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New Women New Church

Winter/Spring 2016 A Voice for Women's Equality in the Catholic Church

An Excerpt of Mary E. Hunt's opening remarks at the 2015 Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference

So I turn to my Top Ten list of what Women's Ordination Conference, WOW friends, and all who seek to do justice can celebrate. I list them in no particular order because they are all important.

1. We have successfully avoided being coopted by kyriarchal Catholicism. In the 1999/3 issue of *Concilium*, editors Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Hermann Haring, used the title "The Non-Ordination of Women and the Politics of Power" (<http://www.bijbel.net/concilium/?b=25795>). They wrote in their insightful introduction: "the focus of this issue of *Concilium* is not the question of the ordination of wo/men but rather the non-ordination of wo/men and its impact on the self understanding and practice of church. We are not interested so much in taking up once again the arguments for and against the ordination of wo/men as though wo/men were the problem. Rather we seek to explore the politics of power that has led to the most recent authoritarian assertions of Rome....The issue at hand is no longer a 'woman's problem', the question goes to the very heart and integrity of church and theology."

This framing of the question has served us very well for the last twenty years. We have moved away from questioning or even responding to queries about women's ability to minister, the rightness of women's involvement in decision-making, female symbols and images of divine power. We have gone about our ministries, rejecting the institutional church's distorted notions of women, and proving

over and over that women can and are effective ministers.

We have found the institutional church wanting on most counts. Despite a charismatic pope at the moment to whom I will return shortly, the institution is fraught with corruption both moral and economic, replete with scandal both on sexual and spiritual fronts beginning with clergy sexual abuse and episcopal cover-up, and losing members by the millions who flee from its hypocrisy and deserve better. So we can rejoice that not one of us has been ordained into that disgraceful institution. If forty years after WOC raised women's ordination to international attention, indeed more than 100 years since St. Joan's Alliance, Mary B. Lynch and company first explored this religious territory, the Vatican is still calling women "special" because we can be mothers, I think our success at avoiding their company is devoutly to be affirmed!

2. Our second success is that thanks to feminist and other liberation theologies, the field of theology has changed from a clerical, ecclesial science to a lay and communal art. The practitioners have changed. Think of the theologians you listen to or study. Few of them are ordained and working for the church any more. This is a new phenomenon in church history.



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Erin Saiz Hanna and Kate McElwee

Dear WOC Member,

When the first WOC was held in Detroit on Thanksgiving weekend in 1975, an unstoppable movement for women's equality in the Catholic Church was born. As we continue to celebrate this anniversary of our strong, feminist, Catholic organization, we thank you for your ongoing support and passion for the equality of women in our church.

This past September, just days before Pope Francis' arrival to the U.S., WOC hosted the Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) conference in Philadelphia, bringing together 500 people from 19 countries for an incredibly energizing and prophetic weekend. We include some highlights from this landmark gathering in this edition of *NewWomen, NewChurch*. Our cover story features Dr. Mary E. Hunt's remarks during the academic seminar, starting the weekend by recounting some successes of our movement.

Dr. Shannen Dee Williams also joined us, sharing her trailblazing work chronicling the hidden journeys of black Catholic sisters in the U.S. since the nineteenth century. Dr. Williams' research is crucial to our collective efforts to dismantling racial and gender barriers in the church. Her article begins on page 6.

On page 3, we announce the recipient of the WOW Scholarship for Feminist Ministry, Jacqueline Straub. Conference attendees opened their hearts and wallets to help support this scholarship fund for women's ministry.

In upcoming *NewWomen, NewChurch* publications and on our website, we will continue to highlight some of the speeches and presentations from the WOW conference. In the meantime, view conference videos at: www.vimeo.com/ondemand/wow2015.

Following the WOW conference, WOC staff and activists traveled to Washington, DC to witness for women's ordination during Pope Francis' visit. Our voices for equality were featured on CNN, NBC, NPR, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *LA Times*, *The*

Guardian, *National Catholic Reporter*, and the *Huffington Post* to name a few. It was during this time that one of WOC's board members, Rev. Jane Via, RCWP, participated in a nonviolent direct action with Fr. Roy Bourgeois and other ordained women and allies. Read Jane's detailed account on page 5.

After our media storm, it was no surprise that Pope Francis was confronted on women's ordination on his way back to Rome. On the papal plane, Pope Francis reiterated: "On women priests, that cannot be done. Pope St. John Paul II, after long, long intense discussions, long reflection, said so clearly."

We know, more than ever, it can be done and we're doing it! This fortieth year of celebrations reminds us how far we have journeyed, and that our continued actions for equality will continue to make a difference for decades to come. We have exciting plans for this Spring, including direct actions in Rome and a presence at World Youth Day. If you are not receiving our emails, let us know or sign up on our homepage.

In addition to some actions, there have been some changes at the WOC office. This past January we welcomed our new Office Manager, Katherine Philipson. Katherine works part-time from our Washington, DC location. You can read more about her on page 3. On this same page, you will find the biographies on our newest WOC board members, Kelly Doss and Angela Murphy. Angela also shares with us her story of being called on page 10.

In this present issue, we publish articles that also connect our work with some current social justice topics. On page 5, find WOC board president, Jeannette Mulherin's observations on Catholic bishop's remarks concerning violence against women. On page 8, Cindy Perry writes on her current work with the Catholic Church bringing hope and direct services to Syrian refugees while wrestling with hard feelings and experiences she has with the church she left behind.

Lastly, on page 12, see Rachel Schmidt's review of Tom Roberts' biography of Sr. Joan Chittister. On page 15, Sheila Peiffer reviews *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study & Celebration* by Susan Cole.

Thank you for your prayers, activism, and contributions to WOC. We are proud to work together in this movement for justice and equality.

For equality,

Erin *Kate*

Erin Saiz Hanna & Kate McElwee
Co-Executive Directors

NewWomen, NewChurch is published three times a year by the Women's Ordination Conference (WOC). WOC works for the ordination of women as deacons, priests, and bishops into an inclusive and accountable Roman Catholic Church.

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In principle and practice WOC values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability.

A subscription to *NewWomen, NewChurch* is included in the WOC membership fee of \$45. WOC is incorporated under 501(c)(3) as a nonprofit organization. Contributions are tax deductible accordingly.

WOC archives, including microfilms of *NewWomen, NewChurch*, are held at Marquette University. For more information, contact Philip Runkel at the Department of Special Collections & University Archives, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI 53201-3141, 414.288.5903, or phil.runkel@marquette.edu.

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WOW Awards Jacqueline Straub the 2015 Scholarship for Feminist Ministry

Women's Ordination Worldwide is pleased to announce the recipient of the WOW 2015, *Gender, Gospel and Global Justice* conference scholarship for Feminist Ministry is Jacqueline Straub. The first of its kind, this fund aims to empower women to pursue their ministries through formal education and feminist projects. The scholarship fund was launched at WOW's 3rd International conference held in September 2015 and is the result of the generous donations of our supporters.

Jacqueline Straub is a student of theology at the University of Lucerne, in Switzerland, pursuing her undergraduate thesis on women's ordination and human rights.

Called to priesthood at age 15, she has served as an altar server and works within her parish alongside her priest in many capacities. Jacqueline is frequently featured in German and Swiss media and spoke during the WOW 2015 workshop, "Dancing Through Closed Doors."

WOW applauds Jacqueline's brave and eloquent efforts to share the story of her calling, as well as her optimism for the possibility of great change within the Roman Catholic Church. Her magnetism and energy inspire those around her, engage worldwide media attention, and bring hope to our mission of full equality for women in all ministries around the world.



Jacqueline Straub and Patricia Fresen

WOC Welcomes New Office Manager

Dear Women's Ordination Conference Members and Supporters,

I'm joyful to start work this week as WOC's new Office Manager based in Washington D.C. It's an honor to get to work for a courageous, visionary organization advocating for women's ordination and for a more feminist, anti-racist, and accountable Catholic Church.

I'm originally from Oregon where both of my parents are retired ministers in the United Methodist Church. All of my life, my mother has nurtured and inspired me with her extraordinary love, wisdom, and leadership in our family and in the church – so working toward women's ordination is also personal for me.

Outside of my time with WOC, I currently serve as a volunteer leader with three newer organizations: the U.S.-Africa Network, which fosters relationship and solidarity among progressive activists from the U.S. and the African continent, 99Rise which organizes civil disobedience to get money out of politics, and the D.C. chapter of Showing up for Racial Justice (SURJ), which organizes white people to participate in the multiracial struggle for racial and economic justice. I also love to sing and am part of a women's social justice cappella ensemble.

If I can be of assistance with donations, newsletters, WOC materials, or other inquiries, please feel free to be in touch with me by e-mail, phone, or mail. I look forward to getting to know you!

Best,

Katherine Philipson
WOC Office Manager



Katherine Philipson

New Board Members:

Kelly Doss

As someone who longs for an inclusive, just, and accountable Roman Catholic Church, I am truly honored to be a WOC board member. Residing in St. Cloud, Minnesota, I am a member of a woman priest community called Mary Magdalene, First Apostle, and belong to Christ Church Newman Center. I hold undergraduate degrees in political science and psychology, along with a master's in politics. I am the executive director of a nonprofit that serves people with disabilities, serve as the current president of PFLAG Central Minnesota, and I am also the founder of a nonprofit that develops confidence and leadership skills in young girls. I believe the progressive activism that WOC promotes will generate the reforms needed in the Catholic Church, and I look forward to working with WOC members to create a faith community where all are welcome!



Kelly Doss

Angela Murphy

I was called to the priesthood as a young girl and still struggle with what this call means in my life. I was grateful to discover WOC and other people who passionately advocate for the ordination of women. I live in Nazareth, Pennsylvania with my husband and three children. I am an attorney and practice exclusively in the area of special education law supporting children with disabilities and their families. A long time advocate of inclusion for individuals with disabilities, I am now privileged to serve on the WOC Board and begin to work for inclusion for women in the church.



Angela Murphy

What a Male Catholic Bishop Thinks When He Hears the Words "Violence Against Women"

By Jeannette Mulherin

The word *violence* appears four times in the Vatican's English translation of the Synod's 2014 "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization," only one of which relates directly to women. The Synod's 2015 "Relatio Synodi" uses the word twice in reference to women. However brief its mention, both documents provide insight into the bishops' thinking on violence against women, how it is enacted, and who perpetuates it.

Let's take a look at the bishops' statement in 2014: *"Not to be overlooked is the increasing violence against women, where they become victims, unfortunately, often within families and as a result of the serious and widespread practice of genital mutilation in some cultures."*

Where to begin

"Not to be overlooked" is an interesting choice of words to introduce a profoundly serious issue, followed by the equally curious selection of "unfortunately" to describe the occurrence of domestic violence, a crime that often ends in a woman's death. Apparently, it did not occur to the bishops that the words "tragically" or "horrifically" might be better suited in place of the rather trivial-sounding "unfortunately."

By stating that women are victimized "within families," the bishops are obscuring the fact that women are largely victimized by men. As written, it appears the bishops would rather blame the whole family than acknowledge the painful truth that men are largely the perpetrators of domestic violence.

This unwillingness to identify the victimizer is similar to the Vatican's insistence that the rampant abuse of children by Catholic priests was the fault of the turbulent 1960's, consumerism, materialism, Catholics who didn't pray enough, the parents of victims, even the victims themselves. Is it just too difficult for the bishops to hold men accountable?

People, even bishops, have the potential to grow in their understanding of the world around them. So, did things get better in the 2015 document? Let's see what the



Miriam Duignan and Kate McElwee witness in St. Peter's Square during the 2015 Synod on the Family

Bishops have to say a year later: *"Nor is there need to forget the growing phenomena of violence to which women are subject within the family."*

The bishops are still describing violence against women as taking place "within the family," but instead of introducing the topic of domestic violence with the words "not to be overlooked," they chose the phrase, "nor is there need to forget," which is dismissive at best, perhaps even an implication that in the bishops' world, the phenomena of violence against women is a forgettable one.

Let's back up a bit

In the run-up to the 2014 statement on violence, the bishops wrote: *"The dignity of women still needs to be defended and promoted. In fact, in many places today, simply being a woman is a source of discrimination and the gift of motherhood is often penalized, rather than esteemed."*

The bishops sound downright shocked. Women are discriminated against because they are women? Who knew! There is, of course, no follow-up acknowledgement that the Church itself perpetuates this injustice, or that mountains of evidence directly link religion to discrimination and violence against women.

The immediate segue into motherhood raises a number of questions. In what society is motherhood *not* esteemed? Throughout all of history and in some societies today, producing a child is the only thing that gives a woman value.

Or maybe the bishops are expressing their concern that women with children perform the bulk of unpaid domestic labor? Or that women are denied employment and educational opportunities due to their motherhood status? Perhaps it is the fact that women with children comprise the majority of people living in poverty world-wide. If history is our guide, this sentence is nothing more than a subtle swipe at women who choose either not to procreate or to limit their families to a manageable size, thus not adequately "esteeming" the gift of motherhood.

As noted earlier, people can change.

So, how did the bishops articulate their thoughts a year later? *"In countless situations even today, to be a woman provokes discrimination: the very gift of motherhood is penalized rather than appreciated. From another perspective, for a woman to be sterile in some cultures, is a socially discriminating condition."*

The bishops do appear to have a greater appreciation for the degree of discrimination women suffer; however, they do not acknowledge the Church's role in its perpetration, nor do they address the educational and employment discrimination women face, as if discrimination revolves solely around a woman's reproductive status.

Returning to the 2014 paragraph addressing domestic violence, I am struck by the bishops' implication that female genital mutilation (FGM) is the primary cause of domestic violence against women *"in some cultures."*

In no way should we minimize the brutality of FGM. It is a violent practice that inflicts agonizing pain on young girls, imprinting its victims with life-long emotional and psychological scars. That said, citing this particular crime, and only this crime is a strange choice. While FGM is practiced in parts of Africa by people of many religions, including Christians, it makes more sense to highlight a crime found not in some cultures but every culture. For instance, how about murder? Approximately forty percent of women murdered world-wide are killed by their partners. On rape: In the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone, forty-eight

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Civil Disobedience and Prophetic Obedience

By Jane Via

In June 2015, I attended a national conference where attendees were served lunch on site. Feeling a bit more adventurous than my usual introverted self, I sat at a table populated with people I did not know...until someone I did know sat down beside me. It was Roy Bourgeois of SOA Watch, peace activist, activist for women's ordination in the Catholic Church and GBLTQ activist.

I knew about Roy. I'd seen his photo in the media many times. He spoke in San Diego a few years ago and co-presided with me at Mass at our woman-priest parish. I remembered well his gentle, joyful manner, his soft southern accent, his optimism yet capacity for firm resistance, and his activism, which I admired very much. But I didn't expect him to remember me. He sat down next to me, calling me by name, and began a conversation that would lead me down a road I had not previously travelled.

At first, I didn't see where the conversation was going. Roy noted that everywhere Pope Francis travels, he never speaks about women's ordination. He suggested the Vatican prepares talking points for the Pope. Since discussion of women's ordination is prohibited in the Roman Catholic Church, that subject is not on Francis' list. Roy speculated that even in the U.S., where the issue is ripe in progressive Catholic circles, Francis would avoid mentioning women's ordination. He wondered out loud how

the media might be prompted to ask Francis about women's ordination, forcing him to speak to the issue. He meandered around the topic of some non-violent action to draw attention to the issue and warrant media involvement. Then he got more specific. He began discussing a demonstration in Washington while the Pope was there and getting arrested in order to attract media attention so that at least one reporter would put the question to the pontiff. Before I knew it, he was asking me if I would join such an action. It was important, he said, that women priests participate.

As a former county prosecutor, my professional life had focused on bringing those who violate laws to justice. Because of my professional life, I experienced a heightened obligation to observe the law in my private life. While I had demonstrated on various occasions in my life, I had never been arrested. Certainly, I believed in civil disobedience. Having been a teen during the 1960s and having lived through the Civil Rights Movement, albeit from the sidelines, I understood the importance of civil disobedience and its capacity to promote change. But I had never been arrested. I told Roy I would think about it and get back to him.

From the first moment Roy proposed my involvement, however, I knew that I couldn't tell Roy no. After all, he, a man and a



Jane Via

canonical priest who loved his religious order and lived a prophetic priesthood, had given up most of what he loved best when he recognized the injustice of a male only priesthood. Attending and preaching at the ordination of a woman friend, Roy was expelled from his beloved Maryknoll Order, excommunicated from the Church he had served most of his adult life, forced laicization from the priesthood, and the anger and disappointment of many of his Maryknoll friends. How could I, a woman priest, tell him no?

I also knew deep within that, if I were ever to be arrested for any reason, it would be for women's ordination because I believe it matters so much to the church and the world. I saw Roy's point: action was possible for U.S. Catholics during Francis' stay in the U.S. which wouldn't otherwise be possible at any other time or place.

Nonetheless, I wanted to discuss possible arrest with my best friend (and husband) first. We planned to travel together to the WOW Conference in Philadelphia the following September. Joining Roy in a demonstration in Washington, D.C. afterwards would involve travel to D.C. after the conference, additional time, considerable additional expense, and would impact my husband's trip. When I asked for his counsel, he was unhesitating in his "yes! Do it!" He volunteered to be there to bail us out of jail, if needed.

And so I demonstrated for women's ordination with six others on September 23, 2015 near St. Matthew's Cathedral in Washington, D.C. I was fully committed to the action, even though I was also fearful. The crowd was large and not all civilians in the crowd were friendly. The presence of

What a Male Catholic Bishop Thinks...continued from page 4

women are raped every hour. To add to that horror, Congolese women are subjected to some form of sexual abuse every minute. Every minute.

And yet, FGM was the only form of violence the bishops deemed worthy of mention. In an interesting twist, FGM is also a crime committed primarily by women, not men. Is it coincidence or a stroke of clerical guile that the bishops choose to address violence against women by highlighting a crime they can blame on women.

But that was 2014. The bishops forgot all about FGM in 2015, stating: *"The exploitation of women and the violence perpetrated on their body are often linked to abortion and forced sterilization. Added to which are the negative consequences of practices connected to procreation, such as the renting of wombs or the marketing of gametes and embryos."*

Did they mention that some women, who need it to survive, are denied birth control? Or that some women are infected with HIV/AIDS because the Church condemns the use of condoms? No. As of 2015, the bishops are sticking with forced sterilization and renting a woman's womb.

So what does a bishop think when he hears the words, "violence against women"? An opportunity for self-examination? An unbiased assessment of the impact of Church teaching on the problem? A desire to pursue justice in light of the Gospel message that all people, women and men, are created with equal worth and dignity? Hardly.

But you can depend upon a cursory nod from the bishops about how "unfortunate" it is that families in some cultures victimize women.

Jeannette Mulherin previously served as WOC's President. She lives in Northern Virginia.

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The Hidden Histories of Black Catholic Sisters

Shannen Dee Williams, Ph.D.

Nine years ago, I was completely unaware of the history of African-American women religious and the 2,000-plus years of black female religious life in the Catholic Church. I had never seen a black sister depicted outside of a Hollywood film, and at no point during my Catholic or public school education was I ever taught about black sisters or the longstanding history of Catholicism among black people in the world. And, frighteningly, I only encountered this history by chance.

While searching for a paper topic for a graduate seminar in African-American history, I stumbled upon a newspaper article detailing the historic 1968 formation of the National Black Sisters' Conference (NBSC) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I experienced a metanoia. For the first time in my life, I could name several black women who had dared to embrace the religious state in the U.S. Church and say among many things that they were black and Catholic and undeniably proud of those two facts.

Shocked by my discovery, I began scouring research databases and the Internet for any mention of the NBSC and the sisters whose names I had collected. While the material available was disturbingly scant, I soon realized that many of the NBSC founders had desegregated their historically white congregations after World War II. I read with uneasy amazement as some of these sisters confessed to believing they were the only black sister in the United States prior to receiving Sister M. Martin de Porres (Patricia Muriel) Grey, R.S.M.'s invitation to the first NBSC meeting. I also read in horror as many recounted enduring years of racist discrimination, abuse, and neglect in their orders and the predominantly white communities in which they labored.

From the few published books on black religious by pioneering scholars such as the late Father Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. and Diane Batts Morrow, I learned of the existence of the nation's historically black sisterhoods, first founded in the nineteenth century to ensure the development of black female religious life and a non-racist articulation of



Shannen Dee Williams

Catholicism in the United States.¹ In conducting my earliest oral history interviews, I listened intently as elderly black sisters recounted their heartbreaking experiences of discrimination in the universal Church, including being rejected admission into the same all-white sisterhoods that had educated them solely on the basis of race.

Thoroughly unsettled by how invisible and inaccessible black sisters' lives and history had been to me—a cradle black Catholic and budding historian of black women—I committed myself to learning as much about black religious throughout the world as possible. I also decided to join a small community of scholars working to document their largely hidden histories and the history of black laywomen whose calls to religious life were thwarted by a collusion of racism and segregation before and after World War II. Among them is 80-year old Elaine Clyburn, an associate member of the Sisters of Saint Joseph.

sure of the act was almost unbearable. "Some people do not believe me when I tell them the sisters rejected me because I was black," Clyburn said. "But it is the truth. I was explicitly told that I could not enter the Sisters of St. Joseph because of my color and only because of my color."³



Sister M. Martin de Porres (Patricia Muriel) Grey, Pittsburgh's first black Religious Sister of Mercy and Chief Architect of the National Black Sisters' Conference. Courtesy of Dr. Patricia Grey.



Group Photo of the Oblate Sisters of Providence at 1929 Centennial Celebration. Courtesy of the Archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Following a talk that I gave on my research at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee in 2012, Clyburn approached me and thanked me for bringing attention to the exclusionary admissions policies of the nation's historically white sisterhoods. "Young lady, you just told my story," she said. "In 1952, I was denied admission to the Sisters of Saint Joseph [of Carondelet] in Buffalo, New York solely on the basis of race. I was one of the broken hearts that you mentioned."²

After collecting her oral history interview a few days later, I finally began to understand the full impact and trauma of these racist admissions policies. While the CSJ's rejection had been emotionally devastating for Clyburn, the subsequent denial and era-

While there is ample documentation about the exclusionary admissions policies of historically white sisterhoods, memories of the longstanding practices of racial segregation and exclusion in female religious life remain largely restricted to the victims, their families, and the perpetrators.⁴ Many congregational histories fail to mention the existence of such discriminatory policies, and church studies that do generally mention them in passing or as side notes, often dismissing or underestimating their impact on the quality and nature of female religious life and the Church as a whole.⁵ Moreover, many women like Clyburn, who became the first black woman graduate of LeMoyne College in 1956, never submitted written applications to their communities. Instead,

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they received oral rejections from individual white sisters, oftentimes a teacher, school counselor, or visiting vocational director, leaving no written record of the event.⁶

Such realities make determining the exact number of black vocations lost to the Church due to these racist policies impossible. It also shields some of the most insidious forms of white supremacy and racial hatred in religious life from popular view. While oral histories help shed much needed light on longstanding racism in female religious life, locating the women who fell victim to these practices and asking them to relive what were often traumatic experiences is an extremely difficult task. My seven-year journey to interview Sherrill Adams (formerly School Sister of Notre Dame Nathan Marie) is a telling example.

In 1962, Adams, then just eighteen years old, became the first African American accepted into the Baltimore province of the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) as a postulant. In 1968, Adams helped to establish the NBSC and quickly emerged as a leader in the burgeoning black Catholic movement. Like many black sisters who came of age during the black power movement, she also paid a heavy price for activism. I first learned of Adams from a 1972 *Washington Post* article, which detailed her congregation's delaying of her final vow profession as punishment for her political activism.⁷ However, my efforts to locate Adams between 2007 and early 2014 were fruitless. I knew she had departed the SSND, but since most congregations per-

manently seal the files of members who did not persevere, I could only rely on oral history to reconstruct her story. However, I could not locate Adams. Some of my interviewees thought she had passed away. Others, who knew her story, suggested that she probably didn't want to be found.

After some persistence and luck, I finally tracked down Adams in the summer of 2014. After explaining who I was and the purpose of my project, Adams took a moment and then began repeating (but not necessarily to me) "Why now?" After a few more minutes, she confessed that she had not been able to speak about her time in religious life without great emotion for decades, but concluded that it was probably time to share her story. A few days later, I interviewed Adams for over three hours and recorded a familiar and unfamiliar story.

Like many pioneering black sisters in white congregations, Adams endured racial harassment, bullying, verbal abuse, and emotional isolation on a daily basis inside the convent. Although Adams, a former SSND pupil and product of D.C.'s segregated and integrated parochial schools, had expected to encounter some resistance to her presence in the SSND, the "24/7" micro- and macro-aggressions of her hostile white counterparts knew no bounds.⁸

On the day of her first profession ceremony in 1965, for example, five of the newly invested novice sisters with whom Adams entered the order loudly yelled, "nigger" in unison and snickered as she walked down

the back path of the SSND mother-house to join her family, who had come to celebrate the sacred occasion. Adams also routinely endured the humiliation of waiting extended periods of time to be assigned to one of her

order's schools to teach because most of her white counterparts, many of whom taught African-American children, steadfastly refused to live and dine with her on non-segregated terms. Although Adams's admission into the SSND's Baltimore province had been subject to a general chapter vote, she had never expected that such humiliating votes would continue once she professed her holy vows as a SSND. However, white SSND across the nation routinely voted on whether or not to accept Adams (and black SSND in other provinces) into their convents, teach with her, or simply host her for a meal.⁹

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Elaine Clyburn with Sister Agnes Clare at Mt. Saint Joseph Academy's Graduation in 1952. Courtesy of Elaine Clyburn.

Civil Disobedience and Prophetic Obedience ...continued from page 5

every federal law enforcement agency of the U.S., as well as the District of Columbia Metropolitan police was daunting. The snipers on nearby roofs and the circling helicopters were intimidating. Our little group of seven walked back and forth for a long time between two corners carrying our signs urging Francis to ordain women. There were several women from WOC and WOW present, singing, urging us on. I was grateful for their presence and support. Our civil disobedience began in the few minutes before Pope Francis arrived. When the officers announced the street had to be cleared, some of us lay down and the rest of us sat down in the street. After what seemed a long time sitting on hot asphalt in intense sun, after officers gave us three warnings on loud speakers the volume of which completely silenced the crowd, the officers forcibly removed us from the street and placed us on a corner law enforcement had claimed.

We had hoped for media attention and got much more media attention than we dreamed possible. We didn't expect to see Pope Francis. We saw him twice. We never imagined Francis would actually see us or our signs; but as he left the cathedral, he drove by the "law-enforcement corner" where we were waiting to receive our citations. He was within six feet of us. Four of us made direct eye contact with him. Each time, he looked from their eyes down to the signs they were carrying: "Pope Francis: Ordain Women"; "Primacy of Conscience"; "Women Priests Are Here"; "Todos son Iguales en Los Ojos de Dios: Ordenen Mujeres" ("All are equal in God's eyes: Ordain Women"). On the plane, on his way home, it happened: a reporter asked Francis about women's ordination. The answer wasn't encouraging. Francis said women's ordination is "not going to happen." But he had to face the question.

Afterwards, several of us felt similarly exhilarated. It was as if the Spirit choreographed the events so that the best possible scenario unfolded. Maybe that's what prophetic obedience means.

Jane Via was born and reared in St. Louis, Mo., graduated from Purdue University with a degree in Spanish Language and Literature and from Marquette University with a Ph.D. in Religious Studies with an emphasis in New Testament. She taught Theology for nine years full time at Catholic colleges and universities, then went to law school and became a country prosecutor, while continuing to teach Religious Studies part time for several years. She was ordained a priest in 2006 on the Bodensee, founded a parish in San Diego, Calif. in 2005, and led the community for almost nine years. She now assists the young woman priest and pastor as Pastor Emerita.

Refugee Sponsorship: My Return to Partner with the Church I'd Left Behind

By Cindy Perry

I grew up in a Catholic family that attended Mass weekly. My sisters and I attended Catholic grade school and high school. Ultimately, I selected a Catholic (Jesuit) university as well. My relationship with the Church over those first twenty-two years was not without conflict, however. At age nine, I was dismayed to discover that the boys in my class could be excused from class to fulfill altar-boy duties during daytime funerals; I was especially offended that they received tips for their services and that this lucrative, class-skipping activity was not also available to the girls. Still, I largely towed some party lines—for example, my “pro-life” position in high school even won me an essay contest. And I subsequently participated in a “March for Life” demonstration in Washington, DC. I supported most other Church policies without exception.

I arrived at college with a fairly strong Catholic identity, and considered joining related groups, such as the pro-life group, when I arrived on campus. When I started to get calls about protesting at nearby abortion clinics, I began to feel uncomfortable, and backed off involvement with these groups. Still, I saw around me many positive aspects of Catholic faith, including volunteer activities in the local community and abroad. By sophomore year, I had stopped attending mass regularly, and through a philosophy/theology course, I came to question much of what I had been taught about interpreting the Bible. I came to view the Bible more as a literary work than a sacred text or moral guide. By senior year, when I took an Intro to Feminisms course, I had distanced myself almost completely from the Church. I identified as strongly pro-choice and agnostic by the time I left college. Over the course of the next few years, my agnosticism grew to atheism, and this remains my conviction.

While at graduate school—my first time attending a non-Catholic educational institution—I met people from many different faiths as well as became friends for the first time with openly gay people. Over late nights of coffee and computer programming, I started to think about the very real practical and emotional consequences of the non-legal status of gay marriage. I became passionate about the injustice of this

issue. In addition to participating in marches and other public protests for this right, I informed solicitors from my high school and college that the Church’s stance on this issue was the reason that I refused to donate to them. When Massachusetts became the first state to legalize gay marriage, I was ecstatic. When Cambridge City Hall opened at midnight on May 17, 2004 to begin issuing marriage licenses, I walked over to witness the moment. Any good work that the Catholic Church was doing at this time was far from my mind; I could see only the Church’s opposition to progress in welcoming all types of people into society, time and again.

Following the completion of my PhD, I used the flexibility of a postdoc to increase my volunteer work with Planned Parenthood to include both escorting and volunteering on their hotline. I still count these as some of the most valuable volunteer experiences I have had in my life, helping me to see up close—if only for a few moments or hours—people who face different circumstances and challenges in life than I ever have. My passion for the gay marriage movement and gay rights in general grew during this period. In 2006, my (male) partner at the time and I got engaged and announced to our families that we would not be getting married until gay marriage was legally recognized by the federal government. This decision was greeted with confusion by some family members and outright disapproval by others. Almost no one was impressed, but it always felt like the right thing to do.

During most of my twenties, I had no contact with the Catholic Church other than to deny my alma maters donations or to attend weddings and funerals, where I willfully suppressed the lyrics and responses that I had memorized and repeated for so many years, as I no longer believed in their meaning.

In 2006, my partner and I went on a trip to Zambia with Habitat for Humanity, where we lived with a family and built some housing structures over the course of two weeks. It was incredibly hard work, and a very rewarding way to get a glimpse of life in the middle of Africa. While cooking with the women in the family, we discussed topics such as birth control—the eldest daughter of the patriarch, who was about fifty

years old, told us about her birth control method (a string of beads worn around her waist). She said it only worked some of the time; she had six children.



Cindy Perry

Our team of seventeen people was about three-quarters female, and many of those women were incredibly physically strong. Watching us work, one of the middle-aged women was inspired to try her hand at laying bricks, much to the dismay of the men in the family who were looking on. The family was devoutly Catholic, and their Church provided a strong community for them. I couldn’t help but also think of the Church’s role in enforcing the patriarchal society that I was witnessing, but still, it was during this trip that I was able to set aside my differences with the Church and mostly just observe the positive things that the Church brought to this family, including a communal place where they could get together with their neighbors and sing and pray on a Sunday morning, as well as being one of the connectors (through Habitat) that brought our group out to help the family build their housing structures.

The most life-changing part about my trip to Africa was meeting the woman who is now my wife. In an activity on the third day that I knew her, I wrote that she was “one of the coolest chicks I’ve met, incredibly hardworking, good-hearted, and so much fun!” Months later, when the team met up in Los Angeles for a reunion, we were fast friends, and eventually I came to realize that I was falling in love with her. Two years later, I moved to Canada, and we got married. During the time that I was coming to understand more about my sexuality, I faulted the Church that I grew up in in part for my lack of self-knowledge. I wondered, if I had been encouraged to explore my sexuality as a teenager, rather than saving myself for marriage, if I had not been taught that it somehow made sense that being gay was not a sin but acting on one’s sexual identity, was, if the Church had stepped up to truly love all humans and to denounce hatred and discrimination toward LGBT people, how much

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more would I be willing to embrace the Church for the good that it does rather than to distance myself because of the harm it does?

If I ever thought there was a place for me and my views in the Catholic Church to this point, by a year ago, I was fairly convinced that the Venn diagram of me and the Catholic Church had no overlapping pieces—except for those damn hymns that I couldn't seem to forget. My wife and I now have two wonderful daughters whom we are raising as atheists. They have never been to a Catholic Mass. Despite some of the admittedly positive experiences I had during my Catholic upbringing, I still didn't see a permanent place for myself or my feminist, atheist, lesbian family in the Church.

But then Aylan Kurdi's tiny little body washed ashore, and something shifted for me. It was time to build coalitions to help address this crisis. Together with a friend whom I had known from our lesbian prenatal class (yes, such a thing exists in Toronto!), we began to put out feelers and form a group of people interested in sponsoring a refugee family from Syria to come to Canada.

Canada is the only country in the world that has a formal route for private citizen groups to sponsor refugees. The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program was established in 1978 and was initially focused on responding to the "boat crisis" by sponsoring refugees from Vietnam. Many churches and other (mostly) religious organizations established agreements with the Federal government that allow them to facilitate the sponsorship of refugees by their congregants or other groups of private citizens. Sponsorship entails legally accepting financial liability for the newcomers for their first year in Canada, during which they are eligible for all services such as health care, but cannot access cash welfare programs. In addition, the resettlement group is responsible for orienting the newcomers to Canada, for example, in terms of accessing services; finding housing, schooling, and language courses; and learning about Canadian culture. Private citizens can form sponsorship groups outside of Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), but the SAHs facilitate paperwork (of which there is a lot) and also bring decades of experience in resettling refugees to bear.

We explored a few options for connecting with SAHs, but ultimately this group of friends and friends-of-friends that we had gathered decided to sponsor a family

through the Archdiocese of Toronto's Project Hope. There was no small amount of apprehension in moving forward with this partnership, as our group membership is thirty percent LGBT plus many atheists and agnostics and people of non-Catholic faiths; several people voiced negative experiences in general with organized religion or specifically with the Catholic Church in these discussions. Ironically, I found myself in the position of arguing for partnering with the Church. I favored their long experience in resettling refugees and their structured approach to resettlement, which I thought would prove useful for our group of resettlement newcomers. But I also found myself arguing for the good parts that I knew of the Church, including the social justice work of the Jesuits that I had witnessed and learned from in college. And ultimately, I felt more comfortable going with the Catholics than with any other faith-based group; they felt like family to me, and as such, I felt strongly that I could and would call bullshit on them if needed throughout the process.

If I ever thought there was a place for me and my views in the Catholic Church to this point, by a year ago, I was fairly convinced that the Venn diagram of me and the Catholic Church had no overlapping pieces...

And thus began my partial reconnection and partnership with the Catholic Church.

Having been on both the outside and inside of the Catholic Church has its benefits. After spending over a decade of my adult life identifying as straight, when I found myself in love with a woman, I felt fully entitled to being treated with the same dignity and rights that I had enjoyed as a straight person. After spending two decades identifying as member of the Catholic Church, I also feel fully entitled to leverage the social justice work of the Church as its partner despite being an atheist, lesbian, and feminist who disagrees with many of the policies of the Church.

I used to wonder why people who believed so strongly in the ordination of women, for example, would continue to claim membership in an organization that so openly prac-

ticed oppression of them. As I circle back to partnership with the Church, it is making a bit more sense. Still, because of my differences with the Church, when the coordinator of refugees doesn't call me back for days, I start to wonder if it has something to do with our group's LGBT presence. It probably doesn't. But it sure would be nice to know that we were working with a group that embraced humans of all sexualities equally, so that I could instead assume that a lack of call-back has only to do with the fact that they are very busy with the many sponsored newcomers who are arriving each day.

We are just beginning our relationship with the Church in this sponsorship role. I hope that we will come to believe that we were not treated any differently because of the many LGBT and non-Catholic people in our sponsorship group. I hope that we will have such a positive experience that we will choose to do our next sponsorship through the Church as well. But I'm skeptical. The Church has built a massive obstacle for itself to win over groups such as ours.

The analogy of the Church as a huge ship to be turned slowly feels apt. I commend those of you who continue to work to turn the ship from the inside despite the fact that the ship maintains policies that contribute to your oppression, but I can't say I'm ready to join the inside fight. I hope your efforts, as well as those who are working to shift Church doctrine toward welcoming the LGBT community and other marginalized groups, are successful, for I am acutely aware of partnerships that could achieve so much good that are falling by the wayside while the ship rolls forward at full speed, barely edging toward that ideal destination of becoming a Church that is inclusive of all of humanity.

Cindy Perry writes to us from Toronto, Canada where she and her wife, Christine, are raising their two young Canadian-American daughters to be feminists, atheist-humanists, and believers in the good in all people.

May I have the courage today.
To live the life that I would love.
To postpone my dream no longer.
But do at last what I came here for.
And waste my heart on fear no more.

From "Morning Offering," by John O'Donohue

It was not long after returning from the WOW Conference in September that I encountered the above poem. It could not have been more timely. The question of what it was that I came here for was no longer a silent whisper in the depths of my heart. It is now a question spoken loudly and clearly. It is a question of call. It is a question of my dream. It is a question that has always evoked the same response—my priesthood.

The dream comes from my childhood. It was the dream of a gentle and shy little girl who somehow dared to believe that she wanted to be a priest. I do not remember exactly when I felt this call. I know that I was in early elementary school. I attended a Catholic school run by oppressively rigid sisters. The time before Easter was spent with preparation for the Holy Week services. I was in the choir. Due to my choir duties, my family spent most of Holy Week in church. I do not recall feeling any sense of obligation. Rather, I was drawn to the mystery of the Mass.

The dream comes from my childhood. It was the dream of a gentle and shy little girl who somehow dared to believe that she wanted to be a priest.

Singing my heart out for Jesus, there was something compelling about the Holy Week services. It was on a Holy Thursday that I felt the inexplicable pull of something that I could not name. Singing without the organ had a plaintive, sorrowful feel. The incense filled the small church. The church was silent and somber. The prayers were unlike any other during the liturgical year. The washing of the feet was like watching a play. Always a sensitive child, I was absorbed into the story of the suffering Jesus.

At some point during that service, I knew that I wanted to be a priest.

Now, being a good little Italian Catholic girl, I knew better than to tell people that I wanted to be a priest. I do not remember to whom and when I first told anyone. I do not recall telling anyone when I was a small child. I remain moved beyond words by the Mass. Every Holy Week brings back those early feelings. There were no altar girls at the time. However, I always wanted to be as involved in the Mass as I was permitted. I don't know if I ever wondered why there were no women on the altar. With the support of a good priest and pastor, I was eventually the youngest lector in the parish and one of the first females to become a Lector.

Then High School arrived and I needed to decide what I wanted to do with my life. I was still in Catholic school with all the stifling guilt that prevailed at that time. I remained a shy and awkward teenager who was studious and hard working. I decided to talk to the High School priest about my call. I announced to him that I wanted to be a priest. Needless to say, my pronouncement was not well received. I recall that he laughed at me and told me that girls could not be priests. He suggested that I become a nun. (Nuns and I did have some matters of contention so that was unthinkable to me. Anyway, I wanted to say Mass.) I was humiliated. I must have thought that was the end of that. After all, Father said so. I am not good enough for God because I am a girl.

I moved on quickly and did not make the mistake of discussing my call to the priesthood again for a very long time. I decided that I wanted to be a lawyer. I attended a Lutheran college and seriously concerned undertaking a major in Religion. I knew of female classmates who were headed to seminary. My heart sighed at the thought of seminary. But, I was too traditional and entrenched to ever consider leaving the Church at the time. The Religion professors were not able to provide me with any direction on what a Catholic woman who



Angela Murphy during her first Communion

wanted to be a priest is supposed to do with her life. But, there was the law and big dreams of politics.

Fast forward to a wonderful life that began when I met my husband in Law School. We have three amazing children. My husband and I practice law together in our small firm. I was able to focus on the many wonders of motherhood. My early difficulties in having children resulted in a crisis of faith that led me to finally leave the Church. I was away for a very long time. Yet, each Eastertide would come along and I felt lost. The Protestant church that I attended periodically was very welcoming, but something was missing. I finally talked to a friend who was also once a Catholic. She said that Easter time was the worst and I somehow needed to reconcile my conflicts about the faith. I now know that Easter was also especially difficult for me because it was the anniversary of my call.

I came back to the Church more than ten years ago through the loving example of the Franciscans. The long silenced tug at my heart that is the priesthood also returned. As my children grew, I occasionally thought about my call. I began to tell people that I had wanted to be a priest. I was mostly met by bemused indulgence. Eventually, it became increasingly difficult for me to sit at Mass and watch the lack of women involved in the services. We were good enough to set up the altar and prepare the Church, but forget about the Eucharist (or even reading if an ordained male was available.) In voicing my views, it was suggested that I must think God a sadist if I truly believed that I was called to the Roman Catholic priesthood.

Still, I thought that my call was dead. I have a successful law practice helping children with disabilities and their families obtain educational services. After all, I told myself

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Despite such hostilities, Adams resolved to remain in her community and fight the racism deeply imbedded in the Catholic Church. In 1976, however, Adams, then just 30 years old, suffered a heart attack, which her physician attributed solely to stress. When no member of her community visited her during her two-week stay in the intensive care unit at a local hospital, Adams finally conceded that it was time to depart religious life and end her community's experiment in racial segregation. "It broke my heart," she stoically recalled. "They [the SSND] shredded my heart."¹⁰

Although some aspects of Adams's tenure in religious life are exceptional, black sisters' experiences of virulent racism and discrimination in the church are far from uncommon. The oral and written testimonies of black women and girls who desegregated white sisterhoods are filled with incidents of verbal and physical bullying, deliberate ostracism, and other forms of racist abuse from their white counterparts, religious superiors, and the Church at large. These everyday occurrences included everything from refusing to use the same bathroom facilities as their black congregational members and burning their bed sheets to subjecting black sisters to daily racial taunts.¹¹

Some, like the pioneer black members of the Sisters of Saint Mary (now the Franciscan Sisters of Mary) in Saint Louis, Missouri, were initially forced to enter the back doors of their motherhouse, live in segregated quarters, and profess their vows separately from their white counterparts, among many other humiliating abuses.¹²

Some white superiors even instructed their light-skinned black sisters to pass for white or simply non-black in their respective assignments. Such was the case for School Sisters of St. Francis Lorraine (Elizabeth) Holley and Maria Cruces (Sandra) Smithson. In the case of Smithson, who entered the congregations in 1953, she dutifully obeyed her superior's instructions to pass for white at her first teaching assignment at her order's Alvernia High School in Chicago, Illinois until she began mentoring one of the school's few black girl students, who experienced severe racial discrimination. Soon thereafter, Smithson revealed her racial heritage to the student and news quickly spread around the school. In response, the SSSF reassigned Smithson to Costa Rica where she served as the principal of the order's Saint Clare College, a high school, and passed as a non-black Latina sister until her return to the states in 1972.¹³

Such realities and the lived experiences of black sisters offer major revisions to key narratives about the American Catholic experience and reveal among many things that the color of Christ's brides mattered in the universal Church, perhaps even more so than the color of Christ. Indeed, one cannot honestly tell the history of black sisters (or Catholicism) anywhere in the Atlantic world without confronting the Church's sin history of racism, slavery, colonialism, segregation, and exclusion. But the history of black sisters is not all pain and degradation.



Sister Nathan Marie (Sherrill) Adams, SSND, with Parents, c. 1965. Courtesy of Sherrill Adams.



Segregated Profession Ceremony of the First Five African-American Sisters of St. Mary, c. 1947. Courtesy of the American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives at the Catholic University of America. Reprinted with permission.

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that this was a fine ministry and I was God's instrument in aiding these children in need. How could this have not been my mission in life? Let alone the raising of my own dear children? Then one summer, a very dear friend asked me if it was possible that my call was something other than my work. That was followed by yet another Easter which ended in tears as my heart broke again on a Holy Thursday when the priest renewed his vows before the congregation. Only men were on the altar that night. I decided to go to a friend who is a minister and tell her of my call to the priesthood. My friend issued me a challenge. She told me that I worked for inclusion every day of my life for children with disabilities. How could I sit at Mass and accept the lack of inclusion of women in the Catholic Church? She encouraged me to listen to my

call. I was stunned. This was the first time that anyone had acknowledged that my call was real and not some flight of childhood fancy. She cautioned me that if I did not listen to this call, it would continue to come back and demand to be heard.

I have taken steps to follow my friend's advice. I discovered WOC and only heard more resounding affirmation that my call was real. I attended the WOW conference and learned how much I have to learn. However, the actual discernment of my call remains elusive. I am regularly carried away by the busyness of my family and career. I do not allow myself the time to listen to a voice that says that there may have always been something else.

So each morning I pray, "May I have the courage today to really listen to the voice of

the Spirit that calls to each one of us." The wide-eyed and wonder-filled little girl who was me knew how to dream. She knew how to listen to the voice of God and the Spirit carried her. That little girl still resides within me, though she has been buried by the dictates and demands made by other voices and obligations. There is no better time than now to find her again and honor her by finally discerning what she heard when she was called by God to the priesthood.

Angela Murphy is a member of the WOC board and resides in Nazareth, Penn. with her husband and three children. She is a lawyer practicing exclusively in the area of special education law and is active in supporting the needs of disabled children and their families.

Tom Roberts. *Joan Chittister: Her Journey from Certainty to Faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015. 248 pages. 978-1-62698-148-5. \$28.

Reviewed by Rachel Schmidt

Joan Chittister: Her Journey from Certainty to Faith by Tom Roberts is the compelling life story of a woman who has consistently chosen faith over fear with an enduring spirit and stubborn adherence to the call God has placed in her heart. Her sheer determination, hope, and reliance upon God have accompanied her through her struggles in childhood, as a young nun during Vatican II, and as a woman in a patriarchal Church. Tom Robert's ability to weave the tapestry of Joan's existence into a biography with the theme "from certainty to faith" is a task that he mastered with humility. In his *Acknowledgements* he admitted the "anxieties of this male writer over the challenge of taking on the biography of such a powerful woman and feminist." Roberts was worthy of the task and produced a biography with clarity, vision, and thoroughness. I seek to represent how this record has touched my young, Catholic heart.

As I read the honest representation of Chittister's experience of domestic abuse, I could not help but marvel at the courage and honor of the women who have come before me. Her mother, Loretta, embodies the plight of women during the early 20th century — limited education, no independence, and reliance upon a husband for economic support. Loretta wanted to be a nun, but her mother needed her at home to take care of the household. Then she married Chittister's father who passed away when Joan was only a baby, and her only choice for economic security was to remarry Dutch, Chittister's stepfather. Dutch was an alcoholic who got violent with Loretta whenever he was drunk, and she had no other economic options than to stay with him. My grandmothers are contemporaries of Joan's, and I have heard their stories of controlling husbands, unending housework, and their desire to be free. I hear in my matriarchs' stories a similarity to Loretta — working hard at the service of men with no opportunity to do otherwise leaving vast talents untapped.

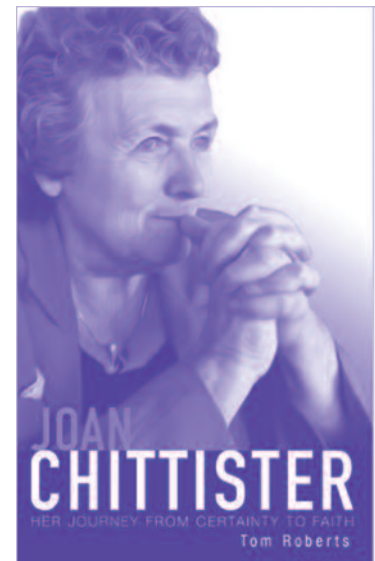
Joan entered the Benedictine monastery in Erie, Pennsylvania at age 16 in 1952, where religious life was about order, blind obedience, and characterized by the "rigor of routine." From 1952 until the order started incorporating the Church reforms of Vatican II, the nuns spent their time

praying, cleaning, and teaching. This way of life was not without its difficulties for Joan but she loved it. As a woman who earned a masters degree in theology, I have always viewed Vatican II as a positive event in the life of the Church, and my opinion on the matter has not changed. However, Chittister's experience opened my eyes to the struggles that existed for sisters as they transitioned from a community that was inward facing one that was outward facing. Shedding the habit was also intensely symbolic — leaving an old way of life behind and heading into an unknown future. Sometimes when the Spirit wants to make room for something new in our hearts it can be painful, but the gifts are worth the struggle.

When Chittister's community made it to the other side of the Vatican II reforms, they had unlimited opportunities for service. The sisters began to branch out into various charitable and justice-oriented ministries, they created relationships with people in situations of poverty, and they sought to do work that was based on the call in their hearts rather than blind obedience to mother superiors and bishops. They had the ability to act, and they experienced the joy of living out what God created them to do. The answers to life's calls were found by looking inside at gifts, talents, and desires. The emphasis of religious life was no longer on conformity and rules.

It is no wonder that ordination started to be embraced as a legitimate call for women in this post-Vatican II atmosphere. Despite Pope John Paul II declaring in 1994 that the topic of women's ordination was no longer up for discussion, many organizations ignored the pope's mandate. John Paul II's pronouncement that the debate was over only led to a wider and more intense discussion about women's ordination with WOC, WOW (Women's Ordination Worldwide), and the Roman Catholic Womenpriest (RCWP) movement. WOC is specifically cited in the biography as having a regular and continued presence in Rome, to influence equality for women in the Church.

Joan began to understand, through faith, that women "can contribute in proportion to their total personal gifts not just by the exercise of one biological function." She was moved by a book *Women and the Church*



by Sr. A.M. McGrath about the patriarchal oppression of women and was impassioned to dialogue with a priest friend about what she had learned. Her attempts were met with dismissal. Chittister said his response was not mean, but "it was worse than mean. It was dismissive. It had no value, and I realized that every word that woman (McGrath) had said, every word my mother ever said, in that moment, became frighteningly true and clear." She credits this priest friend with cementing her commitment to the liberation of women in the Church.

Joan continued to make clear her commitment to women in the Church in spite of difficulties. She was invited to speak at the first international conference on women's ordination in Ireland sponsored by Women's Ordination Worldwide, which prompted a letter from the Vatican to Joan's community's prioress, Sr. Christine Vladimiroff. The prioress was instructed to "forbid and prohibit" Chittister from going. Chittister's response to the Vatican was, "Who do you think you are that you can tell me what to think, tell me to whom I may speak, tell me where I can or cannot go?"

Vladimiroff was not going to stop Joan and did everything in her power to make sure Joan and the community would not be harmed. She consulted with canon lawyers, travelled to Rome, and corresponded with Vatican officials. The details of Vladimiroff's efforts to support Joan's decision are unknown, because the prioress sealed all the files on the matter for sixty years in order to protect the community. In the end, Chittister's entire community supported her speaking at the conference.

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The entire experience, including Joan speaking at the conference in Ireland, was triumph for women religious and the movement for women's equality in the Church. Her message at the conference was about discipleship and following Christ. She said, "To follow Jesus...is to follow the one who turns the world upside down, even the religious world." She talked about Jesus spending time with lepers and the outcasts of society and how discipleship is "to be, in our own world, what Christ was for his: healer and prophet, voice and

heart, call and sign of the God whose design for this world is justice and love." Chittister calls us to ask the questions and discuss the difficult topics in spite of push back from the authorities in Church. She said, "I will continue to question...I see it as an intellectual, theological imperative, that we think our way through the faith."

The message I received from Joan's life is that as Church we need to stop holding so dearly to arbitrary rules and embrace the desire to question as well as the messiness of living out the call God has placed in our hearts. Rules can be comforting and predictable, but they are also limiting to the

spiritual life. Am I open to go wherever God is taking me? Am I willing to go against the status quo, as Jesus did? God is greater than the Church, than patriarchy, than the expectations of traditional Catholicism, or any fear that is within me. I must shed my habit, like Joan did, of being comfortable with certainty and step into the blinding light faith.

Rachel Schmidt lives in and writes to us from Capitol Heights, MD. She is currently the Communications Associate at NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby.

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Their lives and testimonies also document a vibrant and longstanding Catholicism among black people and a history of black and white resistance to white supremacy that has yet to be fully explored and examined.

While the thousands of black vocations likely lost to the Church due to racism and exclusionary admissions policies remain the Church's shame, the black women and girls who resolved to answer God's call and traveled hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles to enter communities that accepted African-American candidates, stand atop the greatest testimonies of the Catholic experience. Their unyielding faith in the face of unholy discrimination not only proves that Catholicism can be free of white supremacy and racism, but also can help to facilitate much-needed racial healing and reconciliation in the Church. As such, anyone invested in a full and honest accounting of the Catholic experience has an obligation to ensure that the lives and sacrifices of black sisters are never erased, marginalized, or reduced to myth. I am simply committed to doing my part.

Notes

¹ See Davis' *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1990) and Morrow's *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence, 1820-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

² "Still Mining the Forgotten: Black Catholic Sisters in United States History", talk delivered at "Lunch and Learn" Seminar at the National Civil Rights Movement in Memphis, Tennessee, March 21, 2012. See also <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2013/10/segregated-sisterhoods-and-the-mercurial-politics-of-racial-truth-telling/>.

³ Elaine Clyburn, interview by author, March 27, 2012.

⁴ The oral and written testimonies of black sisters and laywomen and the published studies of the anti-black admissions policies conducted by Jesuit Father Raymond Bernard from 1949 to 1957 quickly put any denials to rest. See Raymond Bernard, S.J., "Some Anthropological Implications of the Racial Admission Policy of the U.S. Sisterhoods," *American Catholic Sociological Review* 19 (1958): 125; "Jim Crow Vocations," *Social Order* (1949): 214-44 reprinted in *Interracial Review* (1949): 171; "Interracial Vocation Opportunities: Supplemental List of Seminaries and Novitiates," *Social Order* 2 [Old Series] (1949): 454-55; "More Vocation Opportunities," *Social Order* 3 (1950): 368; "Sisterhoods and the Negro," *Interracial Review* 28 (1955): 42-45; and "Integration in the Convent," *America* 95 (April 26, 1956): 83-84.

⁵ Studies that acknowledge the history of racial segregation and exclusion in female religious life include: Margaret McGuiness, *Called to Serve: A History of Catholic Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007), Lara Medina, *Las Hermanas: Chicana/Latina Religious-Political Activism in the U.S. Catholic Church* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time*. In *The American Catholic Experience: A History of from Colonial Times to the Present* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

⁶ Clyburn, interview by author.

⁷ Laura A. Kiernan, "Nun Takes Vows 9 Years Late," *Washington Post*, July 29, 1972, E8.

⁸ Sherrill Adams (formerly Sister Nathan Marie, SSND), interview by author, digital recording, June 24, 2014.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Adams, interview by author.

¹¹ Oral interviews with former women religious: Dr. Patricia Grey, Angela White Davis, Patricia Hamilton, Sister Mary Antona Ebo, the papers of the National Black Sisters' Conference, and published testimonies by Sister Daniel Marie Myles, SSSF and Sandra Willingham are just a few sources that document this discrimination.

¹² Sister Mary Antona Ebo, interview by author, March 26, 2007. See also John Feister, "Sister Mary Antona Ebo, FSM.: Brave Sister of Selma," *St. Anthony's Messenger* (March 2007), online issue, <http://www.americancatholic.org/Messenger/Mar2007/Feature1.asp> (accessed on June 5, 2012).

¹³ Sister Sandra Smithson, SSSF, interview by author, June 11, 2015. Documentation of Sister Lourene's racial passing can also be found in "Sister Lourene Holly: Long-time Alvernia Faculty Member Dead at 54," *Just For You: A Newsletter for Parents of Alvernians* 1 (Spring 1975): 1. Copy from the SSSF Archives in author's possession.

Dr. Shannen Dee Williams is an assistant professor of history at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. She is currently completing the manuscript for her book, "Subversive Habits: The Untold Story of Black Catholic Sisters in the United States." She also frequently lectures on the history of black women religious in the Atlantic world.

This article is a combined and revised version of two talks she delivered at the 2015 Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference in Philadelphia, Penn.

Contemporary Catholic scholars are people like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Ivone Gebara, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Shawn Copeland, Margaret Farley, Maria Pilar Aquino, none of whom are ordained. This is only to mention the most experienced colleagues. Happily many new scholars are also on the horizon. Rare are the clerics we read—Charles Curran and Thomas Gumbledon being notable exceptions.

3. Our third success is the refusal of women to be divided and conquered into nuns and laywomen. If we have learned anything from the non-ordination of women, it is that all women are laywomen despite energetic efforts on the part of the Vatican to suggest otherwise. ...Women in religious congregations choose community as the setting for their mission and ministry. But it is ordination in kyriarchy, not membership in a religious community, which divides clergy and laypeople.

4. Let us not leave aside our fourth success, namely the myriad role models we have named and claimed as part of our movements for justice and liberation. Jewish feminist scholar Judith Plaskow gave us Lilith as a counterpoint to Eve. The late biblical scholar Jane Schaberg snatched Mary Magdalene from the jaws of patriarchy and helped us to see her centrality in the Jesus narrative. We now cherish...[others who]... function as prototypes of our own work... Without concrete persons as role models it is hard to imagine our way forward. ... We have Theresa Kane with us this weekend—an icon of women's bold, courageous, and courteous efforts to bring about right relation. A quick look around this room reveals many more role models, people doing the everyday work of justice and liberation, of gospel and global justice because of gender empowerment. Let us celebrate that!

5. Our fifth major accomplishment is the deeply interreligious nature of our struggle. We have learned from ordained women—rabbis, Protestant ministers, Muslim colleagues, and others—the privileges and pitfalls of ordination. And we have seen in their processes many elements of our own. ...What we mean by Catholic has changed thanks to them, now reflecting more the original sense of broadly based. It is with gratitude that we celebrate the interfaith dimensions of our struggle.

6. Our sixth success is feminist ministry in myriad forms. Feminist ministry is the umbrella term used to describe the many ways in which we meet the needs of the world. This includes ministries of education,

health care, political life, social work, as well as leading worship, preaching, and administering our base communities. What are new and worthy of celebration are the many ways in which Catholic women carry out these tasks with dignity, integrity, competence, and little or no support from the kyriarchal church...

We now have Catholic women priests ordained in a variety of ways. Catholic women ordained as Lutheran or Episcopal priests, as United Church of Christ, Methodist, Disciples, or other Christian denomination ministers, are, after all, also Catholic ministers. Women ordained through Roman Catholic Womenpriests and the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests, and the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, and other groups now claim and demonstrate that we have Catholic women priests.

Feminist ministers, including priests, prove three important points: first, that feminist ministry takes many forms for which local communities are finally responsible; second, that the needs of the world not the failings of the church determine how feminist ministers act because the urgency of injustice permits none of us to stand by idly while people are in need; and third, that the validity and licitness of sacraments are in the eyes of the beholder such that theological hairsplitting takes a backseat to pastoral practice.

7. In the seventh place, we have been instrumental in creating new models of church. When WOC began, the notion of "renewed priestly ministry in a renewed church" began with it. I daresay we were in the vanguard, and remain so in creating new ways to be church. Many people have left the institutional church because of the scandal of gender inclusion (not to mention issues of abuse, sexuality, divorce, remarriage, etc.). We did not invent these problems, but our solutions have become models for other people. ...Women-church groups function largely without benefit of clergy and with inclusive participation of all members. ...Let us celebrate all of these new models of church.

8. Our eighth success is the international nature of our movement. Women's Ordination Worldwide is living proof that what began as a movement in one setting has morphed into a range of movements in many settings. These autonomous but interconnected groups demonstrate that feminist ministry...is not a U.S.-only phenomenon, nor is it a U.S. export. Each local group has its own character and content, its own priorities and methods. ... We celebrate

in many languages and styles, with many songs and dances ... fulfilling social justice needs around the world despite great odds. Alleluia.

9. Our ninth success worthy of celebration is the rich spirituality and liturgy that characterize our movement and are a resource for the whole church. I am fortunate to live and work with one of the prime movers in this regard, Diann Neu, so I know firsthand the creativity and energy that goes into planning and offering prayers and rituals that convey our deepest commitments. By contrast, learning the rubrics of the Mass and how to preach an eight-minute sermon is child's play. Our liturgists, musicians, dancers, and preachers bring incredible talent and training, creativity and insight to their work. They rely not just on the first and second readings as prescribed in the lectionary, but on materials from literature and the arts, new interpretations of scripture, fresh perspectives on traditional celebrations. ...Liturgical and spiritual innovators will help us celebrate this weekend, and we celebrate them as well.

10. Our tenth success is that we are just getting started. For those who came to Philadelphia to celebrate the end of WOC or the demise of Catholic women's movements, let me suggest respectfully that you are in the wrong place. If you want to see a movement in decline you might want to come back next week and see the holy hoopla of the papal tsunami that will disrupt this city's citizens, cost money that, in my view, could be better spent on direct service to the poor and structural change efforts to end poverty. But we are just getting started! Here's why.

We make the explicit claim that the exclusion of women from decision-making and ministry in the Roman Catholic Church is a symptom and at the same time a byproduct of a theology and ecclesial polity of inequality and elitism. As such, it baptizes and confirms other such forms of oppression—whether racism, economic injustice, heterosexism, ableism, colonialism, militarism, and the like. Our many and varied efforts to change the kyriarchal system are based in Gospel values of love and justice and aimed at the broadest possible global justice agenda. We have work to do. Let us celebrate the first forty years with a commitment to move ahead according to our lights, confident of our foundations.

Dr. Mary E. Hunt is a feminist theologian and co-founder of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual, based in Silver Spring, MD. Dr. Hunt's full speech is available at www.womensordinationworldwide.org.

Susan Cole, Marian Ronan, and Hal Taussig. *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration*. 3rd edn. Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press, 2015. 228 pages. 978-1-94067-177-2. \$19.95.

Reviewed by Sheila Peiffer

Readers who have been staunch followers of feminist theological issues will already be familiar with the prior editions of *Wisdom's Feast* – a delightful compendium of theology and practice centered on the concept of “Sophia” or Wisdom in scripture and tradition. This new edition adds a preface that succinctly surveys recent developments in Sophia scholarship and also provides enlightenment on some of the hostility that this scholarship continues to encounter from hierarchy and organized religion.

As we celebrate WOC's fortieth year, it is especially instructive to read the prefaces to the different editions and glean a vision of how daring it was thirty years ago, and still can be today, to incorporate this female image of God into worship and discussions. “Sophia refuses to conform to the binaries between immanent and transcendent, male and female, native-born and foreigner, pure and contaminated, that are such a comfort to the threatened.” (p. x) In fact, the hostilities became so overt in the 1990s that the controversy spilled out into secular media like “Nightline” and invoked a special United Methodist Bishops letter to affirm the importance of Wisdom theology but condemn any “worship of Sophia as a goddess.” (p. xviii) The authors speculate that some of this same fear is also behind the Catholic hierarchical critique of Elizabeth Johnson in 2011.

Two of the authors of this work, Susan Cole and Hal Taussig, are ordained Methodist elders with pastoral ministries where many of the rites and celebrations outlined in the second half of the book have been tested. Marian Ronan is a Catholic lay scholar and feminist. They all live and work near Philadelphia.

So who is this Sophia who “raises the question of who God is for us and provides a new way of thinking about, imaging, and relating to the divine”? (p. 100) These au-

thors begin their discussion of the theoretical and theological aspects of Sophia by talking about what constitutes spirituality and the role played by feminism in spirituality. They trace an evolving argument and conclude that “feminist spirituality can be defined as the experiencing, the expressing and the effecting of the radical connectedness of all creation, and the radical equality of all human beings.” (p. 6) Sophia, who “permeates all things” and “is a breath of the power of God” (Wisdom 7: 24, 25) epitomizes this connectedness and also provides a new understanding of power, where sharing authority preempts domination.

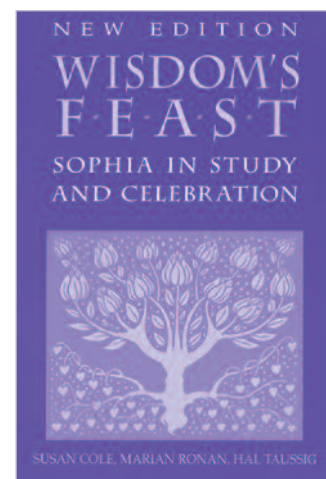
The figure of Sophia is a real biblical person who is part of Jewish and Christian traditions, but has been suppressed and relegated to the status of a minor figure. The authors trace the plight of Sophia as a victim of patriarchy (like many other female figures), yet also hold out hope that she can enliven our worship and provide a source for an authentic evolution of our religious language and symbolism.

The second half of this book is artfully designed to help us to do just that: begin to retrieve images, prayers and celebrations that will satisfy our hunger for rituals that speak to our experience, our diversity and our need to acknowledge the reality of God's feminine presence. Bible studies, liturgies, homilies, meditations, discussion guides, litanies and more (even the most pertinent scripture passages conveniently included in an appendix) abound in a plethora of celebration and prayer that is really the best way to learn, supporting the maxim *lex orandi, lex credendi*—what we pray is what we believe.

This book will be an invaluable source for anyone interested in feminist spirituality and scripture study but also will be a delight for all who meet in small groups, for

those who hope to create prayer experiences and celebrations that resound with our personal experiences, or for those who work for justice. Like many women, Sophia as a figure has been marginalized, suppressed and ignored, but this suffering of invisibility and anonymity only serves to make her a “strong and poignant means of identification” with the poor and minorities. (p. 68) The authors assert, “A Sophia who does not drive us to action on behalf of others becomes a travesty, one more image shoring up the old patriarchal spirituality which divides religion from politics, and the self from society.... May she be for all of us the strength, the courage, the splendid arrogance with which together we will undertake the transformation of society.” (p. 69) *Wisdom's Feast* will spark your imagination, challenge your assumptions and provide ample creative possibilities if you are looking for ways to express the feminine divine presence.

Sheila Peiffer serves on the WOC Board of Directors. She has an M.A. in Theology and experience in many aspects of Catholic pastoral ministry. Currently she is Coordinator of Social Justice for the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church.



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