

CWO e-news October 2008 issue 10

Welcome to issue 10 of the e-news. It's a long one this time so please read right to the end!!
Please contact me with items for next e-news info@catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk
Joint editors Pat Brown and Myra Poole

Vatican Action - WOW! in Rome

Wednesday 15th October, the Feast Day of St Teresa of Avila, saw a series of actions in Rome which challenged the Vatican over its ban on Catholic women's ordination and its exclusion of women from Lectionary readings. On 15th October, at a well-attended press conference organized by the German branch of We Are Church, journalists heard strong statements from national and international groups, speaking as members of Women's Ordination Worldwide. The group included Anne Brown (New Wine) and myself; Angelika Fromm (We are Church Germany), Aisha Taylor (Women's Ordination Conference, USA), and Marleen Wijdeveld (Roman Catholic Womenpriests, Netherlands). There were also representatives from Portugal and Japan. We decorated the press-room with purple and gold silk table covers from We Are Church, and a WOC banner. In the press release (see CWO website) which was picked up by AP, the Catholic News Service, the International Herald Tribune, the Washington Post and other papers, the speakers challenged the Papal ban on discussion of the issue, reminded listeners that in 1976, Catholic theologians had found no scriptural objections against women's ordination, and linked the issue to Jesus' gospel message of liberation and justice and worldwide issues of women's poverty and oppression. Unfortunately, no British journalists attended the press conference, but we were pleased that last week's *Tablet* published a short piece (with cartoon!)

Several of us then dressed in classical costume typical of early Roman Christian women (lots of 21st-century safety pins), with placards identifying us as prominent women leaders of the early Church. Others wore multilingual purple T-shirts, courtesy of Aisha and Erin from WOC. We processed, singing, to St Peter's Square, followed by photographers. In balmy sunshine, we entered the Square and moved around with the WOC banner, talking to people and giving out leaflets; people were friendly, sometimes indifferent, but rarely hostile. As far as I recall, we saw no police at this time.

Later that day, having replaced our togas with T-shirts, we held a short street liturgy outside a nearby church, and returned to the Square where Angelika and Marleen were due to hand in a petition at the Bronze Doors (where the Swiss Guards stand). The petition, calling for the restoration of the diaconate to women, had been coordinated by Husetop (www.womenpriests.org) and had been signed by 26 Catholic organisations and over 1700 individuals. This time, we were accosted by the police (doubtless alerted by the press release) almost as soon as we entered the Square, and our passports were taken from us and details noted. More and more security personnel appeared – at one point, we counted 13! Finally, the top Vatican security official rolled up in a shiny car, told us politely we could not go any further and said he would make sure the petition reached the Pope. As the police still had our passports, we had no choice but to accept his offer.

Next day, we returned to the Square to continue handing out leaflets, but were stopped almost immediately and our passports checked against a typed list. The police were friendly, but told us we needed authorization to hand out material, both in the Vatican or Italy, and that we shouldn't do it again. However, we continued to do so discreetly as we explored other places in Rome (two of us wearing the 'Better Birettas' made by Pat Brown, which attracted lots of amused looks and brought people over to find out more).

One encounter (on a bus) was with three Rome-based members of the Salvation Army, who were delighted to hear about it all. Aisha and Erin also had some interesting encounters over the next couple of days – see their reports and excellent photos on the WOC website.

Two less happy events marred the trip. One of our party fell on a broken pavement and broke her ankle, which meant several hours in A and E; and on the night of the 15th, burglars broke into the apartment where Aisha and Erin were staying, entered their room, took their bags into the hallway and removed their computers and an I-pod. Their money and cards were untouched. (Thanks to Aisha's and Erin's hard work, their reports and photos had already been sent off to WOC that evening). We were all very relieved that they were not harmed.

On a happier note, we had an excellent talk one evening from Sr. Chris Schenk, director of US-based FutureChurch, about the emerging archaeological evidence for women's leadership in the early Church. Chris treated us to a slideshow of tombstones, mosaics and inscriptions from catacombs and churches in the Mediterranean world, many of which are only now being explored. Some of this research will be familiar to CWO members through the work of Dorothy Irvin and others. A more recent book is The Bone Gatherers, by Nicola Denzey. On the Saturday, some of the group visited the catacombs of Priscilla and other sites, including the church of St Praxedes, where you can find the famous mosaic entitled 'Teodora episcopa' in the chapel of St Zeno. Chris also told us about the postcard campaign organized by FutureChurch before the Synod, which publicized the omission of many readings about women are absent from the Lectionary (for details, see the FutureChurch website).

Many thanks must go to We Are Church Germany, especially Angelika, Christian Weisner and Anne Gret Laakman, who did much of the preparatory work and set things up with the Italian press; and to WOC for their work before and around the event with press and photos and their T-shirts. But thanks are equally due to everyone who came and lent their voice and presence to events at St. Peter's. I suspect it made many of us appreciate just how much courage it would take to stand up and be counted in situations of real danger. And to those who would have come if they could, and thought of us, thank you too.

(Anyone interested in the Synod's goings-on can find reports from John Allen Jr. of the National Catholic Reporter – <http://ncronline3.org/drupal/> click on NCR Café).

Jennifer Stark, WOW Co-ordinator

Lumen Books

Ianthe Pratt offers access to CWO of the resources of Lumen Religious Books Trust, which runs the Christian Women's Resource Centre which contains a wide range of books and materials on the theme of women and religion and inter-gender relations, for instance theology, liturgy, spirituality and so on. Although it is a reference library there is available a wide range of themed sheet liturgies which can be sent to people involved in creating liturgies - these are to spark off ideas rather than to be closely followed. She can also provide copies of "Making Liturgy: creating rituals for worship and life (£10 post free) which was edited by a group of CWO and WWS members. Those living in or near London or visiting would find it interesting to visit the Centre. There is a much used photocopier! Contact Ianthe through info@catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk

"When women stand up and challenge the current rules, then the iron curtain in the Catholic Church will crumble."

*-Janice Sevre
Duszynska*

A response to the 20th anniversary congress of Mulieres Dignatatem (*CWO October Newsletter*)

I feel I must write to protest however at Cardinal Rylko's comments about "radical feminists".

As a mother of five daughters and a woman who chooses to be in a loving relationship with another woman and as a radical feminist, I see my political affiliations as bringing me closer into union with my children, my friends and my family.

To be an empowered woman for me brings with it a responsibility to all people who face injustice and not self interest as is implied by Cardinal Rylko. In fact I know that I am more capable now of standing up for others as a direct result of standing up for myself!

I work actively to support people with long term mental health needs, people seeking asylum, people with physical disabilities. A long list of people whom I am better able to serve because I see the injustice they face as women and men. I do not exclude anyone in contrast to those in the Church who would want to exclude me and my family as we do not fit their idea of what is acceptable.

When are those people in high places going to realise that we can be their best allies and not their enemies?

I feel sad for them that they are not able to see beyond the stereotypes they carry in their heads and I pray that one day they will gain enlightenment!

I feel even sadder when I read the comments by Carrie Gress (from the USA) that back up the attitudes of the Cardinal. I would say she needs to get out more as she is not meeting the right sort of women is this is what she thinks about them.

Whatever happened to sisterhood Carrie?!

Jacqui Lovell

There is nothing so ugly and so beautiful as the Catholic Church. If you cannot see the ugliness of the Church, you are closing your eyes. But, if you cannot see the beauty, you don't know the Church.

*Bishop Geoffrey Robinson
Archdiocese of Sidney, Australia*

Comments from four more members about the "contra legem" issue.

If you want to add your views, please email info@catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk

"CWO needs to have an explicit policy regarding "contra legem" ordinations. If, our aims are to examine, challenge and develop the present understanding of priesthood and to achieve the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church then this harsh directive from the Vatican of excommunicating women and men needs a revision of our policy. Surely we do not accept these penalties being imposed on women priests and men who support them? I will email John Sivalon and the three member Maryknoll Council to stand in solidarity with Fr. Roy Bourgeois"

"Ordination to the priestly ministry is the end of a long and often painful journey of growth in self knowledge. It may well begin with 'a feeling' or a sense of being 'called.' These experiences cannot be dismissed but have to be recognised and tested. The testing of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life is rooted in the Catholic tradition. It is a journey of conscience formation, for the decision to be ordained is moral one. The candidate goes forward with a good conscience know it is right. The Magisterium has always recognised the primacy of conscience. 'In the depths of conscience , the human person detects a law which is not imposed but holds him or her to obedience.' Gaudium et Spes 16.

St Thomas Aquinas recognised this when he argued , 'Anyone upon whom the ecclesiastical authority, in ignorance of the true facts, imposes a demand that offends against his clear conscience, should perish in excommunication rather than violate his conscience. iv Setences.dist.38.q2.a4"

"I believe that any official acceptance by CWO of Contra Legem ordination would be counterproductive and alienate the people whom we need to convince of the need for women priests. Apart from that, individual members can personally support individuals involved in Contra Legem but it is a private matter."

Vocation to ministry or priesthood comes from a call from God. The person receiving it then has to convince the Church that he/she has had this call. I know because all my classmates had to do this! A student one year ahead of me did not have a call to ministry and her application for training for ministry was turned down.

Professor Marcella Althaus-Reid, School of Divinity of the University of Edinburgh, has said: Should women be diplomatic in a patriarchal system and get into the system, play it and vote for women? They compromise with the patriarchal system to move it a tiny bit! Opposition and protest may gain more, and faster!

"Many traditional religious leaders would argue that feminism seeks to separate women from the churches. Women certainly have no wish to be co-opted any longer into structures that are still oppressive to women. "Working for change within the structure which draws its strength from our subjugation verges on the futile, and is damaging to ourselves" (Webster 1991). Women are not engaged simply in reforming bad structures. Bad structures, like apartheid, have to be destroyed. But women are interested in transforming structures, in being church, in being in the church as equal partners with men."

Isherwood, L. and McEwan, D. INTRODUCING FEMINIST THEOLOGY. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001. pp.75-76.

Letter which was sent to Scottish bishops prior to Synod in Rome.

We, the members of Catholic Women's Ordination in Scotland, are taking the opportunity to write to you and all the Scottish Catholic bishops, while you are preparing for the next Synod of Bishops in Rome in October 2008.

We would be very grateful if you would ask for the ordination of women to the diaconate and to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church to be added to the agenda for discussion at this Synod. We also ask you to give your wholehearted support to both these issues at the Synod.

We respectfully remind you of some of the main reasons for supporting the ordination of women.

In 1976 the Pontifical Biblical Commission determined that there is no reason in Scripture to prohibit the ordination of women to the priesthood. Women as well as men are created in the image of God, therefore both may represent Jesus Christ, Gn1: 26-27, "Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image.".....So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

The Gospels tell us that Jesus treated women as equals. Jesus often talked with women as equals, had women among his disciples and healed women as well as men. Jesus chose Mary Magdalene to be the apostle to the apostles, Mt28: 1-10; Mk16: 1-11; Jn20: 1-18. The Samaritan woman was the first person to whom Jesus revealed that he was the Messiah and she promptly became a disciple, Jn4: 4-42. Martha and Mary, much loved friends of Jesus, Jn11: 1-44; Jn12: 1-8, were also disciples and ran a house church in their home, Lk10: 38-42. Joanna was an apostle Lk8: 3; 24: 10 and Mary of Clopas was a disciple, Jn19: 25.

Paul tells us in Rm16 that Phoebe was a deacon, Junia an apostle and names several women as valued co-workers. He declares in Phil 4 that Eudia and Syntyche struggled beside him for the Gospel. Paul also writes, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus," Gal 3:28, indicating that he taught and practiced a policy of non-discrimination. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* #29 recognised and reinforced this policy of non-discrimination, "Every type of discrimination whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent."

1Tim3: 8-12 refers to women deacons.

Tombstones and documents indicate that women were ordained deacons in the Greek speaking countries of the eastern Mediterranean during the first nine centuries of the Church and in the Latin speaking countries of the western Mediterranean for four or five centuries before being stopped by Rome. There is also evidence on tombstones and in documents that women were ordained as priests and deacons and it is documented that St Brigid of Kildare and St Hilda of Whitby were ordained as bishops.

Bishop Davidek of Czechoslovakia ordained Ludmila Javorova as a priest in the underground Church in 1970 and in 1991 Cardinal Miloslav Vlk of Prague confirmed that five or six other women had also been ordained priests during that time. (See J. Wijngaards, *The Ordination of Women in the Catholic Church*. Delhi: Media House, 2002)

We are confident that there are no valid reasons to continue to prohibit the ordination of women to the diaconate and priesthood in the Catholic Church. Furthermore, we have recently noticed a growing interest worldwide in the restoration of the diaconate for women. You will know that Cardinals Martini and Daneels have stated publicly that the matter of women deacons is still an open question in the Church. You are no doubt also aware that within the Orthodox Church successive consultations and meetings (e.g. Agapia 1976, Rhodes 1988, Damascus 1996, Istanbul 1997) have called for the restoration of the diaconate to women and the Coptic and Armenian Orthodox Churches already have women deacons. What you may not know is that the Bishop of Ghent wrote a foreword for John Wijngaard's book, *No Women in Holy Orders: The Women Deacons of the Early Church*. Canterbury: Canterbury Press, 2002. This book was the outcome of his detailed, scholarly research on this topic.

In 2006 the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops published the "Synthesis of the Contributions of the Church in Brazil to the Conference of Aparecida," which contains a statement calling for the ordination of women as a "pending debt." (The Tablet. 26th May, 2007, page 38.) We know from our campaigning that many Catholics in Scotland would be happy to have women priests. This general concern about the ordination of women to the diaconate and priesthood denotes to us a movement of the Holy Spirit, speaking through the faithful of the Church. We wish to bring this work of the Holy Spirit to the notice of the Scottish Bishops. Although, at first, voices for change are generally silenced, we are aware that the Holy Spirit gradually awakens a new consciousness in the "sensus fidelium" of the Church. This change of consciousness is then concretised within the teachings and structures of the Church.

Unfortunately, there is a great deal of despondency in the Church at present, especially among those who experienced the joy and hope that was born at Vatican II. We believe this joy can be reignited, if the Bishops dialogue and work with all members of the faithful for a more inclusive, dynamic and living Church. We in Catholic Women's Ordination do not believe this is possible unless all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in women as well as in men, are recognised and used in every ministry of the Church.

We write to you as our Pastors because we respect your role as leaders of this Church, but as faithful, critical members of the Church we are calling you to account on this issue. You have been called to leadership in this Church and we need reflective, prayerful and future-orientated leadership. We welcome an opening up of real dialogue in the Church on women deacons and priests, where all participants have open hearts and a willingness to listen and be changed. We place our total confidence in you to start this process. We look forward to receiving your reply.

Morag Liebert

Mary Daly

This month Mary Daly celebrated her 80th birthday. She also took a fall which landed her in the hospital and now in rehab. Fortunately, no bones were broken but she is still unsteady on her feet.

Some of her friends thought it would be nice to send cards, letters, greetings at this special time in her life. If you would like to join us in doing this, her address is:

Dr. Mary Daly, 55A Norwood Newton Centre, MA 02459

Mary is a major figure in feminist work in religion. Honouring her as she turns 80 will be something she will enjoy. Imagine where we would all be if she had not done her pioneering work!

CWO Annual Gathering

Saturday, 11 October 2008 at Bebington

This was a great success. 21 attended and we acquired one new member.

We heard a thought provoking talk from Martin Dean in the afternoon and in the evening shared a meal back at Bebington

Thanks to all in the North West group who helped to make this such a success.

Pat Brown

Websites to visit

www.catholic-womens-ordination.org.uk

Ours!

<http://ncronline3.org/drupal/>

National Catholic Reporter

www.womenpriests.org. You can sign up for their regular newsletter

www.womensordination.org

More news of Visit to Rome.

Prayer of thanks for St Thérèse of Lisieux

God, you gave us our sister Thérèse, whose life, too short for us, was long enough to prove that no life, however brief, is without meaning.

Thérèse showed us a path to sanctity yet untrodden - her Little Way of life as a signpost to its fullness and completion. Through her we learned that in every moment of our lives the glory of the infinite is offered and may be grasped.

Grant us the simplicity of heart and let each of our moments dedicated to your service unite us with you. May our efforts be blessed by Thérèse who taught us how.

Some Suggested Christmas Reading

'The Uncommon Reader' by Alan Bennett (faber and faber 2007, cost £8.99).

This is a short book of 124 pages and it is about the Queen becoming a serious reader with the help of the royal kitchen boy she meets in the Palace. It says on the cover 'Subversive and hugely enjoyable' and very funny'. It is really a good short read, especially for train travelling.

On a more serious note, Claire Henderson Davis, one of our past Scottish members, has published a book entitled 'After the Church: Divine Encounter in a Sexual Age' (Canterbury press, 2007, cost £10.99). This is also a short book of 78 pages, in which Claire writes of her life since her father and mother's death. Her father was the famous theologian Charles Davis who, she says 'left the Church in protest against its authoritarian structures' after 'Humanae Vitae' in 1968. She sums up her thoughts on the church, and Christianity in general, as one where a 'dysfunctional transmission' of tradition' has seeped right into its heart or in Claire's own words: 'The search for contemporary religious practice is real and widespread: children of dysfunctional transmission, longing for dialogue with God'.

Myra Poole

God is a comedian, playing to an audience too afraid to laugh

Voltaire