurch, who was in Rome for the whole event. If we are not officially represented, we still have access to the media.

Those who did participate moved the church only a little. At least there was discussion of *virii probati*—the kind of married men who might be considered for ordination: tested. Sounds like a Henny Youngman joke! Four of twelve study groups of delegates thought it would be useful to review whether married men could be priests, and, apparently, national bishops' conferences still might request doing such a study. Chris Shenk raised this question: how would that affect the many married, single, and religious women who have been serving as pastoral leaders? Someone with less experience and possibly less education may be brought in to lead, doing what these women have been doing. To me, this may just reinforce the sexism in the church now. We can imagine *mulieres probatae*. It never came up, not even women deacons. However, CORPUS is gearing up to identify married men who are called to priesthood and who “would like to challenge the policy of mandatory celibacy,” in the hopes of moving this agenda forward. They are looking for women called to ordination to support their effort (www.corpus.org). Like the FutureChurch position on women deacons, I go along with partial measures, believing that they will go nowhere anyway. We need to support each other and work out our differences in private.

At least the priest shortage was on the agenda; it was not, originally. I really think the relentless attention of FutureChurch and others—I hope you signed the petition—

helped, as did the delegates from the third world. The Eucharist was affirmed as a “right” of Catholics, not some special “gift” to be meted out as clergy are available. Strategies for addressing the shortage were “same-old” and bankrupt: pray for vocations; step up recruiting efforts; reduce the attraction of secular society; redistribute priests. I think it is the attraction of our affluent societies that brings priests from the developing world to the United States and Europe; there are fewer priests per capita elsewhere.

The synod confirmed the liturgical changes of Vatican II and Pope Benedict XVI even intervened to affirm that the Eucharist is both a sacrifice and a communal meal, the theology of Vatican II. I am still distraught about the recent changes to the liturgy that over-emphasize the role of the priest, but at least this synod did not carry that spirit further. The curial cardinals still exercised a lot of power, very consciously, able to do so partly because of the weak theology of some of the bishop delegates. Yet there was more open discussion than in synods during the papacy of John Paul II. Marian Ronan might suggest that the resolution on the Eucharist as the dynamic source of action for peace, global social justice, and the environment should not really encourage us. What does this mean if the Eucharist is becoming rarer? Yet we cannot forget our true faith in the midst of such benighted human struggles; receive communion with this knowledge.

WOC Bishop Murphy Scholarship

The Women's Ordination Conference is accepting applications for the \$1000 Bishop Frank Murphy Scholarships for the 2006-7 academic year, to be awarded to women enrolled or accepted in certificate or graduate programs preparing them for Catholic ministry. The programs can be diocesan, college or university based, or in other institutions of religious studies.

Scholarship applications must be postmarked by January 30, 2006. For further information: Scholarship Committee, Women's Ordination Conference, PO Box 2693, Fairfax, VA22031-0693, 703-352-1006, programs@womensordination.org.

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Reviews

Sixtieth Anniversary Film Review: *The Bells of St. Mary's*, (Leo McCarey). With Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman. 1945. Republic Pictures Home Video. 126 min. \$9.98.

reviewed by *Lea Pierce*

*Oh, how joyfully,
Oh, how merrily
Christmas comes with its grace divine!
Grace again is beaming
Christ the world redeeming;
Hail ye Christians,
Hail the joyous Christmas time!*

In terms of proving conclusively their inalienable American pedigree as a way of overcoming anti-Catholicism, American Catholics, had they tried, could not have constructed a more powerful piece of propaganda than *The Bells of St. Mary's*. To that end, *The Bells of St. Mary's* stands as perhaps the crowning achievement of what film historian Francis G. Couvares calls “a new generation of Catholic clerics and lay intellectuals whose ambition increasingly was to speak not only for their coreligionists but also for Americans as a whole. ... Catholic thinkers ‘were much closer in their intellectual and emotional response to the great majority of Americans’ in their acceptance of the American status quo.”

More important than its achievement as political and social propaganda, however, I believe *The Bells of St. Mary's*, through the redemptive action of Father Chuck O'Malley, established the core iconography and popular understanding of Catholic grace that in fact set up the church for unfairly hyper-critical media attacks that have been uncritically delivered during the current priest sex abuse scandals.

Father Chuck, as you will remember, is the jaunty young priest sauntering down the streets of New York City dressed in a black suit, roman collar, and straw hat. Played by the ever-jovial Bing Crosby, Father Chuck “personifies a particularly American, improvisational approach to life.” As such, he becomes, through his film portrayal, a bridge between the Old World and the New; more importantly, he becomes the iconic image of a new invention, the *American Catholic Priest*.

The idea, action, and experience of *perfect grace* saturate this film. Consider the words from one of the film's theme songs: “Grace again is beaming/Christ the world redeeming” might as well be rewritten to “Father Chuck again is beaming/Father Chuck the world redeeming,” for here is a

priest whose very presence seems to turn around difficult, unpleasant, even sordid situations—like Jesus, his presence redeems the world.

Father Chuck redeems a fallen woman (Mrs. Gallagher), effortlessly reuniting her with the husband who ran out on her thirteen years previous and forced her into prostitution; Father Chuck redeems Mrs. Gallagher's child Patsy, who presents herself to him in a “fallen” state (dressed up as a grown woman with makeup, etc.); Father Chuck redeems Horace Bogardis, the curmudgeonly capitalist who through the good father's machinations turns over his brand-new building to the sisters. And finally, Father Chuck redeems Sister Benedict—not only from her over-reliance on rules and regulations, but from her belief that she has somehow failed the school, and so is being sent away.

So Father Chuck is perfect, as is Sister Benedict, and by extension so is the Catholic church. I'm sure I'm not the only Protestant (or Catholic, for that matter) who believed that every priest was Father Chuck and every sister wept glorious, beautiful, incandescent tears of *redemptive grace* when confronted by heartbreak.

And I think the Catholic church and everyone in it or associated with it, participated in and encouraged this beatific vision of the church. Why wouldn't they? (Protestants would love to have that kind of iconic imagery, too, but will never be able to pull it off without establishing a priestly class, which is antithetical to the Protestant project.)

Given this image, which soaked into the bones of everyone who watched this and similar films in the forties and fifties, it is no wonder that when the earthen vessel was revealed, there was (literally) hell to pay. The shock with which the priest sex scandal has been received by Protestants and Catholics alike is related to the sort of shock that occurs when a child finds out there really is no Santa.

In some ways, perhaps it's best that we have been stripped of our naiveté; on the other hand, I and everyone else who grew up in that era will always believe that, *if we could just get it right*, we could recapture the purity of a perfect grace, which is born and cradled in an innocence this world simply does not allow.

And maybe that's why we keep coming back to church; sadder, wiser, but with a belief and a hope that those perfect tears Sister Benedict shed can be shed by us, too.

Lea Pierce is a student at the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, CA. A slightly shorter version of this article was submitted to fulfill a requirement in the ABSW course, “Religion and American Film.”

REGARDING THE MALE EGO

In the beginning, God created Eve in her own image, and placed her in the Garden of Eden, and for a short time everything was good. But before long Eve became bored and lonely, so God said to her, “I will make you a mate.”

“What's a mate?” Eve asked.

“A mate is someone like you in many ways, but bigger and physically stronger. He will love and protect you, and be your companion for the rest of your life.”

“Sounds good,” Eve said. “Do it.”

“There's just one thing,” God said. “We'll have to let him believe I made him first.”

SEPA/WOC E-MAIL LISTSERV

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

A Feminist Companion to Paul, edited by Amy-Jill Levine. *Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings* 6. The Pilgrim Press, 2004. x + 227 pp. Paper. \$21.00.
reviewed by Judy Yates Siker

A Feminist Companion to Paul is the sixth volume in a new series, *The Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings*. This collection of essays (some new, some previously published) includes the work of authors representing a wide range of perspectives and provides the reader with a good sampling of feminist readings of the undisputed letters of Paul. The volume is comprised of the following: Daniel Boyarin, "Paul and the Genealogy of Gender"; Diana Swancutt, "Sexy Stoics and Rereading of Romans 1:18-2:16"; Luzia Rehmann, "To Turn the Groaning into Labor: Romans 8:22-23"; Beverly Gaventa, "Our Mother St. Paul: Toward the Recovery of a Neglected Theme"; Kathleen Corley, "Women's Inheritance Rights in Antiquity and Paul's Metaphor of Adoption"; Sara Winter, "Philemon and the Patriarchal Paul"; Richard Hays, "Paul on the Relation between Men and Women"; Margaret MacDonald, "Virgins, Widows, and Wives: The Women of 1 Corinthians 7"; Faith Hawkins, "Does Paul Make a Difference?"; and Luise Schottroff, "'Law-Free Gentile Christianity'—What about the Women? Feminist Analyses and Alternatives."

In a thorough and insightful introduction, editor Amy-Jill Levine offers summary of and comment on the essays in the collection. According to Levine, the *Companion* series was created with the hope of offering new insights to and bridging gaps between church and classroom; presenting a broad approach to the topic; and including authors outside of Western Europe, the US and Canada. While this collection of essays clearly works toward these goals, its success is stronger in some areas than in others. For example, all the essays are accessible to a wide range of readers, but some are definitely more accessible to an academic audience. The esoteric nature and the sophisticated argumentation of several of the essays assume a deeper knowledge of Pauline scholarship than a church group typically possesses; other essays, however, could easily serve as a springboard for ecclesial discussions. This volume also falls somewhat short of its goal of offering a "global perspective" (p.3). Only two authors (Rehmann and Schottroff) are non-North Americans. Having noted these two minor critiques, it must be pointed out that the one goal unquestionably achieved is that of offering a breadth of approaches. A brief comment on the essays themselves will demonstrate this.

Daniel Boyarin and Diana Swancutt emphasize the influence of the Greco-Roman cultural world on Paul's writings. Boyarin offers a new way of reading Paul generated "by feminist reading practices, politics and theory" (16). By careful analysis of cultural images, ideas and stereotypes of gender and marriage, he describes an epistemological and cultural trap in which both ancient and modern readers are caught. The work is thick, but a close reading offers a new idea for understanding the apparent discrepancy between Paul's ideas on gender in Gal. 3:28,29 ("...there is no longer male and female.") and 1 Cor. 11:1-16 ("...the husband is the head of his wife."). Swancutt offers a new perspective on Romans 1:18-26 through her analysis of the *topos* of the Stoic sage. Like Boyarin, she is concerned with Greco-Roman ideas of gender. While her contextualization of Romans 1 in this trope

may be somewhat overstated, she calls us to remember the ubiquitous influence of the Greco-Roman culture on Paul's writings.

Two scholars focus on maternal imagery in Paul. Luzia Rehmann (whose essay was translated from the German for this volume) argues against traditional understandings of Rom. 8:22,23 ("...the whole creation has been groaning...") as indicative of suffering and suggests that Paul's use of birthing imagery in this passage represents not suffering, but rather an active participation in the birthing of a new world. Paul's use of maternal imagery is also the focus of Beverly Gaventa's essay. After reviewing several passages (including 1 Cor. 3:1,2; Gal. 4:19; Gal. 1:15 and others), Gaventa suggests that these rather complex metaphors may help us understand how Paul subverts the traditional social constructs of his day.

In addition to essays that focus on Paul's Jewish or Greco-Roman cultural milieu, this volume includes Kathleen Corley's study of Paul's use of the word for adoption (*huiothesia*) in which she argues that Paul's use is gender specific; Winter's analysis of the slave/free dichotomy in Paul's letter to Philemon; and Hays' approach to Paul's views on sexuality as seen in 1 Corinthians (an approach that serves as a conversation partner to Boyarin's essay).

MacDonald addresses issues of evangelization and group identity and, in contrast to many other scholars of today, argues that this problem should be recognized as present in the undisputed letters of Paul and not only in the later pastoral epistles. Hawkins addresses gender issues by non-gender specific passages.

The volume ends on as strong a note as it began. Schottroff's essay (translated from the German for this volume) is a provocative piece. Her approach is, as always, an unapologetically bold argument and in this essay she highlights the anti-Jewish elements within the Pauline corpus.

In summary, this volume provides today's academic and ecclesial readers with challenging essays demonstrating not only the complexity of the Pauline corpus but also the diversity among the feminist approaches to the biblical text.

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Centers for Spiritual Growth and Support

The following centers and groups offer programs and activities of interest to progressive Catholics. If you would like to include events in the *Equal wRites* calendar, please contact Cassie at 215-467-8898 or peacecatphilly@yahoo.com

Franciscan Spiritual Center, a contemplative place of simple beauty, respectful of creation, and reflective of the Franciscan values of hospitality, mutuality and Gospel living, offers programs which are holistic, ecumenical, collaborative in nature and supportive of nonviolence. The center provides accommodations, space for spiritual direction, prayer, study, art and exercise on a beautiful, handicapped-accessible campus. Clare House offers a quiet place for contemplation, guided retreat weekends and directed prayer. For this Advent season, the center offers two retreats in December: *Hollowing Out the Darkness with Light* and *Waiting in the Cave of the Heart*. Widows and widowers can seek spiritual support in February at the *Twilight Retreat*. Reiki training, grieving support and Taize prayer are also ongoing. For more information, call 610 558-6152 or check the web site at www.osfphila.org. The center is at 609 S. Convent Rd. in Aston, PA.

Jesus House Prayer and Renewal Center is a Roman Catholic center that is open to people of all faiths. The mission of Jesus House is to offer programs, prayer support, spiritual direction, and hospitality toward all God's people. Its quiet, reflective atmosphere fosters reconciliation for those who separated from church or society. The center offers a variety of retreats, personal growth seminars, book studies and days of reflection. Groups are also welcome to use the center's facilities for their own programs. Days of Prayer and Reflection this winter will include *Advent Weavings*, *Praying with St. Francis de Sales* and *Conversational Prayer*. Come to the center in December also for an Advent Evening Prayer. For more information, call 302-995-6859 or check the website at www.jesushousecenter.org. The Center is located at 2501 Milltown Road, Wilmington, DE 19808.

Kirkridge is a retreat and study center rooted in Christ close to the earth where people of diverse backgrounds find community and experience the transforming power of the Spirit for personal wholeness, reconciliation and justice in the world. Its work is based on the understanding that the life of faith requires not only action to transform the world toward greater shalom, but also the cultivation of a deep spirituality to sustain that compassionate action. Kirkridge hosts a *Peacemaker Training Institute* in January, as well as *Knitting Into Mystery*, a knitting and contemplative prayer retreat; *The Sermon on the Mount* with John Dear and in February, *the Art of Lovingkindness* and *Light to Read By: Literature and the Religious Imagination*. For more information on these and other programs, call 610-588-1793, check the site at www.kirkridge.com or e-mail kirkridge@fast.net. Kirkridge is located at 2495 Fox Gap Road in Bangor, PA.

The Lourdes Wellness Center, a ministry of the Franciscan Sisters of Allegheny, New York, is sponsored by Our Lady of Lourdes Health System. The center hosts a wide variety of wellness workshops, offering programs on yoga, meditation, feng shui, hypnosis, aromatherapy, guided imagery for pain management, Feldenkrais method, reiki, shiatsu and reflexology. The center also offers special programs for older adults through its 50-Plus Club. Experience poetry as a spiritual exercise at the once-monthly Poetry Circle or join with other survivors of breast cancer in the Pink Ribbon Poetry Group, which meets twice monthly. The center will host an Advent Retreat Day in December. The Lourdes Wellness Center is on 900 Haddon Avenue, Suite 100 in Collingswood, NJ. Please call 856-869-3125 for information, or check the website at www.lourdeswellnesscenter.org.

Mary's Vineyard welcomes people of all faiths. All those alienated from the traditions of their upbringing will be given opportunities to continue their search for meaning. Although primarily focused on the needs of women, the center is open to all who have accepted the responsibility to form and care for future generations and who desire to share their burdens and joys with others. For information about upcoming programs at Mary's Vineyard, please call 856 428-5495 or check the website at www.marysvineyard.org. Mary's Vineyard is located at 1812 Haddonfield-Berlin Road in Cherry Hill, NJ.

At **Pendle Hill**, education is envisioned as the transforming of people and society. Programs offer the resources and time for integrated spiritual, intellectual and personal learning. Guests come to Pendle Hill to study, learn more about Quakerism, seek an experience of community living, deepen prayer and spiritual life, or discern a future direction. This winter, join with others *In Search of Authentic Community*; learn more about *Activism and Contemplation* or *Prayer and Peacemaking*. Bring in the new year with a musical program, *Art of the Great Interpreters* or with a semi-silent retreat, *Open Heart, Peaceful Mind*. Or join in the *Quest for Personal and Social Transformation* with Gandhi, Dorothy Day and Malcolm X. Social Action and Social Witness Internships support and encourage young people who are, or wish to be, actively engaged in social justice work. For more information on any Pendle Hill programs, call 610 566-4507 or check the website at www.pendlehill.org. Pendle Hill is located at 338 Plush Mill Road in Wallingford, PA .

Local Groups Working for Peace, Justice and Equality

The **SSJ Center for Spirituality** is a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill rooted in the charism of unity and reconciliation. In a spirit of hospitality, the center welcomes individuals and groups for spiritual direction, retreats, and other opportunities for deepening one's relationship with God, self, and all creation. Directed prayer weekends are scheduled in both December and February and individual retreats may be arranged at the Cape May retreat house. This season, enjoy an *Advent Retreat Evening* or an *Advent Day of Waiting*. If your spirit's feeling the need for some attention, try January's *Mid-Winter Tune-Up*. For more information on these and other programs, call 215 248-7231. The SSJ Center is at 9701 Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill, PA.

Temenos, an outreach ministry of the Swedenborgian Church, is a nonprofit conference and retreat center. It exists to facilitate renewal and transformation in human lives in the Swedenborgian spirit of inquiry and personal growth and the belief that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life. Programs are open to persons of all spiritual traditions and the sacred space of Temenos is also available for private individual retreats and for groups wishing to reserve space for their own programs or events. Visitors are welcome at worship Sundays followed by a spiritual discussion group. Come to Temenos for ongoing Yoga classes, for Mindfulness Meditation or to join the Course in Miracles. If you've suffered a loss and find the holidays challenging, join with others for a *Holiday Bereavement Program*. Or try an interfaith exploration of divine guidance by *Experiencing the Angels*, one in a series of programs about angels. For information call 610 696-8145 or e-mail programs@temenosretreat.org. Temenos is at 1564 Telegraph Road in West Chester, PA.

Local Works for Peace, Justice and Equality

ANCHOR (A Non-Denominational Community Harvesting Our Resources) is a group of Christians committed to living creatively and reflectively. Its mission is to engage in the holistic exploration of contemporary spiritual/religious/moral issues. Communal prayer days and discussion groups, one each in the fall and the spring, address relevant topics of religious and social concern. The "Universe Story" study group meets on the third Wednesday morning of the month, September through May. Discussions focus on the interface between science and faith, with an emphasis on ecology, cosmology, and the increasing urgency of mutuality, sustainability and justice. For particulars on any of the above programs, call 215 233-4929 and request a calendar of events.

The **Brandywine Peace Community** continues its peaceful resistance to the manufacture of weapons by Lockheed Martin and to America's presence in Iraq. Join the community for a monthly potluck supper and program on the second Sunday of each month, 4:30 pm, University Lutheran Church, 3637 Chestnut St., Philadelphia (bring a main dish, salad, or dessert to share.) Upcoming events this winter: December 11 Human Rights Day Observance, "Human Rights and Haiti"; December 21 Christmas Candlelight Vigil for Peace at Lockheed Martin and January 17 MLK Day of Nonviolent Resistance. For information, call 610 544-1818 or e-mail brandywine@juno.com. For updates, see the site: www.brandywinepeace.org.

Call to Action/Philadelphia, a group committed to church renewal, serves southeastern Pennsylvania, south Jersey and Delaware. For information on organizational meetings and programs, call 215 345-1176.

COR/Philadelphia (Catholic Organizations for Renewal) is a coalition of individuals and groups, including SEPA/WOC, sharing a commitment to a renewed church. All are most welcome to attend planning meetings. For information, call 215 232-7823.

Dignity Sunday Liturgies are at 7 pm at St. Luke and the Epiphany Church, 330 S. 13 St. in Philadelphia. The church is wheelchair-accessible. For information on these and other Dignity programs, call 215 546-2093.

House of Grace Catholic Worker holds a liturgy and potluck the first Monday of each month September through June at 1826 Lehigh Avenue. Contact the house for details: 215 426-0364.

Philadelphia Catholic Worker hosts liturgy and potluck every Thursday at 6 pm at 430 W. Jefferson Street. The Philadelphia Catholic Worker is a community striving to follow in the footsteps of Dorothy Day. A newsletter, "Common Life," is available upon request. For information, call 215 232-7823.

Sacred Heart Peace Community in Camden New Jersey invites you to its third Annual Gathering for Peace and Justice in Camden, "Teaching Peace and Tolerance", on Saturday, February 18. Featured speakers are Celeste Zappala and Sr. Margaret McKenna. Small group workshops and lunch provided, free of charge. For information, call 215-467-8898.

Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference core committee meetings with liturgy are held monthly, and all are welcome. For information on time and location, call 215 545-9649.

Women of Faith, a ministry of the Metropolitan Christian Council, is an ecumenical community in the greater Philadelphia area that celebrates women's gifts in Christian ministry and seeks justice and equality for all women in the church and the broader society. Women of Faith endeavors to foster Christian unity through worship and education, bringing together persons from diverse cultures and backgrounds for mutual nurture, support and service to the larger community. Join Women of Faith for a monthly potluck supper. For information, contact the Metropolitan Christian Council at 215 836-7784.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

Christmas, 2005

Isaiah 9:1-6

by Judith A. Heffernan

It is November 11—the anniversary of the Armistice to end all wars, and I see the latest statistics from the Iraq War: 2,032 US deaths, 15,220 US wounded, 3,509 Iraqi police and military deaths and 30,163 Iraqi civilians killed. It is surely a heartbreak for us all.

As a person who wanted to be a Philadelphia priest since I was six years old, as a person who has spent her entire professional life with young children, I found the recent grand jury report especially devastating. I realized that I had really believed in my heart that no widespread abuse had happened here. How very mistaken I was. It is surely a heartache for us all.

I am reminded of my Christmas homily from last year and look through it. I read, “A theology professor at the University of Munich wrote that many of us are in a state of collective despair. Because of this, the *NCR* editor has encouraged us to set our lives against futility and despair.” Further, Joan Chittister advises that for the sake of the One whose birth we are celebrating—don’t lose your nerve now!

I pray the Isaiah Christmas Scripture, “...upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light will shine..a child is born

to us...the Prince of Peace...you will bring abundant joy.”

There have after all been hopeful signs this year. Brother Roger of Taizé, a minister of the Swiss Reformed Church, a prayerful man of peace and reconciliation, received communion at the funeral of John Paul II from the hand of the Roman Catholic eucharistic minister—Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger!! (Now we can proclaim, Brother Roger, pray for us.)

Hans Kung had a four-hour lunch with Benedict XVI. Neither had to be silent!

The Holy Thursday/Ordination Day WOC witnesses have a new patron saint—Rosa Parks, pray for us.

I draw hope and joy, too, from my favorite poet—Karen Lenz—“...our love was strong enough to stop the bombs...together we changed the world.” Have hope! We can do it again. This land is your land. This church is your church.

Let us bless each other with the prayer of a favorite Christmas blessing, “...May some chorus of angels surprise us in the night with a song unbelievably beautiful about something unimaginably good...and may Jesus be born to us, in us for a world divided between Herod and Caesar.”

Amen!

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

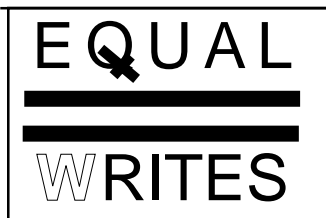
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MANUSCRIPTS AND CORRESPONDENCE: If you would like to contribute an article, letter, or anything else to *Equal wRites*, please send it double-spaced, with your name, phone number, and a short biographical note. The next issue will be March 2005. Final deadline for submissions is January 15. Send to the editor: Karen B. Lenz, 430 W. Jefferson St., Philadelphia, PA 19122 (215) 232-7823, equalrites2005@aol.com.

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