

# STATE OF THE MOVEMENT , YEAR'S END 2007:

## TWO VIEWS

### ETHICAL CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMEN'S ORDINATION MOVEMENT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

by *Marian Ronan*

The US movement for the ordination of Catholic women emerged alongside other liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s, including the US civil rights movement and the broader women's liberation movement. Because this is the case, it can be argued that women's ordination activism and the second wave feminist theology that underpins it were during the 1960s and 1970s ethical undertakings. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, critiques by feminists of color and "third world" feminists called into question the structuring liberal/universalist world-view of second wave feminism that seemed to include all ("diversity," "full equality") while obscuring the exclusion of less privileged women and men. This language and world view have been fundamental to the

Catholic women's ordination movement.

By the year 2000, the eruption of the Global South—its burgeoning populations, its massive suffering under neoliberal capitalism and western environmental degradation—had become the primary ethical challenge facing Euro-Americans, including Euro-American feminists. The Catholic women's ordination movement has had difficulty registering this massive shift. This is so, in part, because the issue of women's ordination focuses primarily on the problem of the exclusion of highly educated women from the leadership cadre of the Roman Catholic church. Increasingly repressive actions by the Vatican and the Roman Catholic hierarchy regarding women's ordination have also contributed to a certain tunnel

*continued on page 5*

	<b>EQUAL</b>	<b>Catholic Feminist Newsletter for Women and Men in the Philadelphia Area</b>
Vol. XVI No. 3		DECEMBER 2007 – FEBRUARY 2008
	<b>WRITES</b>	<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b> - <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>

### ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS: ANOTHER WAY

by *Eileen McCafferty DiFranco*

It seemed to the seminary chaplain to be the perfect thing to do. Women's Day in South Africa provided the opportunity to introduce the seminarians to a woman homilist, who, by chance, was also their professor. Alas, it was not to be. When Dr. Patricia Fresen, a Dominican nun, a veteran teacher, and seasoned seminary professor began her homily, her students booed and hissed her off the pulpit. The insult was not lost on Dr. Fresen. The boos and hisses, as hurtful as they were, pulled the curtain back from what a seminary professorship once protected her from seeing. Catholic men would protect their turf with every tool at their disposal, including cruelty from those who would be pastors. Patricia Fresen was forever finished with that type of seminary.

For Marie Evans Bouclin, the sexual and professional abuse of women by men in the church provided a watershed moment. Bouclin noticed that many priests and bishops tolerated women as sexual partners, secretaries, administrators or pastoral assistants as long as they "put out." One step over the line—an independent thought, a request for a raise, a commitment, a vacation—and the women were gone without a trace to be replaced by fresh blood. Bouclin describes her work with abused women in her book *Seeking Wholeness*. Marie Bouclin came to believe that there needed to be another way of doing church business.

The words "another way" describe most of the women—and men—who are members of RCWP. All of the members of the Roman Catholic Womenpriest movement tell different stories about their pathway to ordination. Some performed priestly duties for years as parish administrators baptizing babies, marrying couples, presiding at funeral and communion services, often to be abruptly replaced whenever another

"Father" arrived on the scene. Others worked in parishes in various capacities in RCIA, adult education, or children's liturgy. Some worked as retreat directors, chaplains, spiritual directors, or professors of theology. A few were long-time members of WOC, devoting many years to promoting women's ordination, and then finding that they themselves felt called to ordination. Some were asked to be priests for people who needed a Roman Catholic community where they were welcomed without reservations or qualifications. Oth-

*continued on page 6*

#### **This IS the next issue of *Equal wRites!***

Thanks so much to all of you who responded so generously to our appeals, either Judy Heffernan's letter - the most sincere and sincerely responded-to appeal we have ever done - or my note in the last issue. We are here for another year, when we will again ask you for support. UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOU WOULD LIKE TO GIVE *Equal wRites* AS A STOCKING STUFFER FOR SOMEONE WHO SHOULD BE READING IT! The core committee encourages you to spread the word by giving a gift subscription so that the word spreads for four issues in 2008. Of course, if you are new to *Equal wRites* or if you are looking for contribution opportunities for tax purposes at the end of this year, consider us. We'd like to be sure to be able to print as many copies as usual before our Holy Thursday and Ordination Day witnesses, and we are not sure right now. Mail your new subscription or contribution to SEPA WOC, c/o Marianne Jann, Treasurer, 49 Driscoll Drive, Ivyland, PA 18974.

And again, whatever you can do, the core committee of SEPA/WOC thanks you so much for your consistent support and wishes you peace and persistence in the New Year.

**Regina Bannan**, president

**EDITOR'S NOTE**

*The four articles which appeared in the last issue of Equal wRites under the banner headline, "The East Coast Ordinations / Four Perspectives," occasioned an unprecedented reaction, as varied as the original articles themselves. All of the responses submitted for publication follow. In addition the article beginning on p.1 of this issue "RCWP: Another Way," addresses some of the questions raised in last issue's article, "An Affirmation - With Questions." And we invite you to join the discussion.*

*Equal wRites—and I personally—absolutely affirm and support the ministries of the three members of SEPA/WOC's core committee—Judy Heffernan, Eileen DiFranco, and Maria Marlowe—who have been ordained at different times, in different ways. I am sorry if anything in the discussion suggested otherwise.*

*But that is not the same as uncritical, unquestioning agreement with all of the actions or tactics of all of the groups or institutions with which these women are or have been associated, including the Community of The Christian Spirit, the Roman Catholic Womenpriest movement, the Church of the Beatitudes, and the Community of Saint Mary Magdalene. Blind allegiance has long been the explicit expectation of the hierarchical Catholic church—with disastrous results. We can—we must—do better.*

*Karen B. Lenz*

**RESPONSE TO "WHAT'S YOUR HOBBY?"**

I start with the assumption that *Equal wRites* publishes pieces that move the discussion forward with regard to the ordination of women and welcomes dissent. Having said that, this piece raises issues without clearly stating facts or a position. It makes veiled accusations that could be hurtful to the accused and yet leaves wiggle room for denying that what was implied was meant.

I refer first to the rhetorical device of stating that the author will not state or argue particular points, thereby raising them and stating apparently negative opinions in a backdoor sort of way, *e.g.*, whether "women priests" is an oxymoron and whether we need priesthood at all. If the author believes "women priests" is an oxymoron and that priests are not necessary, then those proposition need to be stated forthrightly and defended.

The issue of whether "women priests" is an oxymoron, *i.e.*, whether a priest can be female, is foundational to the women's ordination movement. The theological argument on that was won decades ago, and can be read at [www.womenpriests.org](http://www.womenpriests.org). If the writer is not convinced, then that must be said boldly and that position defended. Such a discussion might enlighten the reader. The same must be said for the issue of whether priests are needed at all. If no, then put that position clearly on the table and defend it.

The next section seems to analogize elementary school children following a fad (regarding candy treats) to women seeking ordination. (Again, the comparison is not made directly and leaves wiggle room for denial.) The analogy goes further and suggests that children hoard the candy and use it as a way to get one-up on one another. In my view, these analogies seek to trivialize and demean not only the individual women who seek ordination but the movement as a whole. The individual women are accused of behaving like children and merely following a fad. The women's ordination movement is accused of placing in competition the vari-

ous roads that women have taken to ordination and, further, that these various groups are behaving like eleven year olds, gloating about which group has ordained the most women. These analogies are offensive. Moreover, as they assume facts not supported by any evidence and imply that the author knows the personal intentions of all the women seeking ordination, as well as those who support them, (which is clearly impossible,) the analogies are an unfounded and grossly unfair attack.

The writer then refers to the impact of these ordinations on the institutional church and points out that the church doesn't recognize any of them and is unlikely to do so. The point seems to be that all of the efforts and actions of the women involved are and have been pointless and, presumably, they should stop. Since the writer does not come out and say that exactly, one is left to assume. Once again, the writer is left with wiggle room for denial.

Regarding the impact of the women's ordination movement on the institutional church, in my view, impacting (renewing) the institutional church is but one goal of the movement. Other goals include, but are not limited to:

- serving the people of God, now, especially those who have been excluded;
- creating models for the way women (and men) will minister and be priest when a "critical mass" of women has been ordained;
- mentoring women who feel called to serve in this way;
- educating the faithful regarding misogyny in the church;
- strengthening bonds with other denominations and religious groups; and
- speaking out on issues when the institutional church's voice is muted, *e.g.*, the occupation of Iraq, universal health care, etc.

From my perspective, these are worthy goals and, on many of them, the movement has been successful, *i.e.*, it has made progress.

The hobby analogy follows. The writer speaks of catching butterflies as a hobby she enjoys and continues to pursue her hobby because "it fulfills a need in me." It is apparent that the writer, without saying so explicitly, considers the pursuit of ordination by these women and the women's ordination movement as a whole to be a hobby, comparable to chasing butterflies. The implication is that seeking ordination is not worth doing and the reason women engage in the pursuit is to fulfill their own needs.

Comparing the quest for ordination to chasing butterflies and stating that the work these women do is simply a hobby is breathtakingly insulting. To imply that choosing such a goal, which fulfills a need in these women, is somehow wrong, is not to understand what makes us human. Of course the work or life style we choose fulfills several needs in us. We would be pretty miserable if it didn't. We can each go back to Mazlow's hierarchy of needs to find what needs our work or lifestyle choices fulfill. The unstated implication here, though, appears to be an accusation that these women are seeking ordination simply to fulfill a need for self aggrandizement. If that is not what is implied, then please tell us what is. If this is the author's implication, then it should be stated boldly with the supporting evidence. If there is no evidence, an apology is due and the accusation must be withdrawn.

In summary, dissent, dialogue, battling ideas, and raising issues that bother us, even if they are not fully articulated,

are all necessary if the movement is to reach its goals. However, healthy dialogue and dissent requires that: the issues be stated clearly and directly, without subterfuge or equivocation; civility and mutual respect be maintained; personal disagreements be dealt with between the parties in private first and brought to the group, only if they impact the group, and brought in a good faith attempt to settle the dispute amicably.

“What’s *Your Hobby?*” is an opinion piece and each of us has a right to his/her own opinion but not to his/her own facts. The opinions that are published in *Equal wRites* should be based on clearly-stated facts. This piece contained no facts and laid down innuendo in place of opinion. As such, it struck me as cowardly and not worthy of publication in *Equal wRites*.

*Peg Murphy*

## WONDERFUL SPECTRUM

To the Editor:

I just received a copy of *Equal wRites* so I am writing on 11/20 when the first reading for the mass of the day is from the second book of Maccabees and what pops out to me (come Holy Spirit) when Eleazar is offered a way out of breaking the Judaic law...a “simple” one re: eating pork...story goes: “But Eleazar made up his mind in a noble manner, worthy of his years, the dignity of his advanced age, the merited distinction of his gray hair, and of the admirable life he had lived from childhood; and so he declared that above all he would be loyal to the holy laws given by God” (and Eileen DiFranco takes me on and she is formidable when it comes to the pen (or the keyboard as it were!) This is what touched me; not for everyone.

This being said, what a wonderful spectrum of responses you provided...and may I say I only received notice we needed \$\$ for newsletter; I heard nothing about an “ordination” in my home town, so I agree with Karen and Magdalena that “secret” and private party does not augur well for the feminine dimensions that women are reportedly meant to bring to structures that are male modeled.

Judy’s “Magical” so describes Judy’s view or appearance. She may have her shadow side, but she seems to view everything as great and wonderful when it comes to women and good men who support women and her love of “Bishop” Patricia’s story...how come the *New York Times Magazine* in the summer knew the name of the man in the vault and said he was defrocked???

And Eileen, might she remember at the Holy Thursday event when she wore the white collar like the male clergy do and we were listed together as recipients of the Mary Magdalene Award I said I guessed I was getting mine for all my civil disobedience and she was getting hers for canonical disobedience? Wouldn’t that be similar to being called “dissidents”

I was touched to see Eileen refer to one of the women in my former religious community and wondered why she didn’t give her name and why would Sr. Sara meet with you all if she viewed you as dissidents?

My dear spiritual director who just died once wondered, to me, why the community sent Sara to Theology and not me...his bias,...but I was only known as the funny one, not a scholar and now when I see how long and faithfully she has worked for the church I can only thank God for her being the community’s choice.

Like “Bishop Patricia,” Sara has taught in seminary for

many years and has studied the question of women as priest. I believe she’s writing or finished a book on the subject so she knows from whence she speaks. And while it may upset Eileen and others that the church claims the apostolic roots and the rest as spin-offs—to put it in my language—it was not a direct result of the cancellation by the Lutheran pastor...one of life’s peculiar co-incidents but I loved how Eileen played it up...she is so clever with words, but a little unloving herself when she says/asks “why did the Lutherans heed the fear-mongering of a papal representative.” No wonder God kept Sara from meeting with you. You might have devoured her!!

Karen’s article absolutely resonates deep in my heart, except I wish she had not chosen to call the RCWP ordination an indicator of the *progress*, perhaps “process” would suit my sensibilities better. But remember the four 60 year olds sound like kids to me, so I guess I will have to acknowledge that I don’t see the RC church allowing women as priests in my lifetime and if so, married with children would be the last in line. Especially when mass is presided by an African, African-American or Asian male and I think “OK God, I guess you will want men of color before more Euro-descents, even (white) women.” And, by the way, I find it absolutely fascinating that, by and large, so many of the women seeking “ordination” are those who went through the most traditional of Catholic lives, married, had children, did all kinds of good church and, I’m sure, community and world related stuff and then what? Sang “it’s my turn?” or only then the Holy Spirit spoke? I guess each story is unique but it gives me pause...anyone else wonder?

Magdalena’s take completely delights me and can be a wonderful examen of conscience for any and all of us. The world, indeed, “is too much with us, late and soon.” I understand one effort toward correcting an injustice can contribute to healing injustices in any part of the world, but we run the risk of being so self-focused that we have no energy to fight for what may be the greater need and I dare not presume to know what that is but this war sure gets me down and my week in federal prison for protesting its start does not immune me from continued protests.

Now then, while I’m at it, my thoughts on other features in what could be the last newsletter of WOC and therefore unprinted thoughts!

As to Fr. Fox, I told him at his Kirkridge retreat (the day Pope John Paul die, before all the other guests, that I came to bring him back (to the RC church) and he said out loud he never left!) So what “takers” is he looking for? And yes, the Pope is a sinner as are we all, which also makes me love this church which so welcomes sinners!

And don’t you have to love Jim Plastaras? He seems to want to lift the women of the Gospels up for our edification...most of us have lifted them up for ourselves a long time ago or we wouldn’t have been able to believe we are equals in God’s/Jesus’ eyes since the church’s language of “He, he and him” doesn’t do it for us!

As to Maria’s article re Mary Magdalene community, did I miss a copy of *Equal wRites* that explained what happened to the Church of the Beatitudes, if that’s the place form which her new group was torn asunder? I think the reason for the tear would be important for WomenChurch folks to know about, or is that a secret too? Just asking.

Judy, of letter to editor, not to worry. In our St. Vincent parish we petition writers lean more toward the peacemakers than the war makers! And your “Scripture Reflections” only reinforce my impression of you as the sweet open

woman you are. If the church ever makes it ok for women/priests, you're my "guy!"

**Bernadette Cronin-Geller**

*is a long-time advocate for equality for women in the church and whole world especially for including feminine dimensions of God in all aspects of our worship. She is a St. Vincent de Paul parish, SEPA/WOC member.*

**NEEDED DISCUSSIONS**

Dear Editor,

In the article "Behind the Scenes" it mentions that the vote taken in support of Sr Joan Chittister to speak at the WOC conference in 2002 was 127 with one abstention. The sister abstaining was Sr Joan. The other sister who was slated to speak at the conference that year was told she couldn't speak because if she did the Vatican could replace the superior of her order with a priest. St Benedict in his wisdom did not give that power to Rome over the Benedictines. So the Vatican had no choice but to look the other way when the vote was taken in support of Sr Joan.

What I would like to see in print by female theologians is a discussion of the message of Jesus that each of us has the divine within us, that Jesus never asked anyone to declare him their personal savior, that he never said he was God or the messiah, that he never said he was going to die for someone else's sins.

**Mafalda Faillace**

**WHAT'S MY HOBBY?**

To the Editor:

I have devoted a lot of thought to this since Magda Eliasova's article in the last *Equal wRites* I do spend a lot of time on women's ordination that I could more pleasurably devote to other things. Certainly I might find more relaxation than I do working for reform in the Catholic church – or for a union for adjuncts at Temple, my other major activity these days. Pleasure and relaxation, not paid occupation – that's my dictionary's criteria for "hobby." Ordination is the vocation of those women who have chosen it "irregularly" – it does not begin their paid career for many historical reasons, but it does affirm their preoccupation with creating a new vision of church now and their willingness to devote their personal resources and hard work to it. Pleasure? Relaxation? Probably not. Satisfaction? Service? I hope so.

**Regina Bannan**

**... and WHAT'S YOUR CONTEXT?**

to the Editor—

As an inveterate educator, I am convinced, as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin famously insisted, that "nothing is intelligible without its context." Sometimes I even try to convince others of this. We all know what happens to people who go to seminary. Ostensibly (or ideally, whether formally ordained or not), they minister. We who read *Equal wRites* now know what happens to people who go to law school. They argue. Sometimes, if no one else is around, or interested (and before, after and whether formally admitted to the bar), they pick a fight—or even argue with themselves, as in the case of butterfly-chasing law student Magdalena Eliasova, whose provocative, if disturbingly unintelligible, essay, "What's Your Hobby?" got front-page play in the October-November 2007 issue.

Perhaps if the writers and editors/publishers of this price-

less "feminist newsletter" were paid (and had more "free" time, already generously given), we could demand clearer thinking and finer tuning, but since an appeal for funds to keep it afloat appears on the same page, maybe a timely question is: What can we readers/thinkers/activists do to shore it—and ourselves and others—up? My durable conviction: Consider the context. Always. All ways.

If ordination is too agonizingly elusive for some, so be it. The same can be said of law school, training for the Olympics and a doctorate in any field. If support for those who are led (or driven) to pursue such things seems not worth the investment, simply withhold it. Put your energies elsewhere. But please don't presume to recognize and dismiss complex circumstances and personal allurements that remain unknown to you; above all, never even *seem* to equate what is deeply experienced by some as a "vocation" (WOC is still a linguistically "Catholic" endeavor, is it not?) with an ephemeral, if beloved, hobby. None of us can say for sure that seemingly secular pursuits are not experienced by the pursuer as spiritual (butterflies and c.v. credentials included); neither is it clear that what's presented as religious or spiritual is not *basely* secular.

Whether we're oriented ministerially or juridically matters in life as lived. For example, a recent poll of "Catholic opinion" based on a random sample of Catholics in five countries on four continents reports that "even in the face of an AIDS epidemic that costs millions of lives, the Vatican stubbornly refuses to lift its ban on condoms. [This] position holds the most sway in the countries least able to deal economically and medically with the disease...In Ghana, married women are three times as likely as unmarried women to contract HIV; in Europe and North America, few Catholics reported having heard their bishops and priests preaching against the use of condoms. The Catholic hierarchy's teachings can profoundly influence people's behavior, *even if following those teachings runs contrary to their health and that of their families.*" Jon O'Brien, president of CFFC, notes: "This is a battle with very high stakes. In recent years, more and more bishops and priests have been speaking out against the Vatican's opposition to condoms. There are substantial theological grounds—and even more humanitarian and compassionate grounds—to change this policy. It is high time for that change to happen..." [Source: *Catholic-organizations-for-renewal@googlegroups.com.*]

Let it be known that contextually, at heart and in history, we are siblings, embedded in a world where life and death rise up to meet us, bidden or not. Joy and struggle are our inheritance. In the limited time we have, in whatever place (or places) we find (or lose) ourselves, we can learn to be more mindful of the shared, if challenging, context of our lives. Let our legacy be that we have created and discovered ways to empower one another.

**Maria A. Myers**

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**LOOK WHO'S ON THE WEB!**

For information about women's ordination, and updated information about SEPA/WOC activities, check out our website: [www.sepawoc.org](http://www.sepawoc.org).

## ETHICAL CHANGES

*continued from page 1*

vision on the part of Catholic women's ordination activists. Nonetheless, the Women's Ordination Conference, the US organization advocating for women's ordination, has recently taken steps to come to terms with its own white privilege, focusing on questions of race and class at its national gathering in 2000, and since then adopting an anti-racism program as part of its strategic plan. It has been less pro-active in analyzing the universalist rhetoric ("the discipleship of equals," etc.) that obscures its own race and class identity.

Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP) is an organization separate from the US Women's Ordination Conference (WOC), though WOC collaborates with and has supported RCWP initiatives. RCWP began in the late 1990s when a number of theologically trained women from German-speaking countries who felt called to the Catholic priesthood began preparing themselves for ordination. In 2002, seven of them were ordained on a boat on the Danube River by a bishop claiming apostolic succession but belonging to a church that had separated from the Roman Catholic church. Since then, according to the group, three of their members have been ordained bishops by unidentified Roman Catholic bishops in good standing. The apostolic succession of these ordaining bishops is believed to legitimize the several subsequent ordinations conducted by RCWP bishops in Europe and North America.

RCWP maintains that it has undertaken these actions exclusively to resist the unjust law that excludes women from ordination by the Roman Catholic church. But the question of justice, and justice to women, has become much more complex since the eruption into consciousness of the Global South, including those pockets of the Global South embedded in Europe and North America. Roman Catholic Womenpriests is a European group which has now extended its activities to the US and Canada. It justifies its actions in the universalist language of an unspecified "women" and "inclusivity" that is far less ethically appropriate than it was a third of a century ago when the women's ordination movement began. Accompanying repeated references to inclusivity on the RCWP webpage, for example, are many photographs and videoclips of (with one exception) exclusively white faces. In 2007, when white Euro-American feminists proclaim, as RCWP does, that "inclusivity is their hallmark," an

appropriate response is "exactly which women do you mean?"

Claims of "inclusivity" by an almost exclusively white Euro-American group are troubling enough, but a further examination of the RCWP's webpage turns up other problematic practices. These involve unnuanced assertions that the situation of women who are excluded from Catholic ordination are like black South Africans struggling against apartheid and African Americans struggling against segregation. These comparisons are central to two of the most prominent documents on the RCWP webpage—one characterized as "a primary source of information regarding RCWP," and the other a talk delivered by a RCWP bishop at the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the US Women's Ordination Conference. The last paragraph in the first of these concludes:

*Like Rosa Parks, whose refusal to sit in the back of the bus ignited the civil rights movement, Roman Catholic womenpriests are leading the Catholic church into a new age of equality for women in the church. Like Jesus, inclusivity will be our hallmark as we welcome all to God's table of plenty at the Banquet of love. Inspired by our ancient sisters who have gone before us as apostles, deacons, priests, bishops, and leaders in the church, we embrace our call to live Christ's vision of Gospel equality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Emphasis mine). (In Bridget Mary Meehan, Olivia Dako, and Victoria Rue, "A Brief Overview of Womenpriests in the History of the Roman Catholic Church," 1-9 (2006) Roman Catholic Womenpriests, [http://www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org/RCWP\\_Resource.pdf](http://www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org/RCWP_Resource.pdf).)*

One of the authors of this statement holds a Ph.D. from an elite institution and another is the dean of a doctor of ministry program and producer of an award-winning television program. This kind of appropriation of the history and culture of oppressed groups by privileged white women has been subject to widespread ethical critique for at least two decades.

There are other problems that attend RCWP ordinations, including the fact that by ordaining priests and especially bishops without any input from local Catholic communities, the group is introducing a hierarchical form of authority from which the women's ordination movement has been remarkably free up till now. But I believe that the inability of the group to recognize the relative nature of the oppression of white Euro-American women with graduate degrees in theology is a far more serious ethical problem.

Let me be clear: I still strongly support the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic church as well as public actions and educational efforts to bring about those ordinations. And I still support the ordination of women by Catholic small faith communities. But I cannot support actions and statements on behalf of the ordination of Catholic women that are not marked by a thoroughgoing analysis of the racial/ethnic and class make-up of the group undertaking the actions, the rhetoric used to advance the group's objectives, and the meaning of the ordination of Catholic women in light of the massive oppression of Catholic and other women and men in the Global South.

*Marian Ronan is a professor of contemporary theology and religion at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. This article is a summary of an article by the same name which is forthcoming in The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion Volume 23 Number 2 (Fall 2007). Copies of the journal are available at <http://www.hds.harvard.edu/jfsr/> Anyone wishing a copy of the full article can request it from Marian at [mronan@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mronan@sbcglobal.net)*

### *Bishop Frank Murphy Scholarship For Women in Ministry*

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[nvazquez@womensordination.org](mailto:nvazquez@womensordination.org)

[www.womensordination.org](http://www.womensordination.org)

\* Application for WOC membership can be included with scholarship materials.

For more information, visit [www.womensordination.org](http://www.womensordination.org)



RCWP *continued from page 1*

ers were lesbian women and gay men who found the church's language about homosexuals to be cruel and demeaning. Several members sought out RCWP because their physical disabilities disqualified them from the institutional priesthood. The common denominator among all of the members of Roman Catholic Womenpriests is the firm belief that church can be done another way.

"Another way" means that women priests do "priest" differently. There is no exclusionary language such as "eminence of degree" in the RCWP structures document. No one is described as being set apart or lifted up since all people are equal members of the Body of Christ. RCWP do not preside "over" an assembly. They preside "with" the People of God. Consequently, RCWP members do not use clerical titles. They do not wear clerical garb unless circumstances dictate otherwise. Those who function as presiders in religious communities do so within the context of a discipleship of equals where the gifts and opinions of all members of the community are honored and respected. Since many members of RCWP are married with children, they have held the title of "mommy" for a much longer time than they have been priests. The pitfalls of parenthood and family life effectively flatten out the equality gradient. One's children never find one quite so wonderful as one's parents might.

While academicians might argue about the validity or necessity of ordination, they have not yet discussed or considered the pastoral needs of many Catholics who might not yet be ready to function without an ordained priesthood. Some women feel a desperate need to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation from a women priest. Others feel the need for women to break open the Word, which has been preached lopsidedly for most of the last two thousand years. Young women and girls have expressed their need to see women in the pulpit and at the altar if they are to have a future in the church.

For most Catholics, the Eucharist remains the center and summit of worship as the *Sacramentary* suggests. Catholics simply love the Eucharist. Although the same *Sacramentary* states that Christ does not become present solely through the words of consecration, but also through "the spirit and expression of reverence and adoration in which the eucharistic liturgy is carried out" that is, through the participation of the entire assembly in the Eucharistic prayer of thanksgiving, many Catholics continue to view the presence of a priest as a critical part of the rite. Christ, of course, remains above and outside of human control and chooses to be present whenever and wherever people's hearts burn with love for one another.

One only has to read the stories of the women and men in RCWP, or visit their church communities, to understand that the servant model of priesthood within a discipleship of equals abolishes the trappings of clerical priesthood. No one boos

or hisses when a child of God stands up to interpret the Word. In fact, teens are invited to preach and act as Eucharistic ministers. No one gets used and abused and then replaced by a better model. No one is labeled "intrinsically disordered." No one is asked to pledge loyalty and obedience in order to partake of the bread of heaven.

No organization, least of all a very small, poor one like RCWP, can be expected to have the ability to change the entire landscape of the Catholic church in three short years. Discriminatory gender and racial practices found their way into church governance a long time before RCWP arrived on the scene. Like all works in progress, the organization stumbles along, doing its best while remaining acutely aware of life-depleting power plays that can cause even the most observant Christian to claim moral superiority.

A different model of priesthood with egalitarian practices leads to a different perception of priesthood and a new understanding of how to do church. Through the untamed, uncontrollable power of the Holy Spirit, who pours out her grace, pressed down and overflowing to renew the face of every institution, the church will change. When the clerical trappings and privileges of priesthood are pried loose from the ideal of community based humble service, then will the People of God be empowered to choose their own priests from among their own church communities as the Dutch Dominicans suggested in October. And Shekinah, Holy Spirit Mother Wisdom, will give birth to a new church.

*Eileen McCafferty DiFranco is an ordained Roman Catholic Womenpriest.*

## PURPLE STOLES

For many years, Peg Murphy organized the production and sales of purple stoles for SEPA/ WOC. A few years ago, we decided to turn our operation over to national WOC. I was thrilled to see in the recent issue of *Mary's Pence News* ([www.MarysPence.org](http://www.MarysPence.org)) that Aisha Taylor, Nidza Vasquez, and Sharon Danner (the national staff) had asked Mary's Pence to find a sewing group to make the stoles. Now they are being produced by Taller de Corte y Confeccion Mujeres in Amatitan, Nicaragua, and can be ordered for \$15 at <http://www.womensordination.org/merchandise.htm#Stoles>. The stoles are a way of visibly showing your commitment to women's ordination in your local parish and at other liturgies – a wonderful peaceful protest that now supports both national WOC and this women's workshop in Nicaragua. More people need to know about this international symbol of women's ordination, adopted at the Dublin Women's Ordination Worldwide conference in 2001. For more information, link to [http://www.womensordination.org/pages/intern\\_pages/intern\\_actionps.html](http://www.womensordination.org/pages/intern_pages/intern_actionps.html).

*Regina Bannan*

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## ST. LOUIS ORDINATIONS DEFY ARCHDIOCESE

Six days after a courier delivered a message from Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis warning that they would be “automatically excommunicated” if they proceeded with the planned ceremony, two women were ordained priests by Bishop Patricia Fresen of the Roman Catholic Womenpriest movement in St. Louis on November 11.

Rose Marie “Ree.” Dunn Hudson, 67, of Festus, MO, and Elsie Hainz McGrath, 69, of St. Louis, were ordained before an overflowing crowd of some 600 witnesses in a Jewish synagogue at the invitation of the congregation’s female rabbi and its board of directors.

Rabbi Susan Talve explained the motivation for hosting the event in Central Reform Congregation, saying “This building was built to be a Sukkat Shalom—a temple of peace—for those who need it.”

Both Hudson, a retired educator who worked in prison ministry for fifteen years and is married with children and grandchildren, and McGrath, the widow of a deacon and great grandmother who worked for the archdiocese and at St. Louis University, hold advanced degrees in theology and religious studies.

Immediately following the ordination ceremony, the women were greeted by a process server in the lobby of the synagogue bearing a notice from Archbishop Burke summoning them to appear before him on December 3 to defend against charges of “schism” and “rejection of the definitive truth... infallibly set forth that women cannot validly receive the Sacrament of ordination to the priesthood.”

The notice warned that failure to report would result in “ecclesiastic penalties according to the provisions of the Code

of Canon Law” and it also threatened further (unspecified) action if the women were to “attempt to simulate the Holy Eucharist.”

Hudson and McGrath have been celebrating mass on Saturday since their ordination as co-pastors of the Therese of Divine Love Inclusive Community, which holds weekly services in the chapel of the First Unitarian Church of St. Louis.

Oh, yes—and the women were a no-show at the archbishop’s hearing on December 3. McGrath says she and Hudson did not even consider appearing as directed, for reasons including to demonstrate “that a mere man who presumes to speak for God has no power over us. Were we to have attended the hearing we would be granting him a position of authority which is one of the very things we want to eradicate in our priestly ministry.” (story from assorted news sources)

### NEW SEPA/WOC INTERN!

Welcome Stephanie Bilinsky! Stephanie is a junior English and Women’s Studies major at Temple University from north-eastern Pennsylvania who will be working as an intern for SEPA/WOC and national’s Young Feminist Network (YFN) this spring – at least! Her main interest is in organizing college students and other young people.

My goals include posting flyers around Temple University’s main campus (and possibly other college campuses in the city) to find students interested in WOC and YFN; figuring out what is plausible for organizing a group on campus; publicizing WOC and YFN demonstrations on college campuses (the witness on Holy Thursday, for example); periodically writing articles for *Equal wRites* about my experiences and progress; and forming a book club focused on church reform writers. I will add or make modifications to these goals depending on input from SEPA/WOC members, so feel free to contact me at [stephanie.bilinsky@temple.edu](mailto:stephanie.bilinsky@temple.edu)

*Stephanie Bilinsky*

### National Women’s Ordination Conference Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Day Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

I am enclosing the following:  Sustaining Member

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I have friends who may be interested in WOC. I have included a list of their names and addresses.

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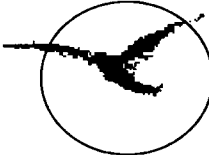
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## THE CALL TO ACTION CONFERENCE: CONFRONTING RACISM AT HOME

By Jim and Jenny Ratigan

At the end of October we headed for Milwaukee with a twofold goal in mind. We would have an opportunity to visit with our daughter and her family, a family which now includes a big sister who is almost five years old and twin young sisters who have just turned two. Although an exhausting experience, a visit with Beth and her family is always such a treat that the gain is always more than worth any of the costs (including very little sleep during the visit).

The other goal was to attend the National Conference of CTA (Call to Action) which was being held in Milwaukee this year. The theme of this year's conference was what most attracted us, **From Racism to Reconciliation: Church Beyond Power and Privilege.** We had both served for some time on the Dismantling Racism Team of the MCCP (Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia). We were certainly interested in the conference but did not really hold very high expectations because numerous times in the past, conferences with such titles did not really seem to carry much commitment to the values or plans for any follow-up once the conference is over.

However, there is a nonstop flight from Philadelphia to Milwaukee, only two hours. In addition, they serve really wonderful coffee during the flight, coffee direct from the Altera Coffee Shop. They also serve chocolate chip cookies during the flight, cookies still warm from the oven because they are baked on board during the flight.

With these powerful inducements in front of us, we were prepared for the conference regardless of how valuable it turned out to be. But to our surprise, it turned out to be one of the more interesting and more valuable conferences we had ever attended.

Before the formal opening session there were several preliminary workshops. The workshop presented by the CTA Anti-Racism team began with a two-person panel presentation by Peggy McIntosh and Victor Lewis. It was a powerful experience as Peggy McIntosh, based in Wellesley, MA, a Harvard-educated, white, academic woman who has been a long-time advocate for women's rights, described her own discovery of "white privilege" and that part of her identity which she realized was racist. Victor Lewis, based in Oakland, CA, is a man of color, working with a community rights group, long-time supporter of anti-racism, spoke of his discovery of his implicit negative judgments about women and that part of his identity which was male chauvinist.

One comment that especially sounded a challenging note from Peggy McIntosh was that she was a "nice" person and so were most of the professional women she knew. So, she pondered aloud, how can I be "oppressive" to others? Her gradual willingness to accept the reality that she had lived many years as both a "nice" person and also "oppressive" to others opened up to her the whole world of racism and white privilege, which she identified as so pervasive as to be all but invisible to many people, unless, of course, you are a person of color.

The three keynote speakers were Jamie T. Phelps, O.P. who founded the National Black Sisters Conference; Dr. Eddie Moore, who founded the White Privilege Conference; and Richard Rodriguez, whose latest book is **Brown, the Last Discovery of America**. Sister Jamie offered a more theological perspective in her comments and Dr. Moore offered a more sociological and personal view. They seem to share a real note of hope about their visions, though each was weighed

down from many years of oppressive labors. Mr. Rodriguez spoke from a religious, not theological, perspective and especially from the viewpoint of a gay person in our society living daily in the oppressive atmosphere of racism.

The theme of the conference arose several years ago, when comments from attendees at previous CTA meetings kept asking, "If so many people of the church are people of color; if so many people of the country and world are people of color, why are almost no people of color here at CTA?"

Several years ago the board of CTA met with a group of community leaders to seek their input on this question. They said that the feedback was difficult to accept. In effect, it was Peggy McIntosh's troubling description. CTA is a "nice" organization, but it is "oppressive." So, if given a choice, people of color choose to avoid being in an oppressive situation. The CTA board identified members and formed an "anti-racism team." They studied and trained for two years at which time they told the board that they were sufficiently prepared to unveil this whole issue to the membership and make it the theme of the annual conference.

At the end of this year's conference, the two co-directors of CTA indicated that the conference was only the beginning. They said publicly that CTA was committed to actively support anti-racism in the country and in the church, but to begin to re-creating CTA as an anti-racist organization.

We are interested to see what action occur during this coming year and in the years ahead. But it's rare to encounter an organization admit publicly that it has exercised white privilege and practiced a type of exclusiveness and oppression. In the program it reads:

Are we racists? Not, we hope, in the sense of personal prejudice and bigotry. But systemic, institutional racism goes deeper, to include the misuse of power by systems and institutions. CTA is afflicted with systemic racism, because, like the U.S. at large, it exists in a society where being white confers an invisible knapsack of unearned privilege, and being persons of color bestows unearned disadvantage. This is unjust, and unworthy of a church called to embody the Vision of Jesus.

It was heartening to witness an organization address such a challenging issue. And even more heartening to hear the agenda list that the first task was to dismantle racism within CTA itself not matter what the cost (possibly a falling off in numbers?).

This kind of commitment to dismantle institutional racism must serve as a model for all of the sub-groups that meet within the larger structure of CTA including WOC and Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP). One need not look far to discover the telltale signs of racism and exclusivity in both groups. Judging from the last issue of ***Equal wRites*** a time for dialogue is upon us and this includes a time to examine ourselves carefully for the signs of institutional racism and exclusivity in all of its forms. We look forward to participating in both dialogue and action as the future unfolds.

### 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](mailto:gaile.pohlhaus@villanova.edu).



## ON CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS

by *Maria Marlowe*

The business of America is business, we are told. At the holiday season, the business of America is big business. Retailers and advertisers are in our faces with an almost constant onslaught of pitches for buying...the perfect gift, the perfect decoration, the perfect holiday. We hear that nothing says love like a diamond or a new car. The subliminal (and sometimes not so subliminal) message is that we should be striving to do whatever it takes to make our loved ones feel on top of the world. In a very short time we'll be hearing the ads for the last-minute shopper, and everything will crescendo to a state of frenzied overkill. Such is the state of our holidays.

I love Christmas. I love the anticipation of it. I love the celebration of it. But as a serious Christian, I am deeply offended by what is nothing less than a rape of the holiday. And while Hanukkah, Ramadan, Kwanzaa, and various other religious holidays are celebrated, it is basically the birth of Christ on which businesses are making a mighty buck. I'm happy that businesses are successful. I understand our economy depends on it. But for practicing Christians, the twisting of this holiday into spend, spend, spend is an abuse of something deeply meaningful and awesome. Jesus was not born to provide fodder for our economic mills. In fact, as I recall, he had a deep aversion to greed.

A few years ago, I was in the Christmas area of a major department store. It was the week between Christmas and New Years. When I was there before Christmas the place was beautifully arranged with trees, ornaments, and garland. The week after it looked like a tornado had gone through it. Merchandise was thrown around every which way and there were cartons everywhere. It wasn't even New Years. Doubtless the retailers were speeding on for the next event. So much for the holiday *season*.

Which leads to the next point. Why does holiday music disappear the day after Christmas? If we celebrate the twelve days of Christmas, should we not be hearing its music for at least the week after?

For the past few Christmases I have tried to find more meaningful ways to celebrate the birth of Christ. To begin with, I realized that the deeper meaning, the Christmas spirit, would descend when I was not doing something connected to shopping. When I was decorating, baking, or writing cards with the holiday music playing (which is a requirement whenever I do something Christmasy) a quiet sense of contentment would embrace me. I realized then that the spirit of the holiday was in the "personalness" of it and not in its things (corny but true). I promised myself that I would never let a trip to the mall override the neighborhood cookie exchange. I would never let the gift override the cards to my dear friends to tell them how much their friendship means to me.

I realized also that when it comes to gift-giving, the best gift is the gift of time. Now I try to give my loved ones experiences that we could share. For my daughters this means a trip to the salon or a night out at the movies. My friends and I used to exchange gifts. Now we go out to a nice dinner. I also try to make at least some of the gifts I give personal and meaningful. With the computer, this is much easier. (I also like to craft, which makes it easier too.)

A few years ago, my cousin wrote about the experiences of my great-grandmother, an extraordinary woman who eloped to England, had two children in London, and five more in America. She was widowed at a young age, raised seven children alone, and, as my cousin proudly stated, "never asked for a dime from anyone." I type her story, framed it, and gave each of my daughters a copy of it. This is the typed personal gifting that is so meaningful. No one else could

have given that gift, and my daughters and I now share a bond with someone we never knew but who is very much a part of us.

This year let's make a commitment to celebrating the birth of Christ by hitting the mute button when the ads come on, lowering the radio when the ads come on, and remembering, in whatever way has the greatest meaning for each of us, that it is indeed a wonderful life. Let's take "the birthday party to end all birthday parties" and use it to honor the good...the good in each other and the good in ourselves. Merry Christmas Everyone!

*Maria Marlowe was ordained a deacon by the Community of Saint Mary Magdalen. The community worships at Burmont Road and School Lane in Drexel Hill every Sunday*

## SEPA/WOC SUPPORTS LETTER WRITER

At its November 17 meeting, SEPA/WOC's core committee discussed a letter from a Philadelphia priest which had appeared in the Nov. 15 issue of *The National Catholic Reporter*. The letter, which was signed "(Fr.) Dominic Chiaravalle," said in part:

"The recent announcement naming new cardinals was another skipped opportunity by church leaders to address the old bias against women (*NCR*, Oct. 26). What a significant impact it could have been for Pope Benedict to incorporate Catholic women leaders into the election-making process of choosing the next pope."

The core committee sent the following letter to Fr. Chiaravalle, who is pastor of Old St. Mary's Church in Philadelphia.

Dear Father,

On behalf of the Core Committee of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference, I am writing to thank you for your courage in writing non-anonymously to *NCR* with your reflections about women's leadership and, specifically, women Cardinals.

We give thanks that you, a Philadelphia priest and our brother, have shared your beautiful, prayerful reflections.

We have been working for women's ordination and leadership for over 30 years. Our mission statement declares that 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.

Your letter has been a real joy for us – and we certain welcome joy in this difficult work and long-haul struggle!

Please know that we are here for you, especially if there are repercussions for your courage.

With hope in the Spirit,  
Judith A Heffernan, M.Div

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## Book Reviews

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### *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by

Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas. New York University Press, 2006. 380 pp. Paperback. \$24.00.

reviewed by Jodie Tooley

I was a fan of Alice Walker all through the 80s. I vividly recall one or two years I was in a hurry to read everything she wrote. I was enthralled with the rhythms of Walker's language and by her striking ability to paint powerful images and ideas with a few perfectly matched words. I was a 20-something woman with a decent education and a nose for narrative that said something, anything, interesting about justice. Walker was artfully cutting a new swath, but I was too white and too new to life on my own to grasp the nature of the revolution underway.

*Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society* is an anthology of essays edited by Christian ethicist Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas in 2006, two decades after Walker penned and published the four-part definition of *womanist* in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Walker gave substance to a paradigm shift that called for black women to, as Floyd-Thomas writes, "defy the compounded forces of oppression (racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism) that threaten her self-actualization as well as the survival of her community." Walker declared womanists to be black feminists or feminists of color, an intentional turn away from the privileged cast of white feminist structures, and toward themselves in order to construct "a house of their own." So, Walker's analogy goes: womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

*Deeper Shades of Purple* gathers together voices from an impressive intergenerational mix of womanist scholars and poets. Revisiting and expanding Alice Walker's classic definition of womanist, each writer illustrates her practice of womanism over twenty years' time. *Deeper Shades of Purple* trains a spotlight upon developments in the academic study of religion and society, and importantly, on womanist epistemology—what it is that womanists *know*.

These scholars' reflections add pigment to the purple hue of womanism; they deepen its shade.

Womanists anthologized in *A Different Shade of Purple* come from a range of religious backgrounds, but I focus here in particular on several of the Catholic contributors. In the anthology's opening chapters, Catholic womanist theologian Diana L. Hayes offers tribute to black women who struggled mightily through past generations, especially to her mother, whose sense of knowing was a wisdom drawn from deep within, from her experience of being black and female in the segregated Jim Crow South. Unable to live the lives they preferred, Hayes' foremothers prepared their daughters for a future for which they had no vision. In "Standing in Shoes My Mother Made: The Making of a Catholic Womanist Theologian," Hayes honors these women who constructed sturdy shoes made for walking in worlds unknown to them. Hayes discusses her decision to become Roman Catholic after growing up in the historically black AME Zion Church. She describes her exhilaration to uncover vibrant stories of her black Catholic heritage, and her dismay to learn the role the Catholic church played within the slave trade. Hayes' interest to cultivate her black Catholic theology coincided with the appearance of Alice Walker's definition of womanist, and the confluence of ideas liberated Hayes to trust her own instincts, to live into her

life and theology from the core of her very own context. Hayes worries about the effects of the ongoing challenge to keep black women's intellectual thought flowing because black women scholars and theologians live and work in an increasingly secular society and they straddle several competitive arenas. To that end, Hayes writes her essay to encourage contemporary womanists to gather together the myriad threads of black diversity, to renew the community through shared experiences of song, story and reclaimed history and language.

Midway through *Deeper Shades of Purple*, Sister M. Shawn Copeland sharpens a focus on Alice Walker's assertion that a womanist is "serious." In "A Thinking Margin: The Womanist Movement as Critical Cognitive Praxis," Copeland asserts that womanism is too often marginalized in church and scholarly pursuits. As a remedy, she calls for womanism to become "a serious thinking margin," an enterprise that adopts "a radical critique of what is." Copeland wants black women to cultivate authentic and moral lives by applying to their living what it is they know. This idea is distinct from the application of critical thought of traditional theology and philosophy which contains its knowledge within structures shaped by what appears to be absolute. Instead, Copeland calls black women to a thinking style that probes and challenges, but leads to taking clear action to transform society and religion. Copeland's transformation toolkit—nurture, interdependence, appreciation of difference, and friendship—roots society's potential for transformation within our human relationships. To be sure, Copeland's essay addresses the pernicious oppression experienced by generations of women, but I am encouraged by the frame Copeland fashions from her amplified focus on critique within relationship, because its ultimate purpose serves truth, liberation and the common good.

*Deeper Shades of Purple's* last section comprises articles by eight well-regarded scholars who are not identified as womanists who consider the influence of womanist thought on their own approaches to religion and scholarship. United Methodist Christian ethicist and Drew School of Theology professor, Traci C. West, closes the anthology with her essay, "Is A Womanist a Black Feminist?" With easy humor, West describes the ragged road she travelled to fully comprehend what distinguishes womanism from black feminism. Readily articulating her appreciation for womanist contributions to black religious studies, literature, and a strengthened black community, West confesses that her identity as a womanist is clouded by her concern that womanist perspectives may privilege black women's wholeness while compromising support for the dignity of other marginalized groups, particularly lesbians and gays. Perhaps West's commitment to "radical inclusion" is wonderfully placed at the end of *Deeper Shades*—West and her devotion to wholeness for all are glimpses of the hope imagined by Alice Walker and uncountable others who guide us along humanity's long, uneven road to justice.

*Jodie Tooley is Assistant to the President at the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, CA. She is preparing for ordination in the American Baptist Churches*

***Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*** by Wonhee Anne Joh. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006, 164 pp. \$24.95. Paperback.

reviewed by Nicole Lamarche

W. Anne Joh is one of a new generation of feminist theologians whose work is shaped by critical race studies, poststructuralism, and postcolonial theory. A student of the distinguished feminist process theologian, Catherine Keller, she has also been strongly influenced by the Asian-American feminist theologian, Rita Nakashima Brock, and by the French psychoanalytic feminist, Julia Kristeva. She is a United Methodist laywoman. In *Heart of the Cross: A Postcolonial Christology*, her first book, Joh explores the shifting and complex construct of identity, including her own “complex routes” and “deep (Korean North American) roots” (xvi). She asserts that, “any and all knowledge is situated, historicized, limited, fractured, and always under change”(xv), as she contends that her theology and all theology comes from lived experience and is therefore always autobiographical.

Joh aims to offer readers a “new understanding of the meaning of the cross,” which ultimately points to the “radical form of love” (xiii) found even in suffering. She uses the Korean concept of *jeong*, which she contends is the “power embodied in redemptive relationships” (xxi) and intertwines it with the Korean concept of *han*, which is suffering, expressed beautifully as “wound(s) of the heart” (20). *Han* is suffering and what Julia Kristeva terms “abjection,” the formation of individual or collective identity by having been excluded or expelled. This *han*-filled shaping of identity from a Korean North American perspective is deeply connected to classism, sexism and racism. Joh argues that redemption itself emerges within the very relationality of *jeong*. *Jeong* resists clear categorizing, as it is “a way of conceiving an often complex constellation of relationality of the self with the other that is deeply associated with compassion, love, vulnerability, and acceptance of heterogeneity as essential to life” (xxi). It is mutuality in the work toward freedom for *jeong* that contests relationships and realities that uphold dualistic perspectives. According to Joh, *jeong* makes its way in the space between the Self and the Other and thus challenges the sharp boundary between the two and allows the Self and Other to reach beyond the edges.

Ultimately, Joh proposes that the cross has a dual function or “double gesture” as it embodies both suffering and radical love. Joh’s work is grounded in a challenge to dualisms and feminist Christological constructs that seek to question the relationship between liberation and oppression. Suffering, according to Joh, is present in both the oppressed and in the oppressors, and this suffering is related to the individuals’ personal experience of suffering (21). She focuses on individual suffering or the “original wound” as an entryway to redemption and reconciliation and she argues “*jeong* works...to create a Third Space.” It is in this Third Space or “interstitial space” that the oppressed and the oppressor, the colonized and the colonizer, can begin to negotiate differences (58). She writes, “Hybridity, understood from a postcolonial perspective, stresses that identity is not the combination of right parts...but an energy field of different forces...New possibilities, in fact ‘newness’ enter the space between fixed identities by way of interstitial openings” (59). Joh asserts that *jeong* is what allows for life to thrive in the in-between spaces.

Throughout the book, Joh uses the myriad experiences of

Korean American immigrants as a place from which to explore both the empowering and disempowering nature of the Cross. The cross stands as a symbol of powerlessness and subjection along with experiences of solidarity. Joh questions traditional atonement theory and argues that while Jesus was executed on the cross he went all the way to the cross because of his “liberative action.” Joh lifts up Jesus’ journey to the cross as a statement of non-violent resistance to the oppression of the Roman government and an act of love. Jesus extended grace even to his enemies as he asks God to forgive them while he suffered on the cross. Joh writes, “revolutionary change, as practiced for example by Jesus, must inherently embody a love ethic that includes the enemy (73).” Her core thesis is that even as the cross serves as a symbol of death and “embodies abjection, it works simultaneously against abjection through Jesus’ embodiment of *jeong*” (77).

Ultimately, if the cross itself performs a “double gesture,” “the abject is the stranger/Other within God’s self” (89). *Jeong* comes out of relationships that are not always mutual and as such serves as the space between suffering and love. Joh argues that *jeong*, in its state of in-betweenness, has been perceived as a weaker, passive and feminine way toward transformation, yet she cites Jesus as the ultimate exemplar of *jeong*.

The core of Joh’s work is found in the final chapter. She writes, “When we live with heart, we cannot remain immune to the other” (117). Her work challenges the idea that ending suffering comes through *dan*, or cutting off. *Dan* denies the truly interconnected relational world in which we live. *Dan* is the Korean concept of removing oneself from systemic oppression. Yet Joh contends that this simply isn’t possible and offers *jeong* as the true way to transformation and reconciliation. She does not deny suffering on the cross or in the world. But she offers the readers an invitation to engage in the complexity of relational transformation. *Jeong* demands relationality, mutuality, vulnerability, no-self (123), or self-emptying and dependence on the interconnected world. *Jeong* is a subversion of quick categorizations of the oppressor and the oppressed. It is a radical act in a world that seeks cutting off before steady engagement with suffering and reconciliation. The cross is a place in Christian theology for people of faith to begin to unravel the boundaries between the oppressors and the oppressed. The cross is a place of suffering but with *jeong*, it is also a window into a love so expansive, so complex, so mutual that it invites healing of wounded hearts.

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### **Editorial Board of *Equal wRites***

*A Publication of SEPA/WOC*

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**Scripture Reflections**  
**Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**January 27, 2008**  
**Isaiah 8 and 9 1 Cor. 1**  
*by Judith A. Heffernan*

While reviewing the Scripture readings for this new church year, I found the *Isaiah* reading for Christmas at Midnight is the same as that for the third Sunday in Ordinary Time.

It doesn't often happen that a reading is repeated so soon, so I felt the message deserved our attention. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom, a light has shone."

The rousing Christmas hymn with these words is still resounding in my heart, while the quiet old story, told in different ways about darkness and light, still makes its presence felt as I read Paul in Corinthians.

"How do we know we have passed from darkness to light? When we see the dawn emerge? When we can tell clearly what is in the distance? Well, yes, but we know for sure we have passed darkness to light when we look into the faces of those we meet and know they are our sisters and brothers!"

Paul urges us to have no factions, no rivalries-to remember we are one in Jesus. (I remember, too, though that Paul didn't mind a good discussion or even a hearty disagreement, for he clearly told Peter that some of Peter's opinions were wrong!)

For SEPA/WOC, much discussion and heartfelt disagreement has flowed from the last issue of *Equal wRites* espe-

cially from the front page article, "What's *Your Hobby?*" Knowing and loving the author as I do, knowing of her life of service, knowing how she loves to stir up the pot and get people to reflect upon and share their truth, I was not too surprised. I decided to use Magda's article as an examination of conscience, (However, I did immediately talk with her, because I was so upset that a dedicated vegetarian would catch butterflies as a hobby, and was **so relieved** that Magda only used the image as a literary tool!)

When I found that other assorted people I love and respect were especially upset by this article, I appreciated their reflections and feelings.

As a sign of mutual respect, we took time at the monthly SEPA/WOC meeting (remember, you are all most welcome—and we treasure your input however you can get it to us) to share our deepest and most honest truths. We consciously chose again to listen, include, respect and trust. We pledged to honor one another, no matter how much we may disagree.

We committed to communicate regularly. We believe new models of church and ministry must evolve, and we affirmed we would keep trying to do our part as sisters and brothers together to bring that renewed ministry to a renewed church. And we did it around a table.

*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.*

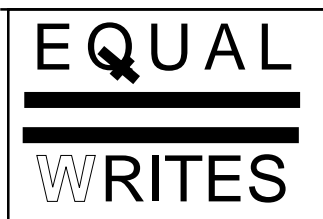
**FINE POINTS**

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