

CWO
Challenging Institutional Sexism in the Roman Catholic Church
E-news April 2015 issue 79

Welcome to the April issue of the e-news. Editor Pat Brown. Please visit <http://www.catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk/News> and previous issues can be seen there. Please send items for May e-news by 20 May. info@catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk for further information about anything in this e-news where contact details are not given. Many thanks to Ruth Wood for proof reading the e-news.

We held three vigils for Vocation Sunday at Birmingham, Liverpool and Westminster Cathedrals. These were very successful with much positive comments from mass goers (although the inevitable negative one too) Pictures and further comments on pages 3 + 4

Last minute news of event in London 12 May with Kathy Kelly, American peace activist (see page 5)

There is still time to book for the CWO retreat at Noddfa (see page 14)

The early bird for WOW has been extended to 15 April as some people from outside the USA experienced difficulties booking. (see page 2)

Voices of Faith – meeting for International Women’s Day in Rome. I sent out a link to a four hour video of this. You may not have time to listen to it all but here’s a trailer which is just over 11 minutes. Worth a watch

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=QkBQAoqwMTI>

Our Annual Gathering this year

Saturday 3 October

St Andrew’s Waterloo, London

11.00 – 1.00 AGM

1.00 – 2.00 Lunch provided by CWO

2.00 – 4.30 Speaker, Discussion/questions

4.30 Closing liturgy

The speaker we had booked is not able to travel to us now because of health problems so we are working to find a replacement.

There will be more information soon.

Third WOW Conference 2015

Gender, The Gospel, and Global Justice.

18 – 20 September 2015

Marriott Hotel

Philadelphia PA



Will you be there?

Registration includes all plenary sessions with inspiring [speakers](#), conference workshops, academic seminars with renowned theologians, special events and receptions, and opportunities to take action.

- **\$275 Early Bird Registration** (Extended Until May 15, 2015 because of some people's difficulties registering)
- **\$300 Registration** (May 16, 2015 to July 31, 2015)
- **\$350 Late Registration** (After August 1, 2015)

It is easy to register via the website – they deal with converting sterling to dollars

<https://www.signup4.net/public/ap.aspx?EID=WOMA18E&TID=So5TRn5clhKVIuNtnsPU1g%3d%3d>

You can opt to share a room. They will match you up with another delegate. The rooms are large with two double beds in each.

Speakers list: Teresa Forcades, Tina Beattie, Christina Rees, Dr. Mary Hunt, Dr. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Barbara Blaine, Kristina Keneally, Ursula King, Sister Genny Dunnay, Sister Christine Fernando, Shannon Dee Williams, Maeve O'Rourke, Mari Steed. Jamie Manson, Theresa Kane RSM, Asra Normani, Kate Kelly, Sr Maureen Fiedler, Patricia Fresen Priest panel includes Tony Flannery, Paul Collins and Roy Bourgeois

Please spread the word via Twitter and Facebook.

If you can't attend you might be able to help someone from the developing world to attend by contributing to the solidarity fund. Any amount is welcome.

You can donate here: -

<https://app.etapestry.com/onlineforms/WomensOrdinationConferenceInc/wow2015.html>

Or you can send me a cheque made out to WOW. My address is on the merchandise form at the end of this enews. If you know anyone who might be worth approaching for a donation please let me know about that too. We desperately need financial backers for this event. info@catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk

Sign up to receive WOW e-news <http://womensordinationworldwide.org/connect/>

Pat Brown

Vocations Sunday 26 April 2015



This is what the young man mentioned below in Westminster report said in his email:

This donation comes from witnessing the courage of some women expressing pacifically this idea outside the Westminster Cathedral. I believe in equality as a fundamental principle of Christianity. Please continue bring on this important, difficult and brave work. May your voice be heard always more. Best wishes, Stefano (Italy)

Vocation Sunday

Westminster

As the London Marathon was on Sunday 26th April, we decided that it would be better for us to be on the Piazza outside Westminster Cathedral for the 6pm Saturday evening mass. There were 11 of us (including 2 from Wales & West and one of their relations, so real devotion to the cause!). It was good to have our CWO pull up banner, which really caught the eye. We were there from 5.15, so able to speak to people going in for evening prayer at 5.30, as well as those for mass.

Reaction was mainly very positive and even those who weren't really sure about women as priests seemed prepared to keep an open mind. Inevitably, we had some rather vocal opponents but they were definitely in the minority. It has been interesting to see, over the past few years, how so many people have become much more open and receptive to the idea of women priests. We waited until 6pm Mass had started and then finished with a liturgy (thanks to Myra for that).

Real bonus of the day was a very charming young man who was inspired by our presence to donate \$100 to the fund for the 2015 WOW Conference - great to feel that we can have such an impact. All in all, an inspiring and fruitful event - and the rain held off until the very end!

Birmingham

The congregations at St Chads are at the traditional end of things in most cases, so it is encouraging that the great majority of people accepted our prayer cards (see page 5). A small number politely refused a card, and one or two were unhappy. About six of us were more or less the right number to hold a banner and engage with people and also not overwhelm the space in an intimidating way. We propped the heavy banner against the wall which was fine.

As well as the cards, there was an information sheet with more references on it, which one of our group had brought and this was accepted by several people who were more interested in having a conversation. One of our group had a good conversation with a pleasant and open young man who is considering a vocation but has concerns including celibacy.

Liverpool

Surprisingly few people attended at either mass in Liverpool - more for the 11.00 Mass and quite a few people just visiting. We were asked to move on, but Pat responded that we were staying. Some opposition but most people took leaflets and prayer cards..



Christ,
the promise of God,
You go before us,
through the waters of baptism,
along the way of the cross,
through death to resurrection.
In our struggle
rekindle our hope,
renew our trust,
and fire us with your love.

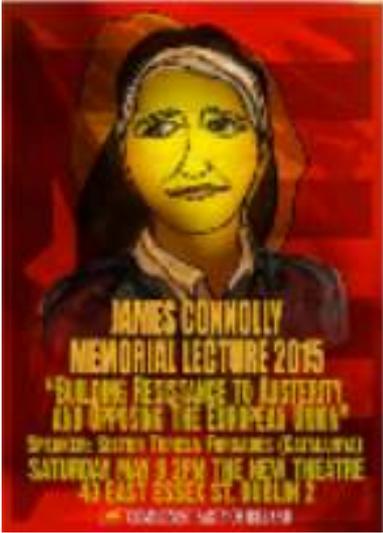
One of prayer cards used in Birmingham on Vocation Sunday

Kathy Kelly American Peace Activist in London 12 May

Kathy is one of the founders of Voices in the Wilderness and co-coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence. She traveled to Iraq twenty-six times, remaining in combat zones during both US-Iraq wars. Her recent travel has focused on Afghanistan and Gaza, along with domestic protests against U.S. drone policy. She has been arrested more than 60 times and written of her experiences among targets of U.S. military bombardment and inmates of U.S. [prisons](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._prison). She just got out of Lexington (KY) Federal Women's Work Camp where she was imprisoned for three months for trying to give holy bread to those on Whitman AFB in MO last June 1st. It is a major drone AFB.

Tuesday May 12th @7pm, Giuseppe Conlon House, 49 Mattison Rd, N4 1BG.

I believe in Solidarity by action not by word - Sr. Hatune Dogan, Voices of Faith



James Connolly Memorial Lecture, 2015

Saturday 9 May, 2 p.m., in the New Theatre, 43 East Essex Street, Temple Bar, Dublin

Speaker: Sister Teresa Forcades (Catalunya)

Sister Teresa, a Benedictine nun from Montserrat, is a leading campaigner in Catalunya and also throughout Spain against austerity and the massive corporate debt imposed by the European Union on the peoples of Spain. She is also an outspoken campaigner for women's rights. She will be speaking on the theme "Building resistance to austerity and opposing the European Union."

She is also a speaker at WOW 2015

Why Jesus Came

The suffering of Jesus is a very human thing. The people he came to love, the system he meant to stretch to its human limits, to its fullest potential, to its deepest vision of God, turned against him. We have all known the situation, the feeling, the pain. It is what people did to Jesus that killed him. It is what the system did to him that destroyed him. It was a fearful system and apathetic people that brought the total sacrifice of Godhead to an ultimate end. It is what people did—or failed to do—for the One who had already sacrificed everything for our sakes, who "did not deign being equal to God a thing to be clung to but who became like us in everything," that led to his death. This is the suffering that takes all the love a human being has. This is the kind of suffering that is divine mystery nobly, humanly, borne.

Jesus does not come to appease God. Jesus comes to teach us how to live a life that makes us worthy of the God who made us. Jesus comes to show us what we ourselves can be, must be. Jesus comes so that we can come to be everything we were created to be, whenever our lives, wherever our efforts, whatever our circumstance: shining glory of human degradation.

The truth of the passion rings across time for each of us: The goal we each seek is the cross we each choose. The purpose of our lives determines the nature of our deaths. What we stood for in life determines who will be at our deathbeds, how we will be regarded by the "nice" people of the time, the degree of respect with which we will be held thereafter. Jesus lived the human cross with us, for us. We have a companion on the way.

From *In Search of Belief* by Joan Chittister (Liguori)

Statement from the [Nun Justice Project](#):

The Nun Justice Project is glad to see that the Vatican has removed their mandate against the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR).

Today's joint statement is testimony to the dogged determination of LCWR sister-leaders to persevere in dialogue with those who unjustly maligned them. It is fitting that in the Year of Consecrated Life, Church officials have at last recognized the good works and impressive leadership of the sisters.

The Nun Justice Project believes that an apology should also have been given to the sisters, but the end of the investigation is a major step in itself. Since no previous Pope ever met with LCWR leadership it is hopeful that Pope Francis met personally with them today. May this meeting inaugurate new era of positive communication between the Vatican and women leaders in the Church.

"As usual, the living example of the women has inspired us," said Erin Saiz Hanna, a member of the coalition, "The nuns responded to this show of patriarchal abuse by finding ways to resist its intrusion and transformed the process by modeling inclusive dialogue."

"It is my hope that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith will institute similar dialogic processes and procedures for addressing other disputed issues in the Church. said Francis DeBernardo, another coalition member.

Since the LCWR mandate was announced, thousands of Catholics have stood up to call for the end of this unnecessary and demeaning "investigation." We are gratified that the immense worth of the work of women religious is being recognized. However, we also remain watchful since some still-to-be-implemented aspects of the joint statement could be interpreted as restricting the conscience rights of sisters.

Over the past five years, the [Nun Justice Project](#) organized massive support for women religious. Tens of thousands of Catholics petitioned the Vatican and participated in hundreds of public demonstrations, prayer services, vigils, and media events. Their voices have been instrumental in advancing due process, raising up women's leadership voice and promoting justice in the Church.

For background on the Nun Justice Project's work addressing the LCWR mandate visit nunjustice.org. The Nun Justice Project is supported by the following organizations: [American Catholic Council](#), [Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church](#), [Call To Action](#), [Catholics for Choice](#), [CORPUS](#), [DignityUSA](#), [FutureChurch](#), [New Ways Ministry](#), [Quixote Center](#), RAPPOR (Renewing a Priestly People, Ordination Reconsidered Today), [Voice of the Faithful](#), [WATER: Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual](#), [Women's Ordination Conference](#).

(see also <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-and-lcwr-announce-end-controversial-three-year-oversight>)

Women and the Church (WATCH) How is it for you? A day with laywomen at Queen's Foundation Birmingham

More than forty women from across England met at the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham on Saturday 21 March to share our experiences of and hopes for the Church. At the start of the day a panel of women described, from their very different view-points, how they saw church and the living out of their faith. They talked of experiences of standing up to both gender and race discrimination, one of positive affirmation by female clergy, one of teaching wide-eyed Year 7 boys the patriarchal context of the Old Testament.

The entire day was bursting with creativity, ideas, sorrow, anger and hope.

Dr Nicola Slee, theologian, lecturer, poet and author, offered some theological reflections in response, from her research into the faith lives of women and girls. ** Dr Slee spoke of how women often have common experiences of alienation from church, awakening to the divine, and a deep sense of relation with others and the created world as part of their journeys of faith. It was so affirming to hear stories that we could connect with and concepts that began to make sense of what is often a maelstrom of feelings of anger, fear, joy and sadness in being women in the church.

During the morning small groups listened to each other's stories and put together a Wailing Wall of laments and furies at the failings of the church as we experience it.

The afternoon began with a Psalm of Edwina Gately that included the lines 'There is an awakening – an expectancy – threading the soul to the beat of heart and pulse and charged with breath Divine'. A wealth of creative materials of pictures and collages were put together by groups showing how the church could be. So many ideas, symbols and sources of life emerged. A "Living List" of resources that people have found helpful and want to be available in future was drawn up. If only WATCH could wish all that into being!

The concluding worship was uplifting, moving, reflective and inspiring. Hopes and desires for change and progress shared, prayers and readings of inspiration and insight given to take away with us. The worship included *the, 'Dangerous women's creed'** including: 'May we pray deeply and teach wisely. May we be strong and gentle leaders. May we sing songs of joy and talk down fear.' That's the sort of church we yearn for, and yearn to contribute even more to. *Those participating had a sense God is listening and, returning to their places of life and worship, it was hoped they could be leaven in the church as well as the world. It is an aim of WATCH that similar days will be held up and down the country.*

Women and the Church (WATCH) How is it for you? A day with laywomen at Queen's Foundation Birmingham (continued)

We thank those who told of their experiences at the beginning of the day of being lay women in their churches and in the wider context of work and the world. They set the scene for the day and gave so much to ponder on. More will be on the WATCH website (www.womenandthechurch.org) and our Facebook page including the "Living List" of Resources. Do look out for that. There will be other days. We came home warmed by friendship and inspired by the thoughts of others. Thank you to those who came. It was so good to be with you.

*** The Faith Lives of Women and Girls: Qualitative Research Perspectives**

Edited by Nicola Slee, The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, UK, Fran Porter and Anne Phillips, Northern Baptist College, Manchester, UK
2013, Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

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Dangerous Women's Creed

Dear God, please make us
dangerous women.

May we be women who acknowledge our power
to change, and grow,
and be radically alive for God.

May we be healers of wounds
and righters of wrongs.

May we weep with those who weep
and speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.

May we cherish children, embrace the elderly, and empower the poor.

May we pray deeply and teach wisely.

May we be strong and gentle leaders.

May we sing songs of joy
and talk down fear.

May we never hesitate to let passion push us, conviction compel us,
and righteous anger energize us.

May we strike fear into all that is unjust and evil in the world.

May we dismantle abusive systems and silence lies with truth.

May we shine like stars in a darkened generation.

May we overflow with goodness in the name of God and by the power of Jesus.

And in that name and by that power, may we change the world.

Dear God, please make us dangerous women. Amen

Lynne Hybel

WATCH would like to send their thanks to all CWO members for your generous, unstinting support and encouragement to us over the years. We have been sustained by you more than you can imagine especially in the particularly dark times - and there have been a few!

We hope you will now rejoice with us that in the past months we have gained three female bishops. Two suffragans; the Rt Revd Libby Lane and Canon Alison White (whose consecration date is to come) and one diocesan, The venerable Rachel Treweek (whose consecration date is on 22 July at Gloucester Cathedral) who will also be taking her place in the House of Lords when a vacancy arises.

We rejoice greatly and look forward to their ministries as bishops while knowing we still have a long way to go until women are fully valued in all ways and at every level by the Church of England - but - hey- this is really good news!

Sally Barnes on behalf of WATCH.

Bishop Egan - after thought prompted by Dr McCaffry's letter in this week's Tablet about the non involvement of the laity in the choice of bishops. (The very secretive/cloak and dagger stuff is, in fact, well documented in "Believing Bishops," by Lee and Stanford , early 1990s). With Bishop Egan I think we have an example of 'what we end up with/or, with which we end up?!?!'

If you do not know the following, please do not repeat it as it may embarrass my 'source'!

A new bishop was required and the due process undertaken and it failed. A candidate was selected and the authorities congratulated him. Not being 'at one' with the system, he declined. The authorities man said that the said bishop elect would look rather silly if he did not take up the post, as it was to be announced in the Media two days later. His response - 'not as silly as you will appear when I tell the Press I am not going to take up the position.....'hence the rethink and Bishop Egan's appointment.

This, I think is a very important, rather paramount factor in the Church today.....were we to time travel back to certain times and certain areas, we would see communities needing someone ordained, gathering together, talking and praying and eventually selecting a candidate and laying on hands(OK, a wee bit over-simplified....)

However, unless and until we move towards a similar situation in the Church, we are going to have the unhealthy clericalism, with its seemingly arbitrary decisions and its two-tier Church and the exclusion of women, and many other categories of people. I am not sure - together with the rest of humankind - how the Holy Spirit works, but maybe she is expecting us to draw conclusions from the way things are being done in order to devise a better system?

John McLorinan

What happened in Limerick should not stay in Limerick: 2nd international meeting of priest associations and lay reform groups take up the tough questions

From April 13 - 17, 2015, thirty-eight Catholics from priest associations and church reform organizations across ten countries met in Limerick, Ireland to discuss some of the most pressing issues facing the Church today and to work together for change.

Traveling from Austria, Australia, Germany, India, various regions in Ireland, Italy, Slovakia, Switzerland, the U.K and the United States, men and women, ordained and lay, familiar faces and new, came together around some of the most difficult and painful problems facing the Church today.

This was the second such meeting. The first meeting in Bregenz, held in November 2013, was called by Fr. Helmut Schueller, the founder of the Pfarrer Initiative. It was the Pfarrer Initiative which issued the prophetic and controversial "Call to Disobedience" challenging Church leaders to halt the consolidation of parishes while calling for a "new image of the priest." Many who had been in Bregenz also came to Limerick and were joined by more than twenty new participants from four new regions.

The "Limerick 38," as I affectionately like to think of them, called on bishops to courageously support Pope Francis' vision for reform. Fr. Tony Flannery conveyed the group's sense of urgency at a press conference on the final day calling this "Francis era" our "last chance" to get renewal right.

Early on, a number of participants, myself included, raised the issue of women's equality and gender justice as central areas that needed to be addressed. And throughout the conference, we worked in a small group to develop strategies that would advance those reforms including promoting a commission of women to work with Pope Francis on his desire to develop a "theology of women" and create a more "incisive presence for women" in the Church. Had nothing else happened, I would have left Limerick with a strong sense of satisfaction in having created solid plans for working together across diverse regions with plenty of "to do" lists to keep us all busy for months ahead. But, the real formative moment was still ahead.

On the third day, the group entered into the most poignant, painful and ultimately transformative moment of the conference. A small group of women, myself included, had approached Tony Flannery with the idea that one of the women at our conference might co-preside with one of the priests at our shared Eucharist. We reasoned, the Eucharist, the sign and symbol of our unity in the Church, should reflect our common work together in Limerick as co-equals working for change. One person asked, "After working alongside each other these last few days, how can we celebrate a Eucharist that isn't a sign of our unity?" Tony wisely suggested that we submit the question to the group. And we did.

What happened in Limerick should not stay in Limerick: 2nd international meeting of priest associations and lay reform groups take up the tough questions (continued)



Rose-Milavec

Deborah

Statement of the Indian Women Theologians Forum Meeting, Papal Seminary, Pune, 17th – 19th April 2015 On “The Common Priesthood of Women”

“New Wine requires new wineskins,” new visions and liberative insights cannot be contained in old structures. This was the realization that struck us during our critical theological reflection on “The Common Priesthood of Women,” which was the theme of the annual meeting of the Indian Women Theologians Forum, held at Papal seminary in Pune, India, from 17th to 19th April 2015.

Recalling the commemoration of the institution of the priesthood on Maundy Thursday, led us to ask: Did Jesus really institute the ministerial priesthood or was his celebration of the Passover meal the culmination of his ministry through symbolic gestures like washing of the feet, breaking of the Word and bread and entrusting his disciples to carry on his mission of bringing about the reign of God?

It is evident that Jesus did not belong to a priestly family nor did he use the term “priest” for himself or his disciples. On the contrary he vehemently opposed the cultic priestly structures of domination and oppression of his time. Jesus’ horizons were prophetic not priestly.

According to Exodus 19 Israel as a whole community was considered a priestly people. In the New/Second Testament, the term “priest” *Hiereus* (Gk) and *Sacerdos* (Lat) is used for Christ alone (Heb 7:15), and for the Christian community as a whole (1Pet 2:5) by virtue of their Baptism.

The followers of Jesus, both men and women, lived their discipleship through witness and various ministries like teaching, healing, prophesying and service to the community which later was interpreted as the exercise of their ‘common priesthood.’ In the early Church women shared in decision making and had leadership and liturgical roles in the community (Acts 18: 26, 21:8-9; Rom 16).

Tracing the history of the ministerial priesthood in the church, we see that it has evolved in the context of the Church’s self understanding in relation to the Roman Empire and the cultic priesthood of ancient Israel. The leaders of the Christian community adopted its titles of leadership, power and respect from the surrounding cultures. Consequently Christian leadership came to be designated using the term “priest.” With the introduction of the Levitical paradigm as a type of Christian office and the consequent revival of the purity laws in relation to priesthood, women came to be totally excluded.

On examining critically the existing hierarchal structures of the Church based on the ministerial priesthood, we find this to be a significant deviation from what Jesus envisioned for his community of equal discipleship. We feel the need to explore further and find new ways of growing as a prophetic and witnessing community according to the vision of Jesus.

Statement of the Indian Women Theologians Forum Meeting, Papal Seminary, Pune, 17th - 19th April 2015 On "The Common Priesthood of Women" (continued)

This vision of Jesus for the Church as an inclusive community of discipleship of equals, which will be instrumental for initiating the Reign of God is like the 'new wine' which requires 'new wineskins.' Realization of this vision will involve:

- Uprooting the hierarchical and patriarchal mindset from ourselves and our communities
- Creating an awareness of Christian discipleship according to the vision of Christ
- Choosing leaders for Christian communities according to the criteria deployed by the early Church, like selecting persons filled with wisdom and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3)
- Celebrating 'inclusive table fellowship' in the family which is the domestic church as well as in Small Christian Communities which are the "house churches" of today, where sharing experiences of joys and sorrows can help create bonds of support and solidarity, thereby building family and community
- Recognizing the varied ministerial services exercised by all the people of God like Coordinators of Small Christian Communities, Ministers of the Eucharist, Ministers of the Word, Ministers of healing/teaching/social outreach/ justice and the like, as equally valued and effective ways of realizing the vision of Jesus

Through this, we dream of birthing a new vision of being the Church with structures which are collaborative, participatory and inclusive without distinctions of class, caste and gender. This will help the Christian community to become the 'new wineskin' that can hold the 'new wine' of the Reign of God.

CWO Annual Retreat at Noddfa, North Wales Friday 31 July - Sunday 2 August 2015. This is for all CWO members. Please book before it is too late!

Noddfa is a lovely place: 12 places are available to CWO and a few are already booked! If we don't have a few more we may need to consider cancelling the Retreat so please let me know asap if you would like to come on info@catholic-womens-ordiantion.org.uk

Some of those on the Retreat offer reflections or activities and we have a liturgy together on Sunday morning. No-one has to prepare anything or attend every session! You will enjoy beautiful, calm surroundings and have wonderful food. You can take yourself off to the sea for a paddle, climb a mountain, read a book or just be quiet in a beautiful place. The sessions take place in the Library and in the Chapel. More information noddfa.org.uk Cost will be £100 per person. Please send £50 deposit to Noddfa to reserve your place. (Cheques to Noddfa) Bookings will close on 31 May 2015.

Please also contact Pippa on info@catholic-womens-ordiantion.org.uk for any queries, dietary requirements and to let her know you are booking!

Courageous women break with tradition



Zekra Alwach, a civil engineer and director general of the ministry of higher education, has been named as mayor of Baghdad for the first time amid widespread corruption and rampant violence.

She is the first female to be given such a post in the whole country, where international rights groups have condemned women's rights abuses.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2015/Feb-21/288273-baghdads-first-female-mayor-set-to-take-the-reins.ashx>



Sara Bahayi is Afghanistan's first female cab driver in recent memory, and she is believed to be the only one actively working in the country.

She endures condescending looks, outright jeers, even threats to her life. Most men will not enter her taxi, believing that women should never drive for a man. She, however, manages to secure enough earnings to spend on her 15-member family, making US\$10-US\$20 a day.

With every fare, Bahayi says, she is determined to send a message to Afghan women: "Get out of the house. Earn money. Don't rely on men.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/the-unlikely-life-of-afghanistans-first-female-taxi-driver/2015/02/26/2b030c1a-b092-11e4-bf39-5560f3918d4b_story.html

**Book Review *The Dark Box: A Secret History of Confession* by John Cornwell
2014 Profile Books, London. 288 pages.**

..." a book anyone concerned with the future of the Catholic Church should take very seriously." Times Literary Supplement.

My review of this well researched and powerful book about Confession carries a health warning. Some of it is very shocking. Cornwell's history of Confession helps to explain "so much that is discreditable in the history of the Catholic Church" (David Lodge). The book illustrates that though it is a healing sacrament it has also had immense power to harm.

I mentioned that I was reading this book to two people, and spontaneously, on hearing the title, one spoke of a childhood beating from a priest who was demanding an apology, and the other person mentioned previously undisclosed sexual abuse from a parish priest. Clearly, the mention of Confession can trigger powerful and traumatic memories.

Cornwell takes us through Confession from the Early Church to the present day. At the time of the Middle Ages he observes that "Masturbation, the single greatest obsession of the confessional manuals, was judged a more serious sin than the abduction and rape of a virgin, or straightforward adultery with a married woman." (p.21) The theory behind this was that "spilling" sperm was the equivalent of homicide, but that if it was done during intercourse conception was theoretically possible so sperm was not wasted... This was at a time when a man could beat his wife in moderation and it was a sin for a wife to try to thwart him. Her disobedience was considered a mortal sin.

In the early 20th Century Pius X lowered the age of Communion for children to the age of seven and so the age for going to Confession was similarly reduced. He also tightened up seminary discipline, emphasised segregation and difference for priests from lay people, (particularly women), and favoured increased clericalism. More deference towards priests was expected from lay people. Authoritarianism, a closing of ranks and secrecy increased. (p.124). Cornwell describes isolated, celibate seminary life which strictly encouraged the suppression of sexuality, masturbation and "impure thoughts". This was not a milieu that encouraged emotional maturity.

In the 1960s sexual liberation, Vatican II reforms, open discussion about contraception, followed by *Humanae Vitae* (1968), (which forbade artificial birth control) were impacting on Catholics. Priests' insular seminary education continued to encourage repression of their own sexual and emotional lives. They were told they could not think for themselves, required to be obedient and impose complete obedience on lay people. Priests were simultaneously aware of sexual and female liberation and the Church's unbending rules. They were being asked for advice about sexual matters including contraception in the Confessional. This created much internal conflict for many priests and lay people.

Book Review *The Dark Box: A Secret History of Confession* by John Cornwell (continued)

Cornwell's book examines some of the roots and circumstances of clerical abuse. Numbers of priests in the intimacy and secrecy of the Confessional were exploiting the psychological and sexual power they potentially had over child and adult penitents. Some priests sexually abused children and adults. A number involved children in masturbation and convinced themselves that it did not break their own oath of celibacy. Cornwell mentions Dr Marie Keenan's studies with priests convicted of sexual abuse, interviewed after their prison sentences were finished. Some had convinced themselves that they were well placed to introduce children to "harmless and beneficial "sexual experience for the benefit of child and priest (p. 189ff). She illustrates the 'doublethink' of many of these priests, their inability to face up to the harm they were doing to children or the consequences in the real world for those they were abusing. Many had closed ranks. Cornwell's own study found that abusive priests were mostly relieving their own sexual repressions. Some abusers repeatedly went to Confession, confessed and received Absolution. The seal of the Confessional was considered sacrosanct for the priest and so abuse continued. Many abused child and adult penitents believed the seal applied to them too so they could not disclose the abuse. Some were afraid to do so, and it is well known that some of these were not believed and were punished. A number of priests were moved on to other parishes. The book documents many terrible cases of children and adults suffering and the way the Church did/did not deal with the abuse. Cornwell uses the term "soul murder" (p. 169) to describe the profound damage that can ensue. It remains a horrifying current problem with a damaging legacy for people.

The book concludes with a section about the numbers going to Confession dropping since the 1960s along with a decline in obedience to papal authority. Many penitents could not make a "firm purpose of amendment" e.g. not to use contraception, and more began to rely on their own conscience to decide, or stopped going to Confession or left the Church.

In 1973 Pope Paul VI announced that alongside individual confession there could be a penitential service with individual confession or a communal service where general absolution would be granted without individual confession. Cornwell describes increasing numbers returning to the Church and confession. (p.210). In 1984 John Paul II ignored collegiality and forbade general absolution.

However I found a hopeful section of the book followed. In Cornwell's survey he found young people were free of feeling confessional practice was oppressive, fearful and causing guilt. Confession was seen as part of the celebratory threshold to Communion. Confession now often happens face to face or side by side outside of a dark box. Many active, Communicant Catholics do not go to Confession. Many believe that forgiveness comes directly from God and each other and can be sought through prayer and reconciliation. Change and spiritual growth are being emphasised rather than confessing sin. Talking therapies and spiritual guidance, reading and prayer groups are replacing Confession for many.

Book Review *The Dark Box: A Secret History of Confession* by John Cornwell (continued)

Cornwell talks of a shift in perceptions of sin. For younger lay Catholics their “moral concerns focus not on the exquisite state of their souls, but on the alleviation of poverty, homelessness, hunger, and disease; care for the environment; and peace building. They seek to combat the ‘sins’ of racism, sexism, child abuse, and the oppression of minorities.” (p. 231.)

It seems to me this is a key book for adults who are interested in Church and Sacramental History and are concerned about spiritual growth and the future of Catholicism. One of the consequences of reading this book, in my view, is that we each are encouraged to develop our consciences, take responsibility for our actions and our own spiritual growth in our church communities, and develop shared ministry together with other people: ordained and lay. Reconciliation with God and each other, which brings about changed perceptions and behaviour working for the common good are part of an adult spiritual journey.

This book illustrates some of the consequences that harsh rules and practices have had for people throughout Church history. Lay people have been infantilised, burdened by guilt and bound by complete obedience to go to frequent confession and offload individual sins on the priest in order to receive absolution and reconciliation with God. Priests have been educated in ways that are “not fit for purpose” for the 21st century and have been similarly burdened by guilt and caught up in clerical, hierarchical fear and the repercussions for not adhering to harsh rules. There are good priests who are beacons of sensitive pastoral practice and enlightened theological thought, but some clergy have used the Confessional and power structures of the Church to abuse and control others.

Pippa B April 2015.

Links

Read WOW conference speaker’s blog -The Church is misogynist but God is also a woman <http://iglesiadescalza.blogspot.co.uk/2015/04/teresa-nun-church-is-misogynistic-but.html>

Francis backs equal pay for women

<http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/francis-firmly-backs-equal-pay-women-citing-christian-radical-equality>

Son of Mary McAleese on growing up gay in Ireland <http://thetruth24.com/?p=10696>

The Pope is a Christian! Garry Wills

<http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2015/mar/29/pope-francis-against-rome/>

Annual Vigil Outside Philadelphia Cathedral Demands Ordination of Women as Catholic Priests 2 April



Members of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference gathered in Sister Cities Park, across the street from the cathedral. Photo by Hadas Kuznits

Catholic women with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference stood witness today across the street from the Cathedral Basilica of Ss. Peter and Paul, outside the home of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, calling once again for the ordination of women as priests in the Catholic Church.

The group's president, Regina Bannan, explains it's an annual gathering. "We've been here, we estimate, about 35 years doing this. Things haven't changed," she noted. Does she think their wish will ever come to fruition? "Well, we feel both hopeful and discouraged by Pope Francis," Bannan said. "He's been wonderful in his witness for mercy for the poor, and we think he has a blind spot when it comes to women."

Bannan says ordaining women would create justice in the Roman Catholic Church. "More of the active people in the church are women. Why should their gifts not be recognized and acknowledged?" she said. And Bannan says although women are still not allowed to be priests in the Catholic Church, she senses the tide is starting to change.

"When we started, 27 percent of Catholics (in the US) favored women's ordination. Now it is always two-thirds or more. Among young people it is 87 percent," she notes.

Hadas Kuznits

Chester Theological Society 2015

**7:30pm, Friday 1st May – Binks
Lecture Theatre, University of
Chester**

Pope Francis and the Future of Catholic Social Thinking

Paul Vallely CMG FRSA - Inaugural
Lecture as Visiting Professor

Pope Francis has issued some powerful
condemnations of the operations of the
contemporary global economy. He has
called for “a poor Church, for the poor”.
But do his trenchant criticisms merely
reiterate the critique of “savage
capitalism” developed by Catholic
Social Teaching throughout the 20th
Century? Or is he developing that
teaching in new Ways?

Paul Vallely CMG FRSA is a writer,
broadcaster and consultant on
international development and
business ethics. He is Visiting
Professor in Public Ethics and Media at
the University of Chester and Senior
Research Fellow at the Brooks World
Poverty Institute at the University of
Manchester.

Admission at the door: £3.00
(Students: £1.00) Wine and
Refreshments

More information

[http://www.chester.ac.uk/department
/trs/chester-theological-society](http://www.chester.ac.uk/department/trs/chester-theological-society)

Harrogate School of Theology and Mission

St Peter's Church Harrogate HG1
1RW

Saturday 16th May

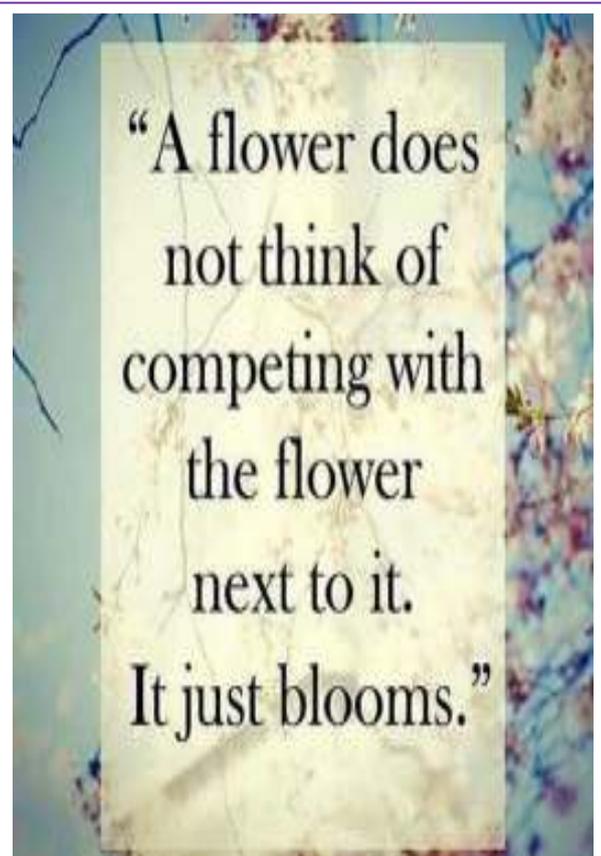
Mark Roques *Celebrity, theology &
Mission*(live lecture)

St. Mark's Church, Leeds Road,
Harrogate

9.30 am – 12.00 noon

More information

<http://www.hstm.org/>



CWO Saints

Mary MacKillop
Ruth Norton
John Hatfield
Celia Greenwood
Michael O’Gara
Sheila Houlihan
Mary Daly
Estelle White
Pat McCarron
Marcella Althaus-Reid
Astrid Klemz
Jean Palmer
Elizabeth Rendall
Maureen Brown
Tissa Balasuriya
Jack Sutcliffe
Pat Regini
Mary Ann Schoettly
Pam Skelton
Robert Kaggwa

Pray for us



Prayer Link

Wednesday between 6.00 and 7.00pm,
please pray for CWO, its members and
its mission.

Saturdays at noon, join with women and
men all over the world to pray for the
work of Women’s Ordination Worldwide
(WOW!)

Please take part in one or both of these
prayer networks if and when you can

The CWO Prayer

Moved by a compulsion of the Holy
Spirit, we cannot remain ignorant of this
injustice in our midst.

We long for all humanity to be
acknowledged as equal,
particularly among your community of
the church,
so we pray grieving for the lost gifts of
so many women.

We ask you, God of all peoples, to bring
insight and humility to all those in
positions of dominance, and an
understanding that the ascended Lord
called us all to act doing Christ’s work
here and now.

We ask this of you, God our Creator,
Jesus our Redeemer, Spirit our Sustainer

Websites (apologies for smaller print – that’s to fit them in!)

<http://www.womensordination.org/>

News of Fr Bourgeois and many other issues

www.wijngaardsinstitute.org

All previous housetop websites can be reached via this address

<http://www.catholicchurchreform.com/>

A global network seeking renewal of the Church

<http://womenandthechurch.org/>

Campaign for women’s equality in Church of England

<http://ncronline.org/>

National Catholic Reporter

<http://www.acalltoaction.org.uk/>

Catholics inspired by Vatican II.

<http://www.gras.org.uk/>

Group for rescinding the Act of Synod

www.we-are-church.org.uk

We Are Church in the UK is a call to recognise that all the Baptised, are part of the Church.

<http://www.ccc4vat2.org.uk>

Catholics for a Changing Church

<http://lgcm.org.uk/>

Campaigns against and challenges homophobia and transphobia, especially within the Church and faith based organisations, as well as working to create and praying for an inclusive church.

<http://questgaycatholic.org.uk/>

Proclaims the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ so as to sustain and increase Christian belief among homosexual men and women. They offer pastoral support for LGBT Catholics friends and families Sign up for quarterly newsletter

<http://82.70.116.125/index.html>

Women Word Spirit

<http://christianfeministnetwork.com/>

Christian Feminist Network - exploring faith and feminism

<http://www.spirituschristi.org>

A truly inclusive Catholic Church

<http://www.stcuthbertshouse.co.uk/Easter2015/>

Rachel is a professed hermit of the R C Diocese of Nottingham.

CWO Merchandise

These items are great way to advertise CWO without costing you very much. I often see people in my rear view mirror admiring the wit of my car sticker!

You can leave the pens lying around in places where it might be difficult to leave a CWO leaflet. The badges attract a lot of attention with the slogan based on the letters of ROME. We now have mugs which as well as being practical are a good way of advertising CWO. You might like to send one to your bishop!

how many unit cost total

Biro - CWO logo, website and phone no	Purple with silver lettering Black ink		0.80	
CWO rectangular badge	Purple with white lettering Renewed Ordained Ministry for Everyone		Free (except please add postage £2)	
NEW!!! Mug CWO logo website "CWO's my cup of tea"	Purple on white Buy for your office, church tea room, meeting room		4.50 each 3 for £12 10 for £35	
P & P *see below				
Donation (optional)				

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Name

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Post code

Contact email or telephone number

Send to Pat Brown, 4 West Park Gardens, Leeds, LS8 2HD

*Postage and packing (increased from last time as postal charges have gone up)

orders up to £10	4.00
orders £10 - 20	6.00
orders over £20	Free