

[Jesus said:]

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

“Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you.

“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

Matthew 7:1-14, RSVCE



# *A Report on the Sinsinawa Dominicans Today*

*By*

*Elizabeth Durack*

who came to a great admiration of Father Mazzuchelli, their founder, then attended a large and public showing at Sinsinawa Mound of a film about Sisters who believe in “women priests” and pantheism, causing her to feel disturbed and sad, and wonder what was going on and how it got to this point

*The Father Mazzuchelli Society*

On the front cover: this student art incorporating the Dominican motto *Veritas*, "Truth" was published in the September 1899 edition of *The Young Eagle*, the magazine of Saint Clara Academy girls' boarding school at Sinsinawa Mound. Saint Clara was conducted by the Sisters of Penance of the Third Order of Saint Dominic, American Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, of Sinsinawa.

Although the text of the print edition is slightly more thoroughly edited, the HTML online version of this Report includes reference links to online sources that this project was primarily based upon, as well as additional graphics and other features.

In some instances, the text of the book version may regrettably lack needed references which the original HTML version supplied efficiently with a link.

All formats of this book including a free PDF download may be accessed at:  
[FatherMazzuchelliSociety.org](http://FatherMazzuchelliSociety.org)

This book includes reform-oriented commentary on internal Catholic Church matters by one who loves and respects the Catholic Church, religious life and the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation and desires others to love and respect them too. This book has not been reviewed by an ecclesiastical book censor. For lack of ecclesiastical approval, per canon 827 §4 this book should not be exhibited, sold or distributed in a church or oratory. The author has tried to faithfully represent Catholic teaching and defers to the teaching of the Church if she has said anything on religion or morals that is in error. The author has tried to be accurate with facts and regrets any unintentional errors or misunderstandings and resultant harm.

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PDF Version

Same as the book version except for fixing one typo

## DEDICATED TO

*Sister Francis Assisi Loughery*

*& the revitalization of the mission of Father Samuel Mazzuchelli,  
the New Evangelization, and the return of Catholics who have left the Faith:*

*"...Let us open eyes of Evangelical charity...."*



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## INTRODUCTION

I first visited Sinsinawa Mound in the summer of 2012 on an edifying parish pilgrimage to sites associated with the great pioneer Dominican missionary priest Venerable Father Samuel Mazzuchelli. A builder of churches and founder of numerous parishes, Father Mazzuchelli also founded the Dominican Sisters of the Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, of Sinsinawa. Since then I have also read his Memoirs and grown to have a tremendous appreciation and love for him and his still-very-current message, and would like to do the little I can do to inspire others to devotion to him, and zeal for the New Evangelization. Father Mazzuchelli's mission in our lands is far from completed.

When I and a friend visited Sinsinawa Mound again in January of 2013 for a large showing of a film called *Band of Sisters*, about religious Sisters who believe in “women priests” and pantheism, both my friend and I were told afterward by Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa that yes, they differed from the Church on matters such as “women’s ordination,” however “one must follow one’s conscience!” I said to one of two Sisters who separately told me this: “yes, but I believe in Vatican II, which says that we are obliged to form our Catholic conscience in keeping with Catholic teaching.” She did not seem to have any idea what to say.

My disturbing experience that day, of trying and failing to find a Sister who believed as the Church does that the Church has no authority whatsoever to ordain women as priests, became a powerful motivation to dig deeper into what was going on at Sinsinawa. In the crowd of hundreds at the film, mostly elderly Sisters, I did not see anyone my own age or younger. I am 35. Later people said to me, “what did you expect?” Local Catholics feel that they know what the Sinsinawa Dominicans are like. But it is one thing to hear or read about what has happened with the LCWR-type religious Sisters, and another thing to have this experience. How did they get from holy Father Mazzuchelli, to this? At the end of this

Introduction, I have quoted his own words on what he intended as the Sisters' purpose. You simply must read that, but I bet you can already guess it had to do with Catholic fidelity.

One of the local tragedies for the Catholic community has been a group of LCWR Benedictine Sisters near Madison who left religious life, left the practice of the Catholic Faith, and become a breakaway sect with a priestless "eucharist" that hosts "women priests" and dissident groups. Local practicing Catholic laity seem to universally understand this as something Catholics cannot support. I became aware that, outrageously, some Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters and other religious had continued giving public talks at this place, now called Holy Wisdom Monastery (HWM). When national political celebrity Sister Simone Campbell was announced as speaker at their Ash Wednesday service this year, I was motivated to organize a grassroots project of lay people's testimonies about why Catholics shouldn't support HWM. I brought them to HWM on Ash Wednesday and gave them to Sister Simone and the former Benedictines. Quite an interesting day! I sent the testimonies document also to the Sinsinawa prioress asking her to make sure the Sisters and everyone at their sponsored Edgewood schools (there was an obvious pattern of Edgewood folks with ties to Holy Wisdom) knew not to support HWM. I even sent this to the LCWR, pleading with them to take note of the tragedy that had happened in my area and be cautioned by the harm that had been done, and begging them to help keep Sisters Catholic and faithful. They did not reply.

Just before my visit to Holy Wisdom in February, I thought it might be my last opportunity to find out what I had wanted to know for a while: whether there was any possibility that I could get a Catholic education at Edgewood College if I decided to finish my degree. My highest educational credential is a G.E.D.

I visited on a Wednesday to visit the Admissions office and attend Mass, and came back also the next day because there was going to be a public talk by a priest. Admissions told me right there I could not get a Catholic education in the Philosophy Department. The following day, after the "Aquinas Forum" lecture by a Dominican friar, Father Thomas O'Meara, who said that the Persons of the Trinity are first of all three actions, and insisted that "the Church isn't going to exist in heaven," I then enjoyed an hour's conversation with the head of the Religious Studies Department. He said students come to Edgewood College with a very low level of knowledge of and negative opinion toward religion. But he did not see offering students an adequate and sound knowledge of the content of the Catholic Faith as a goal. He generally did not dispute the Catholic beliefs I expressed, well not most of them. I tried, I think entirely quixotically, to argue that because catechesis is getting much better than it was years ago, Edgewood College ought to be in the future a place where

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the children I was currently teaching Catechism to at my parish could grow up to actually continue their Catholic education.

A staff member I'd met the previous day seemed to consider the idea of teaching Catholic doctrine out of the question. I was walking down a hallway at Edgewood when I saw the *National Catholic Reporter* in a magazine rack outside an office. It turned out to be that of the Director of College Ministry. She denied my contention that that publication is editorially opposed to various Catholic beliefs, and flatly rejected my suggestion that the Catechism of the Catholic Church is an important source of knowledge of the Catholic Faith that should be available to help students. Unnerved from all this, the irregular aspects of campus Mass did nothing to settle my nerves. When the friendly elderly priest walked up to shake hands and ask my name during Mass I blurted, quietly and accurately, if regrettably, that he should not leave the sanctuary during the sign of peace. He turned out to be a donor to one of HWM's events with Sister Simone. I concluded that I could not deal healthily as a student with Edgewood's revised and ultimately not-Catholic idea of Catholicism. Another curious thing was that homosexuality was overtly a part of the culture and activities at Edgewood College, and as I have learned a little more I have found there is even particularly much a pro-homosexuality perspective in the Religious Studies Department. My review (included in this volume) of two books by Edgewood Religious Studies professor Sister Loretta Dornisch shows obvious cause for alarm. Enthusiastic embrace of moral and theological error is robbing Madison of the Catholic college that Edgewood is supposed to be, and even undermining the Church locally. And if it's not Catholic it's not Dominican either—a term they use much more often than Catholic.

I also discovered SinsinOP, the Sinsinawa Dominicans' massive email discussion list archive, which goes back to 1999. I found it by a simple Google search—it is publicly viewable on the internet. When I realized what an ample and public glimpse it afforded into the conversations of Sinsinawa Dominicans among themselves, and what was going on in their congregation, I went to the Eucharistic Adoration Chapel and prayed deeply about whether I would be able to *charitably*, with sincere love for all concerned and confident hope in God's mercy, bring some of this information to the attention of those who might be able to do something about it. I came to a conviction that that was possible. I decided to sift through SinsinOP, and for the sake of the Church and the common good, let people know what on earth was going on. This has taken me about 6 or 7 months, supported by the encouragement of lay friends. I was determined that, as with the Holy Wisdom Monastery Testimonies initiative, it should be a purely grassroots lay effort. I kept a strict rule to ask no advice of priests or deacons, nor even seminarians. I have continued to pray

constantly for the grace to do this in charity, and for the true good of everyone concerned. Nearing completion of the project I became honestly rather pained and reluctant about making it public and considered whether it would make sense to share it more privately. There did not seem to be another way to make it available to all the Sisters and others who genuinely ought to be able to see this. My friends urged me it is needed.

I sought no one's permission and no diocesan sanction, and therefore of course received none. Whereas the Doctrinal Assessment for the LCWR was as far as I know conducted by theologians at the Holy See, this *Report on the Sinsinawa Dominicans Today* is by a young lay woman who decided to do this entirely independently. I cannot see any way I stand to gain by this; on the contrary it has cost me money, besides such a lot of time. Conscience and strong love for religious life and the Church moves me to make known what I have learned is going on with the Sinsinawa Dominicans. Though there is much to love about these Sisters, and when I have met them they have been nice people, the focus of this Report is admittedly on what is problematic. I did find one good and true Sister who especially stood out for me, Francis Assisi Loughery, now deceased. I so admired her SinsinOP contributions that I pieced together a biography of her which also gives a rough history of what happened within the Sinsinawa Dominicans in the second half of the 20th century, Chapter 8 of this book. I have been told by several different Sisters who knew her, that she was a holy woman.

As Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Clare Wagner said on SinsinOP about the LCWR Doctrinal Assessment: "for myself, many religious and LCWR members the 'accusations' are not 'unsubstantiated.'" I think the "Report on the Sinsinawa Dominicans Today" supplies examples which I think do substantiate that, from one particular large congregation (with still about 500 members, the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters are still one of the largest in our country). The reader will also get a painful sense of the problems there are as a result. It is actually really clear why compassionate concern for Sisters themselves was part of the Church's reason for the Assessment, and for the Apostolic Visitation of Sisters.

I have had to be selective about what I focused on.

Some types of problems, like financial or real estate ones, I have made a conscious choice to avoid, though I want to encourage people to donate for Sisters' retirement. And, I have to mention that I believe that out of respect to the People of God, religious need to conscientiously follow Church law in regards to "alienation" of property, etc and not strategize against it, as the unscrupulous Fr. Dan Ward may have widely advocated. I mention this out of conscience, but do not even know the state of these things with Sinsinawa.

I generally opted to focus on topics that are doctrinal in their impact,

rather than lifestyle issues. The issue of wearing a habit does not really figure in my Report. Not all the issues raised are of precisely equal importance. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life, and the central doctrine of Christianity, so revising the meaning of the Eucharist is much graver than Sisters praying with a Scripture-warping feminist prayerbook instead of the Liturgy of the Hours, for instance, which is not to say I think the latter is even remotely a good idea.

In the end I did not feel drawn to do a specific article about Sisters believing in “women’s ordination,” even though I see this as an **extremely key** topic of my Report and not a lesser one at all. “Women’s ordination” is among the most troubling doctrinal deviations, because it pertains to



something that inherently breaks the Communion of the Church. The large majority of the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters believe “women’s ordination” is something possible, therefore this topic appears throughout all the articles. I think one can see from the words of the Sisters themselves, quoted in my articles, how “women’s ordination” is connected with breakdown in Catholic beliefs and breakdown in Sisters’ relationship with the Catholic Church. Personally I do not relate whatsoever to the desire for “women priests,” above all because I myself am a (privately vowed) celibate woman, in single-heartedness for Jesus. A priest is sacramentally a sign, image or icon of Christ, and

acts in His person, and a woman is not an image of my Bridegroom. I thank God that women and men are not simply interchangeable.

Pope Francis said recently that “women in the Church are more important than bishops or priests,” just like, “Mary is more important than the apostles.” And as Christian men *or* women, our knowledge of the mercy of God means we need not be afraid of our own lowliness. If only the Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary of Sinsinawa could get back to its beautiful Marian roots! Pray to Our Lady.

The chapters that make up *A Report on the Sinsinawa Dominicans Today* were written in approximately the reverse order in which they are presented. The one on Sister Francis Assisi Loughery was actually written first. It was important to me to start with that one, and that is also the one that most tells the story of what happened within the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation from the 1950s to now. The chapter on radical feminist and abortion rights activist Sister Donna Quinn gives another dimension of the history of the same time period. I feel like the article that most reveals “the problem” is the one on “Relationship with the Institutional Church.” More on how feminism causes a clash between Sisters’ goals and the Church is found in the article on the Sisters’ discussions about whether to revise the language of the vow formula to remove all male language for God. The other articles, on “What is Eucharist for me?,” on the Liturgy of the Hours-style feminist prayerbook “Dominican Praise,” and on Sisters giving homilies at Mass, show the impact of feminism on theology and liturgy and how feminists have sought to “change the Church” by changing language and practices in ways which undermine the Catholic Church from within. It bears saying again: since the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, according to Vatican II, matters pertaining to the Mass and the understanding of the Eucharist are of no little significance.

I have also written reviews of books by Sinsinawa Dominicans, to afford a more in depth look at the thinking of the Sister author. These are: *What A Modern Catholic Believes About Women* by Sister Albertus Magnus McGrath (1972) in which there is a recounting of every possibly-offensive thing Catholics have said about women down through history and an argument that “women’s ordination” is necessary to correct the situation, *The Feminization of the Church* by Sister Kaye Ashe (1997) in which a past Sinsinawa prioress lays out the whole radical feminist belief system, *Paul and Third World Women Theologians* (1999) by Sister Loretta Dornisch, in which Saint Paul’s letters are interpreted as if they were written by “Paula”, and also by this author *Feminism and Beyond* (2004), and finally *Awakening to Prayer; A Woman’s Perspective* by Sister Clare Wagner (2009), a book of “spirituality for catholic women” which really seems to be spiritual-not-religious, and the Catholic Church and the Sacraments seem to play no role.

I am moved to want to say that not all books by Sinsinawa Dominicans are as problematic as those. I have Sister Anne Marie Mongoven’s *The Prophetic Spirit of Catechesis* right here, and since I am a beginner (volunteer) catechist, I intend to see what I can learn from it. through SinsinOP it has seemed to me that Sister Anne Marie is a good person, usually worth listening to, though I imagine it is improbable she would like this *Report*. And the late Sister Mary Nona McGreal’s works on Venerable Father Mazzuchelli, particularly the *Positio* and the biography *Samuel Mazzuchelli, American Dominican*, are definitive.

### **Limitations of this project, and cautions to the reader**

All readers should recognize the limitations of a project of this nature, which was carried out on the basis of a considerable amount of evidence of Sisters' own words, and in many cases information about official decisions or communications by the Prioress or the Congregation, but without true and complete inside knowledge. Because of the necessary secrecy of the project during the time when I was working on it, I felt I could not do anything that would risk loss of public access to the SinsinOP archive, so there was not a reasonable possibility of checking with the participants to ask for more information or clarification. The semi-exception was some limited amount of communication with Sisters about Sister Francis Assisi Loughery, including the helpful contribution of the esteemed Sinsinawa Dominican Archives, which sent me a scan of her official obituary. A more major source was the Wisconsin Historical Society, which I live 10 minutes' walk from and probably has the best collection of materials on Father Mazzuchelli and the Sinsinsawa Dominicans outside of Sinsinawa, including bound volumes of the 1960's-80's ExCHANGE magazines.

Also, I am not a professional or credentialed journalist, researcher, historian, writer, or theologian, though I have tried to do the best I knew how in these areas. In charity, everyone should also consider the possibility that some Sisters may not even continue to feel the way they did when they wrote something imprudent in an email that was preserved in the SinsinOP archive. It should also be remembered that, although there seems to have been awareness by most or all of the SinsinOP participants that their messages were being publicly archived, most probably did not continually keep that fact in mind and unless specifically stated, surely were not intending for their messages to publicly represent the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation. Indeed, comments of individual Sisters speaking for themselves should above all be understood in that way, as individuals speaking for themselves. On a great many issues, they do not all believe the same. There is even the occasional possibility of Sisters writing a message via another Sister's account, leading to mistaken attribution.

It is possible that my sincere efforts to understand and justly and authentically interpret what I saw or read may have fallen short in some cases, and that I may have made various kinds of inadvertent errors. I know that I have very strongly wanted not to misrepresent anyone, and I am open to being corrected. As well, and perhaps above all, I have strongly wanted to speak rightly of and act in conformity with the truths of the Catholic Faith, and the Church's discipline, and if I have gotten any of that wrong, may anyone who knows better than me correct me. Finally, I myself do not speak on behalf of the Catholic Church, the Diocese of Madison, or my parish, obviously also not the USCCB, the CDF or the Congregation for Religious, and I don't think anyone need assume that any of them would

even approve of what I have done. And if what I have done is counterproductive to the unity of the Church and the salvation of souls, then I do not *want* anyone, lay or cleric, to approve. But the hope is very deep in me, and I pray, that every reader will choose to respond to what I have written with a sincere and even increasing desire for that true unity in the Church, so desired by Our Lord, and for the salvation of souls.

So by what authority do I presume to do this, if none of the above listed Church entities told me to? Well, Vatican II says lay people may do works of the apostolate on their own initiative, by virtue of their baptism. These works must of course be done in keeping with the mind of the Church, and this I have, in good faith, tried to do. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Vatican II decree on the apostolate of the laity, furthermore gives me this instruction:

Since, in our own times, new problems are arising and very serious errors are circulating which tend to undermine the foundations of religion, the moral order, and human society itself, this sacred synod earnestly exhorts laymen--each according to his own gifts of intelligence and learning--to be more diligent in doing what they can to explain, defend, and properly apply Christian principles to the problems of our era in accordance with the mind of the Church.

### **Sisters, come home**

In the early 1970s, during the mandated time of experimentation to implement the reforms called for by Vatican II, and sensitized to inequities and rights issues by the black Civil Rights Movement (and more to the point, Marxist liberation theology), the Sisters became more and more immersed in a world in turmoil from the Vietnam War, the backlash against *Humanae Vitae*, the push for an Equal Rights Amendment, and the abortion revolution of *Roe v. Wade*. Catholic feminists started to decide that even using masculine pronouns for God, the Father of the Son of Mary, was propping up systematic oppression of women, which they felt they had to work to overturn. Together with other American Sisters they angrily set about attempting a revision of Christian beliefs and practices. The new and different belief system has led many into an antagonistic relationship with the Church. Some remain within in order to subvert and attempt to change its doctrines. In some cases Sisters of other orders have left canonical religious life and formed non-Catholic breakaway sects.

What is a sadder illustration of the crisis within many LCWR-type religious communities, than the phenomenon of fallen-away Catholic Sisters? I think not only of those former LCWR Sisters who formally leave canonical religious life, leave the practice of the Catholic Faith, and sometimes start their own sect, like Holy Wisdom, but of those who remain within their canonical religious congregation but fall away from active practice the Faith, as defined in its minimum form by the precepts of the



Church, and above all attendance at Sunday Mass unless unable for a grave reason. About this, see my two-part article on “Moving beyond the Church?” and particularly the words of Sister Laurie Brink. There is a tremendous tragedy, sadness, and source of scandal in the whole idea of *any* Sisters for whom keeping themselves in a state of Grace is no longer sufficiently comprehended or felt as important. How much we need to renew everyone’s grateful devotion to the incomparably precious gift of Divine Life that comes to dwell in us through Baptism, is strengthened and sealed by Confirmation, restored through the divine Mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation when it had grown weak or been snuffed out by grave sin, covenantally renewed in the Eucharist! And the life of Grace in the soul of the preacher is very essential to the Holy Preaching.

It was a Dominican Sister of Sinsinawa who translated into English the masterpiece of spiritual theology by Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, which was for some years after its 1947 publication a part of novice formation at the Mound. I have a great admiration for this book, and gratitude to the Sinsinawa Dominicans for translating it. This summer when I led a study of Saint Teresa of Avila’s *The Interior Castle* for women at my parish, I drew also on *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, and besides his great explanation of the mystical life as the normal development of the life of grace, to which everyone is called, I was most struck how superbly Garrigou-Lagrange integrates spiritual theology with systematic and sacramental theology, and makes it easy to understand even for regular people like us; the other women also commented appreciatively on what his book contributed to our study. But I am concerned that this fully Catholic understanding of the life of Grace and its development, and for instance how the Sacraments relate to that, may have been left by the wayside for some Sisters.

I think of fallen-away Catholics when I see on the front page of the Father Mazzuchelli Society website the brief quote I placed there from the holy man urging site visitors: “Let us open eyes of Evangelical charity.” He wrote in his Memoirs that, “humanly speaking, unless the work of conversion to the Faith, and the fervor and the charity among the Catholics themselves are not reanimated, all will be dragged down to that unbelief which, at this very moment is giving signs of its dominion over a great part of the nation.” His 1844 book is perhaps the most powerful inspiration for the New Evangelization that I have yet read.

Everyone’s humility and growth in virtue is necessary, and for us to be real Sisters and brothers to one another. Dialogue is important. But the dialogue cannot be a “tactic” and a feminist praxis of circularity-instead-of-obedience, or an attempt to foster indifferentism in hopes that the Church may settle for false irenicism, false peace, a friendly truce between Catholic truth and error. Father Mazzuchelli warned against that very clearly.

But there must be communication, and the Sisters simply *must* inform themselves on every topic far more from orthodox Catholic sources. I wish they could get to know better the orthodox Catholic laity, and especially get to know and respect the wisdom of the growing number of younger Catholic couples who are living their marriages in keeping with Catholic teaching. I believe Sisters need to break out of the alternate universe of *National Catholic Reporter* and “Call to Action,” and learn to feel fully at home again in the Catholic Church, catching up with happily practicing lay Catholics of today and those congregations of Dominican Sisters, for instance the Nashville Dominicans, who are *not* in a kind of cold war with “the institutional Church.” The laity I know see the Holy Catholic Church not as an oppressor but as the channel of Mercy, our mother and teacher of the right use of freedom, and as having human happiness deeply at heart.

Some (many) Sisters’ radical feminist program entails not only altering liturgical language and practices (which Vatican II says even a priest does not have authority to do), but even claiming for themselves authority the Church Herself does not have to edit doctrinal and moral truths. What shocking nonsense is the media narrative of poor bewildered victim Sisters who were (supposedly) doing exactly what Vatican II said and simply want to serve the poor, butting heads with mean male hierarchs who are apparently just out to get them! But, peace. I have read and listened at length to what you have to say, Sisters, I have grown to care about you, and please let go the victim mentality. There is healing through forgiveness. I hope for others to have the grace to forgive you. Peace be with you, Sisters.

There is great need for everything that contributes to real communion in the Church. The Sacraments are necessary; it is necessary to regularly make a good Confession and receive God’s mercy and peace. And I think especially of the necessity of love for and devotion to immutable and objective Truth—devotion to *la prima dolce Verità* in Saint Catherine’s ardent phrase: Jesus Christ. As Vatican II puts it, “the Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth.”

Sometimes what is necessary includes the medicinal remedies there are in Canon Law. I’m not the arbiter of what is just or likely to be helpful.

I believe that the Sisters do need to see that other Catholics love them personally even if they don’t necessarily agree with all that the Sisters have said and done. I hope for those who see the problems to not hesitate to donate for Sisters’ legitimate retirement needs. I hope others will join me in fasting and prayer, confident and hopeful because Jesus shows kindness and mercy to all who turn to Him with humble and contrite hearts. There is need for priests to have the heart of Father Mazzuchelli toward them! Their Father Samuel still loves them. He consecrated them to immutable Truth and to the saving mission of the Catholic Church and he must be interceding before the face of God for their return to these purposes.

**What Father Mazzuchelli says**

The Vatican II document *Perfectae Caritatis* called for “appropriate renewal of religious life” entailing “a continuous return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original inspiration behind a given community.... loyal recognition and safekeeping should be accorded to the spirit of founders, as also to all the particular goals and wholesome traditions which constitute the heritage of each community.” Here are the words of Father Mazzuchelli, writing in his 1860 commentary on the Sisters’ original Rule, on what their purpose is:

It is the special vocation of the Third Order of St. Dominic to oppose religious error in all its forms; and in this country it has as great a work, and perhaps a greater one than that of the times of its holy founder [i.e., Saint Dominic], because false doctrines and bad morals surround our Catholic youth on every side. The Sisters, then, in teaching Christian doctrine, by words and example, to the children of this country, where they are exposed to lose their faith, do fulfill the main duty of their vocation, and become the true children of their Patriarch, and worthy of the name of the Order of Preachers.

The Holy Catholic Church, for several ages past has given her sanction to many Religious Orders, founded by men of God with the view of attending to the particular demands of the times and places in which they lived. In our days, however, it seems that, as the old enemy of mankind is undermining every Christian truth, and striving to bring the world back to paganism, by the worship of man in place of God, the spiritual armies of the Church of Christ are called upon to file in battle array, to combat the enemy wherever he is to be met with. Every branch of human knowledge has been made more or less subservient to the dark designs of Satan: the press, the schools, the politics, and the literature of the day are, in their corrupted state, powerful arms in the hands of the enemy to destroy, if possible, all that is sacred in Christianity. This is the principal cause which, in our age, persuaded the various Religious Orders, ancient and modern, to appear in the same field of battle, and fight with the same spiritual weapons. The hermit, the contemplative, the penitent, the politician, the artist, the philosopher, the man of letters, the school teacher, and even the recluse virgin of Christ, as well as the theologian and the minister of the Lord, have come together to meet the common enemy; and now they stand on the same ground, to fight for the same cause, and save, if possible, the future generation from falling into the darkest, and perhaps, the last stage of infidelity. Whether this multitude of believers of every rank, capacity, and vocation will be victorious at the end of the spiritual struggle, is a secret locked up in the impenetrable decrees of God. It is certain, however, that every one who joins this spiritual

army, and combats valiantly, by teaching, prayer, and by self-denial, will receive a crown of glory from the hands of the Saviour of the world in the day of final retribution.

The Dominican Sisters, by joining the army of the Church Militant against error and sin, become active members of the militia of Jesus Christ, according to their original vocation, which is the most glorious and exalted station in human life, and well worth leaving their homes, their relatives and all worldly affections, in the well-grounded hope of that exceedingly great reward, the entire and eternal possession of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.



*Yours*  
*F. Samuel Mazzuchelli O.S.*

**Prayer for the Beatification of Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, O.P.:**

Lord Jesus, you called your servant, Samuel, even in early youth, to leave home and all for a Dominican life of charity in preaching your holy gospel. You gave him abundant graces of Eucharistic love, devotion to your holy Mother of Sorrows, and a consuming zeal for souls. Grant, we beseech you, that his fervent love and labors for you may become more widely known, to a fruitful increase of your Mystical Body, to his exaltation, and to our own constant growth in devoted love of you Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit live and reign one God, world without end. Amen.

## 1 TRUTH AND CONSCIENCE

This chapter seems to me the least reader friendly one, and it comes first only because it is a compendium of important background knowledge and perspective on the Sisters' basic point of view--but this Report is not particularly intended as a popular work or something elegant. The book you are reading is, rather, a rough document with a purpose and hope of helping the Sisters' relationship with the Church.

The first half of this article gives some context and background knowledge in regards to the teaching of the Catholic Church and the Dominican Saints. I go on to point to some of the sources of the currently prevalent thinking of Dominican Sisters about "liberation" and conscience, then cover in the latter part of the article a selection of what contemporary Dominican Sisters apparently see as conscience issues. Finally, I describe the content of a video titled "A Matter of Conscience" which was made as a collaborative effort by several like-minded congregations of Dominican Sisters in response to the LCWR Doctrinal Assessment, and which Sinsinawa Dominicans were asked to view by their prioress. This video attempts to justify dissent by reference to Vatican II, the USCCB, Canon Law, personal experience, and even a quotation by Joseph Ratzinger, taken seriously out of context.

### **Catholic Teaching**

My survey will not be learned or comprehensive but I hope it will include what is most important. I begin by quoting major Catholic Church documents that provide essential context for reading and interpreting the Sinsinawa Dominicans' comments about conscience. The teaching of the Vatican II document on religious freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* on conscience and the formation of conscience is important today and repeatedly referred to by Sisters as a basis of their beliefs about conscience:

[T]he highest norm of human life is the divine law-eternal, objective and universal-whereby God orders, directs and governs the entire universe and all the ways of the human community by a plan conceived in wisdom and love. Man has been made by God to participate in this law, with the result that, under the gentle disposition of divine Providence, he can come to perceive ever more fully the truth that is unchanging. Wherefore every man has the duty, and therefore the right, to seek the truth in matters religious in order that he may with prudence form for himself right and true judgments of conscience, under use of all suitable means.[...]

Moreover, as the truth is discovered, it is by a personal assent that men are to adhere to it.

On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life.[...]

In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church. For the Church is, by the will of Christ, the teacher of the truth. It is her duty to give utterance to, and authoritatively to teach, that truth which is Christ Himself, and also to declare and confirm by her authority those principles of the moral order which have their origins in human nature itself.

Orthodox Catholics do not believe that something is true *because* the Catholic Church says it is true, but rather that the Church, by a charism from the Holy Spirit, does teach truth with certainty and authority. “The Church is the pillar and bulwark of the truth,” wrote Saint Paul [1 Timothy 3:15]—and further on in this article you will see Father Mazzuchelli quote that, too. At times, Vatican II was even more straightforward about the obligation of Catholics to be guided by Catholic moral teaching, for instance in regards to marriage, conjugal love, and parenthood. From *Gaudium et Spes*, which upholds these things to be great goods:

[I]n their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church’s teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love, and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment.

You will see some of the Sisters I quote in the second half of this article saying that it is a matter of “conscience” for them to dissent from some of this teaching—though some other Sisters disagree with those. Soon after the Council, Pope Paul VI re-stated and explained quite prophetically the moral illicitness and harm of artificial contraception in *Humanae Vitae*.

At least a few Sisters say their conscience leads them to dissent even from the moral teaching protective of the lives of unborn children—though officially as a congregation the Sinsinawa Dominicans have upheld Catholic teaching about this. Abortion, of course, which is materially murder, has

been understood to be wrong even from the very first surviving extra-biblical Christian text, the Didache, which says “you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born.” Pope John Paul II renewed and extensively commented on this perennial moral teaching in light of the situation in our time, in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, which talks a good deal about conscience, for instance:

It is at the heart of the moral conscience that the eclipse of the sense of God and of man, with all its various and deadly consequences for life, is taking place. It is a question, above all, of the individual conscience, as it stands before God in its singleness and uniqueness. But it is also a question, in a certain sense, of the “moral conscience” of society: in a way it too is responsible, not only because it tolerates or fosters behaviour contrary to life, but also because it encourages the “culture of death”, creating and consolidating actual “structures of sin” which go against life.... When conscience, this bright lamp of the soul (cf. Mt 6:22-23), calls “evil good and good evil” (Is 5:20), it is already on the path to the most alarming corruption and the darkest moral blindness.

And yet all the conditioning and efforts to enforce silence fail to stifle the voice of the Lord echoing in the conscience of every individual: it is always from this intimate sanctuary of the conscience that a new journey of love, openness and service to human life can begin.[...]

Faced with the progressive weakening in individual consciences and in society of the sense of the absolute and grave moral illicitness of the direct taking of all innocent human life, especially at its beginning and at its end, the Church’s Magisterium has spoken out with increasing frequency in defence of the sacredness and inviolability of human life. The Papal Magisterium, particularly insistent in this regard, has always been seconded by that of the Bishops, with numerous and comprehensive doctrinal and pastoral documents issued either by Episcopal Conferences or by individual Bishops. The Second Vatican Council also addressed the matter forcefully, in a brief but incisive passage.

Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, and in communion with the Bishops of the Catholic Church, I confirm that the direct and voluntary killing of an innocent human being is always gravely immoral.

Catholicism is not fideism, a belief that unaided human reason cannot know religious truth and so it can only be taken “on faith” or else regarded skeptically—in fact, humans have a true capacity for spiritual truth in the rational faculties of the soul made in God’s own image. And Catholicism is not “traditionalism” in that condemned heretical sense in which the fact something is “traditional” is held to be the chief criterion and guarantee of its certitude—though there is another sense in which Catholics *must be* traditional and uphold a continuity of the Faith handed on to us. In Jesus God has revealed the entirety of what He wants to say to human beings. And this Word, Who was from the beginning, has not changed, and the Faith has not changed from the Apostles handed on. The doctrine of the

Faith increasingly *develops* but does not in essence *change*, from what was handed on by the Apostles.

Regarding the Church's infallibility the Vatican II Doctrinal Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* taught that:

This Sacred Council, following closely in the footsteps of the First Vatican Council, with that Council teaches and declares that Jesus Christ, the eternal Shepherd, established His holy Church, having sent forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father; and He willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world. And in order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed Blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion. And all this teaching about the institution, the perpetuity, the meaning and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and of his infallible magisterium, this Sacred Council again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful. [...]

And this infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed in defining doctrine of faith and morals, extends as far as the deposit of Revelation extends, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded. And this is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith, by a definitive act he proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals. And therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable, since they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, promised to him in blessed Peter, and therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment. For then the Roman Pontiff is not pronouncing judgment as a private person, but as the supreme teacher of the universal Church, in whom the charism of infallibility of the Church itself is individually present, he is expounding or defending a doctrine of Catholic faith. The infallibility promised to the Church resides also in the body of Bishops, when that body exercises the supreme magisterium with the successor of Peter. To these definitions the assent of the Church can never be wanting, on account of the activity of that same Holy Spirit, by which the whole flock of Christ is preserved and progresses in unity of faith.

This applies as much to the teaching on the grave wrong of contraception in *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, the teaching on the Church's absolute lack of authority to ordain women in Pope John Paul II's 1994 *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, the teaching on the very grave sin of abortion in *Evangelium Vitae* in 1995, to mention a few matters on which I have seen efforts to assert exercise of "conscience" over and against definitive Catholic teaching by *some* Sinsinawa Dominicans. It is not clear what percentage support a right to have a direct abortion, but belief in the possibility of "women's ordination" is very clearly held by most of them. I saw that with my own eyes in January of 2013, and for instance Sister Patty Caraher wrote on SinsinOP in 1999,



“Very few of us believe that God has only called men to be priests.” The great seriousness of the matter in terms of damaging ecclesial communion makes it important to lay out adequately here what *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* says:

Although the teaching that priestly ordination is to be reserved to men alone has been preserved by the constant and universal Tradition of the Church and firmly taught by the Magisterium in its more recent documents, at the present time in some places it is nonetheless considered still open to debate, or the Church’s judgment that women are not to be admitted to ordination is considered to have a merely disciplinary force.

Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church’s divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.

Subsequently, because some still wanted to claim this was “not definitive” or “not infallible” the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith clarified that it indeed is:

*Dubium*: Whether the teaching that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women, which is presented in the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* to be held definitively, is to be understood as belonging to the deposit of faith.

*Responsum*: Affirmative.

This teaching requires definitive assent, since, founded on the written Word of God, and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the Tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium (cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 25, 2). Thus, in the present circumstances, the Roman Pontiff, exercising his proper office of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32), has handed on this same teaching by a formal declaration, explicitly stating what is to be held always, everywhere, and by all, as belonging to the deposit of the faith.

*The Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect, approved this Reply, adopted in the Ordinary Session of this Congregation, and ordered it to be published.*

Rome, from the offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on the Feast of the Apostles SS. Simon and Jude, October 28, 1995.

**Joseph Card. Ratzinger**

*Prefect*

Only recently, unknowingly echoing the words of Sister Francis Assisi Loughery on this topic years ago on SinsinOP: “Roma locuta, causa finita,” Pope Francis said to an interviewer: “The Church has spoken, and said no. John Paul II, in a definitive formulation, said that door is closed.”

In 1907 Pope Pius X authored an encyclical letter titled *Pascendi Domenici Gregis*, in regards to the heresy of Modernism. Modernism is more or less the idea that *that* may have been true enough *then*, but this other

logically opposed idea is true *now*, because doctrine has not simply developed but *evolved*, and must be helped along to evolve in keeping with what the modernists say their conscience tells them. This is opposed to the Catholic understanding of the way of conscience formation expressed in *Dignitatis Humanae* of Vatican II, a document which is not at all the “thumbs-up” to Modernism some have wanted to read it as: “under the gentle disposition of divine Providence, [one] can come to perceive ever more fully the truth that is unchanging.”

Pope Saint Pius X asked, “can anybody who takes a survey of the whole system be surprised that We should define it as the synthesis of all heresies?” The program of the Modernists which he described continues to sound very familiar:

[T]he Modernists express astonishment when they are reprimanded or punished. What is imputed to them as a fault they regard as a sacred duty. Being in intimate contact with consciences they know better than anybody else, and certainly better than the ecclesiastical authority, what needs exist – nay, they embody them, so to speak, in themselves. Having a voice and a pen they use both publicly, for this is their duty. Let authority rebuke them as much as it pleases – they have their own conscience on their side and an intimate experience which tells them with certainty that what they deserve is not blame but praise. Then they reflect that, after all there is no progress without a battle and no battle without its victim, and victims they are willing to be like the prophets and Christ Himself. They have no bitterness in their hearts against the authority which uses them roughly, for after all it is only doing its duty as authority. Their sole grief is that it remains deaf to their warnings, because delay multiplies the obstacles which impede the progress of souls, but the hour will most surely come when there will be no further chance for tergiversation [according to Miriam-Webster: “evasion of straightforward action or clear-cut statement; desertion of a cause, position, party, or faith”], for if the laws of evolution may be checked for a while, they cannot be ultimately destroyed. And so they go their way, reprimands and condemnations notwithstanding, masking an incredible audacity under a mock semblance of humility. While they make a show of bowing their heads, their hands and minds are more intent than ever on carrying out their purposes. And this policy they follow willingly and wittingly, both because it is part of their system that authority is to be stimulated but not dethroned, and because it is necessary for them to remain within the ranks of the Church in order that they may gradually transform the collective conscience – thus unconsciously avowing that the common conscience is not with them, and that they have no right to claim to be its interpreters.

One particularly obvious modernist theology of today is called “the universe story” or “the new cosmology” and has been promoted heavily by the LCWR up to the present day with an August 2013 talk on this subject by Sister Ilia Delio, OSF at their annual Assembly. This ideology has made strong inroads into Sinsinawa as well. “The universe story” was taught for instance at the 2009 Sinsinawa Community Days gathering. I discuss it also

in my review (included in this volume) of the 2009 book *Awakening to Prayer* by Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Clare Wagner, an aficionado and sometimes teacher of “the new cosmology.” It is based on a pantheistic or panentheistic re-imagining of religions in light of Teilhard de Chardin and a notion of “cosmic evolution”; the major exponent and promoter of this new-agey, science-flavored ideology today is Dr. Brian Swimme, who has been a past LCWR speaker. As far as I have ever seen, and as best as I can sincerely try to understand, adherents do not seem to necessarily believe their religion of origin is uniquely true, but that all religions emerge or evolve essentially from human experience, and even basic morality and core religious doctrines can and should change, particularly in light of new scientific understandings.

Some Sisters seem to not feel bound “literally” to basic truths of the Catholic Faith anymore, as reflected in the August, 2013 words of Sister Patty Caraher: “One of the challenges I experience with our creed is that for so many years I have taken it literally. I now find myself translating the creed in my mind and often saying my own creed.” She says in the same message that she is “very taken with [new cosmology enthusiast Franciscan Sister Ilia] Delio’s thinking: ‘Christianity needs a new direction, one pointing not upward but forward, not toward ‘heaven above’ but to a new future of healthy relationships in the cosmos, a new heaven on earth, which is what Jesus prayed for....’” But at least one Sister, Ann Marie Mongoven, spoke up to quote Pope Francis as voicing her own view: “The faith is as we say in the Credo, the whole faith, without subtractions, without reductions, without compromises.”

In the documentary film *Band of Sisters* which I viewed at Sinsinawa Mound in January of 2013, perhaps the most striking line for me was by Monroe IHM Sister and former LCWR president Nancy Sylvester, who from her statements was clearly a pantheist or panentheist. Sister Nancy said that in the new cosmology, there’s not a three-level universe anymore, there’s no heaven or hell. I was stunned by her apparent willingness to regard Christian doctrine as if it were no more or less than a pre-scientific misconception of the cosmos in need of “correction.” There seemed to me no other reasonable way to interpret her belief system but post-Christian. This film was a wake-up for me that there were some Sisters who now believed something very substantially different from the Catholic faith. And the hundreds of Sinsinawa Dominicans present seemed to love it. That may have been the most surreal thing I ever experienced.

Pope Pius X knew all about it in 1907. The common conscience of the Catholic Church is not with the modernists, and no quantity of opinion polls showing that they’ve undermined the Church’s teaching from within and converted erstwhile Catholics to their way of thinking, could ever make those beliefs true, or truly Catholic.

### **Truth and Conscience according to the Dominican Saints**

I was interested to know what the Dominican Saints say. This was far and away the most refreshing and spiritually helpful section of the *Report on the Sinsinawa Dominicans Today*, for me to write.

**Saint Dominic** was launched, bare-footed, peaceful, and joyful of heart, a man of the Gospel, on his mission of the Holy Preaching in response to the Albigensian or Cathar heresy. This taught a dualistic idea that matter was created by a devil and was evil, and spirit created by God and good, therefore the Albigensians were given to extremes of asceticism in order that the spirit might somehow free itself from the flesh. They even rejected marriage and motherhood, and some fasted to the point of death. The heretics formed their own parallel church imitating the Catholic Church, but without sacraments (because matter was, to them, evil). Ideas have consequences, and Albigensianism was not just untrue but harming its practitioners, causing strife, and even leading to violence and death. Dominic preached the goodness of the material creation and the beauty of the Incarnation, finding powerful support for this preaching by praying the Rosary.

Because Albigensianism spread particularly among the noblewomen of southern France, nine of Dominic's women converts became, in 1206 in Prouille, France the first religious foundation of what would become the Order of Preachers. Their form of preaching against the heresy was by the living witness to the truth of the orthodox Catholic Faith manifested in their monastic community of nuns. They spoke of the Faith to those who visited them, and also educated children. Later on the mendicant Friars Preachers were founded with Papal approval. This was a novelty since all religious life had been monastic, and in that era of poor clerical education, normally only bishops preached. The good the friars did, and their dedication to the study of sacred truth by means of the then-new Scholastic theology which became the basis for improvement in education of all clergy, assured that this new idea was here to stay.

The earliest account of the life of Dominic is in the *Libellus* of Blessed Jordan of Saxony who told this story of the Saint's willingness not simply to die for the truth, but his love for the truth was such that he would prefer the death to be especially dreadful:

Some time later, as he neared a place in which he suspected traps had been laid for him, he started to sing and walked by fearlessly. When the heretics learned of this, they marvelled at his courage and asked him, "Aren't you afraid of death? What would you have done if we had captured you?" His only answer was, "I would have asked you not to kill me all at once, but to cut me up member by member, so as to give me a lingering martyrdom. Then, before you plucked out my eyes, I would ask you to hold before me each part you had cut from my body. After all that, you could let the rest of my body roll about in its own blood or you could kill me altogether." Astounded by

these words, the enemies of truth no longer laid snares for him or hunted for the soul of the just man whom they would help rather than hurt, if they killed him. But, with all his power and zeal he continue to busy himself winning as many souls as he could for Christ, since his heart was filled with an admirable and almost incredible desire for the salvation of all men.

And “[t]he joy which shone in his features bore witness to a clear conscience.” Saint Dominic liked to read Cassian or the Desert Fathers, whose teachings on the eight vices helped him to form his conscience for growth in virtue. “Along with the help of grace, this book refined the purity of his conscience, intensified the light of his contemplation, and raised him to a high level of perfection.”

In the *Summa Theologiae* of the “Angelic Doctor” **Saint Thomas Aquinas** (on which I am no expert, but trying my best), in the First Part under Question 16, I learn that what is true and consonant with reality, is logically prior to what is good. Although truths regarding various things and residing in various people’s intellects are many, “yet the truth of the divine intellect is one, according to which all things are said to be true.” And in the divine intellect, truth is immutable. As to what is good, (First Part, Q. 6, Art. 2) “there is something that is absolutely being and essentially good, which we call God.... Everything is therefore called good from the divine goodness as from the first exemplary, effecting, and final principle of all goodness.”

Saint Thomas thinks about conscience differently than you or I or Vatican II. He uses (in the First Part under Q. 79 Art. 12) a term unfamiliar to most of us, *synderesis*, meaning according to the Catholic Encyclopedia “the habitual knowledge of the universal practical principles of moral action,” which by definition “inclines to good only.” For Saint Thomas, conscience is specifically not a capacity, but rather a pronouncement of the mind on the goodness or badness of something we have done or intend to do, as he explains in Art. 13. Conscience is formed by habits that depend on *synderesis*, the knowledge of first principles. That is the only thing at all that he says about formation of conscience. Saint Thomas doesn’t appear to have been thinking in terms of conscience as an authority that must be obeyed (our mind could be pronouncing wrongly on the goodness or badness of acts), rather, he understands good acts to be, in a more direct sense, *guided by* the habit/virtue of prudence, “the knowledge of what to seek and what to avoid.” Theologian John Lamont’s analysis seems probable and rings very true in relation to the spiritual life:

According to Aquinas’s understanding of prudence, identifying the formation of conscience as the way to moral improvement is a mistake, if such formation is understood as an attempt to first improve one’s capacity for arriving at true speculative judgements about the rightness or wrongness of actions, in order then to be able to act upon this improved knowledge. On Aquinas’s view, this will not work. The natural way to get better at knowing

what it is good to do is principally by doing what is good. One can acquire knowledge about the goodness or badness of actions through speculative investigation rather than through practice, but only in a subsidiary and introductory way.

The way most of us have conceived of conscience for the last several centuries has actually been distinctly different. This may have been particularly influenced by the Ignatian examen prayer or examination of conscience. Vatican II taught that “On his part, man perceives and acknowledges the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience in order that he may come to God, the end and purpose of life.” Theologian Germain Grisez explains how to connect Vatican II and Saint Thomas:

As used by Vatican II, “conscience” refers at once to awareness of principles of morality, to the process of reasoning from principles to conclusions, and to the conclusions, which are moral judgments on choices made or under consideration. St. Thomas uses a particular word for each: “synderesis” for awareness of principles, “practical reasoning” for the process of moving from principles to conclusions, and “conscience” for the concluding judgment only (see S.t., 1, q. 79, aa. 12–13; 1–2, q. 94, aa. 2, 6).”

When **Saint Catherine of Siena**, the Order of Preachers’ other glorious Doctor of the Church, speaks of truth she speaks usually of Jesus Himself. In her letters she often calls Him *la prima dolce Verità*, “First Sweet Truth,” or “Sweet Primal Truth.” This Truth, Jesus, is also at the same time the Way, Whom she speaks of with a metaphor of a bridge which is the only way to cross over the water without drowning, and as Life.

Saint Catherine speaks of conscience most memorably as an inner alarm against wrong acts. She writes of “the worm of conscience” gnawing at sinners during their life, and even, agonizingly, after the damnation of the impenitent. Treating of priests and the need for their reform, she uses a vivid extended metaphor of conscience as a shepherd’s dog, which if it is not nourished with the blood of the Lamb (practically, the person’s memory needs to be nourished with the blood), cannot bark as it ought to warn of danger to the flock. One is reminded of a key symbol of the Dominicans (in Latin this sounds like *Domini-canes*, the “Lord’s dogs”) that came from a dream Saint Dominic’s mother had, of a dog with a torch in its mouth—which would come to seem a symbol of his preaching. The image of the barking dog of conscience appears in Saint Catherine’s letters too. This is from her *Dialogue*, trans. by Sr. Suzanne Noffke, O.P., Racine:

In other words, the remembrance of the blood sets the soul afire with hatred for sin and love for virtue, and this hatred and love cleanse the soul of the stain of deadly sin. This so invigorates conscience that it stands guard, and as soon as any enemy of the soul, that is, sin, wants to gain entrance (and not only the will but even the thought of it), conscience barks like a dog, excitedly, until it rouses reason.

**Venerable Father Samuel Mazzuchelli**, founder of the Sinsinawa Dominicans, spread truth to Indians and frontier settlers of the Upper Midwest. Among his personal books preserved in the little museum at Sinsinawa Mound is *The Imitation of Christ*, which one might think of when he says in his *Memoirs* that “Such should be the mien of him who preaches the truth confirming it with the brightest example: charity, zeal, disinterestedness, piety, modesty and patience should make of him a living image of his Divine Master, Who set example before precept.” He did not hesitate to address the Holy Preaching to unlearned people, for “Christ’s doctrine is intelligible to all mankind to some degree, and therein differs from human teachings.” Therefore he is confident in the Indians’ capability of knowing the truth and becoming perfect Christians.

The Catholic Priest preaches the truths of the holy Religion of Jesus Christ to the Indians as he would preach them to the most learned persons of the world; without reference to their ignorance or their knowledge he only announces the spotless, unalterable Faith in which he himself has been instructed and which all the Catholics of the world have believed from Apostolic times. And in truth, such is the command of Jesus Christ: “Go ye into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned.” (Mark XVI, 15.) By this means the most simple minds receive all Christian truth, without the aid of books, and Biblical studies, for which the greater part of humanity is unfitted either from natural incapacity or the laborious circumstances of their lives.

In some ways the mission to the Indians was simpler than the mission to the white settlers in the religiously pluralistic milieu of the frontier, where religious controversy with Protestants was a regular occurrence. “It is a truth from the mouth of Truth itself: ‘He who is not with Me is against Me.’ So religious hostility can be avoided in no way except by the adoption of the same belief, or by the indifferentism which is a culpable abandonment of every Christian truth.” But the mission to keep cradle Catholics in the Faith was of the highest importance, he said, because it was essential to the health of the Church in the United States.

Father Mazzuchelli, a great apostle of God’s mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, draws on Saint Catherine’s image of the “worm of conscience” in the course of commenting on Calvinist anti-Catholic sermon that decried Confession.

Nature herself, even without the light of the Gospel, suggests to the man fallen into sin the remedy of a humble confession, and conscience seems to leave him no respite nor to promise him peace of heart except at the cost of a confidential declaration of his own fault. The worldly live slaves to the secret but stern reproaches of a guilty conscience which they cannot hush even in the silence of night, while Christians are called by the Holy Faith to lay down the grievous burden of their sins with their vicious attachments at the feet of him who represents upon earth the Divine Mercy. There they

exchange the restless, cruel, deadly worm of conscience for that peace of soul and of heart that the world could never give. It was for our Redeemer to provide the necessary remedies for the spiritual ills of fallen humanity, and therefore did He say to His disciples: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained." (John XX, 22, 23.) Why will the Christian deny to his Saviour the power of communicating His graces through the ministry of men?

In his writings, Father Mazzuchelli depicts pioneers and Indians alike responding in a Christian way to the promptings of conscience and the awareness that we cannot justify ourselves, by seeking Jesus in His Sacraments. He baptized hundreds, celebrated Mass in wigwams erected specially for the occasion, or in churches he built himself, and inspired many Christian souls to be reconciled to God.

Safe and comforting would it be for sinners to imitate the conduct of that aged man who in 1832 went from Pointe Saint Ignace to the Church of Mackinac to lay down the burden upon his conscience; for more than forty years deprived of the Sacramental Grace of Confession, Mr. N. with the intent of ending the gnawing at his heart said with the prodigal son, "I will go to my Heavenly Father's house: Why should I defraud myself of the inheritance of the children of God? The moving words of life which I heard last Sunday from the mouth of the Priest pierced my heart, they seemed to be aimed at me. I am a true son of the Church who made strange misuse of the gifts of Heaven received in my youth. Lo my soul for many years lives in direst poverty and is dying of hunger!" Moved by these thoughts which softened his heart, he makes ready and leaning upon his staff crosses over upon the ice which in winter joins his place of abode to the Island. Like the leper of the Gospel, he shows himself to the Priest manifesting the clearest signs of a true contrition in the accusation of his faults of more than forty years. He blots out his sins with his sobs, he washes them with floods of tears in the merits of Christ, and provides for the welfare of his soul which he wills to save at any cost. Rising then from the tribunal of Penance with a deep sigh from his very heart, he said: "My father, I seem to have laid down from my shoulders the weight of a mountain !" Such was his gratitude to God's Mercy that he could never afterwards speak of his confession without tears of tenderness.

Not only the white pioneers, but, "Guided by the dictates of conscience, the Indians recognize Confession as the most natural effect of a true repentance."

Father Mazzuchelli resoundingly approves of the American principle of religious freedom, as a consequence of which Catholic missionary work was able to be carried out freely even in these majority protestant lands. What he says brings this article full-circle back to *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Vatican II document on Religious Freedom, because what Vatican II says on the matter is pretty much exactly like what Father Mazzuchelli wrote 120 years earlier:



For the same reason and in the same sense that every government in the world does not interfere with its subjects in indifferent matters, but merely protects them, as for instance in the cultivation of their own farms, the form of their dwellings, the color of their garments, etc., just so in the United States are the citizens protected in whatever is mere matter of conscience. Even when religious practices conflict with the laws in a way, if these practices are not in themselves immoral, unjust or detrimental to one's neighbor, they are respected by the laws; for as they concern the conscience alone of the individual, they are held as entirely free of the governing authority. But should the religious practices of any citizen whatever turn to the prejudice of good order, of administration of the law, or of the rights of a third party, then the secular power can and must interfere and must correct the delinquent, not as guilty of following a false doctrine, but as convicted of an act which violates the law or the rights of other parties.

His downright patriotic American point of view gently showed the lie in the scaremongering American anti-Catholicism of the day, for instance that of Lyman Beecher, and particularly Samuel F.B. Morse, author of an 1834 book called *Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States*. But every bit as surely, Father Mazzuchelli avoided the heretical "Americanism" (a forerunner of modernism) that would be condemned several decades later in the 1899 encyclical letter of Pope Leo XIII, *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae*.

The underlying principle of these new opinions is that, in order to more easily attract those who differ from her, the Church should shape her teachings more in accord with the spirit of the age and relax some of her ancient severity and make some concessions to new opinions. Many think that these concessions should be made not only in regard to ways of living, but even in regard to doctrines which belong to the deposit of the faith. They contend that it would be opportune, in order to gain those who differ from us, to omit certain points of her teaching which are of lesser importance, and to tone down the meaning which the Church has always attached to them.

Father Mazzuchelli writes repeatedly in his *Memoirs* against the religious "indifferentism which is a culpable abandonment of every Christian truth," an error to which people were tempted as a means of maintaining social peace in the religiously pluralistic environment, and which he identifies above all as an effect of "the spirit of Protestantism." The attitude of "majority rule" even in determining religious doctrine, which he saw emerging among Protestants, would later infiltrate the Catholic Church, for instance through such dissident groups as Call to Action, which was founded specifically on that principle. For Sinsinawa's involvement in CTA, see my article on "Relationship with the Institutional Church." Father Mazzuchelli wrote of the alarming situation he saw, wherein such error was so much more predominant than Catholicism that one "who understands the position of our holy Religion in America cannot but tremble for its future":

Every human institution naturally is influenced in some degree by the

character of the society and times in which it finds itself, and in the United States, less than elsewhere, does Protestantism depend upon the authority either of history or of its own theologians; the freedom of the individual decides everything. In the sectarian councils, regardless of the beliefs of their predecessors, the points wherein they differ are decided with the utmost freedom not to say, indifference. The idea of a constant, unwavering interpretation of the Bible can have no weight in their decisions and any argument whatever resting upon tradition would be rejected with contempt. In fine, the political principle that the majority ought to rule, is the same as that which regulates in religious matters. To perceive clearly the position of all the sects in this country, the reader must apply these facts to all the Protestant denominations and to all the local associations that compose them, and lastly, must recognize in each individual the unlimited exercise of that maxim, "I am free" in a much wider sense than in its political signification. So strange an individual freedom is the source of innumerable intellectual vagaries, which are indirectly protected by the civil laws, for these never put any hindrance to the public preaching of the most extravagant religious doctrines.

**"This new awareness and the ethics that flow from it"**

Some principles apparently forming modern feminist Sisters' conscience are referred to by Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Kaye Ashe in her 1997 book *The Feminization of the Church?* : "A feminist approach to ethics... deplores women's continued subordination and seeks to eliminate it.... This new awareness and the ethics that flow from it can be couched in the vocabulary and founded on the principles of various political traditions: liberal, socialist, Marxist, radical." This, she says, is "a corrective to traditional ethics." Feminist ethical norms "avoid the kind of abstract universals or rigid absolutes that have characterized traditional ethics," Sister Kaye explains.

Discarding the Christian understanding of objective morality founded on the immutable truth that abides in God is not without consequences. "We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism which does not recognize anything as for certain and which has as its highest goal one's own ego and one's own desires," said Cardinal Ratzinger, in a homily to the conclave that would elect him Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Francis affirmed the same just after his election: speaking first of the problem of material poverty, he continued "But there is another form of poverty! It is the spiritual poverty of our time, which afflicts the so-called richer countries particularly seriously. It is what my much-loved predecessor, Benedict XVI, called the 'tyranny of relativism', which makes everyone his own criterion and endangers the coexistence of peoples."

It is not difficult to imagine that the meaning of Vatican II when it says that "every man has the duty, and therefore the right, to seek the truth in matters religious in order that he may with prudence form for himself right and true judgments of conscience" may be interpreted very differently

by feminists operating from a “liberal, socialist, Marxist, radical” and modernist perspective, than by Catholics who interpret the Council in continuity with the Catholic Tradition.

Pope John Paul II called compromise between Marxism and Christianity “impossible,” in his social justice encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. But in the United States it made significant inroads with some Christians, perhaps first of all those committed to the important cause of Black Civil Rights, who questioned why Christians had for so long tolerated terrible injustice against blacks.

James Cone, the chief architect of Black Liberation Theology, develops black theology as a system in his book *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970). In this new formulation, Christian theology is a theology of liberation — “a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ,” writes Cone. Black consciousness and the black experience of oppression orient black liberation theology — i.e., one of victimization from white oppression.

No one could deny that the Civil Rights movement righted some grave wrongs. But in hindsight, the introduction of liberation theology into the movement, according to Dr Anthony Bradley, author of the passage quoted above, “may have actually hurt many blacks by promoting racial tension, victimology, and Marxism which ultimately leads to more oppression.” The same principles and methodologies were soon applied to the women’s movement, actively encouraging women to see themselves as victims of male oppression.

The most significant Sister leader who moved from the Civil Rights and “racial apostolate” scene into the women’s movement with a strong liberation ideology, was **Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler**, a School Sister of Notre Dame. Amy L. Koehlinger’s book *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* states that through their experience in “proximity to African-Americans, Sisters in the racial apostolate also learned critical vocabularies to describe their experiences of oppression and gendered inequality within the Catholic Church.” After intense formative experiences on front lines of the Civil Rights movement in the march from Selma to Montgomery, AL, Margaret Traxler became the founder in 1969 of the National Coalition of American Nuns, dedicated to “pushing the envelope” by making bold statements on dissident issues like abortion and “women’s ordination,” and opposing interference of males in Sisters’ affairs (“we hope to end domination by priests, no matter what their hierarchical status,” she once explained), then in 1974 started the Institute of Women Today, “to explore the historical and religious roots of women’s liberation” by a praxis that involved helping women in prison and in crisis, and in 1984 became a signer of the controversial 1984 New York Times Catholic “pro-

choice” ad, which is discussed in my article on Sister Donna Quinn, who had many connections with Traxler and her legacy, was once the Director of the Institute of Women Today and continues to be a coordinator of NCAN. “God gave us free will,” said Sister Margaret. “Free will is guided by conscience.... A woman will answer to God for one thing: Has she followed her conscience?... It’s nobody’s right to tell her what her conscience said to her.”

Some Sinsinawa Dominicans knew or worked together with Margaret Traxler, and/or thought much like her. Sinsinawa Dominican feminist college professor Sister Albertus Magnus McGrath, also of Chicago, wrote in her 1972 book *What a Modern Catholic Believes About Women* (click to read my review of it) that “Especially, the influence of the Black Liberation Movement has been great” on the feminist movement. Her last chapter is titled (and without the asterisk I have inserted): “Women as the ‘N\*ggers’ of the Church”; she calls this “an almost inescapable comparison.” Sister Albertus Magnus seems to have regarded ordination of women as necessary for justice.

My sense is that the “liberated” mentality of the late 60s and 70s formed Sisters to see figures like Sister Margaret Traxler as conscience heroes. Sister Theresa Kane, an LCWR president who seized an opportunity to speak to a vast 1979 media audience in the presence of Pope John Paul II to call for opening all ministries in the Church to women (ie including the priesthood) became another one. This January I saw for myself the warm support of Sinsinawa Dominicans for a dissident film *Band of Sisters* which included footage of Sister Theresa Kane’s famous speech and interviews with her; my concern at not being able to find any Sisters present who disagreed with the film about the possibility of “women’s ordination” (or who seemed to disagree with it about anything else, actually) was a significant part of what motivated the project you are reading. In recent years, some Sinsinawa Dominicans have cited other high profile dissidents such as the intransigent supporter of homosexual behavior Sister Jeannine Gramick (who has even been the subject of a documentary film, prizewinner at homosexual film festivals, entitled *In Good Conscience*), and “School of the Americas Watch” organizer and “women’s ordination” activist Roy Bourgeois, as conscience figures. And some Sinsinawa Dominicans seem to have regarded their own Sister Donna Quinn, most famous for her unqualified support for abortion rights, as a conscience figure.

Many Sisters seem to have been fully persuaded that a new emphasis on personal responsibility in the Church meant, regardless of what Vatican II actually said, *not* needing to “attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church” very closely in forming conscience. And heavily influenced by the dynamics of liberation theology, it seems that they began to take

everything about obedience and humility with a big grain of salt, in favor of the victim mentality, and commitment to resistance against what they saw as structural oppression, by every tool available to them. Rejection of male language for God, circular, non-obediential and nonhierarchical notions of governance, support for “women priests,” etc, all seem to have been elements of the “praxis” by which they hoped to transform the Church to “liberate women”.

My feeling is that many Sisters have themselves so tangled up at this point that there should be a certain compassion toward them, while also calling them to fidelity, which this project earnestly and even affectionately aims to do. Their whole project is, to them, “a matter of conscience.” Their level of formation in the liberationist feminist belief system is such that their conscience tells more than a few of them either to keep working to overthrow “male domination” in the Catholic Church, or else to leave the Church. That this perspective is not coherent with the Catholic Church’s teaching is self-evident. Many other Catholic women, such as me, fundamentally disagree that the Catholic Church is oppressing women. And we do not feel conflicted about looking to Catholic teaching of truth as a guide for forming our conscience. We hope for all Sisters to be open to that, too, by God’s grace.

Opposing racism continued to be a commitment of the Sinsinawa Dominicans, by the way, and I like that, I just hope care is taken for it not to be from a Marxist type of perspective. In recent years dozens of Sisters have taken “Anti-Racism Training” courses. A Sister described the experience in 2004: “It was an opportunity to become not only better informed (factual information) but also, as the Liberation Theologians teach, conscientized (the awakening of the conscience) to racism in our society and how it impacts our lives and the decisions we make.” Some of this seems to have to do with sensitizing participants to a phenomenon of “white privilege” and ways of alleviating ongoing economic and educational disadvantages suffered by racial minorities.

### **Truth and Conscience on SinsinOP**

Unsurprisingly, some of what flows from “this new awareness” and its revisionist morality is far from Catholic. This is regularly asserted to be based on freedom of conscience. But it is important to note that one should not assume they all espouse all of the things mentioned below, as “conscience” issues.

The reading material chosen by Sinsinawa Dominicans and forwarded to their email discussion list, SinsinOP, seems to have regularly presented beliefs at odds with Catholic teaching as a matter of conscience.

An article posted to the Sinsinawa Dominican email discussion list SinsinOP in September of 1999 by Sister Kaye Ashe, which she thought

“might be interesting to many,” describes a sociological study specifically of women who think they are called to priestly ordination. Besides disagreeing with the Church on the matter of ordination, according to the article, “they want to revamp church teachings on sexuality and reproduction, end mandatory celibacy for priests, and enact policies that show profound respect for individual conscience.”

A post in May of 2000 quotes a statement of Catholics For a Free Choice (i.e. to have an abortion): “We are not motivated by anti-Catholicism; we are motivated by a love of the church and a commitment to a vision of church that respects the conscience of every individual. These truths cannot be silenced.” On this occasion, a voice of reason and authentically Catholic conscience was raised in objection, that of Sister Francis Assisi Loughery, a good and true soul who passed away in 2002; her story is recounted in a full article as part of this project. Her words are worthy of a longer than usual quote:

What a sad contrast between Archbishop designate Edward Egan’s pledge of loyalty and obedience to the Holy Father, and the oxymoronic phrase, ‘loyal opposition’ to the Church, adopted by Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice.

A number of years ago the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued their Statement on the Formation of Conscience. It read in part: “For a Catholic, ‘to follow one’s conscience’ is not...simply to act as his unguided reason dictates. ‘To follow one’s conscience’ and to remain a Catholic, one must take into account first and foremost the teaching of the Magisterium. When doubt arises due to a conflict of ‘my’ views and those of the Magisterium the presumption of truth lies on the part of the Magisterium.”

Lumen Gentium #25 explains why: “In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ, and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of soul. This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*.”

[...] If we are called to proclaim the Gospel through the ministry of preaching and teaching, then the hallmark of our authenticity is our fidelity to the official teaching authority of the Church.

After the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a Notification regarding Sister Jeannine Gramick’s refusal to assent to Catholic teaching on the morality of homosexual acts, and attempted to restrict her from continuing to minister to same-sex attracted persons, her continued disobedience was repeatedly cited as a heroic exercise of conscience. In September of 2000 a Sister wrote: “We are seeing a woman refusing to be silent about an action oppressive to her conscience, a woman refusing to collude with a structure whose main purpose is to control, not to set free.” Another concurred: “Being silent about it perpetuates the mental and spiritual imprisonment that women of conscience can suffer within the

Roman Catholic Church when their thinking disagrees with its teaching.” In regards to this, too, Sister Francis Assisi upheld the Church’s point of view, posting the Notice in its entirety, in segments.

Another frequently referenced “conscience” issue was civil disobedience at the School of the Americas protests in Fort Benning, Georgia, an international military training center which they hold culpable for the deaths of innocent people, including religious Sisters and priests, in Latin America at the hands of militants who received training at the school—even though the school itself did not direct anyone to kill innocent noncombatants. A Sister who attended the 2003 trial of Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Kathy Long and several Sisters of other orders arrested for trespassing described: “Each Sister, ranging in ages from the 50s to the late 70s, gave prepared speeches to the judge and to the court. I felt that each speech was masterful. Each Sister explained why she crossed the line and how her conscience and her faith led her to do so.” Sister Kathy continued to feel strongly that her civil disobedience was an act of “solidarity with the victims of violence and torture in Latin America from a faith perspective as a theology of resistance” was convicted and spent a little while in prison. While I am not completely persuaded that the school was to blame for the terrible deaths of innocents, I do not object to the School of the Americas protests in the way that I object to other things they cite as “conscience” issues that are in more specific opposition to Catholic beliefs.

The organization "School of the Americas Watch" was founded by Father Roy Bourgeois, the Maryknoll priest who has also famously been a public “women’s ordination” supporter, and was laicized in 2012 for participation in an “ordination” ceremony of a woman. Catholic belief is that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women. He has also been cited as a conscience figure for this, and in his own public letter to the CDF, forwarded to SinsinOP by Kathy Long herself in 2009 (in 2011 she also wrote in favor of Franciscan Jerry Zwada, another SOAWatch associated priest who also faced canonical consequences for “women priests” activities. Sister Donna Quinn replied to her: “Kathy This always reminds me of the Holocaust and the silence that prevailed....”), Roy Bourgeois wrote:

Conscience is very sacred. Conscience gives us a sense of right and wrong and urges us to do the right thing. Conscience is what compelled Franz Jagerstatter, a humble Austrian farmer, husband and father of four young children, to refuse to join Hitler’s army, which led to his execution. Conscience is what compelled Rosa Parks to say she could no longer sit in the back of the bus. Conscience is what compels women in our Church to say they cannot be silent and deny their call from God to the priesthood. Conscience is what compelled my dear mother and father, now 95, to always strive to do the right things as faithful Catholics raising four children. And

after much prayer, reflection and discernment, it is my conscience that compels me to do the right thing. I cannot recant my belief and public statements that support the ordination of women in our Church.

In February of 2010, Sister Donna Quinn invited SinsinOP members to a Chicago event with Father Roy Bourgeois, who, in her unique phrasing, “has been excommunicated by the Hierarchical Vatican Church”: “He will speak on A Life Lived From Conscience as he shares his personal faith journey during his 38 years of priesthood and the importance of resisting injustice in conscience. Many of you know Roy from the School of the Americas Watch and hearing him speak at Call To Action. Whenever I needed an injection of Courage during my journey this year Roy was a Person of God with whom I spoke.”

And accordingly, some Sisters referred to the women themselves who sought “ordination” as people of conscience. A Sister thanked Sister Donna Quinn in June of 2012 for “the information about the ordained Women priests. I have had many connections with six of them through CTA [i.e., the dissident group Call to Action]. And have spoken with two of the FIVE Women Bishops. I have great respect for these women who followed their conscience to a God-given call.”

In 2006 there was a controversy on SinsinOP after someone posted a petition opposing conscience rights for pharmacists not to have to sell the “morning after pill,” which can work as an abortifacient by preventing a newly conceived baby’s implantation in the womb, causing the tiny new person to be flushed out when the mother has her period. “It’s the morning after pill that kills the fetus! Their pharmacists in their own conscience do not want to aid in abortion,” protested another member of SinsinOP. But one Sister replied in chilling opposition to *this* conscience cause: “What is the difference between pharmnacists [sic] who refuse to sell legal products to their customers and restaurateurs who refuse to serve African Americans?” This is an astonishing and doubly disturbing comment, especially since unborn black children are four or five times as likely to be aborted in America, as unborn white children, according to the Planned Parenthood-aligned Guttmacher Institute, a fact profoundly shaping the racial makeup of our country. Effectively, a hidden genocide is occurring.

A few years later, April 2009, one Sister did forward a message from a group of Catholic OB-GYNs urging opposition to the Affordable Care Act’s “HHS Mandate” to provide contraceptives, abortifacient morning-after pills, and sterilization. In contrast, in fall of that year a forwarded email from NETWORK Lobby, a national religious Sisters’ political lobby closely associated with the LCWR, began with stark apparent rejection of Catholic conscience concerns as irrelevant compared with passing the law: “You know the number one issue: Healthcare Reform.... All must come with this principle and obligation in mind ‘Access to affordable, quality health care is



a basic human right and no one in conscience can deter its fulfillment.’” On the same day NETWORK Lobby’s Nuns on the Bus tour stopped at Sinsinawa Mound last year, I asked Sister Simone Campbell, the group’s leader, whether she opposed the Obamacare HHS contraceptive mandate. She said “it’s complicated” and did not want to talk to me. Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Donna Quinn was not only in favor of the HHS mandate for employers to pay for contraception, but straightforwardly advocated in a 2010 post against the federal ban on government funded abortion, and that “A national health care reform bill must include Medicaid funding for a woman on Medicaid who through the primacy of her conscience and as a valid moral agent chooses this legal medical procedure.” In 2012 she again can be seen advocating for federal abortion funding. In the mind of Sister Donna, “If this Health Care ‘Reform’ does pass we all know that gender discrimination was necessary to do so.” The next month this obviously-confident abortion advocate Sister forwarded, of all things, a LifeSiteNews article quoting then-Archbishop Raymond Burke, who is spot-on:

“Who could imagine that consecrated religious would openly, and in defiance of the bishops as successors of the apostles, publicly endorse legislation containing provisions which violated the natural moral law in its most fundamental tenets – the safeguarding and promoting of innocence and defenseless life, and fail to safeguard the demands of the free exercise of conscience for health care workers?” Burke questioned.

But these concerns mean little to Sister Donna, who shows little or no sign of holding unborn human lives as sacred or worthy of protection, and who has said she remains in religious life “for the Sisterhood.” She wrote in 2011: “If I live to be a thousand I will never understand the attention to and rejection of a woman’s moral judgement or primacy of conscience regarding the center of her being – her womb.” In September 2012 she forwarded an article from that month’s New England Journal of Medicine emphatically promoting the idea that “conscience compels abortion provision.”

Many Sisters did not take kindly to the bishops who tried to help form consciences for faithful citizenship by cautioning that saving the million-plus annual victims of abortion is the gravest issue with no other social justice issue truly proportionate to that in gravity. Many bishops emphasized that voting for pro-abortion-rights politicians is a form of cooperation in abortion. Their moral point was not well taken by all. Ahead of the 2004 elections one Sister wondered on SinsinOP: “Should there be a public, collective response to Bishop Sheridan from the theological community? Or is it more appropriate to wait and let opposing statements from other bishops make the case that Catholics can in fact vote for whomever their conscience dictates without putting their souls in mortal danger?” Another said, “if there was any message from Vatican II it was a validation of the human conscience. Follow yours and let no one tell you

how to vote!” Sister Donna Quinn, famous for her support of abortion rights, shared an NCAN message on the topic: “The National Coalition of American Nuns is profoundly saddened as cafeteria bishops try to toll the death knell for conscience.” On the other hand, a talk titled “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” was presented by a Sister at Sinsinawa Mound in 2008; what she said is unknown to me. On SinsinOP, the same Sister who opposed conscience rights for pharmacists *contrasted* the fact that although the bishops tried to clarify in a new introduction that a candidate’s support for abortion may legitimately lead voters to disqualify them from receiving support, the main body of the document says “A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as abortion or racism, if the voter’s intent is to support that position.”

The media often frames listening to conscience as being opposed to listening to Catholic teaching—certainly not the perspective of Vatican II. A Sister who posted to SinsinOP in 2005 had no objection, though. She said: “Today we have a large number of educated Catholic adults with a mature faith and spirituality. It was interesting the poll on CNN the other evening. The question put forth to Catholic adults was: ‘In the times of decision do you rely on Church teachings?’ The poll results were: 76% I rely on personal conscience; 19% I rely on Church teachings.”

An example of framing of conscience as opposed to listening to “the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church” (to use Vatican II’s phrase) is a 2008 message forwarded by Sister Donna Quinn, (link goes to my full article about her) from the Women-Church Convergence, of which she is a coordinator. WCC gives a litany of “conscience causes”: 1. Sister Louise Lears, member of a different order but the same St Cronan’s parish in St Louis attended by some Sinsinawa Dominicans, had been interdicted by Cardinal Burke for supporting “ordination” of women, described by WCC as “retribution for an act of conscience.” 2. Roy Bourgeois was also facing penalties for his “women’s ordination” activities, “This contradicts freedom of conscience” in the view of WCC. 3. Pro-abortion-rights politicians have been “threatened with excommunication. These are attempts to politicize a Catholic’s right in conscience to receive the Eucharist.” In fact universal canon law requires denial of Holy Communion to persons obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin, such as pro-abortion-rights politicians. “Women-Church Convergence urges all Catholics to resist the hierarchy’s intrusions on conscience. Women-Church creates and supports communities in which conscience is respected. The Convergence is made up of representatives of twenty-six Catholic-rooted feminist groups and organizations.” Among these member organizations is the Sinsinawa Women’s Network, which has its own page on the Sinsinawa Dominican website and is clearly an official group within the congregation. Similarly, in October of 2009 the Sinsinawa Women’s Network sent a message of

support to Sister of Charity Louise Akers, who had been barred from teaching catechetics in Cincinnati and who “stated that to rescind her support of women’s ordination ‘would go against my conscience.’” Everyone on SinsinOP was invited to sign on to it.

The national Congress of another notorious dissident group, the “American Catholic Council,” covered the topic of “Celebrating the Spirit of Vatican II” in 2011, and although if you’ve been reading this article you know that the actual documents of Vatican II pull the rug out from under the dissidents who *claim* to stand on them, a Sister who attended reported back to SinsinOP: “Three common threads that came through the different presentations were the need to: commit oneself to understanding and living the Council Documents; insist on the primacy of conscience; claim an inclusive Catholic Church; commit to a nonviolent resistance to the absolutism of the Vatican and many Bishops.”

Finally, there was a good deal of talk about conscience in regards to “the institutional church” in the last few years, and whether to be part of it considering how “patriarchal” and “oppressive” they considered it to be, or how to stand up to it, a subject I’ve written a whole article about, so in this article I will simply let one of the relatively more reasonable of today’s Sisters briefly introduce the topic:

The only way I know of that we can reform the institutional Church is to speak out when our conscience calls us to do so, knowing that we may be punished for speaking out. We need to be willing to accept whatever just or unjust punishment we are given, not as martyrs but as truth-seekers. And I think that no one of us can speak for the entire Sinsinawa congregation because a single policy, unless accepted by the congregation, seldom if ever represents the entire congregation.

### **“A Matter of Conscience”: A video to inform Dominican Sisters’ response to the LCWR Doctrinal Assessment**

In 2012 a major event for US Sisters was the release of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, on April 18. It upset many, and Sisters began mulling what to do. The next month, some Sinsinawa Dominican leaders “joined leadership teams from 12 other Dominican congregations in a conference call concerning the Doctrinal Assessment,” their second on that topic. “Some were interested in further research on the formation of conscience and how the magisterium works today.” The Sinsinawa congregation leadership

began to work with other Dominicans to gather women among us with the relevant professional expertise to reflect together on conscience – its history in Church teaching, its formation, and its exercise in our lives. The result is a 30-minute DVD, “A Matter of Conscience,” featuring Sisters Arlene Flaherty

OP (Blauvelt), Anneliese Sinnott OP (Adrian), and Lucy Vazquez OP (de' Ricci), who offer necessarily brief but rich insights to stimulate further thought, personal reflection, and discussion.

The video was also posted in a streaming format on the congregation website, protected by a password. Prioress Sister Mary Ellen Gevelinger asked everyone to view the video either on DVD or online, and reflect on several questions about it. The same video is also on YouTube, posted there by the Dominican Sisters of Peace:

One local community of Sinsinawa Dominicans that viewed “A Matter of Conscience” together in January of 2013 “agreed that the DVD is well-done and is both thought-provoking and enlightening, with at least one somewhat surprising statement.” This would have been right around the time that I visited Sinsinawa Mound to view the film *Band of Sisters* and both I and my friend were told by Sisters, in fact I was told separately by *two* different Sisters, in response to my concerns about their belief in the possibility of “women priests,” that “you have to follow your conscience.” I said to one Sister that I was a believer in Vatican II, which says we need to form our Catholic conscience in keeping with Catholic teaching. She looked at me, and did not seem to have any idea what to say. A viewing of “A Matter of Conscience” reveals that the instruction their congregation was supplying to them put a really different “spin” on Vatican II and conscience.

“A Matter of Conscience” consists of three carefully prepared presentations by Dominican Sisters.

The first is by Adrian Dominican Sister Annaliese Sinnott, Adrian Dominican, on “conscience formation before and since Vatican II.” She claims that conscience formation before Vatican II was like a one-legged table, whereas now there are four legs: the Magisterium, the truth that emerges from the world around us, Christian tradition, and “our individual consciences formed through our own prayer, reflection and experience.” What I have always heard is that Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium are the sources of what we believe as Catholics, and this is precisely what the Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation says; factual knowledge of the world etc is also relevant to forming our ability to apply moral principles to specific circumstances (Saint Thomas also says this, I think). But this was the Catholic understanding prior to Vatican II, as well as since, so I am not clear about what she means that it was a one-legged table before. And I am confused what she means about our own consciences being a source of conscience formation.

She quotes out of context a 1968 commentary of Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, on *Lumen Gentium*: “Over the Pope as the expression of the binding claim of ecclesiastical authority, there still stands one’s own conscience which must be obeyed before all else, if

necessary even against the requirement of ecclesiastical authority. Conscience confronts the individual with the supreme and ultimate tribunal, and one which in the last resort is beyond the claim of external social groups, even of the official church.” This quote is especially dear to dissenters. But in context, of course, he is not saying quite what they wishfully interpret. Ratzinger knows conscience is capable of erring, while the Church has (and this is also a teaching of Vatican II) a charism of infallibility from the Holy Spirit, and later in the same text this greatest theologian of our times says: “The doctrine of the binding force of an erroneous conscience in the form in which it is propounded nowadays, belongs entirely to the thought of modern times.” In other words, he doesn’t agree with that.

Sister Annaliese’s concept of the process of how doctrine is defined culminates with: “Following the issuing of an authoritative statement traditionally has come a period of conversation and dialogue with the larger church that leads either to reception, acceptance of that particular teaching, or rejection, non-acceptance.” One thinks painfully, for instance, of that most prophetic and most rejected Cassandra of documents, *Humanae Vitae*! Sister is neutral about the possibility of non-acceptance. To defend her noncommittal attitude toward Catholic teaching, she cites the US bishops! She had to go back many years to catch the bishops saying something quite so open to being abused, but this was a real document that really had a sub-heading “Norms of Licit Theological Dissent”: “In November 1968 the American bishops issued a pastoral letter entitled ‘Human Life in Our Day’ in which they affirm the doctrine of dissent under three conditions: the reasons are serious and well-founded, the manner of dissent does not impugn the teaching authority at the church, and the dissent does not give scandal.” She does not mention that the document means this only in regards to noninfallible doctrine. The truth as taught by the Catholic Church on common dissident “conscience causes” like abortion, contraception, homosexual acts, and “women priests” is actually *infallible* by the ordinary magisterium and not at all subject to ever actually being changed even if the Pope and bishops wanted to. “Human Life in Our Day” says:

When there is question of theological dissent from noninfallible doctrine, we must recall that there is always a presumption in favor of the magisterium. Even noninfallible authentic doctrine, though it may admit of development or call for clarification or revision, remains binding and carries with it a moral certitude, especially when it is addressed to the Universal Church, without ambiguity, in response to urgent questions bound up with faith and crucial to morals.

Sister Annaliese contends that “the official Church seems to be in certain issues moving back to the model of the one legged table. Many of the problems which people grapple with today, immigration, life in all its stages,

poverty, fair wages, war, sexuality, and sexual identity, are also often the dividing issues in our Church. Amid these tensions in the Church today we ask where is truth? Is there truth on all sides of the division?"

The second presentation in the film "A Matter of Conscience" is by Sister Lucy Vasquez, a Dominican of Saint Catherine de'Ricci and canon lawyer, who spoke on "what Canon Law does and does not say about conscience and dissent." She notes that "While the Code does not specifically refer to conscience or to intellectual dissent," the section on the rights and obligations of the Faithful is relevant, for instance:

Canon 218 says that those "who are engaged in the sacred disciplines enjoy a lawful freedom of inquiry and of prudently expressing their opinions on matters in which they have expertise, while observing due respect for the Magisterium of the Church." Respect, not agreement.

Another canon says the Faithful have a right or sometimes a duty to manifest their opinions in matters for the good of the Church and the good of souls; Sister Lucy emphasizes: "Please note that neither canon speaks of any of this being done with blind obedience. As a matter of fact that whole section of canons never mention said any of this has to be done what blind obedience." And this is true enough, and is also the basis on which I am doing my own project that you are reading, and with Canon 1752 at heart.

Sister Lucy says that "through the centuries, numerous theologians were condemned, only to be later exonerated eventually, usually centuries later. Every one of them was speaking *to* the Church. The role of the Magisterium, on the other hand, has been to speak *for* the Church." The Sisters see it as their business to speak *to* the Church—prophetically, in their opinion, or as an alternative magisterium with a different teaching, as some critical commentators have said.

The third speaker on the video, Sister Arlene Flaherty, a Dominican Sister of Blauvelt, spoke on "her lived experience of exercising conscience." This Sister surprised me by apparently disagreeing directly with Saint Catherine of Siena's (and Father Mazzuchelli's) inner alarm type characterization of conscience: "As a child I was taught and subsequently thought of my conscience as an inner alarm that would go off warning me, 'be careful, treading on thin ice here.'" But Sister Arlene is mature now and not a little child: "As an adult, however, I've come to understand conscience more as the process through which I sift and discern decisions with others, in order to promote the best possible good in what are increasingly complex and nuanced situations that I encounter everyday in my life."

Sister Arlene refers to a book by another Dominican Sister, Judy Schaeffer, *The Evolution of a Vow, Obedience as Decision Making in Communion* (perhaps based on her Marquette University dissertation), to allude to the changed understanding and practice of obedience among the modern-type

religious Sisters, but particularly the importance of communal discernment praxis in their communities. “In the struggle we need to be clear that the criterion of dialogue and discernment is essential to the mutual search for truth, the search for God. Without it, community is reduced to authority, and conscience to conformity.” Feminism has been a source to the Sisters of “analytical tools to see understand an address systemic injustices,” which also include the concerns of the poor and of the Planet Earth. Sisters clash with the Vatican because they are not so absolute in their interpretations of morality, a reality which she says is not born of political correctness but is “probably because of their encounters with God abiding with women who have had to make difficult decisions about their pregnancy, with gay couples seeking to give God thanks for the gift of love, or with couples who know they must use a contraceptive so as to better provide for the children they have, or, to better provide for a child in the future.”

As a younger lay woman who has lived deeply in the midst of this complexity and seen and experienced and thought and suffered deeply how sexual immorality and abortion harm people, I disagree that this type of “editing” of the moral law helps people or is any kind of mercy. I do precisely agree with the Church and all the Saints that the natural moral law has to do with what is truly good, and not just abstractly or notionally or “from the point of view of male hierarchs.” And I do not see this true good as oppressive; absolutely the opposite.

Sister Arlene likes a book by a Sister, titled *Liberating Conscience*, which according to a reviewer on Amazon critiques the Christian “preoccupation” with chastity. The reviewer quotes the book itself as saying this fosters “disrespect for embodiment and for female humanity... and the elitism resulting from the rhetoric associated with clerical and religious celibacy.” Again I must respond personally as a lay woman privately vowed to celibate chastity for life in single-heartedness for God, that I could not disagree more, and the idea of chastity as “disrespectful for embodiment” could hardly be more preposterous. What Sister Arlene herself quotes from the book, which does not make much sense to me, is: “absolutism is theologically problematic because all values are relative to God, and is morally problematic because of the effect it has on the common good.” To Sister Arlene, we live in times of new discoveries and new scientific understandings, and we can’t remain stuck in the “medieval” past; Dominican Sisters should be “preaching truth through communal discernment, and identifying and transforming contemporary manifestations of the heresy of dualism.” What she means by the latter statement, she does not explain; if she means by “dualism” what the author of *Liberating Conscience* meant by calling belief in chastity “disrespect for embodiment,” then her thought does not really cohere with Christianity, nor with the good or the dignity of women or men.

One way to describe “A Matter of Conscience” is as an instructional video on turning off the inner alarm of conscience.

Another sort of “conscience” theatre was first previewed at the Call to Action Conference last year, and apparently presented even to the public in Chicago: “The Conscience Monologues,” which Chicago’s Eighth Day Center for Justice created by “Drawing on the methodology of the Vagina Monologues,” and has been advertised repeatedly on SinsinOP. I am not sure how closely Sinsinawa Dominicans were involved with the creation of this, but they have been among the sponsors of the Eighth Day Center for many years. Women-Church Convergence seems to have been involved in promoting it, so it is not at all likely to be faithfully Catholic.

Conscience Monologues presents women’s stories of conscience and provides a space for women to share their lived experiences within the Church. The stories are transformed into theatrical monologues lifting up the still small voice within each person – a soul voice that speaks from our essence and guides our lives.

As I survey the history of the great Dominican tradition, I am struck by how very beautiful and rich it is, and how much good it has done. I am also struck by the sense that some Sisters today have wanted to kill the barking dog of conscience, poison the worm of conscience. And it seems to me the devil’s favored battlefield today is against women’s integrity in sexual matters, and against motherhood. He sure seems happy when people mess around with the liturgy, too. Will these things liberate? Really? And is this the spirit of Vatican II? Certainly not according to the texts. In order to bark, the dog of conscience must be nourished by the blood of the Lamb, Saint Catherine says. Her image explains well the connection not only of holy meditation but above all the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the right worship of God, with the moral life. Doctrinal and moral truth, the sacramental and liturgical life, both women and men in the sweetness of their complementarity, all the different members and orderly structures of the Body of Christ, all the pieces fit together in a marvelous and mysterious way that inspires our love and admiration. O quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum! May no one tamper with it any more!



## 2 MOVING BEYOND THE CHURCH? PART I: "WHAT IS EUCHARIST TO ME?"

The relationship between the Church and the Eucharist is one of profound intimacy and mystery. "Christ is the head of the body, the Church," says Saint Paul, and the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist also is the Body of Christ—His true and living presence, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. The Second Vatican Council speaks famously of the Eucharist as the "fount and apex of the whole Christian life." The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church explains that "As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed, is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on, and, in the sacrament of the eucharistic bread, the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ is both expressed and brought about."

Among the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, there is a range of beliefs about the Eucharist, and among a few, a scandalous openness to redefining the Eucharist and the other Sacraments. Some also participate in alternative "feminist liturgies," belief in the possibility of "women priests" is near-universal among these Sisters, contrary to Catholic teaching. Their reasons seem rooted in radical feminist "liberation theology"—and regarding the impact of feminism on liturgy, see also my separate articles on the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters' attachment to giving homilies at Mass contrary to liturgical and canon law, and their apparently widespread substitution of a feminist prayer book, *Dominican Praise*, instead of the Liturgy of the Hours. Although those things are serious, these matters pertaining to the Eucharist are far more serious.

One particular instigator of discussions based on open-ended questioning on the meaning of the Eucharist, and broaching the topic of redefining it, is Sister Donna Quinn, about whom I have also written an

extended article. In 1998, the Dallas Morning News ran a story about women religious who “did something they believed could get them excommunicated. They held a Eucharist without a priest.” Without a priest it is not actually the Eucharist, and Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Donna Quinn, a longtime feminist activist who had participated in the very first “Women’s Ordination Conference” back in 1976, was among those who told the journalist she does not use the word Mass for the gatherings of this kind organized by the radical feminist coalition group Women-Church Convergence, of which she was spokeswoman. Though, maybe it should be noted, many Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters far more often call the Mass “Liturgy” or “Eucharist” and do not seem to use the word “Mass” very often—I am not sure why, but even they have commented that this is the case. Sister Donna spoke carefully:

“We call it a liturgy,” said Chicago nun Sister Donna Quinn, referring to women-led services that include bread and wine but not the traditional words of a Mass. “If women think of this as Eucharist, it is; and if they do not think of it as Eucharist, it isn’t. I think it’s in the heart of the women who participate.”

Such services have been held publicly in Chicago, Minneapolis and Milwaukee this year. Next year, the sponsoring group, Women Church Convergence, plans to hold services in three other cities.

“We’d like women across the country to continue to light these fires,” said Sister Quinn, spokeswoman for the coalition of 35 liberal Catholic groups.

According to the article, most participants in such services also attend parish Mass.

### **The LCWR knows of some Sisters’ estrangement from the Church and the Eucharist—but seems not to care?**

Sister Laurie Brink remains one of the youngest of the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters. She was “thirtysomething” when she wrote in the February 18, 2000 *National Catholic Reporter* about how social justice figures such as Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, and Archbishop Oscar Romero shaped her Catholic Faith, and it seems to have been the social zeal of Sisters that drew her into religious life. However, she admits “I often feel uncomfortable talking about church issues with some of our Sisters who are in their 50s and early 60s. It’s not simply an age difference but a cultural generation difference.” But with some of these older Sisters, the divide is clearly something deeper still—there are those among them who don’t attend their local parish Mass regularly. Sister Laurie wrote:

I can only imagine the power and energy many of my religious Sisters must have felt in the ’60s and ’70s. Hope and possibility freed them from arcane rules and imbued them with a spirit of adventure. I have sat at their feet and listened with awe and wondered what it would have been like to be

so hopeful; to believe the “seed theology” — the old was dying, the new springing forth; to trust that the spirit of Vatican II had the power to unsettle centuries of encrusted hierarchy. [...]

But these Sisters who have so inspired my vocation are the very ones with whom I cannot talk. A recent encounter will illustrate. A group of us were having dinner and attempting to discuss church issues. I said I didn’t understand why some of our Sisters were estranged from the church, sometimes choosing not to attend the local parish. A Sister in her late 50s who has spent much of her religious life working in a parish responded, “You’re not honoring my anger.” I said it wasn’t a matter of honor or respect. I simply did not understand it and felt overwhelmed by it.

Sister Laurie Brink was the only Sister mentioned by name in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s 2012 Doctrinal Assessment for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious:

Addresses given during LCWR annual Assemblies manifest problematic statements and serious theological, even doctrinal errors. The Cardinal offered as an example specific passages of Sr. Laurie Brink’s address about some Religious “moving beyond the Church” or even beyond Jesus. This is a challenge not only to core Catholic beliefs; such a rejection of faith is also serious source of scandal and is incompatible with religious life. Such unacceptable positions routinely go unchallenged by the LCWR, which should provide resources for member Congregations to foster an ecclesial vision of religious life, thus helping to correct an erroneous vision of the Catholic faith as an important exercise of charity. Some might see in Sr. Brink’s analysis a phenomenological snapshot of religious life today. But Pastors of the Church should also see in it a cry for help.

Although Sister Laurie’s 2007 LCWR Assembly address was genuinely extremely radical and troubling, her words in 2000 in *NCR* make one wonder if “a cry for help” may indeed have been part of her intent.

Some Sisters felt affronted by what they felt were “unsubstantiated accusations” in the LCWR doctrinal assessment. In particular, not all the Sisters thought of themselves as “radical feminists.” However, some very much *did* see themselves in the CDF’s assessment. Sister Clare Wagner wrote on the Sinsinawa email discussion list SinsinOP:

The phrase “unsubstantiated accusations” gave me pause and cause me to wince. That is because for myself, many religious and LCWR members the “accusations” are not “unsubstantiated.”

We do support Network.

We talk about and look toward the choice of ordination for women.

We are at odds with some of the teachings on human sexuality.

We are radical feminists who oppose patriarchal domination.

We do at times challenge positions taken by bishops.

We do not agree to “submission of intellect and will.”

We differ with the magisterium on ecclesiology.

We accept the Systems Thinking Handbook.

Sister Clare Wagner tells the truth when she says: “The accusations ARE

substantiated.” After Sister Anne Marie Mongoven objected that not all this was equally true of everyone, and for instance did not see herself as a radical feminist but “just a plain old hardworking feminist” who hoped “that the Church will remain whole and relevant as the Body of Christ on earth,” Sister Clare edited herself: “I’m happy to change the we to some. I thought I covered that in an earlier sentence, however I must not have been clear. I realize all do not embrace the ‘accusations’ I named.”

The last item on her above list has to do with the problematic way in which the Sisters use mental models of “systems” they feel must be changed, for instance a common theme seen on SinsinOP is the idea that actions such as eschewing male language for God, and promoting “women’s ordination” (something the Church has no authority whatsoever for—it is not possible) are essential to “systemic change” to correct perceived inequality of women within the Catholic Church. As you will see below in real examples, a few Sisters, Donna Quinn in particular, take this so far as to prefer not to include Holy Mass as a part of congregation events, because of the male priest—preferring instead a “feminist liturgy” designed by the Sisters. The LCWR Systems Thinking Handbook, which the CDF ordered to be withdrawn and revised, explains entirely uncritically:

Generally speaking the “Organic” mental model values chaos, connectedness, process, inclusivity, relationship, and a non-linear expression of authority. Some Sisters, schooled in these theologies and situated within this mental model, believe that the celebration of Eucharist is so bound up with a church structure caught in negative aspects of the Western mind they can no longer participate with a sense of integrity.

### **Sister Donna Quinn, anti-Eucharist protester?**

The Sinsinawa Dominicans *do* normally include Holy Mass as part of the agenda of congregational gatherings, though during last year’s weekday Chapter meetings it was apparently one of several alternative spiritual activities (even Tai Chi) one could participate in during that time slot.

In recent years Sister Donna Quinn, famous for abortion rights activism, has continually advocated in favor of abortion rights and contraception to her Sisters on the Sinsinawa Dominican email discussion list SinsinOP. But her militancy against the protection of natural human life is not all; a radically distorted feminism has also led her to agitate against the Eucharist, food for spiritual Life. She has also advocated repeatedly against Holy Mass, on the grounds that she feels offended that only a man can be a priest. During March, 2011 preparations for the Sinsinawa Dominicans’ General Chapter, Sister Donna wrote:

Looking at the Agenda for Chapter I am violated by the continual use of sexism through the use of the word Eucharist....We have a lot of educating to do in this Community by our Leadership when one of the first

items covered is to hire a male priest to lead us in prayer every day. I know I will be boycotting this time ...

There was a substantial volume of responses to Sister Donna's rejection of the Eucharist. Even though, sadly, few of today's Sinsinawa Dominicans give assent to the infallible Catholic teaching that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women, most do value the Eucharist and some were quick to express disagreement with Sister Donna:

I really need to respond. In my life, the Eucharist is mystery and gift beyond any consideration of any slight or offense. Yes, I will rejoice when inequalities are righted in our church; but, in the meantime, I am unwilling to deprive myself and my community of the unfathomable benefit of the source and sign of our unity and life.

Another Sister replies with an orthodox understanding of what the Eucharist is, and tries to reassure feminists by pointing out that Sisters will be preaching the homily at these Masses during General Chapter,—though homilies by the non-ordained are not permitted under canon law:

Dear Sinsinopers, I believe that each time I participate in the Eucharist I commune with the sacramental Body of Christ, the resurrected Christ and the church, which is also the Body of Christ. I revel in this communion as it connects me with my brothers and Sisters in every corner of the universe, as well as the person in the pew next to me. I am looking forward to our daily Eucharist together at chapter where one of our Sisters will be breaking open the Word for us.

Another Sister wrote in defense of the priest, an aged Dominican who has a close relationship with the Sisters:

The wording "to hire a male priest" is offensive. In this case it refers to an actual person, a friend and fellow worker of some of us. Indeed, he's our brother, who is not in any way responsible for the Vatican's wrong-headed policies.

### **"What is Eucharist for me?"**

In February of 2012, Sister Donna Quinn forwarded a Women-Church Convergence email to which she added the comment: "We surely do need a whole new theology of Eucharist...One of these days I will send to you the one I presented at our Women-Church Meeting in Minneapolis last October. Donna Quinn."

June 16, 2012, Sister Donna was similarly unhappy with the inclusion of the Eucharist in the schedule of another large Sinsinawa gathering known as Community Days, and her issue once again was that it chafed her that they would have "a male priest". What she seems to be urging is replacing Sunday Mass (an obligation for Catholics) with a feminist liturgy. Her message is entitled "What is Eucharist for me?"

The Closing Ritual on Sunday August 5 is a Eucharist.

Does this mean that we will be calling in an ordained male minister to lead us

as we conclude our days together – sending  
LCWR members to St. Louis and sending all of us to  
go forth to “explore the emerging Wisdom of God”  
What is that Wisdom that is emerging....What are we learning...What are we  
teaching through Eucharist called sacrament....What kind of courage do we  
need for sharing with others after these days... What changes do we need for  
our place in the world today.

I would like to ask you to consider a gathering  
on Sunday that will be for real and symbolically [sic] lift up who we are  
as builders of a Spirituality that our Daughters can understand  
and that Leadership will courageously carry with them on the  
streets they travel beyond the LCWR meeting.

Whereas the previous March quite a few people had objected to Donna's  
words rejecting the Eucharist, this post “What is Eucharist for me?” drew  
out numerous attempts to articulate personal beliefs about the Eucharist.  
The adequacy or accuracy may be evaluated with the help of the Catechism  
of the Catholic Church, which introduces the topic by quoting from  
Vatican II:

At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted  
the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to  
perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come  
again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his  
death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity,  
a Paschal banquet ‘in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace,  
and a pledge of future glory is given to us. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*)

“The Eucharist is a celebratory meal with wine that lifts our spirits, even as  
it lifts up our pain. It is a meal in which we are offered refreshment and  
sent forth to refresh others,” wrote Sister Anne Marie Mongoven, one of  
the first to respond to Sister Donna's question. Sister Ann Marie objected  
to Donna's repeated efforts to make the Mass a point of controversy: “If  
you want to divide us in this way, Donna, just remember that you *are*  
dividing us. I think you speak division in the midst of our loving unity and  
one of our most significant gifts, a gift we certainly need now.”

But another Sister who tends to be more radical quickly took Donna's  
part: “With all respect for you, Anne, I totally disagree with your  
characterization of Donna's request. She ASKED us to CONSIDER. I  
take that as inviting dialogue, which is a far cry from dividing us.”

Sister Kathleen Long, director of the Cuernavaca Center for  
Intercultural Dialogue in Mexico, said: “These are two good women with  
two different views.” Like Sister Donna, she was open to considering non-  
liturgical experiences to be “Eucharist,” and offered an example:

I don't find the question about Sunday Eucharist divisive but  
courageous. Here in Mexico I was with many families today whose sons and  
daughters, Sisters have been kidnapped, disappeared or murdered and the  
families are left with this agonizing pain in their bodies for life. Our eucharist

today [i.e., Sunday] was being together and entering into the agony and listening ritually to women share their pain. Then we, all 70 of us, Americans and Mexicans, celebrated joyfully and had 3 cakes for Javier Sicilia as he is in the second year after his 22 yr old son was murdered- we recognized father's day with him and with Alfonso who lost his 23 yr old son last year also and with others. This was my Eucharist today. Jesus was present and shared among us, with us. We gave each other the body and blood of Jesus.

In regards to the Sinsinawa "Community Days" gathering of Sisters and lay Associates, Sister Kathleen suggests, "Perhaps we can abstain from the usual Sunday mass as a sign of our indignation with our patriarchal church and the Roman condemnations." It is painful to read her attitude—remember, they are discussing the Real Presence of Jesus and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass: "When will we be outraged enough to stop accepting the norm?"

Sister Mary Clemente Davlin, often a moderate voice of common sense, thought, "Maybe we need another 'all women' ceremony as well, at the end [of Community Days]. But depriving everyone of Mass to prove their loyalty to womanhood would be, I think, like forbidding Sisters to contact their families in order to prove their loyalty to the Sisterhood."

Sister Arturo Cranston, director of the Sinsinawa Dominicans' girls summer camp, Camp We-Ha-Kee, responded to this discussion by stating that she is "a Vatican II Catholic" and that "men in power at the Vatican" have intentionally thwarted the doctrines of the Council—as understood by her—so she, too, has questions about identity and membership and sees a distinction between "Church and church." "Does my own personal integrity demand that I leave what I can have no discourse with? Create a more personally satisfying church community? Stay in place and grumble? What?" She is open to different interpretations of what Eucharist is, but wants to tread with humility, feels some caution, and makes a most important distinction. "Mound bread" is cinnamon bread and other specialties baked by the Sisters at Sinsinawa: "Pass the Mound bread around at our gatherings. Jesus is there with us, but he is not in the bread as he is in Eucharist, his body."

Another Sister said the Eucharist, "yes, by a priest for now", is central for her as a Catholic: "I need the Eucharist, it is a community celebration, and life giving for me. Other celebrations are fine but not instead of the Eucharist at Mass."

### **Participation in the Mass**

On June 29th, after the discussion of the Eucharist had wound down, Sister Donna posted an article from the dissident publication *National Catholic Reporter* on the 10-year anniversary of the invalid "ordination" of seven women on a boat in the Danube River, and attempted to get the conversation going *again*, shifting the focus now from discussion about

whether Sunday Mass is necessary and whether something non-liturgical could be “Eucharist,” to the question of accepting as “Eucharist” liturgies celebrated by “Women priests” or other not-validly-ordained people. She wrote:

I put this on SinsinOP and ask the question again.....What is Eucharist for me?

Friends of mine who are in their twenties often say Let people do what they want to do I am conscious of that when talking with them about racism, contraception, same-sex relations, church, Eucharist which is why I always write Eucharist *for me*...

Is Eucharist always within a canonically-approved Liturgy.....Is Eucharist with ordained women as noted below ....Is Eucharist part of a feminist sacramental system which happens in most circumstances surrounded by love ....or is Eucharist all of the above and then some ? ?

Donna Quinn

Just how broadly Sister Donna Quinn defines “Eucharist” is reflected in a 2002 talk she gave at Harvard Divinity School in which she stated, “[t]his gathering for me has been a Eucharistic celebration,” and in her words at a May, 2012 Planned Parenthood event in California, less than two months before the above “What is Eucharist to me” post on SinsinOP: “Today, I will walk away and say this has been Eucharist to me. I no longer need ordained people.”

This received only one reply; however it is one that leads me to want to get into some further explanation:

Donna, thank you for your e-mail and all the information about the ordained Women priests. I have had many connections with six of them through CTA [the activist dissent group Call to Action]. And have spoken with two of the FIVE Women Bishops. I have great respect for these women who followed their conscience to a God-given call. [...]

[The issue of women's ordination has less priority for me than it once did because of the late Bishop of Saginaw, MI] Kenneth Untener's teaching on Eucharist. Here are a few of the points he emphasized: when the faith-community gathers we are all celebrants through our baptism; At this time in our history the Catholic Tradition has one male President; He asked the Directors of Adult Formation in his diocese to have adults in our teachings of Eucharist, have a copy of the Eucharist Prayer in their hands. Why? So they noted all the times “WE” was used, not “I”. The faith community “calls upon the Spirit” etc .... etc .... So now, it does not matter to me who presides.

It has long been well known that promoters of “women’s ordination” rarely or never hold an orthodox understanding of the Sacrament of Holy Orders and its relationship to the Eucharist, and do not simply advocate for Orders to be conferred on women. This in itself the Church has no authority whatsoever to do, but the problem is even more extensive, “women’s ordination” promoters have a different, non-Catholic understanding of the nature of priestly ordination and tend not to consider it necessary for



consecration of the Eucharist. For instance this belief seems to prevail at Holy Wisdom Monastery, a former-Catholic place with some Sinsinawa connections that will be mentioned later in this article, which has sometimes hosted "womenpriests" and Women's Ordination Conference events. When I went there in February and asked one of the former Benedictine Sisters where she goes to Mass, she said, "here." The "eucharist" service there is lay-led. Other attendees have also insisted to me that it is the same as Mass. The local bishop explicitly states that it is not.

While it has always been understood that the Holy Mass is indeed the prayer of the whole community offered on our behalf by the priest, terming everyone at Mass a "celebrant" is a bit of a nonsensical clericalization of the laity. We cannot all be the "presider." The participation of the person in the pew in offering the Mass, nevertheless, did not begin with Vatican II's advocacy of "full, conscious, and active participation," on the contrary this participation is often far more profound and actually meaningful in the older explanations. Vatican II amplified an already ongoing call from the Church for increased vocal participation of the people; however that was neither the only nor the most important meaning of "active participation." My beat-up 1940 Father Stedman hand missal explains "How to 'PARTICIPATE ACTIVELY'... first by *offering the Divine Victim* to the Eternal Father in union with the priest, your official representative; second, by *offering yourself* to the Eternal Father in union with the divine Victim. To be a co-offerer with the priest, you must have a sacrificial will, so as to make this twofold oblation of Christ and yourself." This missal goes on to explain "your share in the priesthood": though a *lay person*, "You have this sublime privilege by the grace of Baptism. You have not, indeed, the power of the ordained priest to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, but you can offer the Holy Sacrifice in union with the priest at the altar. This, then, is the meaning of the plea of the priest at the altar when he turns to the faithful in the pews and says aloud, '*Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours, etc.*'" I strongly do not want to misconstrue anyone, so I do not pretend to really know exactly what she meant, but *if* this Sister's interest was not as much in our active participation in the sacrifice of the Mass in the sense elaborated above, but what is implied by connecting it with alleged "women priests," i.e. that everyone present is a concelebrant consecrating the Eucharist together,—this is simply not the truth, and Vatican II did not and could not change that.

Reference to the Mass as sacrifice, as it is clearly in Vatican II's explanations ("At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages..."), is absent from the Sisters' discussion of these matters, and I have to wonder if this is part of why they have a sense that they are not participating fully.

Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Albertus Magnus McGrath's 1972 book *What a Modern Catholic Believes about Women* states that "The New Testament sacrifice is no longer the Judaic sacrifice of atonement, it is a sacrifice of thanks and praise." Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, on the other hand, says "As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed, is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on..." and the Vatican II Constitution on the Liturgy, speaks of "the liturgy, 'through which the work of our redemption is accomplished,' most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist" and affirms that "in Christ 'the perfect achievement of our reconciliation came forth, and the fullness of divine worship was given to us.'"

I have seen it said that the "liberation theology" point of view, which reinterprets Christianity in keeping with Marxist principles, tends to reinterpret the meaning of the Cross in such a way that it is to them no longer atonement for sin, but more straightforwardly a historical spectacle of oppression, the response to which is a commitment to class struggle and revolutionary praxis. In her book *Feminism and Beyond*, Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Loretta Dornisch paraphrases an El Salvadorian woman influenced by liberation theology, who expressed this type of view in a 1998 talk at Sinsinawa-sponsored Edgewood College: "If you do not help us to live, then Jesus is still dead in the tomb. If you help us to life, Jesus' resurrection is reality." I asked some friends what they thought of this statement, and all agreed this is not what Christians believe.

It is perhaps little wonder that liberationist praxis itself comes to be seen by some as actually a substitute for the Mass. Indeed, when Marxist-feminists see male priests as oppressors, rejection of Holy Mass and liberationist praxis can be one and the same. In Sister Loretta Dornisch's *Feminism and Beyond*, she says "For some women in the Roman Catholic tradition, Eucharist which is linked only with male authority and patriarchal ritual was recognized as a contradiction of the good news of love.... As the foundations are questioned.... New foundations are called for...." This perspective is nowhere more in evidence than in Sister Donna Quinn's claims that even the use of the term "Eucharist" is sexist, and her campaign for the exclusion of Holy Mass from Sinsinawa Dominican community events. Sister Donna likes to talk about the need to create a "feminist sacramental system." If giving a pro-abortion-rights talk at a Planned Parenthood event is an example of "eucharist" in this system, then one fears to speculate who is being worshiped in the new religion.

### **"Sowing seeds for a new church"**

And why is someone who actively rejects the Holy Mass and repeatedly talks about wanting to institute a "feminist sacramental system," who publicly promotes abortion rights and "same sex marriage," still a

religious Sister? This “feminist sacramental system” idea is promoted also by the radical dissent group Women-Church Convergence—a completely outrageous organization of which the Sinsinawa Women’s Network is a member. The Sinsinawa Women’s Network seems to be an official Sinsinawa Dominican organization and appears on their website, [sinsinawa.org](http://sinsinawa.org).

Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Laurie Brink did the Catholic Church a service by publicly raising the issue of some Sisters “estranged from the church, sometimes choosing not to attend the local parish,” of Sisters “moving beyond the Church” and beyond Jesus. In the words of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Doctrinal Assessment for LCWR, “such a rejection of faith is also serious source of scandal and is incompatible with religious life.”

When I wrote to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious earlier this year to sadly bring to their attention as a cautionary tale another local scandal, Holy Wisdom Monastery, once a LCWR community of Benedictine Sisters, now a non-Catholic breakaway sect with lay-led (invalid) Sunday “eucharist,” that sometimes hosts “women priests”, I pleaded to LCWR: “I hope you will try to be the beneficial influence other Sisters need to stay lovingly united in the Eucharist and in the visible structure of the Church and to be faithful.” LCWR did not reply.

Among the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters who continued giving talks at the heretical, formerly-Catholic Holy Wisdom Monastery, were Sister Clare Wagner, whose response to the LCWR doctrinal assessment is quoted near the beginning of this article, Sister Lynn Lisbeth, and Sister Maureen McDonnell. Sister Clare (see also my review of her book *Awakening to Prayer*) is a “Call to Action” dissent group member who wrote on SinsinOP in 2009, “I have resolved not to put energy into ‘church reform’ but rather into sowing seeds for a new church.” The latter two Sisters were among the members of Wisdom’s Well Interfaith Spirituality Center, when Bishop Morlino directed all his priests that no Wisdom’s Well staff were approved to lead programs on Catholic premises; the prioress notified the press, leading to a Wisconsin State Journal article, and the Edgewood College community raised a big ruckus with letters to the editor in favor of the Sisters, while back at Sinsinawa the pair were “greeted with a standing ovation, a very moving event that will linger with us. The three entertained long lines of Sisters who wished to greet them and personally share their support.” The leadership claimed not to understand what the Bishop’s concerns were, despite the concerns being detailed in an extensive document detailing their New Ageism and religious indifferentism. This February, when a high profile event drew attention to the problem of Sisters and priests continuing to participate in events at Holy Wisdom, the Diocese of Madison contacted religious and asked for them not to do

formal engagements there, and since that time the Sinsinawa Dominicans seem to have finally stopped appearing on the Holy Wisdom schedule.

At least a small minority of Sinsinawa Dominicans appear to be gravely acting against the Communion of the Church, as evidenced by Sister Donna Quinn's advocacy against having Holy Mass at congregation events and in favor of a new "feminist sacramental system," and Sister Clare Wagner's words about "sowing seeds for a new church" and her participation in some events at Holy Wisdom Monastery, a place that *is* actually a new breakaway church based on the radical feminist Sisters' post-Catholic belief system, and where the bishop had to forbid Mass to be celebrated, to prevent confusion. Other, more congregation-level concerns include the belief in the possibility of "women's ordination," which appears to be a *majority* belief within the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa. The congregation's Sinsinawa Women's Network is actually a *member* of the Women-Church Convergence, which agitates for "women's ordination" and a "feminist sacramental system," as well as revision of sexual morality, etc.



*"Ecce Homo" painting from Father Mazzuchelli's historic altar at Saint Patrick Church, Benton WI*

### 3 MOVING BEYOND THE CHURCH? PART II: "RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH"

Although a small minority of Sinsinawa Dominicans feels estranged from and avoids the Eucharist, a sense of estrangement from what they term “the institutional church” is extremely prevalent. Individual Sisters feel this way, and even the congregation as a whole is perceived by many to be in a difficult relationship with “the institutional church,” which they stand as critics of. Sinsinawa Dominicans apparently even formed in 2008 a “Relationship with the Institutional Church Committee.”

What do they mean by this? One Sister refers to “distinctions we have all made between the church as an institution and the church as the people of God.” The Church as “the People of God” is direct from the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. But the Council doesn’t actually support making a distinction whereby a Catholic could legitimately stand aloof from or opposed to “the Church as an institution” but remain in a perfect relationship with the Church as “the people of God.” This one Church, which *Lumen Gentium* calls “the universal sacrament of salvation,” is universal, i.e. catholic, is the Body of Christ, and is both a mystery and (like any body) a visible unity:

**[T]he society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word.”**

[Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church--*Lumen Gentium*]  
*Lumen Gentium* teaches also: “Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the

Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in her could not be saved.”

Yet this did not prevent Sinsinawa congregation leadership from listing in 2008 among questions some members of the congregation had raised in regards to “the institutional church”: “Is it better to work within or step outside and have our own church?” Although this does not appear to be what most want, some *have* already stepped outside, and the *Sisters* also reflect on: “What is our reaction to the exodus of people from our church and our own Sisters’ exodus from our church?”

### **Perspectives on whether to remain a Sister even if one can hardly bear “the institutional Church”**

In 2003 one of the Sinsinawa Dominicans’ youngest members wrote on the Sisters’ email discussion list, of anxieties she felt due to the congregation’s looming demographic cliff. Most Sinsinawa Dominicans are now elderly, and there have been few new members in recent decades. She said: “I turned 40 this past April. The most difficult part of this past birthday was not the number, but the number plus the realization that I had been in this congregation for twenty years and at that time there was only one woman younger than me.” Clearly struggling, at that time she nevertheless felt she wanted to stay, and invited others to give their own reasons why they were staying.

But by the end of 2005 this Sister had submitted to the prioress a request for dispensation from vows, and wrote to the SinsinOP email list in January 1, 2006 with two reasons. One was that she questioned the wisdom of staying since there were very few behind her in age, and if she left now then there was still a possibility of building a retirement in secular life. The other was:

Our relationship with the institutional church—(While I find my life still centered on the values of the Gospel and mission that we preach and live), I find myself growing further away from the institutional church, with the most prominent feeling being one of embarrassment at this time in history. I have come to question my own integrity in remaining in the congregation which is so integrally tied to the institutional church. I know that many of you have difficulties with the institutional church too and have found ways to be women of integrity.

The replies were generally sympathetic and frank. Another Sister reflected:

Do I feel connected with the institutional church today? No. But I am excited and hopeful about where we are at this point of our history. As someone very committed to adult faith formation and spiritual growth I feel very connected to the church as “people of God” as the “Living Body of Christ”.

She wrote also “I was very impressed when I heard about a Dominican Sister who was challanging [sic] a Bishop about certain issues and he said to

her 'If you are not satisfied, then leave the church'. She looked at him and said 'HOW DARE YOU invite me to leave my family,' launching then into angry criticism of this Church family, "in dire need of help." But, remaining within while sowing confusion and discord, and damaging others' relationship with the Church and with God is so harmful that the bishop urged that they just leave. I disagree with the approach of telling anyone to "leave the Church." I think it best to pray, fast and retain hope beyond hope of them truly coming *back to* the Church, insofar as some have left spiritually. It's true the Catholic Church is their family. Jesus longs to have us all united. He is as much the head of "the institutional Church" as of "the people of God," because these refer to His one body.

Another of the younger Sisters in the Sinsinawa Dominican congregation, Laurie Brink, replied also to the Sister who wanted to be dispensed, saying "This is not a new conversation between us, but, now at your invitation, it is a public one." She herself had a sense of loss: "I have spent a good portion of my life as a Sinsinawa Dominican being disappointed that what the Congregation promised in its Constitution and documents about community life was not and could not be delivered. That's due mostly to the fact that in the last fourteen years, we've experienced massive losses: of members (most all of my peers have left), of institutions (are there any convents left?), of identity (folks don't think there are Sisters anymore). We are not who we once were." But her authentic vocation and the call to holiness compel her. A Scripture scholar, Sister Laurie refers to Jeremiah 20:9: "it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it." She explains: "It is that fire which cannot be held in that keeps me in this institutional Congregation and institutional Church. It is, in a word, my vocation."

One of the next posts is by one of those peers of Sister Laurie who left the order. But like some others, she had remained close to the Sinsinawa Dominicans as a lay Associate. "I began the journey of vowed membership in 1986 and left in 1995. [Sister] – your note touched me deeply. I speak as someone who did choose to leave – for different reasons than you – I think it was easier for me to stay Catholic when I was part of the congregation – I could count on regularly having meaningful worship outside of institutional settings."

Another Sister replying to the one who wanted a dispensation also sees the "institutional Church" as a problem but is steadfast in her vocation: "There is absolutely no doubting the realities you identified: there are few behind us in age and, by virtue of our baptism and profession, we are integrally tied to an 'institutional church' that is (and has often been) rife with problems. Additionally, it is hard to imagine anything resembling a secure retirement for any of us who hope to turn 70 within the next 15-25

years.” This Sister says that since they have vowed poverty they should not have such an expectation. (On the other hand I and my organization, the Father Mazzuchelli Society strongly encourage lay people to please donate for Sisters’ retirement, either directly to a congregation such as the Sinsinawa Dominicans or through the USCCB’s Retirement Fund for Religious). “Still, for me, the wisdom of remaining a vowed member in a community of women tied to a flawed institutional church is not informed by these harsh realities.” She has been called by Jesus and she loves Him.

The Church, though “indefectibly holy” in the words of Vatican II, “holds sinners in her bosom”—and it is nothing new that many are scandalized by that fact. We are all sinners, and this is why *Lumen Gentium*, calling to mind Saint Paul, says all are called to holiness: “[I]n the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness.” It is clear from some Sisters’ comments that the real imperfection of the Church’s members is a *part* of what they are disturbed about. This is intermingled with a sense of antagonism toward the Church hierarchy, which has continued to sound a call to holiness to Sisters that includes a call to embrace Catholic teachings, traditions, and legitimate disciplinary authority.

But, to quote one of the principles of Saint Thomas Aquinas, “whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver.” Another Sister says in the same discussion, “In protest training one is taught to stand a bit sideways when confronted with negative energy so it passes by rather than through one.... In relationship to the Church I do a lot of ‘sideways standing.’ If I lived a life of perfect integrity I’d expect the same of the Church; I don’t therefore I don’t.”

From having read the Sinsinawa Dominicans’ 60s and 70s era magazine *ExCHANGE*, which had “rocking the boat” as one of its stated purposes from the beginning, it seems to me that the congregation quite actively acted to destabilize Sisters’ beliefs and sense of their vocation and vows, and their mission and identity. Sister Kaye Ashe was a witness and participant in this, and her reply to the Sister seeking dispensation recalls:

In the late sixties and early seventies, many of us thought deeply about our call and our commitment to the congregation and to one another, and our relationship with the institutional church. We read and reflected and had late-into-the night, heart-to-heart talks about church, future, religious life and the vows. Many left, many chose to cast our lot once again “even unto death” with our Sisters in the congregation. The perspective changes, but the dialogue continues.

Most Sisters seem to feel the way this one did, who entered the discussion late: “I feel much more encouraged to continue the quest as a Dominican of Sinsinawa than I do as a member of the institutional Church. The ambience in the institutional Church right now is way off balance with the Magisterium squelching theologians instead of encouraging or at least



listening to new insights.” This Sister followed up the next day with further thoughts: “Staying does take its toll. Due to the craziness/sinfulness of our church structure, many of us have chosen to leave ministries that put us directly in contact with the abuse of power that is permitted and too frequently wielded in the institutional church. This has been hard to do and necessary for many.”

Only a little while later, at the beginning of February, the Sister who had wanted a dispensation wrote again to everyone on SinsinOP. “Dear Sisters, I am grateful beyond words for your responses to my email....While at Sinsinawa, I asked Toni [the prioress] to shred my request and renewed my vows with her and all of you.”

### **A congregation-level discussion of “relationship with the institutional church”**

At the end of 2007 and beginning of 2008, the Sinsinawa Dominicans launched into a professionally-facilitated visioning process, called “Appreciative Inquiry.” The idea was that it would, in the words of Prioress General Pat Mulcahey, “assist us in identifying how we see ourselves into the future, or as someone suggested, what we hear God calling us to. As I mentioned in my letter of November 19, the Appreciative Inquiry process begins with our appreciating the best of what is and moving from that to what can be. It seems particularly suited for our desire to set a context for planning for our future.” A core team of Sisters, a fairly sizeable and diverse group which included the current prioress, the 1967-1977 “change era” prioress Marie Amanda Allard, and even Sister Donna Quinn, would be trained to conduct interviews with Sisters, lay Associates, “stakeholders” such as donors, sponsored institutions, and prioresses of other Dominican congregations, and members of the public, for example “...Real Estate Agencies, State Historical Society, Native American Communities...Media (options for publishing stories), Business community....” The interview questions seem to have been focused on what these people’s expectations were of the Sinsinawa Dominicans, going into the future. I did not notice any special attentiveness to the Catholic Church’s vision of religious life, or how best to fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ and His Catholic Church for the salvation of souls, as part of the Appreciative Inquiry process’ thinking about the future.

The almost year-long process culminated at the Sinsinawa Dominicans’ Community Days gathering in the fall of 2008. The Sisters did an evening exercise wherein they “‘dreamed’ about what life would be like in 2018, how we are fully living into and embodying our Dominican mission.” This led to a “design dialogue” activity the following day, based on 17 topics “selected from dream statements done yesterday.” This involved table discussions with a purpose: “We were given two tasks to

complete. One was to discover the key questions that when answered will take our chosen topic to a new level of possibility and innovation. The second task was to come up with next steps, conclusions or recommendations for moving the chosen topic forward.” Each Sister chose two topics to engage with. One of the relatively lower-participation topics (16 Sisters, compared with 40 or more on several others) was “Relationship to the Institutional Church.”

The questions and ideas for moving this particular topic forward were later posted to SinsinOP, by the secretary to the prioress and to the congregation, apparently on behalf of prioress Pat Mulcahey, whose name was among those listed in the message as Committee Members for this particular topic (as was Sister Mary Ellen Gevelinger who is now prioress). The congregation as a whole was invited “to share and reflect on them at your regional/circle meetings.” These questions, which surely not all Sisters would agree with, but which nevertheless the Sinsinawa Dominicans themselves put on the internet, accessible to anyone’s eyes via the public archive of their email discussion list, were thoroughly outrageous and opposed to Catholic belief.

A. Questions which arise from our sense of integrity in living our Gospel beliefs

1. When and where does the institutional church serve as an obstacle to fulfillment of our mission?
2. What would Catherine do?
3. How does remaining faithful to our mission invite us to transform the institutional church and its structures?
4. Can we as a congregation call Bishops to account?

B. Questions about process in which to engage

1. How do we talk with the hierarchy?
2. How can we dialogue with the institutional church?

C. Questions about movement toward truths some of us perceive?

1. How do we formulate a feminine sacramental system?
2. How do we support and proclaim feminist theology and feminist theologians?
3. How can we change our vocabulary about God in such a way that we experience an inclusive God?
4. How do we help all people understand that the violence of the world will never be stopped until we stop the violence against women in all organized religion?
5. How do we move toward addressing the deeper issues of human sexuality evident in the sexual abuse crisis?

D. Questions about necessity of the institutional church

1. What is the point of having the institution?
2. What is the value of canonical membership for our community in today’s society?
3. Is it better to work within or step outside and have our own church?

## "RELATIONSHIP WITH THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH"

4. Could the congregation have a united voice regarding the institutional church?

E. Questions about supporting those who cannot accept statements or decisions of the hierarchy?

1. How do we support priests and bishops suffering the same way we are?

2. How much support, given our own integrity can we show for women now being ordained?

3. How do we support the laity and our Sisters in repressive diocesan structures?

4. Could we as a congregation publicly support women's ordination?

5. How do we remain faithful to our mission of the Gospel vis-à-vis demands of the institutional church which we see as contrary to the Gospel?

6. What is our reaction to the exodus of people from our church and our own Sisters' exodus from our church?

F. Questions about our commitment to the teaching of Vatican Council

II

1. How do we educate laity caught in an understanding of authority and who don't know the freedom of the children of God defined by Vatican Council II?

2. What do we say when people ask us what it is really important to believe?

3. How do we address or impact the indifference of people in our faith tradition?

4. How do we revitalize the concepts of Vatican II?

G. Questions about our responses to the firing of laity and Sisters

1. How do we deal with ultra-conservative, inexperienced pastors firing laity and Sisters?

2. How do we deal with the creation of elaborate buildings followed by the wholesale elimination of programs?

The first reply is from a Sister who says: "Thank you all for these fine questions. We are dealing with many of the same issues/questions in our MADISON-CTA group at this time, given our local diocesan situation." MADISON-CTA is the local Madison, WI branch of "Call to Action". The local bishop, Robert Morlino, has said this organization opposes basic tenets of Catholic doctrine and discipline, and is not Catholic.

A more doctrinally grounded Sister, Anne Marie Mongoven, had a strongly different reaction, and put a lot of care into a thoughtful essay which she posted in two parts. "I have seen the institutional church. It is us, and I love it.... The word "institution" does not refer only to the leaders or even less only to some of the leaders in the institution. It refers to all members of the group." "The Church is both a healing and sometimes, painful, presence in our lives. It is made up of sinners as well as saints." She wonders, "Maybe some church members would like to reform us. How would we feel about being reformed by others who were not allied with us in our Dominican institution. How would we respond?" Sister Anne Marie is concerned about "the way in which some members treat other members of the Church, particularly in correcting them. Sometimes

corrections do need to be made but how did Jesus make corrections?” How I have prayed for and sought the way to do this project of the Father Mazzuchelli Society in true charity, with a really heartfelt love and for everyone’s true good! Sister Anne Marie says transparency is “a virtue”—but, this is more transparency than some can feel comfortable with, and I do not take pleasure in that.

Groups of Sinsinawa Dominicans began carrying out the instruction to discuss these questions, and even the congregation’s Circle of Preachers decided that “when COP meets at the Mound on April 18–19, 2009, discussion will center on concerns about our relationship with the institutional church.” A Madison, WI circle of Sinsinawa Dominicans saw a “growing gap between religious orders and the institutional church” as one of the more complex types of issues that needed to be dealt with at the 2011 Chapter meeting.

An Alabama group of Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters “expressed general sadness and frustration about the Catholic hierarchy and the emphasis on selected issues during this election time,” and, far from wanting to hide the disturbing list of “institutional Church” questions, had ideas about disseminating it somehow: “Should we send the Community Days questions from the Institutional Church group to NCR [*National Catholic Reporter* dissident newspaper] or should we join with other groups like Network, Call to Action, LCWR, NCAN, etc. to unify our voice?”

Some Atlanta-based Sinsinawa Dominicans at this same meeting (the Penn community) were enthusiastic about the fact that “a member of the extended community is moving toward being ordained as a women priest. She has fulfilled most of the requirements...” And, “even though the risk of excommunication is real,” they seem to have wanted the Sinsinawa Dominican congregation to officially support her: “How can we be proactive as a congregation and local community as she moves closer to ordination? How will this affect our congregation, the Penn local parish [Our Lady of Lourdes in Atlanta, GA], the poor served by the Sullivan Center if they lose Catholic financial support?” I am not aware of who this woman was. I know only that there is no such thing as a woman Catholic priest, and that this kind of thing is a break with the Catholic Church of a considerably serious sort. Past prioress Sister Kaye Ashe replied supportively in a message titled “Institutional Church”: “Nora and I attended the first Eucharist of an ordained Roman Catholic woman here in Bay area.... The church was crowded, and so far — no excommunications.” A couple of years earlier, August of 2006, a Sinsinawa Dominican lay Associate (not a Sister) had posted proudly to SinsinOP that her mother had recently received “ordination.” I did not see anyone reply.

An Illinois local community meeting discussed the “Relationship with the Institutional Church Committee” questions and declared that “We

acknowledge a sense of frustration and helplessness as we observe what seems to be a step backward with regard to fuller participation by all in the institutional Church. Having acknowledged this, however, we believe that there is a value to maintaining our status as a canonical congregation." Their reasons for wanting to stay a canonical congregation include "to try to effect change from within... to be the voice of the marginalized and oppressed... to remind the hierarchy that preaching is our charism... [to be] a sign of hope and a source of strength for other women in our Church who experience oppression... to be a reminder to some members of the hierarchy and clergy that we do not believe that the Church, as many experience it today, is really being completely faithful to Gospel values." It will allow them "to train future leaders within our Church" and "To continue to educate regarding any number of social justice issues...."

The Sierra Madres Circle in California contributed some helpful definitions of terms : "There is a need for a clarification of the terms hierarchy and Institutional Church. While church as institution embraces us all, feminist scholars and our own experience have made us aware of the extent to which we as women have been excluded from the Roman clerical system of institutional power. We have come to understand the term 'institutional church' as designating, in Mary Collins's words 'that controlled and controlling exercise of power and the symbols of power which feminists have helped us identify as 'patriarchal'." Colloquially, it seems, "institutional church" means those aspects of the Church which feminists reject. Sister Kaye Ashe, the message's author, notes that "Some, like Richard Rohr, speak of the contemporary Church as standing at the edge of a precipice and describe a broader 'Emerging Church.'"

Like many other Sisters, members of a Cuba City, WI group "Samuel's Missionaries," stated in their "Report on institutional church" that "we believe there is great value in maintaining our status as a canonical congregation. We cannot begin to effect change to an institution we are not a member of. In fact, by our very Baptism, we are church." This may likely be an offhand allusion of sorts to the dissident organization We Are Church or Wir Sind Kirche.

The Siena Chapter in Oak Lawn, IL, too, felt that "Criticism is more powerful from within the church.... As one Sister said, 'I won't leave, but keep working from within.' We talked about the fact that 'law follows custom'—the *sensus fidelium*—and that therefore we should 'keep pushing but not in a way that puts you outside the church.' The value of being Catholic is enormous." Someone in the group proposed that there should be women Cardinals. They want women's voices to have impact in the Church and in the world, and indeed the impact of their voice, even though they do not speak with unified voice as a congregation, has a great deal to do with the Sinsinawa Dominicans being part of the Church: "We agree

that our validity as a congregation has to do with the fact that we are part of the institutional church. We could, of course, become a wholly secular society, like the Lionesses or Zonta, doing good works, but our very identity—who we are—includes being part of the church.”

The next summer, August of 2009, Community Days kicked off with Sister Delmarie Gibney FSPA (D. Min from an Episcopalian divinity school) giving a presentation of “the Universe Story”, which is based on Tielhard de Chardin and “contemporary scientific understandings of the evolution of the Universe, Earth, life, and human consciousness as a single unfolding process. Through the perspective of this new cosmology, we can understand both why and how we must change direction to participate in the healing and flourishing of life,” to quote Genesis Farm, a leading promoter of this New-Agey, Modernist worldview which has been embraced enthusiastically by many LCWR type Sisters. In the dissident film *Band of Sisters*, which I viewed at Sinsinawa Mound in January of 2013, past LCWR president Sister Nancy Sylvester explains that this new cosmology no longer includes heaven or hell. After Community Days participants had lunch, there was a review of the history of the Dominicans, from the time of Saint Dominic, “through the 21st Century – Into the Mystery ... the future, the unknown....” After this dramatic preparation for ongoing discussion about the future and relationship with the Church: “The evening found many of us joining together in a filled Westview to explore personal experiences with the Emerging Church – filling us with hope for the Church that IS emerging in the lives and hearts of the People of God – and hearts on fire for the potential that is yet not realized.”

Although this was precisely the time at which the scandal of Sister Donna escorting women to an Illinois abortion clinic was beginning to explode, which was quite stressful for her, a pleased Sister Donna Quinn wrote on SinsinOP the next week, “Again Thanks to the Emerging Church Group who involved all of us during Community Days in the discussions of Creating an Emerging Church and Changing what it means to Dissent in Our Church. The number of participants was overwhelming and gave us hope and courage to continue to say what Church is to us.” She notes that responses included: “How do we encourage and support Interfaith dialogue?” “How do we create a strong voice to address the power structures in the Church?” and “Could we have Emerging Church Committees in each Region?” The Emerging Church Committee seems to be successor to the Relationship with the Institutional Church Committee, and Sister Donna lists its members, including then-current prioress Sister Pat Mulcahey, and Sister Mary Ellen Gevelinger, who is today prioress.

The same day, Sister Donna’s friend Sister Patty Caraher wrote, “We live in an historic moment of monumental change and as women religious we are experiencing this transformation as well. Within this evolution many

of us see ourselves called to be prophetic in relationship to the Institutional Church. We are in the process of defining ourselves not as handmaidens but as equal partners in church and society." She speaks of "inviting the hierarchy and our beloved church into the dance circle" and frames the real problem in regards to Sister Donna's clinic escort activities as not about abortion but about people being judgmental, and states that others (i.e. pro-lifers) must not be allowed "to define what was happening from their point of view."

Follow up in the various local area chapter meetings after this spoke of "What can we as Sinsinawa Dominicans do to help shape the emerging church?" and "We feel our gift to the emerging church and to our world is that our compassionate and deep love of God, each other, all God's people and creation be really visible." A Sister writing in January of 2010 felt that "underneath our vocation discussion is the troubling issue of the hierarchical church with its sometimes, really often times oppressive behavior. Perhaps that reality as much as, or even more than any other is a stumbling block to those who might consider joining a religious community for the sake of mission." Since the 17 LCWR Dominican Sisters' congregations, including Sinsinawa, that participate together in a "Collaborative Novitiate" in Saint Louis, produce only a small handful of novices each year all together, whereas the two more orthodox, traditional type Dominican Sisters in Ann Arbor and in Nashville have dozens of joyful young novices each year, as is well known to the Sinsinawa Dominicans who have moments of bitterness, this claim seen repeatedly on SinsinOP that support for "the hierarchical Church" is an obstacle to religious vocations is really *demonstrably, conspicuously false*.

Another Sister's reply the same day indicates reluctance to even invite women to a religious vocation: "...I seriously question what aspect of this hierarchical Church, of which I am a part, do I continue to hold up/shore up by my being a part of it? In inviting others to join me in religious life am I assisting propping up patriarchy, a hierarchal system that is at the root of the planet's demise? Is Spirit urging us to fan something new into flame?"

Kaye Ashe, serving as scribe for a group of Sisters meeting at Dominican University in Chicago, said, "What does it mean, e.g., to be 'public persons in the Church' but not its agents? (see Sandra Schneiders' talk 'God So Loved the World, June 14, 2009).'" They reflected: "Our relationship with the hierarchical Church: What does it mean to be a 'non-canonical' congregation? What constitutes responsible ecclesiastical dissent? How do we carry out our role as women religious in a large Dominican family (friars, brothers, and other laymen and women) acting in the midst of the Church and in every corner of the world?" Within the Catholic Church, those who are not in the religious state of life in accord with canon law are not religious Sisters or brothers but seculars, and

organizations they form are not religious congregations. Also, those who truly know Catholic doctrine but obstinately dissent and freely teach something gravely opposed to it are technically known as heretics. It is not responsible, conscientious, or healthy to be a heretic.

During spring of 2010 the local Sinsinawa groups began to engage in discussion preparing for the 2011 General Chapter meeting. Imperative matters included for them “Vocations re: identity and membership, i.e., Do we as Dominicans of Sinsinawa want to live or die?” and “Ways in which we can help shape the emerging church.” Another group said: “Relationship with consideration with Church. Don’t let it shackle.”

Community Days approached again, and yet again this was a key topic on which there was planned to be “deeper conversations.” A subcommittee of the Core Team for Community Days calling itself “Preparation for Community Days Discussion on Our Relationship with the Church” (or, humorously, “Church Ladies”) wrote: “Dear Sisters, To prepare for a discussion of our relationship with the Church, we hope that during the next few weeks you will bring to prayer, study and discussion the following questions. Our legacy as Dominicans is an important part of our relationship with the Church.” These questions included “With what realities in the Church of their day did Dominic and Catherine struggle?” “What realities in the Church today do you believe need to change?” “In what ways do we as a Congregation want to work for change?” and “How do we want our relationship with the Church to be perceived by others?”

Sister Donna Quinn replied by posting an article by dissident Marquette University professor Daniel Maguire which she felt “might be helpful to our discussion of Church during Community Days.” It was a breezily mocking piece on “educating bishops” in regards to abortion and homosexuality, from “Conscience, the newsjournal of Catholic opinion published by Catholics for Choice,” the pro-abortion organization.

Sisters living in the Siena section of Sinsinawa Mound discussed the “Church Committee”’s questions about the Dominican Saints’ struggles in their own day, and had quite a few refreshingly reasonable thoughts. “Love the Church – understand its all inclusive reality. Accept reality of the human imperfections of the Church made up of weak and sinful people (including us.)” Another two Sisters reflecting together on these same questions noted with similar reasonableness that Saints Dominic and Catherine had to deal with “Heresy, dissent, illiteracy, human suffering, and little connection between Church and the daily struggles of people – lack of compassion for the oppressed, those living on the margins of society.” The Saints “Confronted evil within the Church with justice, truth and mercy – not afraid to confront the immorality and corruption of their day.”

In regards to the questions about the Church today, Sisters engaging in discussion at Sinsinawa Mound identified need for change from a very



typical "Call to Action" type dissent perspective: "The role of women in the Church – to work toward equality in all areas of Church life/ministry" (i.e. ordination) "The way church leadership is chosen" "The celibacy issue should be changed." "Fear of reprisal for 'speaking up and speaking out' needs to change." Also they wanted more openness and transparency in the Church—perhaps that is why they had all this out publicly on the internet for the general public to know in so much detail what they are thinking amongst themselves. The Sisters "hope that the leadership of our Congregation working with the leadership of the LCWR and with the support of the members of the Congregation would have influence in bringing about some of the above changes." They viewed as an example of good collaboration that made a difference "the role of Sisters in passing the Health Care Bill." This refers to Obamacare, which forces employers and individuals to buy insurance for such immoral things as contraception, abortifacients and sterilization, without any adequate conscience protections.

Another community reflecting on the same questions posed by the Church Committee had very similar responses to many others, until the last entry in a list under the heading "Realities in Church today that need change:" "EWTN—powerful, and is seen by many as authentic Catholicism, danger of knowing only this one perspective." It was alleged to me by someone who may have direct knowledge, that EWTN, the faithfully Catholic cable TV channel founded by a nun, is banned from Sinsinawa Mound.

When Community Days rolled around again in August of 2010, the prioress Sister Pat Mulcahey started off her talk on Day 1 by speaking of renowned protestant Old Testament scholar Walter Bruggemann. Protestants, of course, hold a fundamentally different belief about the nature of the Church and about the Eucharistic liturgy—or else, of course, they might come into full Communion with the Church, as Catholics. Yet these are the matters on which Sister Pat cites Bruggemann.

Brueggemann says, "the great crisis among us today is the crisis of the common good." He goes on to say that commitment to the common good is particularly entrusted to the church and its allies. He then qualifies it by saying:

I take "church" here to refer to the institutional church, but I mean it not as a package of truth and control, but as a liturgical, interpretive offer to reimagine the world differently. When the church only echoes the world's kingdom of scarcity, then it has failed in its vocation. But the faithful church keeps at the task of living out a journey that points to the common good.

The next day included the inevitable conversation on "Church," which was facilitated this time by Sister Nancy Shreck, OSF, current president of her Dubuque-based congregation and a former LCWR National President. She

said, for instance “We need to re-read ‘Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.’” and “Maybe our role today is to reach out to those who have been hurt by the institutional Church.” It was judged to be “truly an experience of ‘thick talk!’”

The next afternoon, Saturday, “there were groups formed to further our energy around specific topics.” The “Our relationship with church” topic was co-led by Sister Clare Wagner, a Madison Call to Action member who has led programs at the Holy Wisdom Monastery former-Catholic sect, and who said on SinsinOP in April of 2009 that she had “resolved not to put energy into ‘church reform’ but rather into sowing seeds for a new church.”

### **Chapter 2011: a holy and just Church and society**

Chapter meeting only comes around every five years and is a major event in the life of the Community, to be prepared for thoroughly.

As Chapter 2011 drew near, Sister Donna Quinn was grumbling about the unlikelihood that Rome would let them remove all male language for God from their Constitutions, language which she equated with rude name-calling. “Perhaps we need a statement to sign saying we disagree with the language but now we are feeling too disconnected to the Institutional Church to change it and we don’t have the energy to bother with it.”

Another Sister believed in regards to the same matter of changes they wished to make to their Constitutions that would never be allowed by Rome, that for the sake of “integrity” and “the historical context for our archives” (as if there was really a lack of documentation that they feel at odds with “the institutional Church”), it was necessary to make “a statement of declaration that speaks to our experience of our relationship with Rome in 2011. Jesus calls us to the freedom of the daughters of ‘Ineffable Mystery’. Such a statement would acknowledge our conflicted relationship to the institutional church and our experience of the magisterial imbalance in its relationship to other branches of the church. ”

Then the Penn Community in Atlanta raised an idea on SinsinOP in November of 2010, which I think others had batted around before: “We suggest adding the word ‘church’ to our mission statement. ‘...in order to participate in the building of a holy and just society and church.’” Until this point, the congregation mission statement had begun: “As Sinsinawa Dominican Women, we are called to proclaim the Gospel through the ministry of preaching and teaching in order to participate in the building of a holy and just society.” Vatican II teaches, in continuity with Catholic tradition, that the Church itself is “indefectibly holy” even though her members sin. Also, it is Jesus Who sanctifies the Church. The suggested new wording of the mission statement is not well phrased—but, it caught on. When it was added to the official roster of Chapter proposals the rationale

was given, which is precisely in the same vein as others who had wanted there to be some kind of statement of their conflicted relationship with "the institutional Church": "We believe that adding the word 'church' is needed for the sake of integrity."

The congregation's repeated returns to the "relationship with the institutional Church" theme over several years may have increasingly disturbed the peace of some Sisters, even while it is certainly true that Sisters disturbed about "the institutional Church" were driving the attention to the theme. "Right now, we have Sisters in angst regarding our relationship with the institutional church," said one Sister in December of 2010. This was why, even though she was "not in total agreement with the starting point of that proposal" she had recently signed in support of a Chapter proposal for "An Alternative (Additional) Non-Canonical Form of Membership" that would accommodate those Sisters who felt they did not necessarily want to remain in the Catholic Church, but wanted to remain Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters. It would "would allow us to STAY as a canonical congregation but make room within the congregation for an additional form of Sisterhood that is non-canonical – but fully participative in the life and mission of our congregation."

Sister Donna Quinn made a Chapter Proposal "That we Call for a Committee of those interested to look at Systemic Change to those Structures which oppress," evidently intending a change-the-Church focus: "That we not embrace the Guidelines now of a group that consistently oppresses women, namely Institutional Church." This was not universally approved by the other Sisters. Some at Sinsinawa Mound said that within their group, "All agree that we do not endorse this "Systemic Change" proposal (about which see also my discussion of the LCWR Systemic Change Handbook in the article on "What is Eucharist For Me?"); the relationship to the Institutional Church will come up during conversations about Identity." Even Sister Clare Wagner said: "My own sense is that we, the majority, are not ready to consider systemic change to structures which oppress us...not at this time. Those of us ready must wait."

However, the 2011 General Chapter that April did indeed add "Church" to the mission statement, which now is like this: "As Sinsinawa Dominican women, we are called to proclaim the Gospel through the ministry of preaching and teaching in order to participate in the building of a holy and just Church and society." The Sisters knew what they meant by this, while outsiders would not necessarily look askance. Sister Donna's "Systemic Change" of the Church proposal was not adopted.

Meanwhile, it is still Jesus alone Who makes His Bride the Church holy. This He has already accomplished, and we members of this Holy Church strive to dispose ourselves that He might fill us with holiness, each and every one.

## **Sinsinawa and Call To Action**

In October of 2011 Sister Donna Quinn recounted a dream:

My dream last week was seeing a person on the second-floor balcony overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican yelling at the Italian police ."Hey, Let My People Go" and then in another shout-out "Erin, Roy, Jim, Janice and All you down there from Women's Ordination Conference, Call To Action, Roman Catholic Women-Priests come on up for some hot chocolate and Italian cookies ...We will meet in the Library and you can tell me what is bothering you...Why you made such a long trip to our home here in Rome.to tell your story and ask for Justice....My home is your home...I am only here as a Care-Taker for a few years. The Vatican belongs to the People of God. Welcome my Friends I see in each of you the Face of God..."

Call to Action is a group founded on the idea that people should decide Catholic doctrine democratically. Their typical platform includes every kind of dissent issue, especially of a feminist and sexual liberation nature, such as "women's ordination," acceptance of homosexual behavior, contraception and abortion, etc. These are things the Church cannot change, but Call to Action does not seem to believe the Catholic Church is what it says it is, or that it teaches infallibly with authority from God. Call to Action is not at all a Catholic organization.

Unfortunately, Sinsinawa Dominicans very much support Call to Action. In 1999, Sister Kaye Ashe wrote on the mailing list SinsinOP, "Dear Milwaukee folks, I'm on the program at the CTA meeting in Milwaukee in November. I'm wondering if any of you will be attending, and if I might stay with you and go back and forth to the hotel with you??"

In 2001 a Sister says, "Those of us on the West coast were the first to experience the Call To Action Conference which was held in LA this past weekend. In honor of their 25th anniversary the conference includes three major city sites this year and it is WELL WORTH YOUR WHILE."

In 2002, the congregation's Promoter of Preaching wrote about a congregation-wide distribution of some materials opposed to canon law and liturgical law in regards who can preach the homily at Mass: "When you receive your Spectrum packet of inserts this month, you will find a brochure entitled 'What's the Good Word on Lay Preaching?' It comes from Future Church, a ministry of Call to Action."

In 2003, a Sister attending the annual civil-disobedience protest of the School of the Americas in Georgia wrote that it was about 75% young people at the protest, and "Having attended the annual Call to Action national meeting two weeks earlier and seeing a predominance of gray-hairs, it was very encouraging to see all the young people."

And in 2004, the congregation secretary posted to SinsinOP on behalf of the prioress: "Greetings! Toni [Harris] asked me to send the following message for her: If anyone is attending the Call to Action (November 5-7 in

Milwaukee) and would like to represent the congregation at a few events, please contact Toni by phone or by e-mail."

In 2006 the coordinator for the Sinsinawa lay Associates felt it necessary to schedule around the next year's Call to Action Conference, for the Associates' annual gathering: "We hope to see a large gathering next year because we are avoiding the Call to Action weekend. Our gathering will be held October 12-14, 2007 – mark your calendars now!"

There is simply no stigma in this congregation in regards to attending these events. "I attended the annual Call to Action national conference this past weekend," writes a Sister in 2007.

In 2008 a group of Sisters wondered together [and about this there is much more up above], "Should we send the Community Days questions from the Institutional Church group to NCR or should we join with other groups like Network, Call to Action, LCWR, NCAN, etc. to unify our voice?"

In 2009, Sister Clare Wagner wrote about a fellow Madison, WI Call to Action member who was let go from a parish Pastoral Associate job because of her beliefs on "women priests" and "same sex marriage": "I have known Ruth Kolpack for about four years. We both belong to a local CALL TO ACTION group. She is a competent and dedicated minister and a gracious and lovely woman. If you are moved to act or to pray concerning her unjust firing, that would be a blessing for Ruth and for the church."

In 2011, a Sister writes: "Dear Sisters, Associates, Friends: For any of you attending Call To Action this weekend in Milwaukee I urge you to be sure and attend any session that Naim Ateek is giving. He is an Episcopal priest from Palestine, co-founder of Sabeel. This is an organization that focuses on Palestinian Liberation Theology."

While the Apostolic Visitation of the Sisters was wrapping up in 2011, a Sister passed on to SinsinOP a message the congregation had received from one of the former Sisters who said: "I am the leader of SW Florida Call to Action and we are dedicating our annual Magdala celebration on July 21st to you religious women. We are hoping to fill the church for liturgy in your honor." I looked this up and it was led by a so-called "womanpriest," a former Benedictine Sister. Pictures show that attendees were few and aged.

Sometimes Call to Action email mailings were forwarded to SinsinOP, such as this one advertising the 2012 Nuns on the Bus stops in Sinsinawa and in Janesville, WI. I myself attended this, but to bring pro-life and religious freedom concerns to the NETWORK Lobby Sisters, rather than as a supporter.

And in September of 2012, prioress Sister Mary Ellen Gevelinger told pleased SinsinOP'ers: "At our Council meeting last week, we considered a donation to Call to Action, and decided instead to offer the donation to you to attend the Annual Call to Action Conference in Louisville, November 9-

11. We will pay transportation, hotel and conference registration for 2 Sisters to attend the Conference, and choose names by lottery. ” The next day she was “delighted to announce the winners of our Call to Action lottery,” and stated their names. “Congratulations to both of you, as you make plans to attend Call to Action later this Fall, with the financial support of the Congregation. Thanks to all who submitted your names for the drawing, and others who expressed the wish that you were able to attend this year.”

When they were safely home from the dissident conference, the Prioress General reported: “They all returned with a renewed hope and confidence that we are all Church.” She passed along two quotes they wanted to share, one from a “woman bishop” who is a former Dominican Sister, and one from a particularly over-the-top post-Catholic ex-priest dissident theologian: “‘Signs of the times call us to focus on hope and resistance, justice and empowerment. We need the courage to listen to our conscience and then move to ACTION.’ Patricia Fresen RCWP ‘Courage and silence are the first signs of hope and spiritual growth. In silence the mud settles and as it settles, we see clearer.’ Matt Fox.”

### **“The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of Truth”**

It is right and just that Father Mazzuchelli should have his say (and let us understand calmly that by “men” is meant both men and women):

But of what are not men capable outside of the Catholic Church ? Will they be able to find the Truth without it? Will they be able to hold fast to any belief? Will they find any foundation whereon to build ? The great apostle of the Gentiles answers us in his letter to Timothy, that they are “ever learning, and never attaining to the knowledge of Truth” (II, III, 7), and writing to the Ephesians he calls them children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the wickedness of men, by cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive (IV, 14); lastly, he denies that there is any foundation of true doctrine outside the House of God, which he declares “is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of Truth” (I Tim. III, 15).

Father Mazzuchelli teaches that “Ecclesiastical Hierarchy is a Divine Institution” and understands the “Apostolical authority to which the Catholic owes the perfect and uninterrupted organization of [her] Church” to be absolutely indispensable, in order that the Church’s members might be truly fruitful for the Gospel.

The Sinsinawa Dominicans are a congregation of Pontifical Right, meaning they are under the Holy See rather than simply a diocesan institution. According to Vatican II’s document on Bishops, if I understand it correctly, this is partly so “that the Supreme Pontiff may make use of them for the good of the Universal Church.” I have daydreamed: what if Pope Francis went to Sinsinawa Mound and was very kind and good to them, and through reason, gentleness and Holy Preaching won their hearts

away from feminist “liberation theology” and back to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, healed their poor hearts and gave them the Lord’s peace, and spoke with them personally of how they can be part of the New Evangelization?

He really has spoken to them, though. Sister Mary Ellen Gevelinger, the prioress of the Sinsinawa Dominicans was present at the Vatican when Pope Francis addressed a meeting of the International Union of Superiors General earlier this year. The Holy Father called on Sisters to live “a fruitful chastity, a chastity that generates sons and daughters in the church. The consecrated woman is a mother, must be a mother and not a spinster.” Based on some of his remarks, one wonders if Francis may have even had in mind Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Laurie Brink’s memorable words to an LCWR Annual Assembly about some Sisters “moving beyond the Church,” that were quoted in the Doctrinal Assessment for the LCWR.

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope Francis told 800 superiors of women’s orders from around the world that the Catholic Church needs religious women and that religious women need to be in harmony with the faith and teachings of the church.

“What would the church be without you?” the pope told the women May 8. “It would be missing maternity, affection, tenderness and a mother’s intuition.”

Religious superiors, Pope Francis said, need to ensure their members are educated in the doctrine of the church, “in love for the church and in an ecclesial spirit.”

Quoting Pope Paul VI, he said: “It’s an absurd dichotomy to think one can live with Jesus, but without the church, to follow Jesus outside the church, to love Jesus and not the church.”

Please, Sisters, please listen to him.



## 4 THE SCANDAL OF SISTER DONNA QUINN

Sister Donna Quinn was born July 26, 1937 to an Irish Catholic family, with “a mom and dad who were a lot of fun.” She recounted in a 2002 talk that her mother died in childbirth when Donna was only 11 years old. She said: “I think death is the first and most devastating form of violence perpetrated on humanity. I still shout at God, saying, ‘even I could have planned it better!’ I think organized religions were invented to explain it and address it.” She grew up attending daily Mass, and she and her sister and brother all entered religious life—her brother Bill became a priest and her sister entered the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters, though she later left.

Donna entered the Sinsinawa Dominicans, the congregation that ran the high school she had attended on the south side of Chicago, in 1955, and professed her final vows in 1960, receiving in the same year a bachelor’s degree in Education and History from Madison’s Edgewood College, where president Sister Mary Nona McGreal was an important influence in her formation as a teacher—“Starting out and receiving a first ‘assignment’ to share a classroom for teaching and spend the other half of every day learning at Duchesne College just down the street from St. Cecilia’s Convent in Omaha I always carried in my heart her love for a good curriculum.” Donna’s education continued with master’s degrees in History from the University of Illinois-Champaign and in Administration from UW-Madison. She served as a Catholic school teacher and administrator until 1975. At that point, her life took a decisive *left turn*.

In 1974, Sister Donna, according to her talk at Harvard Divinity School in 2002, attended a conference sponsored by Chicago’s Association of Catholic Priests. One of the sessions was facilitated by Alinsky-trained organizer and Dominican Sister of St. Mary of the Springs Marjorie Tuite, and when Donna asked, “where’s the women’s group in Chicago?” Tuite, a truly key figure in setting up the feminist Sisters’ extensive organizational



networks, followed up encouraging that Donna start such a group, and offered help in any way possible.

What resulted was an independent activist feminist organization, with no sanction under the diocese, called Chicago Catholic Women. Sister Donna Quinn described its December, 1974 founding the following fall in the Sinsinawa Dominican congregation magazine *ExCHANGE*. She and others desirous of “helping women in the archdiocese of Chicago provide input to the Bishops of the United States for the formation of social justice policy” expressed offense that the Chicago Archdiocesan planning committee for implementing the National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ US Bicentennial plans, had just one woman out of 17 members. In response to their request “that at least one other woman, a religious, be added to the committee we were told that a Jesuit priest on the committee was the representative for women religious.” This led to a meeting of around 40 women, who called themselves Chicago Catholic Women, and formulated a proposal to facilitate women’s participation by holding their own non-sanctioned event for women to give “testimony” on all manner of things:

On June 1, at a public hearing held at Holy Name Cathedral, Catholic Women presented testimony from women for 4 1/2 hours before a panel of 16 men and women and to an audience of over 150 people. The testimony dealt with the following topics: the contributions of women in ministry today; the oppression which Black women experience within the Church; women in prison; justice education in the Church; Latino women’s position in the Year of Woman; the need for ordained women priests and deacons; the exclusion of women from decision-making in the Church; discriminatory language in ecclesiastical documents and liturgy; the Church and Equal Rights Amendment, and reconciliation—male and female.

Close on the heels of this exhilarating and dissident experiment in self-empowerment, Sister Donna joined the radical Sisters’ group National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN) in 1975. This group was founded in 1969 by School Sister of Notre Dame Margaret Ellen Traxler, to oppose any “interference” by men in the affairs of Sisters, in the wake of Vatican efforts in regards to the disturbing and chaotic affair of the disintegration and split of the IHM nuns. Traxler had been formed in Marxist-type liberation theology “praxis” by intense experiences with the Civil Rights and “black liberation” movements, and carried that over to the women’s movement. NCAN is claimed to have been the first “Catholic” feminist organization to publicly endorse abortion rights (whereas most Catholic feminist groups saw, and continue to see simply keeping conspicuously silent on the matter as an effective “strategy”), and I have seen it said to have been the first to publicly endorse “women’s ordination,” in 1971. Its specialty seems to have always been, and continues to be, pushing the dissent envelope. Sister Donna also served together with Sister Marjorie

Tuite on the task force for the 1976 Women's Ordination Conference in Detroit, the original event that founded the organization of that name. This became an enduring focus for Chicago Catholic Women also: "While involved with many women's causes, Chicago Catholic Women identified the ordination of women as a primary focus," regardless of Catholic teaching that "the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women." A Sinsinawa Dominican lay associate who participated in the organization described asking Sister Donna why she stayed in the Catholic Church, and the answer was less radical than it was in later years: "I, too, asked that question to Donna Quinn years ago when I was going to Chicago Catholic Women and had no idea at that time that she was a Dominican (or who or where Sinsinawa was). Her answer was simple, yet strong: 'Because it is my church.'" Chicago Catholic Women continued to be a major focus of Donna's life until 2000, when it was dissolved. The not-authentically-Catholic organization's records are archived at Loyola University, Chicago, as part of its "Women and Leadership Archives."

In 1977 the Sinsinawa Dominicans became a supporting member of the 8th Day Center for Justice in Chicago, which obliged them to provide a staff person and \$5000 yearly membership fee. Sister Donna Quinn, who was already part of the 8th Day Center on behalf of Chicago Catholic Women, now assumed that role on behalf of the congregation. After 1981 the Sinsinawa Dominicans continued to provide funds but not staff. Sister Donna seems to have stayed connected with this organization. The 8th Day Center, which has clearly been a dissident organization, has faced scrutiny, for instance from Cardinal George in 2011 over promotion of "women's ordination". Google reveals its website continues to contain a letter of support to LGBT youth which implies homosexuality is "a gift" for youth, a statement in favor of ordaining "gay" men, advertisement of a New Ways Ministry pro-homosexuality event, an item in favor of "female priests" and the now-laicized Fr Roy Bourgeois, an advertisement of the pro-"women's ordination" film *Pink Smoke Over the Vatican*, etc.

In 1983 Sister Donna, again together with Marjorie Tuite, was a co-founder of Women-Church Convergence, a coalition of nominally-Catholic radical feminist organizations. The Sinsinawa Dominican Women's Network has continued to be a member of this organization, as are "Catholics for Choice", the pro-homosexuality group "Dignity," "Roman Catholic Womenpriests," "Women's Ordination Conference," etc.

In the world of religious life, there was much turmoil over the "Quinn Commission," which the Vatican had called to examine religious life in the US, was attempting to dialogue and probe the explosive issues surrounding Sisters' increasing rejection of the Holy See's definition of religious life.



teaching on abortion. Most of the Sisters, or their congregations acting on their behalf, eventually issued statements which were accepted by the Vatican. It is said that Marjorie Tuite's congregation submitted her statement without her knowledge; she was terminally ill with pancreatic cancer and passed away soon after; her funeral Mass was a feminist pandemonium of sacrilegious behavior.



Sister Donna seems to recall these highly-publicized controversies as her glory days. She recounted the story, to laughter, at Harvard Divinity School in 2002, and again extremely similarly at Planned Parenthood in California in 2012, of a protest of feminist nuns against the imposing Belgian Cardinal Jean Jerome Hamer, Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, who, during a three week visit to the US in August of 1985 addressed the religious of Chicago in the aftermath of the New York Times ad. Some of the people gathered at the Cathedral wore black armbands to signify that, for them, the Church had

died. Sister Donna portrays Hamer as very tall, bald, and blustering, and herself as a frightened David to his Goliath. He touched the dress of one of the nuns, who wore lay clothing, asking "Why are you wearing *pink*?" When Donna boldly declared to the Cardinal (she says Archbishop and does not mention his name but this was surely Hamer, and he had been created a Cardinal that May) that she was one of the signers, and that she, like he, was a Dominican, he said: "You are not a good Dominican!" He urged her to become one. Sister Donna says Cardinal Bernardin came over, told her she looked like she was going to faint, and urged her to sit down. She claims that Bernardin said to her, of the Belgian archbishop, "I don't know what we're going to do with that man." Though played for laughs, the experience was radicalizing: "What did I take from this experience? My belief in a woman's right to choose was stronger than ever," she said in 2002.

In a Summer, 1985 article in the magazine *Spirituality Today*, Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Clare Wagner had written of how this situation affected her personally:

After lengthy and intense discussion with my community group, which included one of the signers [i.e., Sister Donna Quinn, the only Sinsinawa Dominican signer], and after a restless night's sleep, I realized that I felt as if I

was struck by a bolt which rather thoroughly disconcerted me. Things which I had taken for granted and which, I since realize, gave me security were called into question. This left me fearful and threatened.

I had been confident that membership in my religious congregation and the church would go on, with perhaps some rough times, as long as I would live. I had been confident, too, that my Sisters who chose to share this common life-style with me could do so as long as I would live. I had seen ahead of me a path of life which stretched out a great distance before me toward a distant horizon; and I had seen securely situated on this path myself and those with whom I traveled, taking one step at a time toward the future. Suddenly none of the above could be taken for granted and the path was abruptly shortened, the future less certain than ever. Numerous "what ifs" were raised by this incident.

The sense of threat apparently drew the Sisters together:

In the first meeting of thirty-three women of one religious community, we prayed, we heard a chronology of the events related to the issue of the signing, and we asked questions for clarification. In recent years we have met dozens of times for chapter preparation and for the renewal process, but this meeting was different from any of those. Views in the group about the statement in the *New York Times* and Rome's reaction were mixed. There were no mixed views, however, concerning the fact that one among us — one of our own — was facing a difficult ordeal and her very membership in the community was involved. No mixed views either about the fact that we wanted to support her.

Sister Kaye Ashe, another radical feminist who became Prioress General in 1986, not long after the publication of the famous ad, and handled some of its aftermath, writes in *The Feminization of the Church?*: "Many felt the statements they had signed or the statements presented to Rome by their religious superiors did not constitute a retraction of what was stated in the ad, but Vatican officials interpreted the statements as such and cleared all but two of the signers," namely, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Patricia Hussey and Barbara Ferraro.

Substantiating Sister Kaye's words, a June 21, 1986 LA Times story reported that Vatican "officials have had little to say about any of the cases up to now, but sponsors of the original ad say 22 of the cases have been settled far short of retractions." A month later, the LA Times reported that "Eleven nuns who signed a 1984 abortion-related advertisement and were threatened with dismissal from their religious communities today denied a Vatican statement that they now adhere to Roman Catholic Church teaching on abortion." Their possibly surprising public candor was partly to support Hussey and Ferraro, whose congregation was resisting pressure from the Vatican to expel them: "We continue to stand with them in solidarity in their ongoing struggle." The Associated Press reported that these eleven were: "Mary Ann Cunningham of Denver; Mary Louise Denny of St. Louis; Sister Fiedler of Mount Ranier, Md.; Jeannine Grammick of

Brooklyn, N.Y.; Patricia Kenoyer of Kansas City, Mo.; Donna Quinn of Chicago; Marilyn Thie of Hamilton, N.Y.; Margaret Ellen Traxler of Chicago; Judith Vaughan of Los Angeles; Ann Patrick Ware of St. Louis; and Virginia Williams of St. Louis.”

After this, certainly these Sisters should have been dismissed. They, including Sister Donna Quinn, had made it clear that they supported abortion rights and were “pro-choice,” though they tried to claim that this was not “pro-abortion”. If the Holy See took further action it seems to have failed, except for continuing to pressure the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, from which Patricia Hussey and Barbara Ferraro resigned in 1988.

The National Coalition of American Nuns, seven of whose board members (including Donna) had signed the statement, honored Frances Kissling, founder of Catholics for a Free Choice, with its “national medal of honor” in 1986. [*Sisters in Crisis*, Ann Carey] In 1993 and in 2000, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops issued statements condemning the organization. The 2000 statement says: “For a number of years, a group calling itself Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) has been publicly supporting abortion while claiming it speaks as an authentic Catholic voice. That claim is false. In fact, the group’s activity is directed to rejection and distortion of Catholic teaching about the respect and protection due to defenseless unborn human life.” It is now known as Catholics for Choice, and continues to prominently support pro-abortion-rights politicians. Sister Donna stated on May 2, 2012 at a Planned Parenthood panel discussion in California, that she is the Illinois state coordinator of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, a pro-abortion-rights group of which Catholics for Choice is a member organization.

In November of 1990, Sister Donna Quinn was invited by the Peoria branch of the National Organization for Women (NOW) “to speak at their meeting about reproductive rights of women.” Bishop John Meyers contacted Sinsinawa Prioress General Kaye Ashe, who refused to order Sister Donna not to give a pro-abortion-rights talk, and told the bishop he should tell her himself. “Thank God for Kaye!” said Sister Donna in recounting this. Bishop Meyers let Sister Donna know that if she came to Peoria to give the talk he would report her to Rome. She did of course give the talk, and he did report this to Rome.

In 2002, Sister Donna was invited to speak at a conference on feminism and religion, at Harvard Divinity School. This is available in video form online. She deals with some of the obvious questions many people have about someone who is officially a religious Sister, but believes and behaves in ways radically at odds with the Catholic Faith. In fact the question has arisen in her own mind: “One question I have at this time is regarding my identifier as Catholic. I used to say, this is my church, and I



will work to change it because I love it. Later I said, this church is immoral and if I am to identify with it I had better work to change it. More recently I am saying all organized religions are immoral in their gender discrimination.” According to Sister Donna Quinn, “The root cause of evil in the church and thus in the world, is gender discrimination.” At the end of the talk there is this, which definitely underscores the dubia about her “identifier as Catholic”:

Several years ago one of our nuns asked me why I stay in community. She was really upset—why do ya stay in? I think she would love to see me go. I responded that it is the Sisterhood that keeps me in the Dominican community. I do believe that we need more gatherings of women to say how our spirituality is leading us into the future. What are the strategies we want to follow, and how will the Spirit lead us? You in this conference are a good start. The women’s movement has been church for me. On forms sent out by the Dominican community saying ‘list your diocese’ I always list Women-Church. You know, I was so excited, I was ecstatic to come to this conference. This gathering for me has been a Eucharistic celebration, I always say, out with Scripture, just throw it out, what better stories than those we have been told and those we hold in our hearts as yet unspoken.

In 2005, on Pentecost Sunday at Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago, Sister Donna defied Cardinal George, who was had ordered refusal of Holy Communion to visibly identified “rainbow sash” pro-homosexuality protesters, standard practice that guards against desecration of the Eucharist and politicization of Holy Communion:

Dominican Sister Donna Quinn, director of the National Coalition of American Nuns, Joseph and Barbara Parot of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and long time Catholic gay rights activist Rick Garcia, also attended the Mass. After the sash wearers were denied, Sister Donna, the Parots and Garcia approached the altar and received Communion. To the surprise of some, including the sash wearers, the four then approached the sash-wearers and gave them a portion of their consecrated hosts.

There do not seem to have been any ecclesiastical consequences from her actions.

Though I am not sure exactly when she started, in 2006, 2007, 2008 Sister Donna Quinn was working as Executive Director of the Institute for Women Today, at 7315 S. Yale in Chicago, a group founded by the late Sister Margaret Traxler (d. 2002), who had been perhaps the most prominent Sister Civil Rights era campaigner who marched from Selma to

Montgomery in 1965 singing “We Shall Overcome”, before taking her militant liberationist zeal to the women’s movement and in 1969 became founder of the National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN), and had also been one of the signers of the 1984 New York Times ad, and, like Donna, one of the 11 who publicly insisted that they indeed dissented from Catholic teaching on abortion. Donna was also and continued to be a National Coordinator for the radically dissident NCAN, which she’d joined in 1975, a couple years after its founding. A news reporter paraphrased Sister Donna’s description that the Institute for Women Today “works with women, many who have children, who have been rejected by their partners or who cannot afford adequate housing.” It operates a women’s shelter on Chicago’s South Side, Maria Shelter.

The Sinsinawa Dominicans’ email discussion list archive SinsinOP begins in 1999. Sister Donna Quinn’s participation in this means of communication, at first infrequent, became increasingly heavy through the years, a quite continual stream. Her posts are full of the doings of the various dissident organizations she is part of, and urging the community to activism. She seems fond of the font “Comic Sans.”

On October 27th, 2008, Sister Donna recounted to her Sisters via SinsinOP her volunteering as a “clinic escort” at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Chicago (if you follow the link, you must click to the attachment to read it):

For those who are still wondering if Reproductive Justice has disappeared from view let me tell you that in my experience it is alive and well and as long as there are women on earth this issue will be with us. Last Saturday I got up at 4 A.M. (not easy for someone who turns the light out at midnight) to escort women into a health Clinic. (I have been doing this for the last five years). My partner in this endeavor is in her eighties. We arrived at the Clinic to see that it was surrounded by about 25 Catholics shouting the rosary at us (always the sorrowful mysteries) These people keep shouting “Murderers” at the women we are protecting. One woman last Saturday was afraid to get out of her car to go in to the Clinic to discuss a woman’s health issue..The “Catholics” (I refuse to call them protesters as I consider that word sacred in my vocabulary) started blocking the driveway and physically impeding our getting to the drivers to tell them to drive right through. I called the cops. After ten or fifteen minutes a squad appeared with a disinterested cop inside. (He might have been a parishioner !) The Catholics stood there and lied saying we were shouting at them and of course they would never block the driveway....Their numbers at the Clinic are growing and I don’t know if this is a result of October being Anti-Choice month or that they sense a Democratic Platform will take over after November 4. I have greatly admired and worked with all interfaith people for twenty-five years on this issue. Those who volunteer with us are not Catholic. It is only the screamers who are anti-women and anti-choice who are.. Anyway this is an appeal for help. If you would like to help us nationwide



with a woman's right to access health issues please let me know.  
Love, Donna Quinn

No reaction at all from her fellow religious Sisters was in evidence. The claim that pro-life protesters "keep shouting Murderer" at women approaching an abortion clinic, is very improbable, based on everything I have known of the way Catholic pro life activists approach their outreach to vulnerable moms.



*Sister Donna, at left*

The next July, Sister Donna Quinn received a letter from the vicar for religious for the Diocese of Chicago, Sister Joan McGlinchey, MSC, on behalf of Cardinal George, who "has become aware of your actions as a clinic escort at the ACU Health Center abortion clinic in Hinsdale, IL." Sister Donna posted the full text right on SinsinOP. The blunt letter states that the prioress has verified that Sister Donna has been "publicly involved in these pro-abortion actions" and emphasizes repeatedly: "Your pro-abortion involvement as a Catholic religious Sister is cause for public scandal." It is a good question why seemingly none of the Sinsinawa Dominicans had confronted Sister Donna as straightforwardly as Sister Joan: "Your dissent with the Church is widely known, but you are actively cooperating in an act contrary to our beliefs as Catholics." Consequences are spoken of, though not specified:

As Cardinal George's delegate, I am asking you to cease these public actions at Hinsdale and to reflect on the consequences of your behavior for yourself, for your Dominican Congregation and for the Church. This request is serious and we await your response in this matter.

Sister Donna sent a reply, cc: to Cardinal George, protesting for instance that "I am not publicly identified as a member of the Sinsinawa Dominicans there." When she received a terse note in reply from Cardinal George, she

posted that too, with a feisty confidence that her Sisters were behind her (“Thank you for your overwhelming and continued support as we work together to end gender discrimination wherever it is found.”). The Cardinal wrote, in response to correspondence from Donna: “While it is interesting to receive your perspective on events that were reported to my office, this is a situation that is to be worked out between you and your Prioress.”

During the congregation’s Community Days gathering the same month, prioress Pat Mulcahey and other congregation leaders met with Sister Donna about the matter. Donna posted to SinsinOP:

Thank you to all for your prayers, hugs and calls about our continuing work together regarding Peace Keepers at Health Clinics and the Women who want to go in without violence for many reproductive health care issues offered by these licensed Clinics. As you know the Church has questioned my presence there...Pat Mulcahey, Mary Howard Johnstone, Ann Halloran and I met on Sunday to further this discussion...With your energy and the Spirit’s direction we will continue...Thanks again for all of your support.....Love, Donna Quinn

Then, the disturbing fact of the Dominican Sister who accompanied women to enter the ACU Health Center abortion clinic, finally hit the media. LifeSiteNews broke the news on October 23, 2009, based on the reports of Catholic pro-life protesters:

“I’ve called her Sister several times, and she never responded,” local pro-lifer John Bray told LifeSiteNews.com (LSN). “But it’s her.”

Amy Keane, a pro-life witness for 11 years, says Quinn has acted as escort for “six years, at least.” Keane described one incident in which Quinn began shouting at the pro-lifers as they spoke to a woman about to enter the abortion facility.

“[Quinn] was so angry, and burst out very loudly so everyone could hear: ‘Look at these men, telling these women what to do with their bodies!’” said Keane. “She was so angry, that it really took all of us aback.” Keane says that the group was peaceful, and that the men present were not among those engaging the woman.

“For those of us who are Catholic, to have a member of a religious order so blatantly – it is so disheartening. It really is,” said Keane. “She’s participating actively in abortion. That is what is so disturbing for us.”

The Prioress General didn’t immediately speak against this cooperation in abortion, the killing of unborn babies:

Sr. Patricia Mulcahey, OP, Quinn’s Prioress at the Sinsinawa Dominican community, said in an email response to LSN that the nun sees her volunteer activity as “accompanying women who are verbally abused by protestors. Her stance is that if the protestors were not abusive, she would not be there.”

Though Sr. Mulcahey claimed that her Sisters “support the teachings of the Catholic Church,” she declined to comment on Quinn’s public protest of Catholic Church teaching.

The case caused a considerable stir. On SinsinOP, Sister Pat Mulcahey the Prioress reported:

The [LifeSiteNews.com] article has resulted in over 300 emails to me, requests from reporters for comments in news stories and phone calls from people who went to our schools and are very confused. I imagine that newspapers in your local areas may carry articles. Please know that I am working on a public statement to clarify that we as Sinsinawa Dominicans do not support abortion and are working with Donna Quinn regarding her responsibility as a vowed religious vis-a-vis questions she may have about Church teachings.

Respected canon lawyer Dr. Ed Peters weighed in on the case a few days later on his blog. He was well aware there was little chance of the Sinsinawa Dominican prioress taking canonical action, but pointed out three dioceses (Madison, Chicago, and Joliet where the clinic is) had jurisdiction in the case—"the problem is finding an authority willing to act." He explained:

Under Canon 696, dismissal from religious life can be imposed against one who gives "grave scandal arising from culpable behavior". This unusually broad language allows superiors to move against a religious whose specific conduct could not have been predicted when the revised Code was being drafted (perhaps, like Sr. Donna's, it could scarcely have been imagined!), but which we now know can be both imagined and committed. So, to the extent that conducting babies to their death is scandalous behavior for a religious woman, Sr. Donna deserves dismissal.

With not only LifeSiteNews, but also Francis Cardinal George asking for answers, the silence that the Sinsinawa Dominicans might have preferred was not an option. On November 1st, Sister Pat, who was at the time in Trinidad receiving the final vows of Sister C[...], finally issued the following statement on behalf of the congregation, telling the Sisters now that "As vowed Dominican religious we bear a unique responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel and for loyalty to the infallible teachings of the Magisterium":

Public Statement of the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation

Several months ago the leadership of the Sinsinawa Dominicans was informed that Sr. Donna Quinn, OP, acted as a volunteer escort at a Chicago area clinic that among other procedures, performs abortions. After investigating the allegation, Congregation leaders have informed Sr. Donna that her actions are in violation of her profession as a Dominican religious. They regret that her actions have created controversy and resulted in public scandal. They are working with Sr. Donna to resolve the matter appropriately.

Congregation leaders offer the following statement on behalf of members of the Congregation.

We as Sinsinawa Dominican women are called to proclaim the Gospel through the ministry of preaching and teaching to participate in the building of a holy and just society. As Dominican religious, we fully support the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding the dignity and value of every human life from conception to natural death. We believe that abortion is an act of violence that destroys the life of the unborn. We do not engage in activity that witnesses to support of abortion.

Unsurprisingly, Sister Donna had a few things to say about this. The very

next day, she posted on SinsinOP, and I think it is in the interest of the common good to provide it here in full:

Before I send my Statement I want to write to you about the Process I have been involved in with Pat and the Council:

In July I was reported to the Cardinal by people who gather to shout and scream at women needing assistance at health clinics. My presence there as a Peace Keeper giving safe passage got in the way of their violence against these women. Following me to my car they discovered from looking up my license plate that I was a nun doing this outrageous activity.

After I responded to the Cardinal's letter to me he turned the whole matter over to Pat and to our Community

I was happy about this because I thought this will be a teaching moment for the Cardinal as we will lift up a kind loving respectful and inclusive way that our community operates. (It could have been settled back in August).

So far I have kept a silence about this process but it has been three months of hell.

-I have been treated disrespectfully by Pat who calls me at any hour and at any time (3 calls from Trinidad) and attempts to control me by badgering me and twisting stories.

-I went to the Mound this past weekend for the Associates Gathering only to walk into the foyer and find my name on the T.V. monitors to pray for Sr. Donna Quinn. I also found out while there that Pat had called a secret meeting last week of the nuns at the Mound to discuss me.

-I have never heard from the Council (except for an e-mail from Mary Ellen Green a few days ago begging me to think about what I am doing to disrupt the community and Pat). Not one on the Council has asked me how I am during this whole process. (not even when I saw them at the Mound last weekend) but I find them rubber – stamping everything that goes out from Pat... This is not my idea of Leadership.

-I received a letter from Pat that I was to meet "under the vow of obedience of my vows of 1957" This meeting was to be in October at the Mound and I was later told by her that there would be only one Agenda Item and that was that I was to say that I am Pro-Abortion and that I am perceived by the protestors as Pro-Abortion. This meeting did not materialize as I will not be treated in such a manner.

-Most of all I am writing this for the women I asked to help me in this process. Kaye Ashe, Ann Halloran, Marilyn Aiello, and Patty Caraher. We have asked Pat for the correspondence Pat has had with the Cardinal. She has refused this. We asked that Ann facilitate the Nov. meeting. She said No. They asked Pat to please wait until after our meeting to make a public Statement. Pat held a Conference Call from Trinidad with the Council last Saturday nite to rush out the Statement you received from them. There was no reason nor deadline to do this dastardly deed.

I do not want these great women in our Community Kaye, Ann, Marilyn and Patty to be treated with any more disrespect from this Leadership that is now in place in our Community.

-Lastly, I apologize to C[...]

her beautiful and sacred day of Profession with this sick obsession about me.

Donna Quinn

Sister Donna's reference to "the women I asked to help me in this process. Kaye Ashe, Ann Halloran, Marilyn Aiello, and Patty Caraher" refers to a "council" she recruited for purposes of advising her, giving personal support and helping to negotiate with the General Council. Sister Ann Marie Mongoven wrote on SinsinOP: "I understand that Pat and Donna have talked with one another and that Donna also has a group of four Sisters who are advising her. What a wonderful way to resolve a conflict. Council members and Donna's advisors are all Sisters looking out for the good of Donna and the good of the congregation." Sister Kaye is a past prioress of the congregation and radical feminist, Sister Ann the founder of Milwaukee's Dominican Center for Women, who spoke up on SinsinOP strongly objecting to the prioress' public statement on the matter partly on the grounds that the congregation membership hadn't been consulted before declaring that Sinsinawa agrees with the Church that abortion is wrong, Sister Marilyn a medical doctor who states that she counseled women to use contraception, and Sister Patty the co-founder of an innovative Atlanta area school for refugee children and one of the community's consistently most radical dissidents against Catholic beliefs.

Another Sister, Clare Wagner, whom I quoted way up above describing her feelings back when her friend Sister Donna was under fire after the 1984 New York Times ad, further recounts Sister Donna's extensive support network: "On October 3, 2009 [this was prior to LifeSiteNews breaking the story] the Sinsinawa Women's Network met at Dominican University. Donna is a long time member of that group, and we spent most of the day processing and clarifying Donna's experience at the Hinsdale clinic, the cardinal's and congregation's response, etc." Sister Clare says, "I felt that I was able to 'walk in Donna's shoes' for a mile or two that day, and that her only intent was to assist women. I sensed that she assumed the congregation would support her in this." Sister Clare agreed with Sister Donna's advisor Ann Halloran's strong words that the prioress' public statement was "ill-timed, ill-advised, and ill-conceived." On the other hand, others spoke up to say they agreed with the prioress' statement: "I agree with the stance taken by Pat and the Council and I understand the difficulty of their decision. If a vote is need they have mine."

(One Sister wrote: "A friend who is not a Sister just called me and said that she had been following the SinsinOP interaction today. She expressed some alarm about the fact that ANYTHING on the internet is public information. Please, let's not send anything that we don't want to see in a blog or in the newspaper.")

Sister Donna indeed issued a public response statement. It does not at all suggest that she agrees with the prioress "that abortion is an act of

violence that destroys the life of the unborn,” nor that she would not “engage in activity that witnesses to support of abortion.” It even exhorts pro-life protesters to stop protesting the Hinsdale Clinic, and calls the Sinsinawa Dominicans to stop communicating with the media on the matter, criticizing the statement that had been made by her congregation as “not... in the best interest of women.”

Response of Donna Quinn to the Nov. 1, 2009 “Public Statement of the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation”

On Sunday, November 1, 2009 I was informed that the “Congregation” had decided to issue a Public Statement regarding my role as a Peace Keeper at the Hinsdale Health Clinic. While a meeting had been scheduled for Nov. 18 to discuss this matter, Congregational leadership decided to act immediately. I am disappointed that the process agreed upon was circumvented.

At the same time, I am more concerned that the growing publicity around my role as a Peace Keeper is inconsistent with what a Peace Keeper is supposed to do. As a Peace Keeper, my goal is to enable women to enter a reproductive health clinic in dignity and without fear of being physically assaulted. I should not become the center of attention. I am very worried that the publicity around my presence will lead to violations of every woman’s right to privacy and expose them to further violence.

Thus, I have decided to suspend for a time my activities as a Peace Keeper and to think about the ways in which I can be helpful to women seeking reproductive health care that does not in any way threaten them.

I want to be clear that this is my decision. Respect for women’s moral agency is of critical importance to me and I look forward to continuing to dialogue with our Congregation on these matters as a way of informing my actions as well as educating the community.

I take this opportunity to urge those demonstrating against women who are patients at the Hinsdale Clinic, whom I have seen emotionally as well as physically threaten women, to cease those activities. I would never have had to serve as a Peace Keeper had not they created a war against women. It is my sincere hope that my decision serves to protect these women from greater exposure to public ridicule. Were I only concerned for my own interests, I would not suspend this important work.

Since the community has issued its statement in public, it is my intention to make my own statement public. I will not, however, be available to the media to discuss the statement or my decision and I ask that the Congregation also suspend any media contacts or reactions it has undertaken which I believe have not been in the best interest of women.

Donna Quinn

November 2, 2009

Frances Kissling, the founder of Catholics for Choice, the organization that had placed the 1984 ad in the New York Times asserting that Catholics have a diversity of opinions about abortion, spoke to her old friend Donna Quinn on the phone, and wrote a warmly supportive article quoting the

above statement by Sister Donna, that appeared the next day in Religion Dispatches. Of the signers of the famous 1984 ad, Kissling said “Quinn is one of several who have remained active on the abortion issue, especially supporting the concept of women’s moral agency as relevant to the question of abortion. There is no doubt that Quinn will find creative ways to continue to support women.” The Chicago Tribune said, similarly, of Sister Donna’s statement: “Quinn showed no sign of changing her ways Tuesday.”

It must be underscored that in 2009 after the clinic escort affair, just as after the 1984 New York Times letter, the congregation made a statement on Sister Donna’s behalf which responded to a demand of the Church hierarchy, but that Donna didn’t endorse and even made a public statement contrary to. The Sinsinawa Dominicans made a wagon circle around her, covered for her, apparently never considered dismissing her, and she vigorously kept up her pro-abortion-rights activism, with the knowledge of all the Sisters. A Chicago Tribune article the following month reported that on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception Sister Donna sent a thank-you to those who had lobbied for defeat of an amendment that would have barred government funds authorized under Obamacare, from being used for abortion. It then quotes her saying something sick and blasphemous, against the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In February of 2010, there is something very surprising and exceptional: right there on SinsinOP, the Hinsdale ACU Health Center pro-life protesters’ side of the story. A Sister writes: “For months I have been reading Donna Quinn’s rendition of what goes on at the ACU Health Center/Hinsdale Clinic. My brother and Sister in law are part of the Pro Life group that prays in this Clinic area each week.” She passes on the words of Cathy Hubeny, the Coordinator of Notre Dame Parish Catholics for Life:

Back in May I wrote to Cardinal George at the recommendation of his Executive Assistant, about an incident involving Sr. Donna Quinn at the ACU Health Center in Hinsdale requesting his pastoral assistance. On a Saturday in May this year, Sr. Donna was at the clinic as a clinic escort. When the sidewalk counselors tried to talk to the girls and offer assistance as they drove in, she interfered, and waved their cars in. She and her female associate then walked next to and talked to the women and girls coming for abortions, as they got out of their cars, and escorted them into the clinic. She told them not to listen to or talk to the sidewalk counselors. Over her street clothes, she wore a vest that says Clinic Escort. When the counselors attempted to tell the women that they have other options, about the dangers of abortion mentally, physically, and medically, and that there is a crisis pregnancy facility that can help them, Woman’s Choice Services\*\*, a few feet away. Sr. Donna and her associate, interfered with the pro-life sidewalk counselors. The counselors are pro-life volunteers from our local Catholic parishes. Sister spoke in an openly

hostile and angry mode toward the people praying, particularly the men. The women sidewalk counselors were trying to talk to some teenage girls who came to the clinic, Sister followed and walked with the girls and derisively said, "Leave these poor women alone" and "Look at all these men here telling the women what to do." Because we all knew who Sister was, I said to her, "Fr. Samuel Mazzuchelli pray for us". Two of the Catholic sidewalk counselors tried talking to Sr. Donna and her associate afterward, calling Sr. Donna by her name, saying to her very lovingly that surely God didn't intend that her caring about women as she does would mean taking the life of their innocent unborn babies. Sister Donna's angry reply was, "You are harassing me." Sr. Donna has been coming to this clinic for a number of years. So, the pro-life volunteers are familiar with her and her escort work at the clinic. (Sr. Donna was recognized by them by her picture in the Chicago Tribune in an article about her protesting at Holy Name Cathedral about the Church not allowing women priests. After the incident, I also looked up Sr. Donna and found her picture on the Sinsinawa Mound website. Because of seeing Sr. Donna at the clinic we have become aware of her history and involvement in dissenting Catholic feminist groups.)

There is also a message from one of the sidewalk counselors:

Those of us who pray and sidewalk counsel at the Hinsdale clinic do so because we care for these women and men in crisis. We stand by them whatever they decide but we know the heartbreaking road ahead for those who chose abortion. Having sidewalk counseled for the past 11 years, I can testify that we do not harass, intimidate or abuse the women entering the clinic. We provide them with information about fetal development, pregnancy centers in the area (including a Catholic center two doors south of the clinic), ob/gyns who will provide free services and the risks/complications from abortion. We provide truthful, factual information so the woman can make an informed decision. We speak the truth in love. That is not harassment, it's compassion. We continue to pray for Sr. Donna that her heart will soften to the truth that Abortion Hurts Women. That fully formed babies with beating hearts, brain waves, fingers and toes are being killed in their mother's wombs at the Hinsdale clinic. I know she is a woman with great compassion for the innocent and the underprivileged. Why doesn't her mercy extend to those she can't see?

On November 17, 2010, Sister Donna, who by this time was posting a steady stream of pro-abortion-rights, pro-contraception, and pro-homosexuality statements, was actually corrected by the General Council for her SinsinOP activity—namely, a strongly worded pro-"gay marriage" statement she wrote on behalf of NCAN, one of the dissent organizations she helps lead, which includes this assertion: "Like blinded Pharisees, [the US bishops] fail to see that the Catholic community is embarrassed by their silence in the face of brutality and incensed by their push of a political agenda against marriage equality—all at a time when their credibility on sexual matters is at a record low."

The willingness of the Council to correct Sister Donna Quinn seems



good, however, incredibly, it was not for endorsing grave moral evils (which she has continued to do continually) that she was rebuked and threatened to lose her posting privileges. Sister Patricia Mulcahey, Prioress General, wrote this message which was signed with the names of each Sinsinawa Dominican General Council member:

We do appreciate Sr. Donna Quinn's efforts to keep us apprised of opportunities to strengthen our commitment to efforts on behalf of women. At the same time maintaining our listserve as a place for respectful dialogue is very important.

Messages which unjustly criticize all members of a group, such as the USCCB, which make derogatory statements about the group and which attribute to the entire Catholic community, personal judgments of a few or some people demean the purpose of our listserve.

We are asking Donna to refrain from posting the type of message she sent yesterday concerning the USCCB. If she or any other user cannot refrain from such types of messages, they will no longer have posting privileges on Sinsinop.

On a frigid January 21, 2011, Sister Donna attended a Planned Parenthood-organized event, "the Conversation on The Future of Choice with Celinda Lake a leading political strategist from D.C." She recounts that "We were also blessed to hear the words of Fay Clayton Chair of Planned Parenthood" as well as numerous other pro-abortion figures in the panel discussion. Sister Donna said: "We have an uphill battle in the U.S. with this new Congress to keep women's primacy of conscience and personal decision-making in tact. We worked over the decades to implement good legislation Now we must work to keep it and to begin this for our female children on Earth. So much still to do....Never give up the struggle ....Never give up hope....."

On May 2, 2012, Sister Donna Quinn appeared at a Planned Parenthood event in California, which was advertised in this way in an Orange County Progressive events listing:

**May 2 Wednesday 11:30am-1:30pm, Irvine: Planned Parenthood Orange County and San Bernardino Counties Event – Consider This, featuring an interfaith discussion about the intersection of religion and reproductive freedom.** Learn how the beliefs of Rabbi Mark Miller, pro-choice nun Sister Donna Quinn and the Rev. Wilfredo Benitez form the foundation of their support for women's health care, including contraception, and safe, legal abortion. Individual tickets: \$45 with lunch and valet parking provided. For tickets and information, call 714/xxx-xxxx or visit <http://www.considerthisoc.org/index.php>

Andre's Conscious Cuisine & Cocktails, 2607 Main St., Irvine.

The event may be viewed in its entirety in a YouTube video or read in an official PDF transcript.

Sister Donna is at her most frank in this atmosphere: "For those women sitting with us today who have chosen abortion, I believe in your

decision. I firmly believe.” She elaborates affirming the choice to have an abortion:

You know, it used to be nuns would say, “Well, I’m prochoice, but I’m not for abortion.” But see, I don’t understand that. I think that’s doing in the women who have made that choice. And you are good, you are holy. Your primacy of conscience, which is not formed by the church, by the institutional church — it’s formed by all that your grandmothers, your great grandmothers, your mothers, all of your family experience, and also the feminist women’s movement — that’s what we have learned and that’s what we’ve been taught, and that has formed our conscience. And I believe you made the right decision at the time you were asked to do that. I sincerely believe that.

On her abortion clinic escort activities she says:

I came through last year having been a clinic — I called it not a “clinic escort” but a “clinic peacekeeper” for six years. I was reported by the Catholics to the Cardinal. I know they’re all Catholics because they’re all praying the rosary.

He sent it on to our community and then I went thought all last year: am I going to be excommunicated? Am I going to be expelled from the community? We went back and forth and I decided there were other areas that I could work in and I decided that the name-calling that they were doing, calling my name, murderer, everything, they were screaming it, and that wasn’t conducive to a peaceful entry for all of the ideas that Planned Parenthood puts into their clinic.

Those women would have been coming in, as Jon Dunn mentioned, for many other reasons than an abortion. But so what if they were coming in for an abortion? So what? We were there for them. So what?

YouTube



Consider This May 2, 2012: Pro-choice or pro-faith? You don't have to choose.



plannedparenthoodosh · 22 videos

Subscribe · 14

265 views



*Sister Donna Quinn, saying: “So what if they were coming in for abortions? So what?”*

To Sister Donna, whether a baby is a person is subjective:

...I heard it some years ago from Marge McGuire, a theologian who says this is not a person until the woman gives her consent to embrace,

nurture, and invite to full personhood. So that's what guides me in my thinking on the whole topic.

She describes a statement she made just after the release of the Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, that reflects radical rejection of and misrepresentation of Catholic beliefs:

Oy vey... So anyway, I did send out a statement immediately to the National Coalition of American Nuns. I said because the church supports discrimination, because the church treats women as second-class members, be it resolved that we will work on giving women the right to vote in the church, create a feminist sacramental system. Today, I will walk away and say this has been Eucharist to me. I no longer need ordained people. You are good and holy. I have learned from all of you.

Third, the primacy of conscience must speak; it must come to a point where we can have abortions safe, legal, accessible and one day federally funded. We have to abolish the Code of Canon Law and instead in its place, have a law, a code of law that says women are equal under that law. We have to have inclusive language, so little girls will grow up with the idea, yes, they're made in the image and likeness of God.

Furthermore, she lets us know, "I am the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice Coordinator of Illinois. We're often meeting in coalition not for the theology but for the legislative issues like getting education bills passed for Illinois."

A month later, June 2, 2012, Sister Donna told her Sisters on SinsinOP, "A month ago I spoke in California for Planned Parenthood and began with a story of why I continue to be a nun." No one spoke up questioning Sister Donna going to speak at a Planned Parenthood event. Planned Parenthood provides the most abortions of any organization in the US.

Not only abortion was on her advocacy agenda, but also in favor of so-called "gay marriage." In January of 2013, Sister Donna and NCAN were publicly advocating for the redefinition of marriage in Illinois. When I was at Sinsinawa Mound in January for a large and public showing of a dissident film *Band of Sisters*, a surreal and disturbing experience for me, I asked a Sinsinawa Dominican Sister who I thought looked official, whether there was anyone there who could tell me whether Sister Donna had been corrected for giving scandal about this, as she had been regarding her abortion escorting; the Sister gave me a strange and unreadable look and told me that no, there was no one who could answer that question. Sister Donna Quinn told her Sisters via their email list SinsinOP on February 23, 2013, "I have been asked to give Testimony to the Illinois Legislation next week about the Marriage Equality Act." As usual, there was a complete lack of Sisters pointing out that this was wrong of her to do.

On February 27th, presumably shortly after she gave testimony to the Illinois State Legislature in favor of legal status for homosexual unions titled

as “marriage,” CNN had her on, to comment on Pope Benedict XVI’s surprising announcement that, weakened by old age, he would soon resign from the Papacy.



*Sister Donna Quinn appears on CNN Newsroom on February 27, 2013 at 9:04 a.m. EST*

Sister Donna Quinn told CNN viewers:

Well, I'd like to thank the Pope for his work and wish him well. I'd like to also pick up on something he just said, “for the good of the church.” We women are calling this papal election invalid. It has to be declared fraudulent because it has no women included in the process. By that I mean there are no women on the ballot in the conclave, there are no women voters, there are no women in the whole process, and women make up half of the Church’s Membership.

If CNN had Donna back on after Pope Francis’ election to follow up about whether she was sticking with a sedevacantist position, I did not see that. She was one of the organizers of a “pink smoke” protest at the Chicago Cathedral advocating for “women’s ordination.” After his election, she posted on SinsinOP a wish-list agenda for Pope Francis which essentially entailed doing away with any understanding of the teachings of the Faith as being from God and objectively true: “make changes in the church, looking at ordination, a feminist sacramental system. the meaning of Eucharist, Scripture-writing as it continues to be written today, and circular models of governing including the People of God who are economically or made poor by systems of oppression. -Celebrate a church which welcomes laughter, discussion and dissent and forms its teachings, laws, and promulgations, on the sharing, life learnings and journeying of the Faithful.”



So what is she up to now? She's still running NCAN, and heavily involved in her umbrella organization of feminist dissident groups with Catholic roots, Women-Church Convergence, organizing and promoting "Women-Church Conference Call Celebrations" to chat about dissident topics, and planning a 30th anniversary conference to be held this September in Mount Prospect, IL, near Chicago.

Sister Donna Quinn is an anti-Catholic activist who simply does not believe the Catholic Church is what it says it is, nor does she believe in its Sacraments, nor its moral teaching, is hostile toward "the institutional Church," and she herself has doubts about identifying as Catholic. She objects vociferously, *strenuously* when her Congregation includes Holy Mass with a (male, obviously) priest at its gatherings, preferring all-women "feminist liturgies. She is proud of her aggressive activism in favor of abortion rights, government funded abortion, and state redefinition of marriage to include homosexual unions.

From the evidence, the appearance is that Sister Donna Quinn as a disbelieving Catholic who remains a member of a religious congregation "for the Sisterhood" and for activist reasons, as she is quite famous as a dissident nun and a key figure in a whole dissident network. It certainly seems her congregation has facilitated and accepted this career of hers, and defended and covered for her, the congregation by and large having studiously ignored and opposed Vatican II's teaching on the obligation of Catholics to form their conscience in accord with Catholic teaching. The Church hierarchy's efforts in her regard have shown a lack of follow-through, since Sister Donna has scandalized great numbers of people and given cause many times over for mandatory dismissal to be ordered. There are others who are much like her in their beliefs, and protecting them is likely one reason why the Sinsinawa congregation never would consider dismissing her—but Sister Donna Quinn is one of the most notorious.

Pray, and if your health allows it, fast, that Sister Donna Quinn may repent and Jesus show her His infinite mercy, because He loves Donna and she is a daughter of God. She is made in His own image, above all in her soul's faculties of intellect, will, and memory; as we all are, she is a capacity for God, made to receive and contemplate Him as absolute Truth and as perfect Charity, to be fertile for God, to be a spiritual mother—not a midwife and P.R. woman of death and sterility.

## 5 ON WHETHER TO GIVE HONOR TO ALMIGHTY GOD, FATHER SON AND HOLY SPIRIT, PART I: DOMINICAN PRAISE

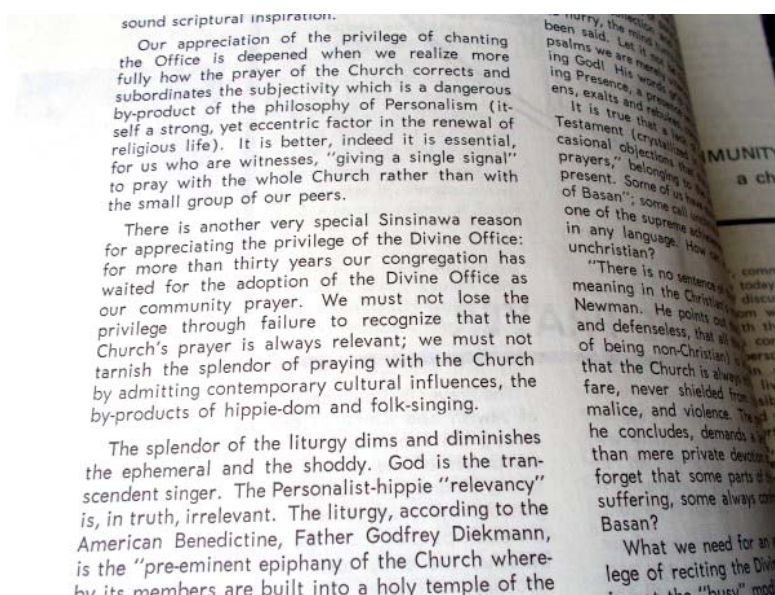
*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. Alleluia.*

This doxology begins each hour of the Liturgy of the Hours—words deeply familiar for most religious Sisters and all priests.

I was astounded and disturbed to read on the Sinsinawa Dominicans' email discussion list archive SinsinOP discussions about what language to use for the Divine Persons of the Trinity, *instead of* "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Some speak of wanting a greater variety of words for God and flexibility; others are very radical and want to do away with all male language for God: "I no longer relate to God as father or ever use the word 'he' when speaking about God," wrote Sister Patty Caraher in 2009. She's not alone. Many Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters say they don't want to renew their vows with the traditional formula that begins "To the honor of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit..." When a vote was taken only a slight majority of 54% wanted no change. Some wish they could change their Constitutions to remove all male language for God—but know the Vatican would not go along with it. The Dominican Sisters' Liturgy of the Hours-style prayerbook *Dominican Praise* uses a novel and genderless doxology: "Blessed be our saving God, Creator, Christ and Spirit, now and forever. Amen." This is not simply neutral. There are obvious and grave theological problems with refusal to speak of God as Jesus' Father, or refusal to speak of Jesus as a man.

## Prayer and gender politics

Let us begin with liturgical prayer. In the June 1969 second issue of the Sinsinawa Dominican publication for congregational change, ExCHANGE, Sister Julie Garner wrote an article on Contemplative Prayer in which she also voiced concerns about how the culture of the '60s seemed to be affecting liturgy. Feminist language wasn't yet the big thing, but she still felt the need to point out that they'd waited a long time for the privilege of praying the prayer of the Church (the Liturgy of the Hours a.k.a. the Divine Office—the Church's official public prayer, together with the Mass), and she saw a danger that although that has finally been granted and encouraged by Vatican II, it would not be appreciated by Sisters, or the way of praying it tarnished by hippie culture:



In the days before the Second Vatican Council, the Sisters prayed in Latin the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, which the Catholic Encyclopedia describes as "A liturgical devotion to the Blessed Virgin, in imitation of, and in addition to, the Divine Office." It was beautiful, and user-friendly for those who didn't actually know Latin, but pretty much the same from day to day; the Divine Office on the other hand cycled through all 150 Psalms, and the whole schedule of liturgical feasts, and had a far greater significance in the life of the Church. The Little Office largely fell out of use after Vatican II newly allowed religious to pray the Divine Office in the vernacular (but take note that the Council also specifies: "The version, however, must be one that is approved." —#101 par. 2, Vatican II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy). In the words of a Sinsinawa



Dominican in January, 2013, the “Divine Office connects us with the whole Church and its liturgical prayer.”

Father Cyril Wahle, OP wrote in the introduction to the old *Office Book for Dominican Sisters*: “The purpose of our prayer is first, the glory of God whose incomprehensible perfections we exalt whenever we say: ‘Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.’” This doxology has been in use since the fourth century, and had to be defended at that time because the Arian heretics wanted to make the Son less than the Father, as one can learn in the writings of Saint Basil the Great.

In our own day, the error that militates against this prayer is that motivated by “liberationist” feminism, that says that “Father”, “Son” or any other masculine terms are not truly eminently fitting terms for God, but are limiting and come out of a particular culture, and should be eradicated. This was part of the liberationist (Marxist) feminist program of changing meanings and practices in the Church to “correct” what was perceived or claimed to be marginalization and oppression of women.

Sister Ann Marie Mongoven wrote on the Sinsinawa Dominican email discussion list SinsinOP in February of 2002, and her perspective is typical of many Sinsinawa Dominicans:

We can no longer burden our imaginations with a deadlly literalist understanding of God language. Vatican Council II released us from that burden. I agree with Elizabeth Johnson and Catherine LaCugna that the use of “Father” and “Son” presents a difficulty from a feminist perspective. And I am grateful to [those who are] urging us to find language that expresses “the ancient mystery of the Trinity.” That is not only our work as Dominican women but as women in the Church. The whole Church needs to and is finding new metaphors and images to add to the Tradition. LaCugna says that “the insights of trinitarian theology should free our imaginations without forcing us to abandon our tradition.” But we need to realize that no metaphor, neither Father, Son, nor Holy Spirit can be understood in a literalist way.

If Mary is the mother of Jesus, and it is a non-literal metaphor that God is Jesus’ Father, one is tempted to wonder who they imagine is Jesus’ other parent?

### **A Scripture-mangling substitute for the Divine Office**

In the late 90s, Sisters from 18 different Dominican congregations began to work to bring about “the creation of a Dominican Women’s Prayer Book that incorporated the Liturgy of the Hours and specific Dominican emphases. Since the license for ICEL is frozen, we formed committees and have been working assiduously.” ICEL is the International Committee on English in the Liturgy, the body that holds the copyright for Catholic liturgical texts (such as the Liturgy of the Hours) in English translation, and licenses them to publishers. These ecclesiastically approved



liturgical texts cannot be altered, which may be what is meant by saying “the license for ICEL is frozen”.

I was very surprised to find that, while other religious orders (for instance the Discalced Carmelites and Franciscans) diligently translated from Latin the “proper” offices for the Saints of their orders, obtained ecclesiastical approval of the English versions, and published them in book form as a supplement to the Liturgy of the Hours, the Dominicans did not. Father Augustine Thompson, OP, a professor in California knowledgeable about Dominican liturgy, told me in response to an email inquiry: “There are two English versions of the Dominican propers. That done by the Central Province many years ago for experimental use. It was never submitted for approval. I don’t know why, perhaps because it was ‘experimental.’ It does not use degendered language. There is a version done by the Eastern Province more recently, and I have been told it has been approved by Rome, but I have not seen it.”

Fr Thompson told me he had never heard of *Dominican Praise*. In response to my question as to whether it could fulfill a priest’s obligation to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, he said “The only books that fulfill a priest’s obligation to the office are the editio typica [i.e. the Latin text of the Liturgy of the Hours] or an approved translation.”

Although it follows a similar pattern, *Dominican Praise* is not a translation of the Liturgy of the Hours, but “a provisional book of prayer for Dominican women.” It is part of the phenomenon that past Sinsinawa Dominican Prioress General Sister Kaye Ashe described approvingly in her book *The Feminization of the Church?*: after the Church declined to approve “inclusive language” texts for the Mass and the Divine Office, some people began to “turn to feminist or women’s liturgies either to supplement or replace them.” *Dominican Praise*’s prayers feature “inclusive language and broader naming of God.” It gives two novel doxologies that could be used instead of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” and advises choosing one and using it throughout the prayer, these include “Blessed be our saving God, Creator, Christ, and Spirit, now and forever. Amen” and one referring to “...Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit...” *Dominican Praise* uses entirely new, feminist translations of Scripture readings and psalms, from the original Hebrew and Greek. Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Mary Margaret Pazdan was one of the translators of the Greek New Testament readings and canticles. Even the Magnificat, Mary’s song of exultation after the conception of His Son in her womb, excruciatingly avoids any reference to God as “Lord” or by masculine pronouns:

My being proclaims the greatness of God;  
my spirit rejoices in God my Savoir,  
Who has looked lovingly on me in my affliction.  
From this day all generations will call me blessed.

For God, wonderful in power,  
has done great things for me.  
Holy, God's name!  
Whose mercy from generation to generation  
is to those who stand in awe....

The book includes some non-scriptural "alternative readings" for Morning or Evening prayer, which include several by Dominican Sister Mary Catherine Hilkert, I think a couple from Vatican II documents, one from the 1986 USCCB document "Economic Justice for All," and even one by controversial feminist/panentheist theologian Sister Elizabeth Johnson.

Sister Kaye Ashe's 1997 *The Feminization of the Church?*, written about the time the *Dominican Praise* project was getting started, refers to "Numerous committees and commissions" at work on "inclusive language translations of the Bible, lectionaries, hymns and prayer books," whose "brave efforts have not been spared caustic criticism," as she illustrates by quoting James J. Kilpatrick writing in the *Washington Post*: "vandalism of this magnitude ought not to go unremarked." The Sinsinawa Dominicans ordered a total of 391 copies of *Dominican Praise*, of the total 2005 edition of almost 5,000 copies, published by Liturgy Training Publications (LTP).

In 2007, interest in a second printing didn't meet the minimum order threshold of 3,000 copies, leading to shortages of the book. The Liturgy of the Hours was not necessarily what they prayed with instead. Both before the availability of *Dominican Praise* and after, feminist sisters preferred another unofficial, feminist-language alternative: "If anyone has a copy of Dominican Praise she is not using, will you please send it to me. I lost mine somewhere between Wisconsin and Florida. Sister Kathleen and I have been forced to use the People's Companion to the Breviary put out by the Carmelites who never heard of a Dominican saint." The Trinitarian formula in that book is: "Source of All Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit."

Heroine of orthodoxy Sister Francis Assisi Loughery's 2003 obituary noted that "Praying the daily office, Francis prayed aloud to the Saints for all who are in need of our prayers." I don't know how many Sinsinawa Dominicans are praying the Liturgy of the Hours daily anymore.

It hardly seems believable that the Sisters are devotees of Vatican II. Not only in this, but in so many things, they seem to care little what it really says. From the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy:

The competent superior has the power to grant the use of the vernacular in the celebration of the divine office, even in choir, to nuns and to members of institutes dedicated to acquiring perfection, both men who are not clerics and women. The version, however, must be one that is approved.

## 6 ON WHETHER TO GIVE HONOR TO ALMIGHTY GOD, FATHER SON AND HOLY SPIRIT, PART II: VOW FORMULA

Not only did the preference for de-gendered language for God contribute to leading the Sisters away from praying the official prayer of the Church, the Divine Office, but many actually wanted to change most everything to remove male language, including their Constitutions and their vow formula.

In February of 2002, Sister Patty Caraher began a discussion on the Sinsinawa Dominicans' SinsinOP email discussion list:

Dears, Thanks to [*Dominican Praise* translation committee member] Mary Margaret [Pazdan] for her carefully presented paper on "alternative language" which prompted a wonderfully lively discussion at our supper table on The Trinity. We suggest that others might like to do the same. Also, do read the amazingly clear and beautifully written chapter on the Trinity in Elizabeth Johnson's book *She Who Is*. We agree with Mary Margaret that we want the language about Trinity to be metaphorical; however, we want to move beyond Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Sister Anne Marie Mongoven responded with an extended reflection of her own. "We can no longer burden our imaginations with a deadly literalist understanding of God language. Vatican Council II released us from that burden," she wrote. Vatican II discusses the fact that literary form or genre of a given text, original meaning in context, and other factors enter into how sacred Scripture is rightly understood; the Council however does not view individual readers as the arbiters of matters of such fundamental doctrinal importance as whether God is "Father" literally. The Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation says: "The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office [*magisterium*] of the

Church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ.”

A few days later, one good and true soul spoke up for the Church’s point of view: Sister Francis Assisi Loughery.

For those pursuing the Naming God discussion, there is a beautiful section on the Blessed Trinity in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that you will find helpful: Chapter One, I Believe in God the Father, p. 54, #19 and ff.; also p. 66 on The Holy Trinity in the Teaching of the Faith.

While you have this text in your hand, you might like to turn to p. 224 for the affirmation of the Church on “Outside the Church There Is No Salvation.” The Church still teaches this truth.

The Trinitarian names, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are not metaphors. (See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 33, art. 2, ad 3: “In human nature the word is not a subsistence, and hence is not properly called begotten or son. But the divine Word is something subsistent in the divine nature; and hence He is properly and not metaphorically called Son, and His principle is called Father.” See also *ibid.*, q. 33, a. 2; q. 13, art. 3: “Whether Any Name Can Be Applied to God in Its Literal Sense?”) Et passim.

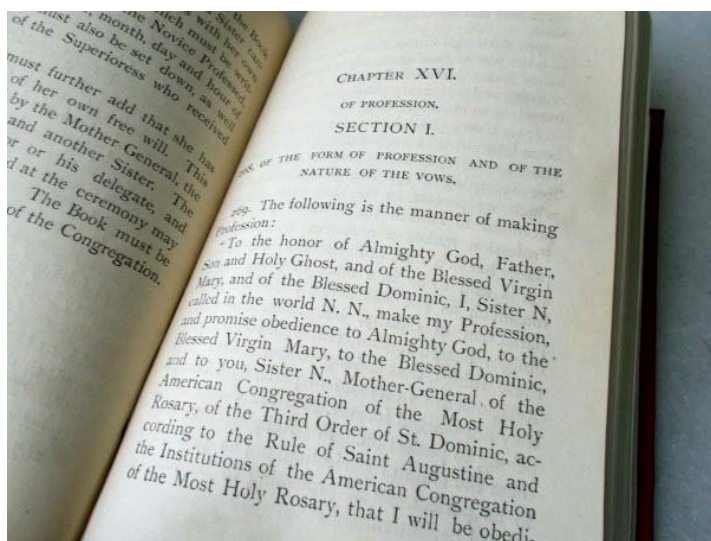
Sr. Francis Assisi, O.P.

The Aquinas references speak to the matter particularly strongly. But there was no response. A few days after that, Sister Kaye Ashe (in the very same vow class with Francis Assisi, but having been wholly won over to radical feminist thought, apparently by becoming friends with radical theologian Mary Daly while both Kaye and Francis Assisi were pursuing doctoral studies in Switzerland) weighed in on the topic: “I want to say thank you to Patty Caraher and Anne Marie Mongoven for their thoughtful reflections on the Trinity. They invite us to thought.... Those who would like a short version of Catherine Mowry LaCugna’s historical and theological development of the doctrine (with due consideration given to feminist concerns) could read her chapter in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*.”

### **The vow formula: to the honor of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... or not?**

It was several years later that the most astonishing discussion occurred.

Discussion over removing masculine language for God from the Constitutions, and particularly the vow formula, had been going on for years. The current version of the Constitutions of the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters was approved by the Holy See in 1990. According to the congregation’s history of the Vow Formula (lest there be any question, I do not have access to their intranet; I found a link to this), “Some limited changes in wording of the vow formula, i.e. changes which depart from the text printed in the approved *Constitution* were permitted by Enactment 61 of the General Chapter of 1994 and now by Enactment 26 of the General Chapter 2000 which renewed Enactment 61.”



*The Vow Formula as it appears in the 1889 Constitutions, substantially similar to the form in which it was given to the Sisters by Father Mazzuchelli, their founder. "Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary" is the formal name of the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa.*

In 1993 or 1994, an edition of the Constitutions in a mauve binder had been produced which included the ecclesiastically-approved Constitutions in a left-hand column, and alternatives to texts in a right-hand column, including inclusive-language Scripture readings, and an alternative, gender-free vow formula "To the Honor of Almighty God and of the Blessed Virgin Mary...", which the General Chapters of 1994 and 2000 apparently believed was canonically licit for the Prioress General to allow Sisters to use, by means of dispensation, instead of the approved one. It seems, based on the messages on SinsinOP, that they were informed that this was problematic, but many felt strongly about it. One October, 2002 example: "My reading of history says that both our scriptures and theology are embedded in 5000 + years of patriarchy from which it is nigh impossible to extricate them. Thus, with the proposed deletion of the alternative language in the right hand column of the *Constitution*, we are left with a choice, which is offensive if not outright oppressive to some of us." Moreover, "The task of rewriting the Constitution at this time seems futile given the 'climate in Rome.'"

By late 2005 the congregation was informed, or came to understand unavoidably, that it was "not correct to include those passages in our Constitution as if they were a part of it. That is a canonical, legal issue." However, this did not discourage the Constitution Committee from taking a survey in preparation for the 2006 General Chapter, on whether to rewrite the Constitution itself, and particularly the vow formula, "with attention to

God language,” or to keep it the same. The Sisters continued to ponder ways to circumvent the authority of the Sacred Congregation for Religious (CICLSAL):

If inclusion of alternative texts for the vow formula and Scriptural references in the Constitution requires approval from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, is the real reason for eliminating these texts the pragmatic one of avoiding problems with CICLSAL, rather than a theological one? If the alternative wording of the vow formula were something like “To the honor of our Triune God and...,” wouldn’t that maintain the Trinitarian theology? Would printing the alternative texts in italics and submitting their inclusion to the vote of the General Chapter eliminate the need to get CICLSAL’s approval?

Some, however, appeared to understand: “Vow formula could be a mute [sic--i.e., "moot"] point given the opinions of Canon Lawyers. Does not seem that dispensation is possible.” Prioress General Sister Toni Harris apparently thought it prudent to proceed in 2006 with a new printing of the Constitution, perhaps to reassure the Congregation for Religious. But this had nothing to do with accepting the vow formula in the Constitutions as the only option. Sister Kaye Ashe, a past Prioress General, explained:

You may remember that in the 1993 “mauve edition” of the Constitution we left this formula intact [i.e., the traditional vow formula was included in the approved Constitution text, in the left-hand column], but partly in response to requests by new members, we offered an alternative which stated “To the honor of Almighty God, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary...” That alternative was removed in the latest 2006 loose-leaf edition of our Constitution. (see Toni Harris’s letter of March 2006.) After discussion at the Chapter a group proposed in Enactment 6 that we adopt a formula beginning “To the honor of God, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Blessed Dominic...,” pointing out, as I recall, that, in the Dominican tradition, this formula pre-dates that of our present Constitution, and suggesting that it takes into account “our study of the experience and expression of the mystery of God among us.” (Enactment 6)

The theory and belief of many within the congregation that the form “To the honor of Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...” could be dispensed by the Prioress General and substituted for another, in the same way that various other Constitutional observances could licitly be dispensed by her, was probably not well founded. The ancient Third Order Dominican *Rule* on which Father Samuel Mazzuchelli based their way of life includes provision that “The Director and the Prioress can dispense the Sisters from the abstinence, fast, and austerities... whenever for a legitimate and reasonable cause they shall deem it expedient.” Father Mazzuchelli certainly could not have foreseen a desire that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be excluded from the vows and never would have considered that legitimate or reasonable; he simply saw it was sometimes necessary to adjust aspects

of their way of life for practical reasons. He wrote in his 1860 commentary on the *Rule of the Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Dominic*:

There are, it is admitted, occasional dispensations needed, which should be granted with a degree of prudence, as not to permit them to continue when their causes are removed. In general, it will be better to dispense seldom or never, or, as the Rule says, “only for a legitimate and reasonable cause.” Superiors will weigh very well the import of these words before the least dispensation is granted, lest, after many illegitimate and unreasonable dispensations, nearly every vestige of regularity should disappear.

It is not conceivable that the Sacred Congregation for Religious would agree to the obviously ideological removal of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from the vow formula. As for Father Mazzuchelli, he saw the Dominican Sisters as inherently ordered toward “the well-grounded hope of that exceedingly great reward, the entire and eternal possession of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”

### **Sources of community reflection**

This message was posted to the Sinsinawa Dominicans’ SinsinOP email discussion list in December of 2008:

In Enactment 3 from our 2006 General Chapter we committed ourselves to “explore together who God is for us:

- \* To learn from one another
- \* To deepen our relationship with God, with one another, and all creation; and
- \* To open ourselves to transformation for mission through theological reflection.”

On a DVD, a conversation has been prepared to engage us in responding to Enactment 3, as well as Enactment 6. In this conversation, Theresa Byrne, OP, Maggie Hopkins, OP, and Paula Hirschboeck responded to the following:

- \* Describe your present experience of God and/or how you first began to experience God and where that led you in your journey.
- \* How does your religious tradition [i.e., Roman Catholic, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian] affect your experience of God? Gender? Ministry? Age?
- \* One final word or idea before we close?

Enactment 6 asks that “in the context of our study of the experience and expression of the mystery of God among us and to express our rootedness in the Dominican tradition,” we consider adopting the following vow formula:

To the honor of God, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of Blessed Dominic, I, Sister \_\_\_\_\_, make my profession and promise obedience to God, to you, Sister \_\_\_\_\_, prioress of the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary of the Order of Preachers, and to your successors, according to the Rule of St. Augustine and the Constitution of the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, even unto death.

The 40 minute DVD in question, *On the Mystery of God*, was meant to be a discussion-starter for local Sinsinawa Dominican groups; it showed Sisters Theresa Byrne and Maggie Hopkins, and former Sinsinawa Dominican and Edgewood College philosophy professor Paula Hirschboeck, who had been lay-ordained a Zen Buddhist priest in 2000 (and has more recently been ordained a Soto Zen priest), in conversation apparently regarding “images of God” and how God is spoken of, and the conversants’ experience of God. Buddhism is a non-theistic belief system. Hirschboeck seems to have continued to be involved with the community, its spirituality outreach initiatives, and other congregation activity long after leaving religious life in 1989, and even after her 2000 Buddhist “ordination,” for instance participating in 2001 on a congregation membership study committee commissioned by the General Council “to explore the meaning of member and its implications for present and emerging forms of relationship, and to communicate the results of this process to our next provincial chapters.” The DVD presentation, filmed in 2008, received praise on SinsinOP, including from Kaye Ashe, and a local “circle” of Sinsinawa Dominicans which said “We found the DVD to be a welcome catalyst to our own sharing about our God experiences and our response to vow formulas.” After another group viewing, a Sister said “The content of their input and their delivery is certainly deserving of an academy award.” It was eventually viewed by “most people” within the congregation.

Around the same time, many Sinsinawa Dominicans were also doing a study of feminist theologian Sister Elizabeth Johnson’s book *Quest for the Living God*, which advocates alternative, non-masculine language for God, as well as panentheism, and was subsequently the subject of a 2011 critique by the US bishops (which upset some Sinsinawa Dominicans). “We have found it to be a growthful experience, especially in the increase of our vocabulary, ” wrote one Sinsinawa group studying *Quest*, which also however felt that the book does not address the issue it was presented by the congregation as being in regards to, namely, the fact that “we [i.e., the Sisters] have vastly different understandings of God.” The US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ doctrine committee concluded in its 2011 critique that “the language used in the book does not adequately express the faith of the Church.”

Besides these sources promoted to the whole community, a variety of other sources were cited on SinsinOP in late 2008 and early 2009 by individual Sisters, as influencing or resonating with their thinking about the Trinity:

Other works by Elizabeth Johnson were often cited also. The works of feminist theologian Catherine Mowry LaCugna were cited by about half a dozen Sisters. One added, “For me this work is also connected to the reassessment of Natural Law by people like Sally McFague as well as other



disciplines.” McFague is a protestant ecofeminist and author of a book titled *Metaphorical Theology*.

Sister Joan Chittister’s dissent memoir *Called to Question* was cited by one Sister, who was affected by Chittister’s quote of a Native American protestant social activist, Juanita Helphrey: “God is a cloud forming, an eagle soaring, a voice from the wilderness echoing through your ear.”

When a Sister mentioned the bestselling novel *The Shack*, which she admits “is not a theological treatise,” others jumped in to say that had been on their minds too. “I’ve read it three times and circulated it to many folks, and have been making connections with our discussion of the Trinity,” said one. In *The Shack*, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit are represented by female characters.

The alternative doxologies of *Dominican Praise* also, unsurprisingly, were cited as possibilities: “What would be the possibility of using one of the doxology formulas found in the Dominican Praise Office book for the vow formula? The honor of almighty God: Creator, Redeemer, and Holy Spirit... or :Creator, Christ, and Spirit...”

### **Opinions about the truth**

The SinsinOP mailing list discussion which this congregation-wide study and reflection spawned at the beginning of 2009 certainly seems to vindicate the USCCB’s concern over *Quest For the Living God*. As you will see, the conversation gives an eye-opening look at the beliefs behind some Sisters’ continual chafing against basic Christian language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The discussion seems not to have been entirely theoretical, but it appears one or more Sisters had already been permitted to make their vows according to alternative formulas, probably based on the theory that the prioress general has the prerogative to dispense from the form given in the Constitutions. A Sister who was professed in 1983 stated in January of 2009: “As someone who made Profession in ‘recent times,’ I recall using the divine reference: ‘To the honor of our Gracious God...’ If there was a Triune reference it would have probably been: Creator, Redeemer and Holy Spirit.” Another post clarified that “Our Congregation allowed this twenty-five years ago when R[...] took her vows, but then went back to the original formula.” The rationale for departure from the form of the vows was apparently based on the provision in the congregation’s Constitutions for the superior to dispense from certain observances of the Constitution:

Since in the Dominican tradition the observance of law is seen in relation to attaining a desired goal, dispensation from the law has a positive meaning for us and can be sued freely for good cause. Those who are given personal authority can dispense individuals and communities from certain obligations for a limited time for the good of persons and their mission. (Constitution, #46)

The prioress of the congregation...has the authority to dispense for cause a Sister or community or a whole province from particular constitutional observances. (Statutes, Chapter Four, I)

Whether dispensing from naming God as Father and Son in the vow formula because of feminist objection is a legitimate exercise of this, is a good question. It certainly seems like it would be difficult if not impossible to make a case that a religious distancing herself from something so basic to the Christian Faith would be “for the good of persons and their mission.”

Some weren’t attached to whether the language Father, Son and Holy Spirit was retained, or not, as long as the language reflected the Trinity. They often made reference to recent feminist theologians as having influenced this perspective:

I would be passionate about keeping a Trinitarian image, not moving from a Christian to a Deist position. It was very helpful to me to study again the article by Elizabeth Johnson Trinity, To Let the Symbol Sing Again. It was in Theology Today, October 1997, Volume 54, Number 3. What metaphor we use to express the inexpressible mystery of Trinity is not as important to me as that we express the mystery in some way. [Dec 26, 2008]

But among the first responses in December 2008 and January 2009 are several unconflicted statements of Christian belief. These Sisters did not have to think about what language to use instead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because they lovingly accepted what they had received from Christian tradition. Many thought Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was important, and gave sound reasons, while some still felt it would be “patriarchal” to take it “literally,” such as this Dec 27, 2008 message by 1966-1967 Prioress General Sister Marie Amanda Allard, which I dare to quote at length because it made many good points and five Sisters responded in agreement:

The basic tenet of our Christian faith is the Trinity. We call ourselves Christian because Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity. All major religions believe in God. Only Christians believe in the Trinity.

The entire New Testament is based on the Trinity.

We were baptized in the name of the Trinity and our vows are a further carrying out of our baptismal promises in our Dominican vocation.

How many times in our lives have we blessed ourselves with the sign of the cross, “In the name of the Father...” And prayed as Jesus taught us “Our Father, who are in heaven, hallowed be your name...”?

Our Sinsinawa Constitution begins with the words: The life of the Trinity is the source of mission.

The vow formula given to us by Father Samuel Mazzuchelli contained the traditional Trinitarian wording.

Therefore, my request is that we not change our present vow formula but rather think and study so as to understand more deeply the importance of the Trinitarian inclusion and distinguish between a literal meaning approach, leading to the patriarchal perspective and theological meaning approach, leading to a relational perspective.

In the first week of January, the radical feminist Sisters spoke up. Sister Donna Quinn, who was one of those who was persuaded that (for instance because of reservation of priestly ordination to men alone) the Church believes women are “not in the image of God” as much as men, wrote that “This topic is very difficult for me to write about because it feels like it invades the very heart and soul of our Sisters who pray to God from the depths of their being.” She wanted “words [that] would embrace all of creation” and proposed that the vow formula should begin “In the Image of God I ( fill in your name)...”.

Sister Patty Caraher wrote from Atlanta, GA, with a revelation that a Christian must be saddened by: “I no longer relate to God as father or ever use the word ‘he’ when speaking about God.” She considered this detrimental because “Unfortunately, for many in our society, any ‘person’ word, especially the word ‘father’ has taken on a literal and therefore patricarchal meaning.” Instead, she endorsed “using the word ‘God’ instead of the Trinitarian formula” and also liked Sister Donna’s reference to “image of God.”

Another Sister was in agreement with Patty and Donna, and pointed to a feminist re-interpretation of Jesus’ word “Abba” (“Daddy”).

...I agree with Patty who does not name her experience of the Holy in male terms. I like Donna’s term but would like some trinitarian form. For my prayer and for the prayer of our community here at the Dominican Center, the form “Source of our Being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit” seems to fit. I especially like the name “Source of our Being” as (I learned from our Scripture classes at Santa Clara) that it is a more accurate translation of “Abba!”

Another Sister who seemed to have an altered concept of basic Christian beliefs quoted Sister Elizabeth Johnson’s *Quest for the Living God*: “The intent of the trinitarian symbol is not to give literal information but to acclaim the God who saves and to lead us into this mystery.” She added, “On page 211 Johnson goes on to explain that the Greek word hypostasis originally meant ‘a distinct manner of subsistence.’ It is not our concept of the term ‘person.’”

A Sister whose preference was zealously in favor of using the words “Living God” said: “Something in me shrivels.... when I consider asking a woman for whom the long tradition of Trinitarian devotion is not meaningful to abandon words which express the deepest and most vibrant connection to her Sacred Source.” Sister Christina Heltsley, director of the St Francis Center in San Francisco, said:

I am thinking that to “force” someone to “vow”, “promise” or “proclaim” something she does not believe really invalidates the promise, or vow. Vows, I believe, are to be freely chosen and when one is forced to vow something that isn’t true for them...well, yes, I believe the freedom to choose to vow is somehow taken away and, like I said, invalidates in some way, the

promise.

Does that for me then mean that I feel that my vow is invalidated? No, because 30 years ago, our thinking about God was different; mine was different and continues to evolve. Would I now, with the evolution in my thoughts/beliefs on God, vow using that same language- no, I would not.

Sister Anne Marie Mongoven, reflected at length, and in conclusion rightly pointed out the Christological problems that arise from tampering with it:

I am fully aware of the patriarchal nature of Father and Son and can understand why some of us do not want to use those words.[...]

The metaphor of Father, Son, and Spirit indicates intimacy and connects us in friendship to the Great Mystery, to one another and to all of creation. Perhaps we could use the metaphors of father and mother, but that creates Christological concerns even as it expresses sublime love.

A Sister pointed to another doctrinal issue with alternative formulas: "I used to say "Creator, Son and Spirit" until someone pointed out to me that if we say the first Person is Creator it suggests that the other two are not and yet they are. All three Persons participate in the process of creation." Another Sister concurred: "The Mystery of the Trinity is an entity unto its self and needs to be an expression of the relationships to each other. Creator is a term that says who God the Creator is to us, not to the others in the Trinity." Later in the discussion a Sister who had been a language teacher for many years made a poignant and compelling claim for the necessity of speaking of Father and Son: "I do not talk to God as creature to mystery. That is much too cold a situation to give my life to. Neither can I give my life to a metaphor. The Son of God, Jesus, gave his life for me."

Some felt that it was all right for a Sister to write her own vow formula, but the prevailing view, both among those who wanted a change, and those who supported the traditional vow formula, was for uniformity. One of the latter said: "I cannot support any statement that meets one Sister's need for specific language over another. There ought to be some commonalities that define who we are. I don't think that we have ever discussed how far individualism benefits or separates us as Dominicans of Sinsinawa." An oft-cited option among the feminist Sisters was to have vows refer to "Triune God;" one explained "while I don't usually use the word 'triune' in my vernacular, this does name the facet of God that is in relationship. I no longer use Father, Son and Spirit as examples of this relationship." Several spoke up for "Living God," a Biblical phrase lately popularized by feminist theologian Sister Elizabeth Johnson. And many wanted simply "God," as articulated by the Prioress General of the late 80's, Sister Kaye Ashe:

After discussion at the Chapter a group proposed in Enactment 6 that we adopt a formula beginning "To the honor of God, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of the Blessed Dominic..." pointing out, as I recall, that, in the Dominican tradition, this formula pre-dates that of our present

Constitution, and suggesting that it takes into account “our study of the experience and expression of the mystery of God among us.” (Enactment 6)

I, personally, thought at the time that this was ingenious: saying simply “God” (as has been done, evidently, in the Dominican tradition for centuries) leaves room for multiple ways of imaging the profound mystery of vitality, love, creativity, truth, mercy, fecundity, and beauty that God represents and that refuses to be captured in any single image.

Some claimed that the traditional, Christian-doctrine-based references to Father and Son needed to be removed, as a matter of adjusting to the present day. A local Sinsinawa group in the eastern US said:

[W]e all seemed to agree that while we have reverence for tradition, we felt that the formula having been handed down from Father Samuel and written in our Constitution as well, did not preclude our examining new language (consonant with the theology of the Trinity) to reflect the “sitz en laben,” the situation in which we presently live. One person made the observation that Father Samuel, himself, would probably understand the need to re-evaluate the wording, given the movement toward inclusivity of women within our Church.[... One Sister stated] that she would not like to think of young women entering in the future who would look at the present wording and think that we were not attuned to the need for inclusive language on behalf of women.

Another Sister commented, similarly, “I do not feel we live in times where using the traditional Trinitarian image for God is helpful or true to our reality at this moment. I believe learning to live with and love the diversity of images and allowing them is more reflective of where we are.”

(Then, Sister Donna Quinn, trying to make a point that she finds “patriarchal” language very offensive, used the n-word as an example of a bigoted word that is really offensive and that we wouldn’t use, and there was a massive reaction of numerous Sisters heartily offended by the word, and some of them were not mollified by level headed explanations by others, that she was not “using” the n-word.)

### **How to write constitutions acceptable both to Sinsinawa and to Rome?**

An online survey regarding the vow formula was taken in May of 2009, which was more than likely the source of a statistic cited in October of 2010, that a slight majority, “54% of us want no change at this time.”

The congregation’s focus shifted more in earnest to preparation for the 2011 General Chapter meeting. By and by, there came to be a variety of ways in which the 1990 Constitutions no longer described the way of life of the Congregation (for instance, they effectively no longer had provinces, and they no longer had any canonical religious houses outside of Sinsinawa), and the Sinsinawa Dominicans saw a need for revising it; the General Chapter would approve new constitutions to be sent to Rome for approval. In the end, most local groups of Sisters supported leaving the

vow formula unchanged in the Constitution, but having the prioress and council grant dispensation to anyone who wanted to use different wording. The Atlanta group added a suggestion for including the feminist concerns but avoiding having to get approval: “with this issue and with the issue of our God language we believe that it’s important to have an addendum to the Constitution. This document would not need to go to Rome.” In the “Floribbean” region group, “Some affirm the suggestion that the revised Preface to the Constitution include ‘a brief reference to the ever evolving ways of understanding the Great Mystery of God in the Church as well as in our Congregation.’” In regards to the vow formula itself, they (and multiple other groups similarly) agreed with the Constitution Committee’s suggestion, but with “frustration,” about making “no changes at this time for pragmatic reasons—that is to make God language changes to the Constitution would mean it would need to be submitted to CICLSAL [the Congregation Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, in Rome].”

Sister Donna Quinn posted in November of 2010 asserting that being obliged to have male language for God is “bullying” and “offensive,” saying

[F]or those who are trying to create the new we are called Dominican Dispensations... I reread the Constitution and believe me there is more name-calling than in the Vow Formula that needs to be changed.[...]

Perhaps we need a statement to sign saying we disagree with the language but now we are feeling too disconnected to the Institutional Church to change it, and we don’t have the energy to bother with it. Either way it will still stand for the future to read about us

or maybe they will just call us the Dominican Dispensations...

At the April, 2011 General chapter, “The 32 edits suggested by the constitution committee were approved as well as the substantial changes in the text regarding General Chapter, Congregation Treasurer, Collaborative Relationships and Local Community.” The language for the vow formula was almost certainly not changed. This was submitted to Rome. In December of 2011, the congregation “received a response from Rome (The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life) regarding our constitution and they made three minor adjustments. We had some questions regarding one of their suggestions and are in the process of consulting a canon lawyer.” The following February, “Mary Ellen has been in contact with Canon Lawyer Dan Ward, for some guidance in wording on some changes suggested by CICLSAL, the Office in Rome that gives final approval for our Constitution. These are changes in preferred wording, rather than substance, and changes that Council can make. We hope that these final details will bring us an approval soon!” Though I could just be unaware, to date I have seen no word on SinsinOP of the new Constitutions having been approved.

## 7 THE PREACHING OF THE NON-ORDAINED: WHY NOT SISTER HOMILISTS

Why is the homily reserved to the priest or deacon alone? There is a deeper reason than the fact that the Church has assured their proper formation, education and training and commissioned them for that service. That reason lies in the unity of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the intense orientation of the Gospel and the exposition of the Scriptures, toward the Eucharist, source and summit of the Christian life. The homily is ordinarily given by the priest celebrant of the Mass, or occasionally for a good reason, a concelebrant priest or one assisting “in choir”, or the deacon, but having some other person slip in to give the homily, who is not even ordained to the sacred ministry, is not really fitting for the integrity of the liturgy. The sacred minister in Holy Orders, consecrated and ordained as he is in his very person for service at the altar, is the one to open the Scriptures so that the people may receive and believe in Jesus Christ first in word, before receiving Him in sacrament. The canon law and liturgical law on this point follows from the theology of the Mass. It’s not that a non ordained person is functionally incapable of preaching a homily at Mass, or necessarily theologically unprepared, but it’s something even more than just a practical function.

But starting in the late 60s and 70s, amidst a heady sense of liberation, a certain amount of experimentation with lay homilists occurred, and that was especially true with apostolic religious Sisters. Then-novice directress Sister Diane Kennedy’s homily was published at the beginning of 1973, in the Sinsinawa Dominican magazine *ExCHANGE* (official policy for which included “rocking the boat” with “occasional bombshells”). In that

(ironically) still more innocent time, her feeling about preaching the homily was “hesitant, and yet believing in the Spirit of the Lord in our midst and trusting that as Dominicans we all have been called to preach the Word.”

*The water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside you*



Sister Diane Kennedy

**T**his afternoon I have the privilege of welcoming five new novices to our Sinsinawa community while reflecting with you on this beautiful passage from John's Gospel. I dare to preach the homily this afternoon because these young women have asked me to. I stand before my Sisters, hesitant, and yet believing in the Spirit of the Lord in our midst and trusting that as Dominicans we all have been called to preach the Word. — I hope today does not seem “out of season.”

The word addressed to us today is framed in the encounter of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob. The account is so alive with tension and drama, so rich in authentic flavor, that we feel the sense of an eye-witness account—perhaps from the Samaritan woman herself recounting it to her fellow-townpeople, or from the startled disciples who had come back to find Jesus engaged in conversation with a woman—and a Samaritan at that. Jesus is weary and thirsty; the woman is shrewd and capable of deception. The movement of the dialogue uses misunderstanding and irony to reveal deeper meaning, and we are engaged by the woman's aggressiveness, by her quickness in changing the subject when Jesus confronts her with the facts of her personal history, by her dropping her defense when Jesus speaks to her directly: “I who am speaking to you, I am He.”

Yet within this earthly scene Jesus reveals profound truth—of Himself, of the Father, of the Spirit—to a woman of somewhat dubious character—surely not a model of moral tidiness or conventional rectitude. And the truth changed her and makes her an apostle who brings others to Jesus. The truth that Jesus reveals in the light of noonday is that He is the source of living water—He will reveal us to ourselves and show us the mercy of God in our midst; He will send the gift of His Spirit that will set us up within us unto eternal life and we shall never be thirsty again.

Your reception announcement spoke of thirst: “If one man is thirst

*ExCHANGE, 1973*

The previous issue had asked: “Does preaching have a specific meaning for Dominicans? How can men and women of the order collaborate in the ministry of the Word?”

Giving homilies at Mass seems to be a topic close to the heart for Sinsinawa Dominicans. Consider a December, 1999 Sinsinawa Dominican email discussion list (SinsinOP) post:

I was back in my old parish [in Michigan] for Thanksgiving. Some of the Catechumenate Catechists gave me a gift of the air ticket and hosted the weekend. In conversation they asked if I was preaching at the Sunday liturgies. I said no, that women are not permitted to preach in Florida, that I knew that and had let-go of that ministry before I come to Florida and that I was happy in my present ministry.

Their response amazed me. They said, “isn't that selfish, You may have decided to let-go of that issue but what about the people that are deprived of that gift in you and also IN OTHER WOMEN.” They then asked how our community were working on that issue. I did not know how to respond. Since I came back I have been reflecting on the whole conversation and wondering if we as a congregation are doing anything as I do not remember it coming up in the Chapter discussions or proposals.

Is the LCWR working on this, she wanted to know; is there dialogue with the US bishops? She suggests this needs to be advanced for the sake of



women religious of the future, and “SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER”. One of the members of the Father Mazzuchelli Society founding group knew a Sinsinawa Dominican Sister in a local Madison parish some years back, who went through the distressing experience of being told she couldn’t preach at Mass anymore, and he and his wife “went through that with her”, humanly understanding and trying to support her, as friends.

Saint Dominic founded the Order of Preachers with different branches; friars, nuns, third order, called to live the charism differently, but all definitely *preachers*. In October of 1999, during a period of preparation for the Sinsinawa General Chapter meeting that occurs every 5 years, a SinsinOP post representing one of the local “circles” of Sisters, presented an idea:

WE PROPOSE THAT THE CENTRAL COUNCIL CREATE THE POSITION OF PROMOTER OF PREACHING AND INVITE PERSONS TO SUBMIT THEIR NAMES.

Timeline: By January, 2001

Our rationale: To en flesh our charism

To encourage our ownership [sic] of the charism of Preaching  
To officially acknowledge the work that has been done and continue the work with other Congregations

There had been for some years a Preaching Committee, but having a specific job position to “promote preaching” was established practice with the Dominican Friars, apparently a trend in other congregations of LCWR Dominican Sisters, and was greeted with approval. The General Chapter meeting in 2000 directed that a Promoter of Preaching be appointed, which was carried out in October of that year with the selection of Sister Alice Ann Byrne for a three-year appointment to the half-time position.

Sister Alice Ann’s December, 2001 review of her office’s activities in its first year included formation of an ad-hoc committee of Sisters which contributed “*Spectrum* [congregation magazine] articles on the realities of itinerant preaching as well as initiating regional/local conversations”, established regional preaching promoters, and “In collaboration with the Promoter of Justice, we are co-sponsoring *Contemplation and Resistance Retreats*; with the Promoter of Study, we sponsored *Gospel Women Speaks*; and presently plans are underway to sponsor a 2003 Forum on the challenges of our preaching identity, concentrating on the scripture study and skills necessary to ground preparation.” She also stated areas of concentration for the next year, 2002, which included: “We need to address the current legal restrictions which are interpreted to limit pulpit preaching to the ordained, especially within the context of Eucharist. This narrow definition of preacher must be addressed out of our belief that the People of God deserve to hear the Word of God claimed and proclaimed from within the life experiences of the entire community...women and men, lay and ordained.”

The Sinsinawa Dominicans' entrenched dissent on the matter of preaching homilies at Mass needs to be understood in the context of the Order's sustained efforts on this matter at the national and international level. That past summer, the 2001 international General Chapter meeting of the Dominican Friars had been held in Providence, Rhode Island, and at that meeting a special Commission had presented its report, "The Dominican Charism of Preaching: An Inquiry". It called for further study "to advance the question of liturgical preaching by qualified and gifted non-ordained members of the Order and the Church", and "that some structure be established to document the many ways that the Dominican friars, nuns, Sisters, and laity are already collaborating in the preaching mission of the Order throughout the world", which they hoped would be a resource to the wider Church, which (perhaps forgetting about *parishes*) they claim "lacks effective structures for collaboration in ministry by women and men, lay and ordained." It concluded with a recommendation "that the Order request from the Holy See permission for the ordination to the order of deacon of apostolic Sisters who are charged with preaching and ministries of the word" (this was commented on by both Sisters and laity in a subsequent international Dominican Charism of Preaching survey collation document, and, whether coincidentally or not I don't know, Sinsinawa Dominicans were also to be found publicly discussing "women deacons" soon after, for instance in the magazine *US Catholic*. The same year at least one Sinsinawa Dominican was involved in distributing copies of a book by Phyllis Zagano advocating women deacons, to every US bishop in advance of a November, 2001 USCCB meeting: "I felt that because women deacons could canonically preach within the Eucharist, our Dominican calling, I entered enthusiastically into this campaign."). A successor Promoter of Preaching, Sister Mary Margaret Pazdan, gave a useful timeline of the Order's efforts to promote lay preaching in a 2004 SinsinOP message.

The news on this topic coming out of the friars' July-August 2001 General Chapter seems to have caused a stir; the Sinsinawa Dominican Promoter of Preaching certainly would have been aware, and I wonder if it also came to the attention of the US bishops' conference. Sister Alice Ann's email asserting the need to prioritize advancing the cause of lay liturgical preaching came a month after the US Bishops' approval of a new complementary canonical norm for the United States which was ratified by Rome, and a month prior to its coming into effect January 15, 2002:

The diocesan bishop will determine the appropriate situations [when the lay faithful may be permitted to preach in a church or oratory] in accord with canon 772§ 1. In providing for preaching by the lay faithful **the diocesan bishop may never dispense from the norm which reserves the homily to the sacred ministers** (cc 767§1; cfr. *Pontifical Acta Apostolic Sedis (AAA)* 79 [1987], 1249). **Preaching by the lay faithful may not take place within the Celebration of the Eucharist at the moment reserved for the homily.**

Although you would think a “Promoter of Preaching” would become aware of this quickly, that was apparently not what happened. In April of 2002, Sister Alice Ann Byrne informed SinsinOP members: “When you receive your Spectrum packet of inserts this month, you will find a brochure entitled ‘What’s the Good Word on Lay Preaching?’. It comes from Future Church, a ministry of Call to Action. I think it presents a thoughtful discussion of the importance of lay preaching and some scholarly interpretation of the 1983 Code of Canon Law. See what you think.” *Spectrum* is an official Sinsinawa Dominican congregation magazine (a possibly less-boat-rocking successor to *ExCHANGE*, the boat-rocking having migrated to SinisnOP), so this reference is apparently to literature distributed by the congregation to the members. The text of this Call to Action/FutureChurch brochure on lay preaching still appears in HTML format on the website of the notorious activist dissent group. The brochure claims that there are a variety of instances when the Church allows lay people to preach the homily at Mass, and urges: “Discuss the issue with your pastor or liturgy commission to see if there is an openness to lay preaching. Encourage lay preaching at daily Mass and at special non-Sunday liturgies, with the goal of including more lay preaching on Sundays.”

In actuality, the “new” US canonical norm was a reiteration of an already authoritative 1997 Instruction from the Holy See, which spelled the matter out strongly and clearly:

The homily, therefore, during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, must be reserved to the sacred minister, Priest or Deacon(69) to the exclusion of the non-ordained faithful, even if these should have responsibilities as “pastoral assistants” or catechists in whatever type of community or group. This exclusion is not based on the preaching ability of sacred ministers nor their theological preparation, but on that function which is reserved to them in virtue of having received the Sacrament of Holy Orders. For the same reason the diocesan Bishop cannot validly dispense from the canonical norm(70) since this is not merely a disciplinary law but one which touches upon the closely connected functions of teaching and sanctifying.[...]

All previous norms which may have admitted the non-ordained faithful to preaching the homily during the Holy Eucharist are to be considered abrogated by canon 767, § 1.(72)

The Call to Action/FutureChurch brochure was based on perceived loopholes in canon law that had actually been completely closed (although, as an example of creativity with loopholes, in March 2002 a Madison-area Sister suggested on SinsinOP: “A parish might see Good Friday as a day that a non ordained person might preach since it is not a Eucharist.”) by the new canonical norm for the United States issued in January 2002, three months prior: non-ordained persons may *never* preach at Mass during the time for the homily. And subsequently, the 2004 liturgical law document *Redemptionis Sacramentum* would reemphasize the Church’s discipline yet

again, saying that the practice of non-ordained persons giving the homily at Mass is “reprobated”; this also indicates it cannot be dispensed even by the diocesan bishop.

On May 10th, 2002, Sr. Alice Ann Byrne had finally become aware of the new canon law norm that had come into effect four months previously, and wrote on SinsinOP:

Last week I was surprised when I read in a column in our Spokane diocesan newspaper that through a recent decision of the American Bishops all lay people are restricted from preaching at Eucharist except before liturgy and after communion. All interpretive options within the canons seem to be entirely shut down and the preaching limited to the ordained. Recently an article interpreting this decision was written by Audrey Borschel, an Aquinas doctor of ministry student and was sent to the promoters of preaching by Greg Heille, OP. It is published on NCR online, Viewpoint, entitled “Excluding Lay Preachers Stifles the Spirit.” If you have the time and interest it is worth reading.

Borschel’s website currently says she has “good memories of sharing pastoral care with the pastor while a pastoral associate in the Catholic Church,” though she is now “an ordained minister” with the Disciples of Christ protestant sect.

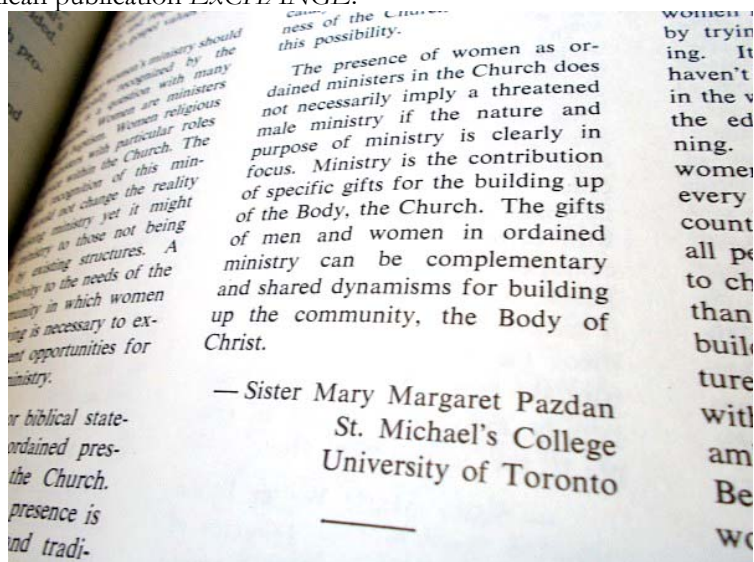
Many Sisters’ desire to preach the homily at Mass is intertwined with their hopes for “women’s ordination”. Catholic teaching is that the Church has no authority whatsoever to ordain women as priests; it is not simply a disciplinary matter, but a doctrinal truth that cannot change, and Catholics who refuse to assent to it set themselves in opposition to Catholic teaching. In 2003, a South African Dominican Sister with a doctorate in theology and credentials as a courageous justice campaigner who had been jailed for racially integrating the school she led and saw the “rule” against women’s ordination as another kind of apartheid, Sister Patricia Fresen, OP, underwent “ordination” ceremonies in Barcelona, Spain,—which of course didn’t actually make her a Catholic priest, and for which she incurred excommunication. At that time there was a big push for “women’s ordination” in Europe; it is not clear whether she also felt encouraged by the commission report to the 2001 Dominican friars’ General Chapter held in Providence, that advocated “ordination” of Sisters as deacons. She believed she was now a priest (later, she was “ordained a bishop” and became one of the leaders of “Roman Catholic Womenpriests International”), and Fresen’s reasons for her action, which was inspiring to some or perhaps many Sinsinawa Dominicans, were detailed in a message forwarded to SinsinOP in October of 2003:

I believe that Canon 1024, which states that a person must be a baptized male in order to be ordained, is an unjust law and therefore needs to be broken.

As a woman theologian in the church, I have often felt pushed aside and

denied opportunities of preaching and pastoral ministry because I am a woman.

In 2004, the Sinsinawa Dominicans' General Council expressed gratitude for Sr. Alice Ann Byrne's service, and appointed Sister Mary Margaret Pazdan as the next Promoter of Preaching, again for a 3-year term. At that time Sr. Mary Margaret was a Visiting Dominican Scholar at the secular Emory University in Atlanta, but would soon return to teach Scripture at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, "the only Catholic institution in the world offering a Doctorate in preaching". Before the creation of the Promoter role, Sister Mary Margaret had been the convener of the congregation's Committee on Preaching. She had also long favored "women's ordination"; for instance this was from 1974 in the Sinsinawa Dominican publication *ExCHANGE*:



Sister Mary Margaret Pazdan periodically posted homilies she had preached (as did others), not all necessarily at Mass (some 2005 examples: 1a 1b 2 3 4). I do not feel strongly about their content one way or another except that I find them not specifically Catholic. Sr. Mary Margaret had also produced feminist language translations from the original Greek of New Testament readings and canticles, for the US Dominican Sisters' ecclesiastically non-approved "prayer resource" resembling the Liturgy of the Hours, *Dominican Praise*, released in fall of 2005 (its male-language-eschewing doxology: "Blessed be our saving God, Creator, Christ, and Spirit, now and forever. Amen."). She did collaborative initiatives with the Promoter of Justice, such as prayer and fasting for peace in Iraq, and promoted preaching education and enrichment for the Sisters and sought such opportunities for herself, such as attending in December 2005 the

annual meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, an organization of teachers and doctoral graduate students of homiletics. With majority protestant membership, this event featured daily protestant services and preaching. The major Catholic speaker was trendy, controversial feminist and panentheist theologian Sister Elizabeth Johnson, whose plenary talk, “Like a Sponge in the Sea: Preaching and a Spirituality of the Earth”, according to Sister Mary Margaret, advised:

First, be contemplative and delight in the universe and goldfinches. The cosmos has intrinsic value to God. Second, be ascetic and exercise discipline in using the resources of the earth. Fast from shopping. Third, be prophetic and act for justice of the earth....

Sr. Mary Margaret also was busy in November, 2004 urging participation in the Order’s international questionnaire/survey on the Charism of Preaching, which asked: “How have you lived the preaching charism of the Order?” and “What are your personal experiences of being a Dominican preacher?”

The famed Dominican house of Santa Sabina in Rome collated the results of this vast survey, which was another stage in the same chain of lay preaching-related initiatives that had included the report to the 2001 General Chapter in Providence, and done in response to a commission recommendation to “continue the theological and canonical study necessary to advance the question of liturgical preaching by qualified and gifted non-ordained members of the Order and the Church”, in a 2006 document. “There is much more to our preaching mandate than ‘liturgical preaching’. We have a broad responsibility in our calling,” says the document, the author of which seems fairly well-grounded. “Laypersons are not permitted to preach a homily,” and “The Order may not have the power to procure a change on this matter, and petitioning of the Holy See appears pointless with regard to the current position of the Holy See on this matter,” however examples of lay preaching in the context of the Mass, and the opinions of Dominicans who advocate this, are mentioned neutrally. Some lay Dominicans are revealed to have been uncomfortable with the 2001 report calling for women deacons, while some Sisters spoke of that positively. Many lay respondents to the survey felt that too much emphasis on liturgical preaching “does not adequately address the extra-liturgical preaching that is in the spirit of St Dominic himself.” Among Sisters, “the issue of the exclusion of the non-ordained from liturgical preaching, and therefore the total exclusion of women from liturgical preaching, was strongly felt.”

Strongly felt, but not always strongly adhered to, as SinsinOP posts attest,—either in a parish, or amongst fellow Dominicans, as on Sunday, March 19th, 2006, at the Sinsinawa Dominicans’ General Chapter Meeting, at a Chicago hotel,

The brilliant sun greeted all who gathered to celebrate Eucharist at 9:00. Our presider, Don Goergen, O.P. began by inviting all to take a moment to look around and to absorb all the beauty, wisdom and holiness gathered in that sacred space. The music was glorious, the dancers graceful and the preaching by Teresa Byrne, O.P. was profound. She invited us to drink deeply at the well, as she reflected on that familiar story of Jesus who long ago met another woman at the well.

Leading friars supported and cooperated in Sisters' preaching at Mass. In September, 2006, the national Dominican Leadership Conference, a group for the leaders of Dominican friars and Sisters in the US, held its annual meeting at Sinsinawa Mound. As I write this, the DLC's DomLife website still has a photo of Sister Toni Harris at the ambo in the Sinsinawa Queen of the Rosary chapel, giving the Sunday Mass homily, with a link underneath: "Read Toni Harris's Homily (Word)". In her words on the Old Testament reading, which prefigures the way in which Jesus, the Just One, would be reviled by some, Sister Toni asks us to reflect: "What voice of truth is 'obnoxious' to us? What truth 'reproaches' us or charges us with 'violations of our training'?" She says that for her that's the voices reminding about voluntary poverty, in a time when we are all participants in a society of rampant consumerism.

Next year, at the October, 2007 Dominican Leadership Conference, there were noteworthy talks by keynote speaker Father Daniel Cadrin, OP, and Sister Mary Catherine Hilkert of the Akron Dominicans. In February of the same year, these two members of the Order's International Preaching Commission had served as US representatives to an international Preaching Conference at Santa Sabina, which reiterated yet again in a letter to the Order that one of two main "challenges that face us" was "(2) the authorisation for preaching by the non-ordained in the liturgical context." Father Daniel's DLC talk included this:

At the Commission on Preaching, we have to work on the issue of preaching in a liturgical (Eucharistic in fact), context for OP women. It raises questions related to our mission but first more with the issue of vocation and ministry. In the eighties, I was part of a small OP community in a new suburb, south-shore of Montreal. There (as in other places at that time), at the eucharist on Sunday, at the parish, the woman who was coordinator of this assembly used to preach. There was then no problem; she was mandated by the bishop and she was accepted by the people. We thought then that this was the beginning of a new era that would lead to deeper changes. As you may have noticed, it is not yet the case.

[...T]o remain faithful to our OP tradition, we have to face this issue with three concerns: we are part of the Church, not outside it; we want to be prophetic, calling the Church and ourselves to renewal; we are part of a Family of Preachers, not isolated units.

Sister Mary Catherine Hilkert went in depth into the matter in her reply presentation. She noted that lay preaching "has long been a passion of the

DLC, of congregations of Dominican apostolic Sisters, of many members of the Dominican laity and associates, and of many of the friars in the USA” and that this was strongly reflected in the Charism of Preaching survey, the results of which had been collated in 2006 by Santa Sabina.

But in the larger structures of the institutional Church at the present time, preaching by qualified and gifted lay persons is one of those construction projects that has been ignored, dismantled, not funded, or not considered a priority. The focus of recent documents from Vatican congregations has been on restricting, rather than expanding, authorization of lay preaching in the liturgical context. This concern is too important to give up on and I think we need to be at the forefront of keeping the question alive.

Although, she said, there was a need to “offer solid theological, biblical, and liturgical grounding for expanding the authorization of liturgical preaching by qualified baptized, but non-ordained, persons”; petitions to change canon law weren’t the best way forward “in the present ecclesial climate”. Rather, collaborative ministry of friars and Sisters and even laity seemed the most promising way around the roadblocks. She advocated also reframing: “Given the rhetoric that we often use in the United States, I think it is important –not just strategically, but also theologically–to shift our language from speaking of ‘our right to preach’ to the vocation and mission to preach.”

Shortly after it was delivered at the DLC meeting in 2007, Sr. Mary Catherine Hilkert’s talk would be studied by the Sinsinawa General Council as “proximate preparation for our Congregation plan to engage each other about the future of religious life and our future”, together with an article titled “What Religious Life for This ‘Other Possible World’” which seems to be about “decentering religious life from itself”, and an article by the Dominican Sisters’ NGO representative to the United Nations.

Efforts to implement the collaborative preaching concept included the formation in the US of Dominican mixed “preaching teams“, such as the retreat preaching pairing of Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Ann Willits (who certainly does also preach homilies at Mass, given the opportunity, see photos below) with some particular Dominican Friars. One of these priests certainly permits Sisters to give homilies at Mass, for instance approximately daily during the Sisters’ April 2011 General Chapter meeting: Father M[...] is noted as celebrant of the Eucharist, with a Sister preacher named, on the 6th, 7th, 8th (when the homilist was Sister Mary Paynter, the vice-postulator of Fr Mazzuchelli’s cause for beatification.), and on the 10th, a Sunday.

[There had been a bizarre controversy on SinsinOP shortly before that Chapter, however, which may help us to suitably appreciate the fact that they actually had a priest and Mass: Sister Donna Quinn wrote, entirely seriously, "Looking at the Agenda sexism through the use of the word



Eucharist...We have a lot of educating to do in this Community by our Leadership when one of the first items covered is to hire a male priest to lead us in prayer every day. I know I will be boycotting this time." Another Sister, however, was "very grateful to the hard-working Agenda Committee and liturgy planners who invited our brother M[...], OP to join us as Presider. When I heard M[...] was coming, I thought: what a gift to have one of our brothers with us! His presence will be a daily reminder for me of our wider family."]

The Sisters do not seem to have considered seriously enough that they may not be called at all to preach at Mass, that it is not truly fitting, that that is not at all important to apostolic Sisters' expression of the Dominican charism, and that their disobedience is not the *sacra praedicationis*, the holy preaching. The founder of the Sinsinawa Dominicans, Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, wrote in a commentary on the Dominican Sisters' Rule, about how the Sisters would fulfill the Dominican charism:

The Sisters, then, in teaching the Christian doctrine, by words and example, to the children of this country, where they are exposed to lose their faith, do fulfill the main duty of their vocation, and become the true children of their Patriarch [i.e., St Dominic], and worthy of the name of the Order of Preachers.

And this does not appear to have been viewed by Father Mazzuchelli as something lesser than the different and complementary apostolate of the friars:

The Dominican Sisters, by joining the army of the Church Militant against error and sin, become active members of the militia of Jesus Christ, according to their original vocation, which is the most glorious and exalted station in human life, and well worth leaving their homes, their relatives and all worldly affections, in the well grounded hope of that exceedingly great reward, the entire and eternal possession of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

This goal of the Christian life has been supplanted for some by the exciting temptation of "liberation" according to worldly criteria, ignoring Catholic tradition, discipline and doctrine,—as in one of the most radical Sinsinawa Sisters' October 24, 2008 SinsinOP post:

Nora and I attended the first Eucharist of an ordained Roman Catholic woman here in Bay area. She followed the Roman Catholic ritual, it was prayerful, the homily was inspiring. She was obviously carrying out what she felt called to do. It was an act of worship, an act of service; it wasn't a performance or a call to arms. The church was crowded, and so far — no excommunications. Kaye Ashe

This is going way, way too far down the slippery slope. And Kaye Ashe is not a marginal figure in the community, but a past Prioress General. Acceptance of lay homilies is certainly not identical with the acceptance of "women's ordination" (an impossibility, the belief in which confuses people and endangers ecclesial communion), but these interests often do re-

enforce each other. The results of that are extremely destructive.

Here in the local Madison area, we experienced the tragedy of a community of LCWR Benedictine Sisters that “went non canonical” and left the Church, now running a kind of pseudo-parish that hosts activist dissident groups like “Call to Action”, “Dignity”, and “Women’s Ordination Conference”, and features lay-led Sunday services they entirely seem to regard as the same as Mass. Yet this place, Holy Wisdom Monastery, continued to enjoy the support of some other religious, including some Sinsinawa Dominicans who continued to often give talks there, particularly the Sisters who ran Wisdom’s Well Interfaith Spirituality Center near the Sinsinawa-sponsored Edgewood College in Madison, and local Call to Action member and Edgewood Campus School trustee Sister Clare Wagner. In late 2012, the Wisdom’s Well Sisters, who liked to also give talks at Catholic parishes, were quietly dis-approved to give presentations or retreats on Catholic premises by Bishop Morlino, citing the religious indifferentism and new age-ism evident on their website. The confidential notice to priests was leaked (the SinsinOP evidence suggests this was by prioress Sister Mary Ellen Gevelinger) to the press, and the Sisters were claimed to be victims of a baffling persecution. At a General Council meeting at Sinsinawa Mound a couple weeks later, they were heroes:

On Wednesday, Dec 5 we had the privilege of spending the morning with our valiant women from Wisdom’s Well – Maureen McDonnell, Lynn Lisbeth and Beth O’Brien. We prayed together, shared feelings and experiences and discussed how we want to proceed into the future. We will continue to follow our contemplative stance, engage in conversations with professionals including canon lawyers and provide the media with our response of support of these women. At noon in the dining room Mary Ellen informed our Sisters of the presence of the three who were then greeted with a standing ovation, a very moving event that will linger with us. The three entertained long lines of Sisters who wished to greet them and personally share their support.

Even though it was public knowledge that the third staff member, Beth O’Brien, was a Holy Wisdom Monastery oblate, I don’t know how many of the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters understood Sr. Maureen and Sr. Lynn were going to Holy Wisdom (and I have no idea whether Bishop Morlino knew), or the gravity of what was going on there. I knew it from reading Holy Wisdom’s newsletters on Holy Wisdom’s website. I subsequently seized the opportunity created when political celebrity Sister Simone Campbell visited Holy Wisdom Monastery to preach at their service on Ash Wednesday of 2013, and I delivered to Sister Simone and the former Benedictines a document of testimonies from a couple dozen local parish lay people who don’t believe Catholics should support Holy Wisdom Monastery. Because one or more priests attended a related event at that

place the following day, Bishop Morlino sent out a confidential letter (later leaked—again) to let priests know that they are forbidden to go there. As of right now, for whatever reason, there are no longer any Sinsinawa Dominicans on their schedule to give talks, either.

I'm cautiously hopeful for the Dominican Order, because the most recent communications from the international level do not seem to have the tone of activism in favor of women preaching at Mass. In January, 2012, a new Master General, Fr Bruno Cadoré, sent a rather profound and moving letter to the Order for a Year for Women and Preaching that had been entered into; this was of course passed on to the subscribers of SinsinOP. This letter only acknowledges the topics of women preaching at Mass, and ordination, before gently pointing us in other directions.

In speaking of Dominican women and preaching, it is not my desire to elaborate here on the topic of complementarity, which is so evident, nor on the topic of ordination and the ministry of preaching. As you have understood by now, the issue is not primarily what is done, rather what is contributed to the common good of the holy preaching, and how we may together be organized to receive what is offered.

There is realism and compassion here:

I believe that when we speak of Dominican women in their relation to preaching, we must recall the difficult experience that many congregations of apostolic Sisters and several monasteries of the Order are facing today. After years of growth and development, there is no sign of relief for the immediate future. We must face this challenge together, supporting one another in his or her own specificity and autonomy, while also witnessing that the mission of preaching, carried out together, is on one hand the fruit of all that has been sewn [sic] before us, and on the other hand, larger than the specific mission of any given institution. I cannot ignore the fact that it may be difficult to face concretely such a test in a realistic and creative manner, without resignation nor obstinacy. We must make an option for true hope in life, even when we perceive death up close, even when a large numbers of houses must be closed, and many beloved Sisters laid to rest in the ground. During this transition, we are in absolute need of our solidarity and our unity, so that we can prepare the future of the mission of the holy preaching based on our present strengths.

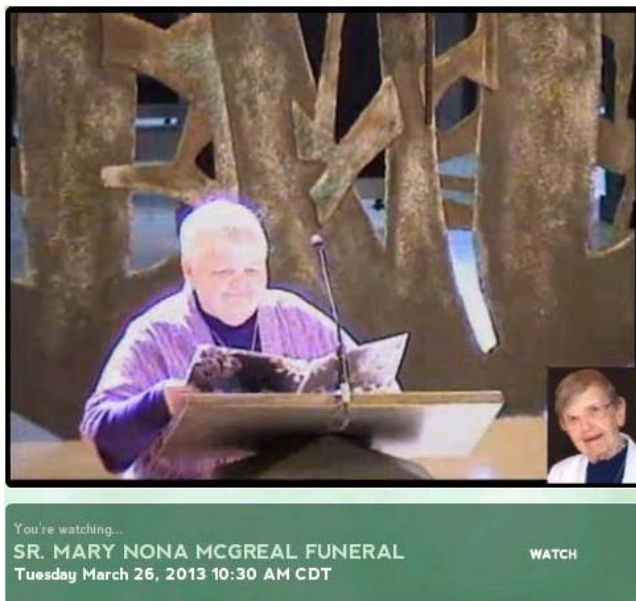
Meanwhile, the Sisters have kept on preaching at Sinsinawa Mound Masses, on selected occasions. Some are even occasions when the public is especially invited, such as Christmas Day Mass. Last year they started putting videos online, particularly of funeral Masses, so that far-flung members, associates, and surviving family members could watch. I blogged one occasion of a Sister homilist in a video on my personal blog in January. These videos are perfectly public and linked from the Sinsinawa.org website.

During Holy Week came the funeral of a most revered Sinsinawa Dominican Sister, Mary Nona McGreal. She was almost 99 years old, and

had been professed almost 80 years. Sister Nona had been the president of Edgewood College who built up much of the campus, and the great historian of the congregation's founder Father Samuel Mazzuchelli. It was she who wrote the *Positio* for his sainthood cause, on the basis of which the declaration was made of his heroic virtue, leading to his being named Venerable. Into her very old age, she continued to work on the history of the Dominican Order in the United States. She received a special honor at the 2006 Dominican Leadership Conference meeting, and at Dominican University (formerly Rosary College) in Chicago there is a McGreal Center for Dominican Historical Studies. It pains me, but there was a Sister preacher at her funeral Mass.

The priest says, in full:

The book of Ecclesiastes in that first reading said that “there is a time for everything.” And Sister Mary Nona had her own way of putting that as we see on her funeral card: “Providence finds everything in due time.” And so, when a beloved friend like her dies, there is a time for silence and grief. But there is also a time for speaking. Speaking in gratitude and reverence for this Sister who has so blessed our lives. An appropriate time not only to speak, but an appropriate time to have a particular person speak, who knew and loved her, and who can help us, in the light of our faith, to see the meaning of Sister Mary Nona's work in life, for us who are better persons for having known her. So, this is the appropriate time to ask Sister Ann Willits to share some thoughts with us.



Sister Ann looks very pleased. Of course, this is precisely *not* the appropriate time for Sister Ann Willits to speak. “Preaching by the lay

faithful may not take place within the Celebration of the Eucharist at the moment reserved for the homily.” That’s canon law, and there are good reasons for the rule. What she’s doing here is not the holy preaching.

She is skilled as a speaker and can do much good speaking at other times. Dominican Sisters International is focused on the New Evangelization this year; someone like Sister Ann could do a lot to help invite fallen-away Catholics to return to the Church and the Sacraments and the life of Grace, and to train other Catholics in speaking skills so that we can help with that too.

It is my belief that Sinsinawa Dominicans are intrinsically good, that one cannot even conceive of the great beauty and dignity of their souls, because made in the image of God, that they are loveable, that they are called to holiness, and that they must not preach homilies at Mass, and that the Dominican Order needs to permanently stop advocating in favor of lay homilists.



## 8 SISTER FRANCIS ASSISI LOUGHERY, WHO SPOKE UP FOR CATHOLIC BELIEFS

Ann Therese Loughery was born July 26, 1922 in Cicero, IL, to Cornelius Francis and Mary (Ryan) Loughery. She had two brothers, Gerald and Francis, and a sister, Dorothy. She received Catholic schooling at Mary, Queen of Heaven Grade School in Cicero and Saint Patrick High School in Chicago, then a bachelor's degree from Chicago's DePaul University, in philosophy and English, after which she taught for a little while at St Patrick High School.

She discerned a call to the Dominican Sisters of the Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary of Sinsinawa in her late 20s, entering the novitiate a year after a friend from DePaul, Mary Courtney, who became in religion Sister John Eudes. Ann was given the name Sister Francis Assisi. Some new friends for life would be made in the novitiate, particularly Sister Angela Donovan, who would serve as prioress at the two convents where Sister Francis would spend her last years. They made their first vows in 1950. During this period of temporary vows the solid course of studies appears to have included the New Testament, the Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the order, *Gospel of Jesus Christ* by Joseph Lagrange, OP, Fr Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange OP's *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* which was then very newly translated into English by a Sinsinawa Dominican Sister, *Religious Vows and Virtues* by Blessed Humbert of Romans, and the "Treatise on Obedience" from the *Dialogues of Saint Catherine of Siena*. Their final profession was in 1953.

Also in the 1953 profession class was Keverne (Kathleen, or Kaye) Ashe. These intelligent women would again spend a formative period of their lives together as they pursued advanced degrees at the Catholic University in Fribourg, Switzerland. A storm of culture change was

brewing, and in the whirlwind of the 60s and 70s Sister Francis Assisi, a prayerful woman profoundly devoted to the Eucharist, would hold fast to the Faith as it is proclaimed by the Church, while Sister Kaye's views would evolve toward the most radical feminism and antagonism toward "the institutional church." Kaye would become the congregation's Prioress General in 1986—while Sister Francis Assisi was doing her best to incarnate a more traditional way of religious life. Many others, both the radical sort and the traditional sort, would leave the community, but these remained. When Sister Francis Assisi passed away in 2003, Sister Kaye, writing on SinsinOP, remembered "her witticisms when we were postulants and novices, her authentic holiness, her principled fidelity to her convictions about our shared religious commitment."

After Profession, Sister Francis Assisi taught Latin and English for five years at the congregation's Bethlehem Academy in Faribault, MN. Mother Mary Benedicta Larkin was elected prioress in 1955, and at the time no one suspected she would be the last to be called Mother Superior. Mother Benedicta must have been aware of Sister Francis Assisi's good qualities, since soon after her 1955 election Sr. Francis was made mistress of novices and of postulants, from 1956-1958. One of her postulants recalled her dry wit:

She was a spiritual lady with a wonderful sense of humor as some have already mentioned. My favorite memory, when we were postulants in 1957: Saturday afternoon we assembled to study as we took showers and baths to get ready for Sunday. This particular Saturday we were studying in silence and Sr. Francis was at her desk reading. We heard footsteps from the third floor approaching with great speed to the doorway of the postulant's room. As I recall it was [...] who said breathlessly, "Sister, there's a bat in my tub." We began to giggle and Sr. Francis looked up and calmly said, "What's the matter, Sister, didn't he sign up?" That was the end of studying. For those who do not know, we had to sign up for a time as there were so many of us. Sr. Francis had a gentle and loving way with all of us.

And the very Sister said to have startled the bathing bat wrote:

I remember Sister Francis Assisi with great fondness. Even though she seemed a little too heavenly for me when I was a postulant, I grew to love and respect her deeply. She was not afraid to speak her truth in spite of what others thought. Her life will always challenged me to search for the truth and live it.

After this service, Francis Assisi was sent to the Sinsinawa Dominicans' Villa des Fougères in Fribourg, Switzerland, the residence for the Rosary College study-abroad program, to attend the University in that city. It was a rich cultural as well as academic experience, and there was the opportunity to travel to see other parts of Europe. The Second Vatican Council met from 1962-1965. Fribourg seems to have been at that time a place where the university had a conservative reputation, but where theological

trajectories issuing out of various disturbed cultural and historical contexts were developing in quite opposite directions.



*Villa des Fougères today.*

Two of Rosary-in-Fribourg's teachers of this era illustrate this vividly. Prior to rising to fame and great influence as a post-Christian radical feminist lesbian theologian, Mary Daly taught philosophy and/or theology at the Sinsinawa Dominicans' Ecole de Hautes Etudes at Villa des Fougères, from 1959-1966. Sister Kaye Ashe, director and superior of the house from 1961-1968, had already been influenced while a student at Rosary College in Chicago, by a fellow Sinsinawa Dominican on the leading edge of the feminist movement, Sr. Albertus Magnus McGrath (see also my review of Sister Albertus Magnus' 1972 radical feminist book *What a Modern Catholic Believes about Women*). Mary Daley's thoughts resonated with Kaye. She says that in 2006 she told an audience of priests in Berkeley,

[I]n Fribourg, Switzerland, where I got my doctorate I met Mary Daly, who was earning a doctorate in theology and philosophy, and working on her first book "The Church and the Second Sex." Even if we had a semester instead of a morning together it would be impossible to describe the kind of mind-blowing, transforming effect those books and scores of others since have had on the way I and millions of other women and men look at gender relations, at marriage, at the institution of the church, at history, politics, law, theology, ethics, friendship, scripture, the sacraments, the meaning of power and authority...in short everything that is of importance to us.

Daley thanked Kaye Ashe on the acknowledgements page of her most famous book *Beyond God the Father*, published in 1973, and Kaye mentions Daley prominently in her own books *Today's Woman, Tomorrow's Church* (1983) and *The Feminization of the Church?* (1997). They were still in contact in the 1980s before eventually the friendship broke off; Daley was not an easy personality: "She both thrilled and threatened me — thrilled me with the

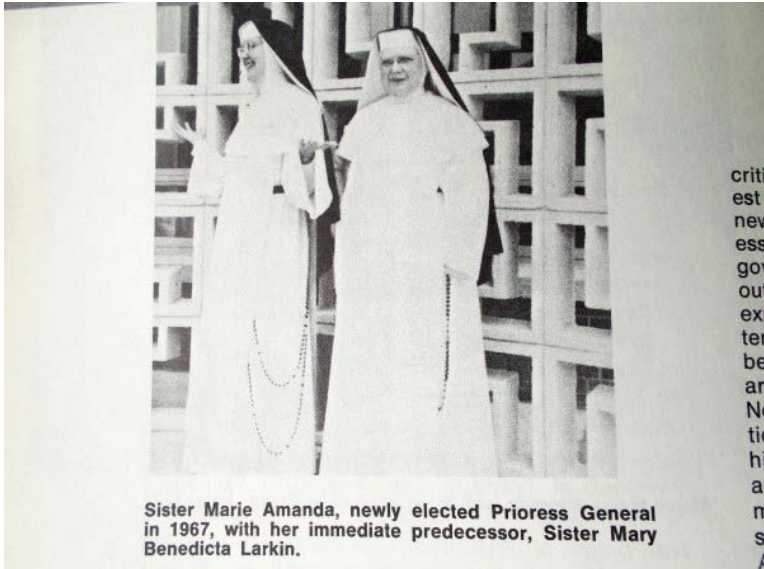


depth of her intelligence and the courage of her convictions, threatened me as a woman religious who intended to stay in the Church while she chose to leave it. ”

Another instructor with a very different theological orientation was Bernard Fay, a complex and controversial figure who Wikipedia says (based on a French language source?), taught French literature at Rosary-in-Fribourg during the 60s, though I cannot be entirely certain since this is not actually mentioned by any Sinsinawa sources that I can find,—perhaps for obvious reasons however. A Harvard-educated royalist French Catholic said to be an anti-Semite and said to be “gay,” he had protected American Jewish lesbian authors Germaine Grier and Alice B. Toklas from the Nazis. After the war was convicted of collaboration with the Nazi-cooperator Vichy regime (he was the head of the French National Library at this time, and was the Vichy government’s anti-freemasonry director whose cooperation is said to have led to many freemasons’ deportation to death camps) and imprisoned, then escaped, partly with financial help from Toklas, and fled to Switzerland. The outcome of Vatican II was especially disturbing for French Catholics of Fay’s sensibilities, and he wound up being one of a small group that caused Fribourg to become the place of the founding of the Society of Saint Pius X, among the others were such sound Catholics as Fr Marie-Dominique Philippe who became founder of the excellent religious order the Community of St John, and Cistercian Abbot Bernhard Kohl. Initially that Society had permission of the local bishop to continue traditional formation of seminarians, but within a few years it sadly parted from the unity of the Church. The biography of the SSPX founder, then-recently-retired Master General of the Holy Ghost Fathers, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, records this, only short months after the approval of the *Novus Ordo Missae*:

It was then on June 4, 1969 when Professor Bernard Fay, Father Marie-Dominique, O.P., Dom Bernard Kaul, Father d’Hauterive and Professor Jean-Francois Braillard met with Archbishop Lefebvre on the dilemma. They took the aging prelate “by the scruff of the neck” and insisted “something must be done for these seminarians!” The “something” they had in mind was that Archbishop Lefebvre establish a seminary.

Strange but true: figures who would spark the most radical anti-Catholic feminism, *and* ultra-traditionalism, were teaching at the Sinsinawa Dominicans’ villa in Fribourg in the turbulent ’60s, with perhaps the effect of mutual scandal. At the same time, Rosary-in-Fribourg was not without fun; Kaye Ashe remembered fondly after Francis’ passing in 2003 “years spent in Fribourg together, and her spirited participation in the games and treasure hunts we devised to entertain ourselves.” In this milieu, Sister Francis Assisi earned a Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree from the University of Fribourg in 1961, and a Licentiate (like a Master’s degree) in the same field in 1963.



**Sister Marie Amanda, newly elected Prioress General in 1967, with her immediate predecessor, Sister Mary Benedicta Larkin.**

*Meanwhile, an era ended, with the election at the 1967 General Chapter of a change-oriented new prioress and the ushering in of a period of experimentation meant to discern how to appropriately make changes called for by Vatican II, to culminate in new Constitutions submitted to the Holy See's Congregation for Religious in 1977, which were approved in 1980. 1967 photo appeared in ExCHANGE, Summer 1977.*

In 1966 or 67 Sister Francis Assisi returned to Wisconsin to work on her thesis at Sinsinawa Mound where Mother Benedicta's grand project of the new round chapel and auditorium complex and the huge new dormitories were freshly completed (in the optimism of 1960 the plans were drawn with rooms for 300 novices, though by the time of the project's completion in 1966 the actual number of novices had plunged from 150 annually to several dozen. As of this writing, there is only one novice, who studies with novices from other Dominican congregations at a collaborative novitiate in Saint Louis.). Sister Francis then taught theology and Scripture at Madison's Edgewood College in 1968-69, before moving back to the Sinsinawa motherhouse where she taught sacramental theology from 1970-1972. Sinsinawa Mound had just experienced, in 1969, the end of a long era with the closing of the Saint Clara Academy girls' boarding school, the school that had originally been founded by Father Samuel Mazzuchelli in Benton, WI—to the great distress of some Sisters and alumnae. A coed day school, Sinsinawa Mound High School, continued to operate for a time.

According to the *Mazzuchelli Guild Bulletin* of Winter 1970-71, Sister Francis Assisi was also the Sinsinawa Mound Archivist starting in 1970, and gave talks to lay groups such as the Catholic Daughters of America and the Mazzuchelli Assembly of the Knights of Columbus, the organization which

subsequently undertook the effortful, costly, and wonderful work of fully restoring Father Mazzuchelli's Saint Augustine Church in New Diggings. They now maintain this precious and unique church, still very similar to how it was in pioneer times, as a museum.

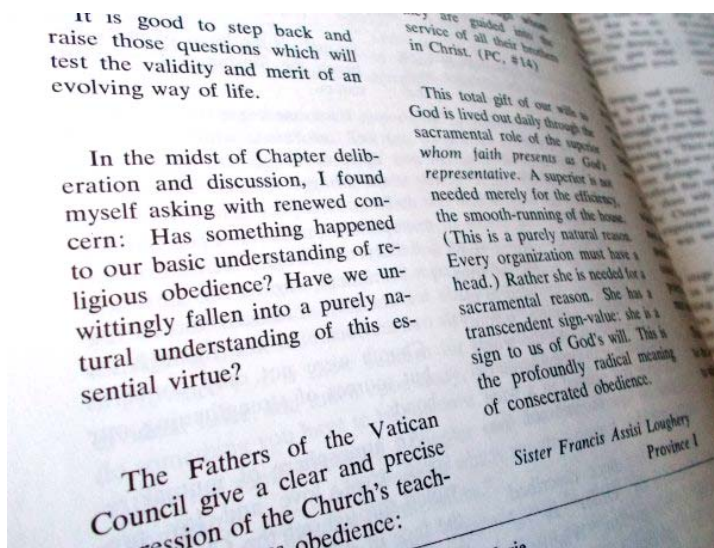
Sister Francis' thesis was under the direction of the great Irish Dominican sacramental theologian Father Colman E. O'Neill. This wasn't solely about books and fine Thomistic argument. Sister Angela Donovan, who seems to have been a close friend of her last years, said at her wake: "Francis spent hours in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Her love of the Eucharist was not only a spiritual exercise but the cause and completion of her doctoral work." Her thesis was titled "The Eucharist, the End of All the Sacraments According to Saint Thomas and His Contemporaries," and earned for her in 1971 a Doctorate of Sacred Theology from the University of Fribourg. This qualified her to become a member of the Catholic Theological Society of America, into which she was inducted the same year.

One source insists that none of the Congregation's colleges ever would hire Sister Francis Assisi Loughery to a teaching position; I am not clear on why this was said, except that Sister Francis' orthodoxy seemed to have some relevance. The information that she briefly was at Edgewood College is from the congregation's official obituary, however it's perfectly true she never was employed at any of the Sinsinawa colleges after that.

She engaged in some kind of further study at Union Theological School in Chicago. In 1972 she participated as a member of the Provincial Chapter for the Northwest Province, then the following year was an alternate delegate on behalf of her province, at the 1973 General Chapter. In the October, 1972 issue of *ExCHANGE* magazine, participants in the four Provincial Chapters that had recently met gave their impressions of the chapter meeting. Sister Francis concernedly made note of one of the most serious shifts she was observing, the redefining of religious "obedience" according to democratic principles, such that now many Sisters understood obedience to be owed to the decisions of the group, not really to a superior who would consult with subjects but still exercise personal authority in a sacred way. This seems to have created increasing difficulties as they struggled to edit their Constitutions in a way that could both enable them to live in accord with their altered understanding of the matter, and still gain approval of this essential text by the Congregation for Religious which necessarily upholds the Church's view. Sister Francis Assisi quoted the Second Vatican Council document *Perfectae Caritatis* to show that is indeed still the Church's understanding of religious obedience.

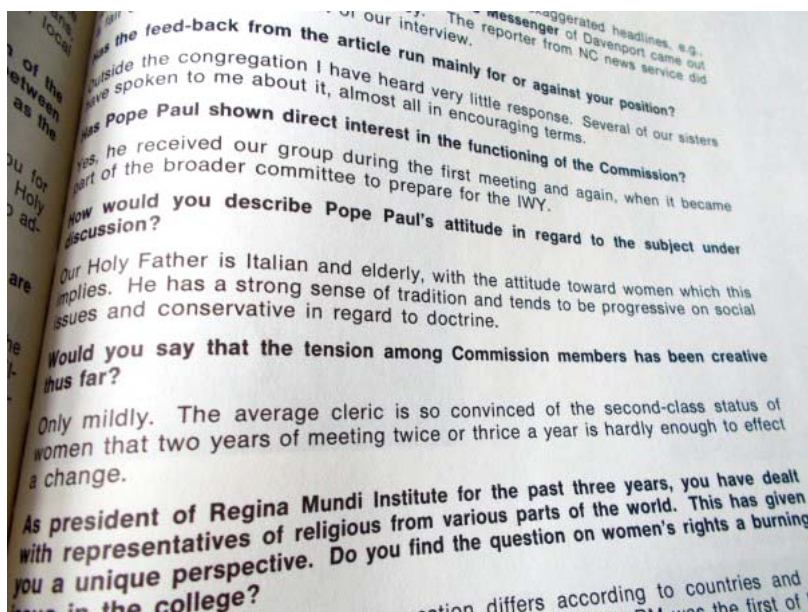
Through the profession of obedience, religious offer to God a total dedication of their own wills as a sacrifice of themselves; they thereby unite themselves with greater steadfastness and security to the saving will of God. In this way they follow the pattern of Jesus Christ, who came to do the

Father's will... Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, religious submit themselves to their superiors, whom faith presents as God's representatives, and through whom they are guided into the service of all their brothers in Christ. (PC, #14)



*Sister Francis Assisi Loughery writes in the October 1972 edition of the Sinsinawa Dominicans' ExCHANGE magazine.*

Sister Francis was invited in the same year to teach theology at Regina Mundi, the college in Rome for Sisters and lay women, which she did from 1973-1978. Regina Mundi was may not have been a bed of roses either; the president at the time was Scottish-born Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Teresa Avila MacLeod (who later went by the name Catriona), a past Rosary College professor whom a 1973 UK Catholic Herald article indicates intended to include discussion of "women's ordination" on the agenda of a Commission on Women and Society to which she had been appointed by Pope Paul VI, regardless of the fact a memorandum had been sent emphasizing that this topic must be excluded. The Fall, 1975 issue of Sinsinawa's ExCHANGE magazine includes an extensive interview with her, particularly regarding her controversial statements to the press as a member of this Women's Commission:



*In an interview published in the Fall, 1975 issue of the Sinsinawa Dominicans' community-change-oriented magazine, ExCHANGE, Sister Teresa Avila (Catriona) MacLeod discusses Pope Paul VI and the Commission on Women to which he appointed her.*

Besides teaching at Regina Mundi, one may speculate that Sister Francis Assisi may again have been studying in Rome. Although no other sources mention it, one uncertain source states that Sister Francis Assisi was among the first women students of the Angelicum, the great University of Saint Thomas. This *is* a plausible reason for her to want to be in Rome. It is not clear however.

In 1979 she accepted a position as a research assistant with the Leonine Commission in Washington, DC. This effort was established in 1880 after Pope Leo XIII asked the Dominican Order to create a Latin critical edition of all the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas, based on the best surviving manuscripts. They'd been laboring at this immense, important, and to most people obscure, task for 100 years. Sister Francis Assisi was the only Sister to work in the American section of the Leonine Commission.

During the same time, Sister Francis Assisi's old college friend Sister John Eudes Courtney had gotten involved in some of the country's most noteworthy efforts of truly faithful Catholic education. Her experience and thoughts give a small glimpse into the type of concerns some Sisters had about how the post Vatican II "renewal" was going.



where will

Sister John Eudes Courtney, presently studying for a master's degree in religious studies at the University of Chicago, has an M.A. in English from Catholic university. She has been teaching in Sinsinawa secondary schools, and most recently in St. Cecilia Academy, Nashville.

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*ExCHANGE, 1975.*

Sister John Eudes Courtney had recently taught for a time at a Nashville, TN high school operated by the significantly more traditional Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia (who have continued to get large numbers of vocations, while that has been an ever slower drip for Sinsinawa), before returning to school herself to obtain a second Master's degree, in Religious Studies "with a concentration on hermeneutics and method", from the University of Chicago. She wrote a piece for the Winter, 1975 edition of Sinsinawa *ExCHANGE* magazine, in which she touches on the thought that "in the seventies, people act on emotion rather than reason," then appeals to the age's love for creativity by rather obliquely making a case for creativity in continuity with tradition, that joins together elements in new ways to meet the needs of the times. She argues that Saint Dominic and Father Mazzuchelli had this kind of imagination and creativity, and she puts this in boldface: **"their change took place within the context of a sequential structure."** The true creativity needed was not that of "the predictable conformist nor even the assembly-line, fashionable non-conformist." One of her hopes is, in that time when the core commitments of religious life were being redefined or abandoned, "the wealth of poverty, the fecundity of chastity, the freedom of obedience" could be rediscovered, and in that time when school teaching was being rapidly abandoned by Sisters, and Catholic schools left faltering without Sister teachers, as they moved into new, self-selected and sometimes even entirely secular work, "that some of our ex-teachers would return to the classroom with renewed elán."

After her studies in Chicago, Sister John Eudes got on board with an exciting new, faithfully Catholic college in Virginia, which would begin



classes in the fall of 1977. She became Christendom College's first librarian, setting up 4,000 volumes on its shelves. History also records she was a participant in the school's first ping-pong tournament. But the most famous fun fact about Sister John Eudes is that an old college friend wrote a 1962 autobiographical novel *Life With Mother Superior* in which the author's best Catholic boarding school friend "Mary Clancey" is based on her, and their hilarious, troublemaking escapades (actually, when she and the author were college age). This became a play and then a 1966 Hollywood comedy film with a lot of good Catholic "nostalgia," *The Trouble With Angels*. Sister John Eudes' schoolgirl character is played by Hayley Mills.

Getting to know about these Sisters a little made me ponder why a few held fast to the Catholic Faith that had been handed on, while many others embraced incompatible deviations. I think Sister Francis Assisi's devotion to the Eucharist was clearly one factor for her. It seemed to me that some lively and original minds, even "troublemakers," were the ones who held fast to orthodoxy—while many more conventional ones went along with the crowd, excitedly *conforming* to the trendy spirit of the times.

The late 1960s and 1970s had seen a period of freewheeling experimentation (ExCHANGE was the journal of that process), intended to sort out how to adapt to the new directives in the Second Vatican Council, but actually going far beyond that. This process culminated in the 1977 submission to Rome of the new Constitutions. In 1979, the Sinsinawa Dominican Congregation, then headed by Prioress General Sister Cecilia Carey, heard back from Rome that these all-new Constitutions, describing a significantly new and different way of life, had been approved, with only minor changes. The beginning of the letter from the Sacred Congregation for Religious is quoted thus in the congregation history *Let Us Set Out; Sinsinawa Dominicans 1949-1985*, by Sister Alice O'Rourke, OP.

These documents are not so much revisions of interim Constitutions previously submitted, but entirely new documents based on the experience of the Sinsinawa Community during the past ten years. They show, however, a careful consideration of the spirit and aim of the founder, Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, and of the directives of Vatican II, which are incorporated into the redaction. Certain amendments need to be made, but the texts, in general, are good.

This history also records that "since the work on the experimental constitution began in 1966, a few Sisters had resisted the idea of completely rewriting the constitution," wanting a continuity with the 1893 constitution that had been updated as necessary through the years. Sister Julius Loosbrock and Sister Magdalita McGinty made proposals to prioress Sister Cecilia in 1977, about what they believed to be essential features of apostolic religious community life. They also requested but were denied a means to bring their ideas to the whole congregation. The General Council wasn't open to the proposals unless they were reconciled with the

completely new constitutions that had been approved at the General Chapter (but not yet presented in Rome), but these Sisters weren't open to these new constitutions. While I have no detailed account of their ideas, one may reasonably surmise the way of thinking of these Sisters was more similar to what was at that time called the Consortium Perfectae Caritatis, and later became the "other" Superiors' group the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, which included groups of Sisters that didn't go along with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious' defiance of Catholic beliefs and directives.

In April of 1980, after the definitive approval of the constitutions, a small group of Sisters privately sent a letter to Pope John Paul II with requests for special provisions that would carve out a possibility to live their more traditional vision of religious life *without* leaving the Sinsinawa Dominicans. They wanted their own autonomous province, and privileges to include:

- 1) that of being governed by the Constitutions approved by the Holy See before 1967, duly adjusted according to *Ecclesiae Sanctae* [a document of instructions for implementing the Vatican II document on appropriate renewal of religious life, *Perfectae Caritatis*], the adjustments to be presented to the Holy See for approval.
- 2) that of submitting directly to the Holy See, through a provincial chapter, the names of those to be appointed by the S. Congregation to the offices of Provincial and Provincial Councillors;
- 3) that of receiving candidates, training them and admitting them to profession;
- 4) that of having an equitable arrangement with the Congregation for necessary financial aid.

When Sister Cecilia, the prioress, became aware of this via a June 25, 1980 letter from Archbishop Augustine Mayer of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, who was seemingly well disposed toward the request, she was determined in opposition and set about right away trying to find out who was involved and trying to persuade Archbishop Mayer not to go along with it, because it was not in keeping with the new constitutions. "She assured him that there would be no possibility of a financial arrangement." But he wrote back saying that he had both the power and the will to grant the petitioners suspension of whatever in the constitutions conflicted, and that they would have their own provincial statutes, which would be termed a directory.

In the Spring of 1981, ExCHANGE, the editors of which would not have known at the time that she was part of the group that had petitioned the Holy See, published an article by Sister Francis Assisi. It was titled "Reexamining Our Place in the Schools." The photo of her on the facing page accompanied the article. She quotes a message of Pope John Paul II to the National Catholic Education Assoc. in 1979: "Yes, the Catholic School must remain a privileged means of Catholic Education in America. As an instrument of the apostolate it is worthy of the greatest sacrifices." She





quotes also from an address of John Paul II to women religious exhorting their continuation in this ministry, in which he says women religious have made "an incomparable contribution." Sister Francis says that "Unquestionably, the Holy Father is asking religious to persevere in their teaching ministry.... Why then are we withdrawing from the schools, precisely when the Holy Father is asking us to continue?" She analyzes the reasons very astutely, and points out some of the new ministries, such as the increasing importance of

Directors of Religious Education and CCD teachers, have arisen as important needs precisely because of the withdrawal of Sisters from the Catholic schools and the consequent "weakening of the parochial school system." She also mentions a broadening of the concept of education to include other kinds of ministries. This was interesting to me partly because when I cited their charism as Catholic education to one Sinsinawa Dominican at the Mound in January, she looked honestly startled as if she hadn't thought of it as that in a while.

In freeing our Sisters for these various ministries, have we not weakened, have we not fragmented, our original charism? Does it make sense to protest we are dedicated to our Catholic schools, and then in the next breath add: the Sisters are free to engage in diverse ministries?

Then Sister Francis Assisi quotes the 1979 LCWR president Theresa Kane, who is associated in every Sister's mind with her very famous public call that year in Pope John Paul II's presence, that the Church "must" respond to the "intense suffering and pain" of American women "by providing the possibility of women being included in all ministries of our Church," i.e. ordaining women. What Sr. Francis Assisi quotes is Sr. Theresa Kane calling for "redistribution of woman-power if we are to be in solidarity with the poor" which "may even lead many to step outside of the established systems, to eventually withdraw from established ministries such as Catholic schools and health ministries." Sr. Francis is very clear that she does not agree with this at all (and by reasonable inference is suggesting she does not

agree with Sister Theresa Kane more generally). One could speculate that her concern to remain faithful to and revitalize the Sisters' ministry of Catholic education may have been for her a key purpose of the proposal to the Holy See for a province with special privileges:

The challenge for Sinsinawa Dominicans in the 80s is clear: we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly once again to the ministry of the Catholic school; we must establish again beyond doubt our reputation as Catholic educators; we must assume leadership reawakening the Catholic religious of our country to this privileged role of the Catholic school in the building of the Church in the United States.

It is an issue that calls for prayerful reflection, honest dialogue, courageous action. Ultimately it is an issue that calls for an unambiguous response to the more basic question: Do we owe any special allegiance to the Holy Father? Is his voice merely one among many?

"It was not until April, 1981 that the names of all nine of the original petitioners were known [i.e., to Sister Cecilia and the General Council], one of whom by that time had decided not to participate," writes Sr. Alice O'Rourke in *Let Us Set Out*. The eight were: Sisters Julius Loosbrock, Magdalita Ginty, Clarentia Kelly, Gemella McLaughlin, Mary Emily Power, Mary Rose Powers, Francis Assisi Loughery, and Mother Benedicta Larkin.

Sister Cecilia and First Councilor Sister Ann Willits met with Archbishop Mayer in Rome about the matter in May 13, 1981. She had a counter proposal of a convent under the ordinary authority of the Prioress General, with what she termed a "monastic life-style." This re-framing of the traditional way of life of active Sisters had negative connotations and also would have implied they were at odds with the intentions of the founder, Father Mazzuchelli, who wrote, in his commentary on the Sisters' Rule, of a monastic way of life as unsuitable for the Dominican Sisters—by which he *meant* that extreme fasting, totally enclosed cloister, and praying all day and in the watches of the night rather than service and teaching, wasn't for them.

On May 25, at the Archbishop's suggestion, Sisters Cecilia and Ann met again with Archbishop Mayer, with Sister Julius Loosbrock and Sister Maria Michele Armato present also; the latter was another supporter of the plan, who had been one of the translators of the new 1967 translation of Father Mazzuchelli's *Memoirs* published by Priory Press, and from 1967-1985 director of the congregation's fine arts college at Villa Schifanoia, Florence, Italy. Sister Maria Michele Armato subsequently left the Sinsinawa Dominicans and founded a new Dominican community in Flemington, New Jersey, the Dominican Sisters of Divine Providence, which is a member of the more traditional Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious rather than the LCWR. According to the page on the CMSWR site, "Their main purpose as religious is to be deeply immersed in God through a serious prayer life. The specific work of the community is the

spreading of the Kingdom of God through the apostolate of teaching.”

From the meetings there resulted an agreement approved by Archbishop Mayer, that the petitioners would be allowed to found a convent as a five year experiment, and that it would be under the authority of the prioress general but not under the authority of the province, to be located someplace other than Sinsinawa, and with its own “special statutes”, termed a directory.

According to *Let Us Set Out*, work then got underway to craft this directory and come to an agreement, and again the Council had rather restrictive specifications for what could be included, for instance they stripped out apparently quite a bit of language “of a Christological nature” which the Congregation for Religious ordered added back in before approving the directory. I had to strongly wonder if Sister Francis was the source of this language and if it centered particularly on the Eucharist; she was certainly the theologian of the group, and in fact back in 1968 when she was at the Mound working on her thesis, had been one of the congregation’s two appointed theologians to evaluate and advise when they were drafting the interim constitutions for the experimentation period. An agreement was not reached on the matter of admitting candidates for formation, this was to be reviewed in two years’ time. It never did come to pass that the experimental community was permitted to admit candidates, nor, according to the Sinsinawa archivist, did they have any women asking to enter religious life through them. But this diligently-pursued and valiant effort, this dream that in hindsight *appears* to have been the last best chance for a healthy renewal from which growth in new members could spring forth within the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa, founded on those Sisters who still embraced the Catholic Church’s understanding of religious obedience, who embraced Catholic orthodoxy, who embraced living a traditional lifestyle in community, with traditional teaching apostolate, strongly caught my imagination.

They were offered a convent at the Cathedral Parish in Rockford, IL by Bishop Arthur J. O’Neill, the brother of a Sinsinawa Dominican. The appeal of this location was particularly that the parish had a perpetual Eucharistic adoration chapel (this was certainly Sister Francis Assisi’s reason for preferring it, and she would remain there years longer than the others), and that it was not far from Boylan High School, where some of them could teach. They called it Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Convent. The Holy See approved the group’s directory in January of 1982, and Sisters Julius Loosbrock, Clementia Kelly, and Gemella McLoughlin moved in the next month. “Sister Francis Assisi Loughery joined them on May 28 after completing her contract with the Leonine Commission in Washington, D.C. Mother Benedicta Larkin became the fifth member on May 31. On that same day, the community held its elections, naming Sister Julius as

prioress and Sister Francis Assisi as sub-prioress.”

My information about how all this turned out is perhaps too limited to conclude anything at all from it. The fact that it did not strongly succeed was not necessarily because of opposition from congregation leadership. I understand that the first Sisters, perhaps motivated by a sense that they were re-founding their congregation, had some rather rigid expectations, for instance, allegedly it was a very severe sin not to clean out the dryer lint. A Sister who had not lived at the Rockford convent but had some knowledge of it, thought that there may have been some very traditional expectations of the sort of keeping silence much of the time—though she was not certain the specific rules of the Rockford house. And the arrival of Sister Francis Assisi and Mother Benedicta, intelligent, humble women, which should have been cause for greater joy, somehow disturbed the serenity of the house; for whatever reason Mother Benedicta moved back to the Mound the next year. Sister Virgilius Thackrey joined in the summer of 1982, and in fall of 1983 Sister John Eudes Courtney (who’d been at Christendom College) and Sister Marciana Mayer.

Sister Mary Julius Loosbrock, who had spearheaded and led the initiative, transferred in 1986 to the well established CMSWR order, the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia in Nashville, TN. She served as registrar at the order’s orthodox Catholic Aquinas College in Nashville, before passing away following an illness in 2008. The Nashville Dominican Sister who contacted Sinsinawa to tell them of Sr. Julius’ death “commented on how much Sister Julius loved the Sinsinawa Dominicans.”

Although it is true that Sister Cecilia the prioress general did not like the whole idea and was not really supportive, the most proximate cause of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament never fulfilling the great hopes may have had as much to do with being frail and limited humans. God willed that they try. Being humanly successful is not the measure of who is a saint.

Sister Virgilius transferred to the congregation’s retirement housing Saint Dominic Villa in fall of 1983 around the same time Mother Benedicta back to the Mound, and Sister Gemella went to the Mound the following year. Sister Gonsalvo Manderscheid joined in the fall of 1985 and was there only till the next year, Sister Maria Giovanna Loffredo joined in 1986 and she also was there only till the next year, and Sister Rosa Rauth came in 1990 and was there until she and Sister Marciana were the last ones remaining there in 1996. Francis Assisi taught at Boylan and probably continued to until she retired to Trinity Convent in River Forest, Illinois in 1994. Her almost lifelong friend Sister John Eudes had become ill in 1989 and returned to the Mound, where she still lives, as does Sister Rosa Rauth, who can be seen playing a brilliant version of “Happy Birthday” on the piano with another habited Sister, in an awesomely cute YouTube video. These last two are the only former members of Our Lady of the Blessed

Sacrament Convent still living (as I write this in June of 2013).

Trinity Convent in River Forest IL, where Sister Francis Assisi retired to in 1996, was closed in 2002 due to the associated high school needing the space for other uses. The remaining Sisters moved to Divine Providence Convent in the Chicago suburb of Des Plaines, IL, a facility owned by the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth and used jointly by Sisters of a few different congregations. "It is a lovely building in a beautiful location near a river and a woods, near a hospital, near a golf course and a cemetery. We are sad to be leaving River Forest, but grateful to God and to our congregation that we can stay together as a community in a convent that will accommodate our needs," wrote Sister Angela Donovan, the prioress of the house, who had been in the novitiate with Sister Francis Assisi and subsequently become the first principal of Saint Dennis School in Madison. The last Sinsinawa Dominicans moved out of Divine Providence Convent in August, 2007 and the congregation does not seem to have any remaining canonical religious house with a prioress, outside of Sinsinawa, despite still having around 500 Sisters as I write this in 2013.

The SinsinOP email discussion list archive begins in 1999, and it was by reading that, that I became aware of, and a very great admirer of, the otherwise rather obscure Sister Francis Assisi Loughery, who at the time the first messages appear (1999) living at Trinity. In my quest to understand how it was that the Sinsinawa Dominicans had gotten from their holy founder Father Samuel Mazzuchelli, to apparently mostly believing in "women priests" as I had experienced in a surreal visit to Sinsinawa Mound to view a film called "Band of Sisters," had read through great volumes of Sisters' emails full of various dissent and things which caused me real dismay, when I found this one outstandingly good and true Sister, Francis Assisi Loughery. Sister Francis was not directly a member of SinsinOP, but on her request Sister Angela Donovan or another Sister posted her messages. This below is from the first, in July of 1999. It also made extensive reference to Chapter enactments and the Constitutions, which Sister Francis was calling on the Sisters to fulfill.

#### WHAT DOES THE WORLD NEED FROM DOMINICANS AS WE ENTER THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?

HOLINESS. Consider the incredible influence of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Blessed Padre Pio, whom our Holy Father recently described as "the Friar who astonished the world," the brilliant Carmelite mystic, Edith Stein, and so many other saintly religious women and men. Holiness is what draws people to the Lord.

Holiness is essential to mission. Indeed, holiness is mission. This is a recurring theme of Pope John Paul II. Speaking to priests and women/men religious a number of years ago, he made clear: "Your first apostolic duty, [that is, your first mission], is your own sanctification... No movement in religious life has importance unless it be also movement inward to the 'still

center' of your existence, where Christ is." [...]

As we approach the Third Millennium, I maintain that HOLINESS is what the world needs from Dominicans, because holiness is our mission: our personal mission and our mission to the world.

Her reflection seems to have been stimulated by question #1 of a governance task force survey asking what phrase best describes the Sinsinawa Dominicans' charism. In another message the following month, she continues reflecting on the survey's findings.

Some Sisters—150, to be exact—think [our charism] is “preaching and teaching the Gospel”. I was one of these Sisters. We always seemed to identify our charism with our apostolate. This is a biblical concept (I Cor. 12:4 ff.), “charisma” is a gift from God for the service of the community (AN ANALYSIS OF THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT II, Zerwick & Grosvenor, p. 522.) There are 347 Sisters, however, who believe our charism is the essentials of our life: “ministry, prayer, study and community[....]”

Then Sister Francis Assisi does something so characteristic of her and so rare for anyone else on SinsinOP: she quotes a church document!

In the third chapter of DIRECTIVES FOR MUTUAL RELATIONS BETWEEN BISHOPS AND RELIGIOUS IN THE CHURCH, (a S.C.R.S.I. [Sacred Congregation for Religious] document), there is a section entitled “The Distinctive Character of Every Institute.” It reads, in part:

*“The ‘charism of the Founders’ appears as ‘an experience of the Spirit’ transmitted to the followers to be lived by them, to be preserved, deepened and constantly developed in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in a process of growth. “It is for this reason that the distinctive character of the various religious Institutes is preserved and fostered by the Church.” (LG 44; CD 33, 35)*

*This ‘distinctive character’ also involves a particular style of sanctification and apostolate which creates a definite tradition so that its objective elements can be easily recognized.”*

She suggests this could mean their charism is both of sanctification or holiness, and of the apostolate, preaching and teaching the Gospel. And this is a fine answer. The founder's own answer, though, shows Sister Francis Assisi even more brilliantly as someone who lived up to the Sinsinawa Dominican vocation. He affirms in his commentary on the Sisters' Rule that

it is the special vocation of the Third Order of St. Dominic to oppose religious error in all its forms; and in this country it has as great a work, and perhaps a greater one than the times of its holy founder [i.e. St. Dominic], because false doctrines and bad morals surround our Catholic youth on every side. The Sisters, then, in teaching the Catholic doctrine, by words and example, to the children of this country, where they are exposed to lose their faith, do fulfill the main duty of their vocation, and become the true children of their Patriarch [Dominic], and worthy of the name Order of Preachers.

The next month, September, another posting emphasized the call to holiness as essential to getting vocations, the dearth of which had become an increasing crisis: “Holiness attracts new members; holiness sustains

veteran members. For many of us, when we prostrated before the altar on profession day, the choir sang the responsory: AMO CHRISTUM. Our religious life is merely a deepening of that same theme. This is our theme song: AMO CHRISTUM.”

In the reflection Angela Donovan gave at Sister Francis Assisi’s wake service, she spoke of their prayer life at Trinity:

Praying the daily office, Francis prayed aloud to the saints for all who are in need for our prayers. She loved our community fiercely and attended all Chapters, challenging us to be what we professed—of one heart and mind.

In a February, 2000 General Chapter report, we get a glimpse of Sister Francis Assisi’s witty personality and the affection between her and her Sisters. It sounds like she may have been framing in scholarly terms, the shared memory of when convent life and school life was so very regimented by bells marking off time periods: “On Friday evening we were royally entertained by Sr. Francis Assisi on the ‘Hermaneuics of the bell, the methodology of the bell, and the praxis of the bell.’” (The Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters’ 1904 book *Golden Bells in Convent Towers, the Jubilee Story of Father Samuel and Saint Clara* waxed poetic about obedience to bells at Sinsinawa Mound: “For the bells have no subjects so loyal and so prompt to obey as the true religious, to whom the community bell is ‘the voice of God.’”) A Sister who lived with Sister Francis Assisi at Trinity Convent (and who, perhaps I should say, did not know of this project) didn’t share all her sensibilities, but described her warmly as a holy person with a joyful spirit, who loved parties.

On May 23, 2000, she sent a message (via Sister Angela again) that I recognize the necessity of. When I’d been at Sinsinawa Mound in January both I and the friend I was with were told by Sisters regarding the matter of “women’s ordination” that one must follow one’s conscience. When I said that I believe the teaching of Vatican II that Catholics are obliged to form their conscience in keeping with Catholic teaching, the Sister I was speaking with was surprised as if she hadn’t heard that. She didn’t seem to know what to say. Another Sister seemed to have a “you have your truth and I have mine” attitude as if she did not believe in objective Truth. The Sisters’ misconceptions about conscience had been actively formed in that way, for instance late in 2012 following the release of the Doctrinal Assessment for the LCWR the prioress urged the congregation to view a video (summarized in my article on Truth and Conscience) arguing extensively that their dissent from settled Catholic teaching can be morally right and “licit.”

In fact, what Sister Francis Assisi tried to tell them in 2000 is the truth. Incidentally, as far as I can tell she *seems* to have been the only Sister ever to directly cite the Catechism of the Catholic Church as a source of information, in the 13+ year history of SinsinOP.

This message is from S. Francis Assissi Loughery.

What a sad contrast between Archbishop designate Edward Egan's pledge of loyalty and obedience to the Holy Father, and the oxymoronic phrase, 'loyal opposition' to the Church, adopted by Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice.

A number of years ago the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued their Statement on the Formation of Conscience. It read in part:

"For a Catholic, 'to follow one's conscience' is not...simply to act as his unguided reason dictates. 'To follow one's conscience' and to remain a Catholic, one must take into account first and foremost the teaching of the Magisterium. When doubt arises due to a conflict of "my" views and those of the Magisterium the presumption of truth lies on the part of the Magisterium."

Lumen Gentium #25 explains why:

"In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ, and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of soul. This religious submission of will and of mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*."

More recently we have the wisdom of the Catholic Catechism which our Holy Father has declared "to be a sure norm for teaching the faith." (See The Teaching Office of the Church, pp. 23-25.)

If we are called to proclaim the Gospel through the ministry of preaching and teaching, then the hallmark of our authenticity is our fidelity to the official teaching authority of the Church.

S. Francis Assissi Loughery, O.P.

The following day, the 24th, there was a follow-up message:

Yesterday when I sent an e-mail relevant to Frances Kissling, President of Catholics for a Free Choice, and her response to the Bishops' statement on her organization, I regretted that I did not have a copy of the Bishops' statement at hand. However, now I do. Her remarks should be evaluated in this context.

A Statement from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops: "For a number of years, a group calling itself Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) has been publicly supporting abortion while claiming it speaks as an authentic Catholic voice. That claim is false. In fact, the group's activity is directed to rejection and distortion of Catholic teaching about the respect and protection due to defenseless unborn human life.

"On a number of occasions the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) has stated publicly that CFFC is not a Catholic organization, does not speak for the Catholic Church, and in fact promotes positions contrary to the teaching of the Church as articulated by the Holy See and the NCCB.

"CFFC is, practically speaking, an arm of the abortion lobby in the United States and throughout the world. It is an advocacy group dedicated to supporting abortion. It is funded by a number of powerful and wealthy private foundations, mostly American, to promote abortion as a method of



population control. This position is contrary to existing United Nations policy and the laws and policies of most nations of the world.

"In its latest campaign, CFFC has undertaken a concentrated public relations effort to end the official presence and silence the moral voice of the Holy See at the United Nations as a permanent observer. The public relations effort has ridiculed the Holy See in language reminiscent of other episodes of anti-Catholic bigotry that the Catholic Church has endured in the past.

"As the Catholic Bishops of the United States have stated for many years, the use of the name of Catholic as a platform for supporting the taking of innocent human life and ridiculing the Church is offensive not only to Catholics, but to all who expect honesty and forthrightness in public discourse. We state once again with the strongest emphasis:

"Because of its opposition to the human rights of some of the most defenseless members of the human race, and because its purpose and activities deliberately contradict essential teachings of the Catholic faith...Catholics for a Free Choice merits no recognition or support as a Catholic organization."

S. Francis Assisi Loughery, O.P.

2000 was the year of the golden jubilee for the Sisters who had entered in 1950, including Sisters Francis Assisi, Angela Donovan, and Kaye Ashe. From Trinity Convent, Sisters Angela and Francis sent a warm joint thank-you message to SinsinOP, in which they also promised to have a Mass said for everyone who had worked on the Jubilee celebration, a list which did not fail to include the maintenance and grounds people.

What can we say for all your prayers and your presence at the Mound and around the world at the time of our celebration of Jubilee? Loving service that nourished our bodies, minds, and spirits surrounded us and our guests every moment of the week-end. Greetings too numerous to mention (our Tulip Bags are over-flowing) brought us joy and remembrances of Fifty Years of relationship with God and with this wonderful Sinsinawa congregation.

In July, Sister Francis Assisi again exercised diligence in informing the Sisters on morally serious matters, posting in 6 separate parts the entirety of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Notification Regarding Sister Gramick and Fr. Nugent", the notorious founders of "New Ways Ministries" outreach to homosexuals, who refused to state personal agreement with Catholic teaching on the sinfulness of homosexual acts (Sr. Gramick to this day is an activist against the natural moral law on this matter). Other SinsinOP members were obviously supportive of Gramick.

Former prioress Kaye Ashe, who had made final vows in the same year as Sister Francis Assisi and been in Fribourg in doctoral studies at the same time, one of the most radical Sisters in the community, responded with a three part posting of an article titled "Irreconcilable Differences?" by Sister Brenda Peddigrew, RSM, which generalized that Sisters "are unequivocal in their support for Jeannine's action, and recognize its larger implications," while on the other hand "groups express sadness and

personal support for Jeannine, but equally emphasize the need to keep open dialogue with the Church, staying away from condemnation of the Church's action." The author seems angry at this restraint on the part of the groups, and speaks of growing tensions between religious women and "the institutional church." She insists that "It is a documented pattern in the history of patriarchy that whenever more feminine values have risen to public recognition, thereby threatening to transform closed systems, a fearful hierarchical authority has stepped up its restriction of thought and speech. This, I believe is one way of seeing what is happening now. We are seeing a woman refusing to be silent about an action oppressive to her conscience, a woman refusing to collude with a structure whose main purpose is to control, not to set free." Pettigrew claims (wrongly, and neglecting to explain that Vatican II emphasizes that Catholics are gravely obliged to form their conscience in keeping with Catholic teaching) that the Church's action is opposed to Vatican II, and "Being silent about it perpetuates the mental and spiritual imprisonment that women of conscience can suffer within the Roman Catholic Church when their thinking disagrees with its teaching. It negates the prophetic role that is of the essence of religious life, at the heart of our purpose." There is no counter-response from Sister Francis Assisi, though we do not know whether because of the latter not being a member of SinsinOP, or because (as indeed is so) she has adequately fulfilled her moral obligation to tell them.

The next February, one of the (still) youngest Sinsinawa Dominicans, Sister Laurie Brink, who later became semi-famous when her speech to the LCWR citing the concerning fact that some Sisters are moving beyond the Church and even beyond Jesus was quoted in the LCWR doctrinal assessment, gives props to Sister Francis Assisi's warm exhortations on holiness: "I agree with Sr. Frances Assisi. When echoing the Pontiff, she urges us to respond to the call to holiness. It is the holy which called us here. It is the holy which sustains us. It is the holy in our lives, congregation, church and world we are called to proclaim."

In April of 2001 Sister Francis Assisi underwent some surgery, I believe after a broken bone, and was touched by the warm support of the community—one of their virtues certainly seems to be that they are there for the sick with cards and letters.

Her health difficulties did not prevent her from caring enough to post in July, apparently in response to Kaye Ashe supporting with "joy" the dissent position, a very informative and very orthodox explanation of why women cannot be ordained as priests. Sister Francis quoted *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* and detailed the Vatican's recent (1991) intervention to try to prohibit Sister Joan Chittister from attending the Women's Ordination Worldwide Conference, which was thwarted by Sister Joan's superior Sister

Christine Vladimiroff, OSB refusing to enforce the prohibition. Sister Francis Assisi emphasized this was a serious dereliction of the appropriate exercise of the authority of a religious superior:

Dialogue between superior and member are very important, but Vatican II makes a clarification: "...a superior should listen willingly to /her/ subjects and encourage them to make a personal contribution to the welfare of the community and of the Church. Not to be weakened, however, is the superior's authority to decide what must be done and to require the doing of it." (Perfectae Caritatis, #14) All religious superiors are bound to exercise this authority: to decide what must be done and to require the doing of it.

What a marvelous inspiration it would have been for Sister Christine's community —and all of us—to have heard her say: "Roma locuta, causa finita."

The Sinsinawa community had experienced a somewhat similar crisis in which the Vatican had demanded recantation from Sisters, including Sinsinawa Dominican Donna Quinn, who had signed a letter calling for the Church to be open to Catholics supporting abortion rights. The congregation had covered for Donna, who did not actually change her thinking or mend her ways.

A reply by a Sister who was apparently fine with the Erie Benedictines' dissent said:

Dear Sr. Francis Assisi,

I highly respect your opinion and your right to express it, but I must ask you not to speak for "all of us"; I was greatly inspired by Sr. Christina's statement as it stands and would have been greatly dismayed by "Roma locuta, etc."

What a courageous woman she is.

But was she courageous? She was guaranteed the support of most of the press, especially the dissent organ *National Catholic Reporter* (the favorite publication of Sinsinawa), and 127 out of 128 members of the Erie Benedictines signed a letter supporting Sister Joan's right to engage in "women's ordination" activities, while Sister Francis Assisi was virtually alone in speaking out within her religious community, against heterodoxy and dissent on this matter.

When I myself was at Sinsinawa earlier this year, and stood up in the large auditorium full of Sisters and was given a mic to ask a question to the filmmaker of "Band of Sisters", I questioned the inclusion of "women's ordination" dissent figure Theresa Kane and same-sex dissent figure Jeannine Gramick in the film and pointed out that "of course, the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women" (this is from *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*). The Call-to-Action linked filmmaker responded that "It takes a lot of courage to ask that question" and that Theresa Kane and Jeannine Gramick speak to a lot of people. After the film, I tried in vain to find a single Sinsinawa Dominican who believed as the Church does that "women's ordination" is not possible. I believe Sister

Francis Assisi was a truly courageous woman, and best of all it was courage with charity.

Sister Francis Assisi's brother Francis passed away in Chicago in mid May, just as the Sisters were preparing to move out of Trinity Convent and to Divine Providence Convent in Des Plaines.

This is a message from Sister Francis Assisi. Dear Sisters, Thank you so much for your beautiful expressions of sympathy on the occasion of my brother's death. Originally I had planned to write each of you a personal note of appreciation, but as the days of our departure for Des Plaines draw near, packing unfortunately takes precedence. Know, however, how grateful my Family and I are for your prayers and your compassion. At the Mass of Christian Burial, I shared an excerpt from a sympathy card we received the previous day. It read: Grief diminishes as memories nourish the heart. Your prayers and solicitude have already diminished our grief, and, in time, it will vanish; but the memory of your Dominican kindness will nourish our hearts forever. Gratefully in the Lord of Life, Sister Francis Assisi, O.P.

There was another, more unexpected loss in July, a 34 year old cousin who died suddenly in Florida. The Sisters responded, as is characteristic of them, with many prayers which were very touching to the grieving family. Sister Francis said, "What a blessing this coast-to-coast prayer line is! Thank you for using it."



By early November the 81 year old Sister was seriously ill, I do not know in what way, and under tender care at Sinsinawa Mound. Prayers were requested for her on SinsinOP on November 7th and by another Sister on the 8th. Her end was surrounded by the love of old friends, including Sister John Eudes, who watched by her side in the last days. "Dear Sisters, Sister Francis Assisi Loughery was called to eternal life by the Lord and Giver of life on the evening of November 10, 2003, in the 53rd year of her profession. Srs. Joris and Patty, two of her postulants, were with her when she died. How lovely is

your dwelling place, O Lord, God of Hosts!" *Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum*—Father Mazzuchelli's favorite hymn, from psalm 83, which was also for the Sisters the joyful anthem of their consecration to God.

After Sister Francis Assisi's passing, a Sister of a far less orthodox stripe wrote on SinsinOP that she found herself distracted by thoughts of her, particularly a strikingly warm memory from an Eastern Province Chapter meeting:

It was the last day and I was at the same table. The topic of Eucharist was being discussed. Sister Francis had a different theological perspective than all the rest of us. Yet there was a real sense of unity at that table. We all respected her and she in her own gracious way accepted and respected us. Her wonderful sense of HUMOR always came forth. Yes, she will be missed for her graciousness, her faithfulness, her kindness and her wonderful sense of humor. May she enjoy forever God's loving embrace.

As her body arrived to her wake service, Sister Mary Ellen Winston described Sister Francis Assisi Loughery as

a very gifted woman, very intelligent and yet humble in speaking about her achievements. She was diligent in her search for truth and not afraid to speak her truth. Francis grappled with hard questions. She had about her a presence, a peacefulness. Her wit and dry sense of humor brought us to another awareness of her many gifts.

Sister Francis Assisi's funeral was celebrated by Bishop Arthur J. O'Neill, who had invited the group of which she was a part to live at the convent of his Cathedral Parish in Rockford, and who became a friend. Her surviving biological sister, Dorothy Walsh, who has now passed away in 2013, was there too. The homily was given by Father Jack Risley, O.P., one of Sinsinawa's resident chaplains. Sister Francis Assisi's theological work on the Eucharist, he said, "was something she loved, something she had a passion for, her delight in pursuing the truth, her belief that any part of God's wisdom that she could obtain would be an 'incalculable wealth.' It would be to know Jesus Christ, and thus be 'filled with the fullness of God.'" She is buried in the congregation's cemetery on the western slope of the Mound.

Not only I, but others I have shared her story with are deeply impressed with Sister Francis Assisi Loughery. I had wondered if any sisters tried to counter the radical changes. Now I know a few pursued a valiant if imperfect and unsuccessful plan to carve out space within the Sinsinawa Dominicans for a more traditional way of life, re-commitment to Catholic schools, and reception of Sister candidates with more traditional expectations of religious life. They even had the support of the Holy See.

Every religious who stands up within a community environment of hostility toward Catholic dogma, doctrine and morals and communicates the truth in charity is to be commended.

# REVIEWS of SELECTED FEMINIST BOOKS

By Sinsinawa Dominicans

I. WHAT A MODERN CATHOLIC BELIEVES  
ABOUT WOMEN (1972)  
BY SISTER ALBERTUS MAGNUS MCGRATH

Later reprinted as *The Church and Women*, Sinsinawa Dominican and Rosary College history professor Sister Albertus Magnus McGrath's *What a Modern Catholic Believes About Women* was one of the early Catholic feminist titles, and seems like it was influential on Sinsinawa Dominican radical feminists such as Sisters Kaye Ashe and Donna Quinn.

Another title might be *What a Modernist Catholic Claims the Church Believes about Women*. It is a thorough and thoroughly tendentious and polemical history of Catholic thought about man and woman and the primacy or headship of man over women, with a view toward absolutely eradicating any such dynamic. The book's out-of-print status is now surely permanent, given Sister Albertus Magnus' prominent and unabashed exploitation of the n-word to equate the Church's attitude toward women with bigotry and oppression against blacks. *What a Modern Catholic Believes About Women* culminates in a call for "women's ordination" as necessary for justice.

*What a Modern Catholic Believes About Women* likely owes an unacknowledged debt to the similar 1968 book *The Church and the Second Sex*, by post-Catholic, post-Christian lesbian feminist "theologian" Mary Daly, who had been a teacher at the Rosary College study-abroad program in Fribourg, Switzerland and fellow doctoral student with Sinsinawa Dominicans like Sr. Kaye Ashe, while authoring that book. And Sister Kaye credits both books in her 1984 radical feminist book *Today's Woman, Tomorrow's Church*, which was from the same publisher as *What a Modern Catholic Believes About Women*.

A Chicago history source recounts how secular feminist politics in the couple of years leading up to the publication of this book undoubtedly

contributed to the militancy of *What a Modern Catholic Believes About Women*. “McGrath was a member of the National Organization of Women and an ardent proponent of the Equal Rights Amendment; she went public with her endorsement of ERA in an advertisement in the *Chicago Sun-Times* that featured her photograph and quoted her as saying, ‘Sometimes I think Illinois seems almost past praying for when it comes to equality for women.’” It was in 1972, the year of publication of *What a Modern Catholic Believes About Women*, that the ERA was passed by Congress, though it was not subsequently ratified by enough states (Illinois was one of those who refused it), which was credited partly to Phyllis Schlafly, a Catholic who argued that there was a danger the ERA would be used to legally persecute the Catholic Church for not ordaining women.

One excellent thing about Sister Albertus Magnus is that she does love Jesus, and she shows us how loving He was toward women. However, she contrasts Saint Paul.

A key impact the work of Sister Albertus Magnus seems to have had on some of her Sisters was via her teaching of “Paul’s denial that women are created in the image of God.” Whereas in Genesis 1 God creates man and woman both out of clay in His image and likeness, in the alternate creation narrative of Genesis 2 He creates Adam, puts him to sleep and takes out a rib, from which He fashions Eve as a fitting help to Adam (no mention being made of God’s image in this version). On the basis of this, Saint Paul says that man is in the image of God, and woman is like a reflection of that image. Paul says that woman was made for man and not vice versa. There is an ordered aspect of the relation of man and woman: the man is the head of the woman, an image of Christ as head of His bride the Church, for whom He sacrifices Himself—but Sister does not present the teaching as having such a positive meaning and purpose.

Sister Albertus Magnus quotes the medieval canonist Gratian stating straightforwardly what she wants to scandalize us with: “woman was not made in God’s image.” On the other hand, she tells us Saint Paul “badly weakens his own argument by admitting: ‘However, though woman cannot do without man, neither can man do without woman, in the Lord; woman may come from man, but man is born of woman—both come from God.’” Also, she tells us Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas both held that both woman and man are in the image of God in the faculties of the soul of intellect, will and memory. Sister does not want us to long suspect that the equal dignity of man and woman (though toward the end of the book she quotes St Pius XII saying so) is the Catholic belief:

But woman is still second-rate in the Catholic view. While she shares the essential character, the possession of intellect and will, she is inferior (in an approved 1960 Catholic publication) in the accidental qualities, the natural and supernatural virtues which perfect the essential likeness. The intellectual



virtues of reason and understanding, the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, the theological virtues of faith, hope and love are all found in higher degree in man (says this authority) *because* Paul says that “man is the head of the woman.”

Her source for this “information” about “the Catholic view” is neither Saint Augustine nor Saint Thomas. It is not from some Papal Encyclical. It’s not Vatican II, Vatican I, or the Council of Trent. Rather, from it’s an 1884 Catholic dictionary that had gone through several rounds of revisions prior to the 1960 17th edition Sister referred to.

Until Saints Dominic and Francis of Assisi founded the first mendicant orders of friars to re-evangelize Europe in the 12th century, there existed no other form of religious life (i.e. vowed life in community founded on the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, and formally recognized by the Church) than monastic life, and for centuries more after that, the female Franciscan and Dominican religious, and all other women religious, remained monastic and contemplative, the praying heart of the Church. The men were the “first order,” the nuns the “second order,” and there was also a third order, a.k.a. brothers and Sisters of penance, comprised of lay people. Apostolic religious Sisters arose not so much from the monastic nuns as from these and other lay movements which (though the road was rough) increasingly proved their worth, won popular and ecclesiastical acceptance, and eventually became classed as a new category of women’s religious life. But all that is how I myself describe it. I was pretty bothered by Sister Albertus Magnus’ pitting modern apostolic religious life as a superior form of women’s religious life compared with what is in fact a significantly different way of life of traditional monastics, and painting monastic nuns as victims almost in the pattern of anti-Catholic literature of yore. The thrust of her version of the history of Sisters focuses heavily on the idea that monasteries were basically a medieval “refuge for surplus females” upon which men imposed “minute restrictions” and “minute details about windows, walls, moats, hedges.”

What the official Church sought (with more or less consistency) as the ideal condition for religious women was that they should be neither seen nor heard.... [T]he motto dear to the hearts of the male clergy was always “*aut maritus, aut murus*” (“either a husband or a wall”).

In these past ages, it really was generally disadvantageous to be an unmarried laywoman (*What a Modern Catholic Believes About Women* points out the mixed blessing of the Industrial Revolution as a point when unmarried women began at least to have more economic opportunities), and some made immoral choices in the interest of supporting themselves. Sister Albertus Magnus asserts improbably that a particularly dismal observation about society constitutes “the Church position” on prostitutes:

With respect to prostitution, St. Thomas, following St. Augustine, states the Church position in this way: The prostitute is like “the sewer in a palace. Take

away the sewer, and you fill the palace with pollution... take away prostitutes from the world, and you will fill it with sodomy. Wherefore Augustine says... that the earthly city has made the use of harlots a lawful immorality (*licitam turpitudinem*).”

Some updating to reflect a greater sensitivity and respect for women has been a blessing for everyone. It appears that “the use of the woman” used to seem un concerning to male authors of (Latin) theological texts for male readers, as a technical euphemism for sexual intercourse. The phraseology recognizes that this act requires the physically active participation of a man; while the woman’s receptive physical passivity after having given her consent would not necessarily be an obstacle to its fecund consummation. But “use of woman” strikes women readers differently: “the wife as a mere instrument for the husband’s pleasure.” Sister Albertus Magnus, who far outstrips all the men in being full of insulting ideas about women, and is far more intentional about them, continually brutalizes us with more of her own “strawman” version of Christian doctrine:

The Christian era continued to honor woman as mother. Somewhat negatively, this honor was expressed in the view that woman required a double redemption: the one, universal, that she shared with man; the second, through the pangs of childbirth and the hardships of rearing children, redeemed her from the original sin of her femininity.

While the idea of men and women, husbands and wives, really loving one another is sadly not much a part of the book, Sister Albertus Magnus continually returns to a reductionistic view of woman as “an ambulatory incubator.” Her dripping scorn toward males chillingly overflows as apparent scorn toward the divine Paternity.

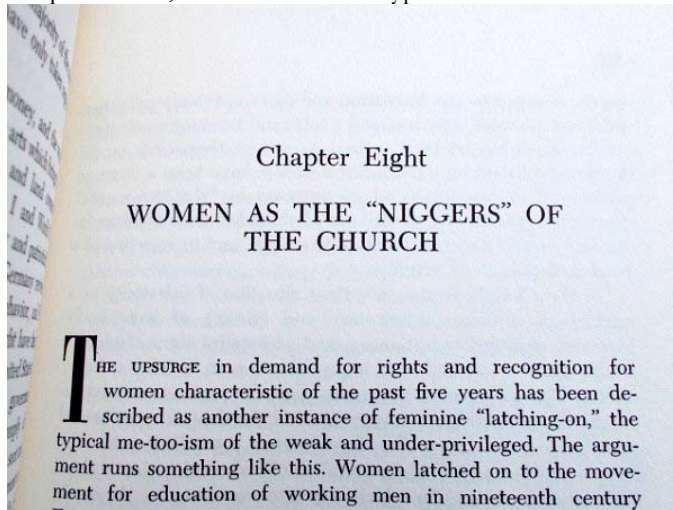
[T]he woman was merely a passive instrument furnishing in her womb “the good earth” in which the all-powerful seed could grow. Any woman would do for this anonymous function, so that the mother does not matter except as being sufficiently segregated to ensure legitimacy. One wonders if it is this view which requires that God as Creator be called Father.

As you might guess, Sister Albertus Magnus is also unhappy that “Methods of decision-making, particularly in matters vital to women such as the birth-control issue, serve only to alienate when they customarily ignore the wisdom, insights, and expertise which women possess.” Thus was ushered in an age of sexual corruption and perversion, wherein a great many women devalue and reject both the good of motherhood and the good of virginity—and, as *Humanae Vitae* warned, men have taken degrading advantage of the ever more ready availability of commitment-free, responsibility-free “use of woman.” Unfortunately, the hated term describes the reality in our brave new era of separating sex from parenthood, better than ever—men and women both use one another, often with no interest at all in Matrimony and family. Yet, from Sister Albertus Magnus’ perspective,

The sin of woman is too little pride, the retreat into the safe “little woman”

role, and a toleration both of the sentimental twaddle which characterizes much of the traditional preachment about motherhood and virginity, and of the Church as over-protective of women on the one hand, and on the other, as the land of the perpetual put-down.

The last chapter is this, which I refuse to type:



“Especially, the influence of the Black Liberation Movement has been great.” Sister Albertus Magnus calls the phrasing in the above chapter title “an almost inescapable comparison.”

Not *everything* in this book is wrong. This chapter includes one reasonable request: “It does not seem to much to ask that the Church repudiate the statements from the patristic age and after which see women as diminished and inferior beings.”

The Church and her leaders heard women’s voices about this. Blessed John Paul II in particular made a fresh, loving, and moving presentation of the Church’s view of women in his encyclical *Mulieris Dignitatem*, On the Nature and Dignity of Woman and his famous Letter to Women on the occasion of the UN Women’s Conference in Beijing (attended by some Sinsinawa Dominicans, though some people later questioned their participation at this famous family-planning-policy-setting occasion), as well as his famous series of audiences On Human Love in the Divine Plan, known as the Theology of the Body. A typical engaged, practicing Catholic young woman today has encountered this loving and wholly respectful contemporary presentation, is disillusioned with the sexual revolution and its ever more obvious harms, and has never met anyone who wants to argue that “woman is not made in God’s image.”

The denouement of *What a Modern Catholic Thinks About Women*, is a treatment of “one final question of the position of women in the contemporary Church which must be faced: the ordination of women to

the priesthood.” In addressing objections, she points out that God in Himself is pure spirit, and “to attribute to Him male sexuality would be a theological error,” and while I am going to follow up by going deeper, she is at least correct that “Jesus Christ on the other hand is undoubtedly male.”

Besides the fact that Jesus ordained men only in the Upper Room at the Last Supper, there is the fact that sacraments use specific signs, and for priestly ordination, a man is necessary. A woman is not an image of a husband or father; a woman is not an image of Christ as Bridegroom of the Church. I noticed something important that Sister Albertus Magnus does not acknowledge, either in the discussions of women as “ambulatory incubators” or in the discussion of whether maleness is a relevant and necessary attribute for a priest: the Holy Spirit is *the Giver of Life*. Granted, she is not a theologian. But we pray this in the Nicene Creed. She has wanted to demythologize “the all-powerful male seed” planted in the “earth” of the womb, and she points us to the scientific understanding that “two life powers, the chromosomes from both mother and father, neither of which has primacy over the other, unite in generation.” But her account, all too full of biological detail, neglects to mention that man and women are cooperators with God Who in a unique act of creation gives the soul of the tiny new person. This *gift of life* within the mother is an act of God, in cooperation with the parents. It is this new-created soul, united with the tiny and growing body in the “earth” of the womb that is the life and the ultimate controlling principle of the new person. And when the child grows, is born, and then is baptized, the Holy Spirit gives the divine life, the higher and supernatural life, the life of Grace in the soul, and makes it a partaker in His own life. That is the immense capacity that the person has because she is made in the image of God in the faculties of her soul, intellect, will, and memory, capable of faith, hope, and charity. If the soul were not in the image of God it could not possess these virtues which are the means of union with Him. It is not any distortion to call this loving giver, *Our Father*. It is a very tender name, and is a distortion to refuse to call Him that. It has to do with the nature of this relation of persons, not so much attributing to God Who is pure spirit “male sexuality” as such. In the humanity of Jesus, though, male sexuality surely is present.

Sister Albertus Magnus does not necessarily even ask the right questions on the subject of “women priests,” which for instance include: “How, if women are, as future priests are apparently taught they are, like brute beasts in their sexual appetites, can they be held to any moral accountability?” and: “First, what makes the result of baptism different for women than for men?” She tells us that the Catholic Theological Society of America suggests in a report “that deacons (and deaconesses) might well be able to hear confessions and give absolution, as well as to administer the Sacrament of the Sick.” Um, no. What on earth is the matter with the

Catholic Theological Society of America?

She feels that if there is to be any hope of them becoming priests, “Women must prove themselves in confidence and freedom in their lives in the Church and in all other aspects of their lives.... Women must work out on their own business and social life, in culture, politics, and marriage what the meaning of the Gospel message is in their complex human situation, without much expectation of, or help from authoritative voices which will comfort them that they are ‘right.’”

“The Church is not meant to be the Church of the hierarchy, the Church of men. It is the Church of Christ who loved and befriended and was served intimately by women.”

In this, Sister is at odds with Vatican II, because *Lumen Gentium* doesn’t want her to set these things in opposition:

[T]he society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word.

*What a Modern Catholic Believes About Women* is short and not too dense, and does have interesting information. It was a chore to read anyway, because it is tiresomely tendentious and negative. I longed for the author to approach her historical information in keeping with the mind of the Church. This book is definitely the work of a historian rather than of a theologian, but I didn’t know when to trust the way she was using her out-of-context quotations—I did not trust her much at all, since the way she was presenting “the Church’s position” was so continuously unfair. In at least one case I looked something up in the *Summa Theologiae* and found that what she had quoted via another author wasn’t what it seemed, it was from one of the “objections.”

In the case of Saint Paul and the matter of headship, I dug into what he was saying and looked at notes in several Bibles, as well as other sources, to understand it and wound up really appreciating that Sister Albertus Magnus had drawn my attention to something that is usually glossed over. I was not offended by what Saint Paul was saying, especially since he elsewhere values mutuality, and since I saw it oriented above all to Christ as head of the Church, Matrimony having a high dignity as a holy image of that, and as a lay woman dedicated to Him in single-heartedness and chastity, I am very happy to acknowledge Jesus’ headship over me. I have not been a chapel veil wearer, but a little bit of study occasioned by reading this book made that practice much more meaningful to me. How can someone be familiar with the Annunciation and the Beatitudes and “the last shall be first”, and think that any Christians, men or women, must fight any imputation of our own lowliness tooth and nail?

## II. *THE FEMINIZATION OF THE CHURCH?* (1997) BY SISTER KAYE ASHE

Sister Kaye Ashe, Prioress General of the Sinsinawa Dominicans from 1986-1994, issues a strident call in her 1997 book *The Feminization of the Church?* for “affirmative action” to “feminize” the Catholic Church by changing meanings and practices. This was published by the National Catholic Reporter, an organization that is afoul of canon law in numerous ways, according to their local bishop. This book is an inside look at how radical feminist heretics think. It proposes socialism and Marxism as corrective to traditional ethics, suggests female friendship as the ideal model of all relationships among created beings, and approves of Catholic women who make up their own all-women liturgies instead of going to Mass. This book is, in short, absurd, chilling, post-Catholic and anti-Catholic.

This is not Sister Kaye’s first radical feminist book; she had penned one called *Today’s Women, Tomorrow’s Church* in 1983. Its themes are similar and overlap, but *Today’s Woman* is above all preoccupied with enthusiasm for the sexual revolution. Sister Kaye encourages rejection of Catholic teaching on matters such as premarital sex and homosexual behavior.

*The Feminization of the Church?* includes a forward by heresiarchess Sister Joan Chittister, in which Sister Joan speaks approvingly of mothers who “edit” their children’s catechesis, as part of mounting “a clear and confident contradiction of canons and practices and moral instructions based on the inferiority of women, the inequality of the sexes, and the invisibility of women in the church. They debate such subjects in the presence of their children.” Sister Joan explains: “That kind of catechesis builds another church in the shell of the old one.” That doesn’t bother Sister Joan: “It is a new church, whether anyone wants it to be new or not.” She sees Sister Kaye’s book as sounding the alarm that the Church needs to accept

feminism as the way to “wholeness,” or else become “redundant.”

Sister Kaye cites an article by Christine E. Gudorf (who states in her 1995 book *Body, Sex and Pleasure*, that “the entire approach of Christian sexual ethics has been and is grievously flawed....ignorance which has allowed and supported patriarchy, misogyny, and heterosexism, the assumption that heterosexuality is normative”) to suggest that “the church lost public status and credibility in the political realm when it protested the scientific discoveries and the rule of the scientific method that began in the 16th century” leading to the Church being seen as domestic and private—“feminine”. Vatican II sought to move the Church back to the public sphere, Kaye says, and explains:

It is my intention in this book to examine further the potential of feminist analysis to bring the church and its members to greater wholeness. I will not, as Gudorf does, look upon feminist theory as a means of recovery from the church’s “feminization.” I will see it rather as a means of effecting the feminization of the Church understood as the full inclusion of women in the life of the church.

Women have, of course, always been fully included in the life of the Church, but as we shall see, what she means is the full inclusion of women in the priesthood and wielding power.

She begins by defining spirituality as now having to do with “self-fulfillment” and “consciousness”, without reference to growth in holiness, and immediately moves on to critique of great classic spiritual books as promoting a masculine spirituality which women (according to her) cannot relate to. She mocks the Desert Fathers’ “futile attempts to rid themselves of sexual fantasies” and references critique of the ascetical practices of the desert monks in the feminist screed *Pure Lust* by Mary Daly, about which see Janet Smith’s critique on the website of the Archdiocese of Detroit. Kaye astonishingly dismisses the women penitents who left a sinful way of life and “adopted unquestioningly and with enthusiasm the extreme asceticism that was the desert ideal” as having not “significantly influenced the spirituality of the monks.” I’ve read the book she cites, *Harlots of the Desert*, and it in fact emphasizes how powerfully inspiring these women were to monks. But Kaye’s disappointment seems to be that they didn’t reject penance and asceticism. Then she lays into *The Imitation of Christ*, which to her is horrible for saying that “[s]elf-knowledge leads to seeing oneself as mean and abject, indeed as a despicable worm” (she doesn’t mention, Sinsinawa Dominican founder Samuel Mazzuchelli’s personal copy resides in the congregation’s museum). The *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius has similar flaws, she says, and she doesn’t like that it tells us the body and self are to be conquered. I wondered if Kaye had an alternate plan for or alternate way of speaking of overcoming lust, sloth, gluttony, pride, etc, but suspected all this was her way of saying that resisting sin was no longer essential to “spirituality.”

Sister Kaye likes Julian of Norwich quite well and sees her as saying sin ultimately has no reality, and she approves of Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, yet disapproves of her ultimately giving up her writing career in obedience to ecclesiastical authorities. Dorothy Day is “both an ally and a critic” of feminists. One of the contemporary sources Kaye likes is the non-Catholic feminist journal *Woman of Power*, and she prints its statement of women’s spirituality “for conscious evolution of our world,” which includes such new-age notions as “the activation of spiritual and psychic powers” and “the honoring of women’s divinity.”

Chapter 2 is on “Women and Ethics”. “So profound are the questions raised” by women’s spirituality, says Sister Kaye, “that Margaret Farley wrote 20 years ago of the beginnings of a moral revolution.” Farley’s 2006 book *Just Love*, which the *New York Times* says “attempted to present a theological rationale for same-sex relationships, masturbation and remarriage after divorce” was condemned by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith last year,—so, immediately the informed reader’s attention is drawn back to the undermining of Catholic teaching on sexual morality. Kaye laments what she claims to be “[w]omen’s exclusion from the human task of discerning what constitutes moral behavior.” “A feminist approach to ethics... deplores women’s continued subordination and seeks to eliminate it... This new awareness and the ethics that flow from it can be couched in the vocabulary and founded on the principles of various political traditions: liberal, socialist, Marxist, radical.” She seems untroubled by this, in fact after elaborating a bit she says this on the next page: “[w]e can look upon feminine and feminist ethics, then, as a corrective to traditional ethics.”

Let me put together for you what Kaye *seems to be proposing*: “liberal, socialist, Marxist, radical.... as a corrective to traditional ethics.”

The critique of Christianity continues: “Feminists are suspicious of the concept of total self-sacrifice as being at the heart of Christian love, particularly when the notion is applied primarily to women in the home.” Since in Christianity this notion is always, *always* applied in the first place to Jesus’ self-sacrifice on the Cross, and Saint Paul says husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church (i.e., totally self-sacrificially), I do not see where she is coming from. This applies to all Christians and I have never seen it presented as being “primarily” about women in the home.

Sister Kaye’s line of thought takes an even more disturbing turn when she introduces us to Dorothy Sölle, who, bizarrely, “suggests that ‘phantasy’ rather than obedience is at the center of the Christian ethical system.” Hmm. No.

Kaye moves on to how women have “sought control over their own bodies, especially in the area of reproductive rights.” People scarcely question now whether the Pill is moral, Kaye says, though abortion is more



complex. She asserts that “more and more Catholics who accept the Church’s teaching on the morality of abortion, nevertheless favor its legalization. Sr. Ivone Gebara, a gifted Brazilian theologian who was recently silenced by Vatican authorities, declared in an October 1993 interview for *Veja* that abortion should be a mother’s choice and should be legalized.” As I write this, it was not even an hour ago that I was with a friend who shed tears in sorrow over having aborted her baby boy years before. “I’m starting to become pro life,” she said. And I never met anyone with a more vivid tale of how contraception had harmed her health and made men feel they had license to exploit her. Speaking as a younger laywoman, these Sisters gravely misunderstand the reality, and *they make me angry*. Furthermore, Sister Kaye does not promote marriage or chastity as being good, and those things actually *are* good. Kaye simply wants “full recognition of women’s sexual rights, which does not preclude a profound respect for motherhood.” I want so much for Sister Kaye to know, women do not need a “right” to fornicate and abort. This only harms us, as way too many women know from experience.

This chapter finishes up with Mary Hunt’s (founder of the radical feminist dissent group Women’s Alliance for Theology Ethics and Ritual) proposal of “female friendship... as a model for relationship among all the elements of God’s creation.” How far does she care to take this? “Female friendship can, furthermore, serve as a model for male-female friendship, and for male-male friendship....”

Chapter 3 on “Women and Language” promotes of course the ideological feminist warping of English, even of Scripture texts and liturgy. This quite frankly includes editing the meaning of Scripture to fit feminist sensibilities: “removing the androcentric bias of scripture texts—a worthy and necessary task.”

Sister Kaye claims bizarrely that “women’s absence in liturgical language effectively excluded them from full participation in the life of the Church.” Was Saint Catherine of Siena effectively excluded from full participation? Kaye is upset that inclusive-language edits to the Eucharistic Prayers were not approved, and consequently “disaffected worshipping communities began to make their own textual changes, and... women continued to abandon corporate worship.”

Some women are creating “feminist liturgies” that “ritualize relationships that emancipate and empower women” and “critique patriarchal liturgies.” “Instead of receiving a blessing from a specially ordained man, the women present are likely to bless one other.” Sometimes, in fact, they do this kind of thing instead of going to Mass: “If, in order to speak and pray authentically, they must congregate in all-women assemblies, they will continue to do that.” But it’s a sin to do this instead of Sunday Mass, you say? Kaye says the feminist-liturgy women should “gain

confidence in their own perspective on what it means to be sinful.”

Chapter 4, “Women and Ministry” of course winds its way around to the topic of women and the priesthood. Blessed John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which declared infallibly that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women, “stunned, saddened and enraged countless Catholics” like Sister Kaye, who then in turn attacked the meaning of infallibility. She claims that “many respectable scholars... insist that a male-only priesthood is a matter of church order or discipline and, as such, cannot be made a matter of faith, much less an infallible teaching.” Although doubtless there are scholars who think that, their opinion is opposed to unchangeable Catholic teaching, and is not a “Catholic” opinion. From a faithfully Catholic perspective, such scholars are simply wrong, and this is an idea with terrible consequences for the communion of the Church, as sadly we’ve seen locally at a former LCWR community that became a non-Catholic break-away sect, Holy Wisdom Monastery.

Remarkably, Kaye Ashe does not ignore or shy away from the fact that “women’s ordination” breaks the Communion of the Church, but describes two points of view of women’s ordination advocates: those who believe ordination of women is compatible with the nature of priesthood in the Catholic Church and that change is possible, and those who acknowledge that feminist goals are not reconcilable with the nature of priesthood in the Catholic Church and “that women’s energy should be spent on creating a different kind of ministry in a different kind of church.” She cites lesbian feminist theologian Mary Hunt of the radical feminist dissent group WATER, as “a Catholic theologian who is in full sympathy with those who have lost patience for the patriarchal trappings of the church” and feels the best strategy for “the women-church movement” is to let the “anti-ordination” and “pro-ordination” “positions” “co-exist in mutual critique,” in other words to foster confusion and indifferentism, as the teaching authority of the Church is denied and truths of the Faith are downgraded to the status of issue positions to be debated based on secular feminist criteria.

Another thing I notice in Sister Kaye’s discussion of ordination is an omission: she does not present it as a Sacrament. She cites a Dominican friar I heard give an extraordinarily theologically dodgy talk at the Sinsinawa-sponsored Edgewood College earlier this year, Fr. Thomas O’Meara, who wants to define ordination liturgies “not as a liturgical exercise of episcopal power, not as something bestowed by juridical decree, but as a ‘... communal liturgy of public commissioning to a specific ministry.’” (Incidentally I recently obtained a book on “women’s ordination” by a Protestant author, with underlining suggesting the reader’s interest in how to promote such things, from a free books box immediately in front of the rectory where Fr. O’Meara lives in Madison--though it could

just as easily have belonged to another dissident friar, or even someone else.) And as if to make it quite unambiguous she doesn't approach priestly ordination as being a Sacrament, Kaye says, "And can we hope someday to arrive at a theology of ministry in which distinctions between lay ministry and clerical ministry, ordained and non-ordained ministry, will be meaningless?" Martin Luther and his followers had pretty much the same "hope" and consequently they do not have most of the Sacraments. As Catholics, no we cannot and must not hope for such a thing, since the distinction between who is a validly ordained priest and who is not has an absolute importance: only a validly ordained priest can celebrate Mass and validly consecrate the Eucharist. Realizing that most if not all "women's ordination" supporters have a very different idea of what priesthood and ordination mean to them (and consequently different beliefs about the Eucharist), at odds with what it is in the Catholic faith, is essential to understanding their movement, its non-Catholic or anti-Catholic nature, and how destructive it is to ecclesial communion.

The final chapter is on Women and Leadership, which makes it plain that the goal is *power*, a word Sister Kaye uses repeatedly. This is *spiritual bankruptcy* from a Christian perspective, but makes complete sense from Sister Kaye's Marxist-feminist perspective. Women are supposed to keep fighting for "public power" in civil society, and women religious must continue moving "from positions of dependence and docile compliance, to the kind of autonomy and rightful use of power that characterizes healthy adults." Then she makes some veiled allusions to situations experienced by her own Sinsinawa Dominican congregation, for instance in revising the Constitutions governing their way of life:

Gradually through resistance, dialogue and compromise in terms of language, if not on principle, congregations won approval of their reconceived and rewritten constitutions, and in the process succeeded in realigning themselves in relation to church authorities. The whole experience raised the question in many American congregations of the value of canonical status, and of the need to win the approval of men of another mindset and culture for the documents that embody the traditions and values that rule their lives.

In other words, they questioned whether they actually wanted to be a Catholic religious congregation anymore. There is also an account of the 1984 *New York Times* ad signed by many laity and also 24 women religious (among whom was Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Donna Quinn, who is not mentioned by name in the book), "stating that a diversity of opinion existed in the Catholic Church in regards to abortion." Kaye clearly supported this, and adds something that was certainly true of Sister Donna: when the Sisters and their religious congregations were required by the Holy See to indicate their adherence to Catholic teaching on abortion, "Many felt that the statements they signed or that the statements presented to Rome by their religious superiors did not constitute a retraction of what was stated in

the ad, but Vatican officials interpreted the statements as such and cleared all but two of the signers,” namely Barbara Ferraro and Patricia Hussey, who Sister Kaye claims are still Catholic and “now frankly pro-choice though not pro-abortion.” Then Sister Kaye tells of a Planned Parenthood who was excommunicated, and some Call to Action members who were excommunicated; Sister Kaye strongly disagrees with that. She speaks positively of the pro-abortion-rights organization Catholics for a Free Choice.

After her discussion of “women’s ordination” in the previous chapter that seemed not to treat ordination as sacramental, I was surprised to see her write this: “Protestant churches have opened the ranks of the ordained to women, giving them the right to preach and teach, and to share in the sacramental power that is granted with ordination....” On the next page, she writes of an Episcopalian lady “bishop” who was sent by a male Episcopalian “bishop” “to celebrate Mass” at a conservative Episcopalian church where she received an icy reception. I am under the impression that the use of the word “Mass” is not very typical of liberal Episcopalianism, so this seems to be Kaye’s own choice, making me wonder if she considers the Episcopalian service to be “Mass.” Again, the confusion about the Sacraments reflected in this book is extreme. Catholics don’t consider Episcopalian ordination to be sacramentally valid.

Is the choice for Catholic women really between siding with the radical feminist “Women-Church Convergence” and its feminist theology and feminist liturgies, vs. being “self-sacrificing victims, destined to abort their growth to full personhood in the interest of helping the men in their lives attain theirs”? Are women really to place their hope in “the uses of disorder in creating new possibilities for growth”? Fractals are beautiful, right, so making chaos in the Church and being “patient with ambiguity” might be the right way forward for the common good of womankind? Sister Kaye Ashe would have us consider that.

In her conclusion, Sister Kaye pulls it all together by explaining that the tool that’s shaping the process of the feminizing transformation of consciousness in the Church “is what Mary Fainsod Katzenstein has called ‘discursive politics,’” and quotes that author, who says this is “the politics of meaning-making. It is discursive in that it seeks to reinterpret, reformulate, rethink, and rewrite the norms and practices of society and the state....” Kaye states that “These, indeed, are the means that women in the church, and particularly feminists, are using. They are forging new meanings and constructing a new language to express their evolving understanding of themselves and of their relation to the church.”

If I understand her correctly, feminizing the Church means redefining Catholicism to be something fundamentally different. It is frankly political (even frankly Marxist) and involves radically changing what words mean,

the way that the Sacraments are understood and practiced, the way we relate to Scripture, the way we understand basic human relationships, everything—it involves changing *everything* to enforce in everything the interchangeability of the sexes, and that the female sex is more equal than the other sex. Although it purports to do away with a Christianity based on obedience, in sum this project of “feminization” is absolutely tyrannical, and I think of Pope Benedict’s phrase “the dictatorship of relativism.” Do you remember back in Chapter 1 when Kaye introduced us to the principle of “the honoring of women’s divinity”? It seems to me that that’s what, if we logically think through the ideas in Kaye’s book, now substitutes for God in this ideology.

An Appendix includes generally supportive short essay responses to various chapters by various Dominican leaders: Chapter 1, Donald J. Goergen, OP. Chapter 2, Daniel Syverstad, OP. Chapter 3, Edward M. Ruane, OP. Chapter 4, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, OP. Chapter 5, Patricia Walter, OP. Blurbs on the back from Sister Anne Marie Mongoven, OP (Sinsinawa), Anne Carr, Univ. of Chicago Professor of Theology, and Kate Dooley, OP (Sinsinawa).

### III. PAUL AND THIRD WORLD WOMEN THEOLOGIANS (1999) AND FEMINISM AND BEYOND (2004) BY SISTER LORETTA DORNISCH

“What if the letters of Paul were written by Paula?” *Paul and Third World Women Theologians* begins. Sister Loretta Dornisch, the author, never refers to him as *Saint Paul*. She seems to have very little respect for him—or for the sacredness of Sacred Scripture. She takes it for granted that Paul’s letters are “patriarchal and oppressive.” Sister Loretta asks, “Can we convert these texts to be woman-friendly, user-friendly, liberation-friendly?” The back cover describes this as a “dialectic.” Sister Loretta is guided in her characterization of “Paula” by thinking of third world women (liberation) theologians.

Sister Loretta Dornisch is a professor of Religious Studies at Edgewood College here in Madison, WI. She, and perhaps even other college professors, may use this book to “teach” college students. I bought my copy used via Amazon and it has college used bookstore stickers on it.

*Paul and Third World Women Theologians* reminded me of something: fan fiction, as in fan-written stories about TV or movie characters. And more specifically than that, the rather “classic” book on the topic, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* by Phillip Jenkins—though I’m not claiming Sister Loretta has read that book. Jenkins explains:

The raw materials of the original story... [provide] instructions for a preferred reading, but they do not necessarily overpower and subdue the reader. The same narratives (Dragnet, say) can be read literally by one group and as camp by another. Some groups’ pleasure comes not in celebrating the values of their chosen works but by “reading against the grain,” in expressing their opposition to rather than acceptance of textual ideology.

I didn’t realize till I looked the book up again the other day, that Jenkins actually drew his central concept of “textual poaching” from a 1980 book

titled *The Practice of Everyday Life*, by a dissident French Jesuit who was an academic at a secular university, Father Michel de Certeau. Besides de Certeau's ideas about the creativity (rather than passivity) of the reader who rejects the "official interpreters", *Textual Poachers* is also heavily influenced by gender theory. Jenkins is very interested in what he labels a "utopian" aspect of women's fan fiction, in which characters' sex and sexual orientation can be quite fluid. Jenkins says:

The strategies Bleich identifies as characteristically feminine reflect, rather, ways women have found to circumvent male-centered narratives and to rewrite them in a fashion that serves feminine interests. Such strategies deflect focus from male protagonists onto the larger sets of social relations constituting the narrative world; such strategies reclaim from the margins the experiences of female characters. These approaches are born of alienation and discomfort rather than closeness to and acceptance of narrative priorities.

This brings us back to Sister Loretta Dornisch and her utopian reading of the Pauline Epistles as if they were written by "Paula." We are immediately confronted with a malleability of gender in the first chapter, on 1 Thessalonians. Sister asks, "What is it that Paul, Paula, Sylvanus, Sylvana, Timothy, and Timothea send to the women, children and men who live in Thessalonica?" And there is a statement in regards to 1 Thes. 2:2 that "Many women from Africa, Central America or Asia can relate to Paula's autobiographical allusions to her suffering and being shamefully treated...." My annoyed pencil reply in the margin: "Paula is not real." There are quite simply no autobiographical allusions about Paula at all in the actual New Testament. There is a specific genre of fanfic that Sister Loretta's book makes me think of, by the way: "Mary Sue."

This is an especially horrible book to introduce Scripture to someone without a lot of knowledge thereof, because the translations are Sister Loretta's own. She knows New Testament Greek, maybe—however she has very little respect for what the words actually say. Here is her translation of 1 Thess 3:12-13:

May your hearts be blameless in holiness before God and our Mother in the presence of Jesus (1 Thess 3:13), our liberator with all those in freedom.

The RSV-Catholic Edition has verse 13 like this:

so that he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Okay, so what does the Greek look like? I don't know Greek, but I would think most of us can tell by looking at it, if it says "Mother" or "Father." It seems to me that "theou" is God and "patros" is the word I am looking for:

eis to sterixai (AAN) umon tas kardias amemptous en hagiois emprosthen tou theou kai patros emon en te parousia tou kuriou emon Iesou meta panton ton agion autou.

And she does *not* point out to her reader what she is changing in her texts.

In 1 Corinthians, Sister Loretta imagines that "Paula sees herself a

‘called apostle through the will of God.’” There is strife among some of the Corinthians, and “strife seems unfortunately to be part of the human condition, even in church groups. We are indeed called to that kind of love, but it does not come easily and dissension is always a scandal.” But then, confusingly, Sister Loretta wastes no time before engaging in dissension: “we think of women being denied access to certain ministries by reason of their being women.” This is essentially the same formula by which Sister Theresa Kane called for “women’s ordination” in the presence of John Paul II in 1979. I reflected while reading this book that these ideas are a sort of utopian “reading” of the Church, taking the materials of Christianity but rejecting its values including the ordered complementarity of man and woman, “rewriting them in a fashion that serves feminine interests,” to quote Henry Jenkins—or rather, a certain kind of feminist interests. To me, the idea that women only have dignity if they can do specifically male things is *insulting*. Women can’t be, and don’t need to be, husbands, fathers, or priests.

Moving on, “Paula” says Christ is the new passover. Sister Loretta decides that one of the possibilities of the meaning of “passover” is “dance” therefore, in keeping with the rejection of any likelihood of actual culpability for personal sin she had elaborated in her chapter on 2 Thess, “Christ is the new dance, the new passover.” Through redefinition, her idea of Jesus apparently ceases to have to do with sinners’ atonement with God and salvation.

Sister Loretta says that in 1 Cor 14:34-35 “Paula” says women should keep silence in church. She’s just reflecting what the custom is, Sister says. Then Sister makes a claim about what other commentators on “Paula’s” words say: “Others insist these words are such a contradiction to the Christianity preached by Paula that they must have been inserted by another author.” Who are these other “exegetes” commenting also on the letters of “Paula”? She probably means the “redaction criticism” on Paul—this is misguided enough.

In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, “Paula names herself as apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God and associates herself with Timothea....”

The Letter to Philemon, according to Sister Loretta Dornisch, “is from Paula and Timothea. Their letter is also addressed to ‘beloved Apphia’ and Archippa, a co-worker, and the church in their house (Phlm 1:1-2).” In the actual letter of Saint Paul, in the Bible, the letter is from Paul and Timothy, and addressed to “To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our Sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house.” “Paula” pleads for “her ‘child’ Onesimus whom she ‘brought forth’ in her bonds(Phlm 1:10). In the actual letter, Saint Paul has become Onesimus’ “father.” Maybe the both of them are in prison and “Paula” has become the



runaway slave's spiritual mom, and Saint Paul his spiritual dad? But it is not wise to think about this alternate universe too hard.

In the Letter to the Phillipians, Paula and Timothea become a good example of female friendship building up a sense of "power and worth" in one another, like "Third World women have become newly conscious of the strength they find in each other as they share common goals." I wrote in the margin, "Prosperity Gospel feminism: Jesus will make you feel powerful and good about yourself." In these stretches of the book, it is pretty continuously about "Paula."

Finally we come to "Paula's Letter to the Romans," which "is thought by many to be Paula's most important letter." It's "[e]specially treasured in the Protestant tradition," says Sister Loretta, which made me wonder how a sincere Protestant would feel about what she is doing in this book, and whether she ever thought about the ecumenical harm of this kind of radical disrespect toward Sacred Scripture!

After talking about the law, and how we will be justified through faith, Sister Loretta and one of her Third World women theologians veer *quite directly in the opposite direction* from Saint Paul. "For some, this faith and hope lead them beyond what they have known of an oppressive Western Christianity. Chung Kyung, for example, writes, 'I do not know what kind of new spirituality and theology will come out of Asian women's struggle to be authentically who we are in the fullest sense. I do know, however, that the future of Asian women's spirituality and theology must move away from Christo-centrism and toward life-centrism.'" Though, "others, like Paula," still place their faith in Jesus.

It is worthy of mention that one of the injustices Sister Loretta refers to is that "many girl children are not even allowed to be born"; this is actually her *second* disapproving reference to abortion of girls, the first having been in the chapter on 1 Corinthians. I am very glad indeed she is concerned about this, on the other hand she does not mention the lives of the boys, or abortion in general, only the sex-selective abortion of girls.

Saint Paul in the Letter to the Romans speaks of the Spirit groaning within him, a profound prayer beyond words. Sister Loretta, relentlessly material, says that "For many women this is a political groaning where is the spiritual is not separated from the political or religious." It seems that for Sister, it's high time that Christianity got "corrected" in accord with liberation theology. "Paula writes: 'The sufferings of this present time cannot be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us' (Romans 8:18). For two thousand years this concept has been used to oppress people in their sufferings, to condone their sufferings in exchange for the promise of 'pie in the sky.'" That, it appears, is what Sister Loretta thinks of non-liberation-theology Christianity.

When Sister Loretta gets to Romans 13 she finally switches back to

talking about *Paul*, because she doesn't like the first part of Romans 13. It's about being subject to authorities! She attributes his belief that we should be subject to the governing authorities to the fact that, unlike Jesus who had a rural upbringing, "Paul had imbibed a tradition of civil laws in the Roman urban style of order, with authority at the top and with the necessity of obedience to what he considered lawful authority." According to Sister, he "adopts the Roman ideas of authority coming from God and authorities as being appointed by God (Rom 13:2)."

I'm no Bible scholar at all, but there is an immediately obvious and glaring problem with her theory of Jesus' and Paul's radically differing beliefs about that, which is that Jesus said to Pilate: "you would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above" (John 19:11). But, according to Sister Loretta "This difference between Paul and Jesus will plague Christianity and societies affected by Christianity for all history." In the Liturgy of the Hours just this evening, I prayed a Canticle from the letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians, "He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, even death on a cross." But according to Sister Loretta, Jesus "was crucified for resisting unjust laws and authorities." According to the Bible, Jesus was crucified because He had indicated in various ways that He was the King of the Jews, and the Jewish leaders who did not believe therefore accused Him of blasphemy; Pilate the civil authority tried to say this was a religious matter and Jesus had not done anything against the civil laws, but the religious leaders, who under Roman rule did not have authority to execute anyone themselves, insisted, and Pilate gave in, out of the sin of human respect.

The chapter on "Paula's Letter to the Romans" concludes with a fan fiction version of the extensive list of warm personal greetings in Romans 16. Only, "Paula's" greeting is to numerous third world women liberation theologians!

Greet Maria and Juana, my helpers in Christ Jesus, who have risked their own necks for me.... Greet Rigoberta, my beloved, who is first fruit from Guatemala. Greet Elizabeth, who worked so much for us. Greet Maria Clara and Hilda.... [etc.]

There's no way to be very gentle with this book, it's grotesque and ridiculous. I can't describe it to people without laughing. It's not remotely reconcilable with the Vatican II Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*. And I have spent far too much work on this review.

### ***Feminism and Beyond (2004)***

*Feminism and Beyond*, by Sister Loretta Dornisch, is self-published via AuthorHouse. This book displays the sheer unreasonableness and

perversity of radical feminism, and its incompatibility with Christianity.

*Feminism and Beyond* reflects religious disorientation and indifferentism that has become common today. On the second page of Chapter 1, Sister Loretta tells us that in today's world, "Persons are disillusioned. Their worlds fall apart. In some cases they search for new arrangements of meaning. New languages, new stories, even new religions, or religions new to them provide new ways of thinking about their lives. They convert from Catholicism to Buddhism, from a Baptist tradition to Islam, or from secularism to Judaism." Feminism, defined in the book as "the struggle to end sexist oppression," is a major source of this disillusionment and indifferentism. Feminist critique of religion becomes the reason why "In North America many Christian women move from traditional Christianity with its patriarchal structures, and then to a search for the earth goddess and then to the goddess within." Sister does not suggest that she has the slightest problem with that. "Theological reflection on the meaning of God or gods... opens up a way perhaps to understand, and to move the critique to developments of the twenty-first century and perhaps of a new aeon."

Chapter 3 gives me insight into what she thought she was doing in *Paul and Third World Women Theologians*. "The etymology of the word [dialectic] suggests reading one view against another or in contrast to another." The conflicts and contradictions entailed are, says Fr Bernard Lonergan, "only overcome by conversions." The contradiction Sister Loretta then points to highlights what is actually the most striking aspect of this book, the association of male-female relationships in general with sexist oppression: "Most American young women are culturally interested in traditional marriages. They are not usually open to understand or acknowledge sexism," for instance "sexism which denies access to religious leadership or ordination."

Some see the defense of male-only ordination as good, Sister Loretta says, while they view opening ordination to women as evil. But she gets this wrong—this statement is simply untrue. Whether "women's ordination" is good or not is actually, from a Catholic perspective, absolutely moot. We believe that there is no such thing; God has not given His Church any authority for it. Viewing the opposition to women's ordination as simply a biased human dislike of the idea, she sees the need for "a reversal Lonergan calls a conversion." She then tells us about priests who, out of "integrity," "converted" away from a Catholic understanding of Holy Orders and then left the priesthood.

Sister Loretta next refers to Paul Ricoeur, a protestant Bible scholar and philosopher who had been the major focus of Sister's academic work. He sees opposing viewpoints as possibly converging, like spokes on a wheel. This suits her interest in dialectic. She does not seem interested in some kind of moderate or centrist view, though. She is interested,

apparently, in “Pushing the dialectic to full reversal. Studying some Native American societies which are matrilineal opens up new ways of interpreting data.” As some women find these new ways of thinking, they “engage in a dialectic with traditional texts.... They re-write history from a new perspective.” This feminist “conversion” also “made previous foundations suspect, or even to be rejected. For some women in the Roman Catholic tradition, Eucharist which is linked only to male authority and patriarchal ritual was recognized as a contradiction of the good news of love....”

I mentioned earlier Sister Loretta’s comment that “Most American young women are culturally interested in traditional marriages. They are not usually open to understand or acknowledge sexism.” Believing Catholics see valid marriage even of non Christians as being from God. Holy Matrimony is actually a Sacrament when two baptized persons marry validly. Vatican II speaks beautifully of the good of marriage. But Sister Loretta Dornisch speaks of marital intimacy together with unchastity. She consistently tends to think of exploitation when she thinks of relationships of men and women: “Sexual services, whether to a husband, a business associate, a boss, a pimp, or a ‘customer’ are the lot of millions of women.”

Feminism is one of the factors shaking up the perceived structure of relationships. At least theoretically in the twentieth century, the nuclear family was taken as the norm in some societies. Male and female were assumed as the basic sexual partners and as the basic family unit. Sexual orientation within that construct was understood to be a given.

Sister Loretta says, and “some movements within feminism soon moved to include sexual and relational female partnering. Within another decade same-sex parenting became more widespread.” And these relationships came to be seen as parallel to marriage, and some were engaging in “same sex marriage” ceremonies. Marriages broke down amidst society’s assault against chastity: “Some husbands and fathers discovered their homosexual orientation. Some wives discovered themselves in love with female partners, felt obliged to leave their families and enter into relationship with female partners. Their love included sexual relationships and even the parenting of children....” Sister Loretta nowhere points out that this is disordered and gravely immoral—though Saint Paul does so very clearly in Romans 1:26-27, which Sister Loretta ignored in *Paul and Third World Women Theologians*.

Of course, “some remained feminists within a male-female structure.” But some feminists were opting for the single life, choosing “to interact with other women, not to be involved with men, and to achieve an independence and freedom they do not see as part of marriage.” Sister Loretta, explaining that “western Victorian so called nuclear family is far from being universal,” incredibly even speaks of plural “marriage” more favorably than real marriage of man and woman—especially polyandry, which she says occurs in western Asia with “one woman and as many as

seven men”: “Far from being oppressive, this often makes it possible for the woman to play one man against the other, to use her favors for control and as a means of obtaining what she wants.” Some Mormon women in polygamous “marriages” “felt their shared relationships worked well.” And “In ancient Rome, male and female slaves, as well as other men and women, were available as sexual and even friendship partners.” She doesn’t evaluate this morally. She’s describing different kinds of “community.”

In the last chapter, she asks “How will the female evolve in the future?” The real story in this book is that Sister Loretta sees male-female relationships as *harmful*. She foretells: “In Western society we can project an increase in single females as well as lesbianism.” It is difficult if not impossible to avoid concluding that this is what she wants to recommend. Sister Loretta’s negative assessment of marriage is consistent and relentless.

Basically the book ends with this radical pessimism and rejection of the love of man and woman. I wrote: “This is very sick.”

#### IV. *AWAKENING TO PRAYER; A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE* (2009) BY SISTER CLARE WAGNER

*Awakening to Prayer; A Woman's Perspective* is published by the mainstream Catholic publisher Saint Anthony Messenger Press. It's part of a series titled "Called to Holiness: Spirituality for Catholic Women." This book is gentle and generally sweet-natured, with attention paid to relationships and human kindness, and with a notable affection toward babies. On the other hand, there is very little reference to God Himself in personal terms, which seems part of the fallout from feminist refusal to speak of God as "He" or "Father"; Jesus is spoken of as having had an "Abba experience." God is "Unfathomable Mystery" or "loving Divine Presence," and seemingly a kind of a force or resource: "God is available as a source of relational, healing energy." As a consequence this book does not convey much sense of prayer as eminently a love relationship between persons. At the end of each chapter there is the sort of made-up private ritual popular with the "womenchurch" movement, for which, for instance, besides lighting a candle, "it would be helpful to place before you: an alarm clock, a bright cloth (a 'wake up' color) and three to five rocks or stones."

The Catholic Church and the Sacraments basically do not appear in this alleged book of Catholic spirituality. It seemed to me a spiritual-not-religious book.

What you wouldn't know from the book itself, and what Saint Anthony Messenger Press probably doesn't know, is that Sister Clare Wagner has been, according to her, an active Call to Action Madison dissent group member, who in 2009 said she has "resolved not to put energy into 'church reform' but rather into sowing seeds for a new church." Until recently, she has given talks at a formerly Catholic place near Madison, Holy Wisdom Monastery, where the Sisters left their vows and

“went non canonical”, left the Church and now run a breakaway sect with a priestless “eucharist.” It is not Catholic now. Sister Clare suggested in 2008 that the Sinsinawa Dominicans, too, should think about giving up their formal status as a Catholic religious congregation: a “topic I would like to see studied in depth and considered again in the light of current developments is becoming non canonical. Much has happened since we last considered that possibility.” Prior to writing the book, Sister Clare Wagner had been for a time the coordinator of a Spiritual Guidance Training Program at Siena Center in Racine, Wisconsin; on SinsinOP it was said in 2012 to be “a two-year program built solidly five rounds ago by Clare Wagner and an ecumenical team. Clare still returns to lay the foundation in the Universe Story,” which is apparently basic to this doctrinally questionable program, which also covers the very closely related concept of “Cosmic Christ.”

I think of what younger Sinsinawa Dominican Sister Laurie Brink, who certainly knows Clare Wagner, described about some Sisters who were “moving beyond the Church, even beyond Jesus,” in her considerably radical 2007 LCWR Assembly Address:

With a new lens, women also began to see the divine within nature, the value and importance of the cosmos, and that the emerging new cosmology encouraged their spirituality and fed their souls.

One Sister described it, “I was rooted in the story of Jesus, and it remains at my core, but I’ve also moved beyond Jesus.” The Jesus narrative is not the only or most important narrative for these women.

The book series of which *Awakening to Prayer* is a part was created with funding from “an organization of philanthropists: Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities (FADICA)” in response to “[t]he need for a creative, solidly grounded, and theologically sophisticated spirituality available in an accessible form for all Christian women.” Series editor Elizabeth Dryer (whom a Sinsinawa Dominican calls “a former member of ‘our crowd’”) says “the time is ripe for ‘ordinary’ women to be doing theology,” and speaks in feminist language of younger women readers “likely to be already grooming the soil for a fourth wave of Christian spirituality done by and for women,” though she is concerned that young women my age are unaware of past efforts to secure women’s dignity. Speaking for myself, I *am* aware, appreciative of what is good, but feel there have been very harmful excesses, such as feminist individuals “doing theology” by novel, questionable methodologies and without assent to Catholic teaching, resulting in large numbers of them now in painful angst as a result of their new and different belief system putting them in conflict with “the institutional Church”, as the Sinsinawa Dominicans put it.

Sister Clare Wagner writes that she has “found it enlivening and engaging to realize that at this moment of enormous change, rapid

technological advancement and a new relationship between faith and science, we are called upon to see prayer, too, in new, creative ways.” It’s not clear to me why this would really change prayer, and I don’t think she means that sometimes people use a smartphone app to pray the breviary, so I suspect she sees herself crafting a spirituality that corresponds to a changed theology. The text gives a lot of evidence of that.

Chapter 3 of *Awakening to Prayer* alludes rather apparently though not explicitly, to one of Sister Clare’s unusual theological interests, “the new cosmology” or “the universe story.” This refers to a radical re-imagining of God and religions in light of evolutionary science and eco-feminism, sparked by Fr Tielhard de Chardin and developed and promoted in its current form by the late Fr Thomas Berry, and Dr Brian Swimme. Besides teaching it to spiritual guidance students at Siena Center, Sister Clare gave a talk to Madison’s Call to Action group on this topic in 2011 for instance, and in *Awakening to Prayer* she says:

The Divine Spirit is and has been living and moving in continuously new ways for billions of years in this universe. To pay attention to this movement now is to embrace an evolutionary perspective.... Each of us is a microcosm of the evolutionary process of the entire universe.

Another characteristic of the new belief system is pantheism or panentheism, which I think she is alluding to under the next sub-heading: “Pannikar writes of God being so interior to the world that there is no way we can separate God from the world.” These are, Sister Clare says, “elements of an emerging spirituality” which is now evolving away from “too limited a God image,” away from “a system of domination and hierarchical dualism,” wherein

the prevalent image of God was that of a sovereign male demanding and distant, possibly frightening and judgmental, definitely patriarchal.... In a system where the “rules” say that spirit is valued over matter, humanity over nature, heaven over earth, soul over body, and man over woman, it is nearly impossible to celebrate equality and thirst for relationship with a God who reigns supreme over all of it.

But she is not stating rightly what Catholic Christians believe; the human person is a unity of body and soul, and while the soul rules over the body, the body is not devalued but dignified; it is “a temple of the Holy Spirit.” And if the one-flesh union in Matrimony entails an order of man as head of woman, this is without prejudice to the equal dignity of both. The fact that Jesus is head of the Church—which is the reigning truth that this is ultimately about, according to Saint Paul—does not imply that the Church, for which He gave His life as ransom, is devalued. Absolutely on the contrary! But Sister Clare’s comments don’t actually mention Christ as head of the Church. She does not really mention the Church. The nearest that I can find are brief mentions of, for instance, a mother’s concern, “I have a gay son. How does my church welcome him?”



In another Sinsinawa Dominican book I reviewed, Sister Kaye Ashe included a quote startlingly proposing that female friendship should be the model *for all relationships among created beings*. Sister Clare similarly urges us toward a “circular, mutual, collaborative way of relating” which she sees as typical of female friendship. “This non-hierarchical way of relating is an alternative to that which is dominant in the culture. Circles of women who embrace and are empowered to relate in this manner compatible with the Spirit’s fruits—peaceful, kind, generous, self-controlled, and joyful—are changing themselves and the world.”

Purely on the level of friendship this is fine! Absolutizing this way of thinking has led the Sinsinawa Dominicans to alter their understanding and practices of religious obedience in ways that seem to have put them at odds with the Church’s canonical requirements for governance of religious life. And the attempt to implement a “non-hierarchical” vision for the Church through democratically deciding things like doctrine, morality, and Church discipline is the concept behind the destructive change-the-Church group Call to Action, of which Sister Clare is a member.

One thing that surprised and specially concerned me in this book is the refusal of forgiveness for some offenses. Chapter 3, speaking of “names for God,” warns that “A judging God can be used to justify a lack of forgiveness.” But Chapter 4 treats of catastrophic “radical suffering” like child abuse, war, and other violence against the innocent. Victims, in Sister Clare’s view, “need an unlimited outpouring of compassion and rage from the Christian community.” Sister Clare Wagner suggests a startling “prayer mantra” for a woman victim of such suffering: “Suffering Companion God, help me to rage against the suffering I have endured.” The research of Doctor Robert Enright of UW Madison (a Catholic with deep insight into how Jesus’ Cross relates to this) into the psychology of forgiveness faced staunch opposition from those who, for instance, felt that the Holocaust must not be forgiven; doubting academics were won over by his solid research evidence of positive psychological outcomes when people go through the difficult process of forgiving—which doesn’t mean *at all* that abuse is okay, or should be tolerated, or shouldn’t be punished. Compassion is needed for deep healing, but so is forgiveness. And Jesus tells us, “If you forgive the faults of others, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours. If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive you.” (Mt 6:14-15)

Another thing I wasn’t expecting in this book was a seeming evasiveness about the divinity of Jesus. In Chapter 3, following a discussion of Sister Elizabeth Johnson and God as Sophia, she spoke of the Trinity, which “[i]n an earlier volume of this series, Elizabeth Dryer spoke of as a community of love,” for which “language, images and understandings of this Mystery compatible with the consciousness of this historical moment

are emerging, especially among women theologians.” There is not any specific reference to this Trinity as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” nor to Jesus as a member thereof. Then in Chapter 6 Sister Clare writes:

Though Jesus knew the Jewish law and the prophets well, his confidence, authority, and belief that he could make a difference were rooted in his Abba experience. This encounter with loving Divine Presence and the relationship with Abba that followed provided the foundation for his spiritual life.

She finds “[i]mportant insight into the spiritual journey of Jesus” in the baptism narrative, when “a voice called him ‘my son, the beloved.’” Jesus “recognized the Spirit of God as the ever-present source and resource of his spiritual energy.” But at no time does Sister Clare refer to Jesus as God, nor to God as His Father. Speaking of Jesus, she says: “Ahead of his time, he was often rejected as he responded to the call to mysticism.”

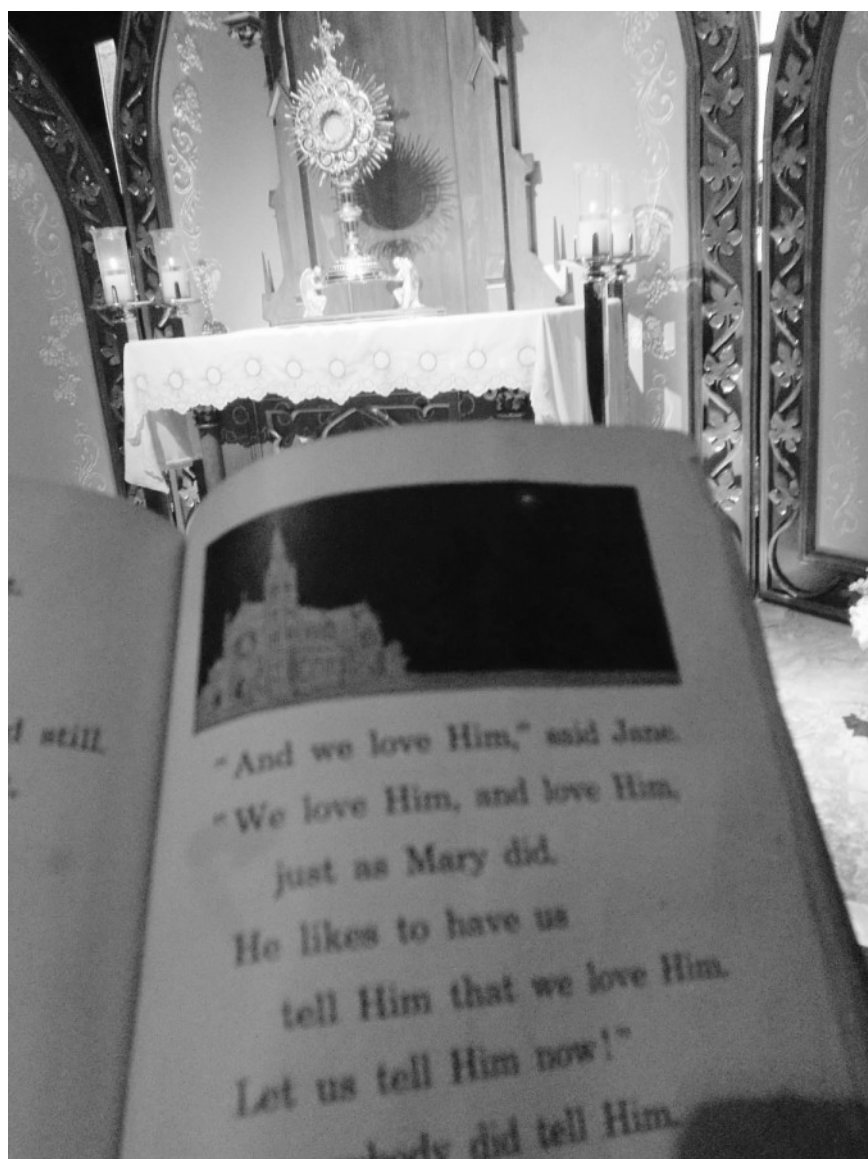
My own formation in the spiritual life and in prayer is above all from the Discalced Carmelite Doctors of the Church, Saint Teresa of Avila, “Doctor of Prayer,” and Saint John of the Cross, “the Mystical Doctor.” I do not see any clear correspondence between the spirituality Sister Clare is promoting, and that prayerful journey in the life of Grace, growing free from sin and growing in virtue, with divine help, unto intensely personal union with God, that Saint Teresa writes of in nuptial terms; according to Teresa’s masterpiece *The Interior Castle*, a book Sister Clare alludes to (but does not quote from) while explaining what mysticism is, the soul begins to live spiritually “when by the heat of the Holy Spirit it begins to benefit through the general help given to us all by God and through the remedies left by Him to His Church,” including, significantly, “going to confession.” Sister Clare’s new spirituality sometimes vaguely resembles Hindu mysticism. Following Chapter 1, which wanted us to focus on our body, the end-of-chapter ritual even recalls Hindu Kundalini meditation: “place your hands first on your solar plexus, which is that area of your body just above your abdomen, next on your heart and then on your forehead honoring body, heart and mind.”

The most poignant thing in *Awakening to Prayer*, is from the end-of-chapter ritual for Chapter 4. We are to “Gather a candle, a small box with a lid, a pen, five or six small strips of paper and a dish with water in it. Arrange these items into a beautiful altar that represents struggle.” We are to do some activities with these items, finally we sprinkle some water on the items and “Make the Sign of the Cross on yourself with this water.” Is that not painful to think of? A lonely ceremony with pretend Holy Water, for a spirituality seemingly without priest or Church.

What relevance have sacramentals or Sacraments of the Catholic Church, in Sister Clare’s view? Perhaps in the new theology, everything is equally a sacrament. Her epilogue says: “God’s presence permeates everyone and everything in the universe—no exceptions. Grasping this

pervasiveness of God makes it clear that there is something lasting and sacred in everything we taste and touch.”

I find Sister Clare human, warm and likeable, which all the more leaves me with sadness. Everything in *Awakening to Prayer* is kept vague enough and sounds enough like Catholic teaching on prayer, that apparently it slips by at a diverse publisher like Saint Anthony Messenger Press, with words on the cover stating it to be “spirituality for catholic women.” But behind this “emerging spirituality” lies an “emerging theology”, that I feel concerned seems to leave the Catholic Church behind.



At the Adoration Chapel with *The Rosary Readers Primer* (1927)  
by Sister Mary Henry, Sinsinawa Dominican.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Elizabeth Durack, a sinner, was born in 1978.

Elizabeth is a “revert.” Baptized and raised Catholic, she fell away as an adolescent and was for some years an atheist and a very active political Progressive, before returning to the Church and the Sacraments in 2006.

She is awed by and grateful for God's Merciful Love.

Elizabeth is grateful for a call to single-heartedness for Jesus, and is a privately vowed celibate. Her love for the religious life is strong. She notes that if God had given her the religious vocation she pleaded and wept for, she couldn't have written *A Report on the Sinsinawa Dominicans Today*.

She has founded the Father Mazzuchelli Society (FatherMazzuchelliSociety.org) to promote devotion to this great Dominican missionary priest and encourage the furtherance of his mission in this age of the New Evangelization. One way the Society has done so is by publishing an inexpensive edition of Father Mazzuchelli's *Memoirs*.

Elizabeth has a personal blog at [LaetificatMadison.com](http://LaetificatMadison.com).