

Exploring the Role and Influence of Catholic Feminism on the Liberal Arts Campus

An experiential workshop facilitated by members of the New Brunswick local chapter of the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE)

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Presented at the **International Conference on the Liberal Arts**

September 30th – October 1st, 2010 at St. Thomas University, Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Abstract:

This experiential workshop will be facilitated by members of the New Brunswick local chapter of the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE). It will include personal stories of work for religious change and the role that a Liberal Arts education has played in this work. Participants will be invited to join in ritual as well as share their own experiences.

Biography:

Since 1980, the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE) has offered a vision of church in Canada that is renewing and open to all. Our mission is to enable women to name their giftedness and from that awareness to effect structural change in the church that reflects the mutuality and co-responsibility of women and men. In 2002 the New Brunswick local chapter was formed. We strive to "be the change we seek" as we gather regularly to pray, learn, celebrate, protest, support one another and work for positive change together.

Workshop Outline

- Liturgy
- History of CNWE and CNWE NB by Elizabeth W. McGahan
- Experiences as Catholic Women and the Liberal Arts:
 - Eleanor McCloskey, CND
 - Colleen Grattan Gick
 - Paula MacQuarrie
 - Cathy Holtmann
- Conversation

Liturgy

Whenever we gather for CNWE, we start with a time of ritual during which we sing, pray and reflect on words of wisdom. Thus, we began this way in order to model a religiosity that honours the leadership and spirituality of all present. This liturgy was prepared and presided by Paula MacQuarrie.

Song: "A Woman's Place" by Sarah Thomsen from the CD *Everything Changes*.

Poem: "More than a Father" from Malone, M.T. (2006). *Praying with the Women Mystics*. p. 37. Ottawa, ON, Novalis.

Reading: selected passages from Chittister, J. (2004). *Called to Question: A Spiritual Memoir*. Lanham, MD, Sheed & Ward.

Responsorial Psalm: "Let Justice Judge!" setting by Linnea Good of the poetry of Lynn Bauman. Available through www.LinneaGood.com.

Prayer: "Jesus' Prayer" a translation by Patricia Fresen based on Douglas-Klotz, N. (1990). *Prayers of the Cosmos: Reflections on the Original Meaning of Jesus's Words*. San Francisco, CA, Harper Collins.

Silent No Longer: A Comment on the History of CNWE¹ by Elizabeth W. McGahan

"It is silence that kills the world," so said Catherine of Siena in the springtime of 1376 (Noffke, 2001). Catherine was a woman with an agenda. She revered the dignity of the priesthood, but urging reform, she spoke out against Church corruption in her day: greed, pride and impurity. Catherine's greatest censure was directed at those who saw and chose to remain

¹ Portions of this comment have appeared elsewhere, see "Reveille for the Catholic Church," *Telegraph Journal*, Saint John, NB 23 October 2009 <http://telegraphjournal.canadaeast.com/opinion/article/833317> and presentation to the Diocese of Saint John, Council of Priests, 26 May 2010.

silent (Noffke, 1980, p. 18). Twentieth century historians have referred to her century – the fourteenth – as a distant mirror for our time (Tuchman, 1978; Noffke, 1996). Modern scholars such as Hans Kung echo Catherine's sentiments, with Kung recently admonishing Catholics "do not keep silent . . . you taint yourselves with guilt . . ." (2010).

Since Vatican II segments within the Catholic laity and clergy have been forming and joining organizations to strengthen those dimensions within our faith that represent the essential goodness of our Church. Among these groups is the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE) formed in 1980 and established in New Brunswick in 2003. Its goal is to encourage women to "effect structural change in the church that reflects the mutuality and co-responsibility of women and men within the church" (CNWE, 2010).

In large measure CNWE seeks a partnership between laity and clergy characterized by civil discourse and mutual respect for each other's intellect and skill sets, while acknowledging our shared need to be accountable to each other within our Church. A progressive laity wants to work with the clergy; not for the clergy. At the same time progressive clergy are open to a mature working partnership with the laity, and an end to the immature reciprocal infantilization that so often characterized relations between clergy and laity more than fifty years ago.

Laity such as those in CNWE are in intellectual sympathy with Catherine of Siena and Hans Kung. We no longer choose to remain silent. In the spirit of Thomas Aquinas, we are "trust [ing] in the authority of [our] own instincts" (1274). With respect to the key components of governance — accountability and transparency — most of us appreciate the tension that exists within the Church between democratic models of governance that have emerged in post Enlightenment Western societies and the Church's hierarchical structure within which clergy (and hierarchy) have been and are working, and we are worshipping (Murphy, 2009).

Most of us understand that the current crisis in our Church is about trust, and the administration and the structure of power within the Church (and within individual dioceses). Many see the current crisis as part of the Church's insular, self-protective clerical culture (Hertzberg, 2010; McBrien, 2010). (James Carroll reminds us that John XXIII wanted to focus on "the priesthood of believers' as a check on clericalism" (2010).) Informed Catholic laity recognize that our Church is "modeled on the political structures of the Roman Empire and medieval Europe," (Herzberg, 2010) but we hope, with Donald Cozzens and Archbishop Martin of Dublin, that our Church is in the process of transitioning from the Roman Catholic Empire to a humbler Roman Catholic Church (2010).

We urge the Church, and especially our respective dioceses, to move towards a flattening of the current hierarchical model to a more collaborative model of the governance structure at the operational level within the diocese (Conde, 2010). Educated Catholics are open to the idea of clergy and laity being priest to each other.

The laity is aware of the changed world in which its clergy lives and works. The priesthood of the ontological difference has been largely de-mystified. In all lives there are periods of ambiguity. For Catholic clergy, ambiguity may have been greater than for the laity. Most clergy are "still working hard at adjusting to the times that are far different from the way [they] expected they would be" (Kennedy, 2000). For the most part our clergy have become Mass priests – one-man sentinels, in insolated rectories. CNWE sees the clergy's reality, and its attendant personal sacrifice...and we know that a future church cannot go on this way Laity and clergy need to have a conversation about "...how the priesthood of the faithful is understood in relation to the ordained priesthood" (Murphy, 2009, p. 121). We know that not everyone is comfortable with this subject.

Like the clergy the laity, too, is a varied group. Although some bishops view the clergy as their first collaborators, in actual fact the laity are more than a close second (Allen, 2010). Many members within CNWE have volunteer "career routes" within the Church. I have served on parish council, participated in fundraising, taught religious education and confirmation classes, organized an academic conference, and in my current parish serve as lector and on a diocesan cemetery committee. On occasion, members of the laity have been exposed to unedifying rhetoric from fellow members of the laity, and its apparent tolerance by some clergy. Within a multicultural nation such as Canada, lay organizations such as CNWE have a role in helping to educate clergy and laity about the new reality within our Church and country.

Many of the clergy and laity in New Brunswick were socialized in areas that have not experienced new immigrants for close to a century. They come from homogeneous backgrounds. Conversely, immigrant laity frequently come from more demographically diverse urban backgrounds. But, whatever our socialization sites, no doubt, clergy and laity, would agree that any form of bigotry should be challenged (Bloom, 2010).

Recently in the Diocese of Saint John a committee on the Visioning Process was struck. One must ask, are all the lay members Canadian born? (TNF, 2010). Are there any Asian-Canadian Catholics on the committee, considering the presence of Korean and Filipino Catholics in the Diocese? Do any of the lay members represent the 20% of Canadians who were born outside of Canada? One way of gently countering latent intolerance within the laity and clergy is to have members of minority or immigrant communities on diocesan committees.

CNWE members of the laity want to work **with** the clergy; not **for** the clergy. Female members of the laity want to work in a respectful environment where a lay person is never targeted by a priest-chair with a humiliating misogynistic comment. Hans Kung has advocated

that Church authorities “respond to the just complaints of the faithful” (2010). The Diocese of Saint John has set up a Responsible Ministry Committee to address deviations from professional conduct within the clergy (and lay employees of the diocese). The truth is that abuse of any kind in our Church cannot be addressed merely by establishing committees but only, as others have said, by rooting out “the unhealthy element where it is found in the church . . . [the element that makes] healthy people feel condescended to, humiliated, manipulated . . .” (Kennedy, 2010). As one priest observed when referring to abuse, “It makes me look at that clerical culture of secrecy and say this is unhealthy. It needs to be blown open” (Lee, 2010). Many priests, perhaps all, have experienced personally within our Church's structure much worse than instances of intolerance, and repulsive innuendo.

CNWE members ask: as a Church where do we go from here? In truth, no one really knows. Depending upon what metric one chooses, we are in a crisis (McGahan, 2009). Together, as committed laity and clergy, we can identify the limitations in our local Church structure, and preserve and build on the essential goodness that is within all of us as individuals and our Church as the collective representation of our shared aspirations. CNWE NB has organized an annual purple stole vigil, published a newsletter (The Seed Keepers), hosted national conferences in 2006 and 2011 (forthcoming), maintains a media presence and is in dialogue with the bishop and priests of the Diocese. However, despite these laudable initiatives, in building for the future, clergy and laity, have to face the new reality within which the Canadian Catholic Church exists.

We have to address the Canada that has emerged over the past 40 years – a genuinely multicultural society where women are increasingly represented in medicine, law, the professoriate and in many religious traditions within the clergy. We need to remind ourselves

that many in the clergy completed their formal education more than 30-40 years ago in a Canada much different from the present. Our clergy need ongoing education – short seminars on the “new Canada.”

In light of these dramatic gender role and ethnic changes, many informed laity, such as those in CNWE, believe it is unfair to thrust newly ordained men into today's pulpits without preparing them for the social context within which they will be ministering. More to the point, priests “already in the ranks” need to avail themselves of periodic access to updating with respect to their ministerial milieu. Clergy should be encouraged to take a semester away from a geographically peripheral place like New Brunswick to read, think and recharge their intellectual batteries. The latter would give many of our capable, willing and prepared lay people an opportunity to experience leading us in liturgical services.

Many informed laity are capable of participating within the diocese in collaborative governance at the operational level and they should be involved in planning policies from the outset and on a continuing basis (Hertzberg, 2010). Diocesan employees (clergy and lay) should be funded to attend management courses as it has been noted that many ecclesial management structures (predominately male) are “largely unaffected by modern management trends or practices . . .” (Olsen, 2009). Within Catholicism the progressive laity “ha[ve] grown up and [in many ways] grown past . . .” (Kennedy, 2000) the hierarchy and clergy.

CNWE and CNWE New Brunswick represent the new laity...committed, engaged, working with, not for, our clergy - together for our Church.

Our Experiences as Catholic Women and the Liberal Arts

Eleanor McCloskey, CND

My personal experience of a liberal arts education comes from my continuing education in the teaching profession, in-service opportunities in campus ministry, and the fifteen years I enjoyed as a faculty member here at St. Thomas University. A liberal arts education is about stimulating critical thinking, what-if and why-not kinds of questions, and nurturing a social conscience. I will attempt to distill the riches of my experience of those years into a few instances that stand out for me as pivotal points in the areas of ecumenism, inclusiveness, and adult faith development.

I came into campus ministry at an excellent time. Feminism was catching on in many circles and professional women were finding a voice. Rita Patenaude, a Sister of Service, was the first woman appointed by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) as coordinator of Canadian Catholic Campus Ministry. Two prominent issues among campus ministry personnel were the presence of women in this work and the push for ecumenism on Catholic campuses. The National Catholic Campus Ministry Association annual conference was ecumenical one year and catholic the next. Having spent many years as a high school science teacher, I eagerly anticipated meeting the men and women already engaged in the new work I was undertaking. At my very first conference, an ecumenical one, I encountered others all discussing Matthew Fox, Meister Eckhart and Creation Spirituality – pros and cons, implications and consequences. I was a science teacher with a smattering of theology and was hearing of Original Blessing for the first time! I realized I needed to continue to embrace new learning in every realm, as I do in the exciting world of science. Since then, I have sought ways to continue learning from others who have read different books and encountered different thinkers.

Professor Sheila Andrews invited me to be a guest on a panel of presenters in her class on Women in Canadian History. This happened more than once, but the first time I found myself preparing diligently to give a brief summary of how being a Catholic was different after Vatican II than it was before that event. I was totally engaged by the passion and conviction of the speakers before me. A middle-aged woman spoke of the life she finds in Wicca. A young mother spoke of the Baha'i faith and the emphasis this community places on building and promoting peace throughout the world. A woman from the Unitarian Church made me envious as she spoke of the kind of Sunday gatherings *they* have. These were women as convinced of their truth as I ever was of mine. I wondered, "What am I missing in a faith so steeped in doctrines and beliefs and clinging to certitude? Can I make room for delight in diversity, allowing my faith to enlarge my views and stretch my concept of God?"

Last year I was part of a panel with a Baptist pastor, a young man following Islam, and a gentleman from the Shambhala Meditation Centre. University students asked reflective questions:

- Is there anything in your creed you don't really believe?
- Is religion a power for good?
- What is spirituality? Is it the same as religion?

Students have taught me much about inclusivity on many issues. A native woman in Education asked me if I knew why the others didn't choose her until last when forming study groups. A lesbian woman wondered, as she prepared to move to Vancouver, if it will ever be safe for her to try to live in Fredericton. Later, in a Masters' Program at Assumption University in Windsor, Ontario, my thesis topic was "Pastoral Care to Homosexual Couples in Committed

Relationships.” What I learned there has been helpful in working with families coming to terms with the revelation of a homosexual orientation in their inner circle.

I need to speak of language. Language changes; language is dynamic, not static. Language is made up of words, and words are symbols. Symbols are given meaning. Somewhere in the eighties, we began to hear, in the world of communications, about gender inclusive language. The CCCB came out with a study kit to help people shift our thinking around language and understand changes we could easily embrace. Some of the newer texts in the Canadian catechism program were much more attentive to the God language, hitherto exclusively male. Of course! Why had it taken us so long? And so what about our God language? In my early days in different convents where I lived, I bristled at Christmas when “Good Christian Men Rejoice” was included in our carol singing. At Easter time I was dismayed that the story always seemed to gloss over the fact – and the significance – that the women were the first to proclaim the resurrection. A couple of priests with whom I worked in campus ministry used to ask me to share my reflections on the readings – I recall Father Frank Wagner said the church would be quite different if the faithful could hear – and share – the gospel stories from a woman's perspective. Why can our patriarchal system offer us a one-sided take on our sacred scriptures? Why am I sought after to teach the Catholic faith to children and prohibited from breaking open the readings to adults gathered in church but not to adults gathered in the church basement, for the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults class?

Finally, the opportunity I had to work with lay ministry programs has been a total gift. The distance program from St. Francis Xavier University in which I am a field advisor offers me a way to relate directly to local persons taking the program. Some have never written a paper since high school and some have never read a book about the Catholic faith. The “a-ha

moments” I have witnessed on the faces of the students of all ages and stages – women and men - in these programs continued to affirm my conviction that adults want to practice an adult faith. They can be helped to stretch their child faith and know other images of God besides father and judge.

Colleen Grattan Gick

At age fifty-five, I have a BA in Canadian Studies which I began at St. Thomas University finished at McGill University, a Diploma in Ministry from St. Francis Xavier University, and a Bachelor of Social Work from STU. In reflecting on what my studies brought to my life experiences, what my life experiences brought to my studies and how this has influenced my position as a Catholic feminist I can see a strong thread of critical thinking on social issues has been nurtured.

I grew up in a middle class family in rural New Brunswick in the wake of the '60s - an era of social upheaval with strong critique of social inequalities along racial and gender lines. My mother, a teacher, worked outside the home at a time when this was not common. Socially my rural area was more diverse than most as it included a Black community and First Nations families living “off reserve.” My father maintained close connections with both of these impoverished communities.

In the early eighties while attending Sunday mass a fellow parishioner spoke from the pulpit about Guatemalan refugees living in Mexico because of civil strife in their country. She told us that the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (D&P) was supporting the refugees and offered us the opportunity to engage in this work by sending a Christmas card with a message of support. I was already experiencing a sense of disenchantment

with the Church for what I perceived as a failure to be relevant in the world but I remember thinking of the work of D&P, "Wow, the church is doing this? I could be part of this."

I subsequently became a D&P volunteer and over the next 25 years had opportunities to develop skills that, as a stay-at home-mother of two young children I would not otherwise wise have been afforded. D&P is the official international development agency of the Catholic Church in Canada. It has a twofold mandate- financial support of socio-economic development projects in developing countries and education of the Canadian population on root causes of poverty. I took on leadership roles and acquired knowledge of the social teachings of the church, poverty issues, social analysis skills, advocacy and engagement for social change. The network of volunteers for D&P and other groups we work with, secular and non-secular, are progressive, critical thinking people. It was within this context that I first encountered the language and analysis of gender inequality. As a white, middle class woman of privilege it was a new realization to understand myself as a member of a major oppressed population, to understand the many situations of oppression women in the world face and I began to ask myself questions about the church and its role in the oppression of women.

With newly acquired knowledge in areas of church life from the Diploma in Ministry I completed in 2000, I was forced to face more squarely contradictions between the social teachings of the church and its dogma and practice of exclusion of women. The increasing conservatism and reactionary responses coming out of Rome began to galvanize many women like myself and in January of 2003 I was part of a small group of like-minded women who met and decided to join the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE). This group of women provides me with me many opportunities to reflect on my experiences and ideas, to share these with other women as I hear their stories and to be challenged by them to know myself, my vision and how I

will act to “be the change we seek.” This is the place where I first named myself as a feminist and understood feminism as a vision for radical equalitarianism that Jesus the Christ lived and died for.

When I began my Social Work program I felt fortunate to be able to attend a social work program that takes pride in its structural approach and think it was an excellent fit with my experience. The program deepened my social analysis skills particularly in the area of power analysis and I was able to use my experiences to examine patriarchy and its myriad of dynamics of oppression, internalized oppression and misogyny. The social work program brought great energy to me as it was a place of connecting with younger feminists. I conclude by quoting from a reflection paper I wrote - an example of the integration of my experience.

“I am going to explore an experience of oppression I had recently that developed because I spoke out against the Roman Catholic Church’s policy of not ordaining women to the priesthood. For the last three years our New Brunswick CNWE chapter has organized an event called the Purple Stole Vigil. This is a silent vigil held annually to protest the exclusion of women from the priesthood. This year our protest drew the attention of the Bishop of the Diocese. After the vigil, the Bishop wrote two letters to Ms. Nancy Blair, the Maritime Region field worker for Development and Peace (D&P) regarding my participation in the Vigil. In the first letter, he canceled his scheduled speaking engagement at a meeting of D&P later that month citing the participation of “some D&P members in the Vigil” as the grounds for cancellation. Ms. Blair responded by pointing out to him that D&P members **did not participate in the Vigil as D&P members** but as CNWE members. The Bishop’s second letter concerns me specifically and I quote:

According to our records, Colleen Grattan Gick is the local contact for CCOD&P. She enjoys the favor of the Bishop in her ministry. The local church is the visible expression of the universal church. To attack the sacramental dimension of the Church is to attack all that flows from it, including the apostolate. Therefore, she is in a serious situation of contradiction. She enjoys my favor as a worker for Development and Peace. At the same time she is ready to kick me in the stomach, not necessarily in the name of CCOD&P but that is her designation in our diocese.

The reason I chose to explore this incident as being oppressive was because of the way the Bishop, the leader of our local church, used his authority in a heavy-handed and arbitrary manner to try and squash my dissent. I was never contacted by him- he never spoke directly to me about his thoughts or feelings about the protest. I felt dismissed, not treated as an adult. He chose to use his authority to communicate only at a certain level of the hierarchy- I was below that. As such, I was rendered powerless, without a voice. I could not respond to him because I was not supposed to even know about the correspondence. He used his authority to protect his privilege and the privilege of the male-dominated institution of the church. The Bishop knows very little about me as a person yet his comments presumed to dictate that I am in a "serious situation of contradiction". As a good friend, a priest wrote, "It saddens me to think he makes such judgment without any idea of the depth of Spirit and discernment with which you live your faith." As a member of an oppressed group, I am not seen as a unique individual but dismissed on the basis of one act that he labels, in essence, disloyal.

At the time this happened, I do not know if I consciously used the word "oppression" or not. I think the word "unjust" was more my discourse at the time. As CNWE members we have all arrived at a certain analysis of oppression of women in the church and in society that makes us demand change. All CNWE members are aware that we are engaging in acts of confrontation of authority and resistance when we hold the Vigil. We speak about that often. We speak about the fear that we feel because we have all been indoctrinated to respect authority, especially

Church authority. The fear of moral judgment is used extensively. So I was aware there could be consequences. I just wasn't prepared for the powerlessness and fear I felt when, for the first time, the threatening gesture was directed against me personally. One observation I can make now, looking back on the experience, is that the Bishop used a place I felt safe, D&P, as an instrument of his harassment. This was certainly an effective "divide and conquer" strategy as my relationship with that organization was tainted by the experience. In class we were told that oppression keeps people "reduced, molded and immobilized" and I think I came closer to understanding this incident as oppression when I heard this. I see all those elements in the actions of the Bishop.

Based on the course material we have covered I have more insight on the nature of oppression and what is going on for the oppressor, in this case, the Bishop. For example, the concept that an oppressor doesn't have the intention to oppress but considers their position of privilege as entirely their due explains, in some way, the utter arrogance of this Bishop on the question of women and ordination. To us his actions seem to belie a lot of fear and hate for women, he is so dismissive. As a woman who remains in the church to work for change, my analysis is informed predominantly by feminist theologians. Feminist theologians trace the rise of patriarchy and hierarchy within Christianity albeit as these same worldviews take hold in the secular world. The clearest image I have of the dynamics operating inside the church to exclude women is the "God is male, so males are God" image (Daly, 1973).

Paula MacQuarrie

The first time I read one of two articles on liberal arts education by Martha Nussbaum in the *Globe and Mail* this year, was not the first time I thought about what I had missed in my early education for work in the biological sciences as a medical laboratory technician. I was

fortunate eventually to get the chance while teaching in an institute of technology to acquire my vocational teacher's license over two summers, and nine years later, get some credits for my area of expertise to do a Bachelor of Education (Vocational) at the University of New Brunswick.

Martha Nussbaum, acclaimed University of Chicago philosopher and author of *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010) is called the latest sage to condemn higher education's obsession with knowledge you can take to the bank. She sees the humanities as vital to society and democracy in particular with the biggest pay off being:

CRITICAL THINKING / the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information, gathered from or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, with communication as a guide to belief and action. In an exemplary form, it is based on universal intellectual values that transcend subject matter divisions: clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, good reasons, depth, breadth and fairness (Allemang, 2010).

Coming from a Catholic education with the Sisters of Charity of Halifax in a small coal mining town in Cape Breton and growing up in a very protective home setting, I regurgitated what was fed to me in my conversations and writing. Marrying a non-practicing Anglican was the first big jolt to my mind in questioning how I looked at people who followed other Faith traditions. My choice of a correspondence Diploma in Ministry program through St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish was where I opened up to reading, critical thinking, and questioning of my Church. The hierarchy, patriarchy, sacramental rules and place of women, social justice in and outside Church captured my interest and imagination.

In CNWE I found a questioning, respectful, empathetic network of women who were willing to openly speak about subjects of my interest. I realized many had liberal arts educations and the skills for critical thinking that I knew were important, to flesh out problems in the

Catholic Church without being disrespectful to fellow church goers and clergy, yet be informed, clear, self assured and determined to encourage women to be all they could be.

Personally, I experienced the long arm of clerical power when I added to the prayers of the faithful at mass several years ago,

Tomorrow is the anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and as Catholics we should be prepared to recognize the violation of human rights and be willing to do something about it when it happens right then and there, especially when it comes to women, gays, lesbians and transsexuals, I pray to the Lord.

The parishioners answered, "Lord, hear our prayer." The next week, the priest cancelled public prayers of the faithful and wrote them himself, concluding his prayer with, "And for whatever is in your hearts, we pray to the Lord." I had been told about this and on the spot I decided to speak quite loudly in the non-existent space between these prayers and the start of the liturgy of the Eucharist. I said, "That as faithful parishioners of our church, may we never be silenced from speaking openly what is in our hearts, I *certainly* pray to the Lord." The response from the people was "Lord, hear our prayer."

What was so sad about this cancellation of open prayers of the faithful was that ordinarily, when someone said, "For my mother who is having cancer surgery on Monday, I pray to the Lord." after mass, many would gather around that woman and offer to drive her to the hospital if she didn't have a drive, offer to keep her mother and her in their prayers, etc. This was a community builder, but with veto power, the decision was now final. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. My story and stories like this are repeated again and again. I have learned, am learning much from CNWE members across Canada and networking groups around the world, eagerly following their critical voices for change in the church, looking for support and encouragement from educated women and men in my communities and continue to associate

with these people. I am presently the coordinator of the National Work Group of CNWE, a body of six members, who meet monthly by conference call, and bring about the wishes of the national membership as laid out by the national conference and Annual General Meeting.

Cathy Holtmann

My path to membership in CNWE was influenced by my education and employment at liberal arts universities which had made space for the practice and study of religion. It was in those academic settings that both faith traditions and people who were engaged members of those traditions, made significant impacts on me. Following my undergraduate degree from the University of Winnipeg I chose to do graduate work at the University of St. Michael's College at the Toronto School of Theology largely because of the ecumenical nature of the degree programs there. While there feminist theology helped me to come to appreciate the rich array of resources within the Christian tradition that contribute to the work of transformation of patriarchy.

Religious patriarchy affects both men and women, constructing patterns of relationship in which being male is understood as being the standard for human being (Clifford, 2005). Recognizing that all theology is fundamentally grounded in situated human experience, feminist theology takes as its starting point, women's experiences paying close attention to socio-economic context, geographical location, race, and sexual orientation. The articulation of women's experiences within structures of religious patriarchy exposes these structures as reflecting male rather than universal human experience. "Feminist theology makes the sociology of theological knowledge visible, no longer hidden behind mystifications of objectified divine and universal authority" (Radford Ruether, 1983, p. 13). The effects of patriarchy are found in the social, economic, political and religious inequality between men and women which is maintained through language, myth, symbol and belief (Penner, 2000). Schüssler Fiorenza

describes patriarchal Christianity as a system of male domination and self-alienation (2001).

Feminist theology and praxis have helped me to take seriously my experiences, critically analyzing my attitudes, reframe my past, and find the liberating core of the Christian tradition (Clifford, 2005; Radford Ruether, 1986).

It was as a newly minted feminist with a graduate degree in theology that I was hired as a campus minister at St. Thomas University. I joined CNWE in 1992 and found a collective movement that shared my particular challenges as a Catholic feminist working in the liberal arts. I address these challenges in two areas:

1. Stereotypes of Catholic women (and religious women in general)
2. Gendered approach to Catholic social teachings

The challenge concerning stereotypes of Catholic women usually involves having to explain that yes, one can be both a feminist and a Catholic. This highlights a regrettable divide among academic feminists - that although it is openly acknowledged that there are a variety of standpoints that feminists can take (Hartsock, 1998) the religious standpoint is often devalued. Religion has played a role in the preservation of gender stereotypes but those stereotypes are being resisted from within by religious women. Within every religious tradition there is variation in terms of beliefs and practices. Religion is a dynamic social institution (Matthews & Beaman, 2007), continually changing with time and context in response to tensions within and beyond its sacred boundaries (Wilde, 2007). Unfortunately many secular feminists base their judgments of religious women on what they receive from the media which often focuses on extreme cases which are not representative of the majority of women who engage in religious practices. While conversations about the history of women's agency within the church and the breadth of women's involvement in Catholicism sometimes eases people's noticeable discomfort

with me, it was usually my participation in social action and my teaching and research on Catholic approaches to social justice that convinces them that I am not simply a passive vessel for conservative Catholic doctrine.

St. Thomas University's commitment to social issues is articulated in its mission and grounded in its Catholic and humanistic heritage. Work for social justice has a secure place at the heart of the modern church. Since 1891 and the publication of *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labour), popes, councils and national bishops conferences have written important documents outlining the Catholic church's teachings on social issues. In 1971 a worldwide synod of bishops declared that social action was a "constitutive dimension" of the preaching of the gospel for all Catholics (Gunn & Lambton, 1999). The CCCB have addressed social issues pertaining to women (CCCB, 2000) yet since the 1990s there has been a shift away from what could have developed into a critical gendered approach to Catholic social teachings in Canada (McKeon, 2003). This coincides with statements issued from the Vatican strongly dismissing the question and the discussion of women's ordination (Pope John Paul II, 1988). It has become increasingly clear that the political struggles of women are not considered a substantive issue of social justice for the clergy (McKeon, 2003). As an example, my recent research shows that while the bishops condemned conjugal violence over twenty years ago, little has been done to train Canadian priests in dealing with the reality of family violence even though at least three out of every ten women sitting in the pews has experienced some form of intimate partner abuse in their lifetime (Holtmann, 2010; Nason-Clark 1997). Opposition to same sex marriage, reproductive choice and stem cell research have come to dominate the Canadian bishops' agenda while the reality of women facing deepening poverty, dating and domestic violence, and trafficking are largely ignored.

As a campus minister I was able to engage in action on a variety of social issues including organizing a social justice group whose members helped to formulate the university's first sexual harassment policy. I was part of the AIDS Advisory Committee and helped to organize an international conference on AIDS and Catholic Higher Education. As an instructor, every course I taught included a section on religion and social action. Many students have never heard about Gandhi, Thich Nhat Hanh or Dorothy Day nor do they realize that the civil rights movement was founded in the churches of the southern US. Many Catholic students have never learned about the social teachings of the church. This is no longer surprising to me since my recent research highlighted that relatively few women in the pews can articulate the link between their faith and social action (Holtmann, 2009a). They know intuitively that they should be a community of compassion and caring yet most of their social action involvement is limited to charity. Those most likely to be engaged in the work of social change are at the margins of the church – women who are either members of religious orders or movements like CNWE (Holtmann, 2008, 2009b).

Engagement in work for social change by Catholic women inevitably raises the question of the roles of women (and laity) in the institutional church. Social analysis, which is required by the work for social justice, is by nature reflective of social structures and power dynamics. An engaged spirituality for Catholic women that includes personal spiritual growth, institutional participation and social change necessarily means a spirituality that is critical of the unjust structures of the contemporary church. Putting Catholic social teachings into practice becomes problematic for women and for the institutional church because doing so exposes a fundamental contradiction between the church's social teachings and its practice (Holtmann, 2009b). The

credibility of Catholic social teachings is inextricably intertwined with the necessity of institutional transformation (McKeon, 2003).

The liberal arts university should also be a place where students can observe and participate in work for social change, social equality and diversity in action, particularly in terms of gender. Contrary to its portrayal in the popular media, the Catholic church is not simply a highly centralized religious institution but rather an institution that is actualized in multiple local contexts and in multiple forms throughout the world. A liberal arts university with a Catholic heritage is a particularly suitable local context for highlighting the situation of women and illustrating to the local church that the mutuality of women and men can be advanced through structural equality.

Conversation

We concluded the workshop by asking participants to consider the following questions:

- What are your experiences of working for religious and/or social change with respect to women's equality?
- What do you think are strategies for moving forward?
- How might the liberal arts better serve women working for equality?

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