

Go,
Rebuild
My Church!

**Comprehensive
Course on the
Franciscan
Mission
Charism**



*"As Man and Woman
He Created Them..."*
A Franciscan
Challenge

Lesson Unit 22

The documents of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* have deeply affected the understanding of mission. Constant efforts are being made to clarify its purpose and objectives, and to determine the most appropriate methods to carry it out. *Go, Rebuild My Church: A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism*, provides a particular context to stimulate dialogue about the many dimensions of mission and the inevitable recognition of the equality, dignity and humanity of all persons. The course is unique, since it is genuinely inter-Franciscan and inter-cultural. An ongoing process for exchange among all members of the Franciscan Family from six continents provides for a creative meshing of the best in current theology, Franciscan research and pastoral practice. The vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent our search for a fuller understanding of humanity in the light of the Gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ.

As Franciscans, with the world as our *cloister*, we welcome this refreshing moment of intercultural dialogue. Francis was the first among founders to situate the missionary dimension of the Gospel call clearly within his rule. This study reawakens us to the challenge and genuineness of Francis' message for our own times.



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Go, Rebuild My Church!

A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism



“As Man and Woman He Created Them...”
A Franciscan Challenge



Lesson Unit 22



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From the Sources



Francis and Women

Francis had a peculiar relationship with women. On the one hand, he was a product of his age, in which every woman was an 'Eve', ready to tempt Adam, the man, and was therefore to be avoided. On the other hand, Francis developed a relationship of friendship with three women.



St. Francis meeting St. Clare.

His relationship to women was, therefore, not without contradiction. It seems that it was not until the end of his life that he managed to achieve an inner freedom, when in his illness he allowed himself to become close to Clare and her sisters (cf. 3C 37 ff.).

First there was Clare, the foundress of the Poor Clares, but he called her "la Cristiana" (feminine form of the Christian) because for him she was the quintessential Christian woman.

Then there was Praxedes, a woman in Rome, who came to him for advice and direction; he pointed out to her an isolated place in which she could participate in her own way in his life in penance (living in the following of Jesus, i.e., the Third Order Secular).

And last of all, there was Jacoba of Settesole, a noblewoman from Rome, whom he occasionally visited, and whose almond cookies he liked. He even asked for some of these cookies on his deathbed, and called her 'brother,' because the observance of cloister did not apply to her.





Networks of Solidarity

Having looked at different forms of oppression and exploitation in previous lessons, this lesson deals with the problem of *sexism*, a term that means the prejudices and disadvantages that women experience because of their gender. Sexism also involves questions and perspectives related to women. It is devoted to the mystery of the difference between man and woman and the unjust structures under which only women suffer, simply because they are women.

As Franciscans, we have the common obligation, like Jesus, to accompany all those who yearn for

justice and compassion. We must rethink the preferential option for the poor and the powerless, since the great majority of the poor and powerless in our world are women and children. We should try to see the world from this perspective and try to understand it.

History to a large extent is written by men and for men. Hence, it is not surprising that the tragic experience of sexism has not been noted. The abuse of women and children and violence against them are largely ignored, excused, defended, falsely interpreted, and yes, even entirely overlooked.

In recent times women historians have uncovered thoroughly the hidden history of women and children. The nameless victims are no longer invisible or voiceless.

Throughout the world, there are networks of solidarity and opposition. These have allowed women and children to put fear and shame be-

hind them, to identify injustice for what it is and to struggle against oppression and unjust structures. After centuries of silence and censorship, it is now possible to denounce sex-

**The abuse
of women and children
and violence against them
are largely ignored.**

ism as a world-wide phenomenon.

Societies should not allow the experience of being women to be viewed totally from the perspective of their status and role as defined by culture and religious tradition (organised religion). Hence, faith communities should remain neither naively indifferent nor ambivalent to the injustice experienced by women. The signs of the times lead us to become more aware of the manner and ways that sexism is even rooted in the great religious traditions of the world just as are racism, class distinctions and militarism. This is especially true of the Roman Catholic Church.



Survey

B



Steps towards Conversion

Since we cannot discuss something that we are not clear about, in the first and second section we will prepare for a critique of *sexism* by defining the term and examining a few of the *myths* and factual data that underlie or express it. The third part presents a short history of the women's

movement and tries to summarise a number of results and the stance of *feminism*. The fourth part attempts to show to what extent the Church is shaped by sexism and how Christian women can relate to this issue. Finally, the fifth part presents sexism as a Franciscan challenge.

Information

C



Sexism

1.



Sexism refers to gender-based discrimination against women, which we have become more aware of since the 1960s. It is one of the most widespread inhuman forms of structural oppression in our world and is often tied up with material poverty. In the countries of the southern hemisphere, women are often doubly poor. Sex-

ism is frequently justified and aggravated by historical and cultural prejudice, social and economic conditions and religious convictions. To recognise sexism and its background, we must take a close look at it and observe the world from a woman's perspective.



Throughout the world, the social roles of women and men are conditioned by gender:

Men undertake the productive role outside the home. The man is the breadwinner; he receives a salary, respect and recognition for his work. Therefore to this very day, all over the world the key positions in state and Church are almost all occupied by men.



"When Adam dug and Eve spun ..."

Women have been oriented to their reproductive role: child-bearing and child-rearing, performing work in the home and creating and maintaining an atmosphere in which the family can live and prosper. This *natural* task of women is carried over to the world of work outside the home. As a consequence, typical occupations for women include teaching, care of the sick, office work and other *service* roles that are generally not well-paid.

In most areas in the world there is still unequal distribution of social roles as shown in the following 1995 report:

| | For Women | For Men |
|------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Employed population | 38% | 62% |
| Income from work | 26% | 74% |
| Seats in Parliament | 10% | 90% |
| Representation in government | 6% | 94% |

Source: *Human Development Report, 1995.*

Women with outside occupations carry a double burden; after a hard day's work they must also perform almost all the household duties. Therefore, women essentially have a longer work-day than men. According to a study of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), if it were marketed, the unpaid work of women in the household, would amount to a value of eleven billion dollars a year. For men, two-thirds of their working time is paid on the labour market, while one-third is unpaid work. The opposite is true for women. The men get the lion's share of the income and recognition for their economic contribution, while the big part of women's work is unpaid, unrecognised and underestimated.

The UNDP report also suggests that "Poverty has a feminine face."

- Women comprise half of humankind, put in two-thirds of the total amount of work time, receive only one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one per cent of the property.
- Women produce up to 80 per cent of basic food in the Third World and work 18 hours per day during harvest time.
- They are often the breadwinner for the family, responsible for the health and education of the children, for doing work in the field, for fetching water, and gathering wood for cooking fuel.

The myth of gender roles leads to discrimination against women. They are equally active in both the productive and reproductive roles in life yet, despite this fact, enjoy little or no social recognition for their indispensable contribution.



Equally popular as the myth of gender roles are the various facts, that hold that woman is subordinate to man. These phenomena can be found in all religions and cultures.

- **Misogyny**¹: Ill-regard and mistrust of women leads to men considering women as inferior and, at best, they are seen as handmaids. If we take a critical look at our own history, we can see that even our Franciscan sources are penetrated by an ill-regard for women:

The honeyed poison, namely, familiarities with women, which lead astray even holy men, Francis commanded should be entirely avoided. For he feared that from such things the weak spirit would be quickly broken and the strong spirit often weakened. Avoiding contagion from association with them, unless it were a question of a most proven man, Francis said, in accordance with Scripture, was as easy as walking in a fire without having the soles of one's feet burned. And that he might speak from deeds, he always showed himself an example of all virtue. Indeed, a woman was so unwelcome to him that you would think that his caution was not a warning or an example but rather a dread or a horror. When their importunate loquaciousness caused him difficulty in speaking with them, he would ask for silence with a humble and speedy word and with his face cast down. Sometimes, though, he looked up to heaven and seemed to draw from there the answers he gave to those who were muttering out of the ground.

But those women in whose minds an urgency of holy devotion had set up the abode of wisdom, he taught by wonderful yet brief words. When he talked with a woman, he spoke what was to be said in a loud voice so that he could be heard by everybody. He said once to a companion "I tell you the truth, dearest brother, I would not recognise any woman if I looked into her face, except two. The face of the one and of the other is known to me, but I know no other." Rightly so, I say, for they provide no profit but only great loss, at least of time. They are an impediment to those who would

walk the difficult way and who want to look up to the face that is full of graces (2C 112).

- **Patriarchalism**²: By this term we understand a form of society, which is marked by the power and absolute authority of the father, a hierarchical system of stratified dominance, at whose summit stands the man.



19th Century patriarchal family.

Historically speaking, the matriarchalism came first, a social system where the women and the mothers had the say. It is interesting that the first to speak of patriarchalism were the men. Under this watchword they celebrated their "liberation from the feminine", the uplifting of spirit and reason over nature, a development of a higher level of existence for humankind. In the present women's movement, in contrast, patriarchalism means the exact opposite; it is the residue of an originally more human society, which was determined by womanly - and integrated - values.

¹ Greek: *misein* = hate; compare with *misanthrope*; *gyne* = woman; Hence, *misogyny*: a man's aversion for the feminine gender (generally, in all social relationships, but especially in the realm of sexuality).

² Greek: *pater* = father, Ancestor; *arche* = lordship/dominance. Hence, *patriarchalism* = the dominance of the father. The description of a society in which the male possesses the overall and highest decision-making power and the right of disposal over all family members.



• **Androcentrism**³: This view holds that the male is the centre and, if it is accepted uncritically, it leads to the unconscious assumption that the male is the norm of human existence and the subject of history. Androcentrism, in which

at best women have a passive role, must be opposed, so that women can have a voice and shape literature, the arts and sciences, politics and the church.

The Myth of Eve, the Temptress

1.3.



The myths of the pre-ordained gender roles and the subordination of woman to man are generally supported by religious tradition. As Christians, we are affected most of all by the story of the first sin, a story that in both the Old and New Testament is often read from a viewpoint that is hostile to women. As a result men have even denied that women were created in God's image and likeness and therefore she is not even really a human being.

As recently as 1910, Max Funk, a philosopher in the Schopenhauer school, wrote a book on the question of whether a woman is truly a person, a question he blatantly answers in the negative: "Was it not a woman who caused Adam's fall? Was it not a woman who tempted the angels Barut and Marut? Was it not a woman who led the pious David to murder Urias? Was it not a woman who caused the chaste Joseph to be put into prison?... And when God drove Adam and Eve out of Paradise, did he not ask Adam: "Why have you eaten of the forbidden tree?" If God, however, had recognised Eve as a human person, he would have certainly addressed this question to her" (quoted by Schüngel-Straumann, 12).

When accounts of the creation and the fall are read without prejudice or bias, we get an entirely different picture. Eve is "flesh of Adam's flesh", a total person equal in dignity, a full-val-

ued equal, standing at his side as a partner. In the mutuality of man and woman is the human person, an image of God. The subordination of woman to man is a result of sin. It is the result of guilt and failure, it is an ungodly lack of order or chaos. Fundamentally, in paradise we find partnership and equal dignity. Such an interpretation would be, to a large degree, critical of society. This function, however, does not come through the text, since the first chapter of the Bible - with very few exceptions - has been interpreted from a perspective that is hostile to women.

One of these exceptions is the 4th-century martyr, Julitta, who had to defend herself from the myth of the "weaker sex" and a false interpretation of the Bible: "We are made of the same fabric as men. We are created in God's image, as they are. The Creator made the female sex capable of virtue, just like the male. Are we not therefore related to men in everything? For the creation of woman flesh was not taken from man, but bone from his bone. Therefore, just like men, we owe the Lord steadfastness, courageous strength and patience" (quoted in Schüngel-Straumann, 34).

Such expressions are the opposite of the opinions of Sts. Paul, Augustine, Ambrose, Thomas Aquinas, and many other theologians who have shaped Christian tradition.

³ Greek: *andros* = man; *kentron* = middle; hence *androcentrism* means centered on the male.





Sexual Exploitation

2.

Taken together, the aforementioned myths necessarily lead to sexual exploitation. From childhood and throughout their entire adult life, many women are exposed to the threat of violence. There is little data about this, but documented

cases show that violence against women is a widespread problem throughout the world. Violence of men against women and children is expressed in various forms.

Forms of Violence against Women and Children

2.1.

- **Domestic violence:** Studies estimate that two-thirds or more of married women are exposed to domestic violence. Women are considered as property and are expected to be available to men as objects for their sexual pleasure. Many people see these forms of violence as failures against the virtue of chastity, and therefore they are taken lightly or totally ignored. In reality, they are crimes of violence, oppression and domination.

- **Pornography, sexual abuse and prostitution:** Estimates are that one million children annually, mostly young girls in Asia, are forced into prostitution; about 100 million young girls suffer from forced genital mutilation. In addition, we have only recently become aware of the extent of the widespread practice of sex tourism, that systematically promotes various forms of sexual exploitation, especially the prostitution of women and children.

- **Rape:** Studies in Canada, New Zealand, Great Britain and the USA conclude that one out of every six women has been raped at some point in her lifetime.

- **Murder and Suicide:** Studies conclude that more than half of the murders of women are committed by their present or former partners. There is evidence from entirely different cultures that violence in marriage is a principal cause of suicide among women.

- **Sterilisation and abortion :** In many countries, sonograms and other medical tests are used for "gender screening", and eventually lead to the abortion of female foetuses. The frequent cases of forced sterilisation, abortion and the killing of children is symptomatic of a world economic order in which women and children are seen as commodities to be used.

Oppression

2.2.

The "weaker sex", so says a false, misleading tradition, must be guided by men. Hence women are held under the sway of men. For centuries women have been prevented from taking part in the decision-making process in matters that affect their own lives. Often this dehumanisation is internalised by the victims, the women themselves, who oppose any attempts to break through

the vicious cycle of their oppression.

Philosophical and theological prejudices are still hard at work! We should not be surprised to discover that the tragic experiences and the disturbing consequences of abuse and violence against women and children are ignored, excused, defended, misinterpreted or entirely overlooked.





The Modern Women's Movement

In the course of history, there have always been times when more recognition has been given to women. Since the nineteenth century, there is a modern women's movement, that goes by the name of *feminism*. This term denotes the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the genders and "organised activities to promote women's rights and interests".

The feminist women's movement concentrates its attention on the history of women, which to a large extent, is still undiscovered. History is often written by men and for men and the women are relegated to the background. In contrast, feminism calls into question the dominant social attitudes, structures, and perspectives that perpetuate sexism.

Feminism is subject to many forms of misunderstanding. At times it evokes the highly politicised and often negative image of the white, western woman. Privileged by race and class, she boldly analyses the systems and structures that promote the dominant interests of western men. But what about the women with skin of a different colour, or the women who are poor, and living somewhere in Latin America, Africa or Asia? We need the criticism of the women of other races, classes and cultures. Their critique can point out sharply the racial, socio-economic and political prejudices of western feminists. The latter often exhibit the same personal interest and feelings of superiority tied up with the First World ideologies. On the other hand, the initiatives of western women in their struggle for women's rights are often undervalued and not closely examined. They are simply labelled as *subversive* or *imperialistic* by some and regarded as *champions* or *colleagues* by others. Women, who are engaged in the struggle for social justice and human dignity, are slandered or libelled or calumniated and misunderstood.

Feminists are often regarded as a threat to the existing social order through their unconventional means. Hence it is not surprising that they are often publicly dismissed as "a threat to society", ridiculed and decried as "blue stockings" or "women libbers" – by the very same men and women whose social, political and economic interests are promoted by the continuation of current sexist behaviour and practices.



Only if feminism
is combined
with the stance
of liberation theology
can this dilemma
be resolved.

Throughout history in many countries of the world women's groups have worked with other humanitarian movements. This is due to the fact that women and children constitute the majority of the poor and those who are deprived of their basic human rights. For example, in the 19th-century USA those struggling for women's rights were equally condemned and praised for their unrelenting efforts for the abolition of slavery, for prison reform,



for the psychologically sick and handicapped, for the integration of immigrants, for *prohibition* [of alcohol], women's right to suffrage and pacifism. Socio-political research shows that this experience is not limited to North America. The themes and concerns expressed by the feminists, and those anchored in the experience of women all over the world, must be taken seriously by us and we must think about them carefully.

The modern women's movement leads to various networks. In many cultures solidarity and opposition have allowed women to put behind them the fear and shame that previously kept them from defending themselves and their children from oppression. The present state of information presents sexism as it really is: a worldwide phenomenon found in varying degrees on every continent and in all societies and classes.

Simone de Beauvoir's Manifest on Sexism

3.1.

In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir published a comprehensive historical study of the status and role of women in Western culture under the title, "*The Other Sex*." Although Simone de Beauvoir is not the first feminist author to systematically criticize sexism, she is surely the most often read and the best-known internationally. In the course of her research, the French philosopher delves into the social, sexual, biological and historical aspects of being a woman.

In her effort to find an authentic answer to the question, "What is a woman?", Beauvoir was especially aware that throughout the centuries men have simply answered the question in their own way, without any consideration for the reflections, convictions, viewpoints and experiences of women. Men defined women not as such, but in relation to himself. Women are defined and identified by men, but men are never defined by women. Simone de Beauvoir made it clear how the lawmaker, theologian, philosopher, novelist and scientist work

together to prove that woman's "subordinate position is made in heaven and advantageous here on earth." What Beauvoir nevertheless overlooked was her own racial, cultural, political and sexual concepts, the prejudices and interests that she had received from her own status as a western intellectual.

Hence her classic Manifest made an important contribution to women's history, because it called into question the old concept, whereby women's destiny is inevitably linked to physiological, psychological, and economic forces. In her investigation of the many reasons women are seen as the subordinate *other*, she presents, down to the smallest detail, the unfortunate further consequences of this situation, for women as well as for men. Without a doubt her analysis is the driving factor in the formation of a new consciousness about the status and role of women – in Europe and all over the world.



There is a new awareness about status and role of women world-wide.



The work of Barbara Bovee Polk shows four different ways in which sexism has entered society. Although Simone de Beauvoir's pioneering work gave a synthesis of the directions taken by earlier researchers' emphasis on sexism, the various women researchers emphasise one or the other direction, or to be precise, a combination of two or three directions. The specific themes and views used to speak about these directions is the next topic for our consideration.

- **Gender roles:** This closer knowledge of sexism supports is based on a social and psychological analysis of the different gender roles. This presupposes that the oppression of women is a direct result of the internalisation of socially defined gender roles. This theory concludes that:

- Social systems tend to prescribe definite behaviour patterns, roles and interests according to gender.
- Since the definition of what is *masculine* or *feminine* varies from one society to another, it is clear that these definitions are arbitrary. They are based on social, not biological, factors.
- Gender roles are systematically strengthened and supported through social institutions and structures, for instance, the family, school, religion, media, economy, politics.
- When individuals do not conform to their expected gender roles, they are often not taken seriously or are considered sick.
- The masculine role has a higher social value. It brings social rewards and guarantees entry into highly regarded social positions.
- *Power* and *reason* distinguish the masculine role while to women are attributed *weakness* and *feeling*. The fortification of these gender roles makes it possible for men to wield power over women.
- Gender-specific division of labour is an important structural element: Production

and reproduction are separated, and women are relegated to the latter.



Gender roles are supported through social structures as well as play.

- **The difference in fundamental values - the dominant masculine and the alternative feminine culture:** This approach puts less emphasis on role differences and more on the differences in basic values between genders. An unsatisfactory solution offered by this approach is that women can improve their position by taking on masculine roles. This appears as a more woman-centred (gynecentric) approach than the other ones since it stresses, identifies and names and promotes the differences in value between men and women, thus presenting the positive aspects of a feminine culture. In essence, the value-difference approach is somewhat disturbing:
- Values are arranged according to a gender-specific order: Masculine values include aggression, independence, readi-



ness for conflict, while passivity, dependence, readiness to help, are feminine traits. In fact, none of these characteristics are naturally masculine or feminine, but are socially determined and are based on the establishment of gender roles. All these characteristics mentioned are important for the *humanness* of both woman and man.

- Masculine values are of greater significance: they represent the values of the dominant and visible culture of a society. They are what is considered *normal* and *mature*.
- Women are undervalued, since they embody an alternative culture. Men are like colonisers, since they dominate the spirit and bodies of women like a "foreign culture."
- Normally, men are socialised in the appropriate masculine value system. Women receive a two-pronged form of socialisation

because, in order to survive in a masculine culture, they must be able to function in both systems. When an individual's upbringing includes only masculine values, social crises can arise, for the inability to recognise passivity, dependence and a readiness to help as human traits, leads to the establishment of institutions and systems that are not in a position to accept the equal dignity of the genders.

- **The power relationship between man and woman:** The theory of "power analysis" does not in the least dispute the importance of gender roles and the value differences in the oppression of women. However, it does maintain that the role distinctions and the value symptoms of the oppression are not its causes. This theory concentrates on the power that men have and not so much on the ways that they acquire it. Power analysis states that:

- Men have power and privileges because of their gender. Thus, since they have the



Identification with a masculine



or a feminine model.



possibility of oppressing women in various ways, they do so.

- It is in the male's best interest to preserve their power and privileges. The capacity to oppress others means more power, regardless of whether or not that person is himself or herself oppressed.
- Men have the political position and economic power in society to exclude women.
- Marriage becomes an institution of oppression and sexual enslavement.
- Men too are frequently oppressed by the system in which they live but, unlike women, this oppression is not based on their gender alone.
- Men can oppress women through brutal violence, but also through more subtle forms of violence: e.g. the limitation of political rights, job openings, education, financial independence.

● **Economic exploitation:** This theory regards the oppression of women as a destructive and dehumanising result of an exploitative economic system.

Therefore, it sees in socialism a basic assumption for the liberation of women. This socialist direction represents the following opinions:

- The oppression of women comes from a socio-economic world view: women are *property*. To the extent that the idea of private property is basically connected with capitalist structures, the oppression of women is directly related to capitalism.
- Capitalism is served by sexism, since it receives two members of the labour force for the price of one. Without the unpaid work of women, men could not perform their paid work.
- Women are a cheaper labour force. They receive less pay for equal work. Their underpayment keeps wages down and increases the profits of the employer.
- The struggle for women's emancipation must not be separated from other emancipation movements. If it is, capitalism will reap the benefits.



Sexism and Christianity

We have just seen the negative influence of a certain interpretation of the story of creation and

the fall. However, now let us take a closer look at this aspect.

Christian Feminism as related to Sexism in the Church

Significant works of women theologians, Bible scholars and historians received great attention within the Church, the academic world and society. They dared to call by name some of the bitter and tragic realities that the Church was partially responsible for, or about which the Church was equivocal or failed to speak up. These

women researchers showed how discrimination against women within the Church contributed to a greater discrimination in *Christian* society. The unavoidable conclusion was that throughout history the sexual exploitation, moral defamation and social subordination of women has had a religious dimension. Pastoral neglect, per-



sonal humiliation, spiritual oppression, exclusion from the priesthood and the terror tactics of the "witch hunts" count among the experiences suffered by Christian women throughout history. With examples taken from all the centuries these women researchers documented the persistent and now all-too widespread "Demon of sexual prejudice." The Church was accused not only as a historical institution but also as the living "Body of Christ." Now the Church is faced with the task of expelling this *demon* – in all its forms. We should state here, however, that in the course of three decades, a number of local Churches and Bishops' Conferences have partially recognised their responsibility for this.

Many theologians – women and men alike – have begun to rethink the dominant influences. They inquire into the feminine face of God, women's place in the order of creation and the meaning of salvation for the "bigger half" of humankind. And so, in the light of the position of other liberation theologies, those questions of faith and justice are being asked that in unique ways reflect the experiences of women.



Life of women from the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary ...



... and to the burning of witches at the stake.

Consciousness-raising of Women in the Church

4.2.

Western Christian feminism arose contemporarily with the development of a political theology in parts of Europe, the appearance of liberation theology in Latin America, black theology in the USA and South Africa as well as the beginnings of indigenous theologies in Africa, Asia and Oceania. In each continent, the new theological voices gave expression to the Church's prophetic

commitment that says: "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" (GS 29).

In the course of time, these same voices, singularly or in common, began to give expression to a serious question and to confront the People of God with an important challenge: if social dis-



crimination is opposed to God's plan, is not the discrimination in the Church itself a turning away from Christ, inflicting a wound on the Body of Christ?

Inspired by the Gospel and encouraged by Vatican II's documents, women theologians from all over the world, among whom were the first women with academic degrees in theology, raised people's consciousness about the scandal and the devastating effects of sexism in the Church. Because there is a basic connection among all the forms of discrimination and human oppression, they struggled for solidarity among all people.

The evidence of more pronounced discrimination in other cultures should not detract from the struggle for women's rights in one's own culture. The marginalization of women who are forced into prostitution or the exploitation of day-labourers in factories, private households and agriculture in order to feed their children, directly related to the exclusion of women from offices in the Church. Each religious justification of the indignity, subordination and exclusion of women – simply because they are women and

not men – lessens the dignity and worth of each woman, and indeed threatens the dignity and worth of each human being.



Voice of women being heard.

The Challenge brought by Women Theologians

4.3

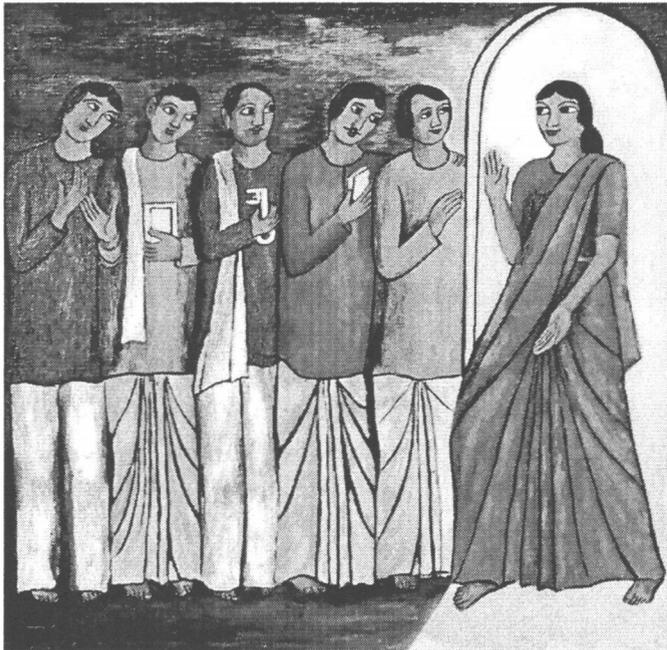
In recent years, an increasingly comprehensive literature about the women's role and status within the Church has made available additional sources, materials and reflections. Among them, scientific and pastoral contributions by Roman Catholic women theologians should be noted. These contributions are met with – both within and without the Church – agreement and rejection. Guided by a "hermeneutics of suspicion"⁴, leading women Biblical scholars argue for a historical-critical reconstruction of women's history and the contribution of women in the beginnings of Christianity. Only then can women reclaim and partially regain their place in Chris-

tian tradition. Androcentrism, patriarchalism, and misogyny have influenced the development of Christianity, the writing of its history and the interpretation of Scripture. This has led to an established tradition in which women have not simply been hidden, but women have been made invisible or considered as suspect. The growing insight into these connections is the basis for the urgent and undeniable wish for change among today's women: they want to reclaim what they have lost, or has been taken from or deprived of. In this regard, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza says: "*Demanding and insisting upon early Christian history as our own women's*

⁴ Greek: *Hermeneuo* = Reading a text from a definite viewpoint. The "hermeneutics of suspicion" means reading the Bible with the suspicion that a woman's face may have been hidden.



history, will help it to become an integral part of the written history of the early Christian movement. It puts us in solidarity with our fore-sisters in the search for our roots and commemorates their suffering, their struggle, their power as women."



Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord (Jn 20:11-18).

Many theologians and pastors hold that the reconstruction of the Christian origins of sexism in the Church is of fundamental importance. As long as sexism, along with many other forms of discrimination continue to be considered in tune with the Scriptures and thus justified, the Church's magisterium bears the responsibility.

From this day forward, Biblical texts must be understood from their basic intention. They are meant to liberate the People of God rather than oppress them. Christian feminists are searching for an authentic spirituality, where their being human as women, created in God's image, is taken seriously. Hence, they logically criticize the prevalence of masculine images of God as well as the power these images have to support sexist behaviour. The work of Rosemary Radford-Ruether shows that it is not so simple to have an assault with images or a denial of tradition. It is more about rediscovering the feminine image of God in biblical texts and in centuries of spiritual literature.

The reconstruction of the origins of Christianity and the rediscovery of the feminine side of God have wide-reaching consequences for the Christian community. Theological statements must be studied and reviewed for any practical effects of sexism and refined accordingly; in pastoral practice the whole Church would be challenged by new knowledge. The Church must learn concretely the meaning of life and death, peace and war, love and hatred, anger and tenderness, liberation and oppression, power and powerlessness, health and sickness, faith and disbelief; particularly from women's perspective. If the Church fails to take the feminine perspective seriously, she shares in the responsibility of the silencing of countless women, pushed to the margins of society.

5.



The Franciscan Challenge

Sexism presents a great challenge to the Franciscan family, which must ask itself how much it is affected by sexist ideas and mechanisms.

That is the only way our family can offer a witness of genuine brotherhood/sisterhood.





For us Franciscans – women and men alike – the following of Jesus also implies the idea that we are sisters and brothers of every person. We are called to familiarize ourselves with the reality and the life circumstances that mark the faith and self-image of those with whom we live and whom we serve. That is not enough, however; we should also allow ourselves to feel their fears and sorrow, the humiliation and marginalization they suffer, just like Francis united himself with those who were marginalized by the society of Assisi. Thus we will help overcome the division between genders. As brothers and sisters in a single family, we can bear witness to the possibility that women and men can share life creatively with one another. However, even in the Franciscan family there are some particulars that we should think about in the light of the knowledge that we have gained from a more in-depth study of the Franciscan sources.

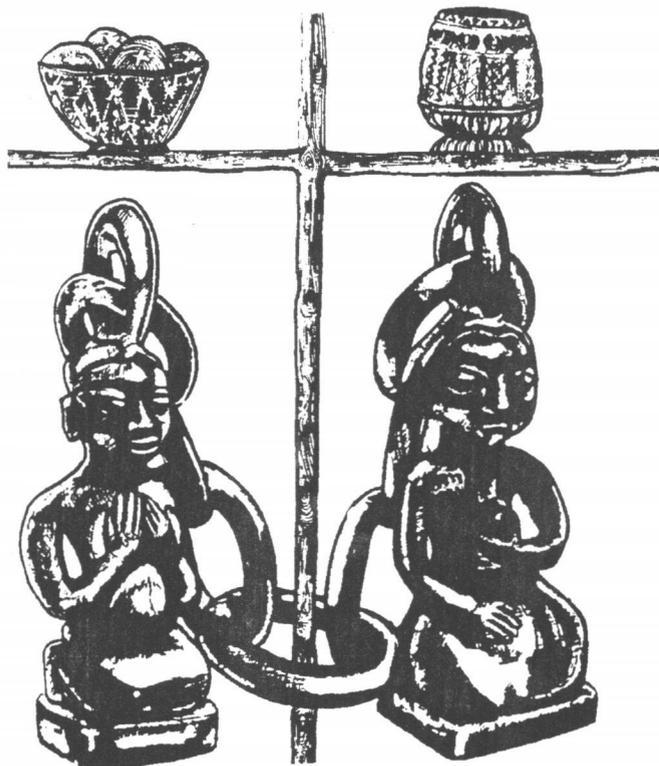
- **Clericalism**⁵: One of these realities is clericalism in the Church and in the First Order. By *clericalism*, we mean the exercise of power by a group based on its religiously conditioned privileged position. Priesthood is generally linked with power, privilege, and prestige. This must be examined critically from the Bible and Franciscan tradition, and even from the perspective of the non-ordained brothers and, in connection with this lesson, especially from the women's point of view.

Clericalism is a form of Church oppression. It shows how much status, value, power and economic advantage is involved in comparison or contrast with those who are not ordained. In the very recent past, we have become more conscious of this reality. It is only after decades of conflict with Church institutions that the first order was recognised as a fraternity, although it is still defined as clerical, and not as a lay order. Francis was a deacon, and as such he belonged to the clergy. However, being a *brother* was the

basic condition in his community. The priests were not to have any more rights than the brothers. In this regard two anecdotes concerning Brother Giles are quite meaningful! The first one criticizes the clerical theology from the perspective of an old woman, while the second criticizes clerical preaching from the view of uneducated laity, with whom Clare of Assisi could be identified.

One day Brother Giles said to Brother General Bonaventure: "My father, has God given you many talents? We have

received no talents. What must we unlearned and stupid ones do if we are to do right?" The general answered: "If God had given a person no other talent except to love him, that is enough." And Brother Giles asked: "Can an uneducated person love God as much as a learned one?" The General answered: "An old lady



From the beginning the Creator made them male and female (Mt 19:1-12).

⁵ Greek: *klerus* = separated; share; cleric = a member of the clergy, actually "privileged position".



can love him even more than a master of theology." Compelled by passion, Brother Giles jumped up, ran to the garden, to the orchard next to the city and cried aloud: "Poor, little, old lady, simple and stupid, you love the Lord God, and can love him more, than Brother Bonaventure." Struck by this thought, he stayed "glued to that spot" for three hours (Life of Blessed Giles).

The second story reads:

A brother from England, a master of sacred theology, was once preaching at San Damiano in the presence of St. Clare and Brother Giles. In the middle of his discourse Brother Giles, filled with passion, cried out: "Be silent, professor, for I want to preach." Immediately the latter stopped speaking, and in the passion of the Holy Spirit Brother Giles found precious words. After a while he said to the professor: "Now, finish the discourse that I have begun", and the theologian resumed his discourse and finished it. When the blessed Clare saw this, she said joyfully: "Today our most holy Father Francis had his wish fulfilled. Once he said to me 'How I wish that the clerics among my brothers would be so humble that a theology professor would interrupt his speech if a lay brother wanted to speak'. I tell you, brothers, this professor edifies me more than if I saw him raising the dead to life" (Life of Blessed Giles).

• **The Masculine interpretation of the Sources:** Over the centuries, the writings of Francis and the early Franciscan sources were mainly researched, translated and studied by men and usually for men. It was assumed that the viewpoint of educated Franciscans was valid for all the members of the Franciscan family. Since the male viewpoint is not necessarily normative for women, this led to biases in the theological training and spiritual guidance of sisters. From today's viewpoint, such a formation was not only restrictive and inhibitive, but perhaps presumptuous and hence, irresponsible. Only a widening of the horizons of thought and attention to the theological and spiritual insights of women can make a non-sexist approach to the sources possible.

In recent years a growing number of women from the second and third orders have joined in the scientific study and pastoral applications of the Franciscan sources. They prove that male-

oriented reading of the Franciscan texts further accented the anti-women attitudes in Francis' thought and deeds (cf. ER 12; 2C 112-113; Lmj V:5). However, their research and reflections also showed how a careful investigation of the writings also gives us a more balanced view of the Franciscan sources.

• **Approach to the Sources:** In part 1.2, we took one example from the many found in the Franciscan sources, in which woman is identified with evil or sin. Such a negative attitude towards women is based, among others things, in men's fears of being tempted or of becoming dependent on a woman.



If we read these selections today, we might have the following reactions:

- We take on the negative image of women found in the Franciscan sources. In that case, we are incapable of conversion and change.
- We simply allow the misleading image of women in the Franciscan sources to stand as it is. Thus we unconsciously promote the sexism that they express.
- We hold that the distorted image of women found in the sources is basically false, but admit to having some truth and validity in concrete life. In that case, we continue the debasement of women.
- We are of the opinion that meaningful and saving elements are hidden in the inter-



pretation of the sources, but that these elements are either not understood or recognised. In that case, we must reconstruct tradition and read the sources anew.

From today's standpoint, the last reaction is the only one that can be considered permissible and responsible.

Reconstructing the Franciscan Sources

5.2.

In analysing Francis' relationship to women, his attitude to power, privilege and prestige is significant.

• **Francis and Clare and the Ethic of Compassion:** According to the North American psychologist Carol Gilligan, the individual person must decide for himself or herself whether to be guided primarily by a sense of justice or of compassion. She claims that, in agreement with cultural conditioning, a sense of justice predominates among men, while among women it is a sense of compassion. The ethic of justice is identified with rights, rules and competition; in contrast, the ethic of compassion is identified with relationships, responsibility and co-operation.

Francis' convictions on *minority* (cf. ER 2; LMn 26) and the servant style of leadership (cf. RH 4; ER 4-5) bear the stamp of the Johannine understanding of *discipleship* (Jn 13:1-20; cf. LMj XIV:5; 2C 217). From this, he gives a new definition to power, authority and obedience. The role and function of a *minister* is fundamentally different from the conventional role of a *prior* [Latin for "first in rank"] (cf. ER 4; RH 4). Hence there arose an alternative to the hierarchical structure found in the other religious orders of Francis' day.

Francis and Clare sought to promote and maintain a discipleship of equals according to the example of Jesus. In their rules, they have taken up not only an ethic of justice but an ethic of compassion as well.

Both Francis and Clare had the ability to see life from a mother's perspective; this led them to emphasise responsibility and caring besides justice. They placed much weight on the relation-

ships of the brothers and of the sisters with one another. Institutions and structures are admittedly important to them, but relationships are even more important (cf. ER 5; LR 10).



Love.

Fraternity, as Francis understood it, did not rely on a brother's good behaviour or failure (cf. LR 11). For Francis efforts to build "genuine relationships" was more essential and necessary in community life than the desire to act correctly out of a sense of justice (cf. RH 3).



When we reflect today about *minority*, we must include women in the circles of beggars, outsiders, excluded and marginal groups. In this way, solidarity with women and “living among them” (cf. ER 9:2; 16:3) becomes a central question: What does it mean for the Franciscan family if women – not of their free choice but because of oppressive structures – must play the role of *minors* in the Church and society? As brothers and sisters, we have the chance to grow with this question through the ethic of justice and compassion.

- **Solidarity and opposition to patriarchy - Francis, Lady Pica and Bishop Guido:** For feminist thought, the critique of patriarchy is counted among the new discoveries. From its perspective the account of Francis’ persecution by his father takes on a new light. Pietro Bernardone tries to force his own will and plans on Francis by humiliation, subordination and physical violence (cf. 1C 12; L3C 17; LMj II:2). Francis refuses to be dominated, personally, politically or financially, or even *ecclesiastically*, and consequently rejects the power, privilege and prestige of his father.



Dona Pica frees her son who had been tied up by his father.

This father-son conflict is grasped by Lady Pica. In solidarity with her son, she goes against her husband – fully conscious of the personal risk this decision entails (cf. 1C 13; L3C 18b; LMj II:3). Because she frees her son from his father’s chains, she is also maltreated because the husband regards her as a *collaborator* with the *enemy*, his son Francis.

When Pietro Bernardone sees his power in the household being challenged and undermined, he seeks legal redress. Since Francis is under the Church’s jurisdiction, Pietro Bernardone turns to Bishop Guido, himself a patriarchally privileged man. He most certainly would, in the name of God, ensure the father’s authority, honour and demands.

However, Guido sides with Francis, knowing quite well that such a stance goes against tradition, something for which the Church herself usually upheld. Of course, Guido could have refused to get involved in this squabble. After meeting Francis, however, he really had no choice.

Like Francis, Lady Pica and Bishop Guido, we too are faced with decisions involving traditional injustices, which hark back to patriarchal structures. Aloofness and lack of involvement does not indicate neutrality, but rather complicity with the purpose and intent of the powerful.

- **Struggling against domestic violence - the nameless woman:** In the story of the unnamed noblewoman, who was horribly mistreated by her husband (cf. 2C 38; MP 27; LMn XI:6), our attention is drawn primarily to the conversion of her husband. Reading this from a woman’s viewpoint, what really stands out is Francis’ dialogue with the victim of domestic violence. The wife feels a call to continence and thus enters into a conflict with her husband. Because of Francis of Assisi, however, the husband comes to realise that his wife has the right to live her vocation and exercise self-determination over her own body. They both join the penitential movement.

- **Rethinking the exclusion of women - Lady Jacoba, Clare and their companions:** The story of “Brother Jacoba” has a special place in Franciscan tradition. It gives an example of Francis’ flexibility regarding a rule which he himself wrote, whereby women are not allowed to enter the Portiuncula (cf. 3C 37ff.; LP 101). Then too, Francis’ conversation with his brothers about the meal that was supposed to take place with Clare and her companions also raises questions about the reasons for and circumstances around the *rule* and its *exceptions* (cf. LFI 15).



The doors of the *cloister* were opened for Jacoba, and for Clare and her companions; the rule no longer applied because of a reason that was convincing at that time. This shows, incidentally, Francis' sovereign attitude to regulations. The call to: "open the door and bring [them] in, for our Brother Jacoba does not have to observe the rule against women" still holds true today. From today's perspective we must note that no "sexual revolution" is necessary. Women must not be excluded merely because they are women, especially not in the Franciscan family.

• **Recognising the spiritual leadership of women - Clare:** In recent years our understanding of Clare has grown. In her writings she proves to be a strong woman and a spiritual director. Francis himself sought her *advice* (LFI 16) though she opposed the Church's authority by her insistence on poverty. She was obviously more than Francis' "little plant". For Pope Gregory IX, too, Clare was a spiritual authority, such that when he visited San Damiano he asked her to bless the bread at the table (LFI 33).

Her spiritual leadership is shown in her correspondence with Agnes of Prague. As a woman she accompanies Agnes on her spiritual journey and supports her in her struggle with the Pope for spiritual independence:

What you hold, may you always hold. What you do, may you always do and never abandon. But with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet, so that even your steps stir up no

dust, go forward securely, joyfully, and swiftly, on the path of prudent happiness, believing nothing, agreeing with nothing which would dissuade you from this resolution or which would place a stumbling block for you on the way, so that you may offer your vows to the Most High in the pursuit of that perfection to which the Spirit of the Lord has called you (2LAg 11-14).

Clare's outspoken feminine consciousness is clearer in her religious rule. For the very first time in history, a woman has written a rule for women. In the formulation of her *blessing*, she emphasises the feminine form of speech, which was entirely unusual for traditional Church language.

Blessing

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May He show His face to you and be merciful to you.

May He turn His countenance to you and give you peace.

I, Clare, a servant of Christ, a little plant of our holy Father Francis, a sister and mother of you and the other Poor Sisters, although unworthy, ask our Lord Jesus Christ through His mercy and through the intercession of His most holy Mother Mary, of Blessed Michael the Archangel and all the holy angels of God, and of all His men and women saints, that the heavenly Father give you and confirm for you this most holy blessing in heaven and on earth. On earth, may He increase His grace and virtues among His servants and handmaids of His Church Militant. In heaven, may He exalt you and glorify you in His Church Triumphant among all His men and women saints. I bless you in my life and after my death as much as I can



Clare protects her Sisters.



and more than I can with all the blessings with which the Father of mercies has and will have blessed His sons and daughters in heaven and on earth. Amen (BCI).

• **The feminine face of the Crucified - Lady Poverty:** Speaking of the option for the poor (Lesson 19), we looked at a fascinating work about "Lady Poverty". This work, written in the middle of the 13th century, the *Sacrum commercium* or *The Sacred Exchange between Saint Francis and Lady Poverty* has previously been limited to an understanding of the virtue of poverty. When we read it from a woman's perspective, however, totally new aspects surface.

Lady Poverty's attitudes and actions were similar to God's behaviour towards His people. The brothers' experience with Lady Poverty parallels the relationship between God and the prophets of Israel. The literary genre which presents the marriage of Francis and Lady Poverty is the bridal mysticism of Wisdom literature, the prophetic books and the *Song of Songs*. The lover and the beloved become one flesh and one spirit (cf. 2C 55, 70). Lady Poverty is his beloved bride, with whom Christ and His imitator Francis has entered into an indissoluble bond. Lady Poverty is the feminine likeness of the Crucified:

You, most faithful spouse, most sweet lover, did not abandon him for a moment. Moreover, the more you saw him despised by everyone, the more you clung to him. For if you were not with him, he could never have been so despised by all (ScEx 20)!

You did not abandon him even to death, death on a cross. And on that cross, his body stripped, his arms outstretched, his hands and feet pierced, you suffered with him, so that nothing would appear more glorious in him than you (ScEx 21).

Women were taught to identify with the crucified. Many a time that led to passivity and to silence about injustice and oppression in general, even to the acceptance of their own oppression as women. Lady Poverty, in contrast, presents a liberating image of redemptive suffering that is born out of solidarity and opposition. Fearlessly and passionately she enters into the mystery of the cross. With her whole being she accepts the incarnate God, as a woman she embraces him, and embodies him in her own suffering. Through her radical and sincere union with the crucified, Lady Poverty invites the broth-

ers to leave behind all smugness and self-satisfaction. She challenges her sisters to go beyond pity and doubt:

Let the length of the race and the immensity of the labour not deter you for you will have a great reward. While focusing on the author and goal of all good, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, after he condemned its shame, endured the cross (Heb 12:2) for the sake of the joy that awaited him, hold onto the unwavering confession of your hope (Heb 10:23). Run in love to the race that is set before you (Heb 12:1). Run with the patience which is especially necessary for you, that, while you are doing God's will, you may receive what is promised (Heb 10:36) [ScEx 66].



The Church is summoned to contribute to the human and Christian advancement of women (CELAM, Puebla 1979).

This lesson is about recognising the prejudices, errors and blind spots that have affected our vision and hindered us in the following of Christ. Sexism is a social sin. It is as widespread as racism, class consciousness and militarism.

Our own particular, Franciscan-shaped witness to a community of divine love, the Trinity, demands that liberating attitudes and action bring about the full participation and the human dignity of all our sisters and brothers.

Because of our conviction "that only in mutual giving and receiving will we be able to realise our Franciscan vocation" (Mattli 2), we accept the challenge to tackle and fight sexism in all its visible and hidden forms.

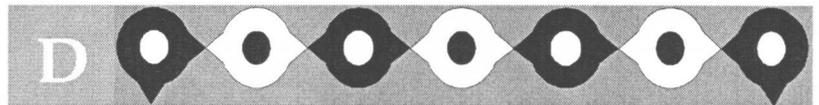


Church Documents and Franciscan Sources

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Scripture | Lk 18:15 ff.; 24:1-10; Mt 28:1-10; Jn 8; 13:1-20. |
| Church Documents | GS 29 |
| Franciscan Sources | Adm 3f.; ER 2; 4-6; 12; LR 10f.; 1C 11 ff.; 2C 38; 55; 70; 112f.; 217; 3C 37 ff.; 181; L3C 17; 18b; ScEx 21f.; 66; LMj II:2 f.; V:5; XI:6; XIV:5; LMn; LFI 15f.; 33; 2LAg 3. |
| Inter-Franciscan Documents | Mattli 2 |
| OFM, OFMCap, OFMConv | |
| Poor Clares | |
| Third Order Regular/Secular | |
| Supplements | |

Each Community may add other items.

Exercises



Exercise

Addressing sexism: An ecclesial perspective

Throughout the world, regional and national bishops' conferences have acknowledged the many forms of social injustice that diminish the dignity of women. In the following excerpts from official Church statements from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the USA, many issues and concerns about the plight of women are discussed.

A. From the Final Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, September, 1986 – Tokyo, Japan (no. 3.3.1. - 3.3.6.):

The laity and the plight of Asian women

International media have highlighted how tourism and the entertainment industries have ex-

ploited, degraded and dehumanised Asian women. However, this is but one aspect of the reality of Asian women today. Many are the injustices heaped upon them because of the traditional societies which discriminate against them and because of the new economic and industrial situations. Dowry, forced marriages, wife-beating and destruction of female foetuses weigh heavily on them, driving many to desperation and even suicide. Modern industry exploits their work – for example, paying a paltry sum for their hard labour in quarries and on construction sites of local and multinational companies. There is discrimination against them in the employment policies, and as domestic workers they are often abused. In general, Asian society views women as inferior.



Such are some of the tragic realities of Asian women that cry out for transformation.

On the other hand, there is a deep and genuine appreciation of women among Asians. A woman is considered the heart of the family. The advancement and contributions that women have made in the professions – as doctors, lawyers, managers, accountants, political leaders, teachers, – have been phenomenal, despite the obstacles placed in their path by tradition. In the church, women contribute significantly in the various ministries of teaching, healing, catechising, organising. They serve as members of pastoral teams. In our assembly we have listened to them and have been made more aware of some fundamental facts and truths about the role of women in Asia.

A woman is an integral human person, no matter what race, class, tribe or religion she belongs to. She is created in the image and likeness of God. To her too was extended the divine call of being responsible for the created world (Gen 1:27). The tragedy is that this image and likeness of God has been degraded and trampled underfoot and she is dominated in various ways. Therefore, women cry out to the Lord for liberation. We have heard this poignant cry from women themselves, who have articulated here their deepest longings for dignity and freedom. They reminded us that Mary is the Mother of God, that she, a woman, uniquely co-operated with Jesus so that the Reign of the Father may come. It is, therefore, not just a human necessity but a Gospel imperative that the feminine half of the world's population be recognised and their dignity restored, and that they be allowed to play their rightful role in the world and in the Church.

The laity thus have a special responsibility in their respective fields – be it business, education, mass media, politics or public service – to uphold and defend the dignity of women, and to change attitudes, policies, practices and legislation that lead to the discrimination against and the repression of women.

But recognition of woman's full personhood must equally be evident among the People of God, the Church. For the Church cannot be a sign of the Kingdom and of the eschatological com-

munity if the gifts of the Spirit to women are not given due recognition, and if women do not share in the "freedom of the children of God". They expect significant responsibilities in the ministries and decision-making processes of the Church.

The entire People of God would then become a credible sign of the dignity and freedom of women in society and in the world. The Church could then speak powerfully about the plight of Asian women and become their voice, with an authority unlike any other.

B. From the Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops (CELAM), Puebla de los Angeles, Mexico 1979 (no. 834-849):

Women

Though various parts of this document talk about women – as a nun, in the home, etc. – here we want to consider women in terms of their concrete contribution to evangelization in Latin America's present and future.

The situation

As is well known, women have been pushed to the margins of society as a result of cultural atomisms – male predominance, unequal wages, deficient education. This is manifest in their almost total absence from political, economic and social life. To these are added new forms of marginalization in a hedonistic consumer society, which even go to the extreme of transforming the woman into an object of consumption. This exploitation is camouflaged under the pretext that times are changing, a pretext disseminated by advertising, eroticism, pornography.

In many of our countries female prostitution is on the increase, due either to the stifling economic situation or to the acute moral crisis.

In the work sector we note the evasion of, or non-compliance with, laws that protect women. Faced with this situation, women are not always organised to demand respect for their rights.

In families women are overburdened, not only with domestic tasks but with professional work as well. In quite a few cases they must assume all the responsibilities because the man has abandoned the home.

We must also consider the sad situation of female domestic employees. They are often subjected to



maltreatment and exploitation by their employers. In the Church itself there has sometimes been an undervaluation of women and minimal participation by them in pastoral initiatives.

But there are also positive signs that must be noted: the slow but increasing influx of women into tasks dealing with the construction of society and the resurgence of women's organisations working to advance women and to incorporate them into all areas.

Reflection

First: we must consider the equality and dignity of the woman. Like the man, the woman is the image of God: "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Thus the task of ruling the world, continuing the work of creation, and being God's co-creators is woman's as much as man's.

Second: we must consider the mission of women in the Church. As far back as the Old Testament we find that women played significant roles in the People of God. For example, there was Miriam, the sister of Moses; Anna, the prophetess, Deborah and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14); Ruth, Judith and others.

In the Church, women share in Christ's gifts and spread his witness through a life of faith and charity. Such were the Samaritan woman (Jn 4); the women who accompanied the Lord and served him with their goods (Lk 8:2); the women present on Calvary (Jn 19:25); the women who were sent by the Lord to tell the apostles that he has risen (Jn 20:17); and the women in the first Christian communities (Acts 1:14; Rom 16:1-15).

But the prime example is Mary. At the Annunciation she unconditionally accepted the Word of God (Lk 1:26ff). At the visitation she went to serve and announced the presence of the Lord (Lk 1:39-45). In the Magnificat she prophetically sang of the freedom of the children of God and the fulfilment of the promise (Lk 1:46ff). At the Nativity she gave birth to the Word of God and offered him for the adoration of all those seeking him, whether simple shepherds or wise men from distant lands (Lk 1:1-8).

With her specific aptitudes, the woman should make a real contribution to the Church's mission, participating in organisms for pastoral planning,

pastoral co-ordination and catechesis (RM 49-50). The possibility of entrusting non-ordained ministries to women will open up new ways for them to participate in the Church's life and mission.

We wish to underline the fundamental role of the woman as mother, the defender of life and the home educator.

Our people's aspirations for liberation include the human advancement of the woman as an authentic "sign of the times", which is supported by the biblical concept of the lordship of the human being, who was created "male and female."

Women ought to be present in temporal realities, contributing their specific reality as women and participating with men in the transformation of society. The value of women's work should not be solely the satisfaction of economic needs. Work should also be an instrument for achieving personalization and building a new society.

Conclusion

The Church is summoned to contribute to the human and Christian advancement of women, thus helping them to move out of marginalized situations in which they may now find themselves and equipping them for their mission in the ecclesial community and the world.

C. From the Pastoral Letter of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States of America: "Economic Justice for all - Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the United States Economy" 1986 (no. 173 and 175):

Children in poverty

Poverty strikes some groups more severely than others. Perhaps most distressing is the growing number of children who are poor. Today one in every four American children under the age of six, and one in every two black children under six, are poor. The number of children in poverty rose by four million over the decade between 1973 and 1983, with the result that there are now more poor children in the United States than at any time since 1965. The problem is particularly severe among female-headed families, where more than half of all children are poor. Two-thirds of black children and nearly three-quarters of Hispanic children in such families are poor.



Women and poverty

The past twenty years have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of women in poverty. This includes women raising children alone as well as women with inadequate income following divorce, widowhood, or retirement. More than one-third of all female-headed families are poor. Among minority families headed by women the poverty rate is over 50 percent.

Wage discrimination against women is a major factor behind these high rates of poverty. Many women are employed but remain poor because their wages are too low. Women who work outside their homes full-time and year-round earn only 61 percent of what men earn. Thus, being employed full-time is not by itself a remedy for poverty among women. Hundreds of thousands of women hold full-time jobs but are still poor. Sixty percent of all women work in only ten occupations, and most new jobs for women are in areas with low pay and limited chances of advancement. Many women suffer discrimination in wages, salaries, job classifications, promotions, and other areas. As a result, they find themselves in jobs that have low status, little security, weak unionisation, and few fringe benefits. Such discrimination is immoral and efforts must be made to overcome the effects of sexism in our society.

Women's responsibilities for child rearing are another important factor to be considered. Despite the many changes in marriage and family life in recent decades, women continue to have primary responsibility in this area. When marriages break up, mothers typically take custody of the children, and often make job and career choices accordingly. In other cases they are not hired or promoted to higher paying jobs because of their child rearing responsibilities. In addition, most divorced or separated mothers do not get child support payments. In 1983, less than half of women raising children alone had been awarded child support, and of those, only half received the full amount to which they were entitled. Even fewer women (14 percent) are awarded alimony, and many older women are left in poverty after a lifetime of homemaking and child rearing. Such women have great difficulty finding jobs and securing health insurance.

D. From the Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda: "Be my witnesses! The vocation and mission of women in the Church and Society", 1996 (no. 11 and 13):

Modern Church teaching about women

All the recent social teaching on active participation of the laity in the Church has clearly brought out the urgency of treating women justly, both in Church and society. It calls on everyone engaged in the pastoral ministry and public offices to promote justice to women and empower them to play their rightful role in Church and society. This teaching is found in the following Church documents which we highly recommend Catholic women to study and fully utilise: *The Family in the Modern World* (1982); *The Social Concern of the Church* (1987); *The Dignity and Vocation of Women* (1988); *The Vocation and Mission of the Laity* (1989); *The Mission of the Church* (1990); *A Century of Catholic Social Teaching* (1991); *The Splendour of Truth* (1993); *Women, Teachers of Peace* (1994); *The Gospel of Life* (1995); *Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women* (1995); and *The Media: Modern Forum for Promoting the Role of Women in Society* (Message of Pope John Paul II for the 30th World Communications Day, January 1, 1996).

Of special mention is the African Synod which was convened in Rome between April 10 and May 8, 1994. It seriously addressed the position, vocation and ministry of women in Church and society. It requested that "woman be given quality formation to prepare her for her responsibilities as wife and mother, but also to open for her all the social careers from which traditional and modern society tend to exclude her without reason. The Synod asks that woman be given once again that place which corresponds to the real importance conferred upon her by the responsibilities she already exercises."

The Synod wants to see women

- being fully involved in decision-making within the Church
- and to assume positions of leadership within the Church.
- New ministries for women in the Church were recommended and just wages to women workers and women pastoral agents were emphasised.



E. From the Pastoral Letter of Cardinal Peter Seiichi Shirayanagi, Archbishop of Tokyo, "Compassion for others", 1997:

The problems of a foreign wife in a Japanese family (no. 8)

The problems a foreign wife has to deal with in a Japanese family are so great that we cannot ignore them either at the pastoral or humanitarian level. Interracial marriages are prone to more difficulties than marriages between people of the same race. Besides the limits imposed by insufficient knowledge of the language, we have again the different culture and customs.

If we take the example of a lady from the Philippines married to a Japanese man we can expect the following. In general a family in the Philippines is of the extended kind. There is a lot of "give and take" and a constant flow of communication. In Japan where the family is small and the children few, there is hardly any dialogue at all. It means that very often the wife will be alone in the house waiting for a husband who comes home late. If the mother-in-law is the domineering type, the young foreign wife will often be caught in the tussle between her husband and his mother. There are many examples too of husbands beating their wives when they cannot get their own way.

In Margarita's case they were married three years when one day, without any notice, her

husband announced that he was in love with another woman and wanted a divorce. He would pay her passage back to the Philippines. This was without any dialogue whatsoever. After many ups and downs they did divorce, but the humiliation that lady endured from the time of her marriage to the day she was divorced is hardly comprehensible to us Japanese.

In some families where the wife has no close friends or someone she can consult, she may become unable to stand the pressure and eventually suffers a mental and physical breakdown. Cases of wives taking refuge in drugs or alcohol are on the increase. We know too of people whose whole personality went to pieces. Fortunately, Margarita knew a sister she could consult and she had friends at Church. They were her salvation.

I beg you, do please spare a kind word for those foreign wives married to Japanese here and consider how you can lighten even a little the hardship and isolation they are suffering.

Questions and assignment:

1. Compare and contrast the statements.
2. Identify the major concerns addressed by each Bishops' Conference.
3. What is your personal reaction to these statements?



Exercise

Addressing sexism: A question of human rights and relationships

In the following excerpts from "*Pacem in Terris*" and "*Gaudium et Spes*" the universal Church is reminded of the human dignity of women and the God-given fundamental rights of all human persons.

A. From *Pacem in Terris*, the Encyclical of Pope John XXIII, 1963:

It is obvious to everyone that women are now taking part in public life. This is happening more rapidly perhaps in nations with a Christian tradition and more slowly, but broadly, among peoples who have inherited other traditions of cultures. Since women are becoming



more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as inanimate objects or mere instruments, but claim, both in domestic and public life, the rights and duties that befit a human person (n. 41).

B. From the 2. Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution, "Gaudium et Spes", 1965:

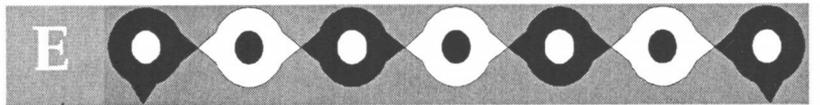
True, all men (sic) are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental human rights are not yet being universally honoured. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose

a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognised for men (no. 29).

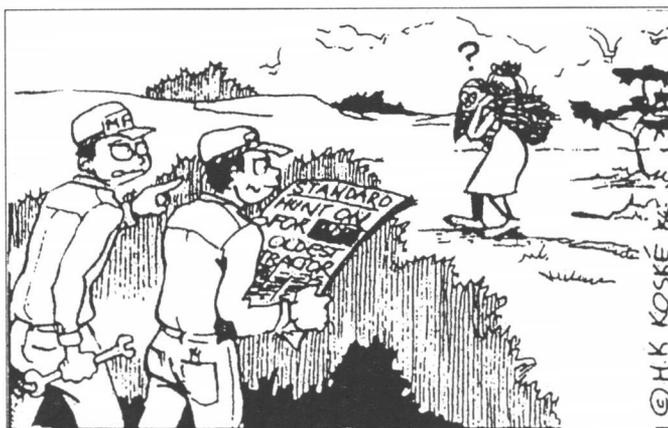
Assignments:

1. Identify three developments (social, scientific, economic, religious) that have served to *encourage* the Church to address sexism – in Church or society.
2. Identify three developments that have served to *discourage* the Church from addressing sexism.
3. Discuss the implications of your findings.

Applications



Application



Hunt Going On For Oldest Tractor.

Assignment:

1. Discuss the cartoon and search for other pictures which point out the situation of women in your region.
2. Take your Rule and Constitutions and examine them for sexist language and attitudes. What experiences have you already had?
3. How much progress has been made in your region in the co-operation of communities of men and women in spiritual, prophetic, social areas (e.g. human rights).





Application

2.

Strategies for dealing with sexism in the Church

Historic and cultural factors prove the need to create an awareness of the Church's need to develop a different attitude towards women. And there are many efforts directed against all attempts to deal with sexism. In spite of this there is ample reason for assuming that the struggle against sexism in the Church will continue. Questions about justice and charity must be raised. Christian men and women alike from every continent must in faith and truth fight further against sexism. Sister Carolyn Ost diek RSCJ has identified for us five ways:

● Remaining on the margins

This strategy implies choosing to remain technically within the Church, but in reality at the margins. Those who represent this tendency cannot make up their minds to leave the Church even though they are not convinced that the Church wants to change or is even capable of changing. With their own experiences of the pain inflicted upon, the harm done to and the alienation suffered by the community of Chris-

tians, they focus rather on the sins and shortcomings of the Church as institution. This strategy usually results to a total rejection of the Church eventually or to adopt a different line of action.

● Remaining loyal

People who adopt this tendency remain anchored in tradition. Their loyalty is a means of taking part in things, a way of maintaining their sense of belonging. Loyalists of this kind affirm

the fundamental good in Christian tradition, its fundamental holiness, holding it to be revealed by God, to be one of His gifts. They are of the opinion that sexism is a human creation, made by people who are imperfect, unjust and hungry for power. The strategy of the loyalists consists in a call for conversion. The need for a genuine humanisation is emphasised, and it is asserted that the will of God for humankind can be fulfilled by a process of change. They stress the factor of personal sinfulness and personal guilt. They rarely admit the significance of historic-cultural



Serving liberation means placing oneself at the side of the poor.



influences, socio-economic realities and the evil that can be inherent within a system in their way of thinking.

● Thinking symbolically

People of this tendency emphasize the symbolic function of the feminine element within the Christian tradition and in the world of religious imagery in general. They stress the value of qualities that are often associated with the feminine dimension, namely intuition, sympathy, mutuality, empathy. They think that by firmly maintaining these values, people can resolve conflicts on a different plane. They strive to reach beyond the harsh realities of sexism by seeking to surmount the complex problems thrown up by history and society. They manage to do this by elevating their creative powers to a symbolic realm where the feminine is totally different to the masculine and where the former is a preferable quality. People who think symbolically do not generally pursue justice or equality. They rarely, if ever, concentrate on solving concrete problems or answering questions. They prefer to tackle sexism by encouraging other people to be creative and imaginative whenever they urge the community of Christians to dream and to hope.

● Interrogating history

Revisionists concentrate on the historical and cultural origins of patriarchal thinking, androcentrism and misogyny in Church and society. They believe that there are sufficient grounds for questioning the view widely held by men, that the history of women has been willfully and falsely interpreted, or has been suppressed or ignored. Revisionists proceed from this premise that another view of history, one that is credible, will bring about a change in patterns of behaviour. They believe that institutional authorities will change for the better when a more perfect and more representative understanding is reached of what history and culture really is. They attach great importance to the theology of Revelation and to the way God is depicted working in history.

● Serving liberation

Representatives of this tendency draw their energy and their inspiration from their religious convictions, which inform them that as Christian women they are called to commit themselves to those who have been deprived of their rights, forced to the margins of society, to the poor and to the powerless, to the weak and the vulnerable. They believe that there is a concrete historical dimension in God's supremacy, and not just a transcendental one. Accordingly, they commit themselves heart and soul to the task of ensuring justice, thus safeguarding the equality and dignity of the human person, irrespective of race, class or gender. Liberationists do not hesitate to place themselves at the side of the poor, for they believe that God Himself is doing the same. They include the preferential option for women in their efforts at tackling sexism in the Church; those women who have been not only driven to the margins of society by the structures of the institution but who have also been suppressed. The strategy adopted by these women is often regarded as being closely bound up with political models, and the women themselves are often associated, in certain circles, with political tendencies in society at large. In thinking about these ways of looking upon sexism in the Church, which have been sketched out here, we must always be conscious of course that such a categorization is an inadequate way of reflecting the infinite variety of reality. Each one of us will feel at home in one or other of these groups at various stages and at different times in the course of our life.

Questions:

1. What feeling and attitudes of women can you find in the circle of your own acquaintances?
2. What is *your* personal attitude?
3. Share your reflections with others, and discuss them.





Application

3.

"Open the door and bring her in, for our Brother Jacoba does not have to observe the rule against women" (3 C 37).

Questions:

1. What does the term "Brother Jacoba" mean to you?
2. What basic conclusions do you draw from this sentence?
3. Describe the relations between sisters and brothers in your area?



Application

4.

Reflect on the following Franciscan views:

A. From the Inter-Franciscan Message of Mattli, 1982:

We are dismayed by the situation of the woman in the Third World. She is the poorest of the poor. She is sometimes looked down upon because she is a woman. She is treated as an object or as merchandise, often exploited sexually (sex tourism,

prostitution, new kinds of slavery in pleasure centres, especially in the First World), used as cheap labour and kept illiterate.

As Franciscans, concerned about discrimination against women, we are reminded that St. Francis discovered and highly esteemed the Feminine in creation. He had a special love and devotion for the Mother of God who gave Christ



to the world. He saw himself as a mother conceiving life and protecting it (2C 16). He also tried to interpret inter-human relations in terms of motherhood. In his wider love of God, friendship flowered with St. Clare of Assisi and Jacoba of Rome. In his Cantic of Brother Sun he called everything *sister* and *brother*, thus bringing them into a harmonious unity.

Therefore we, brothers and sisters in the Franciscan Family, believe that we must make a special option for the oppressed woman within our option for the poor. We are convinced that only in mutual giving and receiving will we be able to realise our Franciscan vocation. In a special way the sisters of our Franciscan Family can prove their solidarity efforts against the discrimination against women. Thus they will be a sign of St. Francis' liberating stance within their various cultures. Francis' example stimulates us to assure women their rightful place, participating in the decision-making processes of Church and society.

B. From Second Celano, 112:

Of avoiding familiarities with women, and how Francis talked with them.

That honeyed poison, namely, familiarities with women, which lead astray even holy men, Francis commanded should be entirely avoided. For he feared, that from such things the weak spirit would be quickly broken and the strong spirit often weakened. Avoiding contagion from association with them, unless it were a question of a most proven man, Francis said, in accordance with Scripture, was as easy as walking in a fire without having the soles of one's feet burned. And that he might speak from deeds, he always showed himself an example of all virtue. Indeed,

a woman was so unwelcome to him that you would think that his caution was not a warning or an example but rather a dread or a horror. When their persistent talkativeness caused him difficulty in speaking with them, he would ask for silence with a humble and speedy word and with his face cast down. Sometimes, though, he looked up to heaven and seemed to draw from there the answers he gave to those who were muttering out of the ground.

But those women in whose minds an urgency of holy devotion had set up the abode of wisdom, he taught by wonderful yet brief words. When he talked with a woman, he spoke what was to be said in a loud voice so that he could be heard by everybody. He said once to a companion: "I tell you the truth, dearest Brother, I would not recognise any woman if I looked into her face, except two. The face of the one and of the other is known to me, but I know no other." Rightly so, Father, for they provide no profit but only great loss, at least of time. They are impediments to those who would walk the difficult way and who want to look up to the face that is full of graces.

Questions:

1. What attitude is imparted by these texts?
2. Are these attitudes fostered in your community?





Application

Last but not least, a humorous reflection on:

An Apostolic Letter About Priestly Ordination Reserved for Women:

My dear Sisters:

With great anxiety, we are made aware of the demands to ordain men also. But this is incompatible with divine revelation and the order of creation. Therefore, I want to restate one more time, and for all time, in this letter why a man cannot become a priest.

Man, indeed, has his dignity as husband and father of the family, but by his very nature, he is incapable of representing priesthood in a sincere and faithful manner. Only to women is the priestly office available. This can be based on proofs that cannot be contested.

1. Through the theology about Jurisdiction.

Priestly office/jurisdiction in the catholic Church makes clear that the Church is built on God's will. The Church did not create itself; rather, God has called the union of believers through his revelation in Jesus Christ. Since jurisdiction makes clear the relationship to God, the holders of jurisdiction can only be feminine. Because God has based the beginnings of the Church in women.

God chose a woman, Mary, to bring His Son into the world. Through the fruitfulness of the Mother of God, the word could take on flesh (Jn 1:14; Lk 1:26-38). In this act of Creation, which according to the will of God, only women can accomplish, lies the pre-existing (from all eternity) essential beginning of the Church. Ecclesio-genesis (birth of the Church, becoming Church) is therefore an act that only women are capable of. Only they can, through their essential being, make believable that God is *mother!* and only they have the open womb for God's life giving action.

The most essential work of this churchly office is the Church's continued birth and creation through the continuing birth of daughters and sons of God, who are by him, placed in the womb of mother Church. Since men, in spite of social/cultural conditions, cannot ever give birth to children, they may not be admitted to priestly office because through such admission, the intended sign would be lost. It is unthinkable that a man, through his essential being, could symbolise the *motherhood* of the Church. The nature of man is based on activity, on the use of power and force. This cannot be reconciled with the inner secrets of the office. Rather it would obscure the working of God and men in that position would play "god like" roles. The men/disciples are fighting already about who should be the greatest among them (Mk 9:34), who should have power in the kingdom of God (Mk 10:37). Peter uses his sword to intervene (Jn 18:10). When Jesus is rejected, they want to call down fire from heaven (Lk 9:54). They want to keep others from doing good simply because they are not of their group (Mk 9:38). On the other hand, the priestly office – the office of shepherd – is expressed through the example of a woman and through feminine attributes (for example cf. Lk 15:8-10).

2. Through biblical witness and proofs.

The Lord came first to women to bring the good news. The women at the tomb, among them especially our sister Mary of Magdala as the "apostles of apostles" are the first witnesses of the resurrection. Jesus first of all revealed himself as the Risen Christ to women.

While the men were still doubting (Lk 24:11 among others), the women are already adoring the Risen one (Jn 20:16). They can accept this incomprehensible dimension in their spirit, while it is still



hidden from men or while they are still seeking tangible proofs (the example of Thomas in Jn 20:24-29).

In this primacy of women in their encounter with the risen Lord and the command of Jesus to the women to announce the resurrection to men, lies the clear pre-eminence in regard to the priestly office.

It was also women who first recognised Jesus as the *Christ* or the *Messiah* which is to say the anointed. It was Martha of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus, who confessed this to Jesus (Jn 11: 27). And it was a woman who proclaimed his Messiahship when she administered the messianic anointing according to Jewish custom (Mk 14:3-9). Jesus himself told her that she would therefore be remembered through all generations. Women therefore, based on the Scriptures, are the only and first witnesses of the Christ.

3. Through the function of mediatrix of the priestess.

The purpose of the priestess lies in her role as mediatrix. The woman alone, who as the biological and believing successor of Mary and of the women, stands at the grave; and can mediate between the divine and profane spheres.

Clearly man, because of biological and spiritual reasons, cannot give birth to something divine. We learn this clearly from the Motherhood of Mary. Otherwise, God could have chosen to enter the world through a man. Because for God, nothing is impossible (Lk 1:37). This would have made more sense in the world of that time where men had precedence. But since God chose to become incarnate through a woman, he gave the Church a continual example and the Church is bound to that.

4. Through the essential element of the Sacraments.

The source of ecclesial life, the experience of God's saving power, is given to the faithful through the sacraments. Sacraments are not only external signs, but also have an inner healing power. Therefore, the minister of the sacraments must be a woman. Because it is the female body that is the external sign for the readiness to accept life in itself. Only a woman can be "the chalice of the spirit" and the "Ark of the covenant with God," as

we say in the traditional hymns to Mary. Just as Mary gave birth to the divine through the fruitfulness of her body, the priestess brings forth the divine through the fruitfulness of her spirit.

5. Through the Mass as Offering.

As we learn from scriptures without doubt, it was the women who followed Jesus even to the cross (Mk 15:40). On the other hand, the men all fled except for John. They were unable to bear pain. They constantly turned down the invitation to accept the way of the cross as a consequence of discipleship. Peter even received a sharp rebuke from the Lord for that objection, he should get out of his sight; he is Satan and is not seeking what God intends but rather what humans want (Mk 8:32-33). Of the others, it is said, that they did not understand what Jesus was saying (Mk 9:32).

How then should men, who have denied the Lord and failed to stand by him under the cross, be capable of offering the sacrifice of the Mass, which makes present the offering of the cross?

Only a woman is capable of presiding at the Eucharist if we are seeking the depth of Communion with Jesus and his willingness to sacrifice himself. We do not want to lose this through the superficiality of men.

From all of this we must conclude that the priestly service is reserved for women due to their very nature. God intended this for all times and places. I therefore implore all men to accept this teaching. The man of today, with his functional thinking, may have difficulty in understanding this explanation, but the Church remains a mystery. To accept this in faith as the truth is the Christian duty of each man. Truth may bring disappointment, but through it we bring the truth to light. And the truth alone can make us free (Jn 8:32).

Joanna Paula III.

Task:

Discuss among yourselves how easy it is, on theological grounds, to portray the vocation to the priesthood as a normal prerogative for women and one from which men are excluded.



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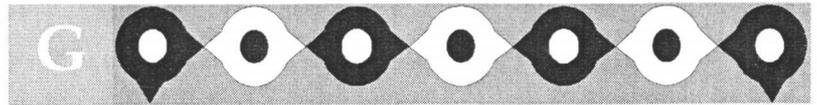


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- Cover** St. Francis, Fresco in the oratory of St. Clare in San Damiano, Assisi.
- P. 3** St. Clare, Fresco in the oratory of St. Clare in San Damiano, Assisi.
- P. 5** Attributed to Cimabue; in the Basilica of St. Clare in Assisi.
- P. 8** **(Left)** From the Yerislav Bible (A.D. 1340) in the Mansell Collection.
(Right) From "Thy Kingdom Come!" Publication of the German missionary organisation ADVENIAT.
- P. 9** From the review: Gespräch 1/79.
- P. 12** Illustration from epd Materialien, Vol III, 95.
- P. 13** Illustration from epd 18/19, 95.
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- P. 18** From Wendekreis 11/90.
- P. 19** Motive on the *Misereor* Lenten Antependium "Biblical Women – Signposts to the Kingdom of God" by Lucy D'Souza, 1990.
- P. 20** From: Renewal Topic no. 3: Matrimony, 43rd international Eucharistic Congress, Nairobi, 1985.
- P. 21** Photo: Anthony Dietrich, Starnberg, Bavaria, Germany.
- P. 22** *Loved*, Toni Zenz. Model for a bronze casting, 1973.
- P. 23** Miniature from the Codex *Legenda maior*, (15th C.) Franciscan Museum, Rome.
- P. 24** Unknown French artist at the end of the 19th century.
- P. 25** From *Misereor* Arbeitshefte 1990. Photo: KNA-Bild.
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Abbreviations:

- dpa - Deutsche Presseagentur
(= German Press Agency).
- epd - Evangelische Pressedienst
(= Protestant Press Service).
- KNA - Katholische Nachrichtenagentur
(= Catholic News Service).

