

TRANSGRESSIVE TRADITIONS:
ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS AND THE PROBLEM OF WOMEN'S
ORDINATION

Jill Marie Peterfeso

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Religious Studies.

Chapel Hill
2012

Approved by:

Laurie Maffly-Kipp

Julie Byrne

Todd Ochoa

Tony Perucci

Randall Styers

Thomas A. Tweed

©2012
Jill Marie Peterfeso
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

JILL MARIE PETERFESO: Transgressive Traditions: Roman Catholic Womenpriests and the Problem of Women's Ordination
(Under the direction of Laurie Maffly-Kipp)

Although the Roman Catholic Church bars women from ordained priesthood, since 2002 a movement called Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP) claims to have ordained approximately 120 women as deacons, priests, and bishops in Europe, North America, and Latin America. Because the women deliberately break Canon Law—and specifically c. 1024, which reads, “Only a baptized man can validly receive sacred ordination”—RCWP acknowledges that its ordinations are *illegal*, but the group claims nonetheless to perform *valid* ordinations because they stand in the traditional line of apostolic succession. They retain the modifier “Roman” to signal their lineage within *Roman* Catholic tradition, yet RCWP’s stated goal is not simply to insert women into the existing Church structures, but rather to “re-imagine, re-structure, and re-shape the priesthood and therefore the church.” This dissertation investigates the following: What does it mean that RCWP calls itself Roman Catholic? Why do these women seek ordination and what can they do as priests within a Catholic tradition that claims it has “no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women”? And, as a twenty-first century reform movement, how do Roman Catholic womenpriests affirm, amend, and/or complicate contemporary notions of Catholic priesthood and Catholic Church reform? Using interviews, ethnographic methods, documentary film footage, and internet resources from a wide range of Catholic reform groups, this dissertation contributes to the academic fields of Roman Catholic studies, American religious history, women’s religious history, feminist critical theory, and

performance studies. The project examines the movement's twentieth-century lineage, RCWP's ordination ceremonies, the group's sacramental economy, the womenpriests' ordained ministries, and the women's embodied performance of ordained, Catholic priesthood. Throughout, I demonstrate how RCWP is, paradoxically, faithful to Catholic tradition while transgressing institutional rules about male-female difference and ordained authority.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Finishing a dissertation means more than just churning out 300-plus pages of scholarly research and analysis. A dissertation culminates the long, arduous, often anxiety-filled graduate school experience. The dissertation becomes the expression of one's grad school process, from coursework to conference papers to conversations in the department hallway. I could simply not have written my dissertation without the support of scores of individuals whom I encountered from 2005-2012.

First, I thank my committee. Perhaps strangely, I never dreaded my defenses—not for my doctoral exams, dissertation proposal, or dissertation itself. Instead, I relished the opportunity to hear brilliant scholars and thoughtful teachers push my thinking, hone my arguments, and illuminate perspectives I had not before seen. Working with each of these people has been a gift. My advisor, Laurie Maffly-Kipp, seems to know always the right things to say and the right questions to ask. Over the years, I would invariably leave her office feeling more confident about my work and more committed to the PhD program. I thank her for timely and well-placed support. Julie Byrne never hesitated to work with me, encourage me, and challenge me. She has been a constantly bright source of guidance throughout this dissertation process, and I pledge to “pay forward” the kindness she has shown me. Todd Ochoa is a gifted listener who speaks with thoughtful reflection, and I aspire to infuse my ethnographic scholarship with his influence. Tony Perucci constantly pushed me toward deeper theoretical reflection, and my scholarly brain is all the better for it. Randall Styers brought not only wit and humor to our discussions, but also a welcome ability

to speak volumes in few words. Tom Tweed has a talent for holding simultaneously the long view and the short, and I appreciate the ways he pushed my present thinking while helping me keep my eye on future goals.

Other talented faculty have contributed to my intellectual journey, and they merit mention. Robert Orsi was my advisor at Harvard Divinity School, and he instilled in me a love for American Religious History and Catholic Studies. Every time I encounter him, at a conference or lecture, I am newly reinvigorated. Grant Wacker expanded my passion for American religion and helped me think about American Christianity more expansively. He has also modeled a genuine scholarly generosity that I aspire to. Mark Jordan is similarly generous, gracious, and genuine. I thank him for his kind support, and even more I cherish the way he models theoretical thinking and poetic prose. Bart Ehrman has been both challenging and encouraging in all the best ways, and I thank him sincerely for showing such dedication and enthusiasm for teaching graduate students and undergraduates alike. Della Pollock's oral history course demonstrated for me the importance of listening and of contextualizing socially active faith communities, and I thank her heartily for introducing me to the art of interviewing and performance.

Graduate student colleagues likewise guided me, supported me, and challenged me. It would be impossible to list every classmate who has helped me think differently, or has modeled for me academic behavior. Suffice it to say, there are many, and I hope our exchanges have been as beneficial to you as they have been for me. As part of our grad student community, I have participated in a variety of writing groups. I want to thank Anne Blankenship, Brandi Denison, John-Charles Duffy, Carrie Duncan, Shannon Harvey, Cynthia Hogan, and Shenandoah Nieuwsma for invaluable help, not only with meeting

deadlines (which should not be understated), but also with sustaining my enthusiasm for this project. I believed you when you cheered, “this is really good!” and because of that, I have a completed dissertation. I want to mention also the participants of the 2011 Seminar on Debates over Religion and Sexuality. You gave me so much to think about, for this project and beyond, and I thank you for your energy and encouragement.

I also have a dissertation because UNC’s Writing Center introduced me to the concept of Dissertation Boot Camp. Perhaps because I respond well to fitness metaphors, the Boot Camp format fueled my writer’s muscles and pushed my production stamina. Boot Camp works because it demands and builds a community of likewise-invested writers, and so I must give my love and thanks to fellow boot campers, particularly Carrie Duncan, Marc Howlett, Claire Novotny, and especially Dan Guberman.

This particular project was possible because of the openness and generosity of the Roman Catholic womenpriests. The women provided hours and hours of their time in interviews. Many also shared with me articles, personal essays or poems, and photographs. Also exceedingly important for this project was filmmaker Jules Hart, who selflessly made available to me the documentary footage for *Pink Smoke Over the Vatican*. How much this dissertation would be missing without Jules’s contribution! The graciousness and commitment of these spiritual and socially active women made this dissertation what it is, and I am deeply grateful.

Lest we forget, librarians are essential for scholarly research. I need to thank the reference librarians at Davis Library and the staff of UNC’s Media Resource Center. I also want to thank archivist John Waide at St. Louis University for his kind help in this dissertation’s early research days.

The contemporary Catholic world is one of rich and intersecting networks, and I am grateful to those people who helped me connect with interview subjects, groups, and worship communities. Here I think Janet and Leo Dressel, Joseph Laramie, and Anne Perkins. Within this Catholic network, I was fortunate to meet Allison Delcalzo, a fellow graduate student asking rich questions about RCWP, and I am grateful for our conversations.

I received some research travel support that proved invaluable. I wish to thank both the Perry family and UNC's Graduate and Professional Student Federation for funding research trips. With these funds, I purchased a digital voice recorder and made trips to St. Louis, Missouri; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Rochester, New York; and two trips to Baltimore, Maryland.

I presented parts of this dissertation at various conferences, and I want to thank the individuals who asked questions or offered feedback. I always marvel at how intelligent and attentive listeners can hone in on important issues I had not yet considered.

At UNC, I want to thank my students, especially those from my RELI 440, 140, 104, and 207 courses. I must also acknowledge my American Christianity 28 precept students at Duke Divinity School. You all inspire me and make me love what I do, and you show me why a lively research agenda is essential for strong teaching. I want to give a "shout out" to my Connected Learning Program 2011-12 participants for making life so much fun during my final year of graduate school. I must also thank Franklin Street Yoga and the UNC Club Field Hockey team for helping to keep me sane and strong for the past seven years.

Multiple relationships have seen me through my graduate school career. I am forever indebted to the good friends who have helped me—with support, encouragement, laughter,

a shoulder to cry on, and a good meal or a glass of wine. Naturally, these relationships have evolved and changed, and will continue to evolve and change, but they remain deeply special to me. Cynthia Hogan has offered endless support of all stripes, and I am forever grateful. Carrie Duncan and Pete Carrasquillo have come to mean the world to me. Brandi Denison and Russell Kerschner were my first friends in North Carolina. Wendy Wyche has shown unbending faith in me, and I thank her and her parents for their many prayers. Sam Jordan was a huge part of my life for many years, and I thank him for support both emotional and financial. Christopher Oakley deserves warm thanks for seeing me through grad school's final push with good humor and great advice. I must also mention Zarah Ayubi, Nathan Berolzheimer, Diane Faires, Liz DeGaynor, Rajneesh Gupta, Sarah Hays, Cameran Hebb, Amber Knight, Emily Peck-McClain, and Ben Saypol. Finally, of course, I give my full heart to my Albert and my Marshall, furry companions who came into my life unexpectedly and who love me unconditionally.

Speaking of unconditional love...I dedicate this dissertation to my two families: my St. Louis family and my North Carolina family. Without the love and support of both, I fear I would be lost. In North Carolina, Dan, Stephanie, Caroline, and Julie Wechsler have been my source of joy, laughter, and love since 2007. I have learned so much from each of you, and I am overcome with gratitude for everything you do and have done for me. Included here is (Aunt) Kathryn Burns, who has never hesitated to help me navigate the academic world, with kind words and big hugs. You are the family I would choose over and over again, and I thank you for choosing me. I am equally blessed in the family I was born into, my St. Louis family: my parents Al and Dana Peterfeso, my sister Terri, and my brother Keith. Though academia is a foreign world to you all, you have never faltered in your support and encouragement and belief that I could "do it!" Here I thank also my godmother

and aunt, Janet, for constant love and prayers. To my families, in St. Louis and North Carolina, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

INTRODUCTION: THROUGH THE LAYING ON OF HANDS: ORDINATION, ROMAN CATHOLICISM, AND THE QUESTION OF WOMEN PRIESTS.....	1
Research Questions and Argument.....	5
Terminology, Theory, Methods and Sources.....	12
Project Significance.....	22
The Dissertation Structure that Follows.....	28
I. AN OVERVIEW OF ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS.....	32
II. FROM VATICAN DECREES TO REFORM-MINDED FEMINISM....	55
Vatican II Inspiration.....	58
Selective Obedience: Challenging Church Authority.....	68
Spiritually Feminist: Simultaneously Secular and Faithfilled.....	71
Ambivalence Ensues and the Church Hierarchy Responds.....	80
Seizing Authority: Sometimes Permitted, Sometimes Prophetic.....	95
Women Make Strides: The Example of Ordination in other Religious Groups.....	108
The European Story.....	117
Confluence and Culmination.....	123
Conclusion.....	126
III. A NEW <i>ORDO</i> ? RCWP ORDINATIONS AS TRANS-PERFORMANCE.....	128

	Rocking the Boat: The Danube Seven.....	134
	Transatlantic Movement and Authority Transferred: The St. Lawrence Seaway, 2005.....	148
	Media Transmission: Ordination and Staged Protest.....	156
	Women's Right to Priesthood, Transposed: Tradition Reasserted.....	170
	Concluding Thoughts and Lingerin Questions.....	178
IV.	ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS AND SACRAMENTAL ECONOMY.....	181
	Roman Catholic and RCWP Sacraments, Semiotically Examined.....	187
	Holy Orders: What Happens, Performatively and Ontologically?.....	191
	A Different Model of Holy Orders.....	204
	Celebrating the Eucharist: "All are Welcome".....	209
	A Different Kind of Sacred Space: Conference-Call Eucharists.....	219
	Other Sacraments.....	223
	Concluding Thoughts and Lingerin Questions.....	236
V.	ORDAINED MINISTRY TO THE MARGINS.....	242
	(Marginalized) Priests in the Making.....	250
	Affirmation from Outside the Church.....	266
	Priests Performing "Everyday" Ministries.....	287
	Concluding Thoughts and Lingerin Questions.....	298
VI.	THE PERFORMING BODIES OF ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS.....	304
	Roman Catholicism and the Issue of Gendered and Sexual(ized) Bodies...	310
	"Putting Your Bodies on the Line": Janice Sevre-Duszynska and Embodied Protests.....	319
	Dressing the Part: Womenpriests in Clerical Vestments.....	324

Sexual Identity and Identification: RCWP's Non-Celibate Bodies.....	333
A Ministry of Female Presence.....	342
Theologizing Biology: Deconstructing the Male-Female Dichotomy.....	347
Concluding Thoughts and Lingering Questions.....	352
CONCLUSION: RCWP'S PERFORMED PRIESTHOOD.....	359
Scholarly Contributions.....	365
The Future of the RCWP Movement.....	375
Concluding Thoughts and Lingering Questions.....	382
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	386

INTRODUCTION

THROUGH THE LAYING ON OF HANDS:

ORDINATION, ROMAN CATHOLICISM, AND THE QUESTION OF

WOMEN PRIESTS

May Day 2010 was a warm Saturday in Rochester, New York. That afternoon, Spiritus Christi church hosted a Roman Catholic Womenpriest ordination ceremony. Hundreds of people flooded the brick structure at the downtown corner of North Fitzhugh and Allen Street to celebrate the ordinations. Visitors came from all over: Rochester, New York state, New England, the mid-Atlantic region, and beyond. The mood was joyous, the air electric. It appeared that most attendees were white. It seemed also that most attendees were older, in their 50s, 60s, and 70s. Few children attended, but a number of teen- and college-aged men and women dotted the pews. Men wore suits and ties, or polo shirts and khakis; women wore colorful blouses, floral skirts, sundresses, and summer sandals. Some attendees carried flowers and gift bags. All seemed to wear large smiles. Friends, family, and strangers alike greeted one another with bear hugs and warm handshakes.

Spiritus Christi itself had dressed for the occasion. Simple floral arrangements adorned the altar. Behind the altar table and underneath the three-story pipe organ, five chalices and five patens (plates and cups used for the distribution of communion) sat on a small, round stand, awaiting the womenpriests who would be celebrating their first Eucharist by afternoon's end. A small crucifix sat in the center of the altar table, and another crucifix rested in the back corner.

Moments before the ceremony began, choir members, dressed in white shirts, black pants, and red stoles, gathered in the ambulatory, just to the altar's right side. Among them were sign-bearers who carried tall, brightly-colored banners—in green, purple, blue—depicting early church women, such as Mary Magdalene, one of Christ's apostles; Theodora, a woman identified as a bishop in a ninth-century mosaic; and Junia, a church leader mentioned in Romans 16:7. After a brief procession, these banners were placed around the altar, their messages proclaiming, "Nothing New!" and "Women Reclaiming Priesthood." The banners' appearance suggested that Mary of Magdala, Theodora, and Junia were watching over the proceedings, smiling their approval.¹

Mass was a grand celebration. Vested clergy attended and processed, representing a variety of religious traditions: Baptist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Unitarian Universalist, United Church of Christ, Metropolitan Community Church, and even Buddhist. Male Catholic priests from CORPUS and the FCM (Federation of Christian Ministries) vested and processed as well.² These Catholic, Christian, and non-Christian priests and ministers marched with the entrance music, and their robes, their smiles, and their presence in multitudes signaled their support for the Roman Catholic womenpriests. A team of liturgical dancers called "A Moving Experience" kept the spirit festive; the group comprised adults with developmental disabilities who on this occasion wore brightly colored shirts, waved brightly colored scarves, and smiled bright grins. Camera flashes seemed unending, more reminiscent of a rock concert than a Roman Catholic mass. Not everyone wanted to be photographed, however: up on the balcony, in a horseshoe shape around the nave, sat supporters who could not risk being photographed. Many of these people held positions in the Roman Catholic Church, as priests, women religious, and lay

¹ The banners I describe here are used frequently at RCWP ordinations and at WOC events.

² Information about the procession comes from a spreadsheet Chava Redonnet shared with me. Redonnet was one of the ordinands and organizers at this Rochester ceremony.

employees, and thus if identified as supporting RCWP, they could face a reprimand, a suspension, or even expulsion. Being at this Rochester ordination, whether in jubilation or anonymity, made a political statement.

The greatest excitement came with the arrival of the candidates for ordination. The three women being ordained to the diaconate, Caryl Conroy Johnson, Patricia Elise LaRosa, and Ann Yeoman Penick, wore plain white or off-white robes. The two women being ordained to the priesthood, Theresa Elizabeth Novak Chabot and Chava (Michelle) Redonnet, were already deacons and so wore deacon stoles over their white robes. Today these women would become—at least in the eyes of their supporters—Roman Catholic deacons and priests. During the ordination ceremony that followed, each woman would be presented to Andrea Johnson, the bishop of Roman Catholic Womenpriests' USA-East region; each woman would listen, along with the congregation, to a sponsor's words endorsing her candidacy for ordination; each woman would lay prostrate on the church's brown and white checkered floor, in a physical sign of submission to God's will.

Midway through this ordination ceremony, after the presentation and examination of candidates, came the ordination rite's most sacred moment: the Laying on of Hands. According to Roman Catholic custom, this ritual act signifies the moment when a bishop, standing in the line of apostolic succession, physically and literally passes the Holy Spirit to a candidate, either for the diaconate, the priesthood, or the episcopate, thereby making the candidate ready for ministry. The doctrine of apostolic succession, as understood by Roman Catholics, posits that today's twenty-first century clergy and bishops can trace their sacred authority through two thousand years of Christian history, back to the apostles, who trace their call to Jesus Christ, whose call came from God. Thus, this “most sacred moment” is, theologically speaking, the

instant when God's Spirit and blessing descend upon the candidate, thanks to the bishop's mediating act.

On this May Day in 2010, Roman Catholic Womenpriests retained and then reframed the Laying on of Hands. In this single, sacred moment, RCWP's practice of combining tradition and transgression was revealed. Put differently, they transgressed tradition, keeping Roman Catholic tradition but adding to it in ways the Roman Catholic Church would forbid as theologically unfounded. True to tradition, the candidates for the diaconate were ordained first, and priesthood candidates followed later. The three women—Johnson, LaRosa, and Penick—knelt in front of the altar, their backs to the congregation, their bodies facing forward. Bishop Andrea Johnson solemnly placed her hands upon each woman's head, pausing over each candidate before moving to the next. Her expression was calm. She wore bishop's robes of a light gold color, simple golden earrings, and—because RCWP rejects mandatory celibacy—her wedding ring.

Then, in a further departure from Roman Catholic tradition, the five friends and family members each ordinand had pre-selected came forward to lay hands on the candidates. At typical Roman Catholic ordinations, the individuals who follow the bishop in laying hands on candidates are all priests or other ordained men. At this Rochester ordination, however, the group was diverse: male and female, ordained and not ordained, older generations and younger, whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics. These people were not Roman Catholicism's institutionally powerful men; these were people from and who worked with “the margins.” This line of supporters blessing the candidates stretched long, to the church's side aisles. Among those laying hands were candidates' spouses and children. Supporters laid hands on each woman, pausing, praying, smiling over the candidates' heads. Some were serious, some emotional, some gently playful. Meanwhile, all members of the congregation had been invited to

extend their hands toward the ordinands, in a symbolic show of support. All around the church, from the lower level to the balcony above, people reached forward. Some stretched one arm, some both. Some grew tired and rested their arms on the pews in front of them, their hands still outstretched.

The Laying on of Hands was not limited to the bishop, but extended to congregants. This modification of Roman Catholic tradition sent a message that, during this sacred moment when God's spirit descends upon the candidate, it is not only the mediating bishop whose power delivers this blessing, but the congregation's support as well. All people present, then, were given responsibility for the ordinands' future ministry. All gave permission as well as blessing to the newly ordained. In short, RCWP retained crucial Roman Catholic tradition (the Laying on of Hands), only to transgress Roman Catholicism's theological boundaries (by giving unordained people the "power" to bless the ordinands).

After the Laying on of Hands came the investiture. The candidates arose from their kneeling position and stepped onto the altar, where a small group of family members awaited them with new vestments. Other womenpriests assisted the families, making sure the dressers knew how to assemble the deacons' and priests' ensembles. The deacons received stoles; the priests received chasubles. Teams of family dressers lovingly and playfully vested their candidate with clothing that signified her new ministerial status. Once vested, the women came to the front of the altar, clasped hands with Bishop Andrea Johnson, and raised their arms. The action read like a posture of triumph, whereby newly ordained women—vested, victorious, and standing on the altar—presented themselves to their community of supporters.

Research Questions and Argument

What does it mean that RCWP calls itself *Roman* Catholic? Why do these women seek ordination and what can they do as priests within a Catholic tradition that claims it has "no

authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women”?³ And, as a twenty-first century reform movement, how do Roman Catholic womenpriests affirm, amend, and/or complicate contemporary notions of Catholic priesthood and Catholic Church reform? These are the research questions at the heart of this dissertation.

As a contemporary history and a critical ethnography of Roman Catholic Womenpriests, this dissertation explores the RCWP movement, the womenpriests themselves, and RCWP’s place within the twenty-first century American Catholic context.⁴ I also investigate women’s roles in traditional religious groups, the significances around and attributed to bodies and embodied rituals, and the role of “womenpriest” as a publicly performed political action. My work draws upon and contributes to the academic fields of Roman Catholic studies, American religious history, women’s religious history, feminist critical theory, and performance studies.

To be sure, the Roman Catholic Church does *not* ordain women, and its stated reasons for barring women clergy are rooted alternatively in theology, scripture, and Church tradition. Canon law affirms that men alone can be priests, as CIC c. 1024 reads “Only a baptized man can validly receive sacred ordination.” As such, any group or individual ordaining a woman does so illegally, i.e., breaks canon law. Yet despite the Roman Catholic Church’s ban on women’s ordination, since 2002 RCWP has ordained over 120 women as deacons, priests, and bishops, in Europe, Canada, Latin America, and the United States—and the number keeps growing. RCWP acknowledges that its ordinations are *illegal* (or *illicit*), but the group claims nonetheless to

³ John Paul II, “*Ordatio Sacerdotalis*,” (“On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone”) (May 22, 1994), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_22051994_ordinatio-sacerdotalis_en.html.

⁴ As a contemporary history, my project borrows the definitions and methods laid out in Peter Catterall, “What (If Anything) Is Distinctive About Contemporary History?” *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 4 (October, 1997); Jane Sherron De Hart, “Oral Sources and Contemporary History: Dispelling Old Assumptions,” *Journal of American History* 80, no. 2 (September, 1993). As a critical ethnography, my project borrows from D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005); Jim Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993).

perform *valid* ordinations because they stand in the traditional line of apostolic succession. RCWP does not identify as an independent group seeking to break away from the institutional church. Rather, they call theirs “a renewal movement within the church,” one that offers a new model of ordained ministry. Even though they retain the modifier “Roman” to signal their lineage within *Roman* Catholic tradition, RCWP’s stated goal is not simply to insert themselves into the existing Church structures and to replicate clericalism with women added, but rather to “re-imagine, re-structure, and re-shape the priesthood and therefore the church.” By placing womenpriests in the public eye through ordination ceremonies and womenpriest-led liturgies, the group argues—to its intended audience of Catholics and non-Catholics—that women can, should, and do perform the holy sacraments, lead Catholic communities as ministers, and embody Christ Jesus. Furthermore, RCWP does not believe celibacy a crucial element of Catholic priesthood, and though some ordained women are single, many are themselves wives, mothers, or lesbians in committed relationships. Thus, the group seeks to use the rituals, resources, and “Roman” title of the hierarchical Catholic Church while simultaneously offering a new model of sacramental bodies serving Catholic congregations.⁵

RCWP asserts that making women’s ordination a reality demands more than writing petitions and books, holding conferences, or beseeching clerical authorities. Women’s ordination activists have used such approaches for decades, but the Vatican’s male-only priesthood endures. In fact, many progressively minded Catholics would argue that the Roman Catholic Church is becoming even stricter and more conservative on barring even the discussion of women’s

⁵ Patricia Fresen, “Prophetic Obedience: The Experience and Vision of Roman Catholic Womenpriests” (speech given at the Southeast Pennsylvania Women’s Ordination Conference, March 2005); Kristen Hinman, “The Church Ladies,” *Riverfront Times* (St. Louis, MO), November 8-14, 2007, <http://www.riverfronttimes.com/>; Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “Press Release: Roman Catholic Womenpriests to be ordained in St. Louis,” October 15, 2007, <http://www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org/>; Associated Press, “St. Louis Archbishop warns of excommunication over women’s ordination,” November 7, 2007. Note: the actual number of ordained womenpriests is unknown and unpublished, as some women have been ordained covertly in what are called “catacomb ordinations,” to protect either the ordinand, the ordaining bishop, or both.

ordination. Thus, if women are to become Roman Catholic priests, dramatic action must take place. RCWP, then, has thrown itself into action, often dramatically. The organization has staged elaborate ordination ceremonies, complete with media presence and public support from Catholic, non-Catholic, and non-Christian clergy. The group has not shied away from public controversy, but in fact seems to embrace it. Like licit Catholic priests, the womenpriests perform sacraments: saying mass, consecrating the Eucharist, baptizing children, and witnessing at weddings. When acting in an official capacity, the womenpriests sometimes choose to wear clothing that signals their priestly role, with robes, stoles, and albs marking them as ordained. RCWP has a calculated public relations strategy, and information about the group and its events can be found in print-, news-, and internet-media. Many RCWP ordinations can be viewed on YouTube and Google Videos. RCWP strives to make it known that womenpriests exist and that womenpriests act ministerially and sacramentally.

This dissertation locates and analyzes RCWP's dramatic actions and examines the ways these actions are designed to invite a reconsideration of both Roman Catholicism and women's roles within traditional religious groups. These two considerations are intertwined. RCWP has made a calculated and controversial move with its decision to call itself *Roman Catholic Womenpriests*. Calling one's group "Roman," as RCWP does, makes a deliberate—if not straightforward—claim.⁶ To be sure, some other "Catholic" groups have started ordaining women (e.g., the Catholic Diocese of One Spirit and the Ecumenical Catholic Communion), but few groups retain the label "Roman." Then there are groups that call themselves "Roman Catholic," but this label does not necessarily signal a relationship with the Roman Catholic

⁶ As Julie Byrne, a scholar of American Catholicism and Independent Catholic Groups, explained to me, independent groups who ordain women and consider themselves "Roman" either 1. Use "Roman" to signal their location in Roman Catholic tradition but not in the Roman Catholic communion, or 2. Consider themselves the *true* Roman Church.

Church. For example, the Old Roman Catholic Church in North America, founded in 1910, is neither associated with the Roman Catholic Church or any Protestant groups. Another example is the Canonical Old Roman Catholic Church, which formed in the 1960s as a reaction to Vatican II. Neither of these groups who call themselves “Roman” profess to be part of the Roman communion. In contrast with these groups, RCWP’s use of “Roman” serves to signal, one, that the group considers itself located within Roman Catholic tradition, and two, that the group desires to influence and remain within the Roman Catholic Church. Put differently, RCWP uses “Roman” to show its location within the Roman communion, but the institutional Church itself avers that RCWP is decidedly *not* Roman Catholic. This dissertation then asks, what, if anything, does RCWP gain and/or lose by calling itself “Roman” Catholic, and what, if anything, is “Roman” about Roman Catholic Womenpriests?

As ordained women, Roman Catholic womenpriests stand at altars, facilitate the Eucharistic consecration, hear confessions, and anoint the sick. Furthermore, RCWP eschews mandatory celibacy and in fact celebrates its ordained women as mothers and grandmothers. Doing so constitutes these women as female clergy in their supporters’ eyes and also creates a publicly performed political action that violates the Vatican’s very foundations of gender roles and sexuality. The Roman Catholic hierarchy cites women’s female bodies as the principal reason women cannot symbolize Christ, and by extension cannot be ordained. The Church also cites celibacy as fundamental to a sacramental priesthood.⁷ Thus, this dissertation asks: how do women’s bodies placed in priestly roles—coupled with Catholic women’s experiences as wives, mothers, grandmothers, women religious, theology professors, lesbians, or social activists—

⁷ *The Code of Canon Law* says of clerical celibacy: “Clerics are obliged to observe perfect and perpetual continence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and therefore are bound to celibacy which is a special gift of God by which sacred ministers can adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart and are able to dedicate themselves more freely to the service of God and humanity.” The Canon Law Society of America, *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, eds. James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, and Donald E. Heintschel (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 277:1.

serve for this group to affirm, amend, offend, or complicate Roman Catholicism, Catholic gender theory, and RCWP's own notions of a "renewed Catholic Church" and "new model of the priesthood"?

A group that deliberately breaks Canon Law is not without its critics. That the Vatican condemns RCWP's actions is to be expected. Rome's current position toward Roman Catholic Womenpriests is summarized in a General Decree, "Regarding the crime of attempting sacred ordination of a woman," issued on May 29, 2008, from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). The decree reads, "both he who has attempted to confer holy orders on a woman, and the woman who has attempted to receive the said sacrament, incurs in *latae sententiae* excommunication, reserved to the Apostolic See." In other words, this "absolute and universal" decree has made the Church's policy one in which RCWP's ordinands and ordaining bishops are automatically (as *latae sententiae* is most simply defined) excommunicated.⁸

Also critical of RCWP are some Catholic scholars and feminist theologians, but for reasons quite different than Rome's. Compared to the Vatican's conservative criticism, these scholars' liberal criticism contends that RCWP does not go far enough to amend the Church's hierarchical (or, in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's terminology, "kyriarchical") power structures. Instead, they view RCWP as validating Church patriarchy by relying on Roman Catholic models—such as apostolic succession—to authenticate their ordinations. Doing so, in this view, keeps RCWP's ordained women within a system that traditionally marginalizes and oppresses the

⁸ The May 2008 General Decree is highlighted in the preface of RCWP's 2008 book: Elsie Hainz McGrath, Bridget Mary Meehan, and Ida Raming, eds., *Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests* (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2008), 1-2.

world's least powerful members. In short, while RCWP may be doing feminist things, the group is not feminist enough.⁹

The Roman Catholic Church might dismiss RCWP as simply, inarguably, “transgressive.” Likewise, some feminist scholars may critique RCWP for being too “traditional.” In contrast to both positions, I argue that RCWP is a hybrid of transgression and tradition. I suggest that, as a reform movement within Roman Catholicism, RCWP straddles transgression and tradition, sometimes deliberately and strategically, and sometimes unconsciously and unintentionally. Neither “pure” Roman Catholicism nor “strict” feminism, RCWP performs a female Catholic priesthood and thereby comes to symbolize the ongoing rhetorical debates surrounding women’s roles in traditional religions. Through their performances as priests and the symbolic significance of a woman’s body presiding at a Roman Catholic altar, the womenpriests take on roles and meanings that are discursive and creative, sometimes envisioning church reform and sometimes recasting tradition in a transgressive form. As such, womenpriests gesture to wider contemporary disputes—in and outside of Roman Catholicism and American religion—over women’s religious authority, leadership, and ability to embody the divine. Because they are women, RCWP’s womenpriests do not and cannot simply adopt and enact the hallmarks of Roman Catholic priesthood; instead, they must reimagine and remake Roman Catholic ordinations, sacraments, ministerial outreach, and ideas about Catholic women’s femininity and female bodies. Roman Catholicism is “remade” because women and

⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “We Are Church—A Kindom of Priests” (speech to Women’s Organization Worldwide in Ottawa in July 2005), <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/womenrel2.htm>; Mary E. Hunt, “Different Voices/Different Choices: Feminist Perspectives on Ministry” (speech to Women’s Organization Worldwide in Ottawa in July 2005), <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/womenrel2.htm>; Helena Moon, “Womenpriests: Radical Change or More of the Same?” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 115-134; Marian Ronan, “Living it Out: Ethical Challenges Confronting the Roman Catholic Women’s Ordination Movement in the 21st Century,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 149-169; Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Church as Liberation Community from Patriarchy: The Praxis of Ministry as Discipleship of Equals” (speech to Women’s Organization Worldwide in Ottawa in July 2005), <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/womenrel2.htm>.

traditionally feminine characteristics are integrated in novel forms. And beyond symbolizing Jesus Christ (to echo Catholic parlance), Roman Catholic womenpriests come to symbolize and signify (without clearly resolving) ongoing discussions about women's performative power and potential in contemporary Roman Catholicism.

Terminology, Theory, Methods and Sources

Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “womanpriest” to describe RCWP's ordained women. This decision is carefully considered. I ultimately decided to use “womanpriest”—a single word, no space—because it afforded specificity that would streamline my prose and clarify my analysis. What is more, since this is an ethnographic project, and because many of RCWP's ordained call themselves “womenpriests,” this terminology allows me to use labels that my subjects themselves use. I do not intend my use of “womanpriest” to make any claims about RCWP's ordained status, to essentialize RCWP's ordained women as gendered females, or to signal my own support for RCWP. In short, using “womanpriest” and “womenpriests” is not intended as a political move. Rather, “womanpriest” offers specificity that the terms “priest” and “woman priest” do not, as “priest” includes valid and legally ordained men and “woman priest” includes women—like Episcopalians—who are validly and legally ordained within their own tradition. Moreover, sometimes I use “womanpriest” to refer to a group of RCWP's members—even if this group technically includes deacons and/or bishops. I do this because, one, the majority of RCWP's ordained women are womenpriests; two, nearly all of RCWP's deacons go on to become priests; and three, it is simpler and more elegant than saying “womendeacons,” “womenpriests,” and “womenbishops” each time I speak about RCWP's women as a whole.

When I say “womenpriests” or “womanpriest,” I am referring to individuals ordained through the group Roman Catholic Womenpriests. When I speak about Roman Catholic Womenpriests (or RCWP, for short), I am talking about the organization; I treat the term as a singular entity and give the term singular verbs. When I capitalize differently and mention Roman Catholic *womenpriests*, I refer to women ordained through RCWP; this is a plural and takes plural verbs. In contrast, of course, a reference to a Roman Catholic *womanpriest* is singular. Still, I must mention that even among RCWP’s ordained, the women have different ways of naming themselves. Some call themselves “womenpriests,” some “women priests,” some simply “priests.” RCWP’s own website identifies the ordained as “womandeacon,” “womanpriest,” or “womanbishop,” independent of a member’s own colloquial usage. As St. Louis-area womanpriest Elsie McGrath explained to me, “[Rose Marie Hudson] and I call ourselves priests. When using the proper title, it is Roman Catholic womanpriest because we were ordained within the Roman Catholic Womenpriests initiative. When speaking in general, we are women priests because we are priests and we are women.”¹⁰ Even within RCWP itself—and this is significant—there is no singular way for womenpriests to name themselves.

Another term I use frequently but not thoughtlessly is “Roman Catholic Church.” This is a broad concept to be sure, and I use it, one, to emphasize the Church’s hierarchical elements as stemming from *Rome*, from the papacy, and two, to describe the workings of a religious body that issues decrees meant to guide all practicing Catholics. The Roman Catholic Church does not, of course, *do* specific things; rather, the pope, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the curia (the administrators who assist in church governance), ecumenical councils (a meeting between the world’s bishops and the pope), and the magisterium (the Church’s teaching authority) *do* things. I will use specific language where possible, but at times I use “Roman

¹⁰ Elsie McGrath, e-mail message to author, January 5, 2011.

Catholic Church” as an umbrella term capturing the actions and utterances of the Church’s governing authorities. Or, put differently, the term “Roman Catholic Church”—or, alternatively, “Rome” or the “Vatican”—describes the Catholic tradition that traces its history through the papacy. To acknowledge there *is* a singular Roman Catholic Church is not to preclude the possibility for dissent and difference within. But what the Church/Vatican/Rome says and what Catholics “on the ground” do is a trick of navigation around authority and obedience.

It is important, therefore, to complicate a seemingly simple equation whereby Catholicism = the Roman Catholic Church. As scholars of Catholicism know and appreciate, there are many types of Roman Catholicism and many people identifying as “Roman Catholic” who follow Church dictates to varying degrees. For that reason, I often use the following adjectives to describe the Catholics in my study: traditional, conservative, activist, liberal, progressive, feminist. These are descriptors I hope to trouble in the course of this dissertation, yet these are also words that capture and convey a kind of essence and motivation. “Traditional” describes, simply, those who adhere to tradition—or, at the very least, their understanding of Church tradition.¹¹ “Conservative” Catholics are often traditional as well, but, more importantly, they have an interest in maintaining the status quo; they often are politically conservative, but not always. “Activists” could technically be conservative- or liberal-minded, but most often activists are working to bring about desired change—and within the Roman Catholic context, this change is typically liberal/progressive/feminist. I use the terms “liberal” and “progressive” almost synonymously, though I more often default to “progressive” so as to destabilize the oft-

¹¹ Please note, my use of “traditional Catholic” must not be equated with “traditionalist Catholic.” Traditionalist Catholics are a specific group of present-day worshippers who reject all Vatican II liturgical and ecumenical changes. Traditionalist Catholics wish to preserve the Tridentine, or Latin, Mass. Some Traditionalist Catholics are in good standing with the official Church, and some are not. This dissertation does not address traditionalist Catholics.

rendered and (to my mind) overly simplified conservative Catholic/liberal Catholic binary.¹² “Feminist” might be the trickiest term of all. One need not be female to be feminist, but in Catholicism, the feminist wave-makers have, by and large, been female.¹³ I use “feminist” to denote a concern for and commitment to women’s issues within the Church. “Catholic feminism” has no simple history, but a book by historian Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement*, offers valuable insight into the twentieth-century’s American Catholic feminist lineage and incarnations.¹⁴ All told, these myriad types of Catholicism point to a major point of contention within contemporary Roman Catholicism—an issue of debate that RCWP also partakes in. That is, simply, “*who is the Church?*” Is “Church” the Vatican, its decrees, and the people who adhere, or is “Church” the people who seek reform—or might Church be both? There is no tidy answer to these questions, and RCWP’s very existence pushes this issue.

Finally, because the words “transgression” and “tradition” comprise a significant thrust of my argument, it is important to explain how I use those terms. Definitions for the verb “transgress” include to break a moral law or rule of behavior; to go beyond set limits; to pass beyond or go over (a limit or boundary); to violate a command or law. The adjective “transgressive” describes actions that break a moral law or rule of behavior.¹⁵ Without a doubt,

¹² For example, see Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Mary Jo Weaver, ed., *What’s Left?: Liberal American Catholics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). These books made important contributions in terms of introducing and framing conservative and liberal Catholics, and now, I contend, scholars of American Catholicism need to nuance that binary.

¹³ Maryknoll priest Roy Bourgeois is one example of a male feminist who has publicly supported women’s ordination and RCWP. Bourgeois will appear again in this dissertation.

¹⁴ Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008).

¹⁵ In defining “transgress” and “transgressive,” I have used and paraphrased entries from the following: *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary of American English* (Boston, MA: Thomson Heinle, 2007); *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Deluxe Edition (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1998).

RCWP transgresses Canon Law and disobeys church authority. They do this deliberately and strategically because they believe Canon Law and church teaching are unjust. They believe God is on their side (and thus what they are doing is moral); the Church adamantly disagrees and says it follows God's preference—as seen in Jesus's own actions—when it denies priestly ordination to women. I am not participating in these moral, scriptural, or legal debates when I say that what RCWP does is transgressive. Rather, I accept, as do the womenpriests, that their actions are violating laws and crossing a boundary. When I use “transgressive” and “transgression,” I talk about the ways the womenpriests' actions—of modifying Catholic priesthood, sacraments, and ordained ministry—go beyond the Church's stated and traditional understanding of priesthood, sacraments, and ministry. I use “transgressive” to signal RCWP's intentional boundary crossing in the service of their mission to renew the Church through a new model of priesthood.

“Tradition” is another word laden with meaning. For the Vatican, *tradition* goes hand-in-hand with scripture as a principal reason that women cannot be ordained. Catholic feminists—and RCWP included—will contest that Rome conveniently misremembers and misapplies “tradition” and that, in fact, early Christianity was far more egalitarian than current church practice would suggest. For this reason, feminist scholars like Schüssler Fiorenza often distinguish between types of tradition: the traditions started with an egalitarian Jesus Movement *contra* the “kyriarchal clerical tradition” marked by male power and dominance must be supplanted.¹⁶ “Tradition,” then, becomes a battleground for women's ordination debates. I acknowledge these uses. When I say “tradition,” I refer to the womenpriests' interest in and study of church history and also to their retention of liturgical and sacramental actions that mark

¹⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “We Are Church—A Kindom of Priests” (speech to Women's Organization Worldwide in Ottawa in July 2005), <http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/womenrel2.htm>.

Christian history. If tradition is “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior” and/or “cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs, and institutions,” then much of what RCWP does and attempts is traditional.¹⁷ To be sure, the movement does not throw out “traditional” Roman Catholic gestures; rather, the group retains (though modifies) sacraments, liturgical structure, vestments, and apostolic succession. Whether RCWP’s actions are traditional in a clerical, kyriarchal sense (à la Fiorenza), traditional in a “respect for what came before” sense, or some blend of both will be explored throughout this dissertation.

Turning now to theoretical considerations: In asking questions about Catholic women’s bodies and gendered experiences, I borrow extensively from feminist critical theory that problematizes gender and cautions against essentializing.¹⁸ I acknowledge and incorporate, for instance, Judith Butler’s contributions to current theories regarding gender, bodies, performance and performatives, and identity.¹⁹ Butler not only theorizes heavily the social constructedness of gender, sex, sexuality, and bodies, but she also offers models for resistance against dominant cultural gender norms. Indeed, the problem of bodies and gendered experience becomes even more explosive when traditional Catholic women’s bodies (per Church teachings) are juxtaposed with post-structuralist debates about identity formation. Because the Roman Catholic Church itself holds essentialized views of men and women, and because it cites men and women’s essentialized natures as reasons men can be ordained and women cannot, I must explore what ordained women’s bodies signal and symbolize within the context of Catholic sacraments and

¹⁷ “Tradition,” *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Deluxe edition (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1998).

¹⁸ Elizabeth A. Clark, “Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History,” *Church History* 70, no. 3 (September 2001): 395-426; Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer 1991); Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia, 1988); Louise Tilly, “Gender, Women’s History, and Social History,” *Social Science History* 13, no. 4 (1989).

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

ministries. Furthermore, because the Catholic male body is allowed to “perform” Christ and his sacramental power (and thus embody and enact power) while Catholic women’s bodies are given as a role model Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, (and thus are defined by their sexuality or lack thereof²⁰), I examine how this traditional Catholic gender construction has created and inspired—however unintentionally—the kind of embodied, theological protest that RCWP now demonstrates. At the same time, I cannot overlook the fact that some of RCWP’s women hold to notions of gender complementarity; for instance, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, one of RCWP’s European and founding members, has said, “Male priests are able to do things that female persons are unable, and the other way around... Women will open the second eye of the male church. When women do officially the same things as the male, automatically the face of the church opens, because both eyes are open and clear.”²¹ In short, my research includes but goes beyond a womanpriest’s physical, visible body, and takes into account what womenpriests *do*, why they do it, and how their actions read—in practice and in discourse. I complicate essentialized notions of women’s bodies so as to understand what ordained womanpriests might mean for Catholicism and, more specifically, how a Roman Catholic womenpriest’s body might *read* for a Catholic audience. Meanwhile, I acknowledge how an essentialized, complimentary gender model frames the discussion of womenpriests, for Vatican officials *and* Roman Catholic womenpriests.

In thinking about creating discourse and constituting practices, I look to the theories and methods of performance studies. I have said elsewhere that this dissertation is a contemporary history (and thus uses some historical methods) and a critical ethnography (and thus uses interviews and participant observation); furthermore, this dissertation applies questions and

²⁰ Deborah Halter, *The Papal ‘No’: A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican’s Rejection of Women’s Ordination* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004), 76-85.

²¹ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, interview, 25 July 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

critical methods from performance studies to RCWP's embodied actions and discursively created womenpriest model. RCWP's discursive power begins with the ways the group draws upon and re-creates traditionally powerful Roman Catholic imagery, inserting womenpriests into Catholic sacraments and ministries heretofore off limits to women. These womenpriest-led liturgies, ordination ceremonies, ministerial efforts, and interfaith engagements are, in my terminology, "public performances." My own working definition of performance is an intentional, embodied practice, performed for an audience (which may include the self, God, or others), which involves a communicative aspect. "Public performances," as I use the term, describes using performances so as to enter public discourse, to claim space and engage or incite conflict, and thereby to assert or maintain identity. As I consider gender within the Roman Catholic context, I ask: when womenpriests undertake public performances as illegally ordained persons, what do their (often non-celibate) bodies signal to various audiences, and what does their presence contribute to contemporary Catholic debate and identity? In short, I am concerned throughout this dissertation with what womenpriests *do*: their gestures, their postures, their speeches, their written performances.²²

I approach my subjects with an ethnographic method inspired heavily by D. Soyini Madison's discussion of "critical ethnography." Madison's own anthropological research stems from her experiences living among the communities she studies; conversely, I have most commonly encountered my subjects through interviews (in person, telephone, and email) and through participant observation of specific events (ordinations, masses, baptisms, pre-liturgy discussions and post-liturgy receptions). Still, I find compelling Madison's summons for

²² Many scholars have influenced my definition of performance, including (but not limited to) Catherine Bell, Ronald Grimes, Jill Dolan, Richard Schechner, Peggy Phelan, Della Pollock, and Philip Auslander. Following Jill Dolan, I do believe that any event or practice *could* be viewed as a performance—but to study something as performance (or, as "performed religion") is to bring particular tools and theories to the analysis, which I model here.

ethnographers to take personal, ethical responsibility and consider issues of fairness and justice, of power and control, and of how this struggle lives in the individuals we study.²³ Without advocating for the same institutional changes that the womenpriests envision, I have taken seriously their desire for reform and their belief that women's ordination is a justice issue. Just as Madison locates dialogue as a key component of critical ethnography, I have approached my discussions with the womenpriests as a dialogic encounter. Giving a nod to Dwight Conquergood, Madison writes, "Dialogue moves from ethnographic *present* to ethnographic *presence* by opening the passageways for readers and audiences to experience and grasp the partial presence of a temporal conversation constituted by others' voices, bodies, histories, and yearnings."²⁴ To borrow Madison's approach is not, I hope, to examine RCWP and its participants uncritically. Rather, my goal is to treat empathetically RCWP's activist aims and understand the experiences, actions, and personal theologies driving the women's *contra legem* performance.²⁵

In order to see and understand what womenpriests do, I use a variety of sources that provide access to RCWP and its members. I have interviewed approximately forty womenpriests, in person and over the phone, in interviews lasting from sixty minutes to two and a half hours. I have attended ordination ceremonies in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Rochester, New York; and Baltimore, Maryland. I have attended multiple RCWP liturgies in St. Louis, Missouri; New York, New York; Rochester, New York; and Baltimore, Maryland. I also attended a baptism in St. Louis, Missouri. When I go to these services, I collect and later analyze liturgy aids and bulletins. In addition, the internet has proved a valuable resource; just as RCWP uses online

²³ D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 5.

²⁴ D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 11.

²⁵ Also shaping my thinking on ethnography is James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21-54.

sites like YouTube and Google Videos to publicize its existence, I have used these film clips—which number in the dozens if not hundreds—to access ordination ceremonies, sacraments (like Eucharist and weddings), and interviews. Also invaluable has been the publication *Equal wRites*, a bimonthly newsletter put out by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Women’s Ordination Conference. Starting with issues from 2004, I have been able to trace the ordination activists’ reactions—celebratory, critical, and concerned—to the RCWP movement. Finally, I received from filmmaker Jules Hart over one hundred hours of footage, containing interviews and entire ordination ceremonies and liturgies, which she compiled when making her documentary film, *Pink Smoke Over the Vatican*. This film takes a strong advocacy position in depicting RCWP and the question of women’s ordination, and progressive Catholic groups have used the documentary in conjunction with awareness-raising events. Thus I must note, I use the film and its footage not for its advocacy, but for the hours of face-to-face, sometimes emotional interviews Hart captured with womenpriests, their families, their supporters, and their dissenters.²⁶ Rounding out my primary sources are ongoing news reports from primarily progressive and reform-minded Catholic groups. Information coming from the *National Catholic Reporter* as well as Facebook updates from groups like Call to Action, Women’s Ordination Conference, and the Association of Roman Catholic Womenpriests have helped keep me up-to-date. Considering women priests was named *Time* magazine’s sixth top story in 2010, this has

²⁶ A note on interviews: I initially planned to speak to dissenters on the topic of women’s ordination generally and RCWP specifically. This became an incredibly difficult endeavor, primarily because most dissenters see John Paul II’s 1994 *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* as the definitive “last word” on the subject. If the matter is closed, there is neither reason nor room for discussion. For this reason, I am all the more grateful for Hart’s film, as she did interview several dissenters—though my understanding is that she, too, had difficulty getting dissenters to go on camera to talk about women’s ordination.

been a frequently shifting and evolving topic, and news and social media have kept me abreast of developments.²⁷

A final word on focus: RCWP is an international initiative, and I explore the movement's European origins and transatlantic developments throughout this dissertation. It must be noted, however, that my focus here is primarily on RCWP in the North American landscape, and mostly on the American womenpriests. This is not only because I am trained in American religious history. First, language barriers exist between myself and many of the ordained European women. Second, parts of the European RCWP movement have distanced themselves from the ever-expanding US group. Third and most importantly, the movement has erupted in the US in ways it has not elsewhere. I will explore reasons for this in what follows. For now, suffice it to say, the American RCWP movement is the richest, largest example for a study of RCWP, and it is also the most accessible to me as an Americanist.

Project Significance

This dissertation project, by its very existence, suggests that Roman Catholic Womenpriests is a significant movement in the history of modern Catholicism—one that should be “taken seriously” as a reform movement within contemporary Roman Catholicism that seeks to make sweeping changes to the Church while retaining many scriptural, sacramental, and ministerial traditions. Saying the movement is “significant” is not to argue that RCWP has the power and potential to single-handedly bring about women's ordinations. Nor does my argument—that RCWP blends transgression and tradition, both strategically and at times unconsciously, in its efforts to reform the church and the priesthood—set out to celebrate RCWP's impact or to imply that this young movement will reverse the problems plaguing the

²⁷ Howard Chua-Eoan, “6. Women Priests, In Spite of the Vatican,” *TIME Magazine*, December 9, 2010, http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2035319_2034971_2034954,00.html.

contemporary Church. Instead, my project and my argument demonstrate how, despite its young age and its relatively small size, RCWP holds deep significance for a variety of academic fields and a myriad of reasons. A sustained reflection on this significance, as framed in my project, is valuable here.

As a contemporary history, this project considers and complicates an emerging movement as it evolves primarily upon the American landscape, thereby expanding existing scholarship on twenty-first century American religious history, American Catholicism, and the changing roles of religious American women. This dissertation places RCWP upon a vast canvass of other activist, progressive Catholic groups working to preserve some church traditions while changing the church's position on certain—and often controversial—issues. RCWP is, as noted above, unique in its reliance upon the “Roman” label, and thus the group's very existence bears significantly on “Catholicism”—both the Roman Catholic Church at large and the millions of people who identify as Catholic. While it is true that dissenting and independent Catholic groups have long existed alongside the “one true holy, Catholic, and apostolic church,” and while many of these groups have faded quickly into (or have been relegated to) the background, there is reason to believe RCWP has the durability to make an impact on contemporary Catholicism. The women who have sought ordination are well-educated in theology and well-versed in ministry; they have experience and education to rival many ordained diocesan and ordered male priests; and they see themselves as having earned their worship communities' respect, despite Vatican disapproval. Moreover, the group is growing steadily, with multiple ordinations planned yearly and many women currently participating in formation programs. They have garnered and continue to draw media attention, both through their public actions and through Vatican statements that forbid women priests.

Moreover, RCWP prohibits any myopic view that conceives of “American Catholicism” as an isolated entity, only occasionally looking east toward Rome. Instead, because RCWP started in Europe, this dissertation considers Roman Catholicism in its broader context and examines the ways American Catholicism influences and is influenced by Western Catholicism, writ large. Doing so tells us something about Catholicism and about America’s influence in the global religious marketplace, as America exports ideas (much like RCWP) that blur the boundary between tradition and innovation. As we will see, no one Catholic country set women’s ordination activism in motion: the movement is a richly international confluence, with ideas and actions flowing dialectically across the Atlantic. Thus, RCWP invites reflection on the ways transnational influences inform American religion broadly, and American Catholicism specifically.

As a group, RCWP troubles the simple “liberal-conservative” divide that is presumed to separate American Catholics. In one sense, RCWP illustrates the conservative-liberal split in post-Vatican II Catholicism, and it shows how the “liberal” 1970s feminist movement impacted religious women’s groups. But this “black and white” division has become overly simplified, and the easy equation (Vatican II + women’s liberation = RCWP) must be infused with greater complexity.²⁸ RCWP models a way to be liturgically and sacramentally traditional while challenging patriarchal (and therefore, traditional) authority. This “grey area” illuminates the

²⁸ Two books whose titles alone reinforce the liberal-conservative split are Mary Jo Weaver’s *What’s Left? Liberal American Catholics* and *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*. Mary Jo Weaver, ed, *What’s Left?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995). These books specifically and Weaver’s research broadly are very valuable for any study of American Catholicism and Catholic women’s issues, and I name these books here not to criticize Weaver’s work but to point to a rhetorical problem in contemporary Catholicism that divides and labels Catholics as sitting comfortably in one camp or another. My hope is for this project to extend the “nuancing” work begun by Mary J. Henold: in a book, Henold explores the inborn connections between Catholicism and feminism: Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008). Henold argues that it was not the secular feminist movement that inspired Catholic women so much as feminist resources planted within traditional Catholicism, e.g., “We are feminists BECAUSE we are Catholic.”

ways people who identify as theological traditionalists can simultaneously advocate for progressive, feminist positions.

At the same time, Roman Catholic womenpriests are not tidy feminists. As I mentioned above, RCWP has faced criticism from some scholars and women's ordination activists for not being "feminist" enough. Two articles in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* accuse the movement of reinforcing traditional views and retaining a hierarchical and kyriarchical model. RCWP gets criticized for validating the Church patriarchy by relying on apostolic succession to "validate" their ordinations; for reiterating an essentialist idea of women; and for showing little consideration for the non-Western, less educated marginalized Catholics who are fast becoming "the center of Christian faith."²⁹ For their part, RCWP rejects this criticism in its public statements. They argue that, contrary to the Vatican's system, they reject clericalism and have no lay-clergy divide. RCWP also argues that at this early stage of Catholic women's ordination, it is important to model closely the male-priesthood forms, from apostolic succession to hierarchical structure to ordaining women who have met certain educational preparation requirements.³⁰

There is ambivalence here, between feminism and tradition, between kyriarchy and the discipleship of equals. This project explores and attempts to explain that ambivalence, and therefore contributes to ongoing debates about the relationship among feminism, religion, and women's religious history. Historian Catherine Brekus noted in 2007 that, one, American religious historians who study women often ignore feminist theory, and two, feminist theorists

²⁹ Helena Moon, "Womenpriests: Radical Change or More of the Same?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 115-134; Marian Ronan, "Living it Out: Ethical Challenges Confronting the Roman Catholic Women's Ordination Movement in the 21st Century," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 149-169.

³⁰ Patricia Fresen, "A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry: Looking at a Church in Crisis," in *Women Find a Way*, 28-35.

often avoid religious subjects, viewing these as a site of oppression, not agency.³¹ My work offers a corrective to both problems, as RCWP presents a case study wherein being feminist *and* religious is not contradictory, but congruous—if ambivalently so.

In addition, RCWP invites a consideration of interfaith relations, both in terms of diverse reactions to women's authority and in terms of interfaith dialogue. Placing RCWP alongside their Protestant and Jewish supporters highlights the various challenges to institutional authority as well as the interfaith support that exists for Roman Catholic Womenpriests. The U.S. Episcopal Church offers a valuable juxtaposition. RCWP's Danube Seven are much like the "Philadelphia Eleven," a cadre of Episcopal women who were validly but illegally ordained in 1974. Within two years, the U.S. Episcopal Church voted to legalize women's ordinations. The similarities between the Episcopalian women's actions and RCWP's cannot be coincidence, and the Danube Seven's conscious or unconscious decision to "borrow" the Eleven's *modus operandi* must be explored.³² RCWP has also received support from Jewish groups, and American Judaism's deep rootedness in tradition provides a valuable comparison to Catholicism. While Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Jewish women have been ordained to the rabbinate, Orthodox Judaism remains adamantly against women rabbis. Finally, RCWP has made ecumenism a primary focus, and in the face of fierce opposition from the Roman Catholic Church, other religious traditions—Protestant and Jewish—have stepped forward to give support. This analysis of RCWP, therefore, extends beyond denominational lines.³³

³¹ Catherine A. Brekus, "Introduction," *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007): 1-50

³² Carter Heyward, *A Priest Forever: One Woman's Controversial Ordination in the Episcopal Church* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1999)

³³ American Judaism, with its deep rootedness in tradition, provides a particularly valuable comparison to Catholicism. While Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative Jews in America ordain women to the rabbinate, the Orthodox movement resists, instead issuing nuanced, legal reasons why women cannot be ordained. As such, Orthodox Judaism demonstrates one form of institutional response to demands for women's equality; Catholicism

Finally, because RCWP uses the Roman Catholic Church's own sacraments and ritual images (i.e., the performative trappings of traditional Catholicism) to enter discursive debates about women's power within Catholicism, this project fuses religious studies with performance studies to deconstruct and reconstruct the womenpriests' sacramental and ministerial actions. Performance criticism explores the relationship between performers (RCWP and womanpriests) and spectators (e.g. congregants, dissenting Catholics, non-Catholics). I suggest that an analysis of performances—ceremonies, bodies-in-action, speeches, sermons, processions, protests—paradoxically highlight womenpriests' agency within that very site where Catholic women have long been subordinated and “othered”: their bodies. Ultimately, this project goes beyond looking at bodies *per se* toward an examination of female *presence* within the priestly role. Indeed, this notion of presence carries special significance for religions like Catholicism, which believes the Eucharist is not merely a symbol of Christ's body and blood, but God's actual presence, made flesh and blood at the communion table. To include women, then, adds theological dimensions previously untapped in American Catholicism. Thus—to use a language of temporality common to performance studies theory—womenpriests' potential impact extends beyond their *present presence* at the altar: the existence of womenpriests amends the *past* exclusion of women while inviting new roles for *future* Catholic women. RCWP's performances, as analyzed within the context of performance studies, highlight debates surrounding women's “God-intended” roles, women's leadership power, and theological claims to a gendered or ungendered Creator.³⁴

demonstrates another. See Malka Drucker, *Women and Judaism* (Westport: Praeger, 2009); Pamela Susan Nadell, *Women Who Would be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889-1985* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Riv-Ellen Prell, *Women Remaking American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007).

³⁴ In thinking about “presence,” as well as presence alongside bodies, I draw heavily from performance studies scholarship, including Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographies of Protest,” *Theatre Journal* 55 (2003): 395-412; Shannon Jackson, “Practice and performance: modernist paradoxes and literalist legacies,” *Professing Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Andre Lepecki, “Introduction: Presence and Body in Dance and Performance Theory,” *Of the Presence of the Body* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004); Peggy Phelan, “The Ontology of Performance,” *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993). To note also, Thomas A. Tweed's

The Dissertation Structure that Follows

The chapters that follow explore different facets of the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement, in order to emphasize the ways RCWP combines tradition and transgression with an eye toward reforming Roman Catholic priesthood. Structurally, the dissertation is meant to evoke concentric circles, with each chapter building upon issues and questions raised in the preceding chapter. The boundaries encircling each chapter's main issues are expanded upon in the next, as the reader receives an ever-widening "view" of the RCWP movement. Each chapter includes thick descriptions from RCWP-led liturgies or womenpriests' interviews, and each chapter ends with both concluding thoughts and questions that RCWP seems to leave unresolved.

Chapter one offers a brief introduction to the Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement. The chapter's title reflects its rather journalistic approach: "An Overview of Roman Catholic Womenpriests." Because RCWP is young, readers might never have heard of RCWP; conversely, those familiar with RCWP's controversial actions may not know the movement's complexity. This brief chapter provides the reader with ample background to navigate the arguments and issues that follow.

Chapter two provides a detailed look at RCWP's genealogy. Titled "From Vatican Decrees to Reform-minded Feminism: Roman Catholic Womenpriests in Context" asks and answers the following questions: What are RCWP's origins, and why are these origins significant? More specifically, how have 20th century Catholicism, Catholic lay activism, and

work on the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception uses the idea of "presence" to describe Catholics in the nation's capitol. Influencing my thoughts connecting performances to temporality include Jose Esteban Munoz, "Stages: Queers, Punks, and the Utopian Performer," *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006); Bert O. States, "Performance as Metaphor," *Theatre Journal* 48.1 (1996): 1-26.

women's ordination efforts, in the United States and Europe, led directly and indirectly to RCWP's 2002 formation? This chapter illustrates that, while RCWP's history is indeed closely aligned with that of the women's ordination movement, RCWP's ideology, theology, and methodology reflect a detailed picking and choosing of what to retain and what to reframe.

The third chapter, "A New *Ordo*? RCWP Ordinations as Trans-Performance," looks at RCWP's ordination ceremonies as public performances meant to transform not only the Church, but public opinion and existing discourse around women's ordination. The chapter asks, how does RCWP use ordination ceremonies to publicize their movement and suggest transformation within the Roman Catholic Church, and specifically the Vatican's position on women's ordination? Through the examples of four RCWP ordinations, this chapter examines the histories of and patterns within RCWP ordinations and pays special attention to ordination ceremonies as trans-performances. In using the performance studies concept of trans-performance, I examine the ways RCWP's ordination ceremonies become a form of public protest and invite new ways to think about the transformation of priesthood, the trans-Atlantic movement of feminist Catholic activism, the transmission of discourse among RCWP, the hierarchy, and the media, and the transposition of early Christian women's clerical roles onto today's womenpriests.

The forth chapter is titled "'All are Welcome' to Interpretive Authority: Roman Catholic Womenpriests and Sacramental Economy." This chapter's driving question is, how does RCWP simultaneously retain and reframe Catholic sacramental economy, so as to emphasize inclusivity, reimagine sacramental authority, and render women visible at the altar? I look in depth at the sacraments of Holy Orders and Eucharist, and I an offer an overview of Baptism, Reconciliation, Marriage, and Anointing of the Sick. I examine what and how these sacraments

mean at the hands of RCWP's womenpriests, and I demonstrate the ways RCWP's sacramental economy is both traditional and transgressive.

Chapter five, "Ordained Ministry to the Margins: Creative Power outside of Institutional Structures" investigates what I have labeled RCWP's "ordained ministry to the margins." As an organization, RCWP is very much about pastoral ministry. The group says it seeks to help people "on the margins," and it also often sees itself as comprised of "marginalized" women. This chapter investigates the rhetorical and creative power inherent in RCWP's "to the margins" language alongside an examination of RCWP's priesthood formation program, the womenpriests' educational and professional backgrounds, ecumenical and interfaith partnerships, and many womenpriests' roles as wives and mothers.

The sixth chapter, "Essentially Feminine, Transgressively Priests: The Performing Bodies of Roman Catholic Womenpriests," places the womenpriests' embodied actions at the forefront of analysis. Here, I consider how womenpriests' bodies have sought pragmatically, symbolically, and rhetorically to impact Roman Catholic priesthood reform. This chapter considers theological issues like Catholic theological anthropology and gender complementarity alongside theoretical issues like the social construction of gender. This chapter also analyzes five case studies drawn from the lives and experiences of womenpriests' embodied and/or body-centered protests. I reflect upon how RCWP is and is not "queering" the priesthood, either by troubling the traditional gendered identity of the Roman Catholic (male) priest or, conversely, by constantly emphasizing what females can uniquely bring to the priesthood.

Now, to conclude with a return to the Rochester ordination: the facets of RCWP that this dissertation takes up—from ordination ceremonies and sacramental modifications, from ministerial outreach to families to female bodies on the altar—were all made manifest on that May Day Saturday in Rochester. One particularly prominent example came during the Eucharist,

when all of the newly ordained women as well as Bishop Andrea Johnson gathered around the altar table. Wearing robes, stoles, albs, and chasubles, they imaged the male priests who traditionally preside over the Eucharist—but with a difference. It was not just the fact that the women’s earrings, rings, and hairstyles marked them as distinctively female. During the moment when bread and wine turn into body and blood, the womenpriests and deacons invited all congregants present to utter the words of consecration, thereby retaining the Roman Catholic rite while sharing power with non-ordained men and women. When the time came to distribute communion, womenpriests gave consecrated hosts—“the body of Christ”—to their spouses, and daughters, and sons, and parents; they also gave communion wafers to the non-Catholics clergy attending the ordination in a sign of solidarity. This would not happen during a licit, traditional, Roman Catholic mass. Combined, these changes—with one foot in tradition and one in transgression—challenge women’s conventional roles in Roman Catholicism, and challenge the very paradigm of Roman Catholicism itself.

CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS

Alta Jacko lives in Chicago, Illinois. She has eight adult children, four girls and four boys. She has sixteen grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Though “retired,” she could not stay away from the classroom, and she returned to teaching—now as a substitute— just two weeks after her retirement. She considers teaching part of her ministry. She also preaches at a local Catholic community and takes part in a neighborhood faith-sharing group. In fact, she says, “My ministry is whatever, wherever, and whenever the Holy Spirit assigns me.” She describes her participation in the Eucharist as one of “profound humility,” where she loses herself in surrender to the Holy Spirit. Jacko is RCWP’s first ordained African American, and she says this is a “very powerful responsibility...to God, myself, and others.” Jacko was ordained a deacon in 2008 and a priest in 2009.¹

Morag Liebert lives in Edinburgh, Scotland. She converted to Catholicism at the age of 23. She could have pursued ordination through her original tradition, the Scottish Episcopal Church, but she had become deeply committed to women’s ordination activism in the Catholic Church and wanted to support the cause. She has an extensive background in nursing, and she believes that this “real world” experience is essential to the type of priesthood RCWP offers. She

¹ Alta Jacko, email interview with author, May 28, 2011.

is a single woman who celebrates a monthly mass in her home. Liebert was ordained a deacon in 2008 and a priest in 2009.²

Andrea Johnson lives in Annapolis, Maryland, with her husband, Spencer. She has served the Catholic Church for decades as a religious educator, as a parish council member, and as a pastor for a priestless parish. She has also long been active in the Women's Ordination Conference, and she served as executive director from 1996-2000. Currently, Johnson co-pastors the Living Water Community in and around Baltimore, Maryland, with fellow womanpriest Gloria Carpeneto. Sometimes the community meets at St. John's United Church of Christ, sometimes at the priests' homes, and sometimes at congregants' homes. She was ordained a deacon in 2005, a priest in 2007, and a bishop in 2009.³

This dissertation focuses upon the very questions of what, where, when, why, and who RCWP is and the womenpriests are. These questions, however, need proper introduction, and while the issues and examples that I take up here will receive richer analysis in the following chapters, this chapter provides necessary background on the RCWP movement, which may be for readers wholly unfamiliar or known only partially from media reports.

Whereas the Roman Catholic Church traces its lineage back nearly two-thousand years, RCWP is, in contrast, quite young. The first ordination took place on Europe's Danube River in 2002. The ordinands' journey officially started a few years before. In late 1990s Europe, three groups of women, separately though united in purpose, started preparing for ordination. They followed a training program developed and led by Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, an Austrian Catholic woman who had felt a life-long call to priesthood. Group members had the will for ordination but lacked bishops to ordain them. Specifically, they sought male bishops, in good

² Morag Liebert, email interview with author, May 20, 2011.

³ Andrea Johnson, telephone interview with author, May 11, 2011; Roman Catholic Womenpriests, "Ordained: Andrea Johnson," Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>.

standing with the Church, standing validly in the line of apostolic succession, who would willingly disobey Canon Law and papal authority by ordaining the women. In early 2002, the long sought after bishops emerged, volunteering for the task. The bishops' names remained secret to protect their identities and episcopal careers, but the official documents would be notarized and stored in a secure location. Not all the women who had been preparing for ordination felt ready to go forward, but the ones who did seized the opportunity. In March 2002, in a private home in Austria, six women were ordained to the diaconate and, three months later, seven women were ordained to the priesthood: Pia Brunner, Dagmar Celeste, Gisela Forster, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, Iris Müller Ida Raming, and Adelinde Roitingner.⁴ This priesthood ordination, which took place on the Danube River, in Passau, on June 29, 2002 was RCWP's first public act. RCWP was not officially titled "Roman Catholic Womenpriests" as yet; the group was unnamed at the time of ordination and shortly thereafter became known as Roemisch-Katholische Priesterinnen. Dubbed the "Danube Seven," this small cadre of women would eventually evolve into "Roman Catholic Womenpriests."⁵

The movement moved across the Atlantic. The first North American ordination took place on the St. Lawrence Seaway in 2005, and the first ordination of a Latin American woman took place on December 11, 2010.⁶ Although nascent, the expanding RCWP movement boasts a

⁴ The women ordained to the diaconate were not exactly the same ordained to the priesthood three months later. Raming, Müller, Forster, Mayr-Lumetzberger, Roitingner, and Viktoria Sperrer were ordained deacons in March 2002. It is unknown why Sperrer was not ordained a priest in June 2002, and it is unknown when Celeste and Brunner were ordained deacons. See Gisela Forster, "The Start: The Danube Seven and the Bishop Heroes," in *Women Find a Way*, 9-13.

⁵ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, "Reflections on My Way: God's Call to Me," in *Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests*, eds. Elsie Hainz McGrath, Bridget Mary Meehan, and Ida Raming (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2008), 14-18; Gisela Forster, "The Start: The Danube Seven and the Bishop Heroes," in *Women Find a Way*, 9-13. Dagmar Celeste was initially ordained under the pseudonym "Angela White" and only later revealed her real name.

⁶ Photographs from the ordination of the first Latin American womanpriest can be found at Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests, "News and Events: Historic Ordination of First Latin American Woman,"

significant genealogy. In public statements, RCWP emphasizes its ancient roots, positioning itself within a tradition dating back to Jesus Christ. The womenpriests trace their clerical status to the earliest days of Christianity, to Jesus' ministry and the communities that arose in the wake of his death and resurrection. Like the banners of Mary Magdalene, Junia, and Theodora that lined the altar at the Rochester, NY ordination, RCWP's public discourse is replete with ancient examples of women's ordained authority.⁷ Doing so not only gives legitimacy to their claims for authentic ordination, but also argues against the Vatican, which said in 1976's *Inter Insigniores*, "the Catholic Church *has never felt* that priestly or episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women."⁸ The Church *has* ordained women, RCWP argues, and we are reclaiming our lost heritage.

The majority of RCWP's ordained are American, or roughly two-thirds. The movement has spread especially quickly in the United States. Although the movement began in Europe and has priests in Canada, American laws separating church and state make it easier for RCWP to expand as a non-profit organization in the United States; RCWP's communities in Canada and Europe do not receive government support in terms of non-profit status as they do in the U.S. Within five years of the first North American ordination, dozens of American women were

<http://associationofromancatholicwomenpriests.org/News.php>. This priest is considered a "catacomb priest," and to protect her identity, identifying images of her face are obscured.

⁷ For example, the banner headlining RCWP's official webpage (www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org) is titled "Bishop Theodora in Women's Episcopal Succession" and comes from a chapel in the Church of St. Praxedis, in Rome. The mosaic, dated in the ninth century, shows Bishop Theodora, standing alongside the Virgin Mary, St. Pudentiana, and St. Praxedis. RCWP looks to this portrait and others to argue that women held positions of ordained authority for centuries in the early Catholic Church. Crediting with finding, researching, and publishing much of this information is Dorothy Irvin, S.T.D., who holds a pontifical doctorate in Catholic theology and specializes in Biblical studies and archaeology. Since 2003, Irvin has produced and sold calendars, titled "The Archaeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church," that show art and artifacts that seem to attest to early Christian women's ordained status.

⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* ("Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood") (October 15, 1976), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi.htm> (emphasis added).

ordained deacons, priests, and bishops. RCWP-USA is now divided into five regions: West, Midwest, Great Waters, South, and East. Included on the North American landscape is RCWP-Canada, which is geographically divided into Canada-East and Canada-West. In 2010, a group of womenpriests—mostly from RCWP-USA South—separated from RCWP-USA to form the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests. In the U.S., individual RCWP worship communities as well as RCWP-USA and the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests are registered as non-profit organizations, thereby enabling their charitable work and helping increase donations.

RCWP's women are well educated; the current formation program requires at minimum a master's degree in theology, or the equivalent. A number of women hold doctorates. Most women are in their 50s and 60s. They are single, married, widowed, or divorced. Some identify as lesbians. The movement rejects mandatory celibacy, and so a woman's sexual identity does not preclude her from ordination. Most womenpriests have biological children; several have adopted children; many have grandchildren. RCWP's are "worker priests," meaning the priesthood does not support the women financially, so they also hold jobs, such as chaplains, nurses, teachers. Some women are retired. Nearly all women lead or co-lead a worship community. These communities are small, with anywhere from five to fifty people, on average, participating in weekly or bi-weekly masses.⁹

RCWP arises largely out of 20th century activism calling for women's ordination in the Catholic Church. Since the 1950s, and specifically since Vatican II (1962-65), many American Catholic women have re-envisioned their role within the patriarchal church—often in very

⁹ Amid these generalizations about RCWP's ordained women, I must note, perhaps confusingly, that Roman Catholic Womenpriests is not comprised entirely of *women*. The group currently has three male priests among its ranks. These men either cannot be ordained within Roman Catholicism (because they are married or openly gay) or they left formal priesthood in order to marry. As RCWP's primary activist goal is to promote women's ordination, male priests make up a small percentage of RCWP's ordained.

public ways. Some were swept up in the secular American feminist wave of the 1970s and 80s, while others found feminist inspiration within the Roman Catholic tradition itself. Some observed Protestant churches ordaining women and believed Catholicism would follow suit. Still others pursued advanced degrees in theology once the American church permitted Catholic colleges and universities to grant theology degrees to women in 1960. Many women felt newly awakened to centuries-old patterns of oppression at the hands of Vatican authorities, yet many of these same women sensed a tide change and believed the time had come to seek ordination.¹⁰ But the hope that some women held in the immediate wake of Vatican II turned to despair a few decades later, as many women's ordination activists felt the institutional Church was making few changes to advance women's ministerial and sacramental authority within the church. While activist Catholic women's groups have continued to grow, organize, and publicize theologically informed arguments, the church hierarchy has continued to issue statements forbidding women's ordination.¹¹

Canon Law has long held that “only a baptized male can validly receive sacred ordination,” but the Church had not issued a systematic, theological defense of the all-male priesthood until *Inter Insigniores*, “Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood,” in 1976. With this document, authored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), Vatican rhetoric against women's ordination intensified. *Inter Insigniores* holds the distinction of being the Church's first public statement of the modern era insisting that—and

¹⁰ Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), vii-xviii, 109-144; Mary Jo Weaver, ed, *What's Left?* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): 46-64; Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”) (December 7, 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

¹¹ Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 1997), 124-6. For an example of the way an archbishop has used Vatican teachings to argue against women priests, see John Paul II quoted in Archbishop Raymond Burke, “Attempted ‘ordinations’ of women: Archbishop Burke,” *Catholic Online*, November 14, 2007, <http://www.catholic.org/>.

explaining why—women cannot be ordained priests. This document restated the Church’s centuries-old position barring women from priesthood, saying “the incarnation of the Word took place according to the male sex,” and if the priest were not male as Christ was male, “it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ.” In short, women cannot image Christ because women are not male as Christ was male; moreover, the efficacy of Catholic sacraments depends upon a “natural resemblance” between priest and Jesus.¹² In 1994, Pope John Paul II wrote the Apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which not only affirmed the Church’s ban on women priests, but instructed that the policy was to be “definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.” In other words, debate about women’s ordination was, for all intents and purposes, closed.¹³ Catholic leaders and theologians have since debated whether or not John Paul II intended his position to be taken as infallible. Although no clear consensus has been reached, current Pope Benedict XVI believes barring women from priesthood is an infallible position.¹⁴

Arguments against women’s ordination are rooted in particular aspects of Catholic tradition and certain interpretations of scripture. Also important are arguments centering upon the gendered body: Vatican ideas about gender difference stems from a *Christian anthropology* and

¹² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (“Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood”) (October 15, 1976), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi.htm>. To clarify arguments made in the controversial *Inter Insigniores*, the CDF later released a Commentary on the Declaration: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “A Commentary on the Declaration,” January 27, 1977, in Deborah Halter, *The Papal ‘No’: A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican’s Rejection of Women’s Ordination* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004), 196-210.

¹³ John Paul II, “*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*,” (“On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone”) (May 22, 1994), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_22051994_ordinatio-sacerdotalis_en.html.

¹⁴ Questions surrounding the infallibility of the Vatican’s position have been raised recently in the *National Catholic Reporter*: John L. Allen, “Infallibility Debate Intensifies: Australia case latest in tensions that have swirled since Vatican I,” *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 2011, 10, 12; Jerry Filteau, “Complex Questions of Infallibility,” *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 2011, 1, 10; “Ordination Ban Not Infallibly Taught,” *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 2011, 35.

manifests in the language of *complementarity*, the idea that God created male and female bodies to be essentially different and, therefore, fill different life roles.¹⁵ John Paul II wrote in a 1988 letter titled “On the Dignity and Vocation of Women” that “Whatever violates the complementarity of women and men offends the dignity of women and men.”¹⁶ By this reasoning, then, God does not call women and men to the same roles, and God intends the ordained ministry for men only. In contrast, women’s mission—as continuously emphasized in church letters, declarations, and decrees—is three-fold: virgin, wife, and mother.¹⁷ Another given reason women cannot be ordained is Jesus Christ’s male body. A priest acts “in persona Christi,” and because Jesus was a man, who himself selected only men as his apostles, an all-male priesthood reaffirms Christ’s ministerial vision. Furthermore, because Catholicism is rooted in sacramental authority, any ordained person must legitimately be able to perform the sacraments. The CDF has argued, in essence, that for sacraments to “work” properly, the priest performing them must physically resemble Jesus Christ—who had a male body.¹⁸ A final argument against women’s ordination that is making rounds in ordination activist circles is the notion that the sacrament of Holy Orders simply will not “take” on a female soul. I have been unable to validate this argument, and thus while it appears this notion has more to do with oral tradition than Church tradition, the

¹⁵ For a discussion of “Christian anthropology” and “complementarity” within the context of the women’s ordination debate, see Halter, *The Papal ‘No,’* 24.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, (“On the Dignity and Vocation of Women”) (August 15, 1988) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html

¹⁷ Deborah Halter, *The Papal ‘No’: A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican’s Rejection of Women’s Ordination* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004): 76-85.

¹⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (“Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood”) (October 15, 1976), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi.htm>. also Chaves chapter that discusses sacramental religions. Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 84-129.

idea that men and women have different souls stems from doctrines that underscore the inherent differences between males and females.¹⁹

Catholics who desire women's ordination argue that the Vatican's positions are theologically unsound and contradict scripture, church history, and fundamental Catholic teachings. They argue that women and men are equal in God's eyes as a result of baptism. They also perceive the Church's rhetoric as becoming increasingly severe and dangerously short-sighted in recent decades. Although twentieth-century Catholic women have become better educated (especially in theology), petitioned the hierarchy on local, national, and international levels, and served the Roman Catholic Church as teachers, administrators, and parish employees, the Church's "no" sounds to them louder and more forceful. Since the early 1960s—before many Catholic women publicly inquired about women priests—Vatican responses to the women's ordination question have shifted from ignoring progressives' pleas (in the late 1960s and early 1970s), to arguing the Church simply has no power to ordain women (in the late 1970s), to barring outright all discussion of women's ordination (in 1994). As Vatican responses have changed, progressive groups have become increasingly vociferous.

Roman Catholic Womenpriests resides alongside and within the lineage of these progressive groups, though notably RCWP is neither a duplicate nor a new manifestation of any existing contemporary religious group that seeks to fully integrate women. Many progressive

¹⁹ Dorothy Irvin writes about ordination not "taking" on a woman's soul in her "Rebound," a self-published compilation of articles, images, and calendars. I bought the "Rebound" from Irvin directly; her calendars, archaeological images and mosaics, and "Rebounds" can also be purchased by contacting Irvin at irvincalendar@hotmail.com. Dorothy Irvin, "But They Have No Community!," in Dorothy Irvin, ed, "The Rebound 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007: The Archaeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church," (unnumbered pages) 28-9. The article, more journalistic in style than academic, is not footnoted. I have searched for any Church statements to this effect without success. I contacted John Wijngaards, Catholic theologian and former priest behind the website womenpriests.org, in search of an answer to this query. He said that no one at the Vatican has publicly made such a statement. He did tell me, however, about a bishop at a French synod who said that women do not have a soul. Furthermore, any question about a difference between male and female souls is contradicted by the Baltimore Catechism, which says that male and female souls are the same. See United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §362-368.

groups exist upon the contemporary Catholic landscape, including We Are Church, the Women's Ordination Conference, Women's Ordination Worldwide, Catholic Network for Women's Equality, Call to Action, and Voice of the Faithful. Also worth mentioning here is FutureChurch, a group based in Ohio that "respects" the Roman Catholic Church's current position on women's ordination while still working to encourage the Vatican to recognize how the current priest shortage may be resolved by opening the priesthood to women and married people.²⁰ RCWP certainly shares values, goals, and members with each of these groups. Yet even though RCWP often aligns with these groups in working to meet those goals, RCWP is a separate organization that did not grow out of any one group.

Additionally, there exist other Catholic organizations focused on fully integrating women into leadership roles, and most fall under the banner of "Independent Catholics." Defined simply, Independent Catholics are congregations that call themselves Catholic but are not in communion with the Diocese of Rome, either by choice or as a result of excommunication. Some groups of Independent Catholics retain the post-Vatican II liturgy and ritual but claim independence from Rome. The Old Catholic Church is one example: this Independent Catholic group retains the sacraments and liturgy of Roman Catholicism but does not hold to papal obedience. In a significant example, 2001 and 2002, respectively, saw Mary Ramerman and Denise Donato ordained priests by Peter Bishop Hickman, who himself was ordained in the Diocese of Ecumenical and Old Catholic Communities, and who is currently the head of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC).²¹ Ramerman and Donato women take the title of "priest" and they have been formally excommunicated, but they are not RCWP's womenpriests.

²⁰ FutureChurch, "About Us," "Mission Statement," "Frequently Asked Questions," FutureChurch, www.futurechurch.org (accessed December 2009).

²¹ John P. Plummer and John R. Mabry, *Who are the Independent Catholics?* (Apocryphile Press, 2006); Halter, *The Papal No*, 144-5. See also Ecumenical Catholic Communion, "The Apostolic Succession of Peter E. Hickman,"

Three other examples are worth mentioning. First, Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IEC) is another diverse Catholic group. Some IECs consider themselves independent Catholics, and others consider themselves Roman Catholic. IECs believe that the community—and not the priest—makes Christ present in the Eucharist.²² Second, the Catholic Diocese of One Spirit, headed by Bishop Jim Burch, uses a “fully-Catholic model of Christianity as practiced by the early Christians” and eschews creeds, dogmas, and any “institutionalizing” impulse.²³ This group is best described as an independent Catholic group that has emerged from progressive movements in contemporary Roman Catholicism. Third, the Ecumenical Catholic Communion describes itself as “a community of communities which are ecumenical and catholic.” The group’s use of a small “c” in “catholic” is deliberate and points to a definition of Catholicism that is not Roman and papal, but “universal.” The group retains Catholic tradition in respect to Jesus’ life and ministry, the New Testament, the Nicene Creed, the sacraments and liturgical traditions, and apostolic succession. But like the other groups named here, the ECC does not consider itself bound by papal authority.²⁴ RCWP, in contrast, consciously retains the “Roman”

Ecumenical Catholic Communion, www.ecumenical-catholic-communion.org/eccpdf/apostolic_succession.pdf. To clarify terminology: Bishop Hickman was the presiding bishop of Ramerman and Donato’s ordinations, the one who provided the apostolic line. But as Spiritus Christi describes the ordination, Ramerman and Donato were ordained by Hickman, the Spiritus Christi community, and international interfaith clergy. What’s significant is that the lay community shared in the call and power to ordain.

²² Intentional Eucharistic Communities, “Intentional Eucharistic Communities: Embracing and Shaping Our Future,” Intentional Eucharistic Communities, <http://www.intentionaleucharisticcommunities.org/>. The IEC describes itself as follows: “Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IECs) are those small faith communities, rooted in the Catholic tradition, which gather to celebrate Eucharist on a regular basis. Born in the enthusiasm flowing from Vatican II for a church of the people, some IECs were instituted in parishes, some were created as alternatives to the parish, some retain close ties with the institutional church, and some function independently. All are characterized by shared responsibility for the governance and life of the community. Through sharing liturgical life and mutual support for one another, members are strengthened to live Gospel-centered lives dedicated to spiritual growth and social commitment.”

²³ Catholic Diocese of One Spirit, “One Spirit One Church: The Catholic Diocese of One Spirit,” Catholic Diocese of One Spirit, www.onespiritcatholic.org (accessed December 2009).

²⁴ Ecumenical Catholic Communion, “Home,” “Distinctives,” “FAQ,” Ecumenical Catholic Communion, <http://www.ecumenical-catholic-communion.org/index.html> (accessed August 12, 2010). Incidentally, at the time I

moniker and, in so doing, signals a concern with Vatican authority—how ever ambivalent that concern may be.

This does not mean, however, that distinctions between RCWP and these progressive and/or Independent Catholic groups are always clear-cut. A large number of RCWP's ordained women participated in the Women's Ordination Conference; many still participate. Recall that RCWP Bishop Andrea Johnson, mentioned at this chapter's outset, served as WOC's executive director for several years. Similarly, some of RCWP's women sought ordination in Independent Catholic groups prior to joining the *Roman* Catholic Womenpriests. Before being ordained through RCWP, Jeannette Love was ordained in the Catholic Apostolic Church of Antioch, and Eleonora Marinaro was ordained an Independent Catholic priest in 1992.²⁵ So, some women sought ordination in Independent Catholic groups before going with the *Roman* Catholic Womenpriests. In a slight reversal of this, womanpriest Marie David advertises an "Ecumenical Catholic" service in her local Harwich Port, Massachusetts newspapers. She explained, "If we advertised as Roman Catholic, we'd be doing people a disservice, because we are not in communion with Rome. We don't want to mislead people who come here for mass." She then added, "We *do* want people to know and question the difference [between Ecumenical Catholic and Roman Catholic]." ²⁶ Some RCWP worship communities operate differently, however, holding fast to the *Roman* Catholic label and advertising as "Roman Catholic" in local newspapers. Theresa Novak Chabot, for instance, was announcing a Catholic mass in local Manchester, New Hampshire newspapers when the Diocese of Rochester requested she stop, as

accessed this link, Bishop Peter Hickman was the Presiding Bishop of the ECC. This shows the great deal of fluidity and overlap among these non-Roman-yet-still-Catholic Catholic groups.

²⁵ Roman Catholic Womenpriests, "Ordained: Jeannette Love," Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>; Eleonora Marinaro, "Coming Home," in *Women Find a Way*, 86-88.

²⁶ Marie David, telephone interview with author, February 11, 2011.

she was “simulating”—and not legitimately “celebrating”—the mass.²⁷ David, in contrast, has taken a path of less resistance, explaining, “I was ordained a Roman Catholic womanpriest, but I see myself functioning as an Ecumenical Catholic priest.”²⁸ RCWP is not uniform in its self-understanding or self-presentation. As Bishop Joan Houk has said, “We are diverse in our unity. Or, we are a unity with diversity.”²⁹

Another characteristic that sets RCWP apart is its insistence on remaining *Roman* Catholic while deliberately breaking Canon Law. RCWP believes that this crucial difference ensures that the women are *validly* ordained, even while being *illegally* ordained. RCWP does not deny that their ordinations are illegal. The movement’s actions are deliberately *contra legem*, “against the law.” In addition to the word “legal,” the term “licit” is often used in conjunction with the RCWP ordinations: the ordinations are not *licit* in that they are not Vatican-sanctioned. But while they are not *legal*, not *licit*, RCWP insists its ordinations are *valid*. The distinction between these terms is crucial. Because Roman Catholic bishops have laid hands on them, the womenpriests purport to stand in the line of apostolic succession, and, thus, to be *validly* ordained. As Elsie Hainz McGrath told me, “We remain Catholic because we are validly ordained. We know we’re *illegal*—we broke one lousy canon law! But we know we’re *valid* because we followed the line of apostolic succession.” Like McGrath, most womenpriests are proudly defiant about their illegal ordination, but they are just as adamant that their ordinations are valid. After all, they argue, canon law is just a man-made creation; being validly ordained,

²⁷ Theresa Novak Chabot, telephone interview with author, January 20, 2011; Kathryn Marchock, “Catholic Woman Acting as Priest,” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, October 8, 2010.

²⁸ Marie David, telephone interview with author, February 11, 2011.

²⁹ Joan Houk, telephone interview with author, January 8, 2011.

however, with the Spirit and God's blessing descending through the Laying on of Hands, is God-given.³⁰

The Vatican's response to RCWP's *contra legem* ordinations has, not surprisingly, been one of extreme disapproval. The Vatican's actions toward the movement have ranged dramatically, from excommunication of the women, to avoidance of their ordinations, and back to excommunication.³¹ In the weeks before the first Danube ordination, Church officials threatened everyone participating with excommunication—not just ordinands, but also any supporters and journalists in attendance. After the ceremony, the Danube Seven (and no one else) received the Summons and Canonical Admonition, requesting that they repent of their actions. The seven women refused, and the Decree of Excommunication followed. For several years thereafter, Roman Catholic authorities ignored the womenpriests, although many more were ordained in Europe and North America. That changed in 2008, when Elsie McGrath and Rose received a Decree of Excommunication from St. Louis Archbishop Raymond Burke. They were the first womenpriests to be excommunicated since the Danube Seven.³²

To date and as of May 2008, all of RCWP's ordained women are automatically excommunicated, per the CDF's General Decree. To that end, many womenpriests state publicly that, while they were initially deeply saddened by the threat and then actuality of their excommunications, they now do not fret the decree. At a lecture for the Osher Institute (a

³⁰ Elsie McGrath, interview with author, July 17, 2009.

³¹ In Roman Catholicism, excommunication is a penalty intended to encourage censured individuals to rebuild their relationship with the Church. Types of excommunication include *latae sententiae*, or automatic, and *ferendae sententiae*, imposed by a Church authority. Excommunication is not intended to forever remove someone from the Church; excommunicants are still expected to attend Mass, though they cannot participate in a ministerial capacity nor can they receive the sacraments. An excommunicated individual who repents can be fully reconciled with the Church.

³² Gisela Forster, "The Start: The Danube Seven and the Bishop Heroes," in *Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests*, eds. Elsie Hainz McGrath, Bridget Mary Meehan, and Ida Raming (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2008), 9-13; Elsie Hainz McGrath, "The Road Less Traveled By," in *Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests*, eds. Elsie Hainz McGrath, Bridget Mary Meehan, and Ida Raming (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2008), 108-114.

lifelong learning institute at the University of San Diego) given in 2007, a year before her formal excommunication, Jane Via became emotional when talking about the possibility of excommunication:

It'll be very sad for me. I went into this with my eyes open. I understand what the possible negative consequences are...I understand—which most Catholics don't—that excommunication is a discipline of the church, has nothing to do with salvation or damnation, even though it used to have to do with life and death...historically speaking. I don't fear it's going to impact my ultimate relationship with the holy...but it'll be very very very sad for me.³³

Two years later, at a follow-up Osher lecture occurring *after* all womenpriests had been excommunicated *latae sententiae*, Via's attitude about excommunication had shifted. She said now, "From my perspective, for any human beings of any generation to believe that they can articulate laws which capture and embody the gospel values of Jesus adequately and completely...is presumptuous beyond imagining... Canon law is a body of literally man-made law... our task as Christians is to live the gospel, not to live according to Canon Law." She went on to say that, as an attorney, she understands that what she did was "religious disobedience," or illegal in the Church's eyes; as a theologian, however, she doesn't accept excommunication as theologically valid, because it contradicts Jesus's teachings.³⁴ In both lectures, Via's drew upon her knowledge and intellectual understanding of excommunication, yet in terms of emotional tone, she appeared sad and wistful before the excommunication, but defiant and assertive after.

Likewise, Judith McKloskey said that her "immediate response [to the excommunication] was deep sadness," because Church leaders were using energy and resources to hurl "verbal

³³ "Osher UCSD: Becoming a Woman Roman Catholic Priest with Jane Via," May 7, 2007, video clip, University of California Television, www.uctv.tv/search-details.aspx?showID=12244.

³⁴ "Osher UCSD: Jane Via 2009, Three Years as a Woman Priest," December 4, 2009, video clip, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_EcnJeNUp8.

lightening bolts at a few mostly-retirement-aged women and men” instead of solving problems in the Church and the world. Her tone, too, changed. Speaking for RCWP, McKloskey said

The Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement rejects the penalty of excommunication. We consider ourselves loyal members of the Roman Catholic Church. We stand in the prophetic tradition of holy disobedience to what we believe is an unjust canon law – canon 1024 – which reserves ordination to men. We believe canon 849, that baptism [not gender] is the gateway to the sacraments. Recent scholarship affirms that women were ordained in the first thousand years of our Church’s history. We are reclaiming that history. Roman Catholic Womenpriests offers a model of renewed priesthood in a community of equals. And yes, some people and some Church leaders find that very threatening.³⁵

Many of RCWP’s women see excommunication as a man-made law—not a law of God. As excommunicated women, RCWP’s members might be denied communion at Catholic mass or denied a Catholic funeral and burial. Still, many women believe—as McKloskey states—that an excommunication decree for womenpriests is “an affirmation that Church officials are now taking the Roman Catholic Womenpriests initiative seriously.”³⁶ Bridget Mary Meehan echoes this, saying the excommunications are a positive sign that “the Vatican is taking us seriously.”³⁷ That they are being excommunicated at all suggests to them how important their efforts are.

Perhaps the CDF-issued “Norms on Most Serious Crimes” (*Normae de gravioribus delictis*) released July 15, 2010 further reinforced this notion that Rome is taking RCWP seriously. In modifying *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*, issued under John Paul II, the CDF intended to deal with sex abuse crimes in the Church. Mentioned alongside guidelines for clergy abuse crimes was

³⁵ Michael J. Bayly, “We Are All the Rock’: An interview with Roman Catholic Womanpriest Judith McKloskey,” *Progressive Catholic Voice* (online forum), August 2008, http://www.progressivecatholicvoice.org/enewsletters/index_Aug08.html#Rock

³⁶ Michael J. Bayly, “We Are All the Rock’: An interview with Roman Catholic Womanpriest Judith McKloskey,” *Progressive Catholic Voice* (online forum), August 2008, http://www.progressivecatholicvoice.org/enewsletters/index_Aug08.html#Rock

³⁷ Elisabetta Povoledo, “Vatican Asserts Rule That Bars Female Priests,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/>.

the “grave” crime of attempting to ordain a woman.³⁸ Women’s ordination activists cried foul at the juxtaposition of sexual abusers with women seeking the priesthood. For RCWP and the group’s supporters, this is yet another sign that the hierarchy has lost its way.

And yet, even though RCWP has found support from many individuals and organizations, dissenting voices join the Vatican in condemning the women’s actions—and, sometimes, in condemning the women themselves. RCWP’s *contra legem* ordinations infuriate some other Catholics, lay and clerical, who are as passionate about their religious tradition as are the womenpriests. To be sure, womenpriests stir up fervent controversy. Any discussion of the ordained women must take into account how angry dissenters understand and label them.

Anyone looking to understand the rage some Catholics feel toward RCWP’s actions need turn only to the “comments” sections of online videos or news stories reporting on womenpriests. Much vitriol plays out amid online anonymity. Here is a sampling of comments:

Stop trying! And go do_ something usefull, like... Go help charities feed people in need, instead of_ trying to contradict God's Word!

Heresy. Gnosticism. Neo-Pagan. Disobedience to_ the_ Vatican. Liberalism, relativism, progressivism. They want same sex marriage, pro-choice ideology. Total wickedness. Excommunication

stop trying to_ ruin the true Church.

As a catholic woman I totally disagree with woman priests. However, if I felt like you, I would leave the catholic church and join one of the thousands of protestant churches that allow women ministers! Whats wrong?? are these churches not good enough for you??? Leave the catholic church_ to those that believe in it!!!

Women priests!!?lol What next..male nuns??? LOL. Heretics...thanks Vatican_ 2! You all opened up the floodgates for heretics such as these so called womenpriests to run absolutely rampant! Anyway. They arent accepted by the rock of st peter the pope and holy mother church..so lol you are never allowed to go to confession or

³⁸ William Cardinal Levada and Luis F. Ladana, “Modifications to *Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*,” July 15, 2010, http://press.catholica.va/news_services/bulletin/news/25862.php?index=25862&lang=en#TRADUZIONE%20IN%20LINGUA%20%20INGLESE.

any of the sacraments as they are al..EXCOMMUNICATED...THEY BROUGHT IT UPON THEMSELVES!

This is the most BLASPHEMOUS video Ive seen to date concerning the Catholic church...we should pray for these poor lost unfortunate souls, and the souls that they deceive.³⁹

Significant here—and repeatedly echoed elsewhere—are statements suggesting the women are ruining the Church, that they are heretics, that they are an expected if troubling outgrowth of liberal and progressive values (including Vatican II), that they should simply become Protestant if they want ordination, and that their souls are in danger.

Similar reactions also appear in print: the SEPA/WOC publication *Equal wRites* reprinted and responded to a letter-to-the-editor published in the Philadelphia archdiocesan newspaper. There, George A. Morton wrote to ask for prayers for the “priestesses” who were “publicly injuring the Body of Christ.” “Thank God for the sacrament of penance,” he said, and added, “We know who is at the helm of the ‘priestess’ movement. We have met him countless times in our own lives. ‘Enjoy the cruise,’ Captain Satan says. And all too often we do, on his terms.”⁴⁰ Here, Morton is suggesting Satan is responsible for the women’s actions; moreover, he labels the women “priestesses,” a term that smacks of paganism and that RCWP has never used to describe its ordained women.

Priests also fall into the category of public dissenters, and a letter from Rev. Michael G. Murtha, the Parochial Vicar of Sacred Heart Church in Havertown, PA, to SEPA/WOC is an example of this. Murtha wrote to criticize SEPA/WOC members for putting notices about a

³⁹ “Roman Catholic Women Priests Ordain Four Women in Chicago,” Comments section, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ifFLNIA4WM&feature=related>; “Breaking the Silence on Women's Ordination on the 15th Annual World Day of Prayer, Comments section, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BvRC981q-Cc&feature=related>.

⁴⁰ Maria Marlowe, “An Womenpriest Ordinations: An Exchange of Views,” *Equal wRites* (Ivylnd, PA), March – May 2007: 3. *Equal wRites* is a newsletter published by the Southeastern Pennsylvania chapter of the Women’s Ordination Conference, and its archives are found at sepawoc.org.

Holy Thursday protest on mass-goers' car windshields, but his focus quickly became women's ordination and the question of "who is a Catholic?" His 2004 letter came after the Danube ordinations but before RCWP had come to the United States. He wrote that there are no validly ordained women priests, even if they have been ordained by validly ordained bishops. Regarding vocational calls, he said, "Some of your members dare to say they have been called to the priesthood! Such a judgment can only be made under the careful scrutiny of the church." Intimating that WOC's protests were worse than "protestant," Murtha said that when Martin Luther protested the teaching of the Roman Catholic faith, he at least had the "courage of his convictions" to no longer call himself Roman Catholic. Ultimately, he concluded that people—like SEPA/WOC's members, and presumably like RCWP's—are not real Catholics: "Dissenting Catholics' are not truly Catholic—they dissent from the teachings and practices of the Catholic church. One cannot speak with arrogance, disrespect, and disobedience toward the Holy Father—as your organization does so frequently—and still hold to the theory that he is a 'Roman Catholic priest.'"⁴¹ Murtha's letter is a valuable artifact from the early years of RCWP, not only because he argues the women are *neither* valid or licit (recall, womenpriests claim to be valid *but* illicit), and not only because he suggests women seeking Catholic priesthood are *not* Catholic and not courageous, but also because letters like Murtha's have largely disappeared from public debate. Increasingly, womenpriests are ignored by local priests and bishops and simply censured *en masse* by the CDF and papacy.

How do womenpriests respond to these criticisms and attacks and insinuations? Why do the women not become Protestant, or leave the Church, or obey the Pope? When asked why they stay Catholic, patterns emerge in the womenpriests' responses. The Episcopal tradition may ordain women (since 1976) and strongly resemble Catholicism, but RCWP's women insist that

⁴¹ Rev. Michael G. Murtha, letter to SEPA/WOC, *Equal wRites* (Ivyland, PA), June – August 2004: 4.

they are Catholic, will always be Catholic, and love the Catholic Church too much to leave it. Eileen DiFranco said, “I feel as if my family has been Catholic since the time of St. Patrick and that I should not have to leave my faith.”⁴² Monique Venne tried to leave, even going so far as to enter a UCC ecumenical seminary, but she discovered “that I was Catholic to my bones!” She felt it would be “dishonest” to join another denomination just to be ordained, and she stays Catholic because of the “optimistic anthropology, the rituals, the sacraments, the history, and Vatican II.”⁴³ Mary Frances Smith also looked into the Episcopal Church: “But,” she says, “I am Roman Catholic on a deep level, and that is where I choose to stay. At this point in my life, I do not believe that I should have to abdicate my Catholicism just because men in the Vatican say that I should. I am Roman Catholic and I belong in the Church as much as anyone.”⁴⁴ Besides, Marie David might add, the Roman Catholic Church is more than the hierarchy—*we*, the people, are the Church, and we can become a better church and follow Jesus more closely.⁴⁵ Repeatedly, RCWP’s women reported that they believe their love for the Church can change it for the better. And if they can facilitate that reform process, they will have succeeded doubly. As Mary Kay Kusner has said of staying in the Church instead of leaving, “I want my presence to speak louder than my absence.”⁴⁶ The Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement vows that it wants to change the church, not abandon the church—especially during what many womenpriests see as a transitional time of great need.

⁴² Eileen DiFranco, email interview with author, January 13, 2011.

⁴³ Monique Venne, email interview with author, March 27, 2011.

⁴⁴ Mary Frances Smith, email interview with author, March 4, 2011.

⁴⁵ Marie David, telephone interview with author, February 2, 2011.

⁴⁶ Mary Kay Kusner, email message to author, September 17, 2009.

Indeed, the Catholic landscape is changing, in America and worldwide, and women's ordination activists have this reality in the forefront of their minds. American Catholic population centers are shifting: areas once densely Catholic like the Northeast United States are losing members, while immigration has infused the Southwest with millions of Hispanic Catholics. Around the world, Catholicism is growing in Africa and Southeast Asia, while it is dwindling in the U.S. and Western Europe.⁴⁷ Vocations to the priesthood are down: fewer and fewer men are entering the priesthood, which limits Catholics' exposure to sacramental and pastoral care.⁴⁸ The Church has lost hundreds of millions of dollars—from lawsuits, victim compensation, and declining offerings—as a result of the clergy abuse scandal. In response to these changes, RCWP has called the church's ethics and priorities into question. Many Roman Catholic womenpriests have noted with disdain that they have been excommunicated, yet no priest found guilty of sexually abusing a child has been excommunicated.⁴⁹ Placing the womenpriests' actions alongside those of abusive priests, womenpriest McKloskey said, "Pedophilia is a crime; covering up pedophilia is a crime; stealing from the Church is a crime. Responding to a call from the depths of one's conscience is not a crime."⁵⁰ The movement and many progressive Catholics see this as a dangerous discrepancy signaling the Church's misplaced priorities and abusive power. In their minds, this is a mounting problem that, perhaps, womenpriests can help to overcome.

⁴⁷ Many Catholics and Catholic observers have noted this trend. One example is John L. Allen, "For Catholic theology, the future is global and lay-led," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 24, 2010, 4a.

⁴⁸ Ruth A. Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); Jerry Filteau, "Panelists urge laity to take the lead," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 7, 2011, 12; Zoe Ryan, "Demographic Opportunity Knocking for Schools," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 4, 2011, 1a.

⁴⁹ Tom Roberts, "Canon lawyer questions Maryknoll's move against Bourgeois," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 30, 2011, 7.

⁵⁰ Michael J. Bayly, "We Are All the Rock": An interview with Roman Catholic Womanpriest Judith McKloskey," *Progressive Catholic Voice* (online forum), August 2008, http://www.progressivecatholicvoice.org/enewsletters/index_Aug08.html#Rock

What then, can being ordained *do*, and what can women do as ordained priests if they are simultaneously excommunicated? The answer here often comes down to justice and equality. Ida Raming, a founding mother of the women's ordination movement, said, "We feel the obligation or responsibility to struggle for women's equality in our church."⁵¹ Patricia Fresen often says "we are not ordained for ourselves"⁵²; rather, empowerment of women is a common refrain. Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger has said, "By my ordination I also wanted to encourage the many women—and men as well—to follow God's call to priestly ministry."⁵³ In this vein, RCWP is a reform group with a Roman Catholic name that acknowledges and enables women's vocational calls; as Kathleen Kunster notes, "For some women, it is the first time anyone has affirmed their vocation to the priesthood."⁵⁴ Elsie McGrath goes further, suggesting that ordination is less important than the justice and reform ordination signals: "My ordination has nothing to do with ordination, *per se*. My ordination has to do with justice; it has to do with reform; it has to do with solidarity and freedom and world community."⁵⁵ In short, ordination is about more than ordination: it is, for the ordained women, about justice and equality, validation and empowerment.

And yet. Roman Catholic Womenpriests sets out to change the Church and reform the priesthood by emulating aspects of the Church and its traditions and by becoming priests. The women understand the Church and the priesthood as sufficiently significant that an ordained priesthood is part of the group's public protest. What events have brought RCWP into being

⁵¹ Ida Raming, email message to author, January 9, 2011.

⁵² Patricia Fresen, quoted in Marie Bouclin, "Call to Ministry: Binding the Wounds of Clergy Abuse," in *Women Find a Way*, 52.

⁵³ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, "Reflections on My Way: God's Call to Me," in *Women Find a Way*, 17-18.

⁵⁴ Kathleen Kunster, "Biography of a Priest," in *Women Find a Way*, 154.

⁵⁵ Elsie McGrath, "The Road Less Traveled By: Canonical Disobedience in St. Louis," in *Women Find a Way*, 110.

and toward this particular form of disobedience? In the next chapter, I look at RCWP's twentieth-century lineage as a way of explaining how RCWP arrived on the Roman Catholic landscape in the early twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2

FROM VATICAN DECREES TO REFORM-MINDED FEMINISM:

ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS IN CONTEXT

On August 16, 2009, at the First Universalist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, during the ordination ceremony of four Roman Catholic women, Bishop Regina Nicolosi's homily began with the following: "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum, et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo. Meine Seel erhebt den Herren; und mein Geist freut sich Gottes, meines Heilands.*" First in Latin and then in German, Nicolosi recalled the opening lines of the Magnificat. Taken from Luke's gospel, and also known as the Song of Mary, the Magnificat is the prayer that Mary joyfully spoke when visiting her cousin, Elizabeth. Both women were pregnant: Mary with the child who would become Jesus Christ, and Elizabeth with John the Baptist. The entire text of the Magnificat—in English—had been the day's gospel reading: "Mary said, 'My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.'" Within the context of this women's ordination ceremony, the prayer was intended to signal God's fidelity, describe blessings upon those who obey God, and celebrate women's power to mother and birth.¹

¹ The Magnificat is found in Luke 1: 46-55. As used during the Minneapolis ordination, the text was modified from standard translations—such as the New Revised Standard Version and the New International Version—in that masculine language was altered, so that God was addressed directly as "You," rather than indirectly as "He," and in that Sarah was mentioned alongside Abraham in recalling God's covenant. The entirety of the Magnificat, as spoken as the ordination's gospel reading, is as follows: "Mary said, 'My soul proclaims your greatness, O God, and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior. For you have looked with favor upon your lowly servant, and from this day forward all generations will call me blessed. For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me, and holy is your Name. Your mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear you. You have shown strength with your arm; you have scattered the proud in their conceit; you have deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places. You have filled the hungry with good things, while you have sent the rich away empty. You have come

Speaking to a crowd of over 500, Nicolosi went on to explain why she chose to translate the Magnificat's opening lines into Latin and German: "I began this homily with the first line of the Magnificat in Latin, to show our connections as Roman Catholic womenpriests with our roots, and to emphasize our intent to remain firmly rooted in the Roman Catholic Church." Nicolosi, who grew up in Germany, then added, "I repeated the same line in German, my mother tongue, to express my own emotional connection to Mary. The German also reminds us of our [RCWP's] roots in German-speaking Europe." Significantly, in terms of the changes RCWP makes to liturgical language, Nicolosi used "Lord" instead of "God": many womenpriests see "God" as allowing for male and female elements in a way that "Lord" does not. It is also noteworthy that Nicolosi chose to open her homily with a nod to Roman Catholic Womenpriest's [RCWP's] genesis, and her explanations of the group's origins align with the etiology included in the ordination program. Welcoming family, friends, and supporters to the ordinations of Mary Katherine Kusner to the diaconate, and Mary Frances Smith, Linda Ann Wilcox, and Mary Suzanne Styne to the priesthood, the program reads:

Since the ordinations of the Danube Seven in 2002, we stand with our foremothers and forefathers validly ordained in Apostolic Succession through anointing and laying on of hands... We stand, too, as women and men of the long view. Historical and archaeological evidence reveals that women served as deacons, priests and bishops from the 2nd to the 6th centuries AD: Deacons Phoebe, Sophia and Maria; Priests Leta and Vitalia; and Bishops Theodora and Alexandra. Before that, in the Upper Room on Pentecost, God surprised the followers of Jesus, women and men whose hearts were open and who were ready for the coming of God's Spirit promised by Jesus for all humankind, for all time.²

Thus, at this ordination ceremony, in RCWP's Midwest region in 2009, the given narrative about women's priesthood started in early Christianity, moved from Jesus's time through the Middle

to the aid of Israel your servant, mindful of your mercy—the promise you made to our ancestors—to Sarah and Abraham and their descendants forever."

² Roman Catholic Womenpriests, "Order of Worship," worship aid, Sixth Midwest Region Ordination, August 16, 2009.

Ages, and reemerged in the Danube Seven's twenty-first century activism. In claiming ancient precedent and invoking Jesus as having sent men and women equally on an evangelizing errand, this history suggests that God willed female leadership since Christianity's inception. Nearly 2000 years later, then, the Danube Seven reclaimed women's religious authority and sacramental responsibilities, which the hierarchical church had long since subsumed. Viewed through this particular history, Roman Catholic Womenpriests marks a return to Jesus's intent and Christianity's early egalitarianism.³

As the Minneapolis example shows, RCWP positions itself as reclaiming and reentering a clerical lineage that women had long been part of. In contrast, I position RCWP in relation to the social, cultural, and religious forces of the twentieth century. My aim here is to lay out RCWP's lineage, emphasizing not theological gravitas or Christ's ministerial intent—as the womenpriests themselves do⁴—but rather historical motion and cultural causes. This alternative history begins not with first-century Christianity but with post-Vatican II Catholicism. Moreover, this chapter attempts to understand why the RCWP movement emerged when it did, why it has taken the direction it has, and how developments in Catholicism (American and European), feminism, American Christianity (Protestant, Episcopalian, and Catholic⁵), and European

³ Some but not all scholars and theorists of religion mark founders and pure origins as significant, as the ideal to which current believers should aspire. One such theorist, the nineteenth century German philosopher Max Müller, argued that one best understands a religious tradition by understanding its origins.

⁴ I am not suggesting that the womenpriests are unaware of the lineage I lay out in this chapter. Indeed, many of the women were themselves leaders in the movements I describe. Rather, I'm drawing a distinction between the "public origins story" RCWP uses to introduce itself and the contemporary historical events that shaped the movement.

⁵ Sometimes I make a distinction between Episcopalians and Protestants. This is a muddled issue that benefits from a brief history: Episcopalians are direct descendants of the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. When the United States earned its independence from Great Britain, what had been the Anglican Church in the British colonies became known as the Episcopal Church. Anglicans—and thus, Episcopalians—are born of *both* Catholicism and Protestant Reform traditions. They have described themselves as "Protestant, yet Catholic." While Episcopalians are often captured under the umbrella of "Protestants" in common parlance, I find a distinction can be useful.

Catholicism led to the Danube Seven's actions in 2002 and RCWP's speedy success in North America beginning in 2005.

In doing so, I seek to nuance the relationship between RCWP's foremothers in Catholic feminism and the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Given how contentious relations are currently between the Roman Catholic hierarchy and RCWP, it is important to examine how Catholic feminists and the Vatican were not always at odds—not even forty years ago. My emphasis on historical, cultural, and social forces—imbibed and digested within a theologically Catholic milieu—reveals that RCWP is primarily the product of four interwoven strands: 1. Vatican and American bishop's actions beginning with Vatican II (1962-5), 2. secular and faith-filled feminism, 3. other religious traditions' budding support for women's ordination, and 4. European theological activism.

I do not seek to give a full history of either Catholic feminism or the women's ordination movement. This has been done—and done well—by past authors.⁶ Instead, this chapter highlights those events that were and remain most significant for understanding the twenty-first century Roman Catholic Womenpriest movement. Important also is the way this chapter shows a constant process of negotiation between Vatican decrees and reform-minded feminism. Ultimately I point out that the blend of tradition and transgression that marks RCWP's actions today emerges from ordination activists' decades-old need to navigate competing forces.

Vatican II Inspiration: Joy in Lay Empowerment, Hope for Ordination

RCWP, like the women's ordination movement, has taken root within the church and alongside church statements. I begin this process of contextualizing RCWP with Vatican II. To

⁶ Books about Vatican II, the growing women's ordination movement, and Catholic feminism are legion. Two that have been the most helpful to me are Mary J. Henold's *Catholic and Feminist* and Deborah Halter's *The Papal 'No.'*

begin with the Second Vatican Council is in no way an attempt to divorce the twenty-first century women's ordination movement from what preceded the Council. To be sure, Catholic women have been activists for social causes long before the 1960s. But Vatican II is significant in that it marked a turning point whereby American Catholic women who wanted women's ordination began to develop a contentious relationship with their church around this issue.⁷

Beginning with Vatican II also marks as significant how the two sides tried, especially at the outset, to reconcile, dialogue, and debate. If Catholic women felt they could expect and demand the priesthood by the 1970s, it was in large part because of Vatican II statements and changes that could be interpreted as increasingly progressive—if not altogether permissive. Considered here will be the ethos surrounding Vatican II and the documents *Gaudium et spes*, *Pacem in Terris*, and *Humanae Vitae*, which inspired some Catholic women to seek greater Church participation and, ultimately, ordination. From the outset, Vatican II emphasized the “people of God” and lay persons’ important role in Catholic life. Many women and men took this to heart and sought new ways to be Catholic. Furthermore, in the 1960s, educational opportunities opened up from which women previously had been barred, and in keeping with Vatican II’s spirit of *aggiornamento*, women sought advanced degrees in theology and Catholic studies. In short, the relationship between the Vatican and women’s ordination activists was never simply a contentious one.

Catholic women’s desire for ordination certainly did not begin in the 20th century. Historians can only guess how many women over Christianity’s two millennia have hoped to receive Holy Orders. A dearth of texts giving voice to women’s desires is not necessarily evidence that such desires did not exist. We do know from written sources that St. Therese of

⁷ See Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009). Cummings argues that Catholic women of the Progressive Era were socially active, yet they found solidarity primarily in their Catholic identity, and not their female identity. As such, the women Cummings describes would not consider themselves “feminist” and did not agitate against Church teachings.

Lisieux, who lived in the late 19th century, longed to be a priest. While she vowed obedience to Church doctrine and never protested the Vatican's policies, she wrote with longing about the priesthood: "If I were a priest, how lovingly I would carry you [Christ in the Eucharist] in my hands when you came down from heaven at my call; how lovingly I would bestow you upon people's souls. I want to enlighten people's minds as the prophets and the doctors did. I feel the call of an Apostle." Therese, beatified a saint in 1925 and named a Doctor of the Church in 1997, felt powerfully called to priesthood and to bestowing Eucharistic grace. Therese died at age 24, having never been ordained. Hers remains the most well-known story of a faith-filled Catholic woman wanting priesthood.⁸

But no matter how many Catholic women prior to the twentieth century desired the priesthood, in prayer or in public, a united group of Catholic women began clamoring for ordination in the wake of Vatican II. With the notable exception of the St. Joan's Alliance (which formed in Europe in 1911 and will be taken up later in the chapter), women's public requests for ordination largely lay dormant before Vatican II. After the Second Vatican Council, however, some Catholic women believed they could ask for—and in fact demand—the priesthood. Today, the women involved in RCWP are disobeying the Church, with intent and calculation. In contrast, Catholic women in the 1960s and 70s were listening to their church and trying to abide Vatican II's sweeping changes. When the windows cracked open and winds of change began to blow (per the language of Vatican II's *aggiornamenti*), Catholic women saw an opportunity. They moved speedily forward, all the while keeping Church directives in view.⁹

⁸ *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux* (Washington: ICS Publications, 1976), 95; Colleen M. Griffith, ed. *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women's Strategies for Reform* (New York: Crossroad, 2009). For more on women's clerical authority in Christianity's first millennium: see Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, eds, *Ordained Women in the early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

⁹ Although the majority of academics and Catholics alike have seen Vatican II as the definitive moment separating traditional Catholicism from contemporary Catholicism, other scholars have argued persuasively that Vatican II was

It is no overstatement to say that few Catholics—lay or clerical—anticipated the maelstrom that became Vatican II. Neither did Catholics expect Pope John XXIII to leave any lasting impact as pontiff. When appointed pope in 1958, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was in his late 70's, and while he was known and loved for his warmth and good humor, his was predicted to be a brief and altogether unremarkable papacy. Yet he stunned Catholics worldwide—and dismayed traditionalists in Rome—when he summoned a Second Vatican Council in 1959. The pope's stated purpose for the council was to update the Catholic Church, allow the church to become part of the changing modern world, and put focus back on the church as the "people of God." The Council opened October 11, 1962, and closed December 7, 1965. John XXIII did not live to see Vatican II's conclusion, dying of stomach cancer less than five years into his papacy, in June 1963 at the age of 81. Paul VI then became pope, continuing and seeing through to completion the Vatican II reforms started under John XXIII.

Approximately 2500 bishops took part in the Vatican II proceedings, but the number of women in attendance—23, to be exact¹⁰—stands out because of its small size. Many Catholic

not entirely the watershed it is often declared to be. To be sure, "Vatican II" has all too often been cited as simple causation for "today's Catholicism," thereby replacing critical analysis and rigorous historicization. I am aware of this difficulty and don't wish to replicate it here. I do want, however, to emphasize the ways the Catholic women's ordination movement has very much arisen alongside and out of the Vatican's own actions and words. Compare Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Mary Jo Weaver, ed., *What's Left?: Liberal American Catholics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) to James M. O'Toole, ed., *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth Century America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) and Kenneth A. Briggs, *Double Crossed: Uncovering the Catholic Church's Betrayal of American Nuns* (New York: Doubleday, 2006). See Mary Jo Weaver's edited books *Being Right* and *What's Left*; versus Joseph P. Chinnici's chapter in *Habits of Devotion*, or Brigg's argument in *Double Crossed* that it wasn't just Vatican II that lead American sisters to reimagine everything from convent life to habits.

I owe great thanks to Robert Orsi for helping shape my thinking about Vatican II and its reforms. While I was a student at Harvard Divinity School, Professor Orsi—my teacher and advisor—taught a seminar course titled "The Catholic Sixties," which taught me to love American religious history generally, and Catholic studies specifically. This wonderfully creative course investigated the social, cultural, and political turmoil surrounding Vatican II; the state of the American Catholic church before and after the council; the ways the changes impacted priests, nuns, laity, traditional and progressive Catholics, and even children and young adults; and how those changes played out in American politics, social justice activism, literature, and popular culture.

¹⁰ Two works I've consulted agree on this number of 23: Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008), 46, and Angela Bonavoglia, *Good Catholic Girls: How Women are Leading the Fight to Change the Church* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 24-5. Ruth Wallace

women—and women religious in particular—wanted fervently to participate in Council discussions and decision-making. It was not until the third session that women were allowed to be present at all, and at that point they still were not allowed to address Council fathers, because the title of “auditor” that the women (and some lay men) held forbid them from speaking publicly. One woman, British economist and devout Catholic Barbara Ward, was asked to write a report on poverty and sustainable development; when the time came to deliver it before the convening clergy, however, she was denied the opportunity to read it herself. Instead, a layman presented her research to church authorities.¹¹ Women *were* allowed to vote on *Gaudium et spes*, one of the largest and most sweeping documents that Vatican II issued. But women’s “voices” here were largely symbolic, as the document was certain to pass with or without their support.¹² Only one American woman attended Vatican II: Mary Luke Tobin, a Sister of Loretto, who has said that the women in Council meetings were either “ignored or trivialized.”¹³ In sum, women *were* present at Vatican II, but in size and strength far smaller than they desired. Citing love of their church and the concern for its future, women appealed for greater participation. When they felt overlooked and dismissed, on what many saw as the apparent eve of monumental reforms, this pain stung more than past hurts. Still, not all Catholic women worldwide felt the sting of ostracism that Vatican II’s female auditors reported; plenty of Catholics in the pews went

alters the number just slightly to 22: Ruth A. Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 2-3.

¹¹ Kenneth A. Briggs, *Double Crossed: Uncovering the Catholic Church’s Betrayal of American Nuns* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 72-3.

¹² Ibid., 73. Briggs says that six women “joined thirty bishops, forty-nine theological experts, and ten laymen” in voting on *Gaudium et Spes*. The commission in charge of *Gaudium et Spes* invited the women to join the business sessions as auditors, and as such, the women were able to vote.

¹³ Many books chronicle women’s role—and lack thereof—in Vatican II. See Kenneth A. Briggs, *Double Crossed: Uncovering the Catholic Church’s Betrayal of American Nuns* (New York: Doubleday, 2006); Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008); Ruth A. Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992). For more on Tobin’s experiences, see Briggs, 72, and Carmel McEnroy, *Guests in Their Own House: The Women of Vatican II* (New York: Crossroad, 1996).

unaware of Vatican II's magnitude, and presumably many, had they known, would not have questioned women's limited participation.

For women who would later cite Vatican II as a watershed, the declarations the hierarchy issued would come to shape their self-understanding as contemporary Catholic women. Of all Vatican statements, *Gaudium et spes* made and continues to make the greatest impact on the women's ordination movement. One of four apostolic constitutions issued during Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* was promulgated by Paul VI on the Council's final day. Also significant, though less pervasively powerful, were the encyclicals *Pacem In Terris*, issued by John XXIII in 1963, and *Humanae Vitae*, issued by Paul VI in 1968, in the wake of Vatican II. It is to these documents that I now turn.

The constitution's unofficial Latin title, *Gaudium et spes*, comes from the document's first line, which is "Joy and hope" in English. Its full title is "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," and as an apostolic constitution, it is the highest level of decree the pope may issue.¹⁴ The document begins with an acknowledgement of humankind's suffering worldwide and the Christians' call to respond: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." At its heart, *Gaudium et spes* sought to bring the Church into harmonious relation with modern life, instructing the Catholic faithful on how to live, how to treat others, and how to discern God's will for

¹⁴ Those familiar with the "Americanist Controversy," also known as the "Americanist Crisis," will recall how the Church balked at modernity and its incarnations in American life in at the turn of the 20th century. At issue was how millions of European Catholic immigrants would adapt to life in the United States, a nation that strictly separated church and state, and how involved Catholics should be in the problems and pleasures of an industrializing age. Pope Leo XIII attempted to lay the question to rest in 1899, with *Testem Benevolentiae*, when he condemned Americanism and American values—though American Catholic scholars and clergy continued debating the issue and its ramifications for decades. In light of this heated dispute not 70 years earlier, Vatican II broadly and *Gaudium et spes* specifically are significant, indeed.

humankind.¹⁵ It took as its audience *all* of humanity—not just Catholics—and it argued the equality of all persons, male and female alike. It condemned all types of discrimination, including sexism: “With respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.”¹⁶ Likewise, *Gaudium et spes* acknowledged the roles that men and women play and aspire to play in their communities:

From day to day, in every group or nation, there is an increase in the number of men and women who are conscious that they themselves are the authors and the artisans of the culture of their community. Throughout the whole world there is a mounting increase in the sense of autonomy as well as of responsibility. This is of paramount importance for the spiritual and moral maturity of the human race.¹⁷

Significant here is language that names both men and women as influential in shaping humanity. This statement did not go overlooked, and some Catholic women took it to heart.

As a result, countless Catholic women found the inspiration to pursue theological studies. Prior to 1960, Catholic universities and seminaries in the United States did not permit women to study theology. Historically, women were seen as unfit for such pursuits, lacking sufficient intellect and reason. This attitude, appalling as it is to many twenty-first century sensibilities, is rooted in the Western tradition, starting with ancient Greek philosophers and continuing through to esteemed Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas wrote that women were fundamentally inferior to men, irrational, incapable of high intellect, and in need of male

¹⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”) (December 7, 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, 1. *Gaudium et spes* was issued in Latin, and a number of translations exist. The translations I cite here come from the Vatican website, and thus I retain the masculine language.

¹⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”) (December 7, 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

¹⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”) (December 7, 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, 55.

authority for guidance, both worldly and soteriological. As a result, in lieu of theology, interested women were directed toward philosophy, a similar yet—it was believed—less demanding discipline.¹⁸ This exclusionary policy changed just before Vatican II began. This shift, compounded with *Gaudium et spes*, led Catholic women who had aspired to theological education to see evidence of Vatican endorsement:

Furthermore, it is to be hoped that many of the laity will receive a sufficient formation in the sacred sciences and that some will dedicate themselves professionally to these studies, developing and deepening them by their own labors. In order that they may fulfill their function, let it be recognized that all the faithful, whether clerics or laity, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought and of expressing their mind with humility and fortitude in those matters on which they enjoy competence.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, then, many women began pursuing advanced degrees in theology and dedicated themselves to an academic study of Catholicism. While *Gaudium et spes* never specifically encouraged *women* to study the “sacred sciences,” a significant number of women interpreted the document as an invitation that corrected years of exclusion.

Even today, the title “*Gaudium et spes*” remains on the lips of Catholic women working for ordination. In an online video intended to introduce viewers to RCWP, public relations director Bridget Mary Meehan said, “We are called to renew theology, liturgy, and pastoral practice, to better reflect the spirit and teachings of the Second Vatican Council, as expressed in *Gaudium et spes*.”²⁰ The small, London-based group that maintains www.womenpriests.org—“the leading international Catholic online authority on women’s ministries”—cites *Gaudium et spes* on

¹⁸ Halter, *The Papal No*, 6, 22, 24. Briggs, *Double Crossed*, 44-46. Of course, some women pursued theology anyway, including Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Mary Daly, for her part, though born and raised in New York state, attained her two doctorates in sacred theology and philosophy from a university in Switzerland, as no American program would accept her for theology.

¹⁹ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”) (December 7, 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, 62.

²⁰ “Roman Catholic Womenpriests: Vision and Mission,” August 29, 2007, video clip. YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJrn-rmHpPQ>.

their homepage. The group consists of Catholic theologians who simultaneously advocate discussion of women's ordination and support the Pope's authority. Referencing *Gaudium et spes* signals a deference to Church teachings, albeit alongside resistance to the theological position surrounding women's ordination.²¹

While *Gaudium et spes* remains the quintessential Vatican II document for the women's ordination movement, John XXIII's 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, gets cited primarily for its emphasis on *conscience*. "Peace on Earth," or its official title, "Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty," made waves not only in Catholicism, but in the secular press, as it called Catholics and non-Catholics to work together for peace worldwide. A message of unity and cooperation resonated loudly in the early 1960s, in the wake of World War II, the Holocaust, the dawn of atomic warfare, and heightened discord between communist and democratic nations. What resounded and still resounds with Catholic feminists, however, is the encyclical's unequivocal celebration of *conscience*. One oft-cited passage describes how God imbued humankind with an ability to distinguish right from wrong:

But the world's Creator has stamped man's innermost being with an order revealed to man by his conscience; and his conscience insists on his preserving it. Men 'show the work of the law written in their hearts. Their conscience bears witness to them.' And how could it be otherwise? All created being reflects the infinite wisdom of God. It reflects it all the more clearly, the higher it stands in the scale of perfection.²²

²¹ Womenpriests.org, "Women can be Priests," www.womenpriests.org (accessed January 11, 2010). The following is quoted: "All the faithful, both clerical and lay, should be accorded a lawful freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought and freedom of expression," from *Gaudium et Spes*, no 62; *Canon Law* no 212 § 3. Womenpriests.org is a group of theologians seeking continued discussion about women's ordination. Unlike RCWP, they do not support "illegal" ordinations, and instead seek change coming first from within Church structures.

²² Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* ("Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty") (April 11, 1963), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html, 5. Again, the translation I use comes from the Vatican website, and gendered language stands.

Notably, the encyclical goes on to distinguish laws created by God from laws created by men. That which God created is the higher law, and it is that which humankind must obey.²³ It will come as no surprise that Catholic feminists—in the 1970s through today—cite following their conscience as God’s law, over and above the Roman Catholic patriarchy’s man-made laws, such as those barring women’s ordination. Today’s Roman Catholic womenpriests, for example, understand theirs as a vocational call, and if obeying God and conscience means disobeying Vatican decrees, so be it. *Pacem in Terris*, they would argue, has made personal conscience foundational.²⁴

Pacem in Terris speaks about many issues—from world peace and weapons disarmament to aiding poor nations and the quest for the common good—yet women’s ordination activists latched onto and emphasized the document’s language about freedom of conscience. Tied to this is the encyclical’s statement regarding the freedom to choose one’s state in life: “Human beings have also the right to choose for themselves the kind of life which appeals to them: whether it is to found a family—in the founding of which both the man and the woman enjoy equal rights and duties—or to embrace the priesthood or the religious life.”²⁵ Ordination rights activists would see here not only egalitarian language surrounding marriage, but an endorsement of any Catholic’s right to select priesthood as a vocational calling. To be sure, this was not likely

²³ The text of the paragraph I refer to here is as follows: “But the mischief is often caused by erroneous opinions. Many people think that the laws which govern man's relations with the State are the same as those which regulate the blind, elemental forces of the universe. But it is not so; the laws which govern men are quite different. The Father of the universe has inscribed them in man's nature, and that is where we must look for them; there and nowhere else.” Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 6.

²⁴ But note, Vatican leaders would argue that nowhere is it stated—in *Pacem in Terris* or otherwise—that one must *always* break unjust laws; sometimes one must obey so as to maintain order. A brief but helpful resource for understanding different ways of interpreting the Church’s stance on conscience can be found in “Civil Disobedience,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 3: 755.

²⁵ Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (“Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty”) (April 11, 1963), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html, 15.

the Council's intent, subtly or directly. While priesthood is not an option for women, "religious life" is. Nevertheless, alongside language of conscience, choice, and freedom to worship and profess God publicly and privately, women's ordination activists seized upon this opportunity to imagine themselves priests, validly and legally.

What cannot be emphasized enough is how Vatican II documents have shaped Catholic women's self-understanding in relation to Church authority. Even though the Council meetings themselves often excluded women, Catholic women who were seeking theological education, an end to gender discrimination, and even ordination were able to find hints of Church approval in select Vatican II decrees, specifically *Gaudium et spes* and *Pacem in Terris*. From the 1960s to the present day, certain Vatican quotes have taken on their own power, their own status-as-dogma, and are used—often times *against* subsequent Vatican statements—as argument for women's participation in the church, even to the level of ordination.

Selective Obedience: Challenging Church Authority

But within the rapidly shifting Catholic terrain of the 1960s, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* marked yet another departure. Although issued by Pope Paul VI in 1968, three years following the Second Vatican Council's conclusion, *Humanae Vitae* is often spoken of in the same breath as other Vatican II reforms and signals a turning point in lay-clergy relations. Recall: with *Gaudium et spes*, Catholics found in hierarchical decrees indisputable arguments against discrimination and for lay theological education; with *Pacem in Terris*, Catholics interpreted the document's celebration of conscience to approve actions that fly in the face of man-made laws. With regards to *Humanae Vitae*, however, many lay Catholics—many of the same who embraced *Gaudium et spes* and *Pacem in Terris*'s emphasis on conscience—decided to disobey deliberately patriarchal authority. "Of Human Life: On the Regulation of Birth" reaffirms the Church's prohibition of

birth control. The encyclical acknowledges the economic difficulties of raising large families, women's changing social roles, and the increasing world population. Yet despite these factors, and despite an overwhelming majority of American Catholic bishops voting in favor of the use of birth control, *Humanae Vitae* proclaimed that artificial means of birth control go against the Church's moral law. If a married couple decides to limit family size or space out the birth of children, they "may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile, thus controlling birth in a way which does not in the least offend the [Church's] moral principles."²⁶ This "rhythm method," as it came to be known, drew ire, not least of all because it stopped intercourse during a woman's most fertile time, which is when some women most desire sexual intimacy.²⁷ And so, millions of Catholics who otherwise applauded the Vatican II reforms found themselves irrevocably at odds with this authoritative statement regulating married sexual behavior—and surprised by the document's traditional tone, given Vatican II's other changes.

If Vatican II was a turning point for Catholics coming to realize that their seemingly immovable church could be moved, then *Humanae Vitae* was a turning point in the way many Catholics disregarded Church teaching on this matter, openly and deliberately disobeying papal teaching. For many American Catholics, situated differently on the progressive to moderate spectrum, *Humanae Vitae* epitomized a growing disconnect between the Roman patriarchy and "on-the-ground" Catholicism. At this moment—figuratively if not literally—many Catholics felt their church desperately "out of touch" with the times. In a book exploring Catholic authority,

²⁶ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life") (July 25, 1968) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html, 16.

²⁷ Robert McClory, *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission* (New York: Crossroad, 1995); Robert Blair Kaiser, *The Politics of Sex and Religion* (Kansas City, KS: Leaven Press, 1985).

Peter Steinfels wrote, “the papacy’s stand on contraception appeared to do much more than leave huge percentages of Catholics unconvinced. It opened up all sorts of questions...about the church’s whole approach to morals, and about church authority generally.”²⁸ Because of these questions around authority, as well as the impact Catholic thinking about sex and birth control had on American culture at large, Leslie Woodstock Tentler’s study, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History*, argues that twentieth-century “American Catholicism, then, can only be understood by taking birth control into account.”²⁹ And so, perhaps more significant than the arguments contained within *Humanae Vitae* was the encyclical’s reception and reverberations—and the fact that many Catholics ignored outright the Church’s teaching on birth control. Although Catholics’ “protest” during this time was privately held and not publicly performed, the door was now open for disagreement between Catholics and the hierarchy: in the wake of *Humanae Vitae*’s controversial dictates, Vatican authority had been eroded.³⁰

In sum, within the course of one tumultuous decade (the 1960s), faithful Catholic women who would lead the women’s ordination movement a decade later (in the 1970s) would find reason to applaud and simultaneously to bemoan Vatican declarations. Neither *Gaudium et spes*, *Pacem in Terris*, nor *Humanae Vitae* did anything in any concrete sense: all were statements of Church positions and policies, not sweeping reforms of sacraments, liturgies, or church structures. Thus, these documents’ power lies in interpretation and implementation. Progressive Catholic women found in *Gaudium et spes* and *Pacem in Terris* signs of change and progress that encouraged their participation in Church life, while they saw in *Humanae Vitae* a reiteration of

²⁸ Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 257

²⁹ Leslie Woodstock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 4.

³⁰ This idea about *Humanae Vitae* resulting in an “erosion of authority” comes from Deborah Halter, *The Papal “No”: A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican’s Rejection of Women’s Ordination* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 103. Other scholars have made this argument as well.

past Catholic positions that denied female autonomy and discarded contemporary concerns. Post-Vatican II Catholicism's official position was sufficiently ambiguous—both frustratingly and encouragingly—to inspire some Catholic women to push further the envelope, to call for greater participation and a clearer Vatican statement on women's roles in 20th century Catholicism.

If the 1960s were a “wash” of sorts between progressive and traditional Catholicism, the 1970s brought forth hierarchical actions that sought to eliminate any gray area in the black-and-white questions surrounding women's ordination. Amid the rise of Catholic feminism surrounding ordination—as exemplified with the Deaconess Movement, the first meeting of the Woman's Ordination Conference in Detroit in 1975, and the emergence of the Women's Ordination Conference as an official organization in 1976—as well as the Episcopal ordinations of the “Philadelphia Eleven,” the Vatican saw a need to clarify its position once and for all. And when the Vatican ceased to inspire, some women turned elsewhere for strength.

Spiritually Feminist: Simultaneously Secular and Faith-filled

Ever since first-wave feminism sought women's suffrage and property-ownership rights in the late 19th century and early 20th century, and ever since second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 70s struggled for women's equality alongside civil-rights activists, that which is called “feminism” has had an uneasy relationship with “religion.” Some feminists have labeled religion as hopelessly conservative, patriarchal, and antithetical to gender equality; likewise, religious persons have marked feminism as always radical, anti-family, and antithetical to God's designs.³¹

³¹ Some examples: in the nineteenth century, woman's rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued that organized religion kept women from enjoying full equality with men. This led Stanton and her daughter to publish a modified scripture, *The Women's Bible*, in the 1890s. Twentieth-century feminist and theologian Mary Daly argued in her 1973 *Beyond God the Father* that a paternalistic, androcentric God does women a grave disservice. In contrast, some religious groups eschew feminism altogether. The conservative religious community's involvement in the 1970's

But scholars have argued what many Catholic feminists have long believed: that there is a deep, historical, and spiritual connection between faith and feminism.

Historian Mary J. Henold's 2008 monograph, *Catholic and Feminist*, acknowledges that Catholic feminism and secular feminism arose around similar historical moments in the 1960s but argues that the two forms of feminism had different inspirational roots. As Henold shows, Catholic women did not merely adopt secular feminism and give it a Catholic flavor: rather Catholic feminism grew out of Catholic faith. As a vivid illustration of her main argument, she cites the first organized American Catholic feminist movement, called St. Joan's International Alliance-United States Section, which proclaimed, "We are feminists BECAUSE we are Catholic." In Henold's analysis, the emergence of Catholic feminism in the 1960s and 70s shows—perhaps surprisingly—that feminism need not be transplanted from secularism to religion, but can be innate within a religious tradition, even one as seemingly hierarchical and traditional as Roman Catholicism.³²

In this section, I trace the way an informed, conscientious Catholic feminism emerged in the mid- to late-20th century, resulting from a confluence of spiritual and secular forces. If Catholic feminists were dancers in a crowded dance hall, they moved to a rhythm that sacramental and symbolic Catholicism established; they adjusted their bodies to a beat that the American-feminist 1960s provided; and they struggled to hear Rome's dance directives over the loud, pulsating music. When these instructions harmonized, they moved accordingly, but when the songs and commands seemed in discord, the dancers found ways to resist while still moving.

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) debates attests to this. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints condemns "feminism," as does the conservative Catholic women's group "Women for Faith and Family." For more on the religion-feminism tension, see Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Catherine A. Brekus, ed. *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

³² Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 6, 83.

It was rarely easy to reconcile all elements, and progressive Catholic women often found themselves moving erratically so as to avoid dissonance. This section examines many of those moves, among Catholic women, secular feminism, and Vatican action, in terms of what the women initiated and what they resisted.

The social and cultural origins of second-wave American feminism cannot be separated from the Civil Rights movement. Starting with 1954's *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, Americans became enmeshed in the intensifying debates surrounding civil rights. When the Supreme Court ruled that the "separate but equal" decision codified in 1896's *Plessy vs. Ferguson* violated the "equal protection under the law" clause guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment, racial segregation officially became unconstitutional—in law if not in practice. A year later, Rosa Parks's arrest for refusing to give up her bus seat spurred the Montgomery bus boycott, and 14-year old Emmett Till was brutally tortured and murdered, allegedly for whistling at a white Mississippi woman. These events drew widespread media coverage and public awareness. By the end of the 1950s, Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as a civil rights leader, overseeing national organizations. By the mid-1960s, America had witnessed such dramatic public spectacles as Freedom Riders' arrival in the South to ensure blacks' voting rights, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington D.C., and the March from Selma to Montgomery. One could scarcely avoid media images and public debates, and the American ethos of the time encouraged consideration of equality and basic human rights. It is no surprise that many women, likewise, began to question their rights and civil status. If racism was despicable and problematic, then so, too, was sexism.

Like the Civil Rights movement, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* gave voice and visibility to some women's latent desire for greater influence and autonomy. Friedan's book was published in 1963 amid these civil rights fires. Promoted as "the year's most controversial

bestseller,” *The Feminine Mystique* critiqued the existing social system that told women they should find fulfillment only as wives and mothers. Writing during the Cold War-era malaise wherein many social critics mused publicly about the values American capitalism placed upon wealth and conformity, Friedan blamed countless social expectations for creating women’s dis-ease. If marriage and children were the perfect cocktail for making women happy, why then was an unnamed unhappiness settled upon so many American women in the 1950s and 60s? Why did studies suggest that unmarried women—discontent though they often were with their single status—were in fact happier, as a whole, than married women? According to Friedan, fault lay with psychology, educational systems, and media influence. Her book sought to bring this nameless discontent to the surface. “It” became “the feminine mystique” and offered an answer to what Friedan saw as millions of women’s lingering question: “If I have everything I should need, why do I want *more*?” By giving a name—and therefore legitimacy—to this specter, *The Feminine Mystique* allowed women to think about and work toward social change.³³ So, just as political culture shaped women’s self-understanding through the civil rights movement, literary icons such as Friedan’s study also contributed to debates about women’s place.

Even before these secular influences began to shape 1960s women, Catholicism itself was seeing the rise of proto-feminist forces. Beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, Catholic sisters and new Catholic organizations began showing signs of a socially progressive ethos, though certainly not under the banner of “feminism.” Henold points to the Grail Movement, the Christian Family Movement (CFM), and the “new nuns” as evidence for these developments. Women were the principal leaders in these groups and, as such, found greater involvement within Catholicism. The Grail Movement trained women as “lay apostles” and allowed them to

³³ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963); Ann Braude, “Faith, Feminism, and History,” in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2007), 232-52.

serve the Church more fully, without becoming consecrated sisters or nuns. The CFM was a group for families and married couples that promoted the family unit and social justice—and women were its primary leaders. The “new nuns” became most visible during the civil rights movement, as photographs of sisters in habit participating in the 1965 March to Montgomery became iconic, heralding to Catholics and non-Catholics alike that change was brewing in American Catholicism.

Years before these public actions, American Catholic sisters had started organizing and planning for the future. Building on the improvements in Catholic higher education that started with the Third Plenary Council in 1884, a number of women’s colleges—such as Trinity College in Washington, St. Mary’s College of Minneapolis, and the College of Notre Dame of Maryland—sought to prepare Catholic women.³⁴

In 1954, U.S. sisters created the Sister Formation Conference (SFC), with education and professionalization for women religious as its core goals. SFC’s leaders argued that sisters should not be placed in teaching positions unprepared and under-educated. This step towards seeing sisters as career women was undeniably significant; also significant was the way the SFC brought different religious orders together for the first time. The SFC did face conflict, both internally within its ranks and externally from Vatican influence, but it successfully articulated and later implemented a program of personal, professional, and spiritual development for sisters and nuns. As a result of the SFC and the discussions that arose from it, the number of sisters with four-year college degrees increased multifold within a decade, and the number of nuns with PhDs nearly doubled. As one sister put it, the SFC was “the most formidable self-consciousness

³⁴ Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 226-234, 256-260.

exercise of self-transformation in the history of women religious.”³⁵ In short, this was a time during which women began to organize, deal with social injustices, embrace leadership opportunities, and achieve educational goals.

Significantly, these examples show how Catholic women’s desires for autonomy arose *prior* to secular feminism and to Vatican II. Catholic women’s activism was not a sudden and reactionary endeavor but an evolving entity, simultaneously connected to both Rome’s dictates and secular influences. There is no single cause of Catholic feminism, nor one explanation for the women’s ordination movement. This is not to understate the profound impact of Vatican II reforms: the preceding section underscored this point, and Henold’s research has led her to argue that, when all influences are taken together, the honor of being “the immediate catalyst for the emerging [feminist] movement...belongs to the institutional Catholic Church, which itself must take credit for both provoking and inspiring Catholic feminism in the early sixties through the Second Vatican Council.”³⁶ What these other examples do show—from the SFC to the Grail Movement, from *The Feminine Mystique* to the Civil Rights struggles—is how forces internal and external to Catholicism prepared Catholics for the Vatican II changes. The groundwork had already been laid, and progressive Catholics were waiting for Vatican approval to take their goals farther.

Armed with this proto-feminism, the Vatican II documents *Gaudium et spes* and *Pacem in Terris*, and new rules permitting women to study theology at Catholic seminaries, some Catholic women became spokespersons for the budding Catholic feminist cause. One of the key ways

³⁵ Sister Schneider, quoted in Karen M. Kennelly, “Women Religious, the Intellectual Life, and Anti-Intellectualism” in *Women Religious and the Intellectual Life: The North American Achievement*, ed. Bridget Puzon (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1996): 63. Readers interested in educated and progressive nuns will appreciate also Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 21.

was through education: increased numbers received advanced degrees in theology and religious studies. A new generation of Catholic theologians emerged—and many of the most influential were women. Whether these same Catholic, female theologians would have become priests had the Church only let them, and whether they channeled an institutional frustration into feminist theology, are matters for debate. What is certain is that scores of women took advantage of the 1960s rule permitting women to study theology. By decade's end— significantly marked by Vatican II's language about the Church as the “people of God”—Catholic women were making an impact on theology and scholarship. Here we find a host of prominent names: Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth Johnson, Anne Carr, and Sidney Callahan. No two stories are the same: these women encompassed married and single life, consecrated and non-consecrated states, American and European heritage. Daly, for example, received a doctorate in sacred theology abroad, as American programs were not yet accepting women; Johnson, in contrast, began studying theology as an undergraduate in 1959, years before taking vows; different still, German Catholic Ida Raming—who is now an ordained Roman Catholic womenpriest—received a doctorate in theology from the University of Münster in 1970, and her dissertation, titled “The Exclusion of Women from Priesthood: Divine Law or Gender Discrimination?,” helped lay the foundation for the women's ordination movement. As a whole, these scholars became the collective, emerging voice for Catholic feminist consciousness.³⁷ To

³⁷ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 123-4; Ida Raming, *The Exclusion of Women from the Priesthood: Divine Law or Sex Discrimination? An historical investigation of the juridical and doctrinal foundations of the code of canon law, canon 968, 1*, translated by Norman R. Adams (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1976); Mary Jo Weaver, “Enlarging the Discipline: Roman Catholic Feminist Theologians,” *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 145-179; Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., Personal Webpage, http://www.fordham.edu/academics/programs_at_fordham_/theology/faculty/elizabeth_a_johnson_/sr_johnson_personal_26145.asp (accessed January 27, 2010).

date, many women actively involved with women's ordination—including most RCWP members—are well educated in theology and religion.³⁸

Having women in positions of intellectual authority as theologians and scholars did not lead to smoother relations with the Church patriarchy. Arguably, the situation worsened, and the gap widened. While these women were now ostensibly speaking a shared theological language with the Catholic clergy, in fact most bishops and priests were woefully under-educated in feminist literature and theology. This is not surprising: Catholic feminist theology was a newly emerging field, and priests had not had the opportunities to study it—and in as much depth—as had this generation of women. Meetings between these theologically trained women and Catholic officials often ended with neither side feeling heard or understood. Debates in print felt much the same way, with vastly different levels of discourse emerging. While several of these Catholic feminists were ready to argue theologically for women's equality and ordination, the Church as a whole was neither ready nor able to engage at the same level. These feminist theologians would first have to organize into groups and, second, articulate their theologies in a unified voice. This young feminist movement, however, was not yet ready for such cohesion.

This is not to say that organizations did not exist. In fact, a myriad of groups dedicated to Catholic women's issues had formed in the 1960s and 70s. What was not in place was any one, unified group dedicated to arguing for women's ordination from ministerial, theological, and civil rights perspectives. Existing organizations included the National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN), its Institute for Women Today (IWT), and the Women's Rights Committee of

³⁸ Though simple to say that American Catholic women were unable to study theology before 1960, this statement is not entirely accurate. True, theology was something studied almost exclusively in seminaries, and so women had no access to this field. As early as the 1940s, however, Catholic sisters were starting to study some theology as preparation for teaching careers. Moreover, the Church drew distinctions—albeit muddled—among theology, philosophy, and “religion.” For a thorough examination of Catholic higher education since 1900, including the education of women, see Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*, 89-94, 163-66, 226-34, and 256-60.

the National Association of Laymen. Some established groups shifted their focus toward women's issues: National Assembly of Women Religious (NAWR), the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the National Black Sisters Conference (NBSC), Las Hermanas (an organization for Latinas), and the Grail movement.³⁹

But it was not until the Deaconess Movement emerged in the early 1970s that there was a Catholic women's group dedicated to ordination. Started by college student Jeanne Barnes—who in turn credited the Holy Spirit with inspiring the group's foundation—the Deaconess Movement was a “support network” for Catholic women who wanted to be ordained. Their focus was not on priesthood alone: as the group's name suggests, some women wanted to be ordained deacons. Vatican II had turned the diaconate into a terminal stage, no longer solely a step toward priesthood. Unlike later generations of women's ordination activism, the Deaconess Movement shied away from public protests and instead communicated through its publication, *Journey*. While the Deaconess Movement's history is largely overlooked in the Catholic women's ordination history, Deaconess Movement leader Mary Lynch is credited with organizing the 1975 Detroit meeting, titled “Women in Future Priesthood Now: A Call to Action.” This meeting would evolve into the world's largest organization dedicated to Catholic women's ordination: the Women's Ordination Conference.⁴⁰

Designed to be a small meeting organized alongside the group Priests for Equality (PFE), which called for equal representation of men and women in the Church, the Detroit conference turned out to be bigger and more influential than Lynch and others first envisioned. The original conference venue couldn't hold all interested persons, and famously, even after moving to a larger location, several hundred people were turned away. Most of the

³⁹ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 66.

⁴⁰ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 104-15.

approximately 1200 people in attendance were women; most were women religious; most were white; most were middle-class. In keeping with the tenor of the mid-1970s Catholic feminist movement, the meeting's tone was optimistic. Goals centered around a reinterpretation of the priesthood given contemporary needs, bonding among women and bridging the divide between laywomen and women religious, and keeping faithful to Church traditions. To hear WOC tell its own history, this first meeting catapulted the women's ordination issue to prominence, putting into motion a movement that persists still today. By 1976, WOC leadership sought to make WOC a permanent organization.⁴¹

But as women's ordination activists soon learned, being optimistic and organized was only one step toward victory: Vatican officials still had power over the formal question of women's ordination.

Ambivalence Ensues and the Church Hierarchy Responds

The gulf between WOC and the Vatican widened, and tensions escalated. Then, with *Inter Insigniores* (the "Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood," written in 1976 and released in English in January 1977), the dynamics around women's ordination suddenly shifted. Using arguments from historical, scriptural, and theological grounds, *Inter Insigniores* (also called "the Declaration") explained why the Church could not ordain women priests. Among women's ordination activists, the Declaration has the notorious distinction of being the first official Vatican statement against women's ordination in the modern era, outside of canon law. For that reason, *Inter Insigniores* became a much-maligned landmark in some Catholic circles.

⁴¹ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 117-36; Detroit Ordination Conference (1975), *Women and Catholic Priesthood: An Expanded Vision: Proceedings of the Detroit Ordination Conference*, ed. Anne Marie Gardiner (New York: Paulist Press, 1976); Women's Ordination Conference, www.womensordination.org.

If we seek to understand *Inter Insigniores*'s impact in the simplest, most rhetorically heightened terms, the Declaration was the Vatican's way of squelching forever the questions of a female priesthood. Certainly, many WOC supporters understood the document this way. Such a reading emphasizes the growing polarization between Church leaders and activist laity. In this understanding, *Inter Insigniores* emerged out of the blue, suddenly confronting organizations like the newly formed Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) with a serious theological impediment against women's ordination.

But if we broaden the picture and examine events immediately preceding the Declaration, we notice that events did not unfold this seamlessly. This simplified story illustrates separate camps with little in common and no communication between them—a rift that only widened upon the Declaration's release. But in fact, behind the scenes, WOC organizers had reason to feel hopeful. Behind the scenes, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) reached out to the WOC, seeking dialogue. Behind the scenes, it seemed possible that women seeking ordination could make strides toward their goal *with* Church leaders' approval, and *without* disobeying Catholic doctrine. It is to this more nuanced timeline that I will now turn.

In response to the upcoming Women's Ordination Conference in 1975, Archbishop Bernardin of Cincinnati, then President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued a letter reminding the Catholic faithful that the church does not ordain women.⁴² Bernardin's letter touched on themes of theology, discussion, and progress—all of which tie into women's ordination. Bernardin called the question of women's ordination “a serious theological issue,” albeit one that had generated lively discussion and could “contribute to a better understanding of

⁴² United States Catholic Conference, news statement, October 3, 1975, quoted in Detroit Ordination Conference (1975), *Women and Catholic Priesthood: An Expanded Vision: Proceedings of the Detroit Ordination Conference*, ed. Anne Marie Gardiner (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 193-7. The NCCB is now called the USCCB: the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

ministry, priesthood, and the role of women in the Church.” Saying that “candor and a sense of responsibility impel[led]” him to address this women’s ordination question, Bernardin stated, “Honesty and concern for the Catholic community, including those of its members who advocate the ordination of women, also require that Church leaders not seem to encourage unreasonable hopes and expectations, even by their silence.” Bernardin went on to say that the Church “must make sure that people are truly convinced of women’s dignity and equality,” and acknowledged, “The Church will suffer, indeed it will be betrayed, if women are given only a secondary place in its life and mission.” He concluded with a call for “charity and mutual respect” between the two sides of this debate, “in order to be as certain as is humanly possible that we are indeed at all times seeking to know and do the will of Jesus Christ.”⁴³

Ordination activists interpreted Bernardin’s letter in vastly different ways. Some were outraged that the NCCB would make a veiled threat against the upcoming WOC meeting. Others believed Bernardin and the U.S. Bishops were simply parroting the Vatican, maintaining the status quo with no concern for the growing American ordination movement. Many look back on Bernardin’s letter with disdain, as yet another indication that the Church was unyielding in its patriarchal power.⁴⁴ Some ordination activists, however, read Bernardin’s statement quite differently. These respondents heard in Bernardin’s letter a nuanced attempt to state the Vatican’s position without closing the door to debate and further research. Patricia Hughes Baumer was one such person. Hughes Baumer, who in 1975 was Patricia Hughes, WOC’s national media spokesperson and coordinating member, saw in the Archbishop’s letter a carefully-worded attempt to state the current Vatican position without altogether barring

⁴³ Detroit Ordination Conference (1975), *Women and Catholic Priesthood: An Expanded Vision: Proceedings of the Detroit Ordination Conference*, ed. Anne Marie Gardiner (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 195, 197.

⁴⁴ Briggs, *Double Crossed*, 164; Weaver, *New Catholic Women*, 112.

discussion of women's ordinations. Seeking clarification, Hughes called Bernardin in 1975 and discussed the letter with him. That he even took her call, Hughes Baumer believes, signaled mutual respect and potential cooperation between the WOC and NCCB. She recalls their conversation as follows:

And I said [to him], "As I read [that letter], Archbishop, it seemed the equivalent of saying 'I am seated, and I'll remain seated until and unless I stand up.'" And I will never ever forget the laughter I heard on the other end of the line. He said, "Patricia, it took me so long to craft that. I was trying to get a snapshot of where we are now, in the history of the church!"⁴⁵

According to Hughes Baumer, Bernardin explained to her that the letter was, in essence, saying women cannot be ordained "unless and until there is a contrary theological development." He was not saying "never": instead, he was pointing out it had not ever been done, and theological groundwork would need to be laid before it could be done. She told him she and the WOC wanted to work with him on changing the church, and they wanted to help lay a theological groundwork for women's ordination. And so, contrary to the majority of interpretations of the NCCB's October 1975 letter, Hughes Baumer, who talked with Bernardin, described his tone as light, positive, and pastoral. When she hung up the phone, she felt encouraged: "There was a door open!"⁴⁶

If Hughes Baumer had reason to feel hopeful in October 1975, she reports that her optimism increased exponentially in February 1976. In the wake of a successful Women's Ordination Conference event in Detroit, she received a phone call from Thomas Kelly, a Dominican priest who at that time was the general secretary of the NCCB. Through Hughes Baumer, Kelly invited the WOC to appoint a permanent liaison to the American bishops' conference, beginning at the next national meeting in March. Hughes Baumer reflected: "This

⁴⁵ Patricia Hughes Baumer, interview with author, August 17, 2009.

⁴⁶ Patricia Hughes Baumer, interview with author, August 17, 2009.

was rather extraordinary, in my judgment; I thought it was phenomenal, in my judgment! The bishops wanted to have an ongoing dialogue!”⁴⁷ Hughes Baumer consulted Marjorie Tuite, a Dominican nun, social justice crusader, and WOC leader. With Tuite’s approval, Hughes Baumer set about assembling a team to attend the NCCB March meeting. But her efforts were stymied. The WOC had not yet become a national organization, and the conference’s leaders were unable to agree on whether this liaison *should* be established, whether they *should* meet the bishops on their terms and turf, or whether they should demand a completely different agenda. Without unified support from WOC leadership, Hughes Baumer did not feel it was the right time to establish this liaison. So she called Kelly, politely declined his offer, and suggested that the following March—once an organization was established, leaders elected, and a united position ascertained—would be a better time to begin dialogue. Kelly, for his part, seemed stunned that Hughes Baumer declined his offer, foregoing this “extraordinary opportunity.”

Hughes Baumer’s story, recounted to me more than 30 years later, makes one wonder whether in the mid-1970s, rapprochement between women’s ordination activists and American Church leaders was indeed possible. Hughes Baumer’s account is, admittedly, just one account, not verified by Bernardin or Kelly, but it reveals an optimism little seen in other feminist activists’ writings from this era. Before this time, the Vatican had not issued any formal theological position explaining why women could not be ordained. The question ordination activists were now raising—“Can women be ordained Catholic deacons, priests, and bishops?”—had never before been asked, at least not on record and not in the modern era. That U.S. Bishops, seemingly apart from Vatican direction, sought to collaborate with American ordination activists—privately if not yet publicly—suggests perhaps the story could have played

⁴⁷ Patricia Hughes Baumer, interview with author, August 17, 2009.

out differently. Perhaps, having established a cooperative link with the NCCB in America, the WOC would have more fuel for the fire when petitioning the Vatican in Rome.

But events did not play out that way.

Despite Hughes' communication with Bernardin and Kelly, and despite the optimistic air of the 1975 WOC event, October 1976 saw the first-ever official Vatican statement prohibiting women's ordination. This document established scriptural and theological grounds justifying women's exclusion. If the WOC—which soon grew from a single event into a national organization—had been able to establish theological justification for women's ordination sooner, and in concert with the NCCB as a permanent liaison, perhaps the Vatican's Declaration would not have been able to carry the same gravitas. The WOC would have been, as Hughes Baumer put it, “on record” months earlier, in March of 1976, as having a working relationship with the American bishops—something the Vatican in Rome could not easily dismiss. As it was, however, no formal partnership had been established, and the CDF's voice became not only the first, but the most authoritative, on the subject of women's ordinations.

For all intents and purposes, *Inter Insigniores* shifted the rules of the game. The “Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood” (its English title) was issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) on October 15, 1976.⁴⁸ The document began, notably, with a nod both to *Pacem in Terris* and *Gaudium et spes*, acknowledging both women's increased role in public life and the Church's stated stance against gender discrimination. In so doing, the CDF gestured to those very same decrees that had shaped and inspired post-Vatican II Catholic feminism. The document praised women's

⁴⁸ The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was formerly known as the Office of the Holy Inquisition. The group's name changed in 1965 amid Vatican II changes, in no small part because of the negative connotations surrounding the original name. It is worth noting also that October 15 is St. Teresa of Avila's feast day. St. Teresa of Avila was a 16th century Carmelite nun and Spanish mystic. She was active in the Catholic counter-Reformation and was, along with Catherine of Siena, the first woman named a Doctor of the Church (by Paul VI, in 1970).

“decisive role” in Church life, primarily as women religious and Christian wives. *Inter Insigniores* also acknowledged that other Christian faith traditions had started ordaining women “on a par with men.” Yet the document then invoked particular elements of Church tradition, gendering the Church female (a familiar move in Vatican documents) and saying that “the Church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination.” The CDF granted that this position “will perhaps cause pain,” but its “positive value will become apparent in the long run, since it can be of help in deepening understanding of the respective roles of men and of women.”⁴⁹

The reasons the CDF gave for not ordaining women caused the greatest uproar. The Declaration’s argument rested on two main points. First, the CDF argued, calling only men to priesthood is in keeping with the “ordained ministry willed by the Lord Jesus Christ and carefully maintained by the Apostles.” In short: Jesus did not call women as Apostles. He did embody an egalitarianism that distinguished his message and ministry from the surrounding culture—but this did not translate to female apostles, nor was even his holy mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, “entrusted the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven,” as were the Twelve.⁵⁰ Men alone were called to proclaim Christ’s message and undertake the apostolic mission. Second, and even more controversial, was the Declaration’s argument that in order to represent Christ, to stand in the place of Christ, a priest must be able to *image* Christ—specifically, the male Christ. This argument is inextricably connected with Catholic sacramentalism: “the priest, who alone has the power to perform [the Eucharist], then acts not through the effective power conferred on him by Christ, but ‘in persona Christi,’ taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image,

⁴⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (“Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood”) (October 15, 1976), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi.htm>, Introduction.

⁵⁰ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, Section 2: The Attitude of Christ.

when he pronounces the words of consecration.” In short: because the sacraments depend on a “natural resemblance” between the priest and Christ, and because Christ was male, the priest must also be male. Should a woman try to undertake a priestly role, “it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man... [and] this is why we can never ignore the fact that Christ is a man.”⁵¹

The Declaration was steeped in scriptural references (such as the Gospels and Acts), appeals to Catholic tradition (such as Tertullian, Origen, Thomas Aquinas, and papal decrees), and gender essentialism. It posited that the Catholic Church was *sui generis*, uniquely distinct from other systems and therefore held to different laws. While the modern world and scientific advancements might increasingly bring women into greater equality with men, it said, Catholicism was rooted in a sacramental theology that placed the Church in a separate analytical category. Although some Catholic women claimed they felt a vocational call to the priesthood, “such an attraction, however noble and understandable, still does not suffice for a genuine vocation.” Despite Vatican II decrees promoting women’s greater participation in the Church, their increased presence in theological studies, and their stated desire to reform Catholicism from within Catholicism, *Inter Insigniores* sought to make clear—for the first time, if not for the last time—that the Church simply could not allow what Christ himself did not intend.

To fully appreciate both the nuances surrounding the seemingly monolithic Declaration as well as some feminists’ outrage over its contents, one must examine the results of the Pontifical Biblical Commission meetings in April 1975 and again in 1976—mere months before the CDF issued the Declaration. Significantly, the existence of this particular Pontifical Biblical Commission—not to mention its findings—suggests that both Rome and scripture held

⁵¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, Section 5: The Ministerial Priesthood in the Light of The Mystery of Christ.

ambivalent, conflicting ideas about the question of ordaining women. At this gathering of Vatican-appointed, Catholic biblical scholars, participants discussed the role of women in scripture. They took three votes, and the conclusions were as follows (emphasis added throughout): 1. The Commission voted *unanimously* that the New Testament does not settle in any clear way whether or not women can become priests. 2. The Commission voted 12-5 in favor of the view that scriptural grounds were *not* enough to exclude the possibility of ordaining women. 3. The Commission voted 12-5 that Christ's plan (for the church and humanity) would *not* be transgressed if women were ordained. What is perhaps most striking is how strongly the Commission's conclusions differ from the theological arguments—purportedly rooted in scripture and Church tradition—put forth in the 1976 Declaration. *Inter Insigniores* cited New Testament examples of a Christ-designed, male-only priesthood—yet the Pontifical Biblical Commission reached vastly different findings about the New Testament Christ only months earlier.

Why, then, did not women's ordination activists riddle the Declaration with ammunition from the Commission's findings? Quite simply, the Vatican never made the Pontifical Biblical Commission's findings official, nor published it. It became public only because it was "leaked." Today, researchers will find no mention of the report in official Vatican documents or websites; instead, the Commission's conclusions are found cited in women's ordination circles, by groups such as Womenpriests.org and Women's Ordination Conference.⁵² What is significant is that,

⁵² Pope Leo XIII established the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1902. The group's intended purpose was to (look in New Catholic encyclopedia) facilitate and regulate Catholic studies of the Bible. While it was once an independent group within the Vatican structures, in 1971, Paul VI amended the group's rules, and one result was that the PBC was now a sub group of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The PBC would not longer make its own declarations; rather, its conclusions would be issued through the CDF. In this way, it is not surprising that the Commission's conclusions on women's ordination did not come to light, as the CDF made a vastly different scriptural and theological ruling not six months later. Yet at the same time, it is in some ways more surprising that these two Vatican groups, ostensibly in communication, could yield such different findings. Information on the Pontifical Biblical Commission is found, not surprisingly, in books advocating women's ordination—and not in texts working apologetically on the Church's behalf. See Leonard Swidler and Arlene

within one year (1976), Church leaders in Rome interpreted the biblical material in vastly different ways. One interpretation became doctrinal, and the other became obscured.

Given the public pronouncements from Vatican leaders and WOC's initial reluctance to establish dialogue with the NCCB, it is no wonder that memories of these events are often cast in black and white, instead of nuanced shades of gray. Simplifying these events has turned the major players into archetypes: while this works for different sides corraling support for a cause, this makes easy narrative of complex politics, crafting "good" and "bad" characters, "right" and "wrong" actions. Doing so has served—and limited—both sides of the ordination debate. Critics have turned WOC members into aggressive, power-seeking harpies who have taken their feminism past the point of honoring Church authority. Critics have also portrayed the Vatican and all its minions as intractable villains, more concerned with power than pastoral leadership. Neither characterization is historically accurate. During the 1970s, some members of the WOC made efforts to work with and within the hierarchical church, specifically through the U.S. Catholic Bishops. The ordination activists had reason to feel optimistic. Communications like those Hughes Baumer had with Bernardin and Kelly were taking place behind the scenes, hinting at possible cooperation. Looked at in this way, the women were not brazenly flouting Church authority, but were seeking to meet their goals within the existing system. Likewise, the U.S. bishops appear not villainous, but cautiously willing—to dialogue gradually if not to overturn Catholic tradition outright. Certainly *Inter Insigniores* placed the American Catholic leadership in an awkward position: to seek dialogue and WOC liaisons *after* the Vatican sought to end discussion on the women's ordination question would have been disingenuous at best,

Swidler, eds., *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); Deborah Halter, *The Papal No*, 37-41.

disobedient at worst. It is no wonder, then, that scholars have called 1976 “the best of times and the worst of times” for Catholics with vested interest in women’s ordination.⁵³

These 1970s dynamics connect to the RCWP movement. Indeed, RCWP’s critics cast them in simplified, villainous terms, and likewise, RCWP sometimes describes Vatican officials as dark and tyrannical characters. But what I show here, and what I suggest RCWP’s actions (if not always their rhetoric) show, is an ongoing attempt to walk a fine line. Just as most 1970s female Catholic activists sought a middle ground between Vatican instruction and feminist impulses, today RCWP blends doctrine with defiance—or, put differently, tradition and transgression. In short, the richer, more complex story—one that both Church leaders and ordination activists often overlook today—reveals more negotiation than simple naysaying.

One might presume the 1976 Declaration gave a sudden devastating blow to women’s ordination activists. *Inter Insigniores* could well have become the end to all hope for change. But in fact, the impact was not immediate. Recalling the January morning in 1977 when the Declaration’s English translation was released in the U.S., WOC member Hughes Baumer remembers a seminary professor greeting her with a hug. “Congratulations,” he said. “For what?” Patricia asked. “You got the bear to growl.”⁵⁴ In other words, now that the Vatican had issued a formal argument with supporting scriptural and theological evidence, the Declaration could inspire scholarly debate, an ideas-exchange undertaken in good faith. Perhaps the Declaration was not the end of the ordination struggle—but indeed, only the beginning.

These ambivalent tensions between the Vatican and WOC intensified women’s need and motivation to organize, yet WOC could not eke out a clear path going forward. While organizational efforts did provide ordination activists with a forum for discussion and a platform

⁵³ John R. Donahue, “A Tale of Two Documents,” in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, eds. Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 25-34.

⁵⁴ Patricia Hughes Baumer, interview with author, August 17, 2009.

for debate, the WOC was far from united in its goals. Although *Inter Insigniores* was a catalyst for WOC's intensified efforts, the Declaration did not illuminate for WOC a clear next step. Now an organized whole, WOC's internal tensions became more apparent. The academic theology degrees that were celebrated years earlier for helping lead women toward discourse and discussion with clerical authorities became, instead, a hindrance, a way for dividing WOC's ranks. Theologians and academics had different ways of seeing and approaching the ordination situation than did non-academic activist women. While the majority of ordination activists disdained the Catholic institutional hierarchy, some members of WOC reported feeling like a hierarchy was developing within the movement itself, with feminist theologians and academics assuming the pyramid's top. Similarly divisive was the range of members' anger at and attitude toward the hierarchical church.

In Baltimore in 1978, WOC hosted a second national conference with a theme of "New Women, New Church, New Priestly Ministry." This meeting revealed the percolating tensions in WOC's ranks.⁵⁵ In the wake of both the Declaration and WOC's increasingly solid organizational structure, the stakes were higher and the internal divisions, wider. One laywoman who aspired to priesthood noted somberly the "spiritual poverty" at the Baltimore conference. Some women remarked that Jesus's own inclusivity and compassion were being lost in Baltimore, replaced with rage and arrogance. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza summarized these tensions and then suggested solutions in a conference speech: "While the first approach wants to complement male hierarchical structures with the qualities women can bring to ministry and the second approach wants to withdraw women's powers and abilities from church ministries in order not to be co-opted, the third approach insists on the conversion of the church as well as women."⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 163-4, 203-14; Women's Ordination Conference, "Our Story," Women's Ordination Conference, <http://www.womensordination.org/content/view/8/59/>.

WOC's members may have been united in their desire for change—but not in their strategies or goals.

Perhaps the most visible example of the movement's problems in the late 1970s—and the choices WOC members faced in reconciling these problems—surrounded a liturgical celebration on the Baltimore conference's final day. Organizers planned a liturgy, presided by Father Bill Callahan, the founder of Priests for Equality. Although the celebrant would be male, his role would be lessened, and women's equality would be the focus. Some conference attendees, however, disapproved of any plan to include a male priest. In response, these dissenters organized their own liturgy, without a leader-figure, and without men at all, where women celebrated the Eucharist on their own. Worth emphasizing is that these two different liturgies did not happen back-to-back, but rather *at the same time*. Conference attendees had to choose which liturgy to attend, and in choosing, made a public statement about their loyalties: did they support reconciliation and integration with the Roman Catholic Church, or did they support an entirely different system that corrected women's historical exclusion by centering women specifically? Or, put in terms of the debates surrounding RCWP twenty-five years later: did WOC members want ordained priests or lay women as liturgical leaders? The ramifications of this dual-liturgy problem went beyond the Baltimore conference: in short, the comfortable pairing of “feminism” and “Catholicism” that had been one of the movement's hallmark traits was becoming strained. Members found themselves having to emphasize one over the other—even though the majority of members longed to keep “Catholic feminism” and “feminist Catholicism” in juxtaposition.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 210.

⁵⁷ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 204-213.

And so, though united by feminism, Catholicism, and a desire to see women ordained, there was no simple way to achieve this ultimate goal. In fact, it was not even clear to women's ordination activists what exactly that goal should be. Being united in purpose—i.e., seeing Catholic women ordained—did not equal unity in process. In the wake of the Baltimore meeting, WOC leadership met to decide its next steps. As the emotionally fraught meetings revealed, this was no simple task. Two possible, disparate paths emerged: seek women's ordination into familiar Roman Catholicism, hierarchy, sacraments, and all; or renew and reimagine the Church so as to emphasize gospel values, egalitarianism, and the Christian community.⁵⁸ While many supported the second option, leaders agreed that such ambitions might be too radical, too unrealistic. Lessons from other religious traditions that had recently started ordaining women (which I will explore in a subsequent section) showed wisdom in gradual steps and in working *through*—and not against—the existing institution. Thus, WOC decided to step back, however slightly, from its anti-institutional rhetoric. Instead of attacking the Church in its powerful entirety, WOC leadership decided it would, through the NCCB, petition the Vatican to remove the second argument from *Inter Insigniores*. In other words, it would ask the Vatican to remove theological arguments against women's ordination as being rooted in women's inability to image Christ, because Christ was male.⁵⁹

Deciding how to proceed in the wake of *Inter Insigniores* and WOC's official status would long remain a challenge for women's ordination activists; Henold has described this time, quite aptly, as “Living with Ambivalence.” Reflecting upon changes within the WOC and the starkly

⁵⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether summarized these two options: Should WOC's purpose be “to ordain women into the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church in some recognizable continuity with what those terms have meant historically” or should WOC's purpose be “to renew the Church as a communitarian grass-roots egalitarian utopian redemptive non-sexist approximation of our particular version of the Gospel.” See Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 213.

⁵⁹ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 213-4.

different tenors between the 1975 Detroit conference and the 1978 Baltimore conference, Henold places much responsibility on *Inter Insigniores*, and writes,

The widespread commitment to reconciliation and dialogue in 1977 stands in stark contrast to the final two years of the decade, when the movement began to abandon the rhetoric of reconciliation and members of the movement's leadership openly questioned continued affiliation with the institutional church. The 1976 release of the "Declaration" can be read as a pivotal event between the two women's ordination conferences of the seventies...⁶⁰

Although the Vatican's actions decrees had shaped many activists' efforts since Vatican II, the official church now gave little inspiration. The reforms, the Catholic feminism, and the petitions for women's ordination that Vatican action inspired in the 1960s and early- to mid-1970s were overturned and fractured—again, by Vatican action—before decade's end. At heart, this discord revealed strong ambivalence over what role the *Roman* patriarchy would, could, and should play in future ordination activists' aims.

WOC tried to make gains toward women's ordination, not necessarily in ways with which all members agreed, but in ways that seemed most likely to yield practical results. Amid this ambiguity, WOC took steps to dialogue with Church leaders, gain media attention, and creatively celebrate liturgies that reflected an egalitarian ideal. After Baltimore, a group of WOC members appealed to the American bishops at their annual meeting. The activists were, in turn, invited to dialogue with the Bishops' Committee on Women in the Church.⁶¹ In their own history, WOC recalls these meetings as productive in raising bishops' awareness, but stultifying in their concrete results. What is significant here is how the women again approached Church leaders, talked to bishops, addressed theological pitfalls, and used Catholic liturgies, all as a way to garner support and model the ideal. If Catholicism and feminism seemed increasingly

⁶⁰ Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 168.

⁶¹ Women's Ordination Conference, "Our Story," Women's Ordination Conference, <http://www.womensordination.org/content/view/8/59/> (accessed October 10, 2009).

incongruent by decade's end, then these steps show how women's ordination activists sought to reconcile the two.

Seizing Authority: Sometimes Permitted, Sometimes Prophetic

From the early days of John Paul II's papacy, and through the 1980s and 1990s, Catholic feminists continued to navigate Vatican ambivalence about women's religious authority. With one eye on patriarchal decrees and another on contemporary social justice issues, many women found themselves either using the authority they had or agitating for more authority than allowed. The dance continued.

John Paul II became pope in 1978, after his predecessor John Paul I died 33 days into his papacy. During his 26 years as Pope, John Paul II gradually overturned many of Vatican II's most progressive changes, making statements and issuing declarations that championed a more conservative Catholicism. During his first papal visit to the U.S. in 1979, he spoke to priests and seminarians in Philadelphia and received a standing ovation when he reiterated the Church's opposition to women's ordination.⁶² If women's ordination activists were to make any significant gains under this new, more conservative pontiff, they would need—at the very least—to appeal to him directly.

The woman who would become the representative of prophetic authority alongside reverent disobedience was Sister Theresa Kane. The president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), Sister Kane was chosen to welcome Pope John Paul II to a service for sisters and nuns at Washington's National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (NCIS), in October 1979, during the pope's first visit to the United States. As mentioned above, the pope

⁶² Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 229-32.

had already addressed crowds in Philadelphia and Chicago, and he had spoken out against issues dear to progressive Catholics, such as artificial birth control, married priests, and extending the priesthood to women. Feminist Catholics had registered the increasingly conservative tenor of John Paul II's young papacy and held vigils and protests during his visit. Sister Theresa Kane was another—albeit unlikely—protesting figure. In front of the pope and thousands of women religious gathered for the service, Kane addressed the “elephant in the room”: women's ordination:

As women we have heard the powerful messages of our Church addressing the dignity and reverence for all persons. As women we have pondered these words. Our contemplation leads us to state that the Church in its struggle to be faithful to its call for reverence and dignity of all persons must respond by providing the possibility of women as persons being included in all ministries of our Church. I urge you, Your Holiness, to be open to and respond to the voices coming from the women of this country who are desirous of serving in and through the Church as fully participating members.⁶³

As she spoke, dozens of sisters wearing blue armbands stood silently, showing support for Kane and protesting their opposition to John Paul II's position. As Kane finished speaking, applause thundered throughout the Shrine. Kane then knelt down before the pope, so as to receive his blessing. He lifted his hand, granting it. Thus, in this Shrine, the symbolic representation of American Catholicism in the nation's capitol; in front of the Pope, a man representing Roman Catholicism's nearly 2000-year old influence; surrounded by nuns, women who had consecrated their lives to serve the Church, feminism and Catholicism stood side-by-side, indivisible.⁶⁴

Kane's speech has become legendary among women religious and women's ordination activists. As a public performance, Kane's oration made use of the NCIS's sacred space, allowed

⁶³ Quoted in Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 230.

⁶⁴ “Religion: Aftershock from a Papal Visit,” *Time*, October 22, 1979, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,947520-1,00.html> (accessed February 1, 2010). The National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. has a rich history of and for American Catholic presence; see Thomas A. Tweed, *America's Church: The National Shrine and Catholic Presence in the Nation's Capital* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

supporters to stand in silent but embodied protest, galvanized women's ordination activists, and attracted critics' attention. Supporters applauded her bravery and her ability to speak so eloquently on behalf of so many. Critics expressed disgust that a nun would make such a scene in front of the Holy Father. The pontiff, for his part, did not respond to Kane's request; the scripted speech he gave thereafter highlighted the importance for women religious to wear "a simple and suitable religious garb." This topic, which harkened back to pre-Vatican II debates, appeared all the more archaic alongside Kane's request. In the wake of Kane's brief but striking speech, Catholic feminists found themselves asking: what next? What more could women's ordination activists do? They had, in their minds, reverently and respectfully petitioned the Vatican for equality, through the figure of Sister Theresa Kane, and the plea seemed to fall on unwilling ears.⁶⁵

Looking back on John Paul II's first papal visit to the United States and Sister Kane's provocative greeting, it is easy to see the NSIC encounter as the frustrating culmination of women's failed progressive aims, or as the moment feminism and Catholicism irrevocably split, or as the hierarchy's final nail in the women's ordination coffin. Yet none of these is accurate; all are too simple. As Henold notes, women had nowhere else to go: Kane had "spoken her truth" to the pope. This would not mean, however, that women would stop trying. The 1980s, then, became a time when American Catholic feminists and women's ordination activists sought and seized religious authority and agency—with or without hierarchical approval.

Twenty years later, RCWP would also seize authority—ordained authority—without Vatican approval. In fact, the roots of what would become RCWP are evident throughout the

⁶⁵ Religion: Aftershock from a Papal Visit," *Time*, 22 October 1979, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,947520-1,00.html> (accessed February 1, 2010); Women's Ordination Conference, "Our Story," Women's Ordination Conference, <http://www.womensordination.org/content/view/8/59/> (accessed October 10, 2009).

narrative I am laying out here. Like women's ordination activists in the wake of Kane's request, RCWP would come to believe that women had to take their ordination efforts to the next level. Like WOC in 1978, RCWP would struggle—and does struggle—with a variety of viewpoints within its relatively small membership. RCWP would have to position itself over and against Vatican decrees and then would have to decide how to respond to Vatican-issued punishments. And—like women's ordination activists in the 1980s—RCWP would have to determine how to balance Catholic tradition and Catholic progressivism. Again, these seeds had been planted before RCWP emerged on the scene. RCWP sees itself as an initiative of women's spiritual self-determination—like its predecessors.

Returning now to the 1980s, one significant indication of women's spiritual self-determination—i.e., an example in which women acted *against* the Catholic hierarchy—was the emergence of Women-Church in 1983. While not strictly Roman Catholic, the Women-Church movement arose particularly out of Catholic feminism and the scholarship from Catholic feminists like Rosemary Radford Ruether. More specifically, it marked the confluence of Catholic and secular American feminism, of women's increased presence as theologians and academics, and of religious responses to social issues—like that of Latin American liberation theology. Women's scholarship, such as that of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, interpreted early church history so as to emphasize a discipleship of equals, an *ecclesia/ekklesia* of women, i.e. a “Women Church.” As with the Women's Ordination Conference, the Women-Church movement first began as a conference held in Chicago in 1983. Called “Woman Church Speaks,” involved a number of Catholic feminist organizations and led to the formation of a national organization.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Women-Church Movement in Contemporary Christianity,” in *Women's Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations Outside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Urbana: University of

Women's ordination began as but did not remain a major focus of the young Women-Church movement. Rather than call for women clergy specifically, the movement honed in on the problems of patriarchy and clericalism in contemporary Christian churches. For Catholics, of course, this meant a call for women's ordination, but because Women-Church included Protestant denominations that had started ordaining women throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, the group's mission embraced women's and social justice issues, writ large. Through conferences, liturgies, and feminist scholarship and theology, Women-Church members attacked the model of domination and subordination that contemporary Christianity implicitly embraced through its clerical model. Women-Church sought in its place community, interdependence, and liberation. The movement worked to dislodge hierarchical control of sacraments, preaching authority, and administrative oversight. It sought to remove any notion of clergy's special relationship with the divine and instead to locate God's power within the worship community. In addition, Women-Church explored imagery around both an ungendered and a female God, rejected any interpretation of Genesis that blamed Eve for the world's sin and evil, and discarded biological and gender essentialism. Now called the Women-Church Convergence, the group still exists today, putting forth its goals for reform around spirituality, theology, liturgy, and community. From its inception, the group marked the union of feminism, theology, and Christian reform, all within an American context. When Catholic women, increasingly well-versed in theology and scriptural history, no longer found hope for reform within the hierarchical church, they turned inward, creating a place for women's religious authority. They also envisioned a future space where all people shared authority within Christian worship communities, independent of clerical

Illinois Press, 1993), 196-210; Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (Harper & Row, 1985).

power or sacramental elitism. If the church would not change for them, they would instead change the church.⁶⁷

Although Women-Church brought together a myriad of groups, its vision was not aligned with every Catholic feminist group. In fact, throughout the 1980s and 90s, the differences between Women-Church and the Women's Ordination Conference echoed those within the WOC during the 1978 Baltimore meeting. Due in large part to its rejection of clericalism, Women-Church did not make women's ordination its sole focus, and when it did advocate for women clergy, it supported ordination *outside* of Catholic sacramental structures. In contrast, WOC continued to agitate for women's ordained authority. While WOC's membership was never of one mind about *how* women should be ordained, they were far more likely than Women-Church to support ordination through existing sacramentalism. In some instances, Women-Church's and WOC's membership overlapped; in other instances, members' visions were widely diverse. On the one hand, WOC held onto its Catholic identity, even through frustrations and setbacks. On the other hand, by the early 1990s, Women-Church had expunged the word "Catholic" from its literature. "To be or not to be Catholic?"—while remaining spiritual and feminist—was fast becoming the question at hand.⁶⁸

RCWP, as we shall see, has had to negotiate the different strands of Catholic feminism advocated by Women-Church and WOC. Because RCWP has tried to insert itself into *Roman* Catholic structures, the movement does not model what Women-Church champions. Likewise, although many of RCWP's ordained women have been WOC members and leaders, WOC was

⁶⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (New York: Crossroad, 1993); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology & Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985); Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985); Women-Church Convergence, <http://www.women-churchconvergence.org/> (accessed March 29, 2010).

⁶⁸ Halter, *The Papal 'No,'* 33-4.

slow to fully endorse RCWP in the movement's early years. RCWP does belong within this lineage of organizations fighting for women's religious authority, but *how* and *where* it fits is a complicated issue with no tidy answers.

RCWP would also come to model another option for publicly disagreeing with official church positions: cling tightly to a Catholic identity, disobey the Church, and accept the fallout. This was the path publicly taken by nearly 100 Catholics—men and women, lay, clergy, and consecrated—in the mid-1980s. In 1984, just a year after Women-Church first organized, a *New York Times* advertisement from Catholics who supported free choice made national headlines. The context was the 1984 presidential election, specifically the debates between New York Archbishop John J. O'Connor and Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro (D-NY) and New York Governor Mario Cuomo. U.S. Catholic bishops publicly criticized Ferraro and Cuomo, both practicing Catholics, for their pro-choice stance. Amid this fraught political climate, the group Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC), founded in 1973 to affirm the *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion, took out a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*. Titled "A Catholic Statement on Pluralism and Abortion," the ad appeared on October 7, 1984. It was signed by 97 prominent Catholic leaders, including sisters, priests, social activists, academics, and theologians. Jane Via, today a Roman Catholic womanpriest, was one theologian who signed the ad (and who was subsequently silenced).⁶⁹ Contrary to the Vatican's staunchly pro-life position, the advertisement acknowledged "a diversity of opinions regarding abortion exists among committed Catholics." It called for open discussion among Catholics about the abortion issue and sought to eliminate the assumption that there was only one legitimate Catholic position surrounding right-to-life issues. Gesturing in part to the academics who signed the statement, the ad further stated, "A large number of Catholic theologians hold that even direct abortion,

⁶⁹ Jane Via, interview, 25 July 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

though tragic, can sometimes be a moral choice.” The Vatican’s reaction to this publicly contrary position was swift and severe. The Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, a Vatican group responsible for overseeing aspects of consecrated life (including religious orders and religious congregations), immediately demanded that the nuns and the clergy renounce their support. If they did not, they would be prosecuted under Canon Law for “obstinate insubordination.”⁷⁰

This *New York Times* example became a large, public symbol of tensions over theology, Roman Catholic authority, Catholic identity, and women’s issues. CFFC claimed to articulate an alternate but equally valid Catholic perspective on the abortion debate. The Roman Catholic Church accused CFFC of grossly distorting the Catholic position and misleading the Catholic faithful. One issue at stake was that of Catholicity—who was “Catholic,” and what constituted a Catholic? Could a person renounce Catholic teachings—and teachings on an issue as heated as abortion, no less—and still claim a Catholic identity? Clearly the Church and the advertisement’s signers held different answers to those questions. A second issue was that of signers’ personal authority over and against blind obedience. All signatories who belonged to religious orders fell directly under Vatican authority, including one priest, one brother, and twenty-four nuns.

Because of this command chain as well as the Vatican’s rhetoric surrounding the ad, nuns seemed to bear the brunt of the Vatican’s ire. The Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes admonished the signing sisters, not through direct communication, but through the nuns’ superiors. Rome threatened these sisters, who held jobs ranging from university work to social justice activism to prison ministry, with expulsion from their religious

⁷⁰ Kenneth A. Briggs, “Nuns Say Vatican Threat Imperils Catholics’ Rights to Speak Freely,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1984; Briggs, “Threat by Vatican Reported by Nuns,” *New York Times*, December 15, 1984; Marjorie Hyer, “Twenty-four Nuns Face Expulsion by Vatican for Opinions on Abortion,” *Washington Post*, December 19, 1984. See also Mary Hunt and Frances Kissling, “The *New York Times* Ad: A Case Study in Religious Feminism,” *JFSR*, Vol 3, No 1, Spring 1987, 115-127.

communities—in short, the loss of their families and homes. Many sisters who refused to recant said it was their work with women's issues, specifically, that guided their decision; for example, two Sisters of Notre Dame issued a joint statement, saying their decision to sign the advertisement came "out of our experience and commitment [working with the homeless], which has grown out of our experience of working with people who have struggled with this [abortion] issue, particularly women, for many years." The Vatican, for its part, claimed that as representatives of the church, nuns have a duty to uphold doctrine and authentic Catholic teaching. Should they disobey, they should be held accountable under Canon Law. Thus, the feminist issues and personal experiences women like the *New York Times*' twenty-four nuns brought to their decision making were considered invalid and inadmissible when compared with Church teaching.⁷¹

Questions about what it meant to be a Catholic woman continued fermenting during the 1980s and 1990s, with the Vatican and Catholic feminists holding disparate positions. Rome certainly did not deny all of women's authority, but nor were Rome's messages crystal clear on where and how women could exercise that authority. While on the one hand Rome continued emphasizing women's God-given role as located within their call to be virgins, wives, or mothers, on the other hand, women were gaining greater representation and authority within the church.⁷² Two significant moves to emerge from the hierarchy during this time were, one, the (American Catholic Bishops') Pastoral Letter on Women, and two, the decision to allow women to serve as pastoral administrators in priest-less parishes.

⁷¹ Kenneth A. Briggs, "Nuns Say Vatican Threat Imperils Catholics' Rights to Speak Freely," *New York Times*, December 27, 1984; Briggs, "Threat by Vatican Reported by Nuns," *New York Times*, December 15, 1984.

⁷² Halter, *The Papal 'No'*, 5-6. Halter's book helpfully traces Vatican rhetoric surrounding women's roles as virgin, wife, and mother, from the early Church fathers through the present day.

The Pastoral Letter on Women was, at its heart, the American bishops' attempt to express sympathy for and initiate dialogue with women, all the while keeping an eye on Rome's recent statements against women's ordination (namely *Inter Insigniores*). As early as 1983, the NCCB formed a committee to investigate "women's concerns" and solicited input from seventy-five thousand American Catholics. In 1988, the NCCB issued the first draft of this pastoral letter, titled "Partners in the Mystery of Redemption." Notably, this document stated that sexism was a "moral and social evil"; it also called for further studies to investigate (though, it must be noted, not to overturn the Vatican's stance regarding) women's relationship to holy orders, sacraments, and church ministry. The Vatican harshly criticized the 1988 draft as being too sympathetic toward Catholic feminists' demands. A second attempt was drafted and released in 1990, now titled "'One in Christ Jesus': A Pastoral Response to the Concerns of Women for Church and Society." This draft drew fire from both the Vatican and women's ordination activists. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), specifically, commended the draft for its condemnation of sexism, but noted that the document—like most Church documents that women's groups took issue with—continued to describe women in terms of biologically-determined gender roles. A third draft was written, and rejected. Finally, a fourth draft appeared in late 1992. This draft, now titled "*Towards* a Pastoral Response" (emphasis added), included statements about gender equality, an end to gender discrimination, and an effort toward inclusive language. Yet it still was roundly criticized by both progressives and traditionalists within the church. The document was tabled; the NCCB did not adopt the letter.⁷³

Now, it seemed, the split between women's ordination activists and Vatican authorities was not narrowing, but widening. After nearly two decades of conversation among the U.S.

⁷³ Halter, *The Papal 'No,'* 82-89. Angela Bonavoglia, *Good Catholic Girls: How Women Are Leading the Fight to Change the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 31-2.

Bishops to investigate Catholic women's concerns, and after a decade trying to write a Pastoral Letter amenable to (if not enthusiastically embraced by) feminists and Vatican traditionalists alike, the American bishops discovered just how sticky this topic had become. To be sure, the Pastoral Letter was very much the *American* bishops' attempt—an attempt not echoed worldwide. The American context was, by and large, more progressive and more open to discussing these ideas. It should also be noted that, in WOC's online history, the pastoral letter process is described in entirely negative terms: the language was “flawed,” the pastoral made “women rather than sexism in the church the problem,” and the WOC members participated in protests and demonstrations and letter-writing campaigns to influence the bishops against adopting it. Conspicuously absent in this recounting is any mention of the Pastoral's positive aspects, the bishops' attempt to reach out to women, or the fact that the Vatican also decried the pastoral, albeit on vastly different grounds. WOC, along with Call to Action and dozens of other progressive Catholic groups, told the bishops that publishing the document would “represent a major embarrassment for the US Church.”⁷⁴ The pastoral—though it was never formalized and never reached the consensus and open dialogue the bishops initially wanted—did generate discussion and ostensibly sought to straddle the increasing divide between women's groups and the Roman authorities.

All the while the Pastoral Letter debate was taking place, some Catholic women were, in fact, finding themselves in authoritative positions within the church—as pastors in priestless parishes. In 1983, the new Code of Canon Law was promulgated, and the wording of canon 517.2, when interpreted generously, opened to lay women the opportunity to administer priestless parishes: “If the diocesan bishop should decide that due to a dearth of priests a participation in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish is to be entrusted to a deacon or to

⁷⁴ *Origins* Editorial Note, quoted in Halter, *The Papal No*, 88-9.

some other person who is not a priest, or to a community of persons, he is to appoint some priest endowed with the power and faculties of a pastor, to supervise the pastoral care.”⁷⁵ Priest shortages worldwide—and in the American context, specifically in rural parishes—led bishops to seek solutions outside of ordained clergy, to lay men and women who could administer parishes *without* administering sacraments. As described in Ruth A. Wallace’s in-depth sociological study of “priestless parishes” and the women who manage them, *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women*, these women (like the lay men who hold similar positions) do all a parish’s daily tasks, ministerial and administrative. Priests from nearby (and not so nearby) parishes come in regularly (and not so regularly) to consecrate bread and wine into body and blood. Wallace’s book explores many challenges of this female-led pastoring system, including relationships with parishioners, support from bishops, and respect from priests. Through interviews, Wallace learned that a number of these women hold strong feelings of inadequacy and unfairness around the sacraments: while these female pastors facilitate nearly every aspect of parishioners’ Catholic lives, they cannot consecrate the Eucharist nor fully preside over baptisms and weddings. In short, these women fulfill a crucial role in preserving Catholicism in smaller, often rural parishes, but their authority—though given by church officials—goes only so far, leaving these women feeling like half-priests, or incomplete pastors, not entirely able to give parishioners what they need.⁷⁶

Women who would become Roman Catholic womenpriests echo some of these frustrations. Notably, some women who would become Roman Catholic womenpriests served previously as pastoral administrators, including Dena O’Callaghan and two RCWP bishops,

⁷⁵ Ruth A. Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 6-7.

⁷⁶ Ruth A. Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

Andrea Johnson and Joan Houk. Houk said being a pastoral administrator was rewarding but difficult, as there was only so much she could do as an unordained woman:

I prayed with those who were sick and dying, but could not anoint with oil. I listened to troubled people, but could not give absolution... I could lead a Liturgy of the Word and distribute communion, but I could not consecrate the Eucharist. I was well prepared to be their priest, but I was a woman. The Spirit called, the people called, the hierarchy said, 'No.'⁷⁷

RCWP's women, then, were some of those who served local parishes yet felt thwarted by their inability to give fully and sacramentally.

Out of this context—this confusing language about women's roles and potential authority in the defunct Pastoral Letter, and this significant but incomplete extension of authority to lay parish administrators—came *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. Written in 1994 by Pope John Paul II, this document attempted once and for all to curtail women's hopes for priesthood authority by claiming that the Church had “no authority whatsoever” to convey priestly ordination on women. In other words, women's inability to claim priesthood authority came not from Rome, but from the Church and the Church's relationship with Jesus Christ. *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* offered little in the way of new arguments; instead, it cited tradition, papal authority (especially *Inter Insigniores*), and Christ's example—including the argument that Jesus' mother Mary was not herself an apostle or a priest. Notably, the document went further than any to date in claiming the Vatican's position against women's ordination was indisputable—and perhaps even infallible. Toward the document's end, John Paul II wrote, “I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be

⁷⁷ Joan Houk, “Journeying Step by Step,” in *Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests*, eds. Elsie Hainz McGrath, Bridget Mary Meehan, and Ida Raming (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2008), 100.

definitively held by all the Church's faithful" (emphasis added). The letter aimed to end discussion about women's ordination once and for all.⁷⁸

The year 1994 was awash in contradictions about women's authority within the Catholic Church. On the one hand, starting in March 1994, the pope officially granted females permission to be altar servers, Eucharistic ministers, lectors, and religious educators.⁷⁹ On the other hand, mid-1994 saw not only *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, but also the removal of gender-inclusive language, through both the Vatican's revocation of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible (replete with inclusive language) and its issuance of a new English-edition Catechism (purged of inclusive language).⁸⁰ While the hierarchy gave women some greater representation during mass, it shattered feminists' desire for not only inclusive language during liturgy, but also discussions about women's ordination. With all these items taken in juxtaposition, 1994, it would seem, saw major set-backs for those Catholic feminists seeking greater religious and sacramental authority.

Women Make Strides: The Example of Ordination in other Religious Groups

Ordinatio Sacerdotalis was not merely the Pontiff's way of asserting his authority over the Catholic faithful. When examined in a broader religious perspective, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* can also be seen as a response to women's ordination in non-Catholic circles. The more women who were ordained outside of Catholicism, the more Rome had to assert its authority within the

⁷⁸ Pope John Paul II, "*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*," ("On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone") (May 22, 1994), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_22051994_ordinatio-sacerdotalis_en.html, 4. Scholars have debated whether this was the Pope's way of claiming infallibility without speaking *ex cathedra*, which had been in the past the formal way of citing infallible doctrine. For a discussion of the document, as well as a summary of scholarly discussion about the document's potentially infallible nature, see Halter, *The Papal 'No'*, 94-107.

⁷⁹ To be sure, however, these changes had already taken place in several dioceses and archdioceses, given to local authority.

⁸⁰ Halter, *The Papal 'No'*, 90-107.

wider Christian tradition. The admission of women to ordained ministry in American Protestantism and the Episcopal Church, U.S.A. exacerbated the problem of women's ordination for the Catholic Church. When Episcopalians began to ordain women in 1976, and Anglicans formalized women's ordination in 1992, the Catholic Church found itself with even more trouble on its hands—and a greater imperative to quell discussion on the topic.⁸¹

This section explores how women's ordination movements outside of Catholicism impacted Catholics—both those in the Vatican and those in the pews. To be certain, there was no singular way Catholics responded to non-Catholic ordinations. Catholic ordination activists saw Protestant and, later, Episcopalian women getting ordained and expected their own church to follow suit. As other twentieth-century women made strides toward gender equality in religious spheres, some Catholic women expressed even more strongly their own call to ministry. But while the ordination of women to, for example, Presbyterian, Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, or Southern Baptist traditions may have inspired Catholic women who want ordination, the Vatican could and did largely ignore these changes. What the Roman Catholic Church could not ignore, and what—to harken back to Patricia Hughes' story—"got the bear to growl," was Episcopalian ordinations in the 1970s.

Thus, what was happening politically, socially, and historically *around* twentieth-century American Catholicism came to bear *upon* twentieth-century American Catholicism. Two books draw our attention to the ways that pressures both external and internal shaped the Catholic ordination movement and led to RCWP's emergence in the early twenty-first century. Mark

⁸¹ While Protestant churches increasingly ordained women throughout the mid- to late-twentieth century, Jewish groups also began to ordain women to the rabbinate. Sally Priesand, the first American woman rabbi, was ordained in 1972 by Hebrew Union College and her Reform Congregation. In 1974, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso was ordained by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. The first woman ordained within Conservative Judaism was Amy Eilberg, in 1985. Of the three women, Eilberg's ordination was the hardest won, as Conservative women began talking about ordination in the early 1970s, but faced barriers not unlike those Christian women faced. To date, Orthodox Judaism does not ordain women. While there is little evidence that the Roman Catholic Church felt any external pressure as a result of the Jewish women's ordinations, juxtaposing the traditions and their ban on women's ordination offers some valuable insights.

Chaves's *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* emphasizes the *external* pressures that lead to formal ordination policies. *Clergy Women*, in contrast, shows the impact that *internal*, historically determined church systems play on ordination formality. Taken together, these studies help better situate Roman Catholicism's ordination questions in the broader context of American Christianity.

Ordaining Women, a 1997 sociological study, investigates denominational policies pertaining to women's ordination. For my purposes here, Chaves's contributions can be summarized in his arguments about *external pressure* and *symbol*. First, Chaves concludes that rules about women's ordination come primarily from external pressures, from outside forces that lead a denomination either to embrace change or resist change. On-the-ground practices may look very different from formal procedures, thus leading to tension between what is said and what is done. (A Roman Catholic example is the practice, described above, of having lay women administer priest-less parishes. Catholic women cannot be ordained, but they can do all the work of priests, save sacraments.) Second, Chaves argues that women's ordination has become a dynamic symbol of a denomination's self-conscious relationship with modernity. For example, the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (North) and the Methodist Church both began ordaining women clergy in 1956, not because women were asking for ordination, but because social developments in the 1940s and 1950s transformed women's ordination into a symbol of gender equality. To ordain women was to promote equality between the sexes. Likewise, opponents of women's ordination (like Roman Catholics) refused to ordain women as a way to take a symbolic stance against modern notions of gender equality.⁸² Significant for Catholicism's policy *not* to ordain women, then, is the Vatican's resistance to aligning the Church with the modern world. Ordaining women would be yielding to external worldly pressures; ordaining women would be

⁸² Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1-13, 82-3.

taking a symbolic stance alongside liberal Protestants, secular feminists, and contemporary culture. To this, despite changes by other Christian denominations, the Roman Catholic Church affirmed “no.”

Symbolic meaning and external pressure, then, play into the decision to ordain women; also relevant are churches’ structure and authority. *Clergy Women* focuses on these kinds of internal forces and locates differences surrounding women’s ordination in the differences among congregation-centered, institution-centered, and spirit-centered denominations. As authors Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang show in using these three typologies, churches respond differently to questions of women’s ordination depending upon leadership structures and decision-making processes. As an example of a congregation-centered denomination, the Congregationalists were the first American Protestants to ordain a woman: Antoinette L. Brown, in 1853. Because Brown’s church, like other congregation-centered churches, places decision-making power in local congregation’s hands and need not acquiesce to national standards, a woman like Brown could be called from within her own community. In contrast, institution-centered denominations such as the aforementioned Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. and Methodist Church, as well as the Episcopal Church and the Lutheran Church in America, tend to move more slowly toward women’s ordination. These denominations consider polity, practical concerns, and—especially—tradition before allowing women clergy. But although institution-centered denominations have not rushed headlong toward ordaining women, once ordained, the women are integrated into their denomination’s institutional structures. The final example, spirit-centered denominations, which describe Pentecostal and Holiness traditions, embraced women’s leadership early on in their founding, as the Spirit moved both women and men to lead. But these groups have seen a *decline* in women’s influence over time, as the churches became more organized and institutionalized. Some of these

traditions—like the Church of the Nazarene and the Assemblies of God—increasingly stress biblical literalism, and therefore cite texts that limit women’s authority in church.⁸³

In considering the Roman Catholic Church, a tradition deeply connected to its own history and deeply aware of its public image, one must examine *both* internal and external pressures. No Protestant women’s ordination pulled on internal *and* external strings, thus touching a Roman Catholic nerve, quite like the ordinations of Episcopal women. Rome could and did remain comfortably nonchalant about other Protestant ordinations: the Reformation-related changes sufficiently widened the gulf between Catholicism and Protestantism so as to leave Roman Catholicism theologically unscathed by Protestant women’s ordinations. Episcopalians and Anglicans, however, were a different story. Why did the Roman Catholic Church feel so threatened by ordained women in Anglican circles? Put simply, of all the Christian diversity to emerge from sixteenth-century Europe, the Anglican tradition alone retained Catholicism’s notion of a ministerial priesthood and a priest’s special relationship to the Eucharist. Thus, Anglicans’ decision to ordain women created theological obstacles for Roman Catholicism in ways that other ordained women Protestants did not.⁸⁴ For this reason, Rome could not sit idly by while Episcopalians in the U.S. and Anglicans in Europe, Africa, and Australia ordained women. The Episcopal and Anglican ordinations threatened the Vatican on external and internal levels, like a reckless sibling disrupting the family tradition.

While Episcopal women’s ordinations destabilized Roman Catholic doctrinal foundations, they also inspired RCWP’s *modus operandi* decades later. In 1974, a group of Episcopal women deacons known as the “Philadelphia Eleven” were ordained to the

⁸³ Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 7-15.

⁸⁴ Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women*, 110-111; Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler, eds, *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 65-69, 319-37.

priesthood. This was an “irregular” ordination, i.e., it was not “legal” or “authorized” but was rather a public protest against the law barring women from becoming priests. Like the Roman Catholic Church today, the Episcopal Church of the early 1970s did not ordain women priests; unlike the Catholic Church, however, the Episcopalians did ordain women deacons. Episcopal deacons can preach the gospel, deliver the homily, and assist the priest with Holy Communion. Like Roman Catholic deacons, Episcopal deacons cannot celebrate all sacraments (like the Eucharist or Baptism) or absolve sins. In 1970, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church opened the diaconate to women; it had not yet opened the priesthood.⁸⁵ At a 1973 convention, U.S. Episcopal leaders took up the question of ordaining women priests. After much heated debate—during which the female deacons listened silently while men with decision-making authority discussed their fate—the General Convention rejected the motion to ordain women priests.

Within months, a group of female deacons began planning an “irregular” ordination. This ceremony would be *without* official permission, but *within* the line of apostolic succession. When Episcopal leadership could not ordain them, the Philadelphia Eleven found retired bishops to perform the laying on of hands.⁸⁶ Ordinands planned an ordination at the North Philadelphia Church of the Advocate, a place known for its diversity and civil rights activism. The Eleven faced a media frenzy of flash bulbs and TV cameras, all fighting for a glimpse of women defying male hierarchical authority. Although their act was one of disobedience, it is crucial to acknowledge their decision to stay within the parameters of their tradition. They chose

⁸⁵ Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*, 170. The date of 1970 is again significant here. Like Catholic women, Episcopalian women felt the influences of secular feminism, and their own push for women’s ordination roughly coincided with Catholics’.

⁸⁶ The fact these bishops were retired is significant: the bishops were in good standing and within the apostolic line, but were not risking their careers by ordaining women.

validly consecrated bishops to ordain them, and they followed the standard ordination service. Had the Eleven been men, the ceremony would have been entirely valid, and wholly regular, by Episcopalian standards.⁸⁷

Observers on both sides of the 1974 Philadelphia ordination debate the success of the Eleven's actions. On the one hand, a 1974 House of Bishops report declared the ordinations *invalid* and prohibited the women from celebrating mass. On the other hand, in 1976, the Episcopal Church legalized women's ordination, and made *valid* the previously "invalid" Philadelphia Eleven ordinations (as well as those of four other women irregularly ordained in 1975). The questions remain: would the Episcopal Church have legalized women's ordination in 1976, even without the Philadelphia Eleven's public and much-publicized protest? Or were the Eleven's controversial actions the "push" that the Episcopal Church needed to start ordaining women?

These questions may be merely hypothetical exercises for twenty-first century Episcopalians⁸⁸—but the answers are immanently pressing for a group like Roman Catholic Womenpriests. RCWP is trying to achieve today what Episcopal women earned in 1976—and they are doing so in ways that reverberate with the Philadelphia Eleven's strategies. Of all Catholic groups working toward women's ordination, RCWP's strategic approach is most like the Philadelphia Eleven's. Furthermore, as stated previously, the Episcopal Church is the American Christian group most like Roman Catholicism, in terms of sacramentalism and ritual, institutional and hierarchical structure, and the importance placed upon apostolic succession.

⁸⁷ Carter Heyward, *A Priest Forever: One Woman's Controversial Ordination in the Episcopal Church* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1999 ed.), 3. For more on Episcopalian women's push toward ordination, see Norene Carter, "The Episcopalian Story," in eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 356-72.

⁸⁸ Although Episcopalian women can now be ordained deacons, priests, and bishops, the Episcopal Church and its Anglican counterpart still struggle for equality. Three U.S. dioceses refuse to ordain women, and the issues of women bishops and openly gay clergy divide the Anglican Communion today.

RCWP's first ordinands received the nickname "The Danube Seven"—certainly a self-conscious echo of the eleven Episcopalian pioneers. Whether or not this Episcopalian "success" story—as women's ordination activists see it—can provide a road map for Catholic women remains to be seen.

Regardless of how RCWP sees it, the Roman Catholic Church has taken the Episcopal women's ordination as a serious affront to ecumenism. Just as the CDF has renounced RCWP's actions, the Vatican has also publicly decried Episcopalians' 1976 decision to ordain women and the Church of England's 1992 rulings opening priesthood to women. In the 1970s and 80s, the pope and Archbishop of Canterbury exchanged a number of letters, acknowledging the negative impact that women's ordination could—and later, did—have on the Anglican-Roman Catholic relationship. In 1984, John Paul II called women's ordination "an increasingly serious obstacle" to reconciliatory progress.⁸⁹ Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie responded by outlining the Anglican position. Most poignant among Runcie's arguments were that scripture and tradition do not fundamentally bar women from ministerial priesthood; that divine law cannot be shown to be against women's ordination; and that Jesus became human so that *all* people might attain salvation, and thus women should be able to become priests so as to "more perfectly represent Christ's inclusive High Priesthood."⁹⁰ With this response, Runcie argued against each key point that *Inter Insigniores* had made in defense of an all-male priesthood. If the mere fact of Anglican women priests was not enough to cause Rome theological distress, Runcie's letter was.

⁸⁹ Pope John Paul II, "The Vatican and Canterbury Exchange of Letters," *Origins* 16, no. 8 (July 17, 1986): 153-55, cited in Halter, *The Papal No*, 70.

⁹⁰ Archbishop Robert Runcie's letter to Cardinal Jan Willebrands in "The Vatican and Canterbury Exchange of Letters," *Origins* 16, no. 8 (July 17, 1986), 156-58, cited in Halter, *The Papal No*, 71.

This brings us back to 1994's *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. Vatican observer Peter Hebblethwaite has described *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* as “an act of authority born of irritation”⁹¹—suggesting the pontiff’s irritation was directed, in part, at the Anglican Communion. Thirty-two women were ordained Anglican priests in the months before the pastoral letter’s release. By the time *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* was issued, hundreds of Anglican women had been ordained worldwide, exacerbating relations between Rome and the Anglican Communion.⁹² John Paul II was not the only one irritated: Anglicans, too, bristled at the Pope’s attempts to extend his religious reach beyond Roman Catholicism. On both sides of the debate, theological concerns had become intertwined with power, pragmatism, and gender equality. And so, as Rome’s response to the Episcopal and Anglican ordinations shows, one form of external pressure—from a religious tradition with familial ties to Catholicism—easily became a kind of internal pressure, whereby Rome believed it needed to issue *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* as a way, one, to prevent its own people from asking questions about women’s ordination, and two, to express its disapproval regarding relevant changes in Anglican policy.

And what can these tensions—between Anglicans and Catholics, between internal and external pressures—reveal for a study of RCWP? First, the strides Protestant women have made toward ordination and the ways the Vatican has largely ignored these show what is really at stake for Roman Catholicism. Rome is not concerned with female ministers *per se*, but rather with women entering into a specifically ministerial priesthood, marked with sacramental power and within an apostolic lineage. Catholic women’s ordination activists have learned, then, to change their approach: simply pointing to ordained Protestant women as an ideal that the Roman

⁹¹ Peter Hebblethwaite, *The Next Pope* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 164.

⁹² Catherine Wessinger, “Women’s Leadership in the United States,” *Women’s Religious Leadership in the United States: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 3-36: 25.

Catholic Church should emulate fails to address the theological and symbolic impulses that prevent Roman Catholic women from ordination. Second, the Philadelphia Eleven's approach has been instructive. The eleven deacons simultaneously applied pressure internally and externally: in using legitimate bishops and an authorized ceremony, the women worked from within the system; in capturing media attention (advertently or inadvertently), the press applied external pressure. RCWP is taking similar actions today, retaining the "Roman" Catholic label and sacramental economy while garnering media attention as they break canon law. Third, the Vatican's refusal even to discuss and theologize women's ordination, amid sweeping moves toward gender equality in the vast majority of other American Christian circles, forces the questions: will the Vatican ever change its mind about women's ordination, or will women's ordination indefinitely remain a symbol of Rome's resistance to modernity? RCWP, it would seem, consists of women who have learned from experience (as Catholic feminists, WOC members, and/or pastoral associates) that petitioning the Church for ordination and soliciting theological discourse has been ineffective, and perhaps, like the Philadelphia Eleven, the only way to be ordained is, simply, to be ordained—invalidly and irregularly, if necessary.

The European Story

Thus far this chapter has emphasized the women's ordination movement's 20th century history from the American perspective, but when considering RCWP, the European groundwork cannot and should not be overlooked. For all of American Catholicism's intensity surrounding women's ordination, and for all the ambivalence coming from American bishops, *European* women spearheaded the movement known now as Roman Catholic Womenpriests. RCWP began in Europe, with a small cadre of women preparing for ordained ministry, finding male bishops to ordain them, and defying hierarchical authority.

St. Joan's International Alliance

Preceding United States' own Catholic feminist activism in the mid- to late-twentieth century was a European organization called St. Joan's International Alliance (SJIA). Started in London in 1911, this movement began amid the women's suffrage movement.⁹³ While in prison for non-violent protests, Catholic women "found" each other. Believing their Church should agitate for women's rights alongside them, a Catholic women's activist group was born. In the following decades, the group (which was initially called the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society) would continue its women's rights efforts and expand throughout Europe, to places like France, Germany and Italy. It took some time before the group became formally organized; rather, in the early decades, theirs was a collaboration of well-educated women who worked to effect change through social and political networks. Their days of street protests behind them, they used dialogue and lobbying to influence policy and law.

By the time St. Joan's International Alliance came to the United States in 1965 (as SJIA-U.S.), essentially kicking off *American* Catholic's organized feminist movement⁹⁴, the group's *European* members had already spent years thinking about and petitioning for women's ordination. One of the key differences between the European and American milieus was access

⁹³ My focus on European Catholic women's activism broadly, and the St. Joan's International Alliance specifically, is not intended to suggest that American Catholic women were inactive or silent from the Progressive Era through the mid-twentieth century. In fact, as Kathleen Sprows Cummings's work has shown, American Catholic women of the Progressive Era had more opportunities for education and employment inside the church than out. Where St. Joan's International Alliance stands out—and how St. Joan's allies with RCWP's genealogy—is in the group's progressive politics and insistence on gender equality. Many American Catholic women of the Progressive Era found solidarity not in feminism or "sisterhood," but rather in Catholic identities that opposed women's suffrage and underscored women's place in "private" spheres, over against the male-dominated "public" sphere. The women of St. Joan's, in contrast to the women Cummings's profiles, disregarded traditional Catholic teaching on gender and suffrage to find solidarity with women of all religious and political stripes. See Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009); Anne Marie Pelzer, "St. Joan's International Alliance, a short history 1911-1977," Womenpriests.org, www.womenpriests.org/interact/pelzer.asp.

⁹⁴ Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 83.

to theological education: while most Catholic women in the United States could not enjoy theological coursework at Catholic universities as men could, in Germany (where state-sponsored universities prohibited gender discrimination) women were earning doctorates in theology. St. Joan's International Alliance became a magnet for these educated European women. Throughout the late 1950s and 60s, German Catholic theologians like Ida Raming and Iris Müller used their theological education to write letters to the Vatican, asking for discussion of the women's ordination issue. Instead of capitalizing on husbands' business and political contacts, as early twentieth-century St. Joan's members had done, Raming and Müller (both unmarried) applied their theological education to the Catholic women's question. Raming's dissertation (titled "The Exclusion of Women from Priesthood: Divine Law or Gender Discrimination?" and which I mentioned previously) became the first significant theological examination of women's ordination through the lens of Canon Law. In short, before Vatican II helped inspire American Catholic feminists toward ordination activism, educated European women, united through SJIA, had already started the process of ordination agitation.

Thus, when Raming and Müller became part of the Danube Seven and were ordained at the 2002 Danube ordination, they could say with confidence, "For more than 40 years...women have disproved the grounds on which they are excluded from the ministries with conclusive arguments... The Vatican leaders of the Church have so far ignored these findings and study of research."⁹⁵ Indeed, Raming and Müller had devoted their academic—and activist—lives to this very question. Their own theological contributions (as well as those of fellow German Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza) continue to inform the women's ordination movement well into the twenty-first century. Since the early 1960s, American Catholic seminaries have opened the study of theology to women, and as such, American feminist scholars (such as Elizabeth Johnson and

⁹⁵ Ida Raming and Iris Müller, "Statement regarding the ordination of women in Austria (29 July 2002)," Womenpriests.org, <http://www.womenpriests.org/called/ramista2.asp> (accessed November 17, 2010).

Mary Hunt) have joined conversations for which Raming and Müller laid the groundwork. And while the United States' own Women's Ordination Conference is now the world's largest organization dedicated to the cause, St. Joan's International Alliance was the first. SJIA captured and channeled Catholic women's activist energy decades before American women even tapped it.

Ludmilla Javorova

Also out of the European context comes the story of Ludmilla Javorova. Born in Czechoslovakia in 1932, Javorova bears the distinction of possibly being the first woman ordained a Roman Catholic priest in the modern era. She grew up in a devout Catholic family and dreamed of becoming a nun. But her youth was not a safe time to pursue a religious vocation: Czechoslovakia, bordered by Germany, was under Nazi occupation during World War II, and after the war, the country came under Soviet influence. The Soviet communist regime sought to silence churches and squelch religion's influence. Soviets confiscated church property and imprisoned thousands of Catholic priests and women religious in concentration camps.

In order to preserve Catholicism, an underground resistance movement emerged. Javorova became part of the group "Kointes," which met secretly for prayer, philosophical instruction, and spiritual reflection. Felix Maria Davidek, one of Javorova's childhood friends, became one of the groups' leaders. Davidek was a Roman Catholic priest and a one-time political prisoner; he had been secretly ordained a bishop and was now charged with helping to keep Czechoslovakian Catholicism alive. "Clandestine" Catholicism was nothing new: the Church used similar tactics—with the approval of Pius XI—in 1920s Mexico, in 1926 Moscow, and in 1940s Romania. This "hidden" Church in Czechoslovakia ordained hundreds of men as priests, with Davidek himself ordaining dozens. Also ordained, so as to avoid suspicion, were *married* men, with Javorova's younger brother counted among them.

As Javorova recounts the story, in 1970 Davidek began pressuring her to accept ordination, telling her they could not wait for official hierarchical approval. At stake was Catholic ministry to women living in communist Czechoslovakia who would likely not otherwise receive the sacraments and pastoral care. The possibility of Catholics being denied the sacraments and ministerial guidance elevated the situation's urgency, and so Javorova accepted this call. It was not a call that started with God, but with her bishop, and she followed obediently. Following standard procedure, she was first ordained a deacon and later, a priest. Davidek used the same ritual to ordain her as he did to ordain males. In other words, he did not deem Javorova's femaleness as reason to revise Catholic ritual, and his own belief in the importance of apostolic succession led him to lay hands on Javorova as he would a male candidate. As a female priest living in a communist-controlled country, Javorova did not seek opportunities to minister and develop her priesthood; she ministered to those who came to her. For over twenty years, she remained a secretly ordained, practicing priest, and the Vatican made no comment.

This changed, however, after the fall of communism in 1989 and the splintering of Czechoslovakia (into the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic) in 1993. Now, the things the underground church had done to survive could and did come to light, and suddenly the Vatican found itself having to address these clandestine ordinations. In addition to Javorova and scores of married men, seven other women had been secretly ordained as both deacons and priests. In this new religious climate, Javorova's gender left her facing dual difficulties: she was excluded from talks between Rome and the secretly ordained priests, and her former colleague *male* priests distanced themselves from her. Davidek had died in 1988, and so Javorova was left without support. As the Vatican assessed the validity of the underground church's ordinations, Javorova could not speak for herself, and none would speak for her. Ultimately, the Vatican ruled that validly ordained *unmarried* men could continue serving as priests and performing valid priestly

functions. Validly ordained *married* men had to stop serving as priests, though their actions while serving the underground church were post facto deemed valid. And *women* were deemed not validly ordained, nor were any of their priestly ministries ruled valid. The Vatican not only denied the existence of Javorova's decades of priestly service, but it refused to hear her story or let her tell it. She had sent a letter to John Paul II but received no reply. Finally, in 1996, Javorova's local bishop "formally prohibited" her from acting as a priest and instructed her to keep silent.⁹⁶

It is not surprising given Rome's ruling that Javorova's priesthood has garnered little attention from the Catholic hierarchy or the majority of Catholic faithful. Few Catholics even know the story of Ludmilla Javorova, ordained woman priest. But since her story came out in the early 1990s—in publications like *National Catholic Reporter* and the *Christian Century*—she has become a *cause célèbre* for women's ordination activists. The Women's Ordination Conference gives Javorova's biography on their website and even brought her to the United States in 1997 to tell her story.⁹⁷ The group represented by "Womenpriests.org" includes on their website Javorova's narrative and a translated interview between her and the Austrian publication *Kirche Intern*.⁹⁸ To date, Javorova continues serving the Catholic Church as a religion teacher for children and teens. Her story was captured in a 2001 monograph, *Out of the Depths*, which she told to a Medical Mission Sister, Miriam Therese Winter. Javorova has said that, when she prays

⁹⁶ Information about Judmilla Javorova comes from Miriam Therese Winter, *Out of the Depths: The Story of Ludmilla Javorova, Ordained Roman Catholic Priest* (New York: Crossroad, 2001) as well as Halter, *The Papal 'No,'* 9-11. Javorova says that seven other women were ordained in Czechoslovakia and Slovakia, by Davidek and other bishops, but these women priests left because of the pressure and difficulties of remaining secret. Ludmilla is unique because she remained a priest.

⁹⁷ Women's Ordination Conference, "Why Ordination? Women Priests and Deacons During the Communist Period," Women's Ordination Conference, <http://www.womensordination.org/content/view/4/84/1/6/>. (accessed November 14, 2010)

⁹⁸ Werner Ertel and Georg Motylewicz, "Yes, I am a Catholic Woman Priest!," *Kirche Intern* 9, no. 11 (1995): 18-19, trans. Mary Dittrich, and published with permission, Womenpriests.org, http://www.womenpriests.org/called/javo_rep.asp (accessed November 14, 2010).

to God, in Czech, she often uses feminine nouns, verbs, and adjectives to address the Divine. Although her formal priesthood has ended, she continues to inspire women seeking ordination and place the feminine at the theological center of her own worship.

Confluence and Culmination

In the years leading up to the Danube ordinations, the threads and themes I have laid out in this chapter came together, sometimes elegantly and sometimes contentiously, thereby making the moment all but perfect for Catholic women to pursue *contra legem* ordinations.

Tensions escalated within the Women's Ordination Conference, with an ever-widening rift between women who wanted ordination and women who wanted to abandon the hierarchical system altogether. This was not a new problem. Recall the debates taking place at the second WOC meeting in 1978 over what direction the movement should take. In the mid-1980s, the rift widened, as the 1985 WOC gathering in St. Louis, Missouri illustrated. Some Women-Church members who also belonged to WOC began emphasizing the importance of *ministries* over ordination, as they believed the Roman Catholic Church was too broken to be worth women's investment. To pursue ministries and a discipleship of equals would support women within community, away from dysfunctional institutional structures. Some members of WOC pushed back, underscoring what they saw as the continued importance of ordaining women within the system. Beyond these two positions, many WOC members fell somewhere in between these poles.

Out of this push back came the group RAPPORT (Renewed and Priestly People Ordination Reconsidered Today), a very small and dedicated cadre of about twenty-five women who wanted to be immediately ordained within Church *even though* the Church was not yet reformed per WOC's vision. The group became closed and its inner workings, confidential.

RAPPORT devised a strategy of covert discussion with bishops “friendly” to their cause. In the 1980s, they worked with American bishops on the Pastoral Letter on Women, and ultimately, RAPPORT considered the letter’s failure to pass a success for women’s issues. In the early 1990s, they arranged meetings between Catholic bishops and Episcopalian bishops, as a way of discussing how one tradition’s transition to ordaining women (Episcopal) might be a model for another tradition not yet ordaining women (Roman Catholic). And in the mid- to late-1990s, when Ludmilla Javaro­va’s story went public, RAPPORT members went to Czechoslovakia to talk with Javaro­va and the other women ordained in the underground church.⁹⁹

While these developments were taking place in the United States, an international confluence of women’s ordination activists emerged. Women’s Ordination Worldwide, or WOW, started in 1996 at the First European Women’s Synod in Gmunden, Austria. Andrea Johnson, who at the time was WOC’s executive director, became WOW’s first coordinator. In 1998, WOW’s steering committee met to begin planning its first international conference, to be held in Dublin, Ireland in 2001. Johnson recalls that Austria’s WOW representative, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, made an announcement: she had conferred with We are Church: Austria and started a priesthood formation program. Mayr-Lumetzberger had a number of women preparing for ordination, and she was now looking for a bishop to ordain them. Three years later, in Dublin in 2001, Mayr-Lumetzberger would take down contact information, so she could announce the ordinations. Within six months, she would email her contacts and say, “we have found bishops to ordain us.”¹⁰⁰ The creation of WOW just years earlier enabled Mayr-

⁹⁹ RAPPORT, Women’s Ordination Conference website, <http://www.womensordination.org/content/view/134/>; Andrea Johnson, telephone interview with author, May 11, 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Andrea Johnson, telephone interview with author, May 11, 2011; Women’s Ordination Worldwide, <http://www.womensordinationworldwide.org/> (accessed August 5, 2011) (site under construction).

Lumetzberger's activism to reach international audiences, and the group Mayr-Lumetzberger spoke of would become the Danube Seven.¹⁰¹

Ida Raming and Iris Müller were two of the seven who would be ordained on the Danube. Both were feminist Catholic theologians and scholars who had been part of the women's ordination movement from the outset. Raming and Müller knew Mayr-Lumetzberger and Gisela Forester through Catholic reform groups in Austria and Germany, and though they were not formally part of Mayr-Lumetzberger's preparation group, they were in frequent contact. For decades, Raming and Müller had advocated women's ordination "within the system," through theological discourse and historical argument. By the end of the 1990s, however, Raming and Müller had a change of heart. They knew about Ludmilla Javaroova and other ordained women in Czechoslovakia. They knew about the Episcopalians' "Philadelphia Eleven" in the 1970s. They knew about *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* and other doctrinal decrees from 1994 onward and knew what these signaled for women's ordination. Thus, the women came to believe that if Roman Catholic women were to be ordained, they would have to go *contra legem*.¹⁰²

Thus, by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the movement that would become RCWP stood poised for ordination. Technically starting in Austria and Germany, the group was fed and fueled by international forces and foundations. Women's ordination activists kept in view the changes taking place in other Christian traditions, particularly the Episcopal Church USA. And Vatican forces were still propelling women toward ordination—although in vastly different ways than during Vatican II. Whereas the Vatican inspired women's ordination hopes

¹⁰¹ For a critical perspective of the WOW meetings in 2001 and 2005, as well as criticism of the women's ordination movement, see Donna O'Connor-Hunnisett, O.C.D.S., "The 'ordination' of 'womenpriests,'" *Catholic Insight*, October 2005, http://catholicinsight.com/online/feminism/article_643.shtml (accessed August 9, 2011).

¹⁰² Ida Raming, "Situation of Women in the Roman Catholic Church: Canonical Background and Perspective," in *Women Find a Way*, 21-26; Iris Müller, "My Story, Condensed," in *Women Find a Way*, 19-20; Ida Raming, email interview with author, January 9, 2011.

in the mid-20th century, it would impel women to take steps to ordination *contra legem* by the end of the 20th century. The dance of navigation and negotiation continued.

Conclusion

In its early years, RCWP used the metaphor of moving water to describe its mission and methods. If RCWP is a river, flowing forth from the turn of the twentieth-century, it has been fed by many streams. This chapter has summarized those streams and explained how RCWP has emerged out of Vatican declarations, Catholic feminism, changes in American Christianity, and European theological and activist precedents.

It is not correct to simplify the Catholic women's ordination movement as an antagonistic force thwarting Vatican authority. From the Sister Formation Conference of the 1950s through the Vatican II reforms of the 1960s through the self-conscious attempt to be both Catholic *and* feminist in the 1970s, progressive Catholic women kept their eyes on Church leaders, retained sacraments' centrality, and placed women's ordination within the context of the Catholic theological tradition. Whether through the Deaconess Movement, the Women's Ordination Conference, or personal responses to Protestant and Episcopalian women's ordinations, Catholic women seeking ordination acted in ways that suggest they sought to honor their vocational calls to priesthood and serve their church.

Similarly, it is not correct to label Vatican officials as villains thwarting women's equality at every turn. Especially during Vatican II, rhetoric in the form of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Pacem in Terris* gave women hope for greater agency and opportunity within the Church. American bishops, especially, reached out to women: some tried to talk with ordination activists in the mid-1970s, and others spent a decade trying to draft a Pastoral Letter on women in the church. A number of bishops worked covertly with WOC's RAPPORT group, discussing the Pastoral

Letter and holding dialogue about women's ordination. That these efforts failed does not undermine the bishops' initial motivations. What can be argued is that since *Inter Insigniores* and John Paul II's papacy, Vatican rhetoric has not encouraged women's hopes: in fact, Rome has increasingly emphasized women's traditional roles and curtailed discussion on women's ordination. Most progressive Catholic women have found little reason for optimism: instead, they have seen only the incentive to act, and out of this frustration, RCWP arose. Roman Catholic Womenpriests has turned away from theological petitions and towards deliberate action. RCWP may have performed its first public action in 2002, but it emerged from a crucible of contemporary forces that both inspired and discouraged Catholics supporting women's ordination. If RCWP is currently "making history," it is doing so by standing upon the myriad histories that preceded it. Yet it also takes a defiant new step in the women's ordination debate by actively and actually ordaining women. As women's ordinations are the hallmark of the RCWP movement, ordinations are where we turn next.

CHAPTER 3:

A NEW ORDO? ORDINATIONS AS TRANS-PERFORMANCE

The bishops reiterated throughout the service that this was an historic event: “the first Roman Catholic ordination of women in North America.” The date was July 25, 2005, and the location was a rented boat sailing on the St. Lawrence Seaway, an international passage flowing between Canadian and American borders. Presiding over this ceremony were three female bishops: Gisela Forster and Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, both members of the Danube Seven who had been secretly consecrated bishops two years earlier, and Patricia Fresen, a former Dominican sister who had been consecrated covertly just months before.¹ In addressing the people gathered who were, most assuredly, sympathetic to their cause², the bishops used a shared homily to make clear their aims and their authority. The women described the ordination’s ship location as a symbol of the RCWP movement. As Mayr-Lumetzberger explained, the ship served as a symbol of “movement, of going forward.” The ship does not rest in stagnant water but “is full of life and presence...[and] power and hope.” Forster then contrasted this RCWP ship with the Vatican’s:

¹ All of these women were consecrated bishops by male bishops. In contrast, in April 2009, four American womenpriests (Joan Houk, Andrea Johnson, Regina Nicolosi, and Bridget Mary Meehan) were consecrated bishops at the hands of female bishops Fresen, Mayr-Lumetzberger, and Ida Raming. American Dana Reynolds had already been ordained a bishop through RCWP, in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2008, by Patricia Fresen, Gisela Forster, and Ida Raming.

² I say that ordination attendees were likely sympathetic for a couple of reasons. First, Church leaders had made it clear that attendance was disobedience, and so just being there was a political act. Second, tickets were expensive and hard to come by.

The ship of the Vatican hierarchy has been lying at anchor in the harbor for many centuries... Sailors who are often unwilling to do the necessary work to keep the ship moving...but who are content to...sleep in the harbor, year after year, century after century. We are now boarding the ship, and we are saying...the sleep of the Roman Catholic hierarchy must end, and the Vatican sailors must be awakened. We have to sing and shout so loudly that they will be awakened... Women are ready...to guide the ship through dangerous water. We women are ready!

Following on the heels of Forster's appeal for Vatican reform, Fresen heralded the achievements of nineteenth century women's rights activists like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and she juxtaposed these with the women on the ship: "We are taking with them a stand against the oppression of women in the Roman Catholic Church—a necessary stand." Mayr-Lumetzberger then defended the womenbishops' authority as defined by Roman Catholic tradition: she reminded listeners that the bishops had received the full apostolic succession, and though they could not reveal the names of the male bishops who ordained them, Mayr-Lumetzberger thanked them for "having the courage of [their] convictions and taking such a risk so women can be ordained." In the homily and elsewhere in the ordination service, the bishops reminded their audience that their actions were historic, progressive, contentious, and validated by the Church's own rules.³

Notably, RCWP's audience extended beyond the ship's confines and beyond the St. Lawrence. Journalists would ensure that the story spread. Media flocked to the ceremony, snapping photographs and requesting interviews. Many journalists boarded the boat, and RCWP organizers struggled to keep the press in designated areas.⁴ One still photograph taken on land shows the three bishops, fully vested, standing arm in arm, looking out over a media sea. At least

³ St. Lawrence Seaway Ordination, ceremony filming, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

⁴ St. Lawrence Seaway Pre-Ordination, pre-ordination filming, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

fifteen cameras—still and video—press in on them.⁵ In the days following the ordination, news articles, briefs, and photographs would make the rounds in newspapers and on websites. Indeed, RCWP's ordination ceremonies—especially in the movement's early years—often have been swirled in a media storm, and as the photograph I described shows, as the bishops pose calmly, in vestments, before swarms of journalists, RCWP's women embrace the publicity that media attention affords. News coverage increases public awareness of the RCWP movement and gives the organization and ordinands an opportunity to make a case for women's equality and against Catholic Church policies. In the example of the St. Lawrence ordination, then, the ordination's audience extended beyond the ship. The ordination ceremony provided a platform upon which RCWP could build and shape their message, as an example of transgressive actions wrapped in the Roman Catholic tradition of ordination.

This chapter examines RCWP's ordination ceremonies as public performances designed to capture attention, garner sympathy, and transform unordained women into womenpriests. Ordinations are a decidedly public display of how RCWP negotiates its own identity and claims a transgressive position vis-à-vis the Church. RCWP uses ordinations to transgress Church laws within the framework of a traditional Roman Catholic ordination ceremony. More to the point, RCWP's ordinations are largely public events; they are also highly controversial and, as a result, attract media attention. The ordinations speak to a range of audiences: ordinations are performed for the media, Church leaders, fellow Catholics, and the court of public opinion.

In the following analysis, I focus largely on two sources that clarify and challenge RCWP's ordination performances. The first is an article by Susan Foster titled "Choreographies of Protest." Foster seeks to correct other theories of protest and performance—which she

⁵ Untitled and uncredited photograph, Dorothy Irvin, "The Rebound 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007: The Archaeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church," 53. Purchased by author from Irvin.

contends have tended to overlook the body's significance—by modeling ways to treat the body as an “articulate signifying agent” that does actual work as a part of protest. She argues that bodies can be both symbolic action and physical intervention. She takes as her case studies three twentieth-century examples of embodied protest: the Greensboro lunch counter sit-ins, the ACT-UP “die ins” of the 1980s, and the World Trade Organization meetings protest in Seattle, WA in 1999. Foster considers how these non-violent protests were designed to garner media attention and inspire policy/political change: “By showing how bodies make articulate choices based upon their intelligent reading of other bodies, I will endeavor to frame a new perspective on individual agency and collective action, one that casts the body in a central role as enabling human beings to work together to create social betterment.”⁶ In this quote, Foster notes not only how bodies are “read” by audiences, but also suggests that bodies “doing certain things” can become a potential force for social change. To read Foster's case studies alongside RCWP's ordination ceremonies shows how RCWP uses ordinations as protest, one that criticizes Church teaching on women's ordination while enacting a scenario in which women are/can be ordained, validly in the line of apostolic succession. Foster invites readers—and propels my own analysis—to appreciate the embodied nature of RCWP ordinations, not only as letting the womenpriests enact their vision for the Church but also in signaling to others—supporters and detractors—what womenpriests' (bodies) say, do, and look like.

In addition to Foster's article, I evoke and implement the concept of transperformance. While not yet receiving widespread use, some performance studies scholars have used the term transperformance to describe potential for change—the same potential that is inherent in ritual

⁶ Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographies of Protest,” *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 395-412; quote from 397.

liminality, i.e., the boundary crossing that gets inscribed in rituals like Catholic sacraments.⁷ The prefix “trans” is often affixed to words so to suggest movement. Mayr-Lumetzberger, recall, analogized RCWP to a ship in terms of movement, change, and going forward. The concept of transperformance is important in this analysis because it brings together the driving forces of this chapter: trans (as a term that means across, between, beyond, over, or through) and performance (a term which for me has a multitude of meanings, but which Madison and Hamera have helpfully described as not simply entertainment, but “creation and being” and which I often think of as an intentional, embodied action or practice, performed for an audience, involving a communicative aspect⁸). More specifically, I investigate RCWP’s ordinations as transperformances with a decidedly public flavor, i.e., as public performances, which I define as performances designed to (publicly) claim space, engage conflict, assert identity, and force new discursive norms/force a new/renewed discourse about women in Roman Catholicism. Furthermore, to study RCWP’s ordinations as public, transperformances is to investigate how other instances of “trans” are operative—in terms of pushing boundaries and sharing ideas—in RCWP’s ordination ceremonies.

“Transformation” is one example. To be sure, transformation rests at the heart of Roman Catholic ordination. In Catholicism, ordination is the sacrament of Holy Orders, during which a candidate is transformed, either into a deacon, a priest, or a bishop. During Holy Orders, grace and the Holy Spirit are conferred upon a candidate. How this happens connects to the mysteries of the faith and involves supernatural elements. During ordination ceremonies, candidates are forever transformed; they receive an “indelible mark” upon their souls and

⁷ When thinking about trans-performance, I start with Josette Féral, “Every Transaction Conjures a New Boundary,” *Critical Theory and Performance*, eds. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 49-66; Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 72-4.

⁸ D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006), xii.

become “distinguished from others, designated as a minister of Christ.”⁹ As a result of this transformation, a priest is distinguished from the laity and is able to perform sacraments.

The womenpriests do not necessarily allege all of the transformative changes (e.g. the “indelible mark”) that Church teaching claims for its own (male) priests—yet these differences between the Roman Catholic Church’s and RCWP’s understanding of ordination are not part of RCWP’s public performance of ordination. These distinctions are also not part of this chapter: what is or is not happening sacramentally—in the women’s own understanding—will be taken up in Chapter 4. What I look at in this chapter is what, how, and why ordination ceremonies signal the transformation that RCWP wants for the Roman Catholic Church and Roman Catholic priesthood. With ordination ceremonies, the women are transformed into priests, signaling that they are no longer waiting for change in Canon Law or Church doctrine. The “trans” ideas of movement and exchange apply to RCWP in ways beyond sacramental change: “trans” is also about womenpriests entering (and seeking to amend) the debate about women’s ordination in public and performative ways.

The lens of transperformance, then, is valuable for studying womenpriests because the movement is about pushing Roman Catholic boundaries in the service of gender equality. What they do is *transgressive*; what they want is the *transformation* of the Church and the priesthood. How they do this is through language, ritual, and imagery that is *traditionally* Roman Catholic—which makes RCWP’s actions all the more transgressive, all the more provocative and controversial in their apparent familiarity. As I show through the example of four ordination ceremonies, RCWP restages and repositions the movement through rhetorical gestures and frameworks. In analyzing these ordinations as transperformances, I simultaneously provide

⁹ New Advent, “Holy Orders,” Catholic online encyclopedia, www.newadvent.org.

historical background on RCWP's evolution, in terms of size, scope, and ideation, from a small group in Western Europe to a flourishing movement in North America.

Rocking the Boat: The Danube Seven

On June 29, 2002, seven women were ordained Roman Catholic priests in a ceremony that took place on the Danube River, aboard a boat that set sail from Passau. The summer day was beautiful, with clear blue skies and a beaming sun. It was the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul, a day which historically sees a number of Catholic *men* ordained. The ceremony began with the words, "Today the boat is our church."¹⁰ The ship, sailing in flowing water, was both a pragmatic solution and a symbolic choice. As women deliberately breaking Canon Law, the ordinands could not hope for ceremonial space within a Catholic Church. If they sailed in international waters, they were not disobeying Catholic doctrine in any one Catholic diocese, and therefore they avoided messy jurisdictional issues. On a boat they could control participants and ensure the ceremony not be disrupted. Symbolically, the boat evoked images of Jesus, fishing with his apostles or calming stormy seas; it also suggested motion, a smooth forward progress, gliding over waters teeming with life. The boat became the church that the Roman Catholic Church was not—or, was not yet. And so, on the Danube River, on a Passau pleasure boat, on that June day, seven women were ordained: Pia Brunner, Gisela Forster, Iris Muller, and Ida Raming of Germany; Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger and Adelinde Theresia Roitinger of Austria; and Angela White (a pseudonym for Austrian-born Dagmar Celeste) of the United States. In time, they would be called the Danube Seven.¹¹

¹⁰ Dorothy McEwan, eyewitness accounts, <http://www.womenpriests.org/called/mcewan.asp>.

¹¹ Throughout this section, general information on the Danube Seven comes largely from the following resources: John L. Allen, Jr., "Ordinations ignite debate over tactics: women face excommunication for actions," *National Catholic Reporter*, July 19, 2002; John L. Allen Jr., "Seven women 'ordained' priests June 29," *National Catholic Reporter*,

For the ordained, this day marked the culmination of years of preparation—and decades of working toward Catholic women’s ordination. The ordination was also a tactical departure from the previous three decades of activism. In a public statement, theologians Ida Raming and Iris Müller explained the Seven’s motives and calculated approach. Both women had been involved for decades in the women’s ordination movement. It was with the confidence that comes from experience, then, that they said,

Since continuing discussion [of women’s ordination] does not produce any prospect, as experience has shown, the women have decided to opt for an ordination *contra legem* (against the law; c. 1024 CIC). For a change in the juridical position of women in the Roman Catholic Church cannot be expected in the foreseeable future. As is known, in a General Church Council that could decide about the admission of women to the ministries, only bishops (therefore exclusively men!) would have voting rights, and bishops have shown themselves in the past as conformists to what the Pope and the teaching authority want.¹²

Acknowledging theirs an “illicit” ordination, Raming and Müller went on to lay out the theological and legal problems with Rome’s position. They went so far as to label c. 1024 CIC and the ban on women priests a “heresy.” They also explained the ordinands’ sense of call and need to honor a vocation they believed came from God. They felt they had no choice but to protest—and this is what the Danube ordination became: “The women...understand their action as a clear prophetic sign of protest, a protest against doctrine and Church law that

July 1, 2002; Gisela Forster, “The Start: The Danube Seven and the Bishop Heroes,” in *Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests*, eds. Elsie Hainz McGrath, Bridget Mary Meehan, and Ida Raming (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2008): 9-13; Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, “Reflections on My Way: God’s Call to Me,” in *Women Find a Way*, 14-18; Iris Müller, ““My Story, Condensed,” in *Women Find a Way*, 19-20; Ida Raming, “Situation of Women in the Roman Catholic Church: Canonical Background and Perspective,” in *Women Find a Way*, 21-26; Dagmar Braun Celeste, “Soli Deo Amor: Story of a Vagabond Troubadour,” in *Women Find a Way*, 4-8.

¹² Ida Raming and Iris Müller, “Statement regarding the ordination of women in Austria (29 July 2002),” Womenpriests.org, <http://www.womenpriests.org/called/ramista2.asp> (accessed November 17, 2010).

discriminates against women.”¹³ Their actions would be intentional, their disobedience calculated. What they did, they did with an eye toward Rome and the intent to transform.

Still, it is important to note that this early Danube movement—not yet called “Roman Catholic Womenpriests”—was also intended to be *transitional* as well as transformative. Within a few years of the Danube ordination, the group (which by then was calling itself “Roman Catholic Womenpriests” in English and “Weilheämter für Frauen” in German) would make clear in writing and in speeches its transitional nature. Placing RCWP in the context of Roman Catholic history, the group’s original draft constitution read, “We are living in a time of transition: We are moving from the non-recognition and exclusion of women to service in all church ministries and to the full co-creation and co-operation of women on all levels of the Roman Catholic Church.” The very first goal expressed in the constitution was this: “RC Womenpriests’ is to bring about the full equality of women in the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time we are striving for a new model of Priestly Ministry. When these goals are reached and Can. 1024 CIC has been changed, the group ‘RC Womenpriests’ will be dissolved.”¹⁴ The movement’s current operating structure echoed this: “We envision: the RCWP initiative as a renewal movement within the Roman Catholic Church that is transitional, and whose goal is to achieve full equality for women and men within the Church.”¹⁵ The transitional message was repeated again in 2005 when Patricia Fresen addressed the Southeast Pennsylvania Women’s Ordination Conference: “[W]e are in a transitional time,” between the need to ordain clergy and, perhaps, a future day when leadership will come from a community, with no need for

¹³ Ida Raming and Iris Müller, “Statement regarding the ordination of women in Austria (29 July 2002),” Womenpriests.org, <http://www.womenpriests.org/called/ramista2.asp> (accessed November 17, 2010).

¹⁴ Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “History: Original Draft Constitution,” Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/NEWhistory.htm> (accessed August 8, 2011).

¹⁵ Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “History: Current Operating Structure,” Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/NEWhistory.htm> (accessed August 30, 2011).

ordination.¹⁶ Thus, from the outset, the womenpriests have seen their actions as a necessary—and necessarily transitional—step in fundamentally transforming the Church.

What would become known as Roman Catholic Womenpriests began as the Danube Ordination Movement; the Danube Ordination Movement began in Germany and Austria as the *Kirche von unten*. A small grassroots movement that emerged in the late 1990s, *Kirche von unten* focused on Catholic women's ordination. The main group then divided into smaller groups located in three different Austrian cities: Linz, Innsbruck, and Vienna. Each subgroup began preparing for ordination. As Gisela Forster, one of the Danube Seven described it, the program drew about thirty women: teachers, nurses, women religious, and theologians, all of whom desired ordination. They undertook a three-year preparation program—which Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger designed and We Are Church – Austria approved—that would make them ready for formal ordination.¹⁷ This was the group Mayr-Lumetzberger first announced to Women's Ordination Worldwide (WOW) members in 1998 and again in 2001. If these women were going to argue that their ordinations were legitimate, they would need to show that they had studied, worked, and trained for the priesthood, just as male candidate must do.

Mayr-Lumetzberger knew that, in constructing this preparation program and working toward ordination, she was going against not only the Vatican, but also some Catholic feminists who questioned the need for women's ordination altogether. Church leadership has denied outright that women are even suitable matter for ordination; in contrast, certain progressive

¹⁶ Patricia Fresen, "Prophetic Obedience: The Experience and Vision of Roman Catholic Womenpriests" (speech given at the Southeast Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference, March 2005).

¹⁷ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, "Reflections on My Way: God's Call to Me," in *Women Find a Way*, 14-18. As Mayr-Lumetzberger tells it, she spearheaded efforts to design a priesthood preparation program because there "were no legal possibilities" for women to do so within Church structures. Mayr-Lumetzberger calls this the "program for the preparation of women for sacramental orders in the Roman Catholic Church," and she herself helped lead the three Austrian groups. Mayr-Lumetzberger has said that she believed at this time, women's ordination activists had to work toward a "practical" approach. In other words, abstract theorizing and theologizing could not offer the movement what practical, concrete solutions—like the preparation programs—could.

Catholics contend women *can* be validly ordained but argue whether or not women *should* be ordained. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza famously said in 1995 that “ordination is subordination,” and other women have agreed with her, contending that priesthood is inherently clerical and arguing instead for women’s ministries.¹⁸ Mayr-Lumetzberger was aware of these debates but believed the time had come for a new solution:

Considering all that [theoretical groundwork] with proper respect, I myself have never felt forced to do theoretical work. I had the feeling that the groundwork on women in the church had reached a level on which a *practical* approach had to follow. I decided not to join into the discussion on women’s ordination, but to take a practical step by setting down facts.¹⁹

Counter to both the Vatican’s position and particular feminists’ position, then, Mayr-Lumetzberger believed women could and should be validly ordained. In 2005, Mayr-Lumetzberger would speak for the movement and say that, *contra* Fiorenza and others, RCWP believes that ordination and equality go hand in hand. For Mayr-Lumetzberger, ordained ministry is not about hierarchy; rather, it is about empowering women with sacred responsibilities.²⁰

And yet hierarchy is an integral component of ordination, and the Danube Ordination Movement sought validly ordained male bishops to ordain them. This was an important strategic move: only by using male bishops in the apostolic line could the women claim to be validly ordained and ensure the continuation of Spirit and grace through apostolic succession. Therein

¹⁸ Rosemary Radford Ruether spoke about this very thing at the 2005 WOW conference, where she championed ministries as something functional and connected to other work—and not as connected to a clerical caste. See Mary Whelan, “Ottawa WOWed,” *Equal w/Rites* (Ivyland, PA), Sept – Nov 2005: 1-2; Peg Murphy, “Rosemary Radford Ruether Speaks at WOW,” *Equal w/Rites* (Ivyland, PA), Sept – Nov 2005: 2-3; Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Church as Liberation Community from Patriarchy: The Praxis of Ministry as Discipleship of Equals” (speech given at Women’s Ordination Worldwide, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, July 23, 2005).

¹⁹ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, “Reflections on My Way: God’s Call to Me,” in *Women Find a Way*, 14; emphasis added.

²⁰ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, interview, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

lay their struggle, as the group searched years for a willing bishop. If they were to claim themselves to be *validly* ordained, they would need a bishop who himself stood validly in the line of apostolic succession, who supported women's ordination, and who would be willing to ordain women and risk reprisal in what would be a very public ceremony. Mayr-Lumetzberger searched for a bishop, and Raming found one in Germany she thought would be willing to ordain women, at least to the diaconate. But while this man would think and even speak contrary to the Vatican position, he told Raming he was not prepared to act against Canon Law. He believed doing so would only create scandal and would not help the cause.²¹ Disappointments like this slowed but did not stop the women, and they ultimately found not one, but two bishops who, on March 25, 2002, Palm Sunday, ordained six women to the diaconate.²² For the Danube ordination, organizers lined up three bishops to ordain the women: the two from the diaconate ordination and a third. Once they had ordaining bishops, the women could proceed toward a priesthood ordination.

Beyond finding a bishop—no simple task indeed—the women had to contend with accusations that their ordaining bishops were not “legitimate” or in “good standing” with Rome. Promoting themselves as womenpriests who stood in the line of apostolic succession was a crucial public relations move, but the ordaining bishops' Catholic histories were not unblemished. Questions surround and continue to surround the three male bishops involved: the identities of two—Romulo Braschi of Argentina and Ferdinand Regelsberger, a former Benedictine monk who lived locally—are certain, and the identity of the third is secret. Braschi was a validly ordained Roman Catholic priest who broke from the Church in the 1970s over

²¹ Ida Raming, e-mail interview with author, January 9, 2011.

²² In her chapter in *Women Find a Way*, Gisela Forster names the six women ordained to the diaconate as Ida Raming, Iris Muller, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, Viktoria Sperrer, Adelinde Roitingner, and herself. Three months later on the Danube River, Sperrer was not ordained a priest, and Dagmar Celeste and Pia Brunner were. It is unclear why this change took place or when Celeste and Brunner were ordained deacons.

what he saw as Church apathy during Argentina's "Dirty War." He went on to form his own Independent Catholic church, called "The Catholic Apostolic Charismatic Church of 'Jesus the King'."²³ When asked about the men who ordained her and the rest of the Danube Seven, Ida Raming was quick to defend Braschi's qualifications. She pointed out that, while other members of the Church hierarchy collaborated with the Argentine military regime, Braschi refused and instead worked "underground" during this politically dangerous time. He left the institutional Church, married, and joined a more charismatic Catholic group. While some have suggested that it was not a *Roman* Catholic bishop who ordained Braschi in the late 1990s, Raming said "his ordination is in the line of apostolic succession," although she admits he was no longer under Church jurisdiction when he ordained the Danube Seven.²⁴ Braschi's own questionable lineage renders Regelsberger's problematic as well, for he was ordained by Braschi months before the June ordination specifically to be the womenpriests' local bishop. And so, while the women worked to ensure their ordinations would both be valid and be viewed as valid in terms of Catholic tradition and apostolic succession, the two named bishops could not escape scrutiny.

The third ordaining bishop did not raise similar questions, perhaps in large part because RCWP did not identify him. Although his identity is far less certain, some sources have identified Dusan Spinner of the Czech Republic. My own interviews suggest that a number of RCWP's newer members do not know the man's identity; members who do know will neither

²³ The website for Braschi's church is <http://jesustheking.20fr.com/> (accessed November 19, 2010). It seems Braschi was ordained not once, but twice: in 1998 by Roberto Padin from the "Catholic-Apostolic Church of Brasil," and in 1999 by Jeronimo Podesta, who'd been a bishop in Argentina until his social and reform activism put him on the outs with the hierarchical church. It is unclear why Braschi would've felt the need to be twice ordained (though the practice is not uncommon, with *sub conditione* ["subject to condition"] ordinations being the Church's way of ensuring that, if the first ordination didn't "work," the second would amend the error). For information on Braschi and the Danube ordinations, see John L. Allen, "Seven women 'ordained' priests June 29: In ceremony they term 'not licit, but a fact,'" *National Catholic Reporter*, July 1, 2002 and John L. Allen, "Ordinations ignite debate over tactics," *National Catholic Reporter*, July 19, 2002. For a letter Forster wrote to the press in the days surrounding the Danube ordination, and which specifically talks about Braschi's qualifications, see Gisela Forster, "Statement on the bishop's ordination and ordination of women priests," trans. John Wijngaards, Womenpriests.org, <http://www.womenpriests.org/called/forster3.asp> (accessed November 19, 2010).

²⁴ Ida Raming, e-mail interview with author, January 9, 2011.

confirm nor deny Spiner's role. I will proceed with Spiner as the supposed third bishop, but let it be noted that I could not learn this information from any Roman Catholic womanpriest. That said, Spiner's story is quite different from Braschi's and Regelsberger's, and his lineage is decidedly less problematic. Like Ludmilla Javarova, whom I introduced in the previous chapter, Spiner secretly became a bishop at the hands of Bishop Felix Davidek in Communist-era Czechoslovakia, when Soviets were persecuting the Catholic Church. Spiner was one of hundreds ordained secretly in order to sustain an oppressed church. Although the Vatican later recognized Spiner's episcopal ordination, he had agreed not to function as a priest. Thus, if the third ordaining bishop was indeed Spiner, his legitimacy is far less problematic than Braschi's or Regelsberger's; by not naming him publicly, however, RCWP continues to risk outright dismissal on the basis of their episcopal lineage.

These questions of legitimacy and being in "good standing" with Rome are only one part of a legal puzzle that, at heart, is more about theology than Canon Law. On the one hand, if these three men were themselves ordained validly, in the line of apostolic succession, by a bishop who himself stood in that line, any candidate he ordained would also be, theologically, validly ordained. Even if the bishop were not in good standing, and even if he had been excommunicated, his power to confer sacramental ordination would stand. His actions may not be sanctioned by Rome, but his ordaining authority would still exist. But, on the other hand, Rome had already stated—in *Inter Insigniores* and *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*—that the Church had no authority to confer ordination on women, and thus, in Vatican eyes, a bishop's legitimacy was a moot point. A male candidate could be ordained, even by a bishop not in communion with Rome; a female candidate, however, could never receive ordination validly—even presumably by the Pope himself. In proceeding with their ordination, then, the Danube ordinands placed authority upon the first theological consideration and disregarded the second. By placing

themselves as prepared and prayerful candidates, wearing vestments, and laying supine in subordination to the Holy Spirit, their bodies indicated to the bishops and the people gathered, “We can and we will be ordained,” regardless of particular theological impediments. Just as the women would be transformed into priests, so too would theology undergo a kind of transformation.²⁵

It was crucially important to the Danube Seven that they stand within Church and apostolic tradition—even when their purpose was to transgress Church laws and ultimately transform the institutional Church. Being traditional was, for the women, a way of being legitimate and ensuring authenticity. Keeping close to Roman Catholic ritual practice also served, to be sure, to infuriate Church officials, who would have bristled at both the women’s claim of being authentically Roman Catholic and their re-performance of Roman Catholic tradition—all within a theological framework that deviated from Roman Catholic teaching.

The Danube ceremony itself, despite organizers’ meticulous planning, was not glitch-free. Spiner—the ordinands’ most apostolically valid bishop—missed the ceremony altogether. Some news reports stated that Spiner was detained by traffic, but Gisela Forster tells a different story. She claims that Spiner was detained intentionally, locked in his room at the religious community where he had been staying as a visitor.²⁶ This version, also attested to elsewhere, suggests a conspiracy on the part of the official church to disrupt the ordination. If correct, this would not be the hierarchy’s first attempt to stop the Danube women: when it first heard of the planned

²⁵ In her “Choreographies of Protest,” Foster describes the men at the Greensboro lunch counter in a similar way: by sitting at the counter, facing forward expectantly, the protesters’ bodies did not need words to communicate their message: “we can and will be served.” Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographies of Protest,” *Theatre Journal* 55, no. 3 (2003): 395-412.

²⁶ Forster, “The Start: The Danube Seven and the Bishop Heroes,” in *Women Find a Way*, 9-13. Forster is not alone in saying Spiner was intentionally detained. See also the eyewitness account from Dorothea McEwan, “Valid but Illegal (6 July 2002),” Womenpriests.org, <http://www.womenpriests.org/called/mcewan.asp> (accessed November 19, 2010).

ordinations, the Church threatened anyone who attended the ordination—including journalists—with excommunication. The Church then sought to prevent the ceremony by suing to rent out the Passau pleasure boat on which the ordination would occur. This tactic was unsuccessful because the Church could not pay more than the women had paid.²⁷

The ordination still took place, yet in some ways clashed with the ordinands' vision. According to the ordained women's recollections and eyewitness accounts, Spiner's absence was liturgically disruptive.²⁸ Not only was Spiner's apostolic authority unequivocal, whereas Braschi's and Regelsberger's raised questions, but organizers had designed the program with Spiner in mind as presider. Without Spiner, Braschi had to step in as the chief authority figure, and he had other ideas as to how the ceremony should proceed. He insisted on implementing these ideas—and thereby changing the sacrament-as-scheduled—at the eleventh hour. Although he never claimed any *Roman* authority—and in fact is said to have told the crowd, "I am catholic but not Roman, [and] I am not working in the name of the Roman Catholic Church"²⁹—he insisted on using the *Roman* Catholic rite to the letter. As *National Catholic Reporter's* John L. Allen, Jr. recounts, Braschi read a prayer in Spanish that mentioned only "brothers," or *hermanos*. Someone certainly moved by the spirit of the occasion cried out "and *hermanas*," or "sisters." Braschi's response was swift: "Today we follow the Roman rite."³⁰ Braschi's Spanish speaking posed another problem. Spiner would have conducted the ceremony in German, a language most

²⁷ Forster, "The Start: The Danube Seven and the Bishop Heroes," in *Women Find a Way*, 9-13.

²⁸ The eyewitness accounts I refer to come from "The Ordination of Catholic Women in Austria on the 29th of June 2002," Womenpriests.org, <http://www.womenpriests.org/called/29june02.asp>, under "Detailed eyewitness reports" (accessed November 17, 2010). I also rely on John Allen's two *National Catholic Reporter* articles and the Danube Seven's stories from *Women Find a Way*.

²⁹ Halter, *The Papal No*, 147 and John L. Allen, "Ordinations ignite debate over tactics," *National Catholic Reporter*, July 19, 2002. Braschi's direct quote here comes from Halter's book, and she in turn cites Allen as her source. Allen does say Braschi "acknowledged that he has no authority to perform an ordination for the Roman Catholic church." It is unclear where the direct quote Halter uses comes from.

³⁰ John L. Allen, "Seven women 'ordained' priests June 29: In ceremony they term 'not licit, but a fact,'" *National Catholic Reporter*, July 1, 2002.

attendees could understand. Braschi used Spanish, and the translator struggled to replicate the details and nuances of Braschi's words. Finally, organizers had put great effort into designing and publishing a booklet that ordination-goers could follow throughout the liturgy, but Braschi's last-minute modifications affected the booklets' usefulness.

Still, many of the ceremony's visual elements took place as planned, and thus, the "women's bodies in protest" aim was retained. In the weeks leading up to the ceremony, the candidates had special chasubles (the sleeveless, outer liturgical vestment that priests wear when celebrating Mass) made for them. Instead of simply recreating the stoles that male priests wear, the women made hand-printed silk stoles. As Mayr-Lumetzberger said jokingly in 2005, there is no book that instructs one on "how to be a female deacon, priest, [or] bishop...[so] we try things!" Clothing, then, became an opportunity for experimentation. Mayr-Lumetzberger went on to say that, because women have female figures and men's clothes don't fit women, it is important to "change a little bit" the clerical clothing.³¹ Thus, the womenpriests imitated male vestments in so far as the male priestly clothing automatically evokes an association with sacred authority and sacramental leadership in viewers' minds. Yet they modified the vestments to reflect what they saw as softness and grace more commonly associated with women.

In addition to the women's dress, the ceremony recreated the embodied gestures of the centuries-old ordination rite. Beginning with the presentation of candidates, whereby the seven women were announced to the presiding bishop(s) and the gathered congregation; to the Litany of Saints during which the candidates lie prostrated before the bishop, stomach to the floor, arms outstretched; to the Laying on of Hands, during which the bishops and many others present laid hands on the women's heads, ensuring apostolic succession and extending the community's blessing, respectively; to the Investiture, where the newly ordained received their

³¹ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, interview, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

stoles and chausibles; to the anointing of hands and the presentation of chalice and paten, the Danube ordination allowed the female ordinands to perform the same ritualized movements as male candidates.³²

Performing bodies were not the only thing on organizers' minds: to cover their theological bases, the womenpriests planned to ask the absentee third bishop—Spiner—to ordain them *sub conditione*, “subject to condition.” In other words, if the Danube ordination was for some reason invalid, or dismissed as invalid by critics, owing to Braschi's questionable legacy, Spiner's Laying on of Hands would ensure a valid ordination; if, however, the Danube ordination *had* been valid, Spiner's ordination would be unnecessary and, thus, ineffectual.³³ Clearly, the Danube Seven were hugely concerned with ensuring theirs a *valid* ordination, and the plan for the *sub conditione* step showed the group's determination to stand within tradition, with legitimate apostolic succession.

It is important to stress the ways the Danube Seven sought to transform Roman Catholic authority and doctrinal interpretation. The Danube Seven's actions and claims to valid ordinations point to a transformation of theological dogma and the Church's power to limit ordination to men only. In staging a *contra legem* ordination, which they themselves viewed as a “protest” undertaken in a “prophetic” spirit, the women bypassed Vatican doctrine and went straight to God, thus transforming the Roman Catholic Church's power-to-ordain. Church tradition retained authority, but the Vatican did not. The ordination drew a sharp line between what the Roman Catholic hierarchy could do and could not do. The Church could establish a theological framework and liturgical system, namely apostolic succession and the Laying on of Hands. But, according to the Danube Seven's actions, the Church could not ultimately decide

³² Dorothea McEwan, “Valid but Illegal (6 July 2002),” Womenpriests.org, <http://www.womenpriests.org/called/mcewan.asp> (accessed November 19, 2010).

³³ I asked Ida Raming if the Danube Seven were, in fact, ordained *sub conditione*, but she would not comment.

which genders were and were not capable of receiving ordained authority. In this way, Roman Catholic tradition became the medium through which sacramental transformation occurred (specifically through ordination-ceremony specifics and the Laying on of Hands)—but nothing more. Roman Catholic ordination ceremonies provided a framework and setting for the Danube Seven’s actions, but did not dictate the rules of engagement. Papal decrees and Canon Law were deemed incapable of preventing these seven women—who had prepared for priesthood and who heard God’s vocational call—from receiving grace and sacramental authority through the Laying on of Hands.

In the aftermath, the women were formally excommunicated. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued three separate documents regarding the Danube ordination: on July 10, 2002, the CDF published the “Warning Regarding the Attempted Priestly Ordination of Some Catholic Women,” which told the women they had until July 22, 2010 to “acknowledge the nullity” of their ordinations and ask forgiveness. The ordained did not meet these demands and were formally excommunicated, via the CDF’s “Decree of Excommunication Regarding the Attempted Priestly Ordination of Some Catholic Women,” on August 5, 2002. To ensure the Vatican’s position on the Danube events was clear, the CDF offered the “Decree on the Attempted Priestly Ordination of Some Catholic Women,” on December 21, 2002. This document noted, among other things, that the excommunication was *ferendae sententiae*, i.e., imposed after a warning.³⁴ Regarding the excommunication, Mary-Lumetzberger said, “[Excommunication] is no more than paper for us. We do not accept this.” The women saw themselves as breaking an unjust canon law—not as acting against the faith. Certainly they did not accept the CDF’s description of them as “schismatics.”³⁵ Interestingly, though ordinations

³⁴ These documents are helpfully gathered in the appendix of Halter, *The Papal ‘No,’* 235-39.

³⁵ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, interview, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

would continue, the Danube Seven would be the last seven women excommunicated (although not the last *threatened* with excommunication) until Rose Marie Hudson and Elsie McGrath—whose ordination ceremony will be taken up later in this chapter—in March 2008. In May 2008, a formal CDF decree ruled *latae sententiae* (or “automatic,” a contrast to *ferendae sententiae*) excommunication for all “attempted ordinations” going forward. But as Gisela Forster writes, “They are not able to stop us, the Danube Seven.”³⁶

These Roman Catholic womenpriests received further help from male Church leaders: months after the 2002 ceremony, a bishop contacted Gisela Forster. He had heard about the Danube Seven and their actions from a television report, and he wanted to support them. He wanted to ordain some of the womenpriests as *bishops* so that the women could go forth and ordain other women. This way, the movement would not need to rely upon male bishops whose identities had to remain concealed. Forster and Mayr-Lumetzberger discerned and ultimately agreed to be consecrated bishops by three valid male bishops. This ceremony happened secretly, in a church, with very few people present. Forster reports that this bishop told the women that these episcopal ordinations were not for them, but for bringing ordination to the world’s women who desire it. He said, “Don’t sleep, don’t do ‘nothing,’ don’t think this is enough. Be active as bishops, go to the people and to those who need you.” Though secret, the ordaining bishops’ names were recorded and notarized and sealed in a vault. Forster writes, “[T]he day will come when the documents will be opened and the Roman Catholic hierarchy will say, ‘Welcome! Welcome to all women priests and women bishops.’”³⁷ Now, the young movement’s members could ordain themselves and not rely on male clergy who endangered their careers with every

³⁶ Forster, “The Start,” in *Women Find a Way*, 12.

³⁷ Forster, “The Start,” in *Women Find a Way*, 12-13.

illegal ordination. This also meant that, by the time RCWP arrived on North American shores, women bishops would hold the presiding authority.

The story of the Danube Seven is one of transformation for a transitional time. With their *contra legem* actions on the Danube River that summer day in 2002, the Danube Seven transformed the rules of the game. Women who wanted to be ordained in the Roman Catholic Church were no longer asking for ordination—they were doing it. They had taken steps to prepare for ordained ministry, found bishops to guarantee their legitimacy, and proceeded to take steps to become ordained priests. The group's actions were deliberately public and designed to protest the Vatican position. The women did not intend to start a new Roman Catholic sect; rather, they wanted their actions to change the church. Thus, their ordinations were done with an awareness of liminality and transitioning. For their part, the Roman Catholic Church felt it could not ignore the Danube Seven's actions. Progressive Catholics petitioning for women's ordination was now an old request, something the Church had decreed could not be discussed. Women actually being ordained, against Canon Law, was a different issue altogether.

Transatlantic Movement and Authority Transferred: The St. Lawrence Seaway, 2005

In the early years following the 2002 Danube ordination, the energized Roman Catholic Womenpriests movement would continue to hold public ordination ceremonies on international waterways. The symbolism remained constant: a boat moving along flowing water, the current's strength and movement analogizing the group's own evolution. Not all ceremonies were public, however: in 2003, of course, Gisela Forster and Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger were ordained bishops in a secret ceremony; also in 2003, Patricia Fresen was ordained a priest by new bishops Forster and Mayr-Lumetzberger. In 2004, the Danube would be the site of another public ordination, and this time, three North American women (one Canadian and two Americans)

would be ordained alongside three European women. In early 2005, an ordination would take place on the Saone, a river in France.³⁸

The ordination of four women to the priesthood and five to the diaconate on July 25, 2005 followed in the movement's growing lineage, with a significant difference: this ceremony marked the first ordination of Roman Catholic women in North America. It took place on a chartered ship that left from Gananoque, Ontario and sailed on the St. Lawrence Seaway, which extends between the United States and Canada. Compounding the ordination's already international flavor was the fact it took place alongside the second WOW (Women's Ordination Worldwide) International Conference, held in Ottawa in July 2005. The St. Lawrence ordination became for some conference-goers the culmination of this international confluence of women working toward both ordination and change in the Roman Catholic Church. Nine women were ordained on this day, four to the priesthood (Michele Birch-Conery, Marie David, Jean Marie St. Onge, and Victoria Rue) and five to the diaconate (Rebecca McGuyver [a pseudonym for Roberta Meehan], Regina Nicolosi, Dana Reyonlds, Kathleen Strack, and Kathy Vandenberg).³⁹ As a transperformance, the ordination *transferred* women's ordained authority from the European continent to the American one; the ceremony also marked the *transatlantic* currents in Catholic reform that were moving back and forth between Europe and North America and signaled *transnational* cooperation among ordination activists.

³⁸ Much information in the following section comes from the following sources: Domenic D. Nicassio, "Canadian archbishop says women's ordination ritual will not be valid," Catholic News Service, June 8, 2005, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0503401.htm> (accessed November 1, 2010); Doug Struck, "Nine Defy Vatican's Ban On Ordination of Women," Washington Post Foreign Service, July 26, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/25/AR2005072501586.html> (accessed November 1, 2010); Roman Catholic Womenpriests, "Photo Gallery: View Movie of the (St. Lawrence) Ordination," Roman Catholic Womenpriests, http://www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org/photo_gallery.htm, click on "View movie of the ordination" (accessed November 1, 2010).

³⁹ These were the names listed in media accounts. Jean-Marie St. Onge is Jean Marie Marchant, and Rebecca McGuyver is Roberta Meehan. Kathleen Strack is now Kathleen Strack Kunster.

Like the original Danube ordination, this St. Lawrence ordination sailed through international waters in order to prevent disruptions and keep the ceremony out of diocesan jurisdiction. Unlike the Danube ordination, this time organizers did not have to worry about finding a male bishop to perform the ceremony: the movement now had three female bishops of its own: Gisela Forster, Patricia Fresen, and Mayr-Lumetzberger. As such, Forster, Fresen, and Mayr-Lumetzberger could and did preside over the sacrament. As they laid hands upon the nine ordinands, they did not just act to confer Holy Orders upon the candidates; they also passed a baton from the European movement to an emerging North American incarnation. This 2005 ordination marked a transfer—of grace (theologically) and of ordained women’s authority (historically)—from European Catholicism to American. The ordained women were aware of this historic exchange, and they used rhetoric and rituals throughout the service to perform the movement’s transatlantic strength and cooperation.

In a ritual that took place between the Entrance Procession and the Presentation of Candidates, the ordinands and ordaining bishops mingled water from their hometowns and home countries into a clear, glass bowl. Bishop Patricia Fresen introduced this ceremony, which marked a departure from the traditional Catholic ordination format: “Today we give honor to our Mother God, that birthed us from the waters of creation and into life in this world. Just as the waters broke in the wombs of our mothers, so we break open the waters of mother church and welcome the birthing of her daughters into equality.” Twelve women then came forward, announcing the source of their small containers of clear water. Lake, river, and ocean water from Boston and Plymouth Harbors, the Mississippi River, the Sacramento River of California, and the Pacific Ocean mingled with water from the Isar River in Munich, a pond from the Austrian Alps, and most fittingly, the Danube River.⁴⁰ This bowl of water became not only a symbol of

⁴⁰ St. Lawrence Seaway Ordination, ceremony filming, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

the womenpriests' community and their unity in one body of Jesus, as Fresen suggested, but became also a way of symbolically enacting the union of European and North American activism and ministry.

Recognition of transatlantic unity continued into the homily, where the presiding bishops spoke together about the group's activism and desire for equality, using the language of ships, water, harbors, and storms. Mayr-Lumetzberger said of the rented ship hosting the ordination: "A flowing, moving, sailing ship, a ship full of thinking and feeling people, a living ship full of power and hope.... It is a ship—our ship... The ship as a symbol of movement, as going forward, as gliding smoothly on water. It does not rest in stagnant water, but is full of life and presence."⁴¹ Gisela Forster then contrasted RCWP's living, moving ship with the Vatican's, which she said had been "lying at anchor in the harbor for many centuries." The crowd laughed heartily as Forster continued: "We are now boarding this [docked Vatican] ship, and we are saying—in a friendly way, we are saying—the sleep of the Roman Catholic hierarchy must end, and the Vatican sailors must be awakened." She concluded by announcing, "women are ready...to guide the ship through dangerous water!" Finally, Fresen acknowledged that this ship—the metaphorical ship of the RCWP movement—will sail through many storms, but the Holy Spirit captains this ship. Thus, Fresen argued, quoting nineteenth century American civil-rights leader and women's rights activist, Susan B. Anthony, "Failure is impossible!"⁴² This ordination was just as much a public performance and protest as the Danube Seven's was, but with emphasis placed upon movement—specifically, transference and transportation.

The St. Lawrence Seaway ordination became symbolic for more than ships and movement: it also signaled the dialectic relationship of give and take that had long been taking

⁴¹ St. Lawrence Seaway Ordination, ceremony filming, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

⁴² St. Lawrence Seaway Ordination, ceremony filming, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

place between European and North American women's ordination activists. As I explored in the previous chapter, European and U.S. women have made significant but distinct contributions to the women's ordination movement. When European women instigated organized dissent, as with the group that would become St. Joan's International Alliance, U.S. women took the organized framework and ignited a national Catholic feminist network. When Europe offered women the theological education that American Catholic women could not attain, European women with doctorates wrote the theological analyses that would fuel Catholic feminism internationally. European (and especially German) universities provided foundations in Catholic theology for American women denied theological degrees in U.S. Catholic schools. Now, with the St. Lawrence ordination, European women were again bringing a new Catholic feminist framework to American soil. American Catholic women may not have been the first to agitate formally for women's ordination, but by the late twentieth century, theirs had become the loudest voices on the scene.⁴³

In considering the interplay between Europe and the U.S. in terms of women's ordination, the events at Spiritus Christi in Rochester, New York are also significant. In 2001 and then again in 2003, this Catholic parish ordained Mary Ramerman and Denise Donato, respectively, to the priesthood. The church, originally named Corpus Christi, had long been part of the Rochester diocese. But throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the church became increasingly progressive in its theology. For example, Father James Callan had appointed Ramerman—a non-

⁴³ Amid this discussion of the give-and-take between North American and European activism, we must not overlook the contributions that American suffragists—like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton—made to European suffrage movements—the original incarnation of St. Joan's International Alliance. Nineteenth and twentieth century women's suffrage is a separate issue than the Catholic women's ordination movement, but a related one. In the days before the St. Lawrence Seaway ordination, as part of a scheduled WOW activity, RCWP's European and North American members took part in the Witness Wagon, a "pilgrimage" (from Washington DC north through Maryland, Philadelphia, Boston and Salem, Massachusetts, Seneca Falls, NY, and ending in Rochester, NY) commemorating the history surrounding American women's rights activism. Just as Fresen quoted Susan B. Anthony in the homily, RCWP's Witness Wagon experience further signals the transatlantic relationship between European and American feminists. For an article describing the Witness Wagon, see Janice Sevre-Duszynska, "Witness Wagon Follows the Vision," Women's Ordination Conference, <http://www.womensordination.org/content/view/165/>.

ordained woman—to the position of associate pastor, and as such, she had a prominent role on the altar during Mass. Trouble ensued when Rochester Bishop Matthew Clark asked Ramerman to stop performing “priestly gestures” during liturgy. Ultimately, many Corpus Christi parishioners opted to leave the diocese rather than submit to diocesan authority, and so Ramerman, Callan, and many parish leaders and parishioners left the diocese and formed *Spiritus Christi* church. They joined the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), a consortium of independent Catholics that sees itself as not beholden to papal authority. (Recall also that while ECC shares many of RCWP’s goals for Roman Catholicism, the groups are not related.) Through the ECC, bishop Peter Hickman ordained Ramerman a priest; two years later, he would ordain Donato. Significantly, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, a founding member of RCWP and presiding bishop on the St. Lawrence, attended Ramerman’s 2001 ordination. Ramerman’s ordination not only inspired Mayr-Lumetzberger’s own notions of ministry and service, but gave her a visual representation of what a female Catholic priest looks and sounds like.⁴⁴ When Mayr-Lumetzberger organized her own ordination ceremony a year later, she had Ramerman’s ordination and priesthood to build upon; in turn, RCWP’s early, European years would directly inform the movement’s North American incarnation.

Also playing a significant role in RCWP’s transnational exchange was Patricia Fresen. From Johannesburg, South Africa, Fresen was a Dominican sister who had a background in teaching, theology, and fighting apartheid. In 1980, she was one of a few women (all nuns) invited to study theology in Rome at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas (the Angelicum), one of the world’s premier institutions for Roman Catholic theology. In studying theology and Canon Law, Fresen realized that, for her, Canon Law 1024 resembled apartheid laws in that it

⁴⁴ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, interview, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

was an unjust law that needed to be broken.⁴⁵ She felt a call to priesthood. She even taught homiletics and sacramental theology in a Roman Catholic seminary, but because she was female, she could not see her training through to ordination, as her male students could. Fresen learned about Mayr-Lumetzberger's and Forster's plans for ordination in March 2002, three months before the Danube ordination, when she approached them via email. Fresen was not one of the Danube Seven, yet by August 2003, she had been ordained a deacon and a priest.⁴⁶ Her journey was not complete, however. An unnamed male bishop and women's ordination sympathizer saw in Fresen the ability to draw American women into the growing movement. A native English speaker, Fresen would be able to communicate RCWP's vision comfortably and coherently in the English-speaking United States. As the story goes, this unnamed bishop—whose identity has been kept secret—predicted that RCWP's future was primarily in the United States, and Fresen would become a chief catalyst.⁴⁷ Indeed, since her ordination as bishop in 2005 and her position as head of RCWP's preparation program, Fresen has become the principal bridge between RCWP's European and North American strands. To date, RCWP members in North America outweigh European women about twelve to one. If any one member of RCWP best exemplifies the movement's transatlantic transference, it is Bishop Patricia Fresen. She has overseen

⁴⁵ Marian Ronan has taken issue with Fresen's comparison of Catholicism's all-male priesthood with South Africa's racist apartheid laws. Ronan has long been an activist for women's ordination, yet she sees in RCWP's specific brand of activism a reliance on second-wave feminism—when Ronan wants a third-wave feminist solution. She acknowledges that sexism is a world-wide problem, yet she is more concerned with the poverty, health-care concerns, and educational limitations in the Global South. When Fresen compares RCWP's actions to the antiapartheid movement, Ronan reads Fresen as replicating “the sort of essentialized, universalist language that early second-wave Christian feminist theology inculcated into the women's ordination movement” (165). In sum, RCWP's rhetorical strategy of appealing to certain ethical positions has not escaped criticism, even from feminist activist who share RCWP's goals for women's ordination. See Marian Ronan, “Living it Out: Ethical Challenges Confronting the Roman Catholic Women's Ordination Movement in the 21st Century,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 149-169.

⁴⁶ Patricia Fresen, interview, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage. Parts of Fresen's story can also be found online in Patricia Fresen, “Why I Want to be Ordained,” *Catholic New Times*, November 30, 2003, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0MKY/is_19_27/ai_n6077705/ (accessed December 30, 2010).

⁴⁷ Dorothy Irvin, interview with author, March 17, 2010.

candidates' training and conferred Holy Orders upon multiple ordinands. As a vehicle of transference, her work is instructional, pastoral, and theological.

In addition to Fresen's role-as-bridge, the American context, and specifically the legal separation between church and state, has helped RCWP thrive in the United States. In many European countries, taxes support the state church, whether or not the person paying those taxes is a church member. As Ida Raming explained, Germans are obligated to pay church taxes, and so Catholics wishing to support RCWP cannot designate that their money go to womenpriests instead of the institutional Catholic Church.⁴⁸ In Canada, a church cannot officially become a non-profit, tax-exempt organization unless that church is in good standing. Because RCWP is not in good standing with the Roman Catholic Church, it is viewed as an advocacy group. Canadian womanpriest Michele Birch-Conery has found that people will not give donations as freely because they cannot deduct the contribution from their income taxes.⁴⁹ The U.S. context is different from both Canada and Europe. The U.S. has no state-sponsored church, taxes do not support any church group, and church groups do not have to be in "good standing" to qualify as non-profit organizations. These variances have contributed to RCWP's rapid growth in the United States.

All told, this July 2005 St. Lawrence ordination ceremony came to symbolize the creative exchanges and cooperative spirit that had long taken place between European and American women's activism. The ordination demonstrates RCWP's own evolution, with events on both sides of the Atlantic inspiring the movement's next steps. RCWP's evolution invites a reassessment of the intellectual and ideological relationship between European and American Catholics. At the turn of the twentieth century, amid what would become known as the

⁴⁸ Ida Raming, e-mail interview with author, January 9, 2011.

⁴⁹ Michele Birch-Conery, telephone interview with author, April 19, 2011.

Americanist Crisis, it was presumed that American values were anathema to European—and specifically, Roman—Catholicism. While the United States became marked as progressively modern, Europe was deemed conservatively traditional. Compounding this were Europe’s nationalized Catholic churches, in contrast to America’s ostensible separation of church and state. Even throughout Vatican II, American Catholicism was often held in different esteem than European Catholicism (to say nothing of Third World Catholicism), as the American bishops sometimes argued for positions that were, relatively speaking, progressive. But an investigation of RCWP’s roots and outreach suggest that cooperation and camaraderie has existed between these continental Catholicisms, specifically surrounding issues of feminist activism and women’s ordination.

Thus, those symbols of water, ships, and movement, so prominent at the St. Lawrence ceremony, signify not just the Roman Catholic Church, but also RCWP itself. Furthermore, RCWP’s movement is not just within the framework of Roman Catholic activism, but is also the next step in a history of transatlantic cooperation among Catholic feminists. Finally, we cannot forget the sacramental transference of grace, and of women’s ordained authority, from Europe to America. As Fresen said as she concluded the homily, the ordination that took place on this living, moving ship was breaking down the “false distinctions” between men and women in the Roman Catholic Church. Because these women were being ordained, here in North America, “We are one step closer to the church that Jesus envisioned.”⁵⁰

Media Transmission: Ordination and Staged Protest

While nearly every public RCWP ordination ceremony has garnered attention from the media and the Catholic hierarchy, the ordination of Rose Marie Hudson and Elsie Hainz

⁵⁰ St. Lawrence Seaway Ordination, ceremony filming, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

McGrath stands out among the others. On November 11, 2007, in St. Louis, Missouri, Hudson and McGrath were ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood. Hudson, then 67 years old, was a retired schoolteacher, wife, mother, and grandmother, who had long been active in parish life and prison ministries. McGrath, then 69, had worked for the St. Louis Archdiocese and St. Louis University's theology department; she was also a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Presiding over the ceremony was Bishop Patricia Fresen. A confluence of forces, ranging from the ceremony's location (a Reform Jewish synagogue) to the archbishop's reaction (sustained and emphatically critical) to RCWP's own media strategies, ensured a media frenzy that kept RCWP's actions in the spotlight. The word "transmission" here described not just the Holy Spirit's mediated descent upon the ordinands, but also the movement and exchange of ideas between RCWP and the St. Louis archdiocese, mediated through local—and later national—news.

No Catholic church would allow Hudson and McGrath's ordination within its walls, so the women turned to other faith traditions for help. They found sanctuary at the Central Reform Congregation (CRC), a Jewish synagogue well known throughout St. Louis for its social justice activism and its prominent female rabbi, Susan Talve. Talve presented the women's request to the CRC board, which approved unanimously. Thus, this ordination would take place not on a riverboat nor in a Christian church, but in a Jewish place of worship.

Archbishop Raymond Burke's reaction to the announced ceremony was swift and unequivocal—and likely the most vitriolic response from a Roman Catholic leader in RCWP's short history. Speaking to St. Louis Catholics in the archdiocesan newspaper days before the ordination, Burke wrote that the proposed event "imperils the eternal salvation of the women seeking the attempted ordination and the woman, claiming to be a Roman Catholic bishop, who proposes to attempt the ordination." Furthermore, "It generates confusion among the faithful and others who are not Catholic regarding an infallible teaching of the Catholic faith." He made

it clear that he would commence official excommunication proceedings if the women continued with their plan. His public outrage did not stop with RCWP but extended to Rabbi Talve and her congregation. He denounced CRC's role in hosting the event and wrote that CRC's involvement "constitutes a grave violation of the mutual respect which should mark the relationship between the Jewish faith and the Roman Catholic faith."⁵¹ In attempting to use his office as archbishop to intervene in the ordination, Burke communicated the situation's severity.

All of this played out in the local news media, which became the vehicle communicating rhetorical and theological debates about women's ordination and ecumenism. And when the parties involved—RCWP and the archdiocese, specifically—did not communicate with one another, the press mediated their exchanges. The ordination came to be no longer about two sixty-something women answering a vocational call: it was now a politicized event about the Catholic hierarchy fighting to stop a small movement seeking reform through *contra legem* actions. The ordination became a battle between right and wrong, "good" and "bad," freedom and repression...and by and large, RCWP was portrayed favorably and the archbishop, negatively. The media created characters—if not caricatures—out of the main players: on one side were four women, nobly trying to do God's work; on the other side was one angry man, unreasonable and insufficiently pastoral. Never mind that Burke, too, was trying to do "God's work" as he understood it. Speaking as head of the St. Louis archdiocese, his words were meant to instruct, to clarify, and to prevent the ordination from taking place. He surely did not intend his censure to generate sympathy—for the ordinands (McGrath and Hudson), for the presiding bishop (Fresen), and for the hosting rabbi (Talve). Indeed, McGrath and Hudson have admitted that they were worried at first how the media would "slant" their story and generate controversy, but looking back on the coverage nearly two years later, they agreed that the media were "wonderful,"

⁵¹ James Rygelski, "Archbishop says women seeking ordination risk excommunication," *Catholic News Service*, November 8, 2007, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0706386.htm>.

and “very, very supportive” of their ordinations. They marveled at the media’s sudden and dogged interest in their ordinations; McGrath recalled a local television station calling her at 4:30 in the afternoon, hoping to get an interview for the 6 o’clock news. When she told them she did not have time because she was meeting friends for dinner, the news cameras came to speak to her in the restaurant parking lot.⁵² Her defiance of institutional authority made her a local celebrity.

As we consider the role of media transmission in sharing and shaping Hudson and McGrath’s story, we should pause and ask whether anti-Catholic biases may have played a role in the easy villainizing of Burke and quick celebrity of Hudson and McGrath. Scholars of anti-Catholicism do not have to look far to find it. Two recent monographs called anti-Catholicism the “last acceptable prejudice,” and often Catholicism finds resistance in the United States’ Protestant majority because it is viewed as anti-democratic and antithetical to American values. I would concede that there is something suggestive of anti-Catholicism in the media’s involvement in the 2007 St. Louis ordinations—but that explanation is also far too simple. To be certain, RCWP itself critiques the Roman Catholic Church in ways reminiscent of anti-Catholicism, especially around issues of clericalism and mandatory celibacy. But to call RCWP “anti-Catholic” would be to suggest that clericalism and celibacy are the primary hallmarks of contemporary Catholicism, and that issues like sacraments and tradition—which RCWP retains yet modifies—are less important in determining Catholicity. Moreover, the media’s role could be viewed as less anti-Catholic than anti-institutional. St. Louis has a long and rich Roman Catholic history, dating back to French missionaries in the eighteenth century, and Church influences are evident all around the city, from hospitals and parishes to parochial schools and Catholic universities. In

⁵² Elsie McGrath, interview with author, July 17, 2009.

short, the local media would know this context and tread carefully around any blatantly prejudicial Catholic criticism.

What was likely helping RCWP's cause—far more than any latent anti-Catholicism—was the fact that Archbishop Burke was a well-known public figure whose reputation was marred by controversy. Since becoming archbishop in January 2004, Burke had made a number of contentious decisions, each made all the more divisive because of his public and unyielding stance. During the 2004 presidential election and using Catholic Senator John Kerry as an example, Burke declared that any Catholic politician who publicly supported legalizing abortion must be denied communion. Burke also decreed that any Catholic voter supporting a pro-choice candidate because of his or her pro-choice stance should be refused communion. Burke demanded that Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital withdraw singer Sheryl Crow's invitation to perform at a benefit concert because the singer supports embryonic stem-cell research; when his request was denied, he resigned from the hospital's board of directors. He also got into a public and prolonged dispute with St. Stanislaus Kostka, a Polish Catholic parish in St. Louis, over whether the archdiocese or the St. Stanislaus board controlled church property and assets. And just as he would do years later to Hudson, McGrath, and Fresen, Burke ultimately excommunicated the St. Stanislaus priest and lay board members, accusing them of schism. Burke had become a model—and a notorious one at that—of the Church attempting to dictate Catholics' voting behavior and civic engagements. Burke's policies during his tenure alienated all but the most conservative St. Louis Catholics. In the public eye and media's mind, Burke came across as a man more concerned with Canon Law than pastoral outreach. As such, the RCWP ordination was not the first time Burke was portrayed unfavorably in local media.⁵³

⁵³ "Backers Join Ousted Priest in 'Illicit' Mass," *New York Times*, December 26, 2005, www.nytimes.com; Christopher Leonard, "Archbishop Blasts Sheryl Crow Appearance," *Washington Post*, April 25, 2007,

Hudson and McGrath expected Burke to react to their ordination, but they did not expect him to lash out at Talve and the CRC. Neither did they expect such support from the local media. These surprises aside, RCWP is aware of the media's power to spread a movement's message and introduce its members. In the weeks following Hudson and McGrath's ordination, I asked RCWP's public relations director, Bridget Mary Meehan, about the media's role in helping the group realize its mission. She responded:

Media is very important in spreading the word to a larger community. If people see womenpriests in action, then they realize that there is hope for change in the church since womenpriests are now a reality. We get inquiries from people all over the country as to when and where they can find a womenpriest led liturgy. Some are more than ready now. Others who are not quite sure can get used to the symbol shift by seeing women in videos online... I have worked hard to get our videos up on Google and YouTube.⁵⁴

Meehan issued a press release a full month before the St. Louis ordination. Over one-third of the document outlined media opportunities for viewing the ceremony and communicating with McGrath and Hudson.⁵⁵ RCWP invited reporters and photographers to a briefing with RCWP and WOC representatives, welcomed both video- and still-cameras, set aside a special section of the CRC's sanctuary for journalists' use, and made available a back-door route for any who could not stay for the entire service. Finally, in an effort to protect the identities of those whose careers could suffer if identified as supporting the womenpriests, RCWP asked the media to secure permission before publishing photographs or video footage of any ordination attendee.⁵⁶

www.washingtonpost.com; John Thavis, "Archbishop Burke says he'll continue politics-abortion campaign," *Catholic News Service*, November 29, 2004, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0406521.htm>.

⁵⁴ Bridget Mary Meehan, e-mail message to author, December 10, 2007.

⁵⁵ "Press Release: Roman Catholic Womenpriests to be ordained in St. Louis," Roman Catholic Womenpriests, October 15, 2007, www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org/articles.htm.

⁵⁶ RCWP has continued this policy of protecting vulnerable guests. When I attended an ordination in Rochester, New York, in May 2010, the balcony was reserved for people who did not want to be photographed, for fear of hierarchical reprisal. While talking to people in the balcony, I met a number of women religious and diocesan employees who risked discipline or dismissal should they be identified.

The press release also allowed RCWP to set an initial agenda regarding how Hudson and McGrath would be described and judged. Casting the ordinands as sympathetic, relatable characters became part of RCWP's media strategy. In the press release, Meehan emphasized that neither RCWP nor Hudson and McGrath wanted to separate from the Church; instead, they wished to create a "renewed model of priesthood for a renewed church." The press release read:

Rose Marie and Elsie have both earned graduate degrees in theology and ministry, and have been engaged in active ministry for many years. Rose Marie is a retired school teacher, a wife, mother and grandmother. Elsie is a retired editor, a widow, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Prophetic obedience, a hallmark of the RCWP movement, led them to make this life-altering commitment and "walk the talk" of clerical reform in the Roman Catholic Church. As priests, they will continue to exercise a variety of volunteer ministries.

Worth highlighting here is the use of the women's first names, which serves to humanize and personalize them. Although the women had been ordained deacons in August, they are not labeled with their ordained monikers of "Deacon." This stands in contrast with other Catholic clergy, whose names (first or last, depending on the desired formality) are modified with Father, Bishop, or Archbishop. Also emphasized in the press release are the women's ministerial backgrounds and graduate education, both communicating that the women are prepared—and have been preparing—for their priestly roles. Finally, the press release stresses the women's *obedience*. In stark contrast to the archdiocese's characterization of the women as schismatic and salvivically imperiled, this press release argues the women are obeying a higher power. In the weeks before the ordination, newspaper articles and on-air local news broadcasts would echo and enhance these characteristics. Most articles gave the women's ages, described their roles as mothers, grandmothers, and wife or widow, and remarked upon their years of service to the St. Louis archdiocese.⁵⁷ Hudson and McGrath were not simply nameless, faceless figures disobeying

⁵⁷ Michele Munz, "Cheering crowd attends disputed ordination of two women as priests," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 12, 2007; James Rygelski, "Archbishop says women seeking ordination risk excommunication," *Catholic*

the Roman Catholic hierarchy: as the press release described them they were individuals with families, lifetimes dedicated to service, and a desire to make Catholicism more open and egalitarian. Hudson and McGrath were shown to be long-time St. Louis residents seeking to serve local Catholics. These were women people might know, might have met, or might encounter on any given day in St. Louis.⁵⁸

As the ordination day neared, Burke intensified his rhetoric, both in published letters in the *St. Louis Review*, the archdiocesan paper, and through other archdiocesan officials. “What is most painful about the proposed attempted ordinations is the calculated and grave offense they will offer to our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church... There is no doubt that our Lord Jesus Christ chose only men for the Holy Priesthood, even as He, at the Last Supper, consecrated only men for the priestly office and ministry.” Father Vincent A. Heier, archdiocese director of ecumenical and inter-religious affairs, went after the Reform Jewish congregation: he intimated that the CRC’s decision could irrevocably harm Jewish-Catholic relations in St. Louis. He contacted St. Louis’s Jewish Community Relations Council, seeking support in stopping Talve’s synagogue from hosting; the Council took a neutral position and deferred to CRC’s autonomy in such matters.

News Service, November 8, 2007, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0706386.htm>; “St. Louis Archbishop warns of excommunication over women’s ordination,” November 7, 2007, <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/11/07/america/NA-REL-US-Women-Priests.php> (accessed December 13, 2007); “St. Louis Archdiocese Angered By Synagogue’s Hosting of Women Priests Ceremony,” November 10, 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,310360,00.html> (accessed December 13, 2007).

⁵⁸ Notably, the press release does not define “prophetic obedience,” which is used by RCWP to describe obedience to the Holy Spirit, and not simply to man-made laws. Explaining this concept may have helped theologize the St. Louis ordination. Also, RCWP’s strategy has shifted somewhat since the St. Louis 2007 ordination. Now, the movement talks about “re-claiming” Catholicism’s ancient heritage. Using scholarship that argues women were ordained in Roman Catholicism for over 1000 years before changes to Canon Law in the Middle Ages, RCWP says its womenpriests are “nothing new.” See Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, eds, *Ordained Women in the early Church: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Despite aggressive archdiocesan attempts to halt the ceremony, the ordination took place as scheduled. Before a standing room only crowd of nearly 600 people, including Catholics, Christians, and Jews, Hudson and McGrath were ordained priests. Fresen, upon learning what St. Louis's national monument, the Gateway Arch, symbolized, said, "For us in St. Louis today, the Arch is a symbol for the gateway to justice and equality for women."⁵⁹ Her words expressed RCWP's goal for gender equality in terms local St. Louisians could embrace, as the town's national monument was juxtaposed favorably with egalitarian ideals. That this was not the kind of gender equality the Roman Catholic hierarchy was prepared to embrace only made it more difficult for the St. Louis archdiocese to "win" this media war. As grounded as Burke may have been in his interpretation of canon law and papal decrees, his position and approach *contra* RCWP's came across as unyielding and unpastoral. His influence seemed to fall on deaf ears. A story that circulates among RCWP's ranks testifies to Burke's impotence: when the ordination ceremony ended and Fresen and the newly ordained women made their way down the aisle toward the lobby, a lone figure stood waiting for them. This man was an archdiocesan representative, papers in hand, waiting to serve documents demanding the women recant their actions. Amid the thunderous applause, celebratory exclamations and laughter, and eruptions of camera flashes, this man seemed small, silent, and out of place. Though this man represented Burke and the official Vatican position, he was the one who appeared out of touch.⁶⁰

In the months after the ceremony, Burke and the women would make a final "appeal" to the court of public opinion, each memorializing the St. Louis ordination but in vastly different ways. For its part, RCWP created and posted an ordination video on Google Videos. Titled

⁵⁹ Michele Munz, "Cheering crowd attends disputed ordination of two women as priests," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 12, 2007, <http://www.stltoday.com/>.

⁶⁰ Laura Singer, telephone interview with author, November 17, 2010; Baltimore Ordination, Catonsville, MD, field notes, June 4, 2011.

“Roman Catholic Womenpriests: St. Louis,” this 10-minute, edited short features ceremony highlights. The video begins with what looks and sounds like a processional typical of any Catholic service. What would strike Catholic viewers, however, is that the individuals in the procession, wearing vestments, are women. Long hair falls over the stole, earrings adorn earlobes, painted toenails peek out from leather sandals. The songs are those sung often at Catholic mass. One familiar hymn, “The Summons,” takes on new meaning within this context: the lyrics, about obedience to God’s vocational call, ask, “Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?” Another song, “All are Welcome,” speaks of the end of oppression and injustice: “Let us build a house where love can dwell, and all can safely live...Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace. Here the love of all shall end divisions! All are welcome...in this place.” In addition to these sounds and sights, a viewer will notice the standing room only Central Reform Congregation synagogue, filled with a diverse crowd of all ages and genders, most of whom wear suits and dresses. Several men wear yarmulkes.⁶¹

This video did and is doing rhetorical and framing work, just as the media’s reporting did. I have shown elsewhere how RCWP emphasizes its ecumenical support; likewise, this video displays the ordination’s interfaith nature, with subtitles identifying Rabbi Susan Talve and cameras revealing yarmulke-wearing supporters. The song selections highlight questions of inclusivity and welcome, of social justice and equality. When these ideals are placed aurally alongside visual images of womenpriests’ bodies and ecumenical cooperation, as the video did, RCWP and its goals have been favorably cast. For viewers familiar with Catholic ritual, subtitles announce the Litany of Saints and Laying on of Hands, suggesting that this unorthodox

⁶¹ “Roman Catholic Womenpriests: St. Louis,” November 15, 2007, video clip, Google Videos, <http://www.video.google.com/>. Meehan posted this video within days the ceremony. In fact, the “St. Louis Ordinations” portion of the RCWP’s website was updated frequently in the weeks following the ordination, with newer articles and videos added to older ones.

ordination *did* retain some Catholic orthopraxis. People who could not attend the ordination—or who may wonder what a womanpriest and her ordination ceremony look like—could watch this ten-minute video illuminating RCWP’s ideological moves and interpretation of the Roman Catholic sacrament of Holy Orders.

That this video exists suggests something about RCWP’s relationship with and use of the media. As RCWP moves beyond the tactics that women’s ordination activists have tried for decades without avail, they implicitly place action over dialogue. They believe this a crucial change if women are to be ordained. To borrow from Foster’s “Choreographies of Protest,” RCWP acknowledges and utilizes women’s bodies as signifying agents, communicating a vision for social change and enacting that idealized future in the present moment. The St. Louis ceremony itself, coupled with the subsequent YouTube and Google videos, argues RCWP’s point: that despite Vatican prohibitions, womenpriests *do*: they do exist, do dress like priests, do recite prayers like priests, and do celebrate sacraments.

Burke kept up his public performance as well. On March 12, 2008, four months and a day after their ordination, the Fresen, Hudson, and McGrath were officially excommunicated. Archbishop Burke published the excommunication decree in the archdiocesan paper, the *St. Louis Review*, wherein he declared that the women had committed “the most grave delict of schism...[and had] lost membership in, good standing in, and full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.”⁶² This was RCWP’s first North American excommunication. Although more than two dozen women had been ordained in North America, and although diocesan leaders had threatened excommunication before, Burke was the first to follow through. Perhaps the sustained media attention left him feeling he had no choice but to follow through with

⁶² Raymond L. Burke and Henry J. Breier, “Declaration of Excommunication of Patricia Fresen, Rose Hudson, and Elsie McGrath,” in *St. Louis Review*, March 14, 2008, 10.

excommunication. Or perhaps Burke actually gave little thought to the media noise and excommunicated the women because he believed his office delegated him to do so. Whatever the reason, Hudson and McGrath became the first formally excommunicated Roman Catholic womenpriests since the Danube Seven.

As California-based womanpriest Victoria Rue reflected in a 2009 article, "The Vatican saw that if they made us a cause celeb (*sic*), people would gather around us. If they didn't give us publicity, then people wouldn't know that womenpriests exist."⁶³ Rue's observations certainly seem to fit with the events surrounding the 2007 St. Louis ordination. The publicity that Hudson and McGrath's ordination received came in large part from the fact the archdiocese took on the women as legitimate threats. To ignore them would have been to disempower them, but engaging them showed the Church was taking RCWP seriously. One can surmise that the negative publicity for the institutional Church, especially when contrasted with the relatively positive publicity for the womenpriests, is part of the reason why the CDF issued a decree in May 2008, declaring all women who attempt ordination excommunicated automatically. Now, local dioceses and archdioceses would not have to involve themselves with disciplining women seeking priesthood: the Vatican had already spoken.

When examining the 2007 RCWP St. Louis ordination, it is impossible to evaluate exactly the magnitude of Burke's reactions and the media's interest. But the ordained women certainly credit Burke for the attention they received. "We had a tremendous controversy," Hudson told me, laughing at the memory. McGrath chimed in that their ordination was distinctive "because of our Archbishop, obviously, who was the greatest PR person anyone could've gotten a hold of." Then she added, with a smile and a glint in her blue eyes, "And it didn't cost us anything." Hudson continued, "The week or two before our ordination, Elsie and

⁶³ Greg Archer, "Roman Catholic Female Priests Growing in Numbers: An Insider's Perspective," *The Huffington Post*, June 12, 2009, www.huffingtonpost.com.

I ran our legs off. We were called by every radio station, television station..." Both women agreed they were interviewed at least three times in McGrath's home.⁶⁴ St. Louis's media storm went national, as the *National Catholic Reporter* caught wind of the story and published on it multiple times.⁶⁵ The local news attended Hudson and McGrath's first Mass in December 2007; the women continue to celebrate a weekly liturgy as Therese of Divine Peace Inclusive Community, which meets in the Hope Chapel at the First Unitarian Universalist Church in downtown St. Louis—directly across the street from Susan Talve's Central Reform Congregation. People who heard about the ordination and the new Therese community sought out the Therese congregation, which they believed would welcome them. As one 34-year old St. Louis Country resident and homosexual who had fallen away from the Church told the newly ordained Hudson, "I look forward to coming to your service. As a lifelong Catholic, you have given me hope."⁶⁶ Without constant media attention, this man and others would not likely have known about RCWP.

I do not wish to suggest that RCWP's women staged this ordination any differently than others. Hudson and McGrath told me they expected Burke's vitriol, but they did not anticipate its magnitude. But the St. Louis ordination became a public protest on levels few (if any) other RCWP ordinations have. RCWP is already media-savvy, using technology and communications networks to spread word of their existence, frame their ordinands favorably in the public mind, and counter any official Church censure. With this particular ordination, though, probably

⁶⁴ Elsie McGrath, interview with author, July 17, 2009.

⁶⁵ Pamela Schaeffer, "Woman rabbi takes the heat for woman ordinations," *National Catholic Reporter*, November 9, 2007, <http://www.ncronline.org>; Pamela Schaeffer, "Though church bans women priests more and more women are saying 'Why wait?'" *National Catholic Reporter*, December 7, 2007, <http://www.ncronline.org>; Pamela Schaeffer, "Profiles of Five Women Priests," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 7, 2007, <http://www.ncronline.org>; Editorial, "Finished Playing by the Rules," *National Catholic Reporter*, December 7, 2007, <http://www.ncronline.org>.

⁶⁶ Michele Munz, "Cheering crowd attends disputed ordination of two women as priests," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 12, 2007, <http://www.stltoday.com/>.

because of Burke's reactions and his pre-existent reputation, RCWP's women were able to enjoy more sympathy and more attention than if the archbishop had ignored them. The way information about RCWP was transmitted—and the tone of that transmission—shaped the St. Louis discourse around issues of women's ordination and Catholic reform.

It does seem the institutional Church learned lessons from RCWP's St. Louis ordination. In 2009, Therese of Divine Peace saw the ordination of another Roman Catholic womenpriest, Marybeth McBryan. But Archbishop Burke left St. Louis in 2008 for a position in Rome, and his successor, Robert Carlson, has to date ignored Therese and the RCWP movement. McBryan's ordination drew far fewer than 100 attendees, and no media storm ensued. Perhaps hierarchical officials had learned the hard way that media attention does more harm than good for the Church, and more good than harm for RCWP.

In RCWP lore, Hudson and McGrath's ordination ceremony stands out for the focused and consistent attention it received from both the media and the archbishop.⁶⁷ The ideas transmitted throughout St. Louis during October and November 2007 helped to create RCWP in the public eye. Months later, with the public excommunication of Hudson and McGrath announced in the local Catholic newspaper (and picked up by other local news outlets), the story stayed in the forefront of Catholics' minds. Without that attention, certainly, few local Catholics would have known the ordinations were taking place, or even that RCWP exists. This transmission of ideas helped RCWP to perform publicly, not only its existence, but also its ideology of, as Fresen said of the Gateway Arch, "justice and equality for women."

⁶⁷ When I say, "in RCWP lore," I refer to the fact many of RCWP's members know well the much-publicized events of Hudson and McGrath's ordination. Often times, when I've introduced myself to womenpriests before beginning an interview, I mention I am originally from St. Louis. Almost every time, the interviewee has responded to the name "St. Louis" with a comment or question about the prominence and impact of the November 2007 ordination.

Women's Right to Priesthood, Transposed: Tradition Reasserted

By 2010, RCWP had added a new element to their ordination ceremonies: an insistence that their desire for priesthood was a deliberate reclamation of what early Christian women had long enjoyed. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when this occurred, it is certain that RCWP increasingly turned its attention to existing and mounting scholarship on the history of women's ordination.⁶⁸ In doing so, RCWP's actions were no longer simply a protest against an unjust canon law; rather, the womenpriests were reclaiming a lost heritage. It can be said that RCWP *transposed* its own ordinations to reflect awareness of Christian women's true legacy; it can also be said that RCWP transposed ancient Christian women's clerical ministries onto RCWP's modern-day vocational call.⁶⁹ In doing so, RCWP stopped solely looking forward to a day when women could be ordained and instead simultaneously looked back to a more egalitarian past. Put another way, RCWP used a collective memory to strengthen their argument for future change.

In recent decades, scholarly debate about women's ordination in the early church has fallen into three camps. Some argue that women *were* ordained in the past; others argue that women were *not* ordained in the past; a third group argues that women were not ordained in the past *because* the early church was misogynist, *but* this anti-women cultural sentiment should not prohibit women's ordination today. Two additional considerations have been added to this mix: first are debates about what it meant to *be ordained* throughout Christian history. Second are

⁶⁸ To this point, it seems that as early as the first ordination on United States' soil in Philadelphia in 2006, RCWP was using banners saying that Catholic women's ordination was "nothing new." Certainly—as the introductory remarks in Chapter 1 indicate—RCWP drew upon this women's ordination history in August 2009 at the Minneapolis ordination. What does seem clear is that these efforts to align RCWP's activism with ancient customs have increased in recent years. The Rochester ordination I describe not only used this history deliberately, but because I attended the ordination, I can well describe how this history was applied.

⁶⁹ There are a number of definitions for the verb "transpose" according to the Oxford English Dictionary (online edition). The ones most relevant for my usage are "to change the purport, application, or use of; to apply or use otherwise; to give a different direction to," and "to remove from one place or time to another; to transfer, shift; to transplant."

questions about which clerical offices women were and were not ordained to.⁷⁰ Since the intensified efforts of the Roman Catholic women's ordination movement in the 1960s, activists in favor of ordaining women have fallen into the first and third camps. Given its emphasis on "reclaiming" ordained priesthood for women, RCWP has come to position itself in the first group: women *were* ordained in the past. Thus, RCWP understands itself as reclaiming a rite that once belonged to women and now has been lost.

When I say that RCWP "reclaims" the priesthood—and this is the very language the group uses—I am not making the argument that early Christian centuries were a model for contemporary concepts of gender equality. Moreover, I suspect few if any womenpriests would make such a claim either. Where I do stand along with scholars of both stripes—those arguing that women's ordination did exist and those arguing the opposite—is in holding the idea that early Christian women *did* things that, to modern eyes, look sacramental and priestly. What these gestures and actions *meant* is a different issue altogether and is, as I see it, where the real debate lies. It behooves us to examine this matter in greater depth, if only briefly, as there is much at stake here for the women's ordination movement and for RCWP. A great deal of recent scholarship argues that ancient Christian women exercised many of the same clerical duties as men; at the same time, others have countered that, while women may have exercised seemingly-clerical duties, women were never clergy. Almost without exception—and not surprisingly—the conclusions that a scholar or theologian reaches map directly onto his or her political and theological aims. For example, the Vatican's own position is that women have never been ordained at any time in Christian history—and Vatican documents like *Inter Insigniores* reaffirm

⁷⁰ Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-22, 23-48. Gary Macy's book has become the go-to book for scholars making their way through the women's ordination issue—and rightly so. Not surprisingly, much of the discussion about early Christian women's ordination has taken place within theological and ecclesiological spheres. Macy's book, by contrast, is historical and is concerned solely with historical evidence.

this. Because Christ chose twelve men—and no women—as his apostles, it is the will of Jesus that only men should be priests. In contrast, RCWP will argue that Jesus never ordained anyone, nor was he himself ordained. RCWP will say further that ordination is a man-made construct—but a construct that women enjoyed for approximately 1000 years before a dramatic “change” took place.

A 2007 book by historian Gary Macy, titled “The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination,” tackles this “change.” Unlike most existing scholarship on early Christian women’s ordination, Macy comes to the subject with neither theological nor denominational presuppositions. His approach is strictly historical. Macy acknowledges upfront that he is building upon a foundation that most scholars agree upon: in Western Christianity in the 11th and 12th centuries, ideas about ordination and what it meant to be ordained changed.⁷¹ Leading up to the 11th century, a person holding an ordained office was not viewed as having special powers to perform sacred, sacramental acts. Rather, someone who was ordained was special because a particular community had called this individual to serve. Nor was an ordained person moving up a hierarchical ladder with each stage reached; instead, a deacon could be ordained a bishop without ever becoming a priest; a priest need not have been a deacon; and a number of popes had never been ordained priests.⁷² But times were changing. The church consolidated papal (and therefore patriarchal) authority as Catholicism’s spiritual influence increasingly extended into secular realms. In addition, the church had to distinguish itself in relation to groups deemed “heretical”—and changing the church’s ordination and sacramental foundations allowed leaders to distinguish “legitimate” authority from a more “heretical” brand. As canonical records show, between the 12th and 13th centuries, theologians began to distinguish

⁷¹ Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination*, 23.

⁷² Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination*, 25.

between “nonsacramental consecration” for women and “sacramental ordination” for men. With this change came a newfound emphasis on a priest’s Eucharistic role: now, only a “properly ordained priest” could rightly make Christ present in the Eucharist, and as such, ordination grew into a way of distinguishing clergy from laity.⁷³

Using the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 as a convenient point of demarcation, Macy argues that, once this change took place, the offices women held—such as deaconess, abbess, presbyter (the ancient term for “elder” and the precursor to our notion of “priest”), and bishop—ceased to be considered ordained offices. There emerged a distinction between the terms *ordinare*, *consecrare*, and *benedicere*, when before there had been none. Now, an “ordained” priest held a sacramental authority that a “consecrated” woman religious did not. Moreover, the ceremony for ordination would evolve during this time, with the Laying on of Hands becoming a requirement for an authentic conferring of Holy Orders. Being called to an ordained office was now no longer about ministering to a particular worship community (which had called the individual to ordination) but about being able to celebrate the sacraments—and only then being able to lead a worship community. Ultimately, Macy concludes that women *were* ordained in the early Middle Ages: “according to the understanding of ordination held by themselves and their contemporaries, they were just as truly ordained as any bishop, priest, or deacon.” Significant here is Macy’s emphasis on a particular definition of ordination and a particular acknowledgement of what ordination could and could not do. Macy continues, with a word for those, like the Catholic magisterium, who would argue against women ever having held ordained authority: “To argue that these ordinations were not ‘true’ ordinations since they were not ordinations to service at the altar, or because they did not always involve the laying on of hands or lead inexorably to the ministry of priesthood, would be at best a theological judgment based

⁷³ Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination*, 41-2.

on the standing these women would now have in some Christian communities (if they were alive), and is anachronistic.”⁷⁴ We cannot, then, read early Christian ordinations through a contemporary (Catholic) Christian lens.

It may seem obvious that a group like RCWP would want to emphasize Macy’s findings, as doing so legitimates the womenpriests’ claims to authority. And indeed, as an organization, RCWP applauds Macy’s research, including it on their website’s “Resources: Recommended Reading” section and citing Macy in public speeches.⁷⁵ What is significant, however, is that this RCWP strategy acknowledges and extends the importance placed upon *tradition* in Roman Catholicism. RCWP is not positioning itself as antithetical to tradition but instead as a continuation of tradition. Here, RCWP’s stance is not that early Christianity’s culturally located misogyny prevented women from holding any leadership positions: rather, RCWP argues that *in spite of* cultural patriarchy, some Christian communities allowed women authoritative power.⁷⁶ It is, then, *this* tradition—one that embraced women’s spiritual and leadership gifts—that RCWP wishes to reclaim. In turning attention to reclaiming tradition, RCWP is speaking to those Vatican officials and practicing Catholics who so value Roman Catholicism’s traditions that they automatically see women priests as anathema to Christ’s intent. RCWP is retelling this story. The movement seeks to educate the public about women’s ordination while simultaneously embodying a forgotten history. As decades of women’s ordination activism reveal, calling for

⁷⁴ Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination*, 86.

⁷⁵ Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “Resources/Links: More Recommended Reading,” Roman Catholic Womenpriests, www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org/resources_links.htm. RCWP calls Macy’s book a “must read!” and says of the book, “One of the most comprehensive and scholarly surveys of the history of womens ordinations in the Roman Catholic Church—a very thorough study with over 130 pages of notes and cited bibliography.”

⁷⁶ Here it is worth giving a nod to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s work, particularly *In Memory of Her*. In doing rigorous exegetical analysis of New Testament scriptures, Fiorenza argues that in the aftermath of Jesus’ ministry, women did enjoy something akin to equality. This changed over time, however. Fiorenza would fit into the camp that says women were not ordained because of problematic cultural misogyny. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Construction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

gender equality on the grounds that “the Church should modernize” has not yielded the desired results. Perhaps, then, harkening back to Jesus’ times and the first thousand years of the early Church will offer more compelling evidence.

RCWP’s ordination ceremonies have become prime locations for the group’s educational and reclaiming efforts. At the May 1, 2010 ordination in Rochester, NY, the history of women’s ordination served, both rhetorically and literally, to frame the ceremonial proceedings. Before the formal entrance processional even took place, in the service’s joyful early moments, marked with song and liturgical dance, participants adorned the altar with four large banners. Standing about eight feet tall, the banners were placed on the altar, upstage. Each banner was a different color: royal blue, olive green, dark blue, and dark red. Each bore an illustrated picture of an early church female leader, and the images were identified as “Mary Magdalene, Apostle,” “Junia, Leader,” “Theodora, Bishop,” and “Phoebe, Deacon.” And atop the banners, above the pictures, were the words “Nothing New!” in all capital letters. Finally, at the banners’ bottoms read the words, again in caps, “Women Re-Claiming Priesthood.” These banners remained on the altar throughout the nearly three-hour long ceremony. These ancient, female, Christian leaders were thereby made participants in the day’s events, serving to link the ordinands with their fore-mothers in Catholic ordained authority.

Before the ordination mass began, womenpriests Jean Marchant and Eileen DiFranco came to the podium and explained RCWP’s ancient lineage to the gathered assembly. Marchant said,

Historical and archaeological evidence reveals that women served as deacons, priests, and bishops from the second to the sixth centuries... In the outer room at Pentecost, God called the followers of Jesus, men and women whose hearts were open and who were ready for the coming God’s spirit as promised by Jesus for all humankind, for all time. All those served as leaders in the first years of building the Christian community.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Rochester Ordination, Rochester, NY, field notes, May 1, 2010.

Focusing first on historical precedent and referring to archaeological evidence, Marchant made a theological shift to the language of call, saying that men *and* women were summoned to fulfill Christ's promise and lead the nascent Christian community. DiFranco spoke next, making explicit a connection between Jesus's mission and RCWP's actions:

Today, in the ordination of deacons and priests, we continue in the renewal of our very first Christian traditions, and we celebrate the fact that Jesus invited women as well as men to becoming leaders in building the kin-dom that we desire.... And just as Jesus promised, he is still with us, and will continue to send spirit, Wisdom Sophia, to dwell in us, and lead us forward, in being church, in a way that is faithful to the original intent of our brother Jesus.⁷⁸

Significant are the following: DiFranco's language of renewal; her evocation of tradition; her reference to honoring Jesus's wishes; her use of the gender-neutral "kin-dom" over "kingdom"; and her reference to the Holy Spirit as the reimagined feminine, Wisdom Sophia. Yet perhaps most significant is her final statement, which argues that what RCWP is doing now—with the day's ordinations, with knowingly illegal actions—gets to the heart of what *Jesus* himself originally intended. It is not only tradition, then, that RCWP seeks to honor: it is Jesus Christ. DiFranco implies that RCWP may stand in opposition to Vatican authority—but the group does so in order to obey a higher authority.

One wonders to whom RCWP is speaking with this rhetoric as used at ordination ceremonies. Presumably, RCWP's supporters and ordination-attendees would applaud women's ordination regardless of historical precedent. Yet as I argue in this chapter, RCWP's ordinations do accommodate a media presence, and statements like Marchant's and DiFranco's, as well as banners like those lining the altar, make for memorable sound-bytes and compelling visuals. Scholarly debate aside, RCWP has streamlined its message: in the early church, women were

⁷⁸ Rochester Ordination, Rochester, NY, field notes, May 1, 2010.

ordained just as men were ordained, and therefore, women should be ordained just as men are ordained in today's Church.

In sum, RCWP's strategy of transposing an ancient history onto their own serves to position differently the womenpriests in relation to Church tradition. This argument of reclaiming a lost heritage shifts the discourse surrounding the women's disobedient, discordant actions. Perhaps, this argument suggests, RCWP's actions aren't so transgressive after all. Perhaps it is the Roman Catholic Church that has sinned against women, denying women the leadership authority that Christ intended. In emphasizing the names and orders ancient Christian women once enjoyed, RCWP rhetorically moves the argument: womenpriests are not simply defending their actions, but they are placing a burden of proof upon Catholic leaders who would argue that the Church cannot and never had been able to confer ordination on a woman.

Of course, a tension remains—one that will be taken up in later chapters. RCWP picks and chooses which facets of Catholic tradition to emphasize.⁷⁹ The movement celebrates the female leaders in Christianity's first millennium while retaining the gestures and rituals that came about in Christianity's second millennium—after women were defined out of ordination. That is, RCWP's actions do not recreate the ordinations early women—such as Phoebe or Theodora, two women from the banners—enjoyed. Rather, RCWP retains the meaning of ordination that arose later, in the 11th through 13th centuries, after sacramental special-ness became ordination's defining quality. In this way, it becomes clear how difficult it is for a group like RCWP to simultaneously stress the past and the future. For Christian women's ordination, it would seem, the past is incomplete and the future remains uncertain. RCWP is covering its theological, historical, and sacramental bases by holding ordinations that look, sound, and feel like “legal”

⁷⁹ It is important to note that the institutional Roman Catholic Church *also* picks and chooses which elements of traditional Catholicism merit emphasis.

Roman Catholic ordinations, yet by doing so, they raise questions about what, exactly, is the past they envision for the future.

Concluding Thoughts and Lingering Questions

In this chapter, I have examined four RCWP ordination ceremonies and traced the movement's evolution via ordination; I have also employed and expanded upon the performance studies concept of transperformance and the notion that bodies—in this case, women's-bodies-as-priests'-bodies—can do signifying protest work. As RCWP seeks to transform Roman Catholicism and the Catholic priesthood, the group's gestures of and toward transperformance mark its public personae and strategies for enacting and inspiring change. And I have shown that, as a movement in the early stages of formation, RCWP demonstrates both an attachment to its own founding ideals (of equality for women and reimagining priesthood) as well as a willingness to adapt (to emerging situations and with modified arguments).

Paradoxically, RCWP's ordination ceremonies are simultaneously transgressive and traditional. The moment of ordination is the moment signaling the women's ultimate disobedience, in which they are excommunicated *latae sententiae*, yet this is also the moment where RCWP signals its desire to remain within the Roman Catholic lineage, as it emulates Catholic ritual and retains apostolic tradition. As this chapter has shown, this tension has been present since the first Danube ordination. RCWP deliberately breaks Canon Law 1024 but does so by retaining apostolic succession. This apparent contradiction is, at least in the mind of Bishop Fresen, an issue of justice and quality, as she has said, "Women have the right, not only to be ordained to the diaconate, priesthood and episcopacy, but to be ordained in the same way,

in the same tradition, as men.”⁸⁰ As the four ordinations I have examined here reveal, women in Europe and North America can exercise that right; the media can communicate RCWP’s existence and vision to an otherwise unknowing public; and RCWP’s womenpriests harken a return to the leadership structures of the early church. In traditional Roman Catholicism, men are ordained into an *ordo* that the Church claims stretches back nearly two millennia. RCWP is redefining and transforming that *ordo*: the women’s ordinations are designed to transform contemporary Catholic priesthood and use the early church as a model—but also retain the apostolic succession of the late medieval church. Male clerical ordinations are, according to the Church, an avowed continuation of tradition; RCWP’s ordinations are a selected blend of early church tradition, Roman Catholic hierarchical tradition, and performed transgression.

All of this points to the attention RCWP has given to its audience during the movement’s early years. They have retained apostolic succession, as this allows them to claim valid ordination. They have planted themselves in the United States early on, as this allows them to reach a larger, more progressive pool of women. They conscientiously have used media resources, as this places the group’s ordained women within public discourse. And they have claimed to stand within a lineage of ancient Christian leadership, as this legitimates their illicit actions and vilifies the patriarchy that has erased RCWP’s foremothers from history. In ways cultural, social, and historical, RCWP’s ordinations are transperformances that communicate the group’s mission, evolution, and perceived audience. Through ordinations, RCWP enters and tackles discourse around women’s ordination. Put another way, by actively and actually placing women into traditionally male Roman Catholic ordination gestures, RCWP defines itself and performs itself through public ordination ceremonies.

⁸⁰ Patricia Fresen, “A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry: Looking at a Church in Crisis,” in *Women Find a Way*, 29.

Still, not all of RCWP's ordination ceremonies are public. Some are decidedly private. An undisclosed number of women have been ordained secretly, in "catacomb" ordinations. These women risk reprisal if their transgressive actions become publicly known; some of these women are women religious or laywomen who work for the Church, and they would likely face dismissal if identified as ordained. Recall how male bishops who participated in the Danube ordinations and the episcopal ordinations of Mayr-Lumetzberger, Forster, and Fresen could not be identified publicly, and so those rituals also were kept secret. The existence of these clandestine, catacomb ordinations suggests that transforming public discourse is not RCWP's only goal: in addition to changing minds around women's ordination, the group places great import upon sacramental transformation—the kind that happens at ordination. These women become priests not, in part, as an act of public protest, but as a way to allow women to celebrate sacraments and stand in the apostolic line. What, then, of sacraments? Considering RCWP's actions, how might the Roman Catholic Church be transformed through sacramental power and modifications? For that, we turn now to sacraments.

CHAPTER 4

‘ALL ARE WELCOME’ TO INTERPRETIVE AUTHORITY: ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS AND SACRAMENTAL ECONOMY

Victoria Rue has described her ordination to the diaconate as leaving her feeling “cellularly rearranged.” An American and a lesbian, Rue said the only time she had ever experienced so powerfully a ceremony was when she and her partner had their commitment service. Thereafter, she “saw the world differently.” Similarly, after bishops Gisela Forster and Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger laid hands on Rue and five other women on the Danube River in 2004, Rue says that she saw the sky differently, felt her feet on the ground differently. She expressed this sense of transformation with fire in her eyes and passion in her voice; after all, Rue is (according to her partner) a “theatre person.” A year later, when she was ordained to the priesthood on the St. Lawrence Seaway, she again felt a cellular change, but this time, she attributed it to the dozens of hands, of all of the men and women in attendance, who laid hands upon her, filing past the ordinands in a line, bestowing their blessing and prayers. In her recollection, Rue and the others were on their knees for forty-five minutes as members of the community came forward, laying hands on the candidates as the bishops had done. “What an extraordinary moment!” Rue recalled. After the Laying on of Hands, she needed help standing up. “The Spirit was at work.”¹

¹ Victoria Rue, interview, April 19, 2006, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage; Kathryn Poethig, interview, April 19, 2006, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

The Mary, Mother of Jesus House Church celebrates the Eucharist in an intimate setting: a home in Sarasota, Florida. The community, led by womanbishop Bridget Mary Meehan, meets on Saturday evenings. Meehan sees this as a return to the house church model used by early Christians—and she is not alone. One of the church members, Jack Duffy, has said, “In this small, intimate, friendly, around-the-table setting, the worship was deep, spiritual, holy. We could all really sense that Jesus was there with us. This is the way early Christians celebrated the Lord’s Supper, during the time of the Acts of the Apostles, and for the first 200 to 300 years, before we became encumbered with big buildings.” As Meehan emphasizes, the community prays *together*, announces the words of consecration *together*, and celebrates *together* the mysteries of faith as present in the Eucharist.²

On September 11, 2010, womanpriest Theresa Novak Chabot baptized Kira, Jolene, and Ryan Wood, ages 9, 8, and 5. Rachel and Clayton Wood had adopted the three girls, the oldest when they were in their late 40s. The Woods married in the Roman Catholic Church in 1975 but left shortly thereafter, specifically because of the Church’s position against ordaining women. But Rachel separately promised both of her devout Catholic parents—on their deathbeds—that she would have her children baptized Catholic “when a woman could do it.” Rachel later learned about Roman Catholic Womenpriests and, “as soon as Reverend Theresa was ordained,” she had her daughters baptized. As Rachel sees it, as a result of RCWP, she was able to keep the promise she made to her parents.³

² Bridget Mary Meehan, “Holy People, Holy Music, Holy House Church: A Roman Catholic Womanpriest’s Story,” in *Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests*, eds. Elsie Hainz McGrath, Bridget Mary Meehan, and Ida Raming (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2008), 89-94: 93, 90.

³ Rachel Wood, telephone interview with author, May 10, 2011; Sarah M. Earle, “Don’t Deny Me Your Prayers,” *Concord Monitor* (Manchester, NH), March 20, 2011.

In these three examples wherein RCWP's sacramental actions are mediating personal relationships, we glimpse how ordained women envision the sacraments and what these sacraments mean to others. The sacraments are intensely powerful, and no less so because RCWP's women have been ordained *contra legem*. For many of RCWP's ordained women, "sacraments" and "Roman Catholicism" are inexorably linked. Sacraments are the vehicles through which Catholics live out their faith and worship in community. When asked why they "stay Catholic"—considering they want to be ordained and Roman Catholic leadership does not allow ordained women—many women will immediately answer "the sacraments." For instance, when asked why she remains Catholic, womanpriest Mary Ann Schoettly responded, "It is in my DNA... I value the sacraments and rites of the official church. I believe that they provide a unique way of inspiring and reinforcing our consciousness of our connection with the Holy."⁴ When asked why she sought ordination, womanpriest Marie David said without hesitation, "Because of the sacraments."⁵ Bringing the sacraments to those who seek them inspires much of RCWP's ministry. The RCWP movement is concerned because many Catholics today are prevented from routinely celebrating the sacraments. As Patricia Fresen has said, "The sacraments are for the people," and given the lack of priests and increased parish closures in twenty-first century Catholicism, some Catholics see a visitor priest only once every few weeks or months, thus impacting their sacramental lives.⁶ Womenpriests, then, speak of valuing the sacraments on levels both individual and communal.

⁴ Mary Ann Schoettly, email interview with author, January 9, 2011.

⁵ Marie David, telephone interview with author, February 11, 2011.

⁶ Patricia Fresen, "A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry: Looking at a Church in Crisis," in *Women Find a Way*, 28. Note, the role of pastoral administrator that some women play—and that a number of RCWP's ordained women have played—is detailed in Ruth Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

RCWP's use of sacraments is not without controversy. According to official Church teachings and public statements about women's ordination, any "meaning" behind RCWP's sacraments is moot. Because the Church categorically does not allow that the women's *illicit* ordinations might also be *valid*, the sacraments RCWP offers do not "count" in the minds of Vatican officials. Moreover, the women have all been excommunicated *latae sententiae*. The 2002 Warning on the Attempted Ordination of Women labeled the Danube ordination a "simulation of a sacrament."⁷ In theological parlance, this means the Church sees the ordination as invalid, as a reenactment without soteriological merit; by extension, any sacraments the invalidly ordained individual performs would also be invalid and without salvific merit. Womenpriests have seen firsthand the effect of the hierarchy's position. Theresa Novak Chabot is one of many womenpriests to have been served an official letter from her bishop, in this case, Bishop of Manchester John McCormack. McCormack told Chabot that, because she had "separated herself from the Church," she was "not permitted to celebrate or receive the sacraments" or participate at mass. He went on to ask her "not to simulate the celebration of a sacrament nor imply that you act in the name of the Roman Catholic Church." Doing so, this Bishop and others like him have suggested, impacts the womanpriest's own salvation as well as the salvation of those who follow her.⁸

There is also criticism coming from more progressive spheres: some feminist Catholic critics disparage RCWP's decision to participate in Holy Orders and existing Roman Catholic sacramental structures. These outspoken and educated women (like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary Hunt, and Marian Ronan) suggest that women should not perform sacraments in

⁷Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Warning Regarding the Attempted Priestly Ordination of Some Catholic Women," July 10, 2002, in Deborah Halter, *The Papal 'No': A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican's Rejection of Women's Ordination* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004), 235.

⁸ Theresa Novak Chabot, telephone interview with author, January 20, 2011; Bishop of Manchester John McCormack to Theresa Novak Chabot, letter, 30 September 2010, provided to author by Chabot.

ways that follow closely the Roman Catholic model, because doing so inserts womenpriests into a system that is hierarchal, patriarchal, and, thus, inherently flawed. These critics are not concerned with the sacramental validity that preoccupies Vatican authorities; rather, these scholars worry about women participating in and perpetuating kyriarchial structures. Women facilitating sacraments in the way that male priests do, these scholars fear, does a disservice to the “discipleship of equals” model that Schüssler Fiorenza has championed. In this formation, sacraments are part of the problem—not, as RCWP would suggest, part of the solution.

Consequently, RCWP is caught between competing forces, each critiquing the movement for its sacramental use—albeit for different reasons and in different ways. Along this fault line, where Vatican traditionalists and certain feminist theologians are chafing at RCWP’s *modus operandi*, rests a tension—one that RCWP seems willing to be “at peace” with and unhurried to rectify. To be sure, RCWP doesn’t entirely eschew traditional sacramental structures, and thereby what they do *looks* and *sounds like* Roman Catholicism. In other ways, however, what they “do,” sacramentally, is entirely transgressive—as the Vatican’s reaction underscores—for the mere fact that RCWP inserts women into the sacramental priesthood. By emulating the centuries-old Church while injecting female-led innovation into it, RCWP’s sacraments blend tradition and transgression.

Given the criticisms from the Vatican and feminist theologians as well as RCWP’s commitment to equality for women, I argue that RCWP must and does simultaneously retain and reframe the relationship between sacraments, the Catholic priesthood, and Catholic worshippers. To simply retain the sacraments as they stand—as the Roman Catholic all-male hierarchy uses them—would be impossible for these women who seek a remodeled and reframed priesthood. Roman Catholic Womenpriests, therefore, seeks to do concurrently

something that is both different and the same, i.e., traditional and transgressive. This tension, this friction, this straddling of boundaries, I contend, functions in three ways: first, RCWP's sacraments and use of sacraments shift the traditional Roman Catholic sacramental economy and place the nexus of (sacramental) authority in the community gathered, and not strictly in the hands of womenpriests; second, and building upon the first point, RCWP seeks to create a radical inclusivity, whereby all people present—Catholics, non-Catholics, or Catholics in poor standing with the Church—can not only receive the sacraments, but participate in facilitating them as well; and third, RCWP builds upon the “sign” and “symbol” language that the Roman Catholic Church traditionally uses to discuss sacraments and, by inserting *women* priests and making women visible *as* priests, seeks to modify (traditional) ideas about who can and does image Christ.

This chapter begins with an introduction to the traditional Roman Catholic sacramental economy, as expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, distinguished from Protestant sacraments, and linked to the Roman Catholic Church's idea about the priest as standing in the person of Christ. In so doing, it addresses signs, symbols, and semiotics as seen in RCWP's sacramental gestures and the women's own understanding of sacraments. The narrative then moves into an analysis of RCWP's emerging sacramental economy, with specific attention paid to Holy Orders and the Eucharist, because—as I will show—these are the sacraments that Vatican teaching most links to the male image and a male-only priesthood. The concluding analysis will touch briefly, though not exhaustively, on examples of baptism, reconciliation, marriage, and anointing of the sick. Throughout, I seek to show what Roman Catholic womenpriests *do*, in terms of sacraments, and what this means for the movement's desire for a new model of priesthood. My analysis reveals the ways RCWP relocates sacramental authority,

emphasizes inclusivity, and deliberately places a woman *in persona Christi*. Together, these emphasize what RCWP most desires for a renewed Roman Catholic Church.

Roman Catholic and RCWP Sacraments, Semiotically Examined

Roman Catholicism defines sacraments as “outward *signs* of inward grace,” as “visible rites” with signifying power, as performed by an ordained male priest who symbolizes Christ.⁹ Sacraments and the soteriological weight placed upon those sacraments are at the very heart of Roman Catholicism. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says the following:

The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. (§ 1131)

The Roman Catholic Church avers that for faithful Catholics (the *Catechism* reads “the believers”), “the sacraments...are *necessary for salvation*.” Only through the sacraments can the Holy Spirit bestow “sacramental grace,” thereby healing, transforming, and bringing believers into unity with Jesus Christ (§ 1129). The Church celebrates seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist (considered the Sacraments of Christian Initiation); Penance and Anointing of the Sick (considered the Sacraments of Healing); and Holy Orders and Matrimony (considered the Sacraments at the Service of Communion). These “signs of grace” are, by divine design, rendered visible. “Matter” and “form” helping bring about sacraments’ visibility and efficacy, as deemed necessary by the Roman Catholic Church. For instance, in the sacrament of baptism, water is the *matter*, which can be touched and seen, which renders visible what Christ intends for the Church; the words of baptism are the *form* that define the matter as

⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (“Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood”) (October 15, 1976), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi.htm>, Section 5, “The Ministerial Priesthood in the Light of the Mystery of Christ”; New Advent, “Sacraments,” Catholic online encyclopedia, www.newadvent.org.

representative of the baptismal rite. Matter and form collaborate to authenticate the sacrament.¹⁰ The Church teaches that human beings benefit when sacred things are *seen*, as with ceremonies, symbols, and signs. Sacraments, then, which have elements both embodied and sacred, help human beings—who are both corporeal and spiritual—conceive of the divine.¹¹

Sacraments also serve to distinguish Catholic worship practice from Protestant. Protestants neither attach the same significance to sacraments nor celebrate all seven. Catholic teaching sees Protestants as being in “error” for treating sacraments as signs only, thus overlooking the ways sacraments confer grace.¹² These differences date back to the Reformation and the writings of Martin Luther, as sixteenth century reformers struggled with Catholic teaching on sacraments. While the Roman Catholic Church taught and teaches that Jesus Christ instituted all seven sacraments (by ordaining the conferred grace, if not fully commanding sacramental specifics), many reformers found scriptural evidence only for Christ instituting baptism and the Eucharist. The Church asserted itself against the Protestants’ challenges at the Council of Trent, which took place in 1545 amid the Counter-Reformation. At Trent, Rome formally codified its sacramental teaching. Language about sacraments as a “necessary” part of Christian life first emerged from the Council of Trent, as a way of distinguishing “correct” Catholic teaching from errant Protestant innovations.¹³

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas is credited with making this distinction between matter and form, as thereafter applied to all Catholic sacraments. Liam Kelly, *Sacraments Revisited: What Do They Mean Today?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 11-13.

¹¹ New Advent, “Sacraments,” Catholic online encyclopedia, www.newadvent.org.

¹² New Advent, “Sacraments,” Catholic online encyclopedia, www.newadvent.org.

¹³ New Advent, “Sacraments,” Catholic online encyclopedia, www.newadvent.org; Alexandre Ganoczy, *An Introduction to Catholic Sacramental Theology*, trans. Reverend William Thomas, assisted by Reverend Anthony Sherman, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

And so, although the word “sacrament” never appears in the Bible, on Jesus’ lips or otherwise, sacraments have long been and remain central to Catholic worship. Within sacraments, grace is conferred from the Spirit to the believer; a Catholic grows closer in faith to God; communities embody and express their faith; and the ecclesiastical communion strengthens and manifests itself.¹⁴ In the wake of Vatican II’s emphasis on the laity’s devout and active participation in worship, sacraments and liturgy became more strongly linked. Both became increasingly viewed as embodied, *experiential* opportunities: laymen and women could simultaneously experience the sacred and participate in community.

Deliberately placing itself in this post-Vatican II vein, RCWP both adopts and adapts the Roman Catholic sacramental framework and its interpretation of signs, symbols, and signifying work. RCWP’s sacraments are modeled upon Roman Catholic sacraments with the significant difference of allowing women to act *in persona Christi*. Within sacramental performance, womenpriests strike poses that male priests strike; they echo Christ’s biblical words like male priests echo; they move, dress, and gesture in ways that male priests move, dress, and gesture. Signs and symbols are retained and then reframed, given new meaning under a womanpriest’s leadership. RCWP understands, takes, and modifies the Roman Catholic sacramental economy, thereby creating a different—if, I argue, nascent—sacramental economy of its own.

When placed in a semiotics framework, Roman Catholic sacraments are revealed to be about direct correlations between signifier and signified, wherein meaning is fixed and not fluid. As we will see, this fixed meaning has become intertwined with the Church’s given reasons for a male-only priesthood. Language about “signs” and “symbols” permeate Vatican rhetoric about sacraments as well as documents explaining why women cannot be priests. For instance, *Inter*

¹⁴ These are paraphrases of different Catholic definitions of sacrament. See Liam Kelly, *Sacraments Revisited*, 1-3.

Insigniores places significant theological meaning and import upon sacraments, which are described as being “natural signs” that point directly to salvific work:

[I]t must not be forgotten that the sacramental signs are not conventional ones. Not only is it true that, in many respects, they are natural signs because they respond to the deep symbolism of actions and things, but they are more than this: they are principally meant to link the person of every period to the supreme Event of the history of salvation, in order to enable that person to understand, through all the Bible's wealth of pedagogy and symbolism, what grace they signify and produce. For example, the sacrament of the Eucharist is not only a fraternal meal, but at the same time the memorial which makes present and actual Christ's sacrifice and his offering by the Church.¹⁵

The document goes on to say that “the whole sacramental economy is in fact based upon natural signs, on symbols imprinted upon the human psychology.”¹⁶ Men must be priests because only men can carry a “natural resemblance” to Christ, because Christ was male. Faithful Catholics would have difficulty seeing Christ in the priest if this natural resemblance were not retained, “for Christ himself was and remains a man.”¹⁷ This line of argument, centered upon signs, symbols, and natural resemblance, leads to a conclusion whereby women cannot be ordained priests because, celebrated by a woman priest, the sacraments—which inherently involve visibility, signification of Christ, and the Church’s saving power—would not and could not “work” properly.

RCWP’s sacraments are not simply the performed protests that I examined in the previous chapter, but they are—like the ordinations-as-protests—closely linked to visual signs, symbols, and signification. As womanpriest Eleonora Mariano writes of the communities she and her husband, David, co-pastor, “Often women will come to the Mass just to see a woman

¹⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, Section 4: “Permanent Value of the Attitude of Jesus and the Apostles.”

¹⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, Section 5: “The Ministerial Priesthood in Light of the Mystery of Christ.”

¹⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*, Section 5: “The Ministerial Priesthood in Light of the Mystery of Christ.”

actually celebrating the Eucharist. On many of these occasions we all wind up crying, some for the loss of opportunity [to] be a woman priest and some for the joy of finally see[ing] a woman priest celebrate.”¹⁸ Within this change from male priest to female priest, the community gathered for worship places meaning—often a personal meaning, as Mariano suggests—upon the priest and the sacrament, and this meaning can—and is, in fact, invited to—go above, beyond, and/or away from the traditional, “textbook” official Church meaning. Mariano adds, “At this point, the actuality of my Roman Catholic priesthood is mind-boggling.” Meaning making and interpretive authority cease to rest solely with the Roman Catholic magisterium and therein rests with RCWP’s womenpriests and womenpriest-led communities. Using the Roman Catholic sacramental framework but making theological changes via a womanpriest’s body, RCWP crafts a new sacramental economy in the shadow of the old. The womenpriests perform a sacramental system that allows for meaning-making, redistributes authority, and places women *in loco Christi*.

Holy Orders: What Happens, Performatively and Ontologically?

Recall that the 1995 Women’s Ordination Conference gathering had the reformers debating the best strategies for incorporating the women more fully and authoritatively into Roman Catholic life. Despite some feminist theologians’ insistence that “ordination is subordination,”¹⁹ RCWP’s members firmly believe that such inclusion cannot be accomplished without sacramental authority. Patricia Fresen, an RCWP bishop, has articulated this RCWP vision and rationale most thoroughly:

For the sake of credibility and also as a matter of justice, these women are ordained in apostolic succession. Women have the right, not only to be ordained to the diaconate,

¹⁸ Eleonora Marinaro, “Coming Home,” in *Women Find a Way*, 87.

¹⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza quoted in Pamela Schaeffer, “WOC gathers to promote women’s ordination amid conflicting visions, goals,” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 1, 1995, www.ncronline.org.

priesthood and episcopacy, but to be ordained in the same way, in the same tradition, as men. At this early stage of women's ordination, it is important, even essential, to claim this right. The sacrament of Order is founded on baptism, not on gender.²⁰

Here, Fresen takes aim at one of the Vatican's most prevalent arguments against women's ordination, as expressed in *Inter Insigniores*. She counters this with the argument that Holy Orders is bestowed on baptized Catholics—not only *male* baptized Catholics.²¹ Making this change happen, allowing the symbol-shift to take place, and including women in sacramental authority are all, for Fresen, matters of justice, and for this reason, women should be ordained in the same way that men are ordained. For Fresen and other RCWP members, the goal is not to capitulate to patriarchy or replicate kyriarchical injustices: the goal is to do sacramentally and traditionally for women what the Roman Catholic Church does for men.

Because RCWP's goal is about equality for women, RCWP's female ordinands receive the sacrament of Holy Orders in ceremonies that borrow extensively from the Roman Catholic ordination rite. For RCWP, following the form is imperative and cannot be changed.²² Recall that, during the 2002 Danube River ordination, bishop Romolo Braschi reprimanded an

²⁰ Patricia Fresen, "A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry: Looking at a Church in Crisis," in *Women Find a Way*, 28-35: 29.

²¹ While Fresen does not here provide evidence for her argument that baptism is for all baptized Catholics, male and female. I suspect she is drawing upon United States Catholic Conference *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §1267-1274, which explains how Baptism brings all Christians into the Body of Christ, "which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes" (§1267). As a result of Baptism, Christians receive "an indelible spiritual mark" (§1272-74) and share in the "priesthood of Christ...in the common priesthood of all believers" (§1268). She may also be referencing §1546: "The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly... Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are 'consecrated to be...a holy priesthood.'"

²² Earlier in this chapter, I introduced the importance of both form and matter for Roman Catholic sacraments. In RCWP's understanding, the group keeps the Roman Catholic form and the women themselves—baptized in the Church—are the matter. Conversely, critics contend that it is irrelevant that the form is retained, as the *matter* is improper for Holy Orders because the Church cannot ordain women.

ordination attendee who called out “and sisters” when Braschi offered up a prayer naming “brothers.” Braschi told the crowd, “Today we follow the Roman rite.”²³

RCWP’s ceremonies consciously follow the Roman Catholic order of the Ordination Liturgy. For instance, during the Calling, Presentation and Election of the Candidates for Diaconate, the candidates are called forth, one at a time, to announce, “Here I am; I am ready.” A concelebrant then says, “Dear Bishop. The Holy Church asks you to ordain this candidate to the diaconate.” The Bishop asks, “Do you know if she is worthy?” The co-celebrant replies: “Those responsible have been asked. They testify that they find her worthy. Will those who have accompanied the candidates for the diaconate please come forward now, and witness to why they should be ordained?” After the witness speaks on the candidate’s behalf, the Bishop proclaims, “In the name of Jesus the Christ, we choose you, (name), as deacon.”²⁴ In similar fashion, during the Examination of the Priest Ordinands, the Bishop asks questions and the women respond. Here are some excerpts from that examination:

Bishop: My dear sisters, before you receive the order of the priesthood, you are asked to proclaim before the assembly that you willingly take on this office and ministry. So I ask you: are you ready to be ordained for priestly ministry, in the Church, by the laying on of our hands, and the gift of the Holy Spirit?

Ordinands: I am ready.

...

Bishop: Are you resolved to celebrate the mysteries of Christ faithfully, as the church has handed them down to us, for the Glory of God and the flourishing of God’s grace, together with Christ’s people?

Ordinands: I am ready.

²³ John L. Allen Jr., “Seven women ‘ordained’ priests June 29,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 1, 2002.

²⁴ Minneapolis Ordination, Minneapolis, MN, field notes, August 15, 2009; Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “Sixth Midwest Region Ordination Order of Worship,” worship aid, August 15, 2009.

Bishop: Are you resolved to consecrate your life to God, for the Holy Spirit's saving work with the people of God, and to unite yourself closely to Christ, who lived and taught in justice, in the beatitudes and acts of mercy?

Ordinands: With the help of God, I am ready.

Bishop: May God complete the good work already begun in you. Amen.

More of the traditional ceremony continues. The Litany of the Saints is sung while the candidates/ordinands lay prostrate. The Laying on of Hands, which is "the most sacred moment of the ordination rite," takes place in silence. Deacons are invested with a stole and receive a Bible. Priests are invested with a stole and chasuble, have their hands anointed with oil, and receive a paten and chalice.

Chava Redonnet, a womenpriest ordained in Rochester, NY in May 2010, says that because of RCWP's emphasis on correct form, ordinands cannot "get creative" with their ordination ceremonies. While she finds this "disappointing," she understands why: Redonnet was for years a member of Spiritus Christi Church, an independent Catholic Church that is, as Redonnet puts it, "off the map" and therefore "completely ignored" by Rome. In contrast, because RCWP uses the same ceremony, wherein the only difference from Roman Catholic tradition is the ordinands' gender, "we can know that Rome is taking us seriously."²⁵ In RCWP's calculus, staying true to Roman Catholic form ensures equality for women and signals the authenticity of the women's ordination. So, there are for RCWP's women aspects of the ordination rite that are non-negotiable.

²⁵ Chava Redonnet, telephone interview with author, January 6, 2011. Redonnet is correct that Spiritus Christi is not currently getting the kind of attention RCWP is drawing from Church officials, but Spiritus Christi has had its share of diocesan trouble. In 1998, Rochester Bishop Matthew Clark removed Father Jim Callan from leadership; Clark was likely feeling Vatican pressure, as Rome frowned upon the parish's willingness to allow women on the altar, bless gay unions, and invite non-Catholics to communion. Many members of the parish known as Corpus Christi broke away and formed *Spiritus Christi*. In February 1999, the Rochester diocese declared that the new parish's members had excommunicated themselves. Recall, this *latae sententiae* excommunication is the same as which applies to RCWP's women. For a brief history of Spiritus Christi, told by Spiritus Christi, see Spiritus Christi Church, "About Us: Our History: History of Spiritus Christi Church," Spiritus Christi, <http://spirituschristi.org>.

At the same, RCWP does make changes—perhaps “additions” is the better word—to the ordination ceremonies. Gender inclusive language is a fundamental aspect of RCWP’s sacramental reshaping of Holy Orders. In fact, all of RCWP’s sacraments and liturgies demonstrate gender-inclusive language, a move RCWP and Catholic feminists deem even more important in the wake of Rome’s 1990’s decision to mandate gender *exclusive* language.²⁶ Conscious language use has always been a hallmark of RCWP’s sacraments, and in this way, the Braschi example above seems a likely anomaly. It is difficult to imagine that the 2002 Danube Seven directed Braschi to use gender *exclusive* language in the service of the Roman rite: these feminist theologians and women’s activists would likely have bristled at Braschi’s words just as the outspoken ordination attendee did. More likely, Braschi made some last-minute changes—recall, he was not originally set to preside at the ceremony, but rather co-celebrate—that kept the Roman form while, I suspect, chafing the feminist sensibilities of the women present. Given the importance of following Roman custom for authenticity’s sake, Braschi was most likely being overly cautious—and not intentionally patriarchal.

RCWP’s language is not just gender-inclusive in terms of using men *and* women, brothers *and* sisters, or humankind instead of mankind, but also in inserting women more consciously into the service. The Rochester ordination, for example, began with a nod to ordained women from early Christianity. Womanpriest Jean Marchant told the crowd gathered, “Historical and archaeological evidence reveals that women served as deacons, priests and bishops from the second to the sixth centuries. Deacons Phoebe, Sophia, and Maria; Priests Letta and Nathalia; Bishops Theodora and Alexandra, served alongside the apostles.” Womanpriest Eileen DiFranco then added that the day’s ordination would celebrate “the fact

²⁶ Debora Halter, *The Papal ‘No,’* 90-93.

that Jesus invited women as well as men to becoming leaders in building the kin-dom that we desire.” By saying women as well as men—and reversing the binary to make “women” the forethought and men the addition, she emphasized women as called, as clearly part of Jesus’s plan for humankind. When she speaks not of “kingdom”—a word with “king” and therefore a male monarch at its root—but of “kin-dom,” the emphasis becomes one placed on family and relationship, not power and rule. DiFranco then expressed gratitude that Jesus sent Spirit, Wisdom Sophia, to guide the Church. This way of marking the Holy Spirit as female is not new to RCWP but gestures back to the ancient church and echoes the “return to early times” moves that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, for example, has made. Gendering the Holy Spirit in this way inserts a female presence into the Trinity.

Another presence that RCWP deliberately inserts into its ordinations is that of families. Because RCWP believes celibacy should be optional, and not required of Catholic priests, many ordinands are married or partnered and most have children and grandchildren. For this reason, ordinands’ families participate in ordination ceremonies. During the Presentation of the Candidates, oftentimes candidates’ spouses will witness to their suitability and worthiness for ordination. In Rochester, Caryl Johnson’s husband spoke of his wife as his “soulmate,” his “happy heart,” and the “source of strength” and the “light” in their family.²⁷ Husbands sometimes say thing to suggest their wives’ decision to seek ordination has not been taken lightly nor independently. Ann Penick’s husband reported that, when he first heard that Ann was considering ordination with RCWP, he responded, “Really? Tell me, why do you want a ticket on the Titanic?” Jim’s comment received much laughter and applause. Made in the context of this ordination ceremony, the comment also suggested that Jim came around to support his wife

²⁷ Rochester Ordination, Rochester, NY, field notes, May 1, 2010.

who, he said, “always answers” when God calls.²⁸ When Dana Reynolds was ordained on the St. Lawrence in 2005, her husband Don testified that his wife of over 40 years was following her calling and her passion. As Don finished his brief speech, the couple shared a kiss on the lips, an intimate gesture that signaled RCWP’s commitment to ordaining non-celibate priests.²⁹ Taken together, these examples show an openness to and emphasis on women’s marital lives: the intimacy of their relationships contrast with the Church’s required priestly celibacy.

Candidates’ children also participate in the ceremony, their presence inviting a connection between motherhood and priesthood. Some children present their parents for ordination, as did Patricia LaRosa’s daughter, who praised her mother’s commitment to the journey toward ordination.³⁰ Children also participate in the Investiture. Four young women helped invest Chava Redonnet with her stole and chasuble: Redonnet’s three daughters, Clare, Bridget, and Emily, and her oldest daughter’s partner, Katie. The sight was a stirring reversal of the typical mother-child relationship. Now, instead of the mother dressing the daughter’s body and tending to her needs, the child dressed the mother’s body, marking her physically as a priest. Adding to the moment’s power for participants was Redonnet’s status as a single mother. The four women, each wearing dresses, helped Redonnet remove her red deacon’s stole; they helped put the chasuble over her head; they helped situate the red priest’s stole around her neck. They made small adjustments, gently touching Redonnet’s body and vestments. When Redonnet was fully vested, she enveloped her daughters and daughter-in-law in giant bear hugs. This family of

²⁸ Rochester Ordination, Rochester, NY, field notes, May 1, 2010.

²⁹ St. Lawrence Seaway Ordination, ceremony filming, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

³⁰ Rochester Ordination, Rochester, NY, field notes, May 1, 2010.

five women, standing on the altar, investing a womanpriest, signaled women's authority and ability in the sacred ordination process.³¹

Children, husbands, and valued friends also take part in the most sacred moment of Holy Orders: the Laying on of Hands. Significantly, RCWP has expanded the Laying on of Hands to mean not just the bishop's hands placed upon a candidate's head, thereby conferring grace and Spirit upon an ordinand, but also the community's hands, conferring the community's calling forth of the ordinand and its approval of Holy Orders. RCWP's ordination ceremonies have used different modifications to the Laying on of Hands, yet each incarnation involves a blend of bishops and community members. Victoria Rue recalls the St. Lawrence ordination, where she was ordained a priest, being on her knees for 45 minutes while everyone laid hands on her.³² In contrast, in Minneapolis in August 2009, after Bishop Regina Nicolosi laid hands on the ordinands, "clergy and representatives of the community who have been asked to do so" came forward and laid hands on the ordinands. Similarly, the ordinands in Rochester elected five individuals to lay hands on them; these "representatives of the community," as they were named, filed past the kneeling ordinands, laying hands on each woman—and not just the woman who had "picked" them. Meanwhile, people in the pews were invited to reach out and touch the shoulder of the person in front of them, as a way of extending the Laying on of Hands blessing. Many in the pews did just this, gently touching the shoulder or upper arm of a person in front of them or beside them. Others extended their arms outward in the direction of the ordinands, their palms open and their hands in midair. In this way, symbolically, all people in attendance participated in blessing the women.

³¹ Rochester Ordination, Rochester, NY, field notes, May 1, 2010.

³² Victoria Rue, interview, April 19, 2006, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

The “representatives of the community” that come forth and the people in the pews who extend their hands come to symbolize RCWP’s ideas about inclusivity and authority. The bishop is not alone in authenticating the ordinands’ call is not authenticated; instead, Holy Orders becomes a community-wide endeavor. The *Catechism* distinguishes Holy Orders as a sacrament in service of the Holy communion, i.e., a sacrament that serves the community. RCWP gives that community the “first move,” so to speak, in legitimating and blessing that call. Perhaps for this reason, it is important that the community representatives represent diversity. Redonnet’s “five people,” as she describes them, included a former homiletics professor, a Baptist preacher from El Salvador, a member of the local Catholic Worker house, an illegal immigrant who lives at the Catholic Worker house, and a member of Spiritus Christi. These five people comprised different ages, different genders, different races and ethnicities, different religious denominations, ordained and non-ordained status, and diverse educational backgrounds. And each person had a role in affirming Redonnet’s call and ordination; each laid hands upon her, just as did Andrea Johnson, the presiding bishop at Redonnet’s ordination.³³

What, then, of the bishop’s authority? When a multitude of community members lay hands on or extend hands toward the candidates, what is the *bishop* actually doing? In traditional Roman Catholic ordination ceremonies, the answer is clear: the bishop mediates God’s grace and confers the Spirit and apostolic succession. For RCWP, the bishop’s role is more ambiguous. Bishop Patricia Fresen is careful to explain that RCWP “strive[s] to avoid the trap of dualism, clericalism and hierarchy.” In saying this, Fresen responds to certain feminist critics mentioned above who might suggest that RCWP’s womenpriests are simply capitulating to and replicating the clerical system. Fresen points out that RCWP’s ordained women do not vow

³³ Rochester Ordination, Rochester, NY, field notes, May 1, 2010; Chava Redonnet, telephone interview with author, January 6, 2011.

obedience to the bishop, whereas male ordinands do. Instead, RCWP's women aim to live in "prophetic obedience," described by Fresen as obedience to the Spirit and characterized by listening to and following a call, much as biblical prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah) and contemporary prophets (Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero, and Nelson Mandela) have done. As a way of signaling obedience to a force that is sacred—and not hierarchical—during the ordination ceremony, RCWP's ordinands prostrate in front of the altar—and not in front of the bishop, as legally ordained male ordinands do. Thus, RCWP keeps the important embodied posture of prostration but removes the hierarchical figure receiving reverent obedience.³⁴

Yet however clearly RCWP says it eschews clericalism and embraces prophetic (over hierarchical) obedience, these boundaries are blurred in practice. RCWP's ordinands *do* prostrate themselves: women lay on the floor, stomach down, head toward the altar, feet pointing back, and hands folded, supporting the forehead. Customarily, just as Fresen described, the bishop sits off to the side and not directly in front of the prostrating women. In Minneapolis in August 2009, when the concelebrant announced, "the ordinands' prostration is an act of loving surrender to God," she explained to the community that prostration is not a gesture of obedience to clergy, but rather obedience to the divine.³⁵ Still, the prostration reads—and appropriately so—as an act of supplication and submission, and someone unaware of RCWP's stated position may read the gesture as a form of clerical obedience. Likewise, someone familiar with Roman Catholic ordination ceremonies but unfamiliar with RCWP's unique ordination theology might see the prostration as "just right" in terms of modeling valid and licit Roman Catholic practice. Adding to these multiple meanings is the bishop's centrality as the mediator of apostolic succession. Sacramentally, RCWP leaves no doubt that the Laying on of Hands is the

³⁴ Patricia Fresen, "A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry," in *Women Find a Way*, 31-32.

³⁵ Minneapolis Ordination, Minneapolis, MN, field notes, August 15, 2009.

most sacred moment of Holy Orders—and the bishop is the first to convey this blessing. The bishop is essential for a valid ordination, as she conveys apostolic succession. She brings that validity, not only to the ordinand about to become deacon, priest, or even bishop, but also to RCWP’s claim of sacramental authenticity. At the same time, the bishop is not alone in laying hands: she is joined by ordained and unordained alike in touching candidates’ heads. The bishop is an ambivalent figure, then, powerful (in preserving the apostolic line) but deflecting any acquiescence to her power. It is not yet fully clear what position the bishop occupies in RCWP theological understanding, and that place of tension—though sacramentally fascinating—may lead unintentionally to confusion and misunderstanding.

Compounding these questions about authority is the very real question of *what happens at ordination*, to ordinands? Again, Roman Catholic tradition is clear about this: when a man becomes a priest, an ontological change takes place that allows him to perform the sacraments (§1572). RCWP, for its part, has no unified position about the question of ontological change. Some women believe wholly that they are transformed as a result of ordination, while others dismiss the notion. Victoria Rue is in the former category. Rue, whom I introduced at this chapter’s beginning, described feeling “cellularly” changed when she was ordained. There is no question in Rue’s mind that something is different as a result of ordination.³⁶ Rose Marie Hudson talked about feeling “heaviness” upon her back as she lay on the floor prostrating before God. She had great difficulty getting up from the supine position. Later, a male priest friend told her that that heaviness was the Holy Spirit, and the same thing happened to him

³⁶ Victoria Rue, interview, April 19, 2006, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage. It must be noted that while Rue’s comments do suggest she feels somehow transformed by the ordination, they do not indicate that she believes she has been “indelibly” changed in the manner of Roman Catholic theology around Holy Orders. I take Rue’s statement to be primarily about the profound spiritual power of her ordination experience.

when he was ordained. “What a tremendous confirmation of ordination,” Hudson thought.³⁷

While these personal accounts do not automatically imply an understanding of ontological change or hierarchical separation between ordained and non-ordained Catholics, these stories do suggest that ordination can be a profoundly moving experience for ordinands and can be viewed as a deeply personal transformation. Kathy Vandenberg is less sure about this change, but she does know something is different. She wrote, “Even now I am still trying to understand what it means to be a priest. I look into a mirror and I still look the same as I did before I was ordained. I know that I am the same – but also different.”³⁸ Then there are women who disregard the ontological notion altogether. Eileen DiFranco explains that she learned and retained from Protestants (as she was trained in a Lutheran seminary) that “no ‘ontological’ change occurred with ordination.”³⁹ Similarly, Kathleen Kunster has said, “While I’m not at all sure that I would say there is an ‘ontological’ change at ordination, it is clear to me that God has been more present in my life since I said ‘Yes’ to being ordained. And it seems to be clear to other people as well.”⁴⁰ The Roman Catholic Church would unquestionably affirm an ontological change during ordination for *male* candidates, and while some womenpriests reject that notion outright, others embrace the idea of transformation and sacred affirmation of ordination.

Questions remain: about the bishop’s role, the community’s authority, and ontological change. Might the bishop “give” to ordinands something that others cannot? This would make the bishop sacramentally distinct (in the context of Holy Orders), but not distinctly powerful (in a kyriarchical sense). Are community members who lay hands bestowing additional blessings so

³⁷ Rose Marie Hudson, “I Think I See a Priest,” in *Women Find a Way*, 105.

³⁸ Kathy Sullivan Vandenberg, “Prophetic Obedience,” in *Women Find a Way*, 125.

³⁹ Eileen DiFranco, “A *Contra Legem* Life,” in *Women Find a Way*, 59.

⁴⁰ Kathleen Strack Kunster, “Biography of a Priest,” in *Women Find a Way*, 154.

as to “strengthen” what the bishop has already done? If so, RCWP implies that the community’s blessing—made in multitudes—bolsters the bishop’s gesture. Why do some womenpriests embrace a change during ordination (“cellularly rearranged,” as Rue described it) while others are quick to reject that distinctive mark? This interpretive difference suggests that, perhaps, some women seek confirmation of their ordination, from unseen and sacred forces, and believe God is on their side and enabling the transformation. In contrast, other women deny the ontological change perhaps because doing so preserves RCWP’s commitment to breaking down a lay-clergy distinction; if no transformation happens, then the ordained women are on the same level as the people—no more and no less powerful: clericalism averted.

In returning to what I described as RCWP’s post-structuralist sacramental view, I want to suggest that these questions remain unanswered in part because meaning-making is a process within RCWP sacraments—one in which persons lay and ordained are invited to participate. Unlike in the Pope’s Roman Catholicism, where answers are laid out in Canon Law or the *Catechism*, RCWP deliberately deviates from those clear-cut answers. The Roman Catholic Church has a particular (and, I would say, structuralist) way of understanding sacraments, but RCWP does not. RCWP draws no tidy line from signifier to signified and offers no straightforward way to “read” symbolic gestures. RCWP’s *modus operandi* may not be entirely *Roman Catholic* in the traditional sense, but it is a radical intervention into Roman Catholic tradition. How exactly apostolic succession is conveyed, how exactly the community blesses candidates, and how exactly ordained women are different from non-ordained people are all questions presently left unexplained in RCWP’s reordering of Holy Orders. Independent of explanation, RCWP’s use of Holy Orders becomes a sacramental performance that symbolically demonstrates RCWP’s commitment to inclusivity, to sharing sacramental authority with diverse persons, and to making women visible within familiar and otherwise legitimate Catholic

sacramental structures. These points seem to take precedence over the certainty of ontological transformation.

A final example from Chava Redonnet shows that some womenpriests do realize the contradiction at play here—and they are not hurrying to reconcile it. If Holy Orders may or may not make women ontologically distinct and if RCWP consciously breaks down the clergy-lay divide, then *why be ordained?* Redonnet did not have an easy answer. She admitted that she does not “believe in that ‘ontological change’ thing, but...” Here she paused and reflected. “I’m inconsistent,” she admitted. Being ordained is, for Redonnet, the “most empowering thing in the world,” and having “all of those people pray” for her—those who laid hands on her and those who extended hands toward her—was “so empowering.” She added that, her first day back at work following her ordination to the priesthood, she changed her stole: she no longer wore it over her left shoulder and cinched at the waist, as a deacon does, but she put it behind her neck and down the sides, as a priest does. Once a priest, Redonnet marked that change on her body, with her dress and her public persona. Regardless of what had happened to her ontologically, on the inside, as a result of ordination, she let the empowerment she experienced as an ordained priest show on the outside. Her female body was marked, then, as a priest. In the Roman Catholic parlance of priesthood, therefore, Redonnet was now imaging Christ.

A Different Model of Holy Orders: The Example of Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community

A discussion of RCWP and Holy Orders would be incomplete without the example of a very different ordination ceremony that took place at Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community (MMACC), in San Diego, California, on July 31, 2010. MMACC is a faith

community co-pastored by Jane Via, a Roman Catholic womanpriest, and Rod Stephens, a Roman Catholic priest who is openly gay and no longer serves the institutional church. The banner on MMACC's website says the community offers "A new way to be Roman Catholic."⁴¹ What happened at MMACC illustrates an alternative way of understanding Holy Orders, apostolic succession, and a community's power to call a person to priesthood. On that July day, Nancy Corran was ordained a priest, not through the apostolic succession handed down through a bishop, but through the nearly 150 hands of MMACC community members. To be clear, the ordination was *not* through RCWP but was done at a community led by RCWP's Jane Via; Corran's ordination did not emphasize apostolic succession but rather the communal calling from the MMACC faith community.

Corran's ordination was called "historic" and heralded by some as a return to an early church model of ordination.⁴² This is because MMACC used an entirely different model of apostolic succession through which to ordain Corran. Ordination through the imposition of a bishop's hands—which is the sacramental mode discussed thus far in this chapter—is not the only way that individuals have been ordained throughout Christian history. The current official Roman Catholic model maintains that succession marks an unbroken line from Jesus to the apostles to today's episcopacy. Early church scholars such as feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, however, have called this teaching on apostolic succession an "historical myth." Rather, Ruether and other scholars have noted that there existed in early Christian

⁴¹ Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community, "Home," Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community, <http://www.mccarronwebdesign.com/mmacc/>.

⁴² Christopher Cadelago, "Congregation ordains Catholic female pastor," *Sign On San Diego*, August 1, 2010, <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/aug/01/congregation-ordains-catholic-female-pastor/>. In this article, Bridget Mary Meehan, an RCWP bishop, says Corran's ordination is valid and "quite historic." See also Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Women priests offer differing approaches to valid ordination," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 10, 2010, <http://ncronline.org/news/women/women-priests-offer-differing-approaches-valid-ordination>.

communities different ways to select and ordain church leaders: some groups ordained through the community's laying on of hands (as MMACC has done with Corran's ordination), and others traced their lineage back to the twelve apostles (as the Roman Catholic Church does today). Those who emphasized an apostolic lineage, such as Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons, and later Eusebius of Caesarea, did so in order to assert authority and orthodoxy over and against other, earlier Christian groups.⁴³ Ruether has also argued that apostolic tradition was originally a *teaching* authority that many early Christian communities used to ensure continuation of the original faith traditions; not every early Christian church was preoccupied with continuation of the episcopal hierarchy.⁴⁴ In short, scholarship shows that the ideas around apostolic succession, such as those held by the Roman Catholic Church today, were not the only nor the earliest formations of episcopal authority or ordination. MMACC, then, sought to emulate the very early church models where ordained authority meant differently and emerged differently than today.

RCWP's Jane Via is a theologian and a New Testament scholar who describes her own theology as progressive, even within the progressively minded RCWP movement.⁴⁵ Via has a doctorate in religious studies and spent years researching and teaching undergraduates. This background surely led her to consider an ordination model different from the institutional Church's—and, notably, different from RCWP's. Corran came to MMACC with a diploma of theology from Oxford University and a Master of Divinity from the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley. She was prepared to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA), but she

⁴³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Women priests offer differing approaches to valid ordination," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 10, 2010, <http://ncronline.org/news/women/women-priests-offer-differing-approaches-valid-ordination>. In her article, Ruether cites Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 120, and Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

⁴⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 5, 284.

⁴⁵ Jane Via, telephone interview with author, November 22, 2010.

attended MMACC and felt drawn to the community. She served MMACC as a pastoral associate. MMACC's pastoral team decided to ordain Corran as a Roman Catholic, and they took this decision to the MMACC board; this proposition then went to the entire MMACC community at a town hall meeting, and the group voted almost unanimously to ordain Corran. As this process suggests, Via and Stevens have worked to create democratic decision-making structures at MMACC and reduce any hints of clericalism, and thus it is not surprising that the community would be able to call Corran forth and then ordain her. At the ceremony, community members of all ages, including young children, came forth to lay hands on Corran.⁴⁶

Again, Corran may be a Roman Catholic woman priest, but she is not a "womanpriest" in the RCWP mold. As shown in the previous section, RCWP deliberately and strategically retains the Roman Catholic tradition of priestly ordination through the laying on of a bishop's hands. Because Corran does not stand in that apostolic line, hers is not considered an RCWP ordination. Although tensions initially surfaced within RCWP when Via announced her plan to have the MMACC community ordain Corran, ultimately RCWP came out in support of Corran's unorthodox (if historically verified) ordination. Fellow Californian and RCWP womanpriest Victoria Rue attended the ordination in a show of support, as did Dana Reynolds.⁴⁷ Likewise, RCWP's Bishop Bridget Mary Meehan said, "There are many ways to be ordained. And we certainly consider [Corran's ordination] a valid ordination."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Jane Via, telephone interview with author, November 22, 2010. The MMACC website used to have a video showing footage from Corran's ordination and interviews with attendees. On this video, one could see the scores of MMACC community members filing past a kneeling Corran; one also saw in attendance RCWP members Victoria Rue and Dana Reynolds. This video is no longer on the MMACC website.

⁴⁷ It must be noted that Dana Reynolds, a member of RCWP since 2005 and consecrated bishop since 2008, resigned as RCWP bishop in the months leading up to Corran's ordination. Thus, she could not be said to have attended in any official RCWP capacity.

⁴⁸ Christopher Cadelago, "Congregation ordains Catholic female pastor," *Sign On San Diego*, August 1, 2010, <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/2010/aug/01/congregation-ordains-catholic-female-pastor/>.

Indeed, the mode in which MMACC ordained Corran might have been a first in any RCWP-led community, but it is something the movement had foreseen as a possibility. In a book published two years before Corran's ordination, Bishop Patricia Fresen acknowledged that another apostolic tradition may be employed to ordain Catholic priests. Emphasizing the importance of first obtaining for women the same ordination rights as men, Fresen wrote,

It is possible that, once women's right to be ordained equally with men, and in the same way, is more firmly established, there may be some new developments. . . . I suggest that our whole understanding of apostolic succession could be considerably broadened. Apostolic succession rightly means that the tradition of laying-on of hands for community ministry comes down to us through the centuries from the time of the early Church, and in fact goes back even beyond that. However, it need not necessarily be limited to the laying-on of hands by the bishop only. When we trace what we call apostolic succession, it usually goes back, in its written form, to some time during the Middle Ages. This is a hierarchical form of apostolic succession, passed down from one bishop to the next. It could still be accepted as apostolic succession, I propose, if the community—not the bishop—were to lay on hands. That would fit the communitarian model.⁴⁹

MMACC has done just what Fresen described, albeit before Roman Catholic women and men have achieved full priesthood equality within the Church.

Sacramental transitions and evolution—from the current, bishop-centered model to the community-centered model Fresen describes—are taking place, then, in the RCWP movement and in womenpriest-led communities. But changes are being undertaken deliberately and conscientiously. As RCWP's ordained women have told me time and again, womenpriests must meet the people they serve where they are. In thinking about Corran's "historic" ordination, Canada-based womanpriest Michele Birch-Conery explained that not every womanpriest-led community across Europe and North America is "ready" to do what Via's MMACC did in July

⁴⁹ Patricia Fresen, "A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry: Looking at a Church in Crisis," in *Women Find a Way*, 29.

2010.⁵⁰ Like the womenpriests themselves, community members have diverse educational backgrounds, different attachments to Catholic tradition, and a variety of regional Catholicisms. So it is possible that Corran's ordination took place when it did (July 2010) and where it did (San Diego, CA) simply because Via is a progressive and highly-educated feminist theologian who pastors a liberal parish of educated worshippers in the "blue state" of California.⁵¹ But I would like to propose a richer reading of the 2010 MMACC ordination, one that goes beyond geography and instead points to the possibility for creativity and freedom inherent in the RCWP movement. Given the authority bestowed upon her as an ordained Roman Catholic womenpriest, and given the authority she, in turn, has shared with MMACC in the spirit of democratic inclusivity, Via has moved the link between apostolic succession and Christian tradition in new directions. MMACC reimagined and then performed an understanding of Holy Orders that moved beyond even RCWP's own claiming/reclamation of women's ordination.

Celebrating the Eucharist: "All are Welcome"

The altar table at Therese of Divine Peace Inclusive Community has etched into it the words "All are Welcome." Whether the chairs for that day's Mass are arranged in rows, in arcs, or in a circle, community members see that message of welcome. Around that altar table, Therese's members gather weekly to celebrate Eucharist.⁵² At this RCWP-led worship community, as at all womenpriests' communities around North America, the priests are not alone in speaking the words of consecration. Instead, the entire community speaks those words together. RCWP's emphasis on inclusivity—which Therese of Divine Peace has even inserted

⁵⁰ Michele Birch-Conery, telephone interview with author, April 19, 2011.

⁵¹ Jane Via, telephone interview with author, November 22, 2010.

⁵² Therese of Divine Peace Inclusive Community, mass, St. Louis, MO, field notes, July 5, 2009; Therese of Divine Peace, mass and baptism, St. Louis, MO, field notes, December 27, 2009.

into its full name—becomes extended to the community in the form of sacramental authority, whereby the Body of the gathered community remembers the Body of Christ.

Roman Catholicism has no sacrament as central and profoundly important as the Eucharist. Canon Law deems the blessed Eucharist the “most august sacrament” and explains that “Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered and received” through the Eucharist. This is “the summit and the source of all worship and Christian life” (canon 897).⁵³ Because of the sacrament’s “inexhaustible richness,” it goes by many names, including the Lord’s Supper, the Breaking of Bread, the Holy Sacrifice, and Holy Communion.⁵⁴ Significantly—and in contrast to Protestant understandings of communion—Roman Catholicism holds that the bread and wine are not just symbols of Christ’s body and blood, but *are*, in fact, the body and blood of Christ. In celebrating Eucharist, then, Catholics

offer to the Father what he has himself given us: the gifts of his creation, bread and wine which, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of Christ, have become the body and blood of Christ. Christ is thus really and mysteriously made *present*. (*Catechism* §1357, emphasis in original)

How Christ is made manifest in the Eucharist is a mystery—but it does happen, according to Church teaching. Often called “transubstantiation,” this process by which bread and wine become body and blood received further attention at the Council of Trent, during the Counter-Reformation:

[B]y the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. (*Catechism* §1376)

⁵³ Canon Law Society of America, *The Code of Canon Law*, canon 897.

⁵⁴ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1328-32.

Given this sacramental transformation, then, only a validly ordained priest acting *in persona Christi* can bring the sacrament of the Eucharist into being.⁵⁵

RCWP eschews this teaching and reimagines the Eucharist and how Christ is made present in the Eucharist. As “validly but illegally” ordained priests, the womenpriests could presumably retain and replicate the Vatican’s/II’s notion that, as a function of Holy Orders, priests have within them the power to make Christ present in the Eucharist. RCWP shuns this idea, however, dismissing it as a mark of clericalism and an emphasis on clerical power. Instead, womenpriests use a model of priesthood whereby they take their own ordained authority—given to them through the sacrament of Holy Orders and the tradition of apostolic succession, as shown above—and gift it to their communities, sharing the “power” to consecrate with everyone gathered. RCWP understands this approach as a way of eliminating a hierarchical structure and emphasizing communitarian inclusivity.

RCWP has no standardized way for celebrating Eucharist. Communities certainly retain the Roman Catholic rite, but there is play within that formula and no dictated format that womenpriest-led communities everywhere must follow. Still, similarities arise. For instance, everyone present at a womanpriest-led mass participates in parts of the Eucharistic Prayer. According to Roman Catholic tradition, the Eucharistic Prayer is the heart of the celebration, during which Christ becomes present in bread and wine. The Eucharistic Prayer has many parts, such as the Thanksgiving, the Acclamation, the Epiclesis, the Institution Narrative and Consecration, the Anamnesis, the Offering, and the Intercessions.⁵⁶ At Eileen DiFranco’s Community of St. Mary Magdalene, in a suburb of Philadelphia, two community members who

⁵⁵ Canon Law Society of America, *The Code of Canon Law*, canon 900.

⁵⁶ For a full description of the official parts of Roman Catholic Mass, see the descriptions offered by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “The Structure of the Mass, its Elements and its Parts,” <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/current/chapter2.shtml#sect3c>.

bring the bread and wine forward to be consecrated stand with Eileen at the altar during the Eucharist. These individuals then extend their hands over the gifts during the Epiclesis, which is when God is called to send the Holy Spirit upon the gifts. In contrast, the standard Roman Catholic format has the priest alone extending his hands over the gifts. In another departure from tradition, everyone gathered at St. Mary Magdalene says the words of Institution, which in Catholic custom makes Christ “sacramentally present.”⁵⁷ The Eucharistic ministers assisting at the altar then pray the offering.⁵⁸ A similar division of labor and sharing of consecrating authority happens at RCWP’s other worship communities.

DiFranco’s community is not alone in its removal of atonement language. Instead of emphasizing Christ as a sacrifice during the Lamb of God—during which traditional Catholic worship finds the congregation saying, “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, only say the word and I shall be healed”—DiFranco’s community says, “Lord, you make us worthy to receive you and by your word, we have been healed.”⁵⁹ Likewise, other communities remove references to blood atonement, and many also remove the masculine “Lord” and insert “God.” When Rose Marie Hudson’s church, called Hildegard Community of the Living Spirit, in Festus, Missouri was only months old, womanpriest Hudson made a point of leading her congregation in saying, “God, *we are worthy* to receive you.”⁶⁰ This change represents a pointed departure from Catholic orthodoxy, specifically in making the respondent worthy and whole instead of sinful and in need of forgiveness.

⁵⁷ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1353.

⁵⁸ Eileen DiFranco, email interview with author, January 4, 13, and 18, 2011; Eileen DiFranco, “A Contra Legem Life” in *Women Find a Way*, 56-62.

⁵⁹ Eileen DiFranco, email interview with author, January 4, 13, and 18.

⁶⁰ Hildegard Community of the Living Spirit, mass, Festus, MO, December 26, 2010.

Altering body positioning and movement are another way RCWP's ordained women make adjustments, as a way of signaling that priests are no more powerful than the congregation. Typically in a Roman Catholic mass, the priest will stand at the altar, on the highest level, as he consecrates the Eucharist. Altar servers, who in most dioceses may be male or female⁶¹, may assist the priest. Sometimes Eucharistic ministers (men and women) will stand around him or on a level just below him, but above the congregation. According to the Church-issued Order of Liturgy, the priest receives the consecrated host and wine first; communion is thereby dispensed to the gathered community who usually line up in front of the priest or Eucharistic minister to then receive communion.⁶² RCWP changes much of this. At smaller services, like those at Therese of Divine Peace (held in a Unitarian Universalist chapel), the fifteen to thirty people gathered sometimes encircle the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer. Community members are physically proximate to the Eucharist. When it comes time to receive communion, body and blood are passed in a circle, with each person who has just received communion giving, in turn, Eucharist to the person beside them. At even smaller services, like those at St. Praxedis Catholic Community of New York, there is no altar to encircle. The bread and wine then become an intimate part of the community room, and here again, people pass communion to one another. While traditionally the Roman Catholic priest takes communion first, some RCWP communities, such as DiFranco's, make a point of having the womanpriest receive communion last. In short,

⁶¹ Over the past few decades, girls have been able to serve on the altar in certain dioceses and archdioceses. This is changing in certain areas, however, with some clerics wondering why girls should be allowed to be altar servers when they cannot become priests. One satirical *National Catholic Reporter* piece addresses this ongoing issue: Kate Childs Graham, "For altar girls, a modest proposal," *National Catholic Reporter*, October 14, 2011, 21.

⁶² It is crucial to note that the "typical" scenario I have laid out is not the only way Eucharist happens in the "traditional" Roman Catholic Church. I suspect that many Catholics will have experienced in their lifetimes something similar to what RCWP does, in terms of having congregations stand around the altar during the Eucharist or passing communion in a circular fashion. I myself have experienced this countless times when on spiritual retreats, when celebrating Eucharist in homes, or when attending masses for youth. My understanding is that this happens at the presiding priest's discretion. My experience is also that, if a bishop or higher authority disapproves of this practice, he can stop this more intimate Eucharist from taking place.

there are myriad ways womenpriests design and celebrate the Eucharist. Even within individual communities, fluidity occurs from week to week, and evolution of Eucharistic prayer—and the theology behind it—takes place from year to year. At its core, however, the RCWP Eucharist is one marked by deliberate changes to Roman Catholic liturgical orthodoxy that emphasize a sharing of sacramental authority and a rigorous inclusivity.

As a final way of enacting inclusivity, many RCWP communities have modified the “bread and wine” so that all gathered may partake. Instead of using wheat bread and alcoholic wine, as Canon Law 924 stipulates, many womenpriests use gluten-free bread and grape juice. Communities such as Baltimore’s Living-Water, Manchester’s Church of the Holy Spirit, and Calgary’s St. Brigid of Kildare, have adopted this practice. The bread, then, contains no wheat and is safe for individuals with gluten allergies. The “wine,” for its part, becomes safe for people (like those in recovery) who cannot consume alcohol. As womanpriest Gloria Carpeneto explained, this is an important gesture of inclusion, as it allows people who may be “broken” in some way—with alcoholism, with a gluten intolerance—to receive Eucharist fully, in the same way as their fellow communicants.⁶³ Monica Kilburn-Smith, a womanpriest in Canada, noted that making non-gluten bread is not easy, but it is an important step in making the Eucharist sensitive to people’s bodies.⁶⁴

To be clear, RCWP knows it is not the first or only group to celebrate Eucharist in these ways—i.e., using an inclusive model that makes the community, and not simply the priest, the celebrant. Womenpriests acknowledge that the ideas they use and the models they follow connect to early Christian communities, contemporary theology, and the work of other Catholic

⁶³ Gloria Carpeneto, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2011.

⁶⁴ Monica Kilburn-Smith, telephone interview with author, April 20, 2011.

groups like Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IECs). Scholars of early Christianity maintain that the first centuries of Christian worship took place in house churches: small, intimate gatherings marked with a shared meal of bread and wine, in memory of Christ's own gestures at the Last Supper.⁶⁵ Because many experts contend that women participated actively in house churches and likely presided at Eucharists there, ordained women like Bridget Mary Meehan see their house church community's Mass as a "full circle" return "to basics."⁶⁶ Meehan and others also gesture to theologians who have articulated ideas on reframing the Eucharist. Edward Schillebeeckx is mentioned often in conjunction with rethinking the Eucharist and the priest's power; other examples include Bernard Cooke's *The Future of Eucharist* and Paul Bernier's *Eucharist: Celebrating its Rhythms in Our Lives*. Other womenpriests have studied different theories and theologies of the Eucharist in master's and doctoral programs, Catholic and non-Catholic, and they have woven these intellectual encounters into their liturgies.⁶⁷ Finally, IECs have been celebrating the Eucharist in small, often laity-led communities since the late 1960s. Sometimes IECs involve priests, and sometimes they do not. Some RCWP communities are cross-listed on the IEC website, thus indicating their commitment to allowing the community—and not just a priest—to celebrate the Eucharist.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Books on House Churches, which tend to rely on the presumption that house churches were private spaces and thus a woman's domain, while men functioned in the public sphere. See Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006). For a counter-perspective on the public-private divide, see Cynthia M. Baker, *Rebuilding the House of Israel: Architectures of Gender in Jewish Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁶⁶ Bridget Mary Meehan, "House Churches: Back to Basics: Christ-Centered, Spirit-Empowered Communities," in *Women Find a Way*, 44-6.

⁶⁷ Womanpriest Mary Ellen Robertson explains that she encountered Bernier's book during a course on "The Sacrament of Eucharist," and his ideas helped her think about incorporating the entire community into a liturgical celebration. Mary Ellen Robertson, "My Story," *Women Find a Way*, 119.

⁶⁸ A helpful introductory article to IECs is Tom Roberts, "Excellent parishes, small communities work out future," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 7, 2001, www.ncronline.com. RCWP communities listed on the IEC website, as of May 2011, include Therese of Divine Peace (St. Louis, MO), Catholic Community of Sophia (Sussex County, NJ), Mary, Mother of Jesus Catholic Community House Church (Sarasota, FL), and Living Water (Baltimore area).

RCWP uses the Eucharist as the vehicle through which to enact *inclusivity*, but in official Church teaching, communion can be a place to assert *exclusivity*. Womenpriests take steps to emphasize, again and again, in their masses that “all are welcome” to receive communion; the Roman Catholic Church’s rules are quite different. Protestants are not invited to receive communion in Roman Catholic churches. Reasons for this connect not simply to the Church’s stance on transubstantiation, as one might presume, but more directly to Catholic-Protestant differences over apostolic succession and the sacrament of Holy Orders. The *Catechism* teaches that Eastern churches, although “not in full communion with the Catholic Church,” possess in Holy Orders and the Eucharist “true sacraments.” In short, the Roman Catholic Church sees these churches’ sacraments as valid. As such, their members are welcome to receive communion in Roman Catholic churches. In contrast, those Christian groups “derived from the Reformation and separated from the Catholic Church” have not retained the fullness of Eucharistic mystery because they have not retained Holy Orders as a sacrament. Thus, “Eucharistic intercommunion with these communities is not possible.”⁶⁹ RCWP has eliminated this official Church position from its own Eucharistic ministries and has, instead, what it calls an “open table” communion service, whereby anyone and everyone who wishes to partake of bread and wine can do so. While saying mass, womenpriests will often make a point of extending this invitation, thereby making clear how the RCWP position differs from the Roman Catholic Church’s.

Eucharist also works *exclusively* in Roman Catholicism as a way for the Church to enact punitive measures publicly and demonstrably. Canon Law 915 states, “Those upon whom the penalty of excommunication or interdict has been imposed or declared, and others who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin, are not to be admitted to holy communion.” Since the

⁶⁹ United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1399-1400.

advent of Roman Catholic Womenpriests and the public ordinations of scores of Catholic women, diocesan priests and bishops have had to decide whether or not to deny Eucharist to womenpriests who have been excommunicated *latae sententiae*. The fact that womenpriests celebrate and administer the Eucharist is problematic for diocesan officials, but in addition to this, many of the women have wanted to continue worshipping and receiving communion in their home parishes. This becomes a near-impossible task for women who are well-known in their parish communities. Before the May 2008 decree that all ordained women were excommunicated *latae sententiae*, womandeacon Regina Nicolosi (since ordained a priest and a bishop) was asked by her local archbishop to stop receiving communion; should she persist, she would face excommunication.⁷⁰ In the wake of the 2008 decree, womanpriest Eileen DiFranco suffered great hurt when the pastor at her local parish—a liberal-minded “peace and justice church,” as DiFranco describes it, which baptized the babies of gay couples and protested war and capital punishment—asked that DiFranco no longer take communion, “for the good of the parish.” Stunned and pained by the parish’s mixed social justice messages, DiFranco did not return to that church until a funeral brought her back two years later. Enacting what she believed to be her assigned role as an unwanted guest, she sat in the back of the church and did not come forward to receive Eucharist. But while the priest himself did not (and perhaps could not, in obedience to the bishop) welcome DiFranco as a parishioner in good standing, members of the community did: some sat with DiFranco in the back pews, using their presence to signal acceptance, and some brought her communion, thereby including her in the remembrance of Christ’s saving action. The exclusion that the Church mandates as a way to preserve the integrity of the Eucharist, as the Church understands it, became for DiFranco a cause for a symbolic, community gesture of activism and inclusion. When she did not step forward, her fellow

⁷⁰ Mary Frances Smith, “An Interview with Regina Nicolosi,” in *Women Find a Way*, 137.

parishioners stepped back, enacting the “all are welcome” mantra that has become the hallmark of RCWP’s liturgies.⁷¹

In conclusion, RCWP’s model for an inclusive Eucharist involves sharing sacramental authority with the community—a community that may include Catholics in good standing, Catholics outside the Church, and non-Catholics. That a woman stands in as priest during these inclusive services holds its own—though not unrelated—appeal. Many womenpriests have stories wherein they were invited to celebrate the Eucharist. Wisconsin womanpriest Kathy Vandenberg was asked to celebrate a “family Eucharist” in a local home; she was also asked to celebrate in a small farm community.⁷² Meehan tells another story: a woman, Marie, who had been divorced and remarried felt unwelcome and unworthy to receive the Eucharist in her parish church. Within Meehan’s house church, however, Marie came to feel that she had “come home at last.” Taking this further, Marie invited Meehan to *her* home, asking her to celebrate a special Mass for family and friends. It seems Marie had rediscovered inclusion in Roman Catholicism, through RCWP.⁷³ Central to this sense of inclusion is, for many, simply *seeing* a woman preside over the Eucharist. Womanpriest Theresa Novak Chabot has come to accept that many people come to her services simply *to see* a woman priest at the altar.⁷⁴ Similarly, some of RCWPs ordained women, such as Juanita Cordero, describe how moved and inspired they felt seeing a woman presiding over the Eucharist for the first time.⁷⁵ The image of a priest at the altar, arms lifted, extending the blessing over bread and wine, transforming it into body and blood, is

⁷¹ Eileen DiFranco, email interview with author, January 4, 13, and 18.

⁷² Kathy Vandenberg, “Prophetic Obedience,” in *Women Find a Way*, 122-5.

⁷³ Bridget Mary Meehan, “House Churches,” in *Women Find a Way*, 44 and Meehan, “Holy People, Holy Music, Holy House Church,” in *Women Find a Way*, 92.

⁷⁴ Theresa Novak Chabot, telephone interview with author, January 20, 2011.

⁷⁵ Juanita Cordero, “Doors Closed and Doors Open,” in *Women Find a Way*, 140-43.

nothing short of iconic for practicing Catholics. When a woman is placed in that indelible role, perceptions shift. Building upon that change, the visual of the womanpriest does not end with the womanpriest's voice, body, or gestures on the altar. Rather, the change extends outward, directing the community toward a new model of priesthood where the priest is the leader but not the lone celebrant, where the priest facilitates but does not hold power, and where the community gathered has, together, the collective power to consecrate bread and wine.

A Different Kind of Sacred Space: Conference-Call Eucharists

Michele Birch-Conery lives on Vancouver Island, and one of the greatest challenges she faces as a Roman Catholic womanpriest stems from Canada's expansive size and extensive rural areas. Currently, Birch-Conery is one of only eight ordained women in Canada—a country that's geographically larger than the United States, but which has currently, about 90% fewer womenpriests than the US.⁷⁶ Compounding this problem is the fact Birch-Conery's hometown attracts many tourists and has a large retired population. As a result, much of the population is mobile, and those who live there often spend holidays—which are often major religious days—out of the area with children and grandchildren. It becomes difficult, then, for Birch-Conery to build a consistent community. Birch-Conery likens being a womanpriest in Canada with missionary work: in order to effectively reach people, one has to constantly consider geography, resources, and various cultures across wide areas. One must also get creative with sacraments and ministry.

⁷⁶ Birch-Conery is one of eight ordained women as of February 2012. One of the ordained women is a deacon and a catacomb ordinand, i.e., she was ordained secretly and her real name has not been revealed. Another of RCWP's Canadian ordained is a man, Jim Lauder. Lauder is a member of the Secular Franciscan Order and writes in his RCWP bio, "I am so honored to advocate for equality in our church, and be a part of a strong community and movement that models a renewed priestly ministry." Roman Catholic Womenpriests, "Ordained: Jim Lauder," Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>

Birch-Conery is using the internet to combat this isolation. The internet has been a significant part of Birch-Conery's journey to priesthood and her ministry as an ordained womanpriest. She became very sick in 2000, and she spent nearly two years in the hospital and much time thereafter convalescing at home. While recovering, she began doing internet research about feminist theology, and this brought her to the Catholic Network for Women's Equality in Canada. In 2002, CNWE-Canada brought word of the Danube Seven. "I was excited out of my mind! I started to go crazy!" Birch-Conery reports of hearing this news. What's more, she believes she never would have heard about RCWP had she not decided and been able to study contemporary feminist theology, online, while recuperating from illness. Presently, in addition to her PhD in English Literature from the University of Iowa, Birch-Conery is studying through the Catherine of Sienna virtual college, where she is pursuing a master's degree to augment her priestly vocation. She is also building upon her decades of teaching experience by teaching online courses. To be sure, the internet keeps Birch-Conery connected.

Now, she has taken technology and internet connectivity to a new level: Birch-Conery offers what she calls "conference-call Eucharists." On average, Birch-Conery will "meet" once a month with groups of people who want to celebrate the Eucharist but for whom distance raises difficulties. From her office, Birch-Conery calls into a conference call center. Meanwhile, people across distant locations—some in Vancouver, some from around Vancouver Island⁷⁷—meet together, call into the conference center, and join the liturgy. One or more groups may call in. As the womanpriest and leader, Birch-Conery prepares music to accompany the liturgy, which she plays on her stereo during the call. She sends the congregation an email attachment in advance with the liturgy's order, so that people can follow the service and concelebrate with her by reading their assigned parts. When the time comes for the Liturgy of the Eucharist, every group

⁷⁷ The city of Vancouver is not located on Vancouver Island.

participating extends their hands over the gifts and raises the bread and wine that they have brought; Birch-Conery does the same in her office. She herself calls the Spirit onto the bread and wine and makes the sign of the cross over the gifts. She does not ask the conference-call community to do this, she explains, lest they believe they are themselves transubstantiating the gifts, which could make them uncomfortable. When the time comes to receive communion, the people gathered pass it among themselves. “They do not feel that it’s not real,” she has said of the sacrament.

Though untraditional to say the least, Birch-Conery reports that the conference-call Eucharist works extremely well. With small groups across different locations, participation is essential if the liturgy is to work, and this, Birch-Conery believes, helps create the “discipleship of equals” ideal Schüssler Fiorenza advocates and RCWP strives towards. Birch-Conery does not feel the lack of visibility—of the priest or of other call-in groups—is a detriment; rather, she thinks this helps cut down on distraction and increases a focus on language, music, and sacrament. Typically, Birch-Conery follows the Roman rite and Order of Service, and she uses inclusive language; she is ready and willing, however, to alter the Eucharistic Prayer to give the communicants what they want. Communicants make these decisions and go through the same motions as the ordained womanpriest leading them. “It’s pretty good sacramental mentoring, when you think of it,” Birch-Conery explained. Participants have told her repeatedly how “beautiful” and “moving” the celebration is.

But what of transubstantiation, that centuries-old Roman Catholic notion that Christ is not just symbolized in the bread and wine, but actually becomes body and blood? How does that happen in remote locations, miles and miles apart? “I just have to believe it happens!” Birch-Conery exclaimed. As she understands it, the community may not be in the same physical space,

but they are in the same *cyber*-space; they may not sit in the same room, but they sit together in the same *conference call* room. “We are together in a technological age, and we need to rethink [questions of what is real],” she stated.

This example of Birch-Conery’s conference-call Eucharist reveals two things about RCWP and the group’s sacramental approach. First, at present, RCWP has many ways of understanding the Eucharist and how best to serve diverse populations seeking sacramental community and communion. Birch-Conery’s approach is not common, but it is wildly creative, and through this technological intervention, people who may not otherwise celebrate Eucharist can do so—with a womanpriest, no less. Second, through the conference-call Eucharist, Birch-Conery tinkers with the triad of authority, inclusivity, and womanpriest visibility upon which, I have argued, RCWP’s sacraments are built. Birch-Conery keeps the shared authority but removes the visual of the womanpriest *so as to* take inclusion to a whole new level. Were female visibility a requirement, it is certain that fewer people could participate, and those who could would do so less frequently.

As innovative as Birch-Conery’s conference-call Eucharists are, however, it must be emphasized that she retains the important Roman Catholic theological tradition of calling the Spirit onto the gifts and making the sign of the cross over them. The latter is an action that no one but she can see, but one she deems sacramentally crucial. Visibility is not a requirement for sacramental efficacy, in this Eucharistic formulation, but neither does a lack of the (woman)priest’s visibility preclude the necessity of specific sacramental gestures. Birch-Conery continues to perform Roman Catholic priesthood, in spite of who can see her, yet that performance is framed by a desire to reach people who could not otherwise attend. Now, because of Birch-Conery’s idea and the inclusivity it enables, people can be included in Eucharist

not only if they are not ordained, not Roman Catholic or Christian, have a gluten-allergy, or struggle with alcohol addiction: with this model, worshippers can be included even if they are not physically present.

Other Sacraments

Holy Orders and Eucharist are the predominant sacraments associated with RCWP. All womenpriests have participated in Holy Orders, as way of becoming ordained, and nearly all ordained women participate regularly in Eucharistic liturgies, either as celebrants (if they are priests) or as assistants (if they are deacons). The majority of womenpriests also celebrate some of Catholicism's other sacraments, specifically baptisms, marriages, reconciliation, and anointing of the sick. Only RCWP's bishops have celebrated ordinations, and through my interviews, I have not heard of any womanpriest presiding over a confirmation ceremony. What follows, therefore, are examples of RCWP sacraments of baptism, marriage, reconciliation, and anointing.

I begin with baptism and a return to the Wood family. Recall, Rachel and Clayton Wood left the Roman Catholic Church shortly after their 1975 marriage, specifically because of the Church's position on women's ordination. They tried different denominations but realized they were "pretty much Catholics" and did not quite connect with any other faith tradition. Rachel Wood's parents cared deeply about having their granddaughters baptized in the Church, and Rachel promised them she would have the girls baptized...when a woman could do it. As time went on, Rachel became increasingly concerned—given Church politics and declarations—that women's ordination would not happen in her lifetime. She then heard about Roman Catholic Womenpriests. She contacted Massachusetts womanpriest Jean Marchant, who put Rachel in touch with the soon-to-be ordained Theresa Novak Chabot, who also lived in the Woods' home

state of New Hampshire. As Rachel explains, as soon as “Reverend Theresa” was ordained a priest (in May of 2010), she contacted Chabot and began planning for her daughters’ baptisms. The baptisms of Kira, Jolene, and Ryan Wood took place on September 11, 2010. Kira and Jolene, who were 9 and 8 at the time, also made their first communion on this day; Ryan, only 5 on the day of her baptism, will make her first communion within Chabot’s community when she is older.

Rachel Wood reports that the baptism was a “wonderful” ceremony and a “happy” occasion. She did not expect so many members of Chabot’s regular worship community to attend. She says her oldest daughter, Kira, was nervous about the baptism beforehand, picturing a total immersion as she had seen depicted in movies. But Chabot used a simple bowl, baptizing the girls who stood in front of her just as she would an infant held in parents’ arms, by pouring small amounts of water over their heads. Rachel believes that, as her girls get older, they will understand the magnitude of having been baptized by a womanpriest. For now, the girls are regular attendees at Chabot’s masses, and Kira and Jolene assist Chabot as altar servers. They wear white robes, help collect offerings, and, their mother reports, are “happy” to do it. As for what having her daughters baptized by a Roman Catholic womanpriest means to her, Rachel said, “It meant everything to me...the fact a woman could give the sacrament of baptism. I would not have done it otherwise.” Most important to her, in addition to the blessing that comes to the girls with baptism, was her ability to honor the promise she made to her parents. She says that she knows “we are all excommunicated,” and she knows the baptismal certificate Chabot provided will not hold currency in the institutional Church. But although she no longer believes women’s ordination will happen in her lifetime, she does hope RCWP will “keep moving forward” and some day be incorporated into the Roman Catholic Church. Perhaps, in Rachel’s

mind, this is something her young daughters, if not Rachel and Clayton themselves, will live to see.⁷⁸

Baptisms have become a central component of many womenpriests' sacramental ministries. In churches, in homes, or in nearby bodies of water, womenpriests are being called upon to baptize children. These children range in age from infants to school-aged, and many are, like the Wood girls, children of parents who are dissatisfied with the institutional Church. Most of the womenpriests I have spoken to take steps to personalize the baptisms, meeting the families "where they are" as pertains to their vision for the baptism and the level of Catholic formality they desire.

Mary Ann Schoettly talks about a baptism she performed where she found herself emphasizing the Jewishness of Jesus within the context of Roman Catholic baptismal tradition. The baby's grandparents were part of Sophia Inclusive Catholic Community, which Schoettly leads, and as such, the baby's parents learned about Schoettly's sacramental ministries. The couple wanted baptism for their child, but the mother, a Roman Catholic, was uncomfortable with the official church because her Jewish husband was not, she felt, fully welcome. In response to the couple's concerns, Schoettly conceived a service that retained the pouring of water common to all Catholic baptisms but also incorporated textual material from Hebrew scriptures. Schoettly reports that the baby's father was "absolutely delighted" by the service, and she believes it was important to him and his family to hear—from a Roman Catholic womenpriest, no less—that being part of the Christian tradition does not automatically suggest a rejection of other faith traditions. In keeping with RCWP's spirit of inclusivity, the service Schoettly

⁷⁸ Rachel Wood, telephone interview with author, May 10, 2011. This story was also covered in a local newspaper and can be found here: Sarah M. Earle, "Don't Deny Me Your Prayers': Female Priest Says She's Carrying Out God's Will," *Concord Monitor*, March 20, 2011. This article also contains photographs of the Wood girls.

designed emphasized that doing a *Christian* ceremony did not imply problems with *Judaism*. At this baptism service, which took place in the couple's home and had about twenty friends and family members present, Schoettly modeled a Roman Catholicism that embraced both the Jewish and Catholic tradition while crafting an innovative baptismal service.

The validity of RCWP's sacraments can lead to difficulties for people who choose to use womenpriest-led sacraments. Since the Roman Catholic Church does not accept womenpriests' ordinations as valid, their sacraments are also dismissed as invalid. As Schoettly explained, most RCWP sacraments—like baptism and marriage—are legally certified through the Federation of Christian ministries.⁷⁹ This does not, however, guarantee authenticity in Roman Catholic dioceses, and womenpriests understand that a child they baptize may be seen as not-yet baptized in local parishes.⁸⁰ In one example that has been repeated multifold in dioceses and archdioceses where womenpriests serve, Chabot's New Hampshire diocese issued the following warning about Chabot's sacraments via church bulletins:

A member of the organization "Roman Catholic Womenpriests," has attempted ordination to the priesthood and has been presenting herself as available to offer "Catholic" ministry, including celebrating Mass and performing baptisms and other sacraments. This statement is to clarify that neither she nor the members and supporters of Roman Catholic Womenpriests act in keeping with Catholic Church teaching and practice... Please be aware that Catholics who participate in the simulation of a Mass or other sacraments by a "Roman Catholic Womenpriest," also separate themselves from the Church. They are not permitted to celebrate and receive the sacraments or exercise a ministry within the church. (c.f., Canon 1378, §2,3).⁸¹

⁷⁹ The Federation of Christian Ministries evolved out of a post-Vatican II movement calling for optional clerical celibacy. It is the United States' oldest association of married priests. Because the Roman Catholic Church will not validate RCWP's sacraments, the movement must look elsewhere. Through the FCM, American womenpriests' ministries can be licensed and certified.

⁸⁰ Mary Ann Schoettly, email interview with author, January 8, 2011; Mary Ann Schoettly, telephone interview with author, January 9, 2011.

⁸¹ This quote comes from the "Statement from the Rev. Robert Gorski, Moderator of the Curia on the organization 'Roman Catholic Womenpriests,'" which the Diocese of Manchester (NH) placed in church bulletins in 2010. I received a copy of the statement from Theresa Novak Chabot. Other documents and statements about women's

And yet, in spite of warnings such as this, it has been reported that at least one priest said to a local womanpriest that he would record the names of any children she baptizes in his parish records⁸²; doing so places these children's names alongside others who have been validly baptized in the Church, and this suggests that perhaps these children would be able to make a first communion or be confirmed in that diocese. Also worth reporting is that Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger has presided at services alongside Catholic male priests. Mayr-Lumetzberger is an Austria native, a member of the Danube Seven, and a womanbishop. She explains that when she presides alongside male priests—which she reports is happening more and more frequently—the men are “very respectful” of her position as bishop, doing such things as following proper processional formation, with Mayr-Lumetzberger as bishop ascending the aisle last. She believes that many of these priests accept her as an ordained women just as the people she serves accept her, and she celebrates sacraments for the people and alongside the priests.⁸³ And so, while Vatican formalities certainly denounce any RCWP sacramental validity, local practices might reflect a different attitude toward RCWP's sacramental services.

Tension over validity also appears in the baptismal rite's form (i.e., the words used to baptize). Traditionally, the words of baptism spoken by the priest are “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Given RCWP's commitment to gender inclusive language, however, one might suspect that the womenpriests would modify this wording as well. In fact, some womenpriests do. When she baptized her granddaughter Chloe in

ordination can be found at the Diocese of Manchester's website, <http://www.catholicnh.org/catholic-faith/priestly-ordination-and-the-role-of-women/>.

⁸² Dorothy Irvin, “But They Have No Community!,” in Dorothy Irvin, ed, “The Rebound 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007: The Archaeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church,” (unnumbered pages) 28-9.

⁸³ Peter Stanford, “Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger: ‘Defying the Pope? It's not like paying a parking fine.’” *The Independent*. Sunday April 24, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/>.

December of 2009, womanpriest Marybeth McBryan said the words “I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Live-Giving Spirit” as she poured water over Chloe’s blond curls.⁸⁴ Just as the womenpriests modify the traditional sign of the cross to remove male-only language of Father and Son, by modifying the baptismal formula, McBryan emphasized the roles and saving actions of the Trinity, and not their titles or gender. Yet this change is unacceptable to the Roman Catholic Church. In 2008, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued a statement responding to questions over the validity of different baptismal formulas. Specifically, the formulae in question are “I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier,” and “I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Liberator, and of the Sustainer.” The CDF writes that baptisms performed with either of these formulae are invalid, and anyone baptized under these words must be baptized again.⁸⁵ Some womenpriests are concerned with these questions of validity and thus use the authorized “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” when performing a baptism. Marie David is one such womanpriest: though she modifies the sign of the cross, and though at places in the liturgy she will use the words “Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,” she makes sure to use “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” when performing baptisms.⁸⁶ Gloria Carpeneto also uses “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” at baptisms but adds to that with more nuanced and gender-inclusive language. She explains that she “retains the formula for authenticity but modifies it for

⁸⁴ Therese of Divine Peace, mass and baptism, St. Louis, MO, field notes, December 27, 2009.

⁸⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Responses to question proposed on the validity of Baptism conferred with the formulas,” (1 February 2008), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20080201_validity-baptism_en.html. The issue is also taken up here: Catholic News Agency, “CDF rules feminist-inspired baptisms invalid,” February 29, 2008, http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/cdf_rules_feministinspired_baptisms_invalid/.

⁸⁶ Marie David, telephone interview with author, February 11, 2011.

understanding.”⁸⁷ In short, there is no mandated way that RCWP’s women must apply the baptismal formula, and womempriests make sacramental maneuvers that sometimes deviate from official Church teaching and sometimes coincide with it.

There is an irony here that cannot be overlooked. The Vatican dismisses any baptism performed by a womanpriest as invalid because a woman’s ordination is invalid; the question of RCWP’s use of baptismal formulas is moot and secondary by comparison. All womenpriests, however, reject Rome’s dismissal of their priesthood and claim a valid ordination; what some womenpriests do retain, however, is the baptismal formula that Rome endorses. Doing so ensures that Rome would approve the rites as valid. This is yet another example of ongoing tension and negotiation between tradition and transgression: while the womenpriests reject the Church’s rejection of women priests, some womenpriests stand by the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” baptismal utterances. If words indeed have power, as scholarship from John Searle, J.L. Austin, and Jacques Derrida would suggest if not resolve, then RCWP retains an (albeit selective) emphasis on proper wording within rituals—an emphasis the Roman Catholic Church shares. The words matter, in ways that suggest mystery or sacramental power. Perhaps some womenpriests retain this authorized formula because it is biblical: these are the words Jesus instructed his disciples to use (Matthew 28:19). Or perhaps they do this because if and when the institutional Church recognizes RCWP’s ordinations, it will then also recognize their past sacraments as valid—provided proper form was followed. In any case, we see the women working to insert tradition into their already transgressive actions and having to choose what to keep, and when, and why—without explaining to observers how they reached such decisions.

⁸⁷ Gloria Carpeneto, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2011.

Questions about validity plague a sacrament like baptism more than, for instance, a sacrament like marriage, where legitimacy is related more with civil than sacramental status. Once again, most womenpriests in the United States can offer *legally* valid marriages and baptisms thanks to the Federation of Christian Ministries. And yet, because marriage is a sacrament in Roman Catholicism, the Church can still deny the validity of marriage ceremonies that do not conform to Canon Law and Catholic tradition. Marriages at which womenpriests preside would be dismissed as invalid, but this fact seemingly does not trouble the couples who choose to have a womanpriest celebrate their wedding. Many womenpriests have presided at weddings. The webpages of RCWP's regions display a variety of wedding photographs. Most of these images show a bride in a white dress, a groom in a dark suit, and a womanpriest beside them, wearing vestments and a stole. Most photographs reveal an outdoor ceremony, by the beach, on a grassy hill, or surrounded by trees. Roman Catholic weddings must take place inside a church building. Womenpriests will allow the couples to modify the liturgy to meet their own vision; this may include using non-scriptural readings or extending the Eucharist to all present, and not just baptized Catholics. The Roman Catholic Church's rules are far more stringent. In another departure from Church law, womenpriests are willing to marry gay and lesbian couples as well as couples where one or both have been divorced.⁸⁸ In describing the ministries offered, RCWP's Great Waters Region states a dedication to the rights of gay, lesbian, and transgendered people. Womenpriests conduct marriage ceremonies that offer inclusion to couples whose situations or desired ceremonies would not be permitted in the institutional Church.

⁸⁸ In terms of marrying couples where one party is divorced, Marie Bouclin talks about blessing the unions of couples who want a religious service but do not want to go through the annulment process the Church requires for remarriage. Marie Bouclin, email interview with author, April 26 and 27, 2011.

Weddings are a large part of womenpriests' sacramental ministry, and I will briefly examine a few examples here. Victoria Rue and her partner, Kathryn Poethig, together offer a variety of sacraments, including marriage, through their "Threshold Ministries." Threshold Ministries' website invites couples to personalize the ceremony they envision, from a simple ceremony (a brief service in an intimate setting), to a full ceremony (a longer service that includes liturgies), to a unique personalized ceremony (where Rue and Poethig work alongside the couple in designing the entire service), to a full Roman Catholic mass (presided by Rue and complete with Eucharist). The website does warn that the full Roman Catholic wedding will not be recognized by the Church.⁸⁹ Eileen DiFranco has done "tons" of weddings through "Journeys of the Heart," a non-denominational ceremonial ministry service, and two weddings as a Roman Catholic womanpriest.⁹⁰ The difference between the two types of services DiFranco provides, and the range of ceremonies Rue and Poethig offer, suggest that RCWP's women can and do appeal to different audiences, from the more traditionally Catholic to the more ritually experimental. Who are the couples who take advantage of these ceremonies? Mary Ann Schoettly describes a wedding she celebrated where the bride was a cradle Catholic who wanted a woman to preside, and the husband wanted a religious ceremony. The couple planned to use an Episcopalian woman priest until they found RCWP and Schoettly. Schoettly met with the couple for discussion and instruction before the wedding.⁹¹ What Schoettly offered was similar to what the Church offers couples in terms of prenuptial preparation yet different in that a woman stood beside the couple, officiating at the ceremony and guiding the couple through their vows. Because it is important for some couples to have a woman standing at the altar,

⁸⁹ Victoria Rue, "Threshold Ceremonies," Threshold Ceremonies website, <http://home.earthlink.net/~humanint/site/index.html>.

⁹⁰ Eileen DiFranco, email interview with author, January 4, 13, and 18, 2011. See also Journeys of the Heart, <http://www.journeysoftheheart.org/contact-us-3.html>.

⁹¹ Mary Ann Schoettly, email interview with author, January 8, 2011.

RCWP provides something the institutional Church cannot: a female body representing religious and spiritual authority.

Womenpriests also guide their communities through the Catholic sacraments of healing: reconciliation and anointing of the sick. Reconciliation also goes by the names confession and penance, and this is the sacrament that reconciles to God those Catholics separated because of sin (§1422-1424). The processes of healing and reconciliation need not be confined to sacrament: womenpriests like Gabriella Velardi-Ward and Marie Bouclin have worked with trauma and abuse victims, including those who have been harmed by priests. Even before being ordained as priests, Ward and Bouclin tried to help survivors find peace and heal from brokenness. In *Women Find a Way*, Ward writes about reconciliation in ways both clinical and sacramental, as her life path shows her commitment to helping people both as a counselor and as a priest. For Ward, reconciliation requires changing systems and selves. She writes, “Reconciliation with self, the world and God happens when survivors take steps toward empowerment, justice and the re-creation of self as they work against suffering. Reconciliation happens when survivors can begin to feel authentically, truthfully, the feelings that may include anger and the pain of becoming visible. Reconciliation happens when they begin to break the conspiracy of silence and reclaim their truth.” In thinking ahead to becoming an ordained priest and bringing sacraments to the people, Ward looked forward to leading a reconciliation service for survivors of trauma, to taking part in the mediation of God’s grace that happens through the sacraments.⁹² Like Ward, Marie Bouclin has brought her unordained ministry of counseling victims to bear upon her sacramental service. Bouclin described a Catholic woman who traveled a long distance to have Marie hear her confession. This woman was feeling guilt because she had

⁹² Gabriella Velardi Ward, “Draw Me, We Shall Run,” in *Women Find a Way*, 68-75: 73.

been in a relationship with a Catholic priest for many years; she wanted absolution but did not feel comfortable talking to a male priest. She had read Bouclin's book, *Seeking Wholeness: Women Dealing with Abuse of Power in the Catholic Church*, and based on that, decided Bouclin was the priest she wanted performing for her the sacrament of reconciliation. RCWP's existence gave this woman a choice she would not otherwise have: confessing to a womanpriest when the thought of confessing to a male priest discomforted her. A female priest would allow her to find sacramental peace in a way a male priest could not.

Sacramental healing takes other forms in RCWP communities. Even before her ordination, Eleonora Marinaro gave thought to reconciliation, attending workshops with Jesuit priests that explored sacraments as vehicles for healing and grace. Now ordained, Marinaro still focuses on reconciliation, as part of her sacramental ministry and as part of her counseling practice. She explains that, while RCWP celebrates all the sacraments, "reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church after years of estrangement is a prime feature of our ministry."⁹³ Marinaro's comment suggests that RCWP can and does facilitate healing between fallen-away Catholics and the Church sacraments. Thus RCWP, which sees itself as valid but legal, invites people to reconnect with Catholicism. Other womenpriests report that the sacrament of reconciliation often happens for them spontaneously: people will be speaking to a womanpriest, and upon learning she is ordained, will ask for absolution.⁹⁴ A number of womenpriest-led communities use a group confession, which includes a penitential service and absolution for everyone present, instead of individual confessions. Eileen DiFranco's is one community that "believes in group confession," but she recalls a woman from outside the worship community

⁹³ Eleonora Marinaro, "Coming Home," in *Women Find a Way*, 86-88: 87.

⁹⁴ Marie Bouclin, email interview with author, April 26 and 27, 2011. Other womenpriests have reported similar things happening.

who sought out a newly ordained Eileen for confession. “She just felt the need to be absolved by a woman,” DiFranco explained. Mary Ann Schoettly also had someone seek her out for absolution: a woman religious. Schoettly was “delighted and very humbled” by this request. To summarize, being outside of institutional Church structures allows RCWP’s women to offer reconciliation to individuals who may desire a more personalized and extra-institutional style of penance. At the same time, the womenpriests believe that the sacrament they offer, while being outside of hierarchical church structures, still enables a penitent to reconcile with the community of Roman Catholic believers. The institutional church might dismiss these as invalid because they came from the sacramental gestures of *women* priests, but the people receiving the sacrament interpret their experience in such a way that they feel absolved and reconciled with God.

Connected to reconciliation as a sacrament of healing is Anointing of the Sick, also known by the name Extreme Unction. Schoettly has been asked privately to anoint people, in a hospital setting and during a home liturgy. She uses the standard Church rites, modified for inclusive language.⁹⁵ Just as they use group confessions for the sacrament of reconciliation, Eileen DiFranco’s community has done group anointings on John the Baptist’s feast day.⁹⁶ Marie Bouclin has performed anointings, and she admits to feelings of inadequacy in the face of someone’s pain and suffering; instead, she says, “All I can do is assure them that God is with them in their pain, and that God is there in the person of their care givers and people who surround them with their love.”⁹⁷ Mary Ellen Robertson has done a different kind of anointing: she administered the sacrament of the sick for a family that was suffering because of an alcoholic relative. Building upon her own personal experiences with an alcoholic parent, Robertson

⁹⁵ Mary Ann Schoettly, email interview with author, January 8, 2011.

⁹⁶ Eileen DiFranco, email interview with author, January 4, 13, and 18, 2011.

⁹⁷ Marie Bouclin, email interview with author, April 26 and 27, 2011.

counseled this family about alcoholism as a family disease and provided them information about Al Anon. The anointing was one sacramental step in a larger ministerial process.⁹⁸

When I asked womenpriests what it was like for them to perform the sacraments, the word “humbling” occurred the most frequently, and most often in connection with these healing sacraments of penance and anointing of the sick. The ordained women see themselves as mediators, bringing grace to people who seek it via the sacraments. In the context of performance, visibility, and women standing in for Christ, RCWP’s sacraments allow women to become and be seen as facilitators of grace, just as Jesus is understood to be and just as male priests have traditionally been. RCWP’s women stand *in persona Christi* at the communion table, and they also preside at other sacraments: baptisms, marriages, and the healing that confession and anointing offers. And they modify these to meet the people where they are, thereby giving the congregants the authority to design and interpret the sacrament as they see fit.

A question remains: if RCWP is so open to certain sacramental modifications, and if their sacraments are designed to accommodate the worship community’s sacramental preferences, has RCWP removed the “Roman Catholic” from their sacramental economy? Moreover, do sacraments need to be uniform in Catholic Churches worldwide in order for Catholics to fully participate in the global community of believers? RCWP’s members have consistently made clear their own personal commitment to the sacraments; in many cases, sacraments are what keep the women from converting to Protestantism. Certainly, RCWP’s women see theirs as *Roman Catholic* sacraments, because they are “validly if illegally” ordained priests and they retain selective parts of sacramental “form” and “matter.” Just as certainly, the institutional Church would dismiss RCWP’s sacraments outright because the women are

⁹⁸ Mary Ellen Robertson, “My Story,” in *Women Find a Way*, 115-121; example from page 118.

dismissed as priests—in the Church’s eyes, they have no sacramental authority. RCWP’s sacramental gestures force us to ask, then, what is a sacrament? How much of a sacrament is open to reimagining, and how much depends upon hierarchical authority and/or institutional uniformity? As RCWP modifies the traditional Roman Catholic sacramental economy, all the while holding fast to sacraments’ centrality, the movement transgresses familiar sacramental bounds.

Concluding Thoughts and Lingering Questions

As I have emphasized throughout this chapter, RCWP retains the central importance of sacraments for Roman Catholic faith and worship, yet simultaneously makes modifications so as to emphasize its own vision of sacramental equality and experience. Building upon the sign, symbol, and significance of traditional Roman Catholic sacraments, womenpriests perform sacramental differences while attempting to keep sacramental import (specifically the centrality of sacraments as signs and dispensers of grace). An analysis of the womenpriests’ actions shows that RCWP’s sacramental economy underscores a radical inclusivity, shared authority, and women standing in the role of priest, presider, and Christ.

This chapter has also emphasized the way RCWP is situated between, on the one hand, the Roman Catholic sacramental economy and, on the other, concerns some Catholic feminists have about recreating Catholic sacramental gestures within a feminist framework. For the Church, sacraments are central for salvation and mark key distinctions between Catholic and Protestant theology. For some feminist scholars, “ordination is subordination,” and any uncritical remaking of the Catholic structure serves to reinforce kyriarchy and prevent the realization of a discipleship of equals. The institutional Church has dismissed RCWP’s women altogether, publicly declaring them excommunicated and warning Catholics away from

womenpriest-led liturgies and sacraments. Feminist scholars continue to challenge RCWP to evaluate its actions and remove traces of clericalism. Even one of RCWP's own, Jane Via, took a step closer toward this particular feminist Catholic vision when her MMACC community ordained Nancy Corran through the community's—and not the bishop's—authority.

Questions of authority loom large, and questions about equality follow closely. While I have shown how RCWP works to share interpretive authority surrounding sacraments with communities and individuals, presumably some authority remains in the hands of RCWP's ordained women. But the question remains: how much authority? Here there is a line between leadership and clericalism, but that line might be contested, in RCWP's practices and the movement's self-understanding. One must wonder whether authority *and* equality can, for RCWP, go hand in hand.

RCWP, then, has found itself caught between a rock and a hard place, relative to criticisms from the Roman Catholic Church and the feminist scholars, and relative to issues about authority and equality. Critics seeking an undeniable “discipleship of equals” can look at RCWP's ordination ceremonies and note that, if RCWP retains apostolic succession and has a bishop lay hands upon candidates, the group has not sufficiently surmounted clericalism. What may follow is RCWP capitulating to patriarchal power and becoming part of the problem, and not the solution. Similarly, if RCWP exclusively used the community-ordination model that MMACC used, the Church could dismiss the womenpriests on those grounds: the group did not use the proper sacramental form for Holy Orders, and thus the ordination is invalid. Given RCWP's *modus operandi*, it is this latter criticism the group seems more eager and ready to counter. As such, RCWP argues that, unless its women receives the sacrament of Holy Orders, in ways that men can and do, the movement will not impact the hierarchical church. As the

women believe they must be in and connected to the Church in order to transform it, they keep Roman Catholic forms and formalities in view while making modifications that invite shared authority, inclusivity, and women-in-Christ's-image. The negotiation is difficult, opaque, and, in the early years of RCWP's development, not fully explained.

To be sure, RCWP's theology appears different than traditional Roman Catholic theology. This is by necessity, as there is no other way to insert women as figures of sacramental authority *without* modifying some of Roman Catholicism's theological foundations. But as yet, the group has not laid out any unified theological position. RCWP's theological overtures, as expressed (if not stated) in current practice, borrow from Roman Catholicism but also deviate from it. One theological issue in play is that of mystery. Mystery is a central facet of traditional Roman Catholic theology and appears in Church documents and theological treatises. Theologically, mystery is not equated with "incomprehensible" or even "unknowable"; rather, mystery is a "supernatural truth, one that of its very nature lies above the finite intelligence."⁹⁹ Supernatural elements guide natural laws, in ways that require faith, alongside reason. Mystery and sacraments go hand in hand, with sacraments sometimes referred to in Catholic parlance as "sacred mysteries."

So where does RCWP fall on the theological question of mystery, particularly in respect to the sacraments? There is, as yet, no straightforward answer that I can detect. Mystery is a theme throughout much Catholic sacramental experience, and yet sacramental mystery is often closely linked to clerical structures. For instance, there is something supernatural and not fully knowable about how a Roman Catholic bishop can bestow grace and Spirit to an ordinand, just through the laying on of hands. For this to happen requires the bishop to be "set apart," and

⁹⁹ New Advent, "Holy Orders," Catholic online encyclopedia, newadvent.org. The Catholic concept of mystery is incredibly rich and varied and goes well beyond what I can cover here.

somehow “other” than the laity. For RCWP, this mysterious conveying of priestly authority connects—as noted above—to a problem of clerical power, whereby an ordained bishop has an ability that sets him above others. Perhaps this is why some womenpriests describe feeling transformed by Holy Orders, while others oppose the notion. The former position embraces mystery, while the latter eschews clericalism. Because traditional Roman Catholicism embraces both mystery and clerical authority, there is tension between RCWP’s two positions. Consider also transubstantiation: some womenpriests believe it takes place, some downplay that mystery. When I asked Michele Birch-Conery how transubstantiation happens in her conference call Eucharist ceremonies, she responded enthusiastically, “I just have to believe it does!”¹⁰⁰ Andrea Johnson expressed a different emphasis upon transubstantiation. She is less interested in any measurable, scientific change of bread and wine and more concerned with the *anamnesis*, or the memorial character of the Eucharist, performed not just because a priest is present and presiding, but because a community of faith brings about the sacred mystery.¹⁰¹ Birch-Conery embraced mystery, while Johnson embraced a community’s sacramental authority. These two ideas need not be mutually exclusive, but as yet, in RCWP, they seem to be.

RCWP is not alone in exhibiting such tensions. Without question, the Roman Catholic Church’s position on women’s ordination stems from a selective reading of scripture and tradition, and not all Catholic theologians agree with Canon Law. Similarly, the “ordination is subordination” position of certain Catholic feminists leads to disagreements over how—if not through ordination—to proceed toward women’s equality in the Church, and supporters are left to pick and choose what they value most in Roman Catholicism. What I attempt to do here is point out the difficulties inherent in transgressing a religious tradition, particularly when RCWP’s

¹⁰⁰ Michele Birch-Conery, telephone interview with author, April 19, 2011.

¹⁰¹ Andrea Johnson, telephone interview with the author, May 22, 2011.

members deeply value sacraments, sacramental grace, and the power of sacraments to bring a faith community together.

And perhaps what matters most for RCWP's sacraments is how these are understood and appreciated by the individuals receiving them. Because, as I have argued, RCWP strives to give interpretive authority to the communities it serves, the people receiving sacraments at the hands of womenpriests get to determine how they read the women (as clerical or not clerical) and how they receive the sacraments (as sacred mystery or communal experience). As the example of Rachel Wood's family shows, womenpriest can bring estranged people back to the church and back to the sacraments. Whether it's a family like the Woods who disagree with the hierarchy and therefore left the church; a Catholic who divorced and remarried and didn't feel welcome in their local parish; a woman whose intimate, physical relationship with a priest left her feeling both extreme guilt and extreme alienation from the institutional Church; or a woman who long felt a call to Catholic priesthood but could never be ordained within the institution, RCWP enables many people to have sacraments who would not have them—or choose to have them—otherwise.

In this way, sacraments become part of RCWP's pastoral ministries. Sacraments are not an end unto themselves: they are service, community-building, and an way to reach out to people who feel marginalized and whom RCWP sees as marginalized. Ministries, like sacraments, are a key aspect of RCWP's reformed and remodeled priesthood. RCWP's ministries also encompass sacraments. Thus, we turn next to RCWP's ordained ministry to the margins.

CHAPTER 5

ORDAINED MINISTRY TO THE MARGINS:

CREATIVE POWER OUTSIDE OF INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES

Womanpriest Judy Lee offers a rich example of RCWP's ordained ministry to the margins. Lee leads weekly Mass at Church in the Park, a worship service for homeless men and women in Fort Myers, Florida. The park is nothing like a traditional church. It is a city park, marked by sounds of automobiles, playing children, and rowdy basketball players. Lee's homily is interactive, meaning she invites the people gathered to share their stories and ideas as they pertain to the day's scripture reading. Homeless men and women who have struggled with addiction, mental illness, and domestic abuse come together with the purpose of creating "Holy Ground" in the bustling urban park. In this way, Lee calls herself a "street preacher" who, from her Church in the Park, speaks to, for, and with the poor. In conjunction with the worship service, Lee's ministry includes a feeding program that serves around one hundred people. Lee says, "Every week we experience the miracle of the loaves and fishes, as the crowd swells and we still have just enough prepared by many loving hands. I am filled with thanksgiving."¹

As Lee understands it, her call to a ministry to the poor and homeless arose from her own life experiences: a poor, inner-city childhood in Brooklyn, NY; family and close friends' struggles with mental illness and alcohol addiction; and an educational background in social

¹ Judy Lee, "A Priest of the Poor," in *Women Find a Way*, 77-85; description comes from pages 81-3.

work, counseling, and ministry. Lee holds a Doctor of Social Welfare degree from Yeshiva University, an MS from Columbia University School of Social Work, and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Global Ministries University. A professor of social work, Lee worked at Yale Divinity School and the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. Eventually tiring of academia, Lee struggled to accept her vocational call. She found support from individuals—ordained and non-ordained, Catholic and non-Catholic—who encouraged her to priestly ordination. Included in this cadre were a female Episcopal priest, a CORPUS Catholic priest, and a Roman Catholic womanpriest. She retained her wish to emulate Jesus’s passion for social justice and love for the poor. Now ordained, Lee feels called to a “sacramental ministry with the poor, the ill, the different, and the outcasts of society by virtue of color, caste, sexual orientation, mental or physical illnesses or challenges.” Labeling herself a “border dweller” and a “sometimes” outcast, Lee reaches out to people who could be described as “on the margins.”²

The Church in the Park is not something Lee does alone. Her life companion, a former Benedictine Sister named Judy Beaumont who was ordained an RCWP woman deacon in 2011, ministers alongside her. That Lee is in an open relationship with a woman marks hers as a distinctive priesthood. Lee also has received support and sponsorship from another local Ft. Myers Church: the Lamb of God Lutheran-Episcopal Congregation. Further contributing to Church in the Park and its feeding ministries are volunteers from Lamb of God, Call to Action, local Catholic parishes, and other “interfaith friends,” as Lee dubs them. In addition to the sacramental ministry of mass, Lee and Beaumont lead the non-profit Good Shepherd Ministries of Southwest Florida. They provide homeless people with food and supplies and help them find transitional housing and permanent homes. In January 2011, Lee reported that in 2010, the

² Judy Lee, “A Priest of the Poor,” in *Women Find a Way*, 77-85; quote on page 77 and 78.

Ministries had helped 30 homeless people find housing. In their four years as a non-profit, they have helped a total of 48 men, women, and children.³

Lee's story should not be taken as "typical" for RCWP's ordained women simply because there is no tidy formula for womenpriests' backgrounds, educations, or ministries. Lee's story does, however, introduce the major themes and threads surrounding RCWP's ministerial efforts. Like Lee, many of RCWP's womenpriests work with people who might otherwise slip through institutional cracks; many seek vocational support and outreach resources from interfaith groups and individuals; many build their ministries upon their past experiences, personal and professional; and many forge alliances with CORPUS priests, i.e., validly ordained male Catholic priests who no longer serve in the institutional Roman Catholic Church. And, much like Lee, many of RCWP's women believe they have a responsibility *as an ordained priest* to, in Lee's words, bring the "precious sacraments [to] those who hunger and thirst for them, especially those experiencing injustice, poverty, illness and oppression."⁴

This concept of RCWP's "ordained ministry to the margins" demands at the outset a closer examination of the words involved: ordained, ministry, and margins. The base noun "ministry" is certainly not unique to RCWP. To be sure, the Church has a long history of laywomen and consecrated women participating in Church-related ministries. Many of RCWP's women who have now broken Canon Law previously served their parishes, dioceses, and Catholic communities in "licit" ministerial capacities. To name just a few: Theresa Chabot was the Director of Development for New Hampshire Catholic Charities, Diane Smith Whalen was a Jesuit Volunteer, and Bertha Popeney received a Humanitarian Award from the United States

³ Judy Lee, "A Priest of the Poor," in *Women Find a Way*, 82; Bridget Mary Meehan, "Pastor Judy Lee, RCWP, Shares Good News," *Bridget Mary's Blog* (blog), January 26, 2011, <http://bridgetmarys.blogspot.com/2011/01/pastor-judy-lee-rcwp-shares-good-news.html>.

⁴ Judy Lee, "A Priest of the Poor," in *Women Find a Way*, 84.

College of Catholic Bishops'. Women-in-ministry, therefore, is not in itself a controversial issue within Roman Catholicism.

Likewise, feminist theologians who would question the need for women's ordination would applaud ministerial actions like RCWP's. Feminist Catholics who have become agnostic about or antagonistic towards women's ordination still resoundingly support the idea of women-in-ministry. WOC, Women-Church Convergence, and Call to Action publicly condemn clericalism while championing feminist ministry. Theologian Mary E. Hunt spoke at the 2006 Call to Action conference on the topic of "Catholic Feminist Ministries in a Discipleship of Equals." As the title suggests, Hunt emphasized ministries within a framework of equality. She did not define "feminist" as "women-only," but instead used the term to describe women and men who are committed to eradicating structural oppression, such as racism, capitalism, and sexism. She defined "ministries" as "the infinite range of ways we serve our communities," in church and out. For Hunt, feminist ministries can and must do justice work independent of hierarchical structures—and thus, independent of an ordained priesthood. Hunt acknowledged that a variety of Catholic feminist ministries will exist, but added, "It is my view that the focus ought to be on the ministries, not on whether one is ordained to them or not." Continuing on to make what sounds like an indirect criticism of RCWP, Hunt stated, "While I understand and respect the moves toward various forms of ordination in which some Catholic women are engaged, I believe such efforts are fraught with problems that an emphasis on feminist ministries does not share."⁵ In sum, Hunt applauds feminist ministry but not female ordained ministry.

But for RCWP, ministries go hand-in-hand with the ordained priesthood. As such, the adjective "ordained" becomes critically important when exploring RCWP's efforts. In agreement

⁵ Mary E. Hunt, "Catholic Feminist Ministries in a Discipleship of Equals" (speech given at the Call to Action Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 3-4, 2006).

with Hunt, RCWP publicly denounces clericalism, but in contrast with Hunt, RCWP values ordination as part of ministry. Bishop Patricia Fresen has argued in response to suggestions like Hunt's that blessing ministries without the mark of ordination "would do nothing towards claiming equal rights for women in the church and no one would take us seriously as priests. We would be seen as just another sect. We need to take clear action for the equal rights of women to be ordained in order to break down the sexism that is so rampant in our hierarchical structures."⁶ Thus, as part of RCWP's protest against Canon Law 1024, the group works strategically to mark ordained women as priests who perform ministries. Specifically, RCWP sees its ministries as conveying its vision for a renewed priesthood, i.e., as priests who remove patriarchal power from the ministerial equation. Fresen explained in a 2005 speech, "Among the womenpriests, priesthood is not part of a power structure. We try to see and live [priesthood] as a ministry, of leadership certainly but not of domination or exclusion."⁷ Ministries are part of womenpriests' daily performances as ordained women. Unlike the publicity-generating ordination ceremonies intended to provoke and herald transformation in Roman Catholicism, womenpriests' ministries—enacted routinely and sometimes quietly—seek to root RCWP in the renewed Catholic Church and remodeled priesthood that the movement envisions. RCWP therefore champions—through actions and oratory—the value of "ordained ministry," even when the Roman Catholic Church would claim the womenpriests are not validly "ordained," and even when some feminist Catholics would dismiss the need for "ordained" ministry altogether.

Connected to RCWP's "ordained ministry" is the group's commitment to serving people "on the margins." To my knowledge, RCWP has not formally outlined what they mean by "the

⁶ Patricia Fresen, "A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry," in *Women Find a Way*, 30.

⁷ Patricia Fresen, "Prophetic Obedience: The Experience and Vision of Roman Catholic Womenpriests" (speech given at the Southeast Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference, March 2005).

margins,” or “marginality,” or “marginalized,” but it is possible to surmise the group’s intent. Common definitions tend to involve the ways certain groups and individuals face exclusion, from society, politics, or systemic structures, on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, social class, or disability. Beyond this, being “on the margins” can have a number of implications. One, the position can imply a kind of border-dwelling, either chosen or self-imposed, that echoes Victor Turner’s “liminality.” Unlike Turner’s liminal individuals, however, people described as being “on the margins” do not use marginality as a way of transitioning from one stage to another; being “marginal” is to occupy a particular—and often permanent—position relative to mainstream society. Two, being marginal can suggest either demographic or political minority status. This often includes the way minorities have limited access to political power; this can also describe a group’s relatively small size. Three, being marginal can suggest unorthodoxy. Four, marginal can describe groups of limited importance and impact.⁸ Again, it is hard to know what exactly RCWP’s members mean when they invoke marginal language, or even if they use these words synonymously. For my part, I suspect that when womenpriests describe themselves as marginal, they claim for themselves a position that is outside the Roman Catholic Church, and while part of this outsider status comes from RCWP’s own *contra legem* actions, the greater part comes from the history of Church actions and statements regarding women and women’s ordination. RCWP’s implicitly self-referential rhetoric about ministering to people on the margins most often refers to disempowered populations who feel like or are rendered “outcasts” as a result of structures—political, ecclesiastical, institutional, and systemic.

Although this term “ordained ministry to the margins” is my own, the concept’s implications play out in many Roman Catholic womenpriests’ statements and self-identifications.

⁸ In defining “marginal” and “marginalized,” I used the *Oxford English Dictionary*, online edition.

Minnesota-based womanpriest Monique Venne identifies herself on the RCWP website as “a person marginalized by the Catholic Church who ministers to others pushed to the margins by the Church.”⁹ In slight contrast, Judy Lee does not use the word “margins,” but she invokes this idea when she labels herself a “sometimes” outcast and when she speaks of ministering to those who experience injustice and oppression. She does not seem to speak of marginalization from the Church specifically, but rather about more general institutional oppression.¹⁰ In a YouTube video, womanpriest Bridget Mary Meehan explains RCWP’s “new model of priestly ministry.” Meehan speaks into the camera, and photographs from RCWP ordinations, sacraments, and ministerial endeavors punctuate her words. Because her words so clearly capture the ordained ministry to the margins I explore in this chapter, it is worth quoting Meehan at length.

In the Roman Catholic Womenpriests’ community, we reach out to those who have been alienated, hurt, or rejected by the institutional Catholic Church. There are many who feel like second class citizens in their own church: divorced and remarried Catholics, gays and lesbians, and all those on the margins of church and society. We will minister everywhere we find a need for God’s compassion and love. The world is our parish. Wherever we minister, RCWP offer a vision of an inclusive church, where all are welcome at God’s table of plenty, at the banquet of love. We offer a new model of priestly ministry, in which all people and all ministries are equally valued. We work as partners and equals with others in our communities. We work in an interfaith context, respectful of other traditions. Inclusivity is our hallmark. It is not enough to ordain women into a patriarchal and hierarchical structure. The clerical structure needs to be transformed, from a dominator model, with powers reserved to clergy, into an open, participatory model, that honors the gifts of the spirit in the people of God. The present gap between clergy and lay needs to be eliminated. We need to move from an unaccountable, top down hierarchy, to a people-empowered community of equals. We advocate a model of ministry based on partnership with the people we serve.¹¹

⁹ Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “Ordained: Monique Venne,” Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>.

¹⁰ Judy Lee, “A Priest of the Poor,” in *Women Find a Way*, 77-85.

¹¹ “A New Model of Priestly Ministry: Roman Catholic Womenpriests,” October 28, 2006, video clip, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMYrQOpK58>.

Meehan explains not only RCWP's ministerial philosophy, but also intimates the ways ministries play out, with interfaith work, inclusivity, and partnerships with the people being served.

Focusing on the margins allows RCWP's women to extend their thoughts—specifically, their thoughts about their personal, marginalized experiences—into action.

RCWP's rhetoric of marginality must also be critically unpacked, as it reveals much about the group, the group's motivations and self-understanding, and the group's formation and relationships with other groups. To be sure, RCWP's ordained women have felt and do feel excluded from Roman Catholic leadership and the sacramental priesthood. Many are feminists who have, through education and life experience, become aware of inequalities between men and women, in Roman Catholicism and the larger culture. Some womenpriests identify as lesbians and thus face(d) prejudice and political and theological roadblocks, from the Church and society. In short, there is no question that many (perhaps even all) of RCWP's women feel, in some ways, marginalized. And yet, it must be noted that marginalization has become a source of opportunity for women ordained through the RCWP initiative. As we will see, elements of RCWP's ministerial priesthood—such as their priestly formation, their educational and career backgrounds, their support from and service with interfaith groups, and their “everyday” ministries taking on a priestly flavor—very much emerge from an absence of institutional support *but* lead RCWP's women toward support structures and priestly preparedness independent of the Roman Catholic Church. Or, framed differently, the Roman Catholic Church's rejection of womenpriests—before ordination and after—gives the women a kind of ministerial power that womenpriests would not likely have if validly and legally ordained within the Roman Catholic Church. In short, there is tension and, perhaps even, power within RCWP's professed marginality.

RCWP's own professed marginality manifests in their lives as priests. Because RCWP's women cannot be trained as priests in Catholic seminaries, RCWP has created its own formation program. RCWP's women are "worker priests." As such, they are financially independent of the Church and also of their faith communities. Because womenpriests are not bound by clerical celibacy, they have families to whom they minister and from whom they draw ministerial lessons. Because womenpriests are unfettered by the Roman Catholic hierarchy, they can seek models, aid, and ecumenism with other religious groups, Catholic, Christian, and non-Christian. Taken together, these modifications to traditional Roman Catholic priesthood reveal that, in addition to the tensions between tradition and transgression examined previously, RCWP's marginal status allows the women actions, alliances, and ministries the Roman Catholic Church cannot and will not officially endorse. RCWP's ministries allow the womenpriests to perform—through small and sometimes intimate gestures, through interpersonal relationships and chance encounters—the Roman Catholic Church they envision.

(Marginalized) Priests in the Making

When one imagines someone following the path to ordained Roman Catholic priesthood, the "typical" example is this: a young man, either high school or college aged, enters a diocesan seminary or religious order. Once enrolled, the diocese or religious order provides the seminarian with the education and training necessary for a sacramental and ministerial priesthood. Eventually, the candidate takes vows, first as a deacon and later as a priest. This may happen for diocesan priests after nearly a decade; religious orders, especially those that emphasize education (such as the Jesuits), may require another several years of schooling.

Ultimately, when the man is ordained a priest, he will have collected years of educational and ministerial experiences that Church authorities deem necessary for a legitimate priesthood.¹²

From the early days of formation, candidates for priesthood depend on their diocese or religious order for all or part of their room, board, and education. Once ordained, financial dependence continues. Diocesan priests are paid a monthly stipend through the diocese. Most diocesan priests live in rectories (apartments or houses located near the church, paid for and maintained by the diocese) and use their salary to pay for clothing, groceries, transportation, or other basic needs. Alternatively, ordered priests are provided food, housing, transportation, and sometimes clothing (their habit, if they adopt it). Diocesan and ordered priests make vows of obedience, the former to a bishop and the latter to a superior. The vow of obedience and the priest's financial dependence on the Church keep ordained men within the bounds of Catholic polity: following official teachings, honoring directives from hierarchical leaders, and avoiding public statements that might contradict or embarrass Church leadership. Priests who buck this trend and break from official Catholic positions must be prepared for disciplinary action; those who go too far could potentially lose their careers and, therefore, their economic stability.

By design and by necessity, RCWP's women follow a very different path. While seminarians en route to ordination become increasingly assimilated into Roman Catholic culture, womenpriests place themselves outside of the hierarchical church upon ordination. Male Catholic priests become integrated into the Roman Catholic institution while womenpriests become formally placed (through excommunication) outside of the institution. Unlike the quintessential male seminarian, none of RCWP's women is of high school or college age. While

¹² Of course, familiar stories are not the *only* stories, and there is no one type of man—in terms of age, ethnicity, or background—that is drawn to the Catholic priesthood. A book that explores the United States' largest seminary for second career priests, Sacred Heart outside of Milwaukee, WI, is Jonathan Englert's *The Collar: A Year Inside a Catholic Seminary*. For a quick overview of priesthood formation since the Reformation and Council of Trent, see Charles M. Murphy, *Models of Priestly Formation: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Crossroad, 2006).

some Catholic seminaries allow women to take classes, there are no Roman Catholic seminaries preparing women for ordained ministry. Men seeking a priestly vocation choose between diocesan priesthood and joining one of many religious orders. In contrast, a woman wanting Roman Catholic priesthood has only the Roman Catholic Womenpriests option.¹³ RCWP does, indeed, have an acceptance process and a formation program. The movement does not—and financially cannot—provide theological education or ongoing support for its ordained women. Because RCWP’s applicant pool is quite different from the one for male priests, because RCWP does not have a centralized “school” or seminary location, and because RCWP’s typical ordained woman has been doing ministerial work for decades, RCWP’s formation emulates aspects of the Roman Catholic Church’s institutionalized formation program while adapting to accommodating the training and lifestyles of RCWP’s applicants—applicants who have established an educational base, launched careers, built family relationships, and forged relationships with priests and non-Catholics who support their ministries. To accomplish these ends, RCWP emulates parts of the Roman Catholic system but simultaneously claims a kind of authority and authenticity for womenpriests *because* they are outside of those Church systems that streamline formation and demand obedience.

Outside of Seminaries: Educational Backgrounds and RCWP’s Program of Preparation

Instead of joining a seminary to train for priesthood, RCWP’s formation program integrates the educational training that candidates have already received with a series of ordination-specific requirements designed cooperatively by womenpriests. Priesthood is not something RCWP’s candidates have trained for explicitly—certainly, when most of RCWP’s women began their educations in theology or ministry, or when they started working for their

¹³ Recall, many groups that position themselves within a *Catholic* tradition ordain women. But again, this dissertation maintains that RCWP’s insistence on retaining the “Roman” qualifier marks the group distinctively.

local (arch)dioceses or pastoring a priest-less parish, there was little reason to expect the possibility of ordination. As such, RCWP's formation program builds upon the work—the sometimes decades-long education and ministerial service—that women were doing not as candidates for priesthood, but as Roman Catholic women who felt called to serve. In this way, womenpriests reframe their past service, seeing ordination as something for which they *have been training* for years.

In considering the ministerial foundations within womenpriests' educations, it helps to highlight patterns in womenpriests' university degrees. Per the current formation program requirements, scores of ordained women have advanced degrees in theology: from Genevieve Beney in France to Morag Liebert in the UK; from Dagmar Celeste, ordained a womanpriest as part of the 2002 Danube Seven, to Mary Grace Crowley-Koch, ordained a womanpriest in 2011; from Mary Ann Schoettly whose third masters degree was in theology to Mary Frances Smith whose first masters was in theology. Many other RCWP women have Master of Divinity degrees—the same degree held by ordained male priests. Joan Houk, Kathy Vandenberg, Alice Iaquinta, Tony Tortorilla, and Kathleen Kunster all received their MDiv degrees from Catholic schools. Beyond these specifically theological or ministerial degrees, many women hold advanced degrees in other fields—degrees that informed or continue to inform their careers. Joan Houk has an MS in conflict management; Eileen DiFranco has an MA in Education; Alta Jacko holds degrees in music, education, and jurisprudence; Morag Liebert has a M.Sc. in Nursing; Judith McClosky has a masters in library science; Monique Venne has an MS in meteorology; Ann Penick has a masters in counseling. Additionally, many RCWP women have doctorates, such as Michele Birch-Conery (in English literature), Suzanne Dunn (in clinical psychology), Jane Via (in Religious Studies), Kathleen Kunster (in Psychology), and Roberta Meehan in the hard sciences. Among the Danube Seven, Gisela Forster, Ida Raming, and Iris

Muller received doctorates. Patricia Fresen and Patricia Sandall have doctorates in theology. Gloria Carpeneto, Diane Smith Whalen, Jean Marchant, Eleonora Marianaro, and Bridget Mary Meehan have Doctor of Ministry degrees, as does Judy Lee, who also holds a Doctor in Social Work. All told, RCWP's is a highly educated group of women. Now as deacons and priests, many women are continuing their educations so as to extend their theological understanding and better prepare for ordained ministry.¹⁴

At times, women with master's degrees and doctorates have directed their thesis or dissertation work toward questions of women in the Roman Catholic Church. Decades before RCWP's existence, Michele Birch-Conery wrote her dissertation on how the Roman Catholic Church uses theological and philosophical language so as to encode secrecy and exclude women. Gloria Carpeneto's early 1990's dissertation examined the spirituality of middle-aged women. Mary Ann Schoettly's Master in Theology led her to write a paper titled "The Female Body: An Impediment to Ordination," whereby she focused on women's bodies as described and understood in Church statements on the male-only priesthood. While writing her MA thesis, "The River and the Rock: Women Shaping Church," Mary Frances Smith examined interviews with seven Roman Catholic women in light of *Mulieris Dignitatem* and the theology of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Significantly, she interviewed Regina Nicolosi, who was preparing for ordination through RCWP. Later, Smith was herself ordained, and at present, Nicolosi is Smith's bishop.¹⁵ Lastly, Ida Raming's doctorate in theology from the University of Munster culminated

¹⁴ A number of RCWP's ordained are pursuing degrees through Global Ministries University. GMU is an international, online, degree-certifying institution. Specializing in religion, the program focuses on scripture, world traditions, and ministry. The programs offer flexibility and access for those who are working other jobs or who do not live near a seminary or university. Many RCWP women have taken courses and gotten degrees from Global Ministries; what's more, several womenpriests and bishops are listed as faculty, including Bridget Mary Meehan, Dana Reynolds, Elenora Marianaro, and Mary Ann Schoettly. See Global Ministries University, "Home," Global Ministries University, <http://www.globalministriesuniversity.org/>; Global Ministries University, "Faculty," Global Ministries University, <http://www.globalministriesuniversity.org/faculty.html>.

¹⁵ Mary Frances Smith, email interview with author, March 4, 2011.

in 1970 with the work, “The Exclusion of Women from Priesthood: Divine Law or Gender Discrimination?” Later published and translated into English, this book became a foundational work for Catholics seeking women’s ordination. In summary, womenpriests developed the habit of linking educational study with faith-based, ministerial actions, sometimes decades before being ordained.

Yet even as the women’s educational backgrounds serve as ministerial foundations, this training—and, more specifically, the public listing thereof—also performs and argues for the women’s right to and preparation for ordination. Some of the educational information I have chronicled here emerged during interviews, but by and large, this information comes from public sources, such as *Women Find a Way* and the RCWP website. RCWP places importance on making educational information public. Doing so gives the women’s educational degrees a performative character, one in which education itself justifies and lends authority to the women’s desire for and claims to a legitimate ministerial priesthood. Critics claiming the women are ill prepared for priesthood would be confronted with biographical evidence suggesting otherwise. Although *Inter Insigniores* has denied that women have a “genuine vocation” to the priesthood, it is difficult to deny the existence of educational degrees.¹⁶ Womenpriests may not emerge from Roman Catholic priesthood formation, and the Vatican may dismiss their call as false, but their biographies imply that they have nonetheless studied for priesthood and prepared for ministry.

These educational foundations become woven into the RCWP formation process. RCWP’s Program of Preparation for Ordination is a blend of educational-degree seeking, distance learning, and hands-on training. Currently, the steps toward ordination in RCWP are as

¹⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (“Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood”) (October 15, 1976), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi.htm>, Section 6: The Ministerial Priesthood Illustrated by the Mystery of the Church.

follows: first, someone will inquire about the program and receive an information packet. Next, the individual formally applies to the program. At this point, an applicant submits letters of recommendation and undergoes both a criminal background check and a psychological evaluation by a licensed and registered psychologist or psychiatrist. She also has an in-person interview. If accepted, the candidate becomes, in RCWP parlance, an “applicant in discernment.” Many women enter the program already having completed the required theological work; others augment their existing degrees once accepted into the formation program. Officially, an applicant under 55 years of age needs a Master of Divinity, a Master of Theology, or the equivalent; an applicant over 55 needs a Bachelors in theology or equivalent.¹⁷ Candidates must finance their degrees, either through scholarships or other sources, as RCWP does not and cannot finance formal schooling. A womanpriest serving as a Regional Program Coordinator facilitates an applicant’s progress, taking part in the interviews and gathering the applicant’s documents—resumes, baptismal and confirmation certificates, and degree transcripts. Applicants are encouraged to complete a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, something required of all hospital chaplains specifically and seen as being invaluable for ordained ministers broadly.

In addition to the educational and preliminary requirements, applicants must complete program units, which are writing-and activity-intensive. Applicants write essays and homilies, design rituals and compose liturgies, and receive hands-on sacraments training. Customarily, the applicant will work on the units over a period of several months or even years, sometimes in conjunction with studying for an advanced degree in theology. An applicant working toward the diaconate does the first five units; she would later do five more units if she is recommended for priesthood. The units can be modified somewhat, depending on the RCWP region and the

¹⁷ To be sure, determining what “or equivalent” looks like depends on the Program Coordinator, the applicant, and the region in which she has applied.

Program Coordinator. Each unit focuses on a different aspect of ministerial priesthood. Unit one emphasizes personal autobiography and reflection; unit two focuses on baptism; unit three explores anointing with oil; unit four explores the Holy Spirit and “fire” of Pentecost; unit five examines Eucharist; unit six considers penance, as both sacrament and stage of renewal; unit seven unpacks questions of human sexuality in light of RCWP’s rejection of mandatory celibacy; unit eight looks at ministry broadly, including to the sick and dying and in terms of counseling and anointing the sick; unit nine invites the applicant to analyze her call to ordination; unit ten asks the applicant to receive practical, hands-on training for preaching and celebrating the sacraments. Here, applicants receive assistance from either ordained womenpriests or from ordained male priests. Male priests in good standing with their orders or dioceses do this work covertly; otherwise, male priests who have left formal priesthood and are parts of groups like CORPUS or the FCM openly guide applicants through sacramental training. Throughout this process, Program Coordinators will likely emphasize the fact that completion of the program requirements and units should be seen as part of the discernment process. Ordination is not guaranteed. It takes about a minimum of one year to be ordained to the diaconate; ordination to the priesthood generally adds at least another year.¹⁸

Even though RCWP’s formation program is rigorous, organized, and increasingly formalized, for pragmatic reasons, no two womenpriests are trained in the same way. Women are educated at a multitude of schools across North America and Europe and receive a range of degrees. Because of the lack of hierarchical mandate, regional variations due to the candidate’s circumstances or the program coordinator’s preferences are common. Unlike male priesthood candidates whose classmates include fellow seminarians, womenpriests have not been educated

¹⁸ “Roman Catholic Womenpriests Program of Preparation for Ordination,” sent to me by womanpriest Mary Kay Kusner, on September 22, 2009. As such, these are the units she used for her ordination and are representative of but not identical to the process every ordained woman goes through.

alongside other womenpriests. The implications of this variety are multi-faceted. Because ordained women do not all possess the same foundational discourse in theology, religious studies, or pastoral studies, they understand their priestly roles and RCWP's mission somewhat differently. Without a seminary or the equivalent, RCWP does not leave a particular "mark" on the candidates or induct them into a shared way of thinking. RCWP's formation program ensures membership diversity and erases a top-down formula for creating new priests. At times, this educational diversity leads to disagreements within RCWP—including over topics like formation and education. For instance, many ordained women have studied theology or religion but have not read foundational texts in Catholic feminist theology from scholars like Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary Hunt, or Elizabeth Johnson. Certain RCWP members think the formation program should be stricter in mandating theological education. In contrast, others would contend that more stringent requirements might privilege certain ways of talking about ordained ministry and/or preclude certain women from making steady progress toward ordination within a program that is already designed to be rigorous.¹⁹ Currently, because of these debates and RCWP's continued growth, the Program of Formation is being redesigned.

Other challenges to RCWP's formation program stem from the education-intensive model. Critics of RCWP's formation have implied that strict education requirements do a disservice to the marginalized people many womenpriests hope to serve. For instance, writing for *Equal wRites* in 2005, Marian Ronan called upon groups ordaining Catholic women to

go out of their way to ordain women—and men—who do not have academic theological training...who do not have seminary degrees or even college educations...[I]t is essential

¹⁹ I have talked with a handful of women about this issue of the formation program and the uniformity—or lack thereof—within the requirements. Because some women expressed dissatisfaction with the current program or frustration with other members around this issue, I will refrain from citing these interviewees by name.

that the eucharist sometimes be celebrated in Catholic communities by those whom Jesus came to call: the poor and the marginalized.²⁰

The following year, again in *Equal w/Rites*, Karen B. Lenz expressed similar concerns about RCWP. The Church needs “fewer seminaries and advanced degrees and more feeding stations and clinics,” she wrote. Furthermore, while Lenz appreciated the symbolism of RCWP’s ordinations aboard sailing ships, she noted the cost of a ticket (\$85 for the Pittsburgh ordination) prohibited some from attending.²¹ Overall, Lenz and Ronan challenged RCWP to consider how its requirements might preclude the economically marginalized from full participation, as ordinands or as supporters.

Ironically, then, the marginalized, outsider status of RCWP—including the lack of seminaries and financial limitations—might prevent the marginalized people RCWP wants to serve from becoming servant priests themselves. Staying on the margins indeed gives RCWP leverage and power, but remaining financially and institutionally marginalized will make it difficult for certain people to pursue priesthood. In part because of these concerns, RCWP is trying to develop a scholarship program. But honoring Ronan’s request that people without formal training be ordained would certainly undermine RCWP’s concern with authority and legitimacy which, for RCWP, requires claiming and displaying suitability and preparation for priesthood—including education. Furthermore, most of the women who long for priesthood through RCWP have been long immersed in feminist theology—and this immersion often (though not exclusively) happens in university settings. Thus, RCWP is caught in a Catch-22: because of their backgrounds (in the Church) and educations (outside of the Church), womenpriests seek to serve people on the margins as legitimate priests. But in being well-

²⁰ Marian Ronan, From “Celebrating our Triumphs, Committing Ourselves to Change,” *Equal w/Rites* (Ivyland, PA) June-August 2005: 9.

²¹ Karen B. Lenz, “Let us Proceed - With Love and Deliberation,” *Equal w/Rites* (Ivyland, PA) June-August 2006: 1-3.

educated and (in their eyes) well-trained for priesthood, they cease to occupy the same marginal spaces regarding education as the people they long to reach.

Certainly RCWP's ordained priesthood would look vastly different if the women were trained in Roman Catholic seminaries or if RCWP had its own seminary. With a seminary, low-income women without an educational foundation could pursue priesthood through RCWP, because RCWP would finance this seminary education. Of course, RCWP may never have the financial means to fund its own seminary. Moreover, RCWP believes it imperative that its women stand outside of formal institutional structures. As some womenpriests would argue, their unorthodox process towards ordination informs their ministerial priesthood, specifically their ability to reach people on the margins. Having been on the margins themselves—primarily as Roman Catholic women who feel silenced in their own church but also as individuals who have struggled (either financially, as parents, or as relationship partners)—womenpriests believe their ordained ministries benefit from their life experiences as non-ordained women.

Womanpriest Chava Redonnet says that, while it's "frustrating" that it took forty years to answer her call to priesthood, the waiting was "a gift" that she draws upon. Not only is Redonnet a mother, but she has been a single mother and a poor mother. This personal history, Redonnet believes, gives her an authority and an "in" with her priestly ministry. When talking to the people she serves, Redonnet notes, "I can say 'I've been there, I've been in your shoes, and I know how hard it feels.'"²² Simply put, Redonnet suggests her priesthood would not be what it is were it not for the struggles she endured—struggles that many young seminarians might bypass but upon which RCWP's formation program builds. Redonnet's statement implies that many male Catholic priests do not have and cannot have had the experiences of poverty, parenting, and

²² Chava Redonnet, telephone interview with author, Jan 6, 2011.

struggle that Redonnet and fellow womenpriests have. RCWP's formation may be untraditional, but many womenpriests believe that it creates the ideal priest for the ministries at hand.

The Ministries of Worker Priests

RCWP's ministries are distinct from those of male priests because they are not prescribed by a diocese or religious order. Instead, they emerge organically. Unlike many male priests whose superiors assign positions and ministerial tasks, the womenpriests are not "sent" to a parish, a community, or a school to fulfill their ministries, nor are they inserted into pre-existing ministerial functions. Womenpriests must seek out their ministries, often from within their hometowns. As RCWP's Vision Statement instructs,

Candidates need to be aware that ordination in RCWP is for service. Therefore, Candidates who do not have the support of a local community to whom they will eventually minister will work with other ministers to find or build a base community which will affirm their call and support to them in their ministry. Ministries could include but would not be limited to: Liturgy, Continuing Education in the Faith; parish ministries; Community Outreach; Ministries to marginalized persons and groups; and Spiritual Companionship.²³

Where ministries are not already established, womenpriests must establish them.

Womenpriests are "worker priests," and proudly so. As such, they do not depend financially on the Roman Catholic Church, as male priests do. This allows them to bypass the connection between money and ministerial support; it also helps them combat the clericalism reinforced by priests' dependence on the Church. Patricia Fresen has said, "The financial dependence of priests upon their bishop or their Order is a very strong aspect of the power

²³ Roman Catholic Womenpriests – North America, "History: Current Operating Structure: Vision Statement," Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/NEWhistory.htm>. This Vision Statement was ratified on February 3, 2007. I have heard that RCWP is planning an updated Vision Statement, but this one from 2007 has remained on the group's website, at least through 2011.

structure of the hierarchical church.”²⁴ RCWP’s ordained do not pledge obedience to a bishop or superior. Moreover, RCWP lacks the financial resources to support its priests. Simply put, there is no way for a womanpriest to lose her income or livelihood because she has disobeyed a bishop or an institution. Yet the women must finance this freedom themselves: womenpriests must find other means of economic support. Some are retired and live off of pensions or savings. Some receive help from spouses. And many continue working jobs they have held for years. Because RCWP’s women must be worker priests, womenpriests often find themselves fusing their careers (which provides a livelihood) and their ministries (which stem from ordination).

Being educated worker priests with jobs and ministries has become a hallmark of RCWP’s ordained women. Though most womenpriests sought degrees and began careers without serious thought of ordained priesthood, their backgrounds are now made to “fit”—ministerially and performatively—their lives as ordained women. In addition to performing for critics and curious alike an argument for legitimacy, womenpriests’ educational and career backgrounds signal that ordination is, in many ways, a sensible “next step” in these women’s lives. Becoming an ordained Catholic priest is a lengthy process, and RCWP’s public statements about women’s educations show that the women have spent years working toward their priesthood goal. As such, the website biographies emphasize education, careers, and service. In doing so, RCWP performs and thereby creates—for themselves and for critics—the model priest: she is well educated, well prepared, well connected, and well experienced.

Many women build their ministerial priesthood upon past professional experiences. Priesthood becomes an extension of earlier ministries, allowing the women to take further their

²⁴ Patricia Fresen, “A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry,” in *Women Find a Way*, 32.

work, which often comes in ministry-related fields: education, nursing and body care, counseling, and serving as women religious. Several ordained women have worked in education. Alice Iaquina has taught college for over 35 years and says of herself, simply, “I am a teacher.”²⁵ Jane Via also spent many years teaching early Christianity courses at colleges and universities; now an attorney, she is a prosecutor in the San Diego attorney’s office.²⁶ Victoria Rue teaches women’s studies and comparative religion at San Jose State; she also writes and directs theatrical productions. Janice Sevre-Duszynska is a high school teacher who works with ESL students, many of whom have come from violence-ridden nations; this, she says, helped her realize that she must take a stand for peace and justice against war.²⁷ Theresa Novak Chabot is a speech-language pathologist in a public elementary school, working with children with Autism and communication disorders.²⁸ Roberta Meehan has taught biology for many years, and in many states, both live and online.²⁹ Other ordained women have careers and training in medical and body care. Mary Frances Smith, Mary Ellen Robertson, Eileen DiFranco, and Morag Liebert have long backgrounds in nursing. Marie David, Gloria Carpeneto, and Monica Kilburn-Smith are trained Reiki masters. Another trend among RCWP’s ordained women is counseling. Marie Bouclin and Gabriella Valenti Ward have counseled abuse victims; Kathy Sullivan Vandenberg, a

²⁵ Alice Iaquina, “Coming Full Circle: The Journey Back to the Beginning,” in *Women Find a Way*, 127-132; Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “Ordained: Alice Iaquina,” Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>.

²⁶ Jane Via, telephone interview with author, November 22, 2010; “Osher UCSD: Becoming a Woman Roman Catholic Priest with Jane Via,” May 7, 2007, video clip, University of California Television, www.uctv.tv/search-details.aspx?showID=12244; “Osher UCSD: Jane Via 2009, Three Years as a Woman Priest,” December 4, 2009, video clip, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_EcnJeNUp8; Jane Via, interview, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

²⁷ Victoria Rue, interview, April 19 and 28, 2006, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

²⁸ Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “Ordained: Theresa Novak Chabot,” Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>

²⁹ Roberta Meehan, telephone interview with author, April 10 and 14, 2011.

certified trauma specialist, has served Wisconsin as a professional counselor and does grief work for parents of murdered children; Kathleen Kunster has a PhD in psychology and works with people in a community mental health clinic; Suzanne Dunn has a PhD in clinical psychology and runs a private practice.³⁰ These are only some examples of careers womenpriests have held and now continue to hold as worker priests. The patterns suggest not only a generational pull toward service and healing professions, but also personality and character types that gravitate toward ministerial work.

Other women have worked within the Church structures, as women religious and diocesan employees or volunteers. A good number of RCWP's women entered convents; many of these took vows. For eleven years, Michele Birch-Conery studied and taught with the Sisters of the Holy Name before leaving in 1974; Patricia Fresen was a Dominican sister for decades until her ordination through RCWP resulted in her departure; Jeannette Love was a religious sister for nineteen years.³¹ Other "former nuns" include Marie Bouclin and Olivia Doko, who are now married. Suzanne Dunn and Bridget Mary Meehan both still identify as Sisters of Christian Charity in their RCWP biographies. Kathy Redig and Christine Myer-Lumetzberger entered convents as teenagers but left and later married. In addition to these consecrated women, scores of RCWP's ordained women have worked for and within the institutional Church. Elsie McGrath worked for the Archdiocese of St. Louis, and she and her husband (now deceased) together used to run marriage preparation courses. Pat Sandall served the Archdiocese of Los Angeles for over 25 years, working as a catechist, a pastoral associate, and a religious education director. Mary Meyer-Gad worked for archdiocesan liturgy offices in Chicago and Detroit. The

³⁰ RCWP Western Region, "RCWP Members: Suzanne Dunn," RCWP Western Region, web.mac.com/jdcordero/Ministries/RCWP_Members.html.

³¹ Michele Birch-Conery, telephone interview with author, April 19, 2011; Patricia Fresen, interview, July 20, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage; Roman Catholic Womenpriests, "Ordained: Jeannette Love," Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>.

list of Church involvement goes on and on: many women held established, respected positions within the Church, and nearly every woman volunteered with local parish activities.

To suggest, then, that RCWP's women have been entirely "outside" the Church is to paint an incomplete picture. At some time, nearly all of the women worked inside the Church—serving the community, though certainly not making decisions about Church policy or doctrine. Most felt that their church service could go only so far, and this is where the rhetoric of marginalization begins. RCWP's women have worked within the Roman Catholic system and have received training (as diocesan employees) and educations (as religious sisters) within the Church. In spite of this proximity to the institutional Church—though, perhaps more appropriately stated, *because of* this proximity to the institutional Church—the women felt they weren't reaching the fullness of their ministerial calling. An ordained priesthood would offer them something more; as ordained priests, they could offer more in the way of ministry. Instead of remaining within their positions as sisters or archdiocesan support staff, they decided to pursue a *contra legem* path to ordained ministry.

A question still remains: what does ordination bring to these ministries? The sacramental component of RCWP's ministry is undeniably central. Moreover, ordained ministries serve as a protest against the clerical system that determines male priests' ministries. Standing outside the Church (as excommunicated women), womenpriests choose to whom they minister and how they minister. Few male priests have the same self-determination, and their vows of obedience require them to go where a bishop sends. Because womenpriests must make their ministries, they choose their ministerial paths and build upon backgrounds that are best described as richly ministerial—even before "ordained priest" was added to their qualifications. In this way, RCWP's ministries enact the new model of priesthood that the group rhetorically champions.

Simply put, RCWP's women believe that womenpriests can serve in ways male priests cannot—not least of all because male priests live in male bodies, with all of the privilege and power to come with it. I explore womenpriests' bodies more in the following chapter; for now, it must be noted that, as Marie Bouclin has found in her work with women abused by priests, those who have been harmed by priests, by the Church, are not likely to find comfort from priests located within the Church. Also as ordained women, RCWP's members can offer blessings and healing. Gabriella Valenti Ward has long counseled abuse victims; now, she can give them a sacramental reconciliation. Indeed, sacraments become—again—a crucial facet of women's desire for ordination. Now their ministries can take on a sacramental component. Whether through reconciliation (as Valenti Ward does), through baptism (as Novak Chabot did, in Chapter 4), or through a Eucharist for homeless men and women (as Judy Lee does), an ordained ministry to the margins brings a sacramental ministry to marginalized people.

Affirmation from Outside the Church: Calls Confirmed and Cooperation Codified

Because womenpriests are not assisted or affirmed within their own Roman Catholic tradition, and because womenpriests see themselves as marginalized by the Roman Catholic Church, they seek assistance for their ordained ministries outside the Church. When I say “outside the Church,” I refer to a range of interfaith and reform groups that have publicly and/or privately supported RCWP over the years, including independent Catholics, Protestants, non-Christians, and ordained Catholic male priests who no longer function within hierarchical structures. Further, because these womenpriests see themselves as being on the margins, they can forge formal alliances with groups and individuals that the Roman Catholic Church—given its particular positions—cannot. Thus emerges a cooperative relationship between RCWP's

ordained women and interfaith and reform groups. These relationships may arise from necessity, but ultimately they give RCWP ecumenical opportunities that the Roman Catholic Church itself neither has nor desires.

To be sure, the institutional Church has been slow to participate in the ecumenical activities that have characterized much twentieth-century interfaith engagement. The Roman Catholic Church is notably absent from the World Council of Churches, which today comprises nearly 350 Christian groups worldwide. The Church historically has embraced “church unity”; difficulties arise, however, in Rome’s insistence that unity will best be accomplished when all Christian churches unite (or *re-unite*, as the Church maintains) under the Roman Catholic umbrella. Vatican II and *Lumen Gentium* softened Rome’s recalcitrance somewhat. Still, the Church’s willingness to engage in interfaith dialogue has not led it to yield on structural or doctrinal matters. In a 1995 book calling the Roman Catholic Church to greater ecumenism, Jon Nilson argues that, even after 30 years of post-Vatican II ecumenical openness, the church “remains ecumenically aloof and immobile.”³² Moreover, despite an increased commitment to dialogue, the Church still bristles at women’s ordination in other denominations. The Episcopal Church’s decision to ordain women in the 1970s led to a heated exchange between Catholic and Episcopal leaders. Most recently, the Vatican has invited Anglicans unhappy with ordained women to seamlessly transfer to Roman Catholicism.³³ In sum, the institutional Church treads

³² Jon Nilson, *Nothing Beyond the Necessary: Roman Catholicism and the Ecumenical Future* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 9.

³³ Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium* (“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”) (November 21, 1964) http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html; Angelo Maffei, *Ecumenical Dialogue*, trans. Lorelei F. Fuchs (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005); Deborah Halter, *The Papal No*, 69-73; John Wilkins, “Ordinariate gets up and running,” *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 2011, 1, 6-7.

carefully and deliberately on matters of interfaith cooperation, as its self-appointed status of “the one true Church” precludes full partnership.

In contrast, cooperative interfaith work has become integral to RCWP’s identity and priest formation process. The women have come to rely on the ministerial guidance of non-Catholic clergy in their own faith and discernment journeys. This partnership plays out publicly at RCWP ordination ceremonies, in which clergy from other faith traditions participate. Protestant and non-Christian clergy wear vestments appropriate for their own tradition’s formal events, walk in the opening and closing processions, and lay hands on the ordinands during the ordination’s most sacred act. This public performance speaks to non-Catholics’ active support and engagement with RCWP; it sends the message that, while the Roman Catholic hierarchy openly discredits womenpriests’ calls-to-ordination and decision to go *contra legem*, other faith traditions stand in solidarity with RCWP’s vocational aims. This non-Catholic clerical presence also gestures symbolically to the behind-the-scenes support that clergy outside of formal Catholicism have given and will continue to give to womenpriests. Once RCWP’s women are ordained and leading a worship community, these “outsider” clergy will transition from supportive guide (through the discernment and formation process) to cooperative ally (in interfaith, ministerial action).

Two threads in these ministerial partnerships are especially noteworthy. First, womenpriests rely upon people (ordained and not ordained) outside of Roman Catholicism to model, affirm, and encourage their journey toward ordained ministry. Second, once ordained, interfaith partnerships become a defining feature of womenpriests’ ministerial outreach and social activism. RCWP’s ministries thus become cross-pollinated with interfaith ministerial mentoring and ecumenical collaboration.

Calls Inspired, Confirmed, and Legitimized

Many womenpriests speak openly and fondly about Protestant influences that led them to consider ordination. Ironically, some of the Protestant churches that “broke away” from the Catholic Church five hundred years ago are inspiring RCWP’s women to “break away” from Canon Law restrictions on Catholic ordinations. Unordained Protestant women help RCWP’s women realize and pursue their vocations, and ordained Protestant women model and perform Christian women’s ordination. Discussing Protestant influences on Roman Catholic women best begins with Iris Müller, one of the Danube Seven. Born Protestant, Müller studied theology in Germany and became qualified for ordination in the Protestant Church. Yet it was around this time that she converted to Roman Catholicism, drawn to its sacraments, community focus, and world-wide reach. She continued her theological studies in Münster, this time focusing on Catholic theology. Here, she ran into difficulties: as a former Protestant woman who could have been ordained, she was now confronted with Canon Law 1024 and a ban on women’s ordination. She “had become a creature incapable of receiving Holy Orders,” a woman whose rights differed fundamentally from men’s. She wrote that, during her studies in Münster,

the professors and most of the students expected me to simply accept the position of women in the Church without further question. But I decided to be faithful to my conviction, and to my call to ordination. So, as a former Protestant theologian, I was the first woman in the Catholic faculty to give witness that women were discriminated against in the Catholic Church and that their inferior status had to be reformed.³⁴

Müller joined forces with Catholic Ida Raming, a fellow academic in Germany. Together, these women became the theological pioneers of the women’s ordination movement.

The example of Iris Müller suggests that not all of RCWP’s members are “cradle Catholics.” Dana Reynolds, who would become RCWP’s first North American womanbishop,

³⁴ Iris Müller, “My Story, Condensed,” in *Women Find a Way*, 19-20.

converted to Roman Catholicism from the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1999. Jane Via, ordained alongside Reynolds in Pittsburgh in 2006, converted to Catholicism as a teenager. Alice Iaquina was raised Evangelical Lutheran but became Catholic amid the hope and change of Vatican II. Discouraged at times, she “periodically gave up” on the Church. It was while praying with the Quakers in 1994 that she felt “the Spirit” nudging her: “It’s time to go home,” back to Roman Catholicism. Thirteen years later, she would be ordained a womanpriest.³⁵ Two of St. Louis’s womenpriests converted to Catholicism from Protestant traditions. Elsie McGrath converted to Catholicism at seventeen, when she married her Catholic husband. Rose Marie Hudson was raised Methodist and long felt a call to ordained ministry. As the Methodist tradition began opening itself up to women’s ordination, Hudson applied and was accepted into the formation program. At around the same time, however, her husband, Bob, announced that he wanted to become Catholic. Taken aback by this announcement—not to mention what it might mean for her own ordination as a Methodist minister—Hudson embarked on a prayer retreat. There, like Iaquina, she heard the Spirit. Her message: “You’ve been a Protestant for 38 years. Now you will become a Catholic and see what that faith community is like. Later you’ll be a catalyst to help bring the whole church back together again.”³⁶ Stories like this suggest that womenpriests who are convert Catholics view their RCWP ordinations and ministries through a lens of transformation from Protestant to Catholic—oftentimes with the Protestant tradition’s more progressive stance on women’s ordination influencing the now-Catholic worshipper. These former Protestants not only saw women’s ordination performed and embodied in their own tradition, but most could have pursued (and in some cases, did pursue) ordained ministry within Protestantism.

³⁵ Alice Iaquina, “Coming Full Circle: The Journey Back to the Beginning,” in *Women Find a Way*, 127.

³⁶ Rose Marie Dunn Hudson, “I Think I See a Priest,” in *Women Find a Way*, 104.

Non-Catholic influences on RCWP's "cradle Catholic" women have come in the shape of women priests, particularly Episcopal/Anglican women priests. Ordained through RCWP in 2007, Juanita Cordero recalls a 2003 Episcopal liturgy in Chicago where for the first time she saw a woman priest. This stirred her own call to the priesthood, but she dismissed the idea as impossible in the Roman Catholic Church. Not long after, she saw another Episcopal woman priest presiding at Eucharist. Cordero became a regular member of this community, serving as a Eucharistic minister for four years. It was during this time that she pursued her own journey toward ordination. The power of seeing a woman priest, vested and presiding at Mass, is not limited to those generations of Catholic women who have struggled in the church for decades: in 2009 I spoke with Lauren, a Catholic woman in her early 20s recently graduated from a Jesuit university, who described vividly the moment she first saw a woman priest. Lauren was in El Salvador, and attending a liturgy lead by an Episcopalian woman priest left her feeling "overwhelmed," "shocked," and "in awe." She explained further,

[T]he idea a woman could be a priest never even entered my consciousness until I saw it. Until I saw this women celebrating this mass very similar to a Catholic mass in the Episcopal church. And I was just, like, holy cow, and that led to this whole new series of questions, like "What role DO women have in the church?" and "How have women been excluded and oppressed?" And how beautiful it is to see a woman up there and how much that means to me personally to see and experience. So when I came back to school I kind of switched what I wanted to study. I felt a strong call to study theology and women's studies kind of combined, to get the feminist lens of theology.³⁷

Seeing a woman priest so powerfully moved Lauren that she modified her academic pursuits.

What is more, the incident in El Salvador has fueled Lauren's own discernment to the priesthood, perhaps through RCWP. Unlike most forms of Protestant worship, Episcopal and Anglican services most closely resemble the "high Church" flavor of Roman Catholicism; thus,

³⁷ Lauren [pseudonym created by author], Catholic woman, interview with author, July 17, 2009.

seeing a woman moving through rituals and saying prayers that look and sound like Catholicism can leave a lasting impression on life-long Catholic women.

Even women priests in the Catholic—if not *Roman* Catholic—lineage have impacted RCWP’s ordained women. While Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger was preparing for the first Danube ordinations, she attended Mary Ramerman’s 2001 ordination at Spiritus Christi Church in Rochester, NY. Ramerman’s ordination was performed by Bishop Peter Hickman, an independent Catholic. Mayr-Lumetzberger sees Ramerman’s ordination as an inspirational bridge between the United States and Europe. Mayr-Lumetzberger said also that Ramerman was, for her, a valuable model for ministering and being a servant to the people.³⁸ Thus, women priests like Ramerman have influenced womenpriests like Mayr-Lumetzberger. In thinking about her role as one of the first American Catholic women priests, Ramerman has said, “It takes someone about five minutes to get used to seeing a woman at the altar. They get over it!”³⁹ Perhaps Ramerman is correct in noting that the shock or disconnect of seeing a vested woman saying the words of consecration lasts only a moment. But as the Mayr-Lumetzberger example shows, the initial visual of a woman priest can leave a lasting impact, particularly on those individuals who have long felt called to ordained ministry and who see potential and possibility in the woman priest’s presence.

In addition to the visual inspiration that women priests provide, RCWP’s women have had their calls affirmed and their priesthoods encouraged by non-Catholic women and men. After decades of being unaware of her call to ordination, Dagmar Celeste credits two Methodist women for “opening her eyes” to the call when they invited Celeste—an unordained, Catholic

³⁸ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, interview, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

³⁹ Mary Ramerman, interview, July 23, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

woman—to be their pastor. When she pointed out to the women that she was Roman Catholic, she learned the denominational difference did not stop them from selecting her as their minister.⁴⁰ Eileen DiFranco’s call was also affirmed by Protestants: while studying at the Lutheran Theological Seminary of Philadelphia, her classmates tried to persuade her to become ordained. She considered converting to the Lutheran faith and becoming a Lutheran pastor. But a New Testament professor convinced DiFranco to remain Catholic and work to hold the Roman Catholic Church accountable, even amid the threat of excommunication. Her call affirmed and her commitment to Roman Catholicism reinforced, DiFranco became a womanpriest in 2006. A Lutheran minister also played a hand in Kathy Vandenberg’s path to ordination. She revealed to him that, if she could do anything she wanted, she would be ordained a priest. The Lutheran clergyman responded encouragingly, telling Vandenberg that she reminded him of other, Lutheran women called to ministry.⁴¹ Janice Sevre-Duszynska does much peace and justice activism within an ecumenical context. She writes, “From [the interfaith community] I have been affirmed. Over the years, they have recognized my desire for priesthood and they have encouraged me in every way.”⁴² These stories are narrated so as to suggest that faithful, ministerial people support and affirm Catholic women’s calls to ministry—and the non-supportive Roman Catholic Church is missing out on Catholic women as ordained ministers.

Given RCWP’s *contra legem* stance and their desire to have a community affirm and participate in a candidate’s ordination (to the point of joining in the Laying on of Hands), it makes sense, strategically and spiritually, that RCWP seeks and then publicizes support from

⁴⁰ Dagmar Celeste, “Soli Deo Amor: Story of a Vagabond Troubadour,” in *Women Find a Way*, 6.

⁴¹ Kathy Sullivan Vandenberg, “Prophetic Obedience,” in *Women Find a Way*, 123.

⁴² Janice Sevre-Duszynska, “Blessed are the Peacemakers,” in *Women Find a Way*, 97.

other Christian sources. Womenpriests use this affirmation both to authenticate their call and offset the Vatican's dismissal of that call. In *Inter Insigniores*, the CDF addressed the question of women feeling called to the priesthood:

It is sometimes said and written in books and periodicals that some women feel they have a vocation to the priesthood. Such an attraction, however noble and understandable, still does not suffice for a genuine vocation. In fact a vocation cannot be reduced to a mere personal attraction, which can remain purely subjective... Women who express a desire for the ministerial priesthood are doubtless motivated by the desire to serve Christ and the Church... But it must not be forgotten that the priesthood does not form part of the rights of the individual, but stems from the economy of the mystery of Christ and the Church.⁴³

Because the Church has labeled women's ministerial call as inauthentic, it becomes imperative for womenpriests to present their ministerial journeys as not solely the result of private, prayerful reflection but as something public and external. And while prayerful discernment has played a role in womenpriests' movement toward ordination, prayer alone has not encouraged women to go *contra legem*, defy Vatican authority, and become ordained in the line of apostolic succession. It has taken encouragement and affirmation from others to nudge the women to break Canon Law and follow the path to ordination. For many Roman Catholic womenpriests, ordination has come at the confluence of personal reflection and external affirmation.⁴⁴

Even though Church laws bar women from ordination, womenpriests' narrative rhetoric centers upon the theme of an affirmed call. Performatively and persuasively, this framing shows that womenpriests cannot ignore a call that is affirmed by family members, by non-Catholics,

⁴³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* ("Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood") (October 15, 1976), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi.htm>, Section 6: The Ministerial Priesthood Illustrated by The Mystery of the Church.

⁴⁴ One certainly wonders what these supportive ordained and unordained Protestants might stand to gain from encouraging RCWP's rebellion. While this question lies beyond the scope of my dissertation, I suggest some reasons in my Conclusion. I wonder if this support might not be a new form of anti-Catholicism, *if* anti-Catholicism is specifically anti-institutional and anti-hierarchical, but not anti-sacramental. Tellingly, RCWP's stories are of Protestants who encouraged them to challenge the patriarchal church, and not of Protestants who attempted to convert the women to Protestantism.

and by priests and former priests. Showing that people and pastors in other faiths affirm the womenpriests' call, in their estimation, undermines Vatican arguments against women having a true vocation to the priesthood. Emphasizing that the call comes from God and external sources seeks to render irrelevant questions of Canon Law and Vatican obedience. RCWP's rhetoric implies that Canon Law and decrees like *Inter Insigniores* are only man-made laws lacking religious truth. The higher law—indeed, the highest law—comes from outside the Church hierarchy altogether: real authority comes from God, from the Spirit, and from people of other faiths who can see the true essence of a womanpriest's vocation. Even though Catholic women are told not to want ordination—Kathy Vandenberg is one of many ordained women who has said, “Becoming a priest was never something I could think about”—a variety of situations, individuals, and models trigger and nurture a desire for priesthood. Womenpriests have been inspired and then helped by people of faith outside of Roman Catholicism, and this external support becomes a necessary and valuable part of RCWP's rhetoric of and for legitimacy.

What's most important is that this outside help—both a necessity and an opportunity—happens because RCWP is “on the margins.” This marginalization opens doors to extra-Catholic communications. If the Roman Catholic Church did embrace RCWP, the group would not need approval from non-Catholic ministers; if the group were located in Roman Catholicism, it would not be positioned within Protestant networks. Significantly, RCWP uses language of marginalization but is not content with being fully and completely marginalized, outside of all institutional frameworks. In fact, the movement seeks to be included—with other religious groups at present, and with Roman Catholicism in the future. Ousted by Roman Catholicism, RCWP aligns with other traditions—not to adapt their religious traditions, but to build ecumenical partnerships. Wanting legitimacy for their ministerial calls, RCWP solicits help from other professional ministers and practicing Christians, outside of Roman Catholicism. In finding

support from other denominations and individual ministers—many of whom are loved and respected within their own communities—RCWP indirectly and directly seeks to undermine the Roman Catholic Church, which comes across in RCWP rhetoric as a cold institution more interested in policy than in pastoring. This process begins with RCWP’s ministerial calls and continues through their ordained ministries. In this case, the margins prove a good place to be.

But might being on the margins and engaging demonstratively in ecumenical outreach undermine RCWP’s desire to remain within the *Roman* Catholic Church? The institutional Church is decidedly *not* marginal, and its ecumenical position underscores the Church’s self-perception as the “one true church.” RCWP’s actions belie this same sense of denominational superiority. There is irony at play here: in accepting help from others and partnering with Protestants, RCWP fuels the fire of those who would accuse them of being, simply, Protestant. By placing the judgment of Protestants who support the womenpriests’ ministries over and above those of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, RCWP undermines the Roman Catholic Church’s claims of desired Christian unification under the Roman Catholic umbrella. At the same time, RCWP’s interfaith efforts are modeling a form of ecumenical cooperation that the institutional Church has not yet attained. Being marginal and ecumenical distances RCWP from the Roman Catholic hierarchy but simultaneously creates a kind of Christian unity from which the Church has remained conspicuously absent.

Priesthood Preparation: From Covert to CORPUS

Although positioned outside of Roman Catholicism, RCWP’s members find support from male Roman Catholic priests. In fact, many womenpriests have come to rely upon ordained men to affirm their call, to join in RCWP’s public protests against a male-only priesthood, and to provide training for the sacramental priesthood. Because RCWP is on the

margins of the institutional Church, the group becomes a cause celebre for some of these men, for whom women's ordination is a social justice issue. For other men, RCWP's mission to renew the Church parallels their own hope for Catholic renewals, and as such, RCWP enables these men to work for reform.

Some male priests support RCWP's women but do so covertly. Recall RCWP's reasons for being worker priests: male priests risk losing careers and livelihoods if they publicly disobey the Church, especially on an issue as fraught as women's ordination. Recall the difficulty the Danube Seven had finding male bishops to ordain them. Of the three men the women found, RCWP will name only two.⁴⁵ The secrecy is intended to protect the man, allegedly serving the Church in good standing, who would otherwise be punished for his actions. An unnamed male bishop also ordained Patricia Fresen to the episcopate; his identity, too, is protected. In addition to these grand gestures toward ordination, other priests have supported the women by affirming their calls. While Fresen was teaching theology, homiletics, and spirituality for seven years at South Africa's national seminary, she met many seminarians, priests, and even a bishop who confirmed her call.⁴⁶ Like Fresen, many of RCWP's women speak fondly of male priests who have encouraged them. At the same time, they know these men stand to lose by speaking up. Monica Kilburn-Smith suggests that many men support women's ordination but hesitate to make that support known. One priest she knows came out publicly and was removed; he later

⁴⁵ As I discussed in that chapter, the NCR and Deborah Halter's *The Papal 'No'* both named Dusan Spiner as the "unnamed" bishop. When I have asked RCWP members to confirm or deny this information, they either tell me they will not do so *or* that they do not themselves know the answer.

⁴⁶ Patricia Fresen, "A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry," in *Women Find a Way*, 34.

renounced his progressive position to get his livelihood back. She said pointedly, “the Church has ‘em by the balls. And if...the Church squeezes, it hurts.”⁴⁷

There are also priests who step out in public support for women’s ordination and who endure the consequences, if they come. Father Ed Cachia is one such example. A parish priest in Ontario, Canada, Cachia said in 2005 of the upcoming St. Lawrence Seaway ordinations that he hoped the event marked “the beginning of a new and awesome change in the life of the church.”⁴⁸ Cachia’s bishop, Nicola De Angelis, responded unfavorably. He required Cachia to retract statements supporting women’s ordination. Until Cachia did so, he would be removed from the rectory, suspended from public ministry, and given a reduced salary. Cachia did not recant and was dismissed from priesthood and excommunicated in April 2006.⁴⁹ Another example is Maryknoll Father Roy Bourgeois. As an ordered priest, Bourgeois had a bit more leeway than diocesan priest Cachia. Bourgeois was excommunicated *latae sententiae* when he attended and preached at the ordination of Sevre-Duszyńska, his friend and fellow activist. His Maryknoll community stood by him despite the excommunication until 2011 when Father Edward Dougherty intensified pressure on Bourgeois to retract his position on women’s ordination. To date, Bourgeois has not recanted, and the Maryknolls are moving forward with removing him from the order. Canon lawyer Father Tom Doyle is representing Bourgeois, and

⁴⁷ Monica Kilburn-Smith, telephone interview with author, April 20, 2011.

⁴⁸ “Father Ed Cachia and the Reign of Terror (from the *Catholic New Times*, with permission)” in Dorothy Irvin, “The Rebound 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007: The Archaeology of Women’s Traditional Ministries in the Church,” 45-6.

⁴⁹ Edward Cachia, “Fr. Cachia’s Response to Excommunication,” Women’s Ordination Conference, <http://www.womensordination.org/content/view/231/>. At this website, you can also find Bishop De Angelis’ statement regarding Cachia’s excommunication. Note, in the wake of his excommunication, Cachia and others set up a small faith community called Christ the Servant Catholic Community. Cachia says that he feels called to “minister to those who are disillusioned with the current dysfunctionality of the Roman Catholic Church.” His actions and aims in the wake of excommunication are very similar to those of RCWP.

he is arguing that his client should neither be excommunicated nor removed from his order, since he is following his conscience in his support of women's ordination.⁵⁰

Some ordained Roman Catholic priests, however, have little to lose from disobeying the Vatican, as they have already left formal priesthood. Priests associated with CORPUS and the Federation of Christian Ministries (FCM) fit this description. Started in 1974, CORPUS is a Catholic reform group “promoting an expanded and renewed priesthood of married and single men and women.”⁵¹ The FCM evolved out of the Society of Priests for a Free Ministry, which was the United States’ first association of married priests and came out of a post-Vatican II movement calling for optional celibacy.⁵² CORPUS and FCM members include married priests and their wives, as well as smaller numbers of male priests in canonical service. Today, groups like CORPUS and FCM—which are not part of the institutional Church but do champion the sacraments, pastoral care, and preaching—have formed alliances with women's ordination activists like RCWP. The partnership began in earnest in 2004 when the wives of married priests called upon their husbands to “do something.” The group realized it could offer pastoral and sacramental training to women preparing for ordination. In cooperation with RCWP, they developed a sacramental mentorship network, whereby women in RCWP's formation program could partner with a priest mentor. Sometimes women, such as Marie David and Jean Marchant, elected to have their own husbands as their mentors.⁵³ The priest mentors instruct the women

⁵⁰ Tom Roberts, “Canon Lawyer Questions Maryknoll's Move Against Bourgeois,” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 14, 2011, 7; Zoe Ryan, “Priests' letter supports Bourgeois,” *National Catholic Reporter*, August 5, 2011, 9. It is worth noting that, even if dismissed from the Maryknolls, Bourgeois will not lose his pension.

⁵¹ CORPUS website, “About CORPUS USA,” CORPUS.org, <http://www.corpus.org>.

⁵² Federation of Christian Ministries, “FCM Ministries,” Federation of Christian Ministries, www.federationofchristianministries.org/fcm_history.html.

⁵³ William J. Manseau, “Roman Catholic Womenpriest Sacramental Mentorships, an Emerging Ecclesial Presbyterial Collegiality in Process,” in Dorothy Irvin, “The Rebound 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007: The Archaeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church,” 61-2.

on sacramental and pastoral performance, which priests learn about in seminary but which even women enrolled in seminary cannot study formally.

Finally, there are male priests who serve alongside RCWP's womenpriests. Rod Stephens is one example. Stephens was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles in 1974 and has been a member of RCWP since 2008. An openly gay man living with his partner of over 25 years, Stephens could not remain a priest in canonical service. But he could be and was welcomed into RCWP, and he currently serves alongside Roman Catholic womanpriest Jane Via at Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community in San Diego.⁵⁴ Standing outside of the institution, Stephens and Via are able to turn their marginalization into a functioning ministry at MMACC. Likewise, married priests—like those CORPUS priests who no longer function within the hierarchy—sometimes serve with RCWP's women. Alice Iaquina ministers at Jesus Our Shepherd community, in Nenno, Wisconsin, alongside six married priests.⁵⁵ Michael Corso co-pastors the Inclusive Catholic Community of Sophia with Mary Ann Schoettly. Corso was ordained a priest but eventually became disillusioned, in part because Pope John Paul II allowed married Episcopal priests to convert to Catholicism but would not allow Catholic priests to marry. Corso left the priesthood in 1988 and married. He met Schoettly through their local parish choir and became a supporter of RCWP: he attended her diaconal ordination in

⁵⁴ Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community of San Diego, "Pastoral Team: Rod Stephens," Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community of San Diego, http://www.mcarronwebdesign.com/mmacc/pastoral_team.htm.

⁵⁵ Alice Iaquina, "Coming Full Circle," in *Women Find a Way*, 132.

vestments, thus making a public, political statement; he then served as Schoettly's priesthood mentor. Today, the two work side by side as Catholic priests.⁵⁶

Male priests must tread carefully and conscientiously around the issue of women's ordination. The RCWP example shows that male priests who are allies have various ways of responding to RCWP's women. Some support them covertly; some speak publicly and risk discipline; some embrace and encourage RCWP's mission and participate in womenpriests' formation. Thus, RCWP is not entirely removed from the ordained male priesthood; in fact, many women have come to rely upon male priests to affirm their call, give public support, and provide hands-on training. Furthermore, having this male priest support—and speaking about it publicly—allows RCWP to argue against their own marginalization: the Church hierarchy may renounce womenpriests, but other male priests who are in good standing with the Vatican support the group. Rhetorically, this allows womenpriests to suggest that Church teachings barring women's ordination are not universally supported among male priests. RCWP may be in the margins, but they share that space with male priests also seeking Church reform.

Ecumenism: Opportunities and Challenges

For RCWP, cooperation with faiths outside of Roman Catholicism is born of necessity. This gives the women ministerial opportunities and legitimacy they might not otherwise have; at the same time, this challenges RCWP's insistence that it is *Roman Catholic* and not a form of Protestantism. Ecumenical relationships inform womenpriests' ministerial action, leading to social justice activities the Roman Catholic Church would not and could not condone. Being

⁵⁶ Mary Ann Schoettly, email interview with author, January 8, 2011; Allison Delcalzo, "Waiting for Wisdom: Sophia's Response to the Roman Catholic Church's Position of Priesthood" (master's thesis, Theological School of Drew University, May 2011).

outside of the institutional Church, therefore, expands RCWP's ministerial options while serving, perhaps inadvertently, to distance RCWP from the institutional Church.

Examples are multifold. Womenpriests whose communities meet in churches (as opposed to house churches) rely upon non-Catholic denominations to offer worship space. Being on the Roman Catholic margins means masses cannot happen in Catholic churches. This limitation becomes opportunity when Catholics and Protestants form partnerships, yet this limitation poses challenges when explicitly Catholic sacraments must take place in non-Catholic spaces. Many womenpriests either rent or receive rent-free worship space in Protestant churches. When I attended liturgy at Rose Marie Hudson's Hildegard Community of the Living Spirit, in Festus, MO in December 2010, I was surprised to see Hildegard's mass information on the First Presbyterian Church's outdoor sign. Inside, this Protestant church did not have the traditional Roman Catholic signposts, such as a crucifix or pew kneelers. Still, Hudson and her community had taken steps to personalize the space with a nativity scene, candles, and Eucharistic accoutrements. Hildegard was accustomed to these transportable liturgical additions: before moving to First Presbyterian, the group met in a community member's home.⁵⁷ Having use of the Protestant church gave Hildegard more worship room and the opportunity to partner with a Presbyterian community. It also shifted the "Catholicity" of Hildegard's mass away from the liturgical space itself, instead placing emphasis on the sacraments and the "props" chosen for the occasion. Hildegard's First Presbyterian is not a *Catholic* sacred space: the community is challenged to *create* Catholic sacred space amid a Protestant milieu.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Hildegard Community of the Living Spirit, Festus, MO, field notes, December 26, 2010.

⁵⁸ Catholic buildings and liturgical spaces have long been an important part of American Catholicism. "Brick and mortar" Catholicism refers those historical times (dating from the mid- to late-nineteenth century through the twentieth, depending on geographic location) when Catholics raised money, built churches, and placed church buildings upon the American landscape. Building churches proves a deeply personal and worshipful experience for

Protestant support of RCWP is not unequivocal; in some cases, Protestant churches hesitate to extend warm welcome to RCWP, lest this incite the ire of Roman Catholic leadership. In Canada, the Protestant church where Monica Kilburn-Smith celebrates mass asked not to be identified for a news report on RCWP; the church was willing to provide space, but not public support. Marie Bouclin, also living in Canada, explained that while her strongest support comes from ministers in other Christian denominations, “I do not hold liturgies in Protestant churches—they do not want to offend the Roman Catholic bishop.” Instead, Bouclin—like many womenpriests—collaborates with Protestant churches on social justice projects.⁵⁹ For Bouclin, the challenge is not eking out a Catholic niche in a Protestant enclave, but rather proceeding ecumenically in ways respectful of potential Protestant-Roman Catholic tensions.

Two examples of social justice collaboration are worth exploring further, as they illustrate the work RCWP can do because they are outside the Church. First is the relationship that RCWP’s ordained women in Minnesota’s Twin Cities have with the local Dignity group. DignityUSA is a Roman Catholic reform group designed to support GLBT Catholics. A national organization with local chapters, Dignity seeks dialogue with Catholic bishops regarding Church teachings on homosexuality and provides ministries and a public voice to GLBT Catholics. (jill: give a bit of this history...see Mark Jordan *Silence of Sodom?*) The Church teaches that, while being homosexual is not inherently sinful, acting upon homosexual desires is. Dignity members disagree and seek ways to be faithful Catholics who also enjoy committed same-sex partnerships. The RCWP-led community, known as 4C, has an ongoing relationship with Minneapolis’s local Dignity chapter. Womenpriests will say mass at Dignity/Twin Cities masses, which—like many

parishioners. See James E. Healy, *Building a New Church: A Process Manual for Pastors and Lay Leaders* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009).

⁵⁹ Marie David, telephone interview with author, February 2, 2011.

of RCWP's masses—are held not in Catholic churches, but in a United Methodist Church in Southeast Minneapolis. Work with Dignity would easily fall under the category of “ordained ministry to the margins,” as many GLBT Catholics consider themselves marginalized by Church teachings on homosexuality. While the Roman Catholic Church certainly condones spiritual outreach to gays and lesbians, the Church would not approve the positions DignityUSA and RCWP advocate regarding the physical expression of GLBT sexuality. Being outside the Church, RCWP is able to embody a form of Roman Catholicism that embraces different sexual orientations.

A second example is one of Catholic-Jewish cooperation. As examined in Chapter 3, Elsie McGrath and Rose Marie Hudson's 2007 ordination took place in a reform Jewish temple, the Central Reform Congregation (CRC) in St. Louis, Missouri. At the time, angry Catholic leaders suggested the ordination would harm Catholic-Jewish relations in St. Louis. Director of the archdiocesan office for ecumenical and interreligious affairs, Reverend Vincent Heier, said it was “not appropriate” for the CRC to “aid and abet a group” like RCWP, which “undercuts [Roman Catholic] theology and teaching.”⁶⁰ Tensions mounted, playing out publicly for weeks. For the St. Louis Archdiocese, a Jewish Reform synagogue was unequivocally the wrong place for a Roman Catholic ordination. The Archdiocese's concern here was not that a Roman Catholic ordination was taking place in a non-Roman Catholic space: rather, the institutional Church bristled because a Jewish group was hosting a very public Roman Catholic ordination that flew in the face of Church teachings and Canon Law.

Certainly, interfaith harm did not come between the CRC and RCWP groups: working together, McGrath, Hudson, and the CRC's rabbi Susan Talve developed an interfaith

⁶⁰ Associated Press, “St. Louis Archdiocese Angered by Synagogue's Hosting of Women Priests Ceremony,” FoxNews.com, November 10, 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,310360,00.html>.

partnership extending beyond the 2007 ordination. McGrath and Hudson's community, Therese of Divine Peace—which, incidentally, meets in a Unitarian Universalist chapel—is directly across the street from the CRC. Therese's womenpriests have been invited to the CRC's Women's Seder, a specially-designed Passover meal celebrating matriarchal lineages and women's biblical presence. Together, the women have brought their worship communities to the Holy Ground Collaborative, an ecumenical alliance in St. Louis's Central West End. The group currently includes the CRC; Therese; First Unitarian; Trinity Episcopal; First Church of Christ, Scientist; Cornerstone Institutional Baptist (a primarily African-American church); and Second Presbyterian. St. John's United Methodist and a Metropolitan Community Church (for LGBT Christians) were also members until a closing and a relocation, respectively, led the communities to leave the neighborhood. The Holy Ground Collaborative seeks to "increase our awareness of our wonderful diversity," through friendship, social events, and outreach efforts. Members have participated in local volunteer projects (such as Habitat for Humanity, visiting nursing home residents, and registering voters) and made public statements on issues (by protesting program cuts, marching in Pride Fest, and celebrating Obama's "historic" inauguration). While not every community holds the same political positions, the Collaborative works together to build ecumenical understanding and engage local issues. Therese's presence in this Collaborative signals not only that other religious groups "take seriously" RCWP's ministerial progress and potential, but that RCWP's communities can be—and often are—part of interfaith networks that extend social justice activism.⁶¹

⁶¹ Roman Catholic parishes, of course, also participate in interfaith action. The difference lies in the Roman Catholic Church's long-standing ambivalence toward ecumenism. As a result, interfaith work involving Catholic parishes take place largely on local levels. The institutional Church's own political positions preclude it from particular cooperative efforts. For instance, the Church would never, at present, participate in a Pride march, as RCWP's Therese has done with the Holy Ground Collaborative.

Lastly, it is valuable to juxtapose RCWP's women's ordained experience with that of their "legally" ordained Protestant colleagues. In a 2008 book, *A Church of Her Own*, author Sarah Sentilles examines the challenges facing Protestant women who have been ordained. While they have official denominational support and a ministerial career, these women often still face discrimination, either within the church leadership or from congregants. Sentilles gives examples of women who struggle to get hired in Protestant churches, who receive a significantly smaller stipend, and who face constant scrutiny over their personal lives and physical appearances. Some women ministers get appointed to churches in which the denomination supports ordained women, but congregants are not ready for a woman's authority. Sentilles makes the point that formal ordination does not guarantee acceptance of ordained women's leadership.⁶² RCWP, in bypassing formal changes in Canon Law, has bypassed some of the difficulties women face when inserted into hierarchical systems. The institutional Church does not dictate RCWP's ministries; womenpriests do not work closely with priests and bishops who undermine their authority; Catholics who attend RCWP-led liturgies have chosen a womanpriest as their pastor. In this way, the challenges some ordained Protestant women face serve to show RCWP's women that, in fact, being outside can be ministerially beneficial. At the same time, Sentilles's Protestant women do not face accusations of insufficient denominational identity, as do RCWP's women who are often labeled "Protestant." The Protestant label is one womenpriests firmly deny, yet RCWP's Protestant partnerships, born out of necessity and a desire for interfaith cooperation, problematically place the womenpriests in frequent contact with an identity they disavow. The opportunity of ecumenical affiliation becomes a challenge for Roman Catholic identity.

⁶² Sarah Sentilles, *A Church of Her Own: What Happens When a Woman Takes the Pulpit* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2008).

Priests Performing “Everyday” Ministries

Many Catholics—especially those who grew up in the years before Vatican II—remember the moment when they discovered that priests and nuns were people, too. Perhaps these events happened when a Catholic child saw shoes underneath a sister’s full habit or when a teenaged girl saw nuns playing tennis; perhaps an altar boy saw a priest wearing a tee-shirt and shorts before vesting, or an adult Catholic was surprised to see his priest driving a car. In the years before Vatican II, priests and nuns were even more set apart—both formally and in the Catholic imagination—then they were after Vatican II changes and the document on priests and nuns, *Lumen Gentium*.⁶³ Dress had something to do with this: nuns and sisters in habit were marked physically as distinct, and even outside of mass—where priests wear vestments—priests could be found wearing the Roman collar. Living arrangements also played and still do play a role: sisters often live in community with other consecrated women, and priests often live in community or take residence in the parish rectory. Compounding this for priests is Roman Catholicism’s sacramental import: a priest with the power to make Christ present in the Eucharist is, theologically speaking, not the same as the laity he serves. Even today, when most women’s religious orders have abandoned the formal habit and priests say mass in English, face the congregation, and perform charitable outreach alongside parishioners, consecrated women and ordained men are often viewed as distinct, as different. At least initially, it can be surprising to see a priest in the grocery store or a sister at the theatre. Perhaps most importantly, sisters and priests are different—and are viewed as different—because of their vow of celibacy. One might

⁶³ Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium* (“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”) (November 21, 1964) http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

reasonably presume, then, that consecrated and ordained Catholics have distinctive “everyday” lives.

And yet, Vatican II argued that holiness existed in normal, everyday life. Even unordained and non-consecrated Catholics could and should aspire to holiness in their family lives, professional careers, and community work. Journalist, educator, and lifelong Catholic Peter Steinfels noted that the Second Vatican Council “emphasized that holiness was found in marriage, everyday work, and the struggle for justice as well as in prayer and priestly life.”⁶⁴ Many Catholic observers have suggested that this increased emphasis on the sacred nature of “normal” life led to the decrease in Catholic vocations starting in the 1960s and 70s: now that “everyday” life contained “holiness,” was religious life as distinctive and specially sacred?

Womenpriests seek to blend this “everyday holiness” with the sacramental priesthood role. As such, womenpriests position themselves as being more like their lay parishioners than are male priests. Celibacy has a lot to do with this: many womenpriests are or were married, and many have children and even grandchildren. In this way, womenpriests have had experiences surrounding relationships and family that many Catholics have also had, but that most Catholic priests have not had. Practicing Catholics have questioned how celibate male priests can truly relate to married couples, parents, and grandparents. Because they are ordained outside of the formal hierarchy, womenpriests can and do bypass the traditional celibacy requirement and offer an experience-based ministry to families and spouses. In doing so, they perform a remodeled priesthood by embodying new forms of ordained ministry.

RCWP’s women are not, of course, the first and only to sacralize “everyday” activities, nor are they the first ordained women to seek holy action and guidance in daily work and family

⁶⁴ Peter Steinfels, “Ancient Rock in Crosscurrents of Today,” *New York Times*, May 29, 1994, www.nytimes.com.

relationships. Catholic women have talked about holiness in women's work as wives, mothers, and housekeepers⁶⁵; Protestant women, ordained and not ordained, have also sought holiness in the commonplace.⁶⁶ But RCWP's women are the first to do this as Roman Catholic womenpriests. And the fact that they *do* do this as Roman Catholic womenpriests—and some of the first women ordained in Roman Catholicism—is significant. It makes a statement about women as priests, women as ministerial leaders, and the kind of reformed Catholic Church RCWP envisions. RCWP is not only bringing ministry to everyday activities, but they are doing this for and through women. Moreover, sacraments are inexorably important here, as RCWP gives sacramental authority to women who do “everyday” ministerial work—and not explicitly the work of the hierarchical, patriarchal Church.

Womanpriest Marie David has a husband, Jim (a former priest who is now a member of CORPUS), and two daughters, and she says having a family “enriches” her priestly ministry and better allows her to relate to people. Being married, she explained, “makes us [womenpriests] more human. If someone comes to us for marriage counseling, or to celebrate weddings, we know what it's been like.” Marie David often finds Jim a valuable sounding board, helping her “process” her ministerial decisions.⁶⁷ In addition to rejecting mandatory celibacy, womenpriests as “worker priests” hold jobs and have careers. The Davids have invested “everything” they have into Evensong, the retreat center they run in Harwich Port, Massachusetts. They sold their

⁶⁵ Paula M. Kane, James Kenneally, and Karen Kennelly, eds., *Gender Identities in American Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001).

⁶⁶ There are a number of books that examine the “everyday” ministries of Protestant women. Examples include Dori Grinenko Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk with Young Women* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005); Sara Miles, *Take this Break: A Radical Conversion* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007); Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); Susan Willhauck, *Ministry Unplugged: Uncommon Calls to Serve* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2010). Thank you to Diane Faires and Emily Peck-McClain, dear friends and inspiring ministers, for talking with me about these books.

⁶⁷ Marie David, telephone interview with author, February 11, 2011.

home and took on a hefty mortgage. Marie David said, “Whether I’m writing a homily or cleaning a toilet, I’m still doing God’s work.”⁶⁸ Womenpriests believe that working connects them to the people in their parishes who also work to support themselves and their families—implicitly, more closely than celibate, financially supported priests can be connected.

Furthermore, womenpriests very rarely, if ever, wear a Roman collar; they do not live in religious communities or a parish rectory; and they formally reject a lay-clergy divide. Many womenpriests view their “normal” (i.e., non-celibate) lives—as working moms, as retired widows, as self-supporting single women—as constituting an ordained, ministerial priesthood to whom many types of Catholics presumably can relate. Embedded in this philosophy is an intimation that, perhaps, some women can make for better priests than some men. Womenpriests’ “everyday” activities—i.e., those tasks that Catholic women and working adults perform routinely, as a mere function of living and working in society—might read, as Marie David has done, as sacred and special because these are performed by ordained women.

Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger uses the language of “everyday” to describe some of the ministries she does. Like all womenpriests, Mayr-Lumetzberger has provided “services and sacraments,” “spiritual conversation and advice.” But going beyond the typical work of ordained priests, CML has noticed that much of her work as a womanpriest has come in “everyday situations.” She explains, “My hairdresser seizes the opportunity to talk with me, strangers come up to me in the queue before the cash desk of the supermarket and start a conversation, my colleagues in my job sometimes wait for a word of mine, and many a chat in a pub has turned into a real confession.”⁶⁹ In Mayr-Lumetzberger’s understanding, priestly things can happen

⁶⁸ Marie David, telephone interview with author, February 11, 2011.

⁶⁹ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, “Reflections on My Way: God’s Call to Me,” in *Women Find a Way*, 16.

anytime and anywhere. In her ministerial experience, this often takes the form of a conversation. Sometimes this conversation moves into a somewhat sacramental realm: while Mayr-Lumetzberger does not talk specifically about providing absolution through the sacrament of Reconciliation, she does explain that an informal “chat” can become a “real confession.” Mayr-Lumetzberger does not say whether these conversations happen *because* she is a priest or *in spite of it*; while she says that people have “accepted my priestly ministries gladly,” she does not indicate whether people who approach her know she is a priest or not. What is significant—for Mayr-Lumetzberger and other womenpriests—is the fact that their pedestrian activities take on a ministerial flavor. Ordained womenpriests perform everyday actions with ministerial intent. For the womenpriests—and perhaps also for observers—their actions then take on a different tenor and a deeper holiness.

Participants at the 2005 St. Lawrence ordination invoked this notion of ministerial intent and attentiveness, specifically in terms of family-related ministry. When Jim David introduced wife Marie as a candidate for ordination to the priesthood, he stated that her mothering had been a form of “ministering” to their children.⁷⁰ Though she was not yet ordained when raising her children, Jim David elevated Marie’s maternal actions to ministerial status. Mothers do an astonishing multitude of things for their children: tending illness, consoling sorrow, telling stories, and making sacrifices. When these maternal gestures are placed alongside priestly ministry—as Jim David did rhetorically with his statement—then motherly ministry becomes akin to a priest offering a blessing, visiting the sick, or leading parish volunteer efforts. RCWP is reframing priesthood in such a way that mothers’ mundane tasks become more sacred, and women get to participate in a maternal priestly ministry. Not every womanpriest has been married or has children, but this mother-like work of care and concern—which is commonly

⁷⁰ St. Lawrence Seaway Ordination, ceremony filming, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.

gendered female in contemporary western culture—can become viewed as priestly when performed by womenpriests.

Being in a family, either as mother or daughter, can also bring challenges and opportunities for informal ministries. Janice Sevre-Duszynska has described her own ministry as that “of the streets,” doing peace and justice work and marching with SOA, for example. Sevre-Duszynska also participates in the daily care of her mother-in-law, who is in the later stages of Alzheimer’s and lives with Sevre-Duszynska and her husband. Being so closely connected to someone with this disease “makes you feel the fragility of life,” Sevre-Duszynska says. Sevre-Duszynska’s care for her mother-in-law, as well as the way she describes this caregiving, suggests that she sees this as a form of ministry. In another example, Mary Kay Kusner has shaped a kind of ministry around lessons her special-needs daughter has taught her. Anna was born with genetic abnormalities, and Kusner has written a book, titled *Upside-Down and Backwards: A Mother’s Story*, about her parenting journey.⁷¹ The book has its own website, on which Kusner directly links Anna’s story with her own RCWP candidacy. Anna has given her mother “the courage to speak out and to not worry so much about what others might think.” She is answering her call to ministry and writes of the book, “I hope it can help other moms of children with special needs.”⁷² Stating a desire to help others by building upon her personal experiences as a mom, Kusner’s book becomes a form of ministry. In sum, the womenpriests’

⁷¹ Mary Kay Kusner, *Upside-Down and Backwards: A Mother’s Story* (New York: Caritas Communications, 2009).

⁷² Mary Kay Kusner, “Upside Down and Backwards: A Mother’s Story,” Mary Kay Kusner, www.marykaykusner.com/index.html; Mary Kay Kusner, “Upside Down and Backwards: A Mother’s Story: About Mary Kay,” Mary Kay Kusner, www.marykaykusner.com/mary-kay-kusner.html.

ministerial performances include caring for family members and sharing their struggles with others.

Sometimes familial challenges become marked by loss and grief, and RCWP's women have also endured divorce. Mary Ann Schoettly, Chava Redonnet, and Marybeth McBryan have identified, either to me or in public statements, that they are divorced. When divorced women become womenpriests who speak openly about their divorced status, they perform a Catholic priesthood that embraces other divorced Catholics. Dagmar Celeste divorced her husband, former Ohio governor Richard Celeste, in 1995, after he left her for a younger woman. Dagmar Celeste wrote a book titled *We Can Do Together* detailing the emotional anguish she endured. Her book also describes the way she found some spiritual healing and solace in her children and grandchildren, as well as her political activism and charitable outreach. By going public with the private details of her divorce, Celeste speaks to others who face the sting and shame of a failed marriage. Because the Roman Catholic bars divorced Catholics from remarriage without an annulment (and, depending on the parish, denies them communion), Celeste's public position as a divorced Catholic womanpriest signals an acceptance of other divorced Catholics.⁷³ Chava Redonnet draws upon her experiences in shaping her ministry: she believes that her experiences as a poor, single mother have helped her to empathize with other young parents struggling to be both good Catholics and good parents. She acknowledges how her Christian life changed significantly when she had children: it became difficult simultaneously to maintain a commitment to Christian simplicity *and* be a responsible parent. Just getting three kids to Church proved challenging. Redonnet has been told that megachurch Willow Creek offers special parking spots near the church entrance for single mothers. "This makes total sense to me!"

⁷³ Dagmar Braun Celeste, *We Can Do Together: Impressions of a Recovering Feminist First Lady* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2002).

Chava exclaimed, and credited her own parenting challenges with shaping her priestly ministries.⁷⁴ Experiences like Celeste's, Redonnet's, and other womenpriests' become a part of their ordained ministry, which—as Redonnet suggests—offers them an ability to empathize with divorced Catholics—and particularly divorced women—in a way most male priests cannot.

Womenpriests have also lost husbands and children to death. Sevre-Duszynska's son died.⁷⁵ Many womenpriests have lost their husbands, some before ordination and some after. Juanita Cordero served alongside her husband, Don, a former Jesuit until he died in 2007. Together, they celebrated sacraments, including a mass in honor of their 36th wedding anniversary. When Don became ill, Juanita and their Magdala Community anointed Don with oil and laid hands on him. When he died of prostate cancer, Juanita presided at the funeral Mass. Juanita's loss became entwined with her sacramental ministry.⁷⁶ Rose Marie Hudson's husband, Bob, died in the summer of 2011—just months after Hudson lost her mother. Hudson's fellow womenpriests, Elsie McGrath and Marybeth McBryan presided at the funeral. In the words of Henri Nowen (a Catholic priest), those who suffer loss become “Wounded Healers,” better able to tend to others' wounds because of their own experiences. To be sure, many male Catholic priests are also “wounded healers” who have translated their own personal suffering into ministerial empathy. Specifically, there are men who enter the priesthood later in life who have been married and lost their spouse either to divorce or death. The point is not that womenpriests alone carry the burden of deceased spouses and children. Rather, because many womenpriests are older and because many were or are married with children, they are more

⁷⁴ Chava Redonnet, telephone interview with author, January 6, 2011.

⁷⁵ Sevre-Duszynska did not share details of her son's passing with me, but I found an autobiographical account of her loss in Rosemary Smith, ed., *Children of the Dome* (Oxnard, CA: Pathfinder Publishing of California, 1999): 106-110.

⁷⁶ Juanita Cordero, “Doors Closed and Doors Open,” in *Women Find a Way*, 140-43.

likely than the majority of male priests to have experienced a spouse's or child's death. These losses can and do filter into their ministerial priesthood.⁷⁷

Womenpriests' ministerial priesthoods are also informed by their daily work activities. A rich example of this comes from womanpriest Victoria Rue, who teaches at San Jose State University. One fall day in 2005, months after being ordained to the priesthood, Rue experienced a workday in which, she says, "the Eucharist kept appearing." In a comparative religions class, one student brought in matzah and grape juice, for a presentation on Christianity and Eucharist. At the end of class, the student gave Rue the remaining matzah and grape juice. Rue went next to her women's studies class, where a tardy student explained she had just given blood, to test if she could be a bone-marrow donor, and she was feeling light-headed. Rue immediately shared matzah and juice with this student. Rue found herself sharing this Eucharist with students in her next class, and she then munched on matzah and drank the grape juice in her office hours that afternoon. It was a day filled with Eucharist and shared ministry, between Rue and her students. Rue reflected upon this day: she had been trying to decide where she, as a womanpriest, might offer regular liturgies, and she now realized that the place where she worked may be the perfect place to begin her Eucharistic ministry. She pursued this idea and found a nondenominational chapel, among the redwoods, on campus. She began holding regular masses. Students came from San Jose State and eventually also from Santa Clara University, a nearby Jesuit college. In sum, Rue's day of spontaneous Eucharistic ministry gave her the idea to build a formal Eucharistic ministry right in her "office," so to speak. Rue found something sacred in the reemergence of Eucharist and decided to build a ministry from that experience.

⁷⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1972). Note: many of the seminarians profiled in *The Collar* were once married and have lost their wives, either to divorce or to death. Author Jonathan Englert's descriptions suggest that this loss has an impact on the men's lives and how they see their ministry. In other words, womenpriests are not alone in having experiences with death and loss that shape their priesthood experiences.

Of course, there is an alternative angle to consider: while womenpriests' "everyday" ministries and priestly actions as wives, mothers, and working women appeal to some Catholics (such as those who support RCWP), womenpriests who have spouses, children, and careers might be pulled in so many directions that they are forced to juggle ordained ministry alongside family and financial obligations. They may not, then, be able to be fully present with their congregations. Womenpriests' personal and professional commitments can potentially prevent them from fully living in the spirit of poverty and service. Womenpriests do not take any vows—not of chastity, obedience, or poverty—and some have successful careers or spouses with successful careers, and this puts them in an upper-middle class category. Still, some womenpriests do struggle financially, within marriage or as single women. There is no "typical womanpriest" in these everyday terms, just as there is no "normal" Catholic in the contemporary Western world. RCWP's existence displays a concerted effort to expand the category of priest to reflect Catholic diversity.

So what, then, of the margins? How does the fact that womenpriests perform "everyday" ministries relate to their ordained ministry to the margins? Womanpriest Gloria Carpeneto suggests that women *are* different, perhaps as a function of culture or of biological differences or both, and thus more often function "at the margins" than at the center. Therefore, putting a woman (who is marginalized, at the very least as a function of her gender) and her experiences into a leadership position brings a message and a kind of hope that male priests cannot bring.⁷⁸ It would stand to reason, then, in the minds of womenpriests like Carpeneto and RCWP's supporters, that being women—who are married, who are mothers, who are "worker priests"—brings something different to ordained ministry. While the women do not go so far to suggest they are categorically *better* priests than men, they do emphasize their different life experiences as

⁷⁸ Gloria Carpeneto, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2011.

preparing them for a distinctive priestly ministry—one that is sorely absent from the current priesthood model. First, with everyday ministries as with the other examples throughout this chapter, I suggest that being priests who are *outside* of Roman Catholicism gives the womenpriests a power of possibility they would not have if ordained “validly and legally” within the Church. Certainly, any woman ordained today with Papal approval (though it is difficult to imagine that happening) would also need to meet celibacy requirements. These women could sympathize but not empathize with struggling parents or spouses. Second, one might argue that women, by nature or by socialization, constantly perform mini-ministries, whether talking a friend through a crisis or preparing a meal for a family facing illness. Building upon the analysis in Chapter 4, which argued RCWP’s sacraments are intentionally inclusive and extend sacramental authority, RCWP’s everyday ministries show that lay Catholics (women and men) doing “lay Catholic things” can also participate in holy work—because everyday things can be holy as well.

Finally, an interesting tension emerges when RCWP’s ministry to the margins is juxtaposed with the group’s everyday ministries. In some ways, RCWP’s women pride themselves on living “normal” lives and having the same struggles as typical Catholics. RCWP also, as we have seen, thinks of itself as marginal and as having the power to help the marginalized. Yet if the word “marginal” refers to non-conforming behavior, it is Catholic priests and sisters who occupy the margins, with their celibate lifestyles and vows of obedience. When families and intimate relationships enter the mix, RCWP becomes the mainstream example. Having families, holding down jobs, and searching for meaning in daily life all characterize the typical, twenty-first century, Western-world existence. In terms of power and authority, however, married Catholics with families have few formal opportunities to influence the Church, and thus these Catholics are, in a sense, marginalized. So RCWP’s women are in

some ways marginalized, and in other ways, mainstream. Thus, the challenges around the word “marginal” and its varied meanings expose ambivalence and raise questions about what it means that RCWP’s women seek to serve a marginal population while living in the mainstream.

Concluding Thoughts and Lingering Questions

Let’s return to a final example that drives home how RCWP’s women understand the meaning and magnitude of having an ordained ministry to the margins:

For years, Jean Marchant served as a hospital chaplain, and she eventually became the Director of Health Care Ministry for the Archdiocese of Boston. Through her daily work in pastoral care, Marchant often saw and struggled with archdiocesan priests’ inability to meet the sacramental needs of all patients, mostly because of the archdiocese’s large size and Boston’s shrinking, aging priest population. Marchant reports that some priests were simply “pastorally insensitive” while others longed to do more for hospitalized Catholics but were “overburdened.” She and other lay chaplains often found themselves praying that “Father” would arrive in time—presumably to perform the sacrament of Extreme Unction, more commonly known as Anointing of the Sick—and that he could meet the spiritual needs of patients and families—with whom the lay chaplains had often developed ministerial relationships. Seeing people’s sacramental needs going unmet helped push Marchant towards ordination. And so, Jean Marchant was ordained a priest on the St. Lawrence Seaway in 2005. To prepare for ordination, she followed the RCWP Formation Program and built upon her past education and experiences; her husband, Ron Hindelang, a former priest and fellow hospital chaplain, served as her sacramental mentor. In explaining her decision to be ordained, Marchant wrote, “As a woman, I

have found deep fulfillment in marriage, motherhood, and ministry. But I could no longer ignore the persistent call to serve God's people as an ordained priest."

Marchant's decision to be ordained was also driven by her twenty-plus years' experience ministering to people she describes as "on the margins." She ministered to African-Americans, to Islanders and people from Vietnam, to people living with AIDS, to gays and lesbians.

Marchant elaborates:

I met women and men whose experience of marginalization by both our church and our society was profound... I discovered that my experience of being 'on the margins' as a woman ministering in the Catholic church connected me with their experience of being 'on the edges,' and we recognized in one another a 'kindred' spirit.

Ultimately, Marchant's ordination—intended to help her better serve marginalized people—put her further "on the margins" of the Roman Catholic Church. She had to leave her position with the Boston Archdiocese in order to "live [her] priesthood publicly." Now, as an ordained woman living out a ministerial priesthood, she believes she is helping address the burden placed upon male priests and offering pastoral and sacramental ministry to those who want it.⁷⁹

Marchant's story touches upon this chapter's main threads: priesthood formation, interfaith influences and alliances with former Roman Catholic priests, building a priesthood upon professional experiences, and acknowledging the impact of marriage and motherhood. The example also suggests why, for Marchant and for other Roman Catholic womenpriests, reforming the priesthood—to include women, to have more priests with pastoral passions and training, to expand sacramental ministry—is so crucial for a reformed Roman Catholicism, and so central to ordained ministry.

⁷⁹ Jean Marchant, "Womanpriest: Call & Response," *Equal w/Rites* (Ivyland, PA), September – November 2006: 4.

Throughout this chapter, I have examined what I call Roman Catholic Womenpriests' "ordained ministry to the margins." I have explored not only what womenpriests do and say in terms of ministerial efforts, but I have considered also the rhetorical power and potential ambivalence around RCWP's stated position of being marginal while reaching to the margins. I have shown that, because womenpriests have been excluded from traditional Roman Catholic priesthood (a fact that contributes to the women's self-understanding as marginalized), RCWP has had to creatively forge a preparation program and ordained ministry that, on the one hand, echoes much of what the Roman Catholic Church requires of its own priests while, on the other hand, implicitly criticizes the Church's own financially-supported, celibate male priests as ill-prepared to handle the kinds of ministries "to the margins" that RCWP's women—who are working women, wives, and mothers—are prepared to do. Thus, RCWP adopts and adapts aspects of the Roman Catholic priesthood preparation program, uses some of the Roman Catholic Church's criteria for priesthood in order to argue their (RCWP's) own legitimacy as prepared and pastorally-engaged priests, and calls upon their own position of marginality, i.e., being "outside" the Church, to build support networks and possibilities that the Roman Catholic Church's own ordained men—who are part of institutional structures that allow for little deviance—cannot aspire to.

In this chapter on ministry, as in past chapters on ordinations and sacraments, RCWP walks a line between transgression and tradition. The group has enshrouded their transgressive actions in a traditional cloak, criticizing the institutional church while borrowing many of its moves and legitimizing criteria to authenticate the womenpriests' own priesthood and ministries. They keep tradition in order to legitimate; they build upon transgressive, boundary-crossing maneuvers in order to construct the reformed priesthood they envision. Here, transgression provides opportunity, while tradition ensures legitimacy.

Still, their stance provokes questions and reveals tensions. RCWP frequently stresses the importance of *ordained* ministry, as an ordained ministry offers an expansion of existing, unordained ministries. Until she was a priest, Marchant could not provide sacraments; without being ordained, Judy Lee's Church in the Park would not have a priest leading the Eucharistic meal; as a priest, Victoria Rue can bring a liturgy and Mass to the college campus where she teaches. Simply put, ordained ministry changes things. But what happens when the people RCWP's women serve do not know the women are ordained priests? Considering the ambiguity within RCWP around whether or not the women are, in fact, indelibly transformed by Holy Orders (which I introduced in the previous "Sacraments" chapter), one wonders what priesthood does and means when RCWP's women perform ministerial acts for individuals who do not know they are being ministered to by an ordained priest? This happens within and around RCWP's ministries. Roberta Meehan is a volunteer chaplain at a local hospital, but while she will tell doctors, nurses, and patients that she is *Catholic*, she does not broadcast her ordained status. As part of this, she cannot consecrate the communion wafers that patients receive; the hospital where she works has a contract with the local diocese, which would not approve of Meehan acting in a priestly capacity.⁸⁰ Chava Redonnet has had similar experiences. The nursing home where she works categorizes her as a "staff chaplain" because, in their eyes, she does not fit into either the Catholic or Protestant box. She cannot, then, fully share her priestly identity in that ministerial position.⁸¹ Perhaps it does not always matter that the ministry is publicized as an "ordained ministry." Perhaps the transformation that happens through Holy Orders is not necessarily an ontological change that distinguishes RCWP's women from all unordained

⁸⁰ Roberta Meehan, telephone interview with author, April 10 and 14, 2011.

⁸¹ Chava Redonnet, telephone interview with author, January 6, 2011.

Catholics, but rather a mark that may be privately held, informing and infusing the ministry, even if the *priestly* ministry is not publicly performed.

And perhaps this explains the feelings of catacomb priests, as well. RCWP has a handful of women who have been ordained in secret and live their priesthood secretly, known only to a few. Certainly, these women do not feel it safe to “come out” as ordained, as they could lose their jobs as employees in Catholic institutions or as women religious. Thinking RCWP’s *public* ministerial priesthoods to be one of the movement’s hallmarks, I asked one catacomb priest, “Why be ordained?” She acknowledged this a “good question!” and explained that she still hoped and believed that, in her lifetime, she would be able to live as a priest. I pressed further, asking this 70-something year-old womanpriest what could she *do* as an ordained priest when she had to work secretly. She said that, as a priest, she can and does bless people. I asked, “Do these people know you are a priest?” “No,” she said, “but I know.”⁸² This womanpriest’s responses suggest that there is something ministerial (and perhaps even sacramental) that ordained women can offer—not just because of their public ministries, but because they have been “validly but illegally” ordained through apostolic succession. This is not just about public expressions of priesthood, but about an internal change and knowledge that allows one to bless (or baptize, or absolve) the faithful, even when the faithful do not know they are being blessed by a priest. This is also about *knowing* oneself to *be* a priest, even though the Church hierarchy would categorically reject such a claim. In the case of catacomb priests, then, ministries are not publicly about coming “from the margins” or ministering “to the margins”; these are about women ministering from a place of perceived personal transformation that gives them a ministerial power—whether or not those being served know that power exists.

⁸² Baltimore Ordination, Catonsville, MD, field notes, June 4, 2011.

Womenpriests' actions, whether publicly performed or privately held, mark women and women's bodies as capable of making priestly gestures. This, in itself, is transgressive in Catholic dogma. Thus, it is to the embodied performances of womenpriests that I now turn.

CHAPTER 6:

ESSENTIALLY FEMININE, TRANSGRESSIVELY PRIESTS:

THE PERFORMING BODIES OF ROMAN CATHOLIC WOMENPRIESTS

Regina Nicolosi is a wife, a mother, and an RCWP bishop. She grew up along the Rhine River in Germany and now lives in Red Wing, Minnesota. Her call to priesthood first emerged in the late 1970s while her husband, Charles Nicolosi, was preparing to be ordained to the permanent diaconate. She prepared alongside him, but when the time came for him to be ordained, she could participate only in helping him don diaconal robes. She realized she, too, wanted ordination. Looking elsewhere for ministerial outlets, Regina pursued advanced degrees, first an M.A. in pastoral studies and then a doctorate of ministry. She did not complete the doctorate, however, as she decided to devote herself to serving on the Board of Directors for the Women's Ordination Conference. She learned about the Danube Seven in 2002 and was ordained a deacon on the St. Lawrence in 2005. Regina acknowledges the criticisms from some of her "radically feminist sisters" who ask her why she would want to be ordained into the "corrupt system" of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, who wonder if she will be "co-opted" herself. But Regina felt pulled by her call, her understanding of justice, and her desire to remain Catholic (as opposed to becoming Episcopalian) to take this "smaller step" en route to bigger, Church-wide changes. She says that her ordination was not just for herself, but for her daughters, her granddaughters, her son, and the males of the church, as she believes the church will not and cannot achieve wholeness until there is equality between the sexes. She is concerned

about the Church's "misogynist history" and the suggestion that a woman's body is not worthy of carrying the "indelible mark" of priesthood and standing *in persona Christi*. She believes this is a destructive theology. One of the things motivating her toward a *contra legem* ordination was her desire "to bring a woman's body up on the altar."¹

Gloria Carpeneto also thinks a lot about bodies. Carpeneto, a womanpriest who serves the Living Water Community in Baltimore, Maryland, has a husband and two adult daughters. In the 1990s, Carpeneto's doctoral research emerged from her work as a certified massage therapist. As she was working with women during massage, she noticed that many would start talking about deeply spiritual issues. Carpeneto speculated that *touch* put the women *in touch* with their bodies and, by extension, their spiritual selves. The women could better see themselves and their bodies as holy. Carpeneto's dissertation ultimately explored women and embodied spirituality through case studies with active and inactive Catholic women. She found that many of these women, particularly as they got older, shed some of the Catholic teachings that they associated with experiences of shame and discomfort around their bodies and sexuality; instead, the women were coming to embrace "the gift," as Carpeneto describes it, of their physicality and embodiment. Carpeneto says that her academic research led her to pastoral work and, ultimately, to RCWP. Now a womanpriest who celebrates liturgies and sacraments, she is conscious of her body and questions of embodiment: when standing before the congregation, she holds her arms in a certain way that is more circular than angular, so as to create a welcoming and inclusive

¹ Regina Nicolosi, interview, July 24, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage; Mary Frances Smith, "An Interview with Regina Nicolosi," in *Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests*, eds. Elsie Hainz McGrath, Bridget Mary Meehan, and Ida Raming (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2008), 133-38: 136.

pose. In thinking about the physicality of priesthood, she told me, “Your body is the medium, and the medium is the message.”²

Like Carpeneto, womanpriest Monica Kilburn-Smith has brought bodies and questions of embodiment into her advanced academic study. Specifically, her MA thesis looked at dance and incarnational theology. Bit by bit, she is weaving movement into the liturgies at St. Brigid of Kildare Catholic Faith Community, where she leads, though she is cautious not to “throw too much” that is different at her community in its early stages. Kilburn-Smith sees in the Roman Catholic hierarchy elements of “gynophobia” and a fixation on the “matter” (in contrast to form, as distinguished in Catholic sacramental economy) of the male versus the female body. She suggests that, on some levels, the Church’s position barring women from ordination is “all about the penis”—what men have that women do not. It is all the more important to her, then, that RCWP works to insert women into the roles, postures, and poses of the traditional (male) priesthood. She hears criticism from some Catholic feminists who accuse RCWP of catching “the disease of the [Roman Catholic hierarchical] culture,” of being “too white” or “too middle- and upper-middle class,” of replicating patriarchy by replicating apostolic succession. Kilburn-Smith counters this by pointing to the importance of having a woman’s presence—a woman’s *body*—in the priesthood. She speaks about apostolic succession and priestly vestments as part and parcel of the Roman Catholic “visual vernacular.” For Kilburn-Smith, these visual elements are theologically relevant. When a woman sees a woman at the altar, she explained, “It’s not just you seeing me—it’s you seeing *you*.” Visually, performatively, actively, Kilburn-Smith seeks to communicate the message that “women are the face of the divine, too.”³

² Gloria Carpeneto, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2011.

³ Monica Kilburn-Smith, telephone interview with the author, April 20, 2011.

As educated women and womenpriests, Nicolosi, Carpeneto, and Kilburn-Smith represent some of the ways RCWP's women conceive of women's bodies as being intertwined with spirituality, sexual equality, and Roman Catholic theology. These womenpriests are also highly self-conscious of the role and rhetoric of bodies in Roman Catholicism, traditionally and historically. Without question, Roman Catholicism has tremendous power to imprint itself upon an audience, and bodies are pivotal to that process. Catholicism places bodies at the center of worship: from Christ's battered body hanging on the crucifix to statues of Mary cradling an infant Jesus, from stained glass images of martyrs to saints' relics encased in altar tables. The Catholic experience focuses attention upon embodied holiness. Catholicism also disciplines believers' bodies with sacramentals (the sign of the cross or genuflecting), rituals (receiving communion, attending confession), and smells (incense or burning candles). The Church further seeks to discipline sexual bodies and gendered bodies, through firm dictates about sexual activity (forbidden outside of marriage), procreation (the primary purpose of sexual intercourse, not to be inhibited by birth control), and homosexuality (a disordered state that cannot be acted upon). In Roman Catholicism, bodies matter.

As a result, all of RCWP's ordained women participate in the embodied actions of Roman Catholic priesthood, and this chapter examines womenpriests through the lens of gender, bodies, and sexuality. Throughout this dissertation, bodies have been, rhetorically-speaking, moving parts, *doing* things and thereby signaling and symbolizing both protest/innovation and tradition. Now, in this chapter, bodies take center stage, as actors and as rhetorical constructs. In seeking to change and reform the Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic priesthood, RCWP distinguishes itself by its performance of priesthood, i.e., by turning women's bodies into priestly bodies.

To be certain, bodies, gender, and sexuality all suggest performance elements. Here, I think about performance in two distinct but intersecting ways: the first is a more traditional understanding of performance as something connected to action and theatricality; the second is a more theoretical definition that points to the ways certain actions serve to construct and constitute embodiment, genderedness, and sexual identity. Both can be connected to intentionality and protest, yet the latter can be performed inadvertently, as an unconscious or subconscious reflection of cultural pressures and persuasions. Thus far in my dissertation, I have analyzed performing bodies in the first sense; here, I examine performance as action *and* performance as performativity. The women's bodies I explore in this chapter indeed act and render visible, but they simultaneously push and pull theoretically on foundational—and foundationally Catholic—ideas of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Here I tackle the question, How does RCWP's intentional and unintentional performance of bodies, gender, and sexuality impact priesthood and suggest avenues for a reformed priesthood? Or, framed slightly differently, given Roman Catholicism's emphasis on bodies, gender, and sexuality, and considering also womenpriests' embodied performances, gendered identities, and (implied or explicated) sexualities, what does RCWP offer and/or preclude with its performed priesthood?

Theologically speaking, inserting a woman's body into a priestly role is RCWP's most transgressive act. The Church posits a particular understanding of gender and gender difference that excludes women from ordination. Thus, women inserting themselves into priesthood, *contra legem*, is radical. At the same time, however, traditional Catholic overtones—about bodies and gender difference, specifically—linger in the womenpriests' actions. Even as they transgressively push the bounds of Catholic teaching, many of the women have traditional, i.e., gendered, ways of understanding gender difference. Some of them make statements about the need for women priests so as to balance the masculine characteristics of Catholicism's all-male priesthood, and

this way of thinking echoes traditionally Catholic ideas of gender complementarity, in which genders are essentially distinct and thus have different gifts and different roles to fill. In addition, many of RCWP's women are (or were) married with children and grandchildren; a number of non-married women were women religious. Thus, RCWP does some very transgressive things with their bodies and genders while retaining—and in fact reframing—traditional Catholic gender roles. Again, RCWP stands between tradition and transgression. RCWP's women adhere to much traditional teaching about women. Where RCWP's transgresses is not by challenging the very nature of the female body, but by putting that (somewhat traditional, somewhat essentialized) woman's body into the position of priest.⁴

⁴ Judith Butler's work is most relevant in shaping my thinking throughout this chapter, as she not only considers gender, bodies, and sexuality, but also performances and performativity. Thanks to scholarship like Butler's, once seemingly stable categories—such as gender, sex, sexuality, and the body—have become radically destabilized. In many ways, Butler's intervention was an attempt to reframe the disputes that marked second-wave feminism—disputes not unlike the ones women's ordination activists currently have with Vatican authority. Thus, Butler's process of destabilization—both in philosophies and in politics—can be brought to bear on RCWP. Butler offers valuable points of reflection for a study of womenpriests' bodies performing a politically changed and politically charged priesthood. Butler's theories help illuminate the power of bodies within RCWP's protest *yet* highlight the fact bodies are not entirely reconstituted in RCWP's performed protest.

In this vein, we must take Butler's notion of performativity into account when considering RCWP's action. For Butler, gender characteristics are not *essential*, but rather are discursively created and then performed, and are thereby reinforced through repetition and reiteration. RCWP's *modus operandi* is to place women into the role of Catholic priest in an attempt to gain equality for women and reform the priesthood, despite Roman Catholic theological arguments that say women and men are fundamentally different and women are unable to be priests. We must examine, then, how womenpriests use embodied protest to try and change Vatican rules about women's ordination. Indeed, *iterability* is a recurring consideration in Butler's work, as it describes the way an act/ion is cited and performed. Butler has written, "The action of gender requires a performance that is repeated" (Gender Trouble 1990, 140). This notion might be modified to consider the repeated performance of a gender-based priesthood: Catholics have seen (discursively-produced) males performing the role of priests for so long, RCWP's intervention of female priests is bound to be jarring. RCWP, then, introduces a new kind of iterability, with female priesthood being performed and practiced. Butler notes, however, a caveat: one cannot know exactly what impact performances will have on audiences. In terms of RCWP, this means it is difficult to predict what effect the destabilizing intervention of *women* priests may have on Roman Catholicism, either the hierarchy or the faithful.

Connected to discursively-produced gender roles and gender performativity, Butler considers how identity construction and constitution begins with signifying work and involves (political) resistance. Because there is no "natural" category for gender, sex, or sexuality, Butler suggests that there is room for resistance—especially through language and signification. When considering and contesting identity politics, agency, critique, resistance, and change are critical. And, these terms and considerations all mark RCWP's actions as well. Womenpriests' self-construction as Roman Catholic womenpriests begins with their bodies performing particular roles, provoking, prodding, and pushing existing Catholic teaching toward a reformed, gender-inclusive priesthood. Butler suggests that political change begins with an awareness of the power of repeatability as well as the possibility for resignification. Repeatability and resignification are, in a sense, the hallmarks of RCWP's embodied action. They adopt (i.e., repeat) many of the actions, words, and dress standards of male priests, particularly when it comes to

Roman Catholicism and the Issue of Gendered and Sexual(ized) Bodies

When seeking to understand questions of gender within Roman Catholicism and how those questions connect to the male-only priesthood, one must look at Vatican statements from the late twentieth century, and primarily those of John Paul II. Catholic teaching on gender difference centers around a few key concepts: theological (or Christian) anthropology, complementarity, and the bride/bridegroom nuptial analogy. Each of these definitions—as well as their role in Catholic theology and gendered expectations—has been extensively explored in scholarly work, and so I offer here only a cursory examination foregrounding the rhetorical, theological, and existential import of gender difference in Roman Catholicism.

The terms “theological anthropology” and “Christian anthropology”—often used interchangeably—refer to the way a religious tradition—in this case, Roman Catholicism—understands and theologizes the human being, alongside other human beings and the divine. Theological anthropology received great emphasis under Pope John Paul II and has since become foundational for Catholic understanding of gender roles. Moreover, much Catholic teaching around issues of human sexuality, the dignity of the human person, and social justice stem from the importance placed upon Christian theological anthropology throughout the twentieth century.

liturgical and sacramental performances. They perform sacraments (which are powerfully repeated in the lifecycles of Catholics worldwide) all the while attempting to resignify the category “Roman Catholic priest” by inserting women into the priestly role.

All told, Judith Butler offers valuable points of reflection for a study of womenpriests’ bodies performing a politically changed and politically charged priesthood. Butler’s theories, in addition to those of Derrida and Foucault, which influenced her, help illuminate the power of bodies within RCWP’s protest *yet* highlight the fact bodies are not entirely reconstituted in RCWP’s performed protest. Again, RCWP stands between tradition and transgression. RCWP’s women adhere to much traditional teaching about women. Where RCWP’s transgresses is not by challenging the very nature of the female body, but by putting that (somewhat traditional, somewhat essentialized) woman’s body into the position of priest.

Closely tied to theological anthropology is complementarity, a term that describes the interdependent relationship between the sexes. Complementarity posits that males and females are essentially different and therefore must work together—in complementary relationship—to achieve wholeness. In a 1995 “Letter to Women,” John Paul II explained, “Womanhood and manhood are complementary *not only from the physical and psychological points of view*, but also from the *ontological*. It is only through the duality of the ‘masculine’ and the ‘feminine’ that the ‘human’ finds full realization.”⁵ In Catholicism, as in many religious traditions, differences between men and women are seen as innate, reflected in nature, and divinely ordained. If men and women are different—and have different abilities, gifts, and social contributions—it is because God ordered creation in this way. According to John Paul II, to go against this divinely ordered male-female complementarity is to offend human dignity.⁶

The Church’s increased emphasis on gender complementarity throughout the twentieth century marked a shift away from centuries of Church-sanctioned subordinationism, or the idea that, because women were created after men (in the second creation story, Genesis 2:4ff), women are subordinate and inferior to men. This way of distinguishing men and women has a long history in the Church as in Western thought, owing to philosophers like Aristotle and Christian theologians like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Any brief examination of writings from early Church fathers through medieval theologians reveals a strong undercurrent of perceived female inferiority.⁷ In contrast, Vatican II and the mid-twentieth century context led

⁵Pope John Paul II, “Letter to Women” (June 29, 1995) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women_en.html, 7.

⁶ Deborah Halter, *The Papal “No”: A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican’s Rejection of Women’s Ordination* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 79, footnote 315.

⁷ Some instances: St. Irenaeus argued that nature and the law make women subordinate to men; Tertullian intimated that only men—and *not* women—were made in the image of God, and he cast women as dangerous sources of lust and sexual temptation; Augustine wrote that the order of nature dictates that men rule over women; Thomas

the Church to reassess and reject any suggestion that women were inferior to men. To again quote from *Gaudium et Spes*, a Vatican II document that I examined in Chapter 1:

With respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.⁸

This was seen as the Church's way of asserting basic human rights for all individuals, independent of gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, or social status, much in keeping with Galatians 3:28. Debates remain, however, over how thoroughly sexism has been exorcised from contemporary Church teaching and practice.

Independent of whether or not current Church teachings on men and women are sexist, there is no question that the papacy sees women as having distinct vocational roles, namely as virgin, wife, and mother. In *The Papal No*,⁹ Deborah Halter examines the history and nuances of this teaching, and hers is the go-to text for a rich overview of an issue that I will merely touch upon here. In 1988's apostolic letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, "On the Dignity and Worth of Women," John Paul II described motherhood and virginity as "two particular dimensions of the fulfillment of the female personality," and therefore tied intimately to a woman's vocation.⁹ That same year, in the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, the pope again emphasized women's "specific vocation" and how anthropology clarified women's "personal identity [and make-up

Aquinas suggested that women lacked intellect and reason; and Bonaventure argued that women cannot be ordained because they do not bear the image of God ("imago Dei"). Examples like these and others are often cited in Catholic feminist literature as evidence of the female subordinationism that has marked much of the Roman Catholic historical context. A wealth of resources about the discussion of women in early and medieval Church texts can be found at www.womenpriests.org, under "Resources."

⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* ("Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World") (December 7, 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, 29.

⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, ("On the Dignity and Vocation of Women") (August 15, 1988) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_15081988_mulieris-dignitatem_en.html.

and meaning as a person] in relation to man.”¹⁰ By 1995, after *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* decreed silence on the question of women’s ordination, John Paul II’s “Letter to Women” explicitly laid out women’s roles:

[T]here is great significance to that “womanhood” which was lived in such a sublime way by Mary. In fact, there is present in the “womanhood” of a woman who believes, and especially in a woman who is “consecrated,” a kind of inherent “prophecy” (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 29), a powerfully evocative symbolism, a highly significant “iconic character”, which finds its full realization in Mary and which also aptly expresses the very essence of the Church as a community consecrated with the integrity of a “*virgin*” heart to become the “*bride*” of Christ and “*mother*” of believers.¹¹

By emphasizing Mary as the ideal and model (and echoing nearly two millennia of Marian-centered celebration), the Pope equated womanhood with motherhood, spousal relations, and virginity. Although those three roles cannot coexist simultaneously for any Catholic women (as they did for Mary according to Catholic teaching), the Pope heralds these as the superlative to which women should strive.

Using the word “bride” to describe women connects to the nuptial analogy that not only characterizes Catholic gender complementarity and essentialism, but also underscores the Church’s arguments for a non-female priesthood. This bride/bridegroom analogy comes from a reading of the biblical Song of Songs, which rabbis of old interpreted as God (the bridegroom) declaring faithfulness to Israel (the bride), in spite of the latter’s infidelities. Early Christians also adopted this analogy, seeing it as Christ, the faithful bridegroom, expressing devotion to the Church, his inseparable bride. In this formation, the Church is gendered female—hence references to the Church as “she” or “her” in papal documents. When the priest stands *in persona*

¹⁰Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (“Apostolic Exhortation on the Lay Faithful”) (December 30, 1988) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html, 50.

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, “Letter to Women” (June 29, 1995) http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women_en.html, 11.

Christi, therefore, he is the Christ-groom to the Church's bride. *Inter Insigniores* emphasized this relationship as an argument for the all-male priesthood: Christ was a man, and the bride-bridegroom symbolism would be wrecked were a woman to stand in Christ's place at the Eucharistic table.¹²

Taken altogether, theological anthropology, complementarity (as distinguished from subordinationsim¹³), and the nuptial analogy fuel the Church's argument as to why men can be ordained and women cannot. Simply put, in Catholic teaching, men and women have different roles to fill, and priesthood is an example of this. Church officials contend that priesthood is not a basic human right. Unlike in Protestant traditions, Roman Catholicism holds priesthood as a sacrament. As such, priesthood is categorically different than secular concerns (and calls for gender equality) and is a function of biology, Christian anthropology, and Christ's will. Sara Butler outlines these arguments in her book, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Church's Teaching*. Butler, a woman religious with the Missionary Servants of the Most Blessed Trinity, is a professor of dogmatic theology at St. Joseph's Seminary in New York City. In the 1970s, she fully endorsed women's ordination; upon further study, however, she changed her mind. She especially found convincing Pope John Paul II's theology of the body (which draws heavily upon theological anthropology and complementarity) as well as the bride-bridegroom analogy.¹⁴ In her scholarship on women's ordination, Butler suggests that theological arguments

¹² Halter, *The Papal 'No'*, 54-55; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* ("Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood") (October 15, 1976), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6interi.htm>, Section 5: The Ministerial Priesthood in the Light of the Mystery of Christ.

¹³ Many scholars have argued that, even though the Roman Catholic Church has replaced subordinationist language with complementarity, it is the Church's subordinationist history that informs decisions on a male-only priesthood. See Haye van der Meer, *Women Priests in the Catholic Church?* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973).

¹⁴ Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2007). Also helpful is a shorter treatment of her book's argument, available on the Archdiocese of New York website: Sara Butler, "Women's Ordination: Is it Still an Issue?" (Terrence Cardinal Cooke lecture, March 7, 2007).

against women's ordination—which stem largely from the considerations of bodies and gender I have laid out here—are, in effect, secondary to the more fundamental arguments against women's ordination, which are instead based upon tradition and Christ's will for the Church. The “fundamental reasons,” as she sees them, include the constant tradition in the Eastern and Western churches of ordaining only men and quickly suppressing attempts to ordain women; Christ's decision to include only men among the Twelve apostles; the apostolic Church tradition of only laying hands on males; and the fact that male-only ordination has long been seen as normative for the Church.¹⁵ Thus, when it comes to arguing against women's ordination, bodies and gender come second behind tradition and Christ's will.

Butler's arguments and others like hers locate the all-male priesthood in tradition first and theology second. In doing so, they imply that theologized bodies are not the reason behind the Vatican's ban of women priests, but rather, that the Vatican has made moves to theologize bodies so as to understand and explain to the faithful why Christ chose only men as his apostles. Butler also suggests that feminist Catholics misunderstand the reasons for an all-male priesthood and that they take the ban on women priests as somehow suggestive of the Vatican's misrepresentation of women's “nature”; conversely, feminist Catholics attempt to tackle Church teachings on that front (bodies and women's nature) and not on tradition (Christ's will). In short, tradition does not often get the same attention from feminist Catholics as, according to Sara Butler, it gets in Vatican statements about priesthood.

But one could still insist, despite Butler's arguments, that femaleness and the female body versus maleness and the male body are not still a crucial—and indeed, *fundamental*—part of

A good source for John Paul II's theology of the body can be found here: John Paul II, *The Mystery of Human Personhood: A Renewal of the Theology of the Body* (Palo Alto, CA: Academica Press, 2011).

¹⁵ S. Butler, “Women's Ordination: Is it Still an Issue?,” 14.

the Vatican's argument against women priests. Similarly, any suggestion (like Butler's) that the Church has sufficiently shown its own emphasis to be on tradition first and theology and theologized bodies second can be countered in a number of ways. Church rhetoric, for example, belies both of these points, as gendered bodies remain at the heart of Rome's dictates for men and women, priests and laity. According to scripture, Christ chose males as apostles—but the Church presupposes Christ chose them *because* they were male, and that Christ did not choose others—including his own mother, Mary—because they were female. Moreover, the Church teaches that, in order to represent Christ “in his fullness,” and to perform the sacraments, the priest must be able to represent Christ's *maleness*.¹⁶ As activists and scholars have pointed out, Jesus had other defining characteristics besides being male: he was Jewish, and he was of middle-eastern descent and likely had dark hair and eyes and wore a beard. Must priests represent Christ in this way? Some scholars have pointed out, with full awareness of irony, that Jesus was born of a virgin—if priests are to resemble Christ “in his fullness,” must not they represent Christ in this way as well? Furthermore, scholars of the twenty-first century would be right to problematize the very concept of “male”: what is it, does it look like, does it do? The Church presupposes what maleness meant *for Jesus*. Was “male” a strictly biological category, or were there social and cultural implications around “masculinity”? What about the more complicated—and undoubtedly modern—categories of homosexuality, bisexuality, or transgender?¹⁷ In short, it

¹⁶ “Ordaining Female Catholic Priests,” *On Point*, WBUR Boston Public Radio (Boston, MA: July 27, 2011). Women's ordination in the Catholic Church was the topic for an episode of NPR's “On Point,” featuring Roy Bourgeois and Eileen DiFranco speaking in favor of women's ordination and Pia de Solenni outlining the Vatican's position. During the interview, de Solenni sought to explain the Church's argument using language and terminology that non-specialists could understand. She talked about the need for the priest to represent Christ's maleness in order to represent Christ “in his fullness,” about men and women being equal but not the same, and about Jesus wanting to call only men as his apostles.

¹⁷ Without knowing for certain how the magisterium would answer these provocative and undoubtedly post-structuralist questions here, let me surmise a response: given the ways the Church understands male and female gender roles as essential, the Church would suppose that Jesus Christ, as God's son and the savior of humanity, would understand God's will for gender distinctions, and act accordingly. As such, questions about probing gender categories would become moot.

seems impossible to ignore the fact that a rigorous discussion of bodies is inescapable for any question around women's ordination, not simply because priests' bodies must (in Church teaching) emulate Christ's physical presence, but because body issues are intertwined with fundamental and traditional questions about gender in the Catholic Church. While the Church may claim to be adhering to a tradition starting with Christ, it places specific emphasis on (gendered) bodies, those bodies' essentialized, theological roles, and those bodies' ability to symbolize. As I explored in Chapter 2, the 1976 Pontifical Biblical Commission determined that scripture was not enough to prevent women from priesthood. In other words, the tradition that started with Christ is not, in the Commission's findings, clear enough on the question of male versus female priests to be the sole reason for a male-only priesthood. For the Church and its ban on women priests, bodies—and the presumed external and essential differences between male and female bodies—are of utmost importance.

The meaning of real bodies doing real things has not escaped Catholics on either side of the women's ordination debate. The conservative Catholic women's group, Women for Faith and Family, applauded arguments like those in *Inter Insigniores*, saying "Human females, who by nature share in the creativity of God by their capacity to bring forth new life . . . *can no more be priests than men can be mothers.*"¹⁸ In 1992, during a National Conference of Catholic Bishops meeting, Auxiliary Bishop Austin B. Vaughn said, "In the year 2000, 20,000, or 2,000,000, there will still be a Catholic church and it will still have an all-male clergy. A woman priest is as impossible as for me to have a baby."¹⁹ Both of these statements, which sought to affirm

¹⁸ Mary Jo Weaver, *Being Right*, 178 (found in Halter, 53-4).

¹⁹ Peter Steinfelds, "New Fire in Bishops' Debate over Document on Women," *New York Times*, November 18, 1992, A13, quoted in Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 88.

Catholic teaching and gender traditionalism, placed priesthood on a biological and physiological level, whereby female priesthood was simply, organically, unviable. Some on the progressive side of the debate still invoke complementarity but take from it a different lesson, such as the argument of journalist and Roman Catholic Peter Steinfelds, who started with the Church's own position on complementarity and the nuptial analogy and, in contrast to traditionalists, suggested, "Complementarity of the sexes...might be said to *require* both men and women as priests rather than limit priesthood to one sex."²⁰ To have only one spouse, he suggested, would lead to incongruity and lack the gifts of spousal interdependence. In sum, the Church's teaching on gender has not led to any singular, straightforward understanding of what gender could or should mean for the practice of ordination.

And so, the Church's teaching on gender and bodies alongside the Church's reasons for a male-only priesthood must be considered when studying RCWP and the embodied practices of (the female) priesthood that RCWP exemplifies. RCWP's transgressive yet traditional stance must be investigated in the context of bodies: biological, cultural, constituted, disputed, and rhetorical, insofar as RCWP straddles—in ways sometimes incongruent and ambiguous, and in other ways deliberately provocative—the traditional and the transgressive as pertains to Catholic teaching on bodies and gender. The movement knows the centrality of gender and bodies for Roman Catholic doctrine, and this is why its activism takes the form of embodied protest.

"Putting Your Bodies on the Line": Janice Sevre-Duszynska and Embodied Protests

²⁰ Peter Steinfelds, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), quoted in Halter, *The Papal 'No,'* 78.

When looking at the decades' long, embodied protests of Janice Sevre-Duszynska, the concept of "subjunctive performance" comes to mind. Victor Turner described subjunctive performances—or, performances in the subjunctive mode—as examples of performing what is hoped for, what is "not yet," but which "might be." Subjunctive verbs imply possibility and a future "maybe." Likewise, Sevre-Duszynska has a history of using her body to challenge the status quo. With her body on the altar as a child, she enacted a subjunctive performance where girls might be altar boys; with her body positioned expectantly before Bishop Williams at a Lexington, Kentucky ordination ceremony in 1998, she enacted a subjunctive performance wherein male bishops might ordain women; with her body prostrate on the cathedral floor during an ordination for men, she enacted a subjunctive performance in which women, too, could surrender to what they understand as a vocational call; with her alb and cincture at numerous witnessing actions around SOA (School of Americas) Watch, she enacted a subjunctive performance whereby women image priests who risk imprisonment for social justice. The story of Janice Sevre-Duszynska is richly illustrative of bodies, protest, and incarnational theology. Even before and ever since becoming a womanpriest in [2008], Sevre-Duszynska has known the import of "putting your bodies on the line."²¹

Since growing up on Milwaukee's south side during the 1950's, Sevre-Duszynska has felt called to priesthood and called to claim her priesthood—disobediently, if necessary. Her defiance began in elementary school. Longing to be an altar server but unable to do so, young Janice routinely helped Sister DePaul clean the sacristy. The sacristy, a room frequently located just off of the altar that holds vestments and ecclesiastical vessels, would have been available to Janice and Sister DePaul for the purposes of cleaning when no Mass was taking place, but it would have been wholly unavailable to females during Liturgy. Sometimes while cleaning the

²¹ Janice Sevre-Duszynska, telephone interview with author, January 23, 2011.

sacristy, Janice would go to the altar and make believe she was celebrating the Mass: she would lift the Eucharist and the wine; she would bless the congregation; she would sit in the priest's chair. Each of these actions was utterly forbidden to Catholic females, especially in the years before Vatican II, but Janice's priestly performance was made possible by the proximity to the altar that "cleaning the sacristy" afforded. One day, during Mass, bells rang and the priest and four altar boys (all of whom 10-year old Janice knew well from football and baseball games) processed across the altar toward the sacristy. Emboldened, certainly, by her time spent cleaning the altar and sacristy, Janice stood and followed the five males into the sacristy. She recalls hearing Sister DePaul gasp; she recalls feeling convicted that there was a place for women on the altar, and not just as a bride or in a coffin. Thinking back on that event decades later, Sevre-Duszynska explains that she knew, even as a child, that she would come back to that moment, to that disobedient act whereby she sought to position herself equally with the males on the altar.²²

She came back nearly forty years later, in 1998, on her forty-eighth birthday. Just as she had years earlier when she walked through and into sacred space deemed off-limits to women, Sevre-Duszynska was ready and willing to put her body on the line, i.e., to use her physical presence to challenge Catholic patriarchy. Sevre-Duszynska no longer wished simply to be an altar server like her elementary-school playmates: by now, she knew she felt called to the priesthood and wanted to honor that call. An ordination was taking place at Christ the King Cathedral in Lexington, Kentucky. Sevre-Duszynska wrote the bishop, who knew of Sevre-Duszynska's desire for ordination based upon their past dealings, and notified him that she was planning "a gentle action" of protest at the ceremony. Having given the bishop warning, Sevre-Duszynska set to readying her body: she dressed herself in an alb and red cincture that she had

²² Janice Sevre-Duszynska, interview, July 19, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage; Janice Sevre-Duszynska, telephone interview with author, January 23, 2011.

ordered from a Protestant supply store; she wore a coat over her vestments; she went to the Cathedral and sat in the pews during the ordination. And when the bishop asked the candidates for ordination to come forward, Sevre-Duszynska took off her coat, revealed her vestments, and walked to the altar. She spoke: “Bishop Williams, I’m called by the Holy Spirit to present myself for ordination. My name is Janice. I ask this for myself and for all women.” The bishop responded—in a voice that “sounded like Darth Vader,” Sevre-Duszynska later recalled—“Get back to your seat. You’re disrupting the service.” Sevre-Duszynska then prostrated herself, “for about a minute or so,” in the way all candidates for ordination do, as a way of surrendering to the Spirit, as an expression of humility and obedience to God’s call. When she stood again, she spoke:

I am all the oppressed women of the Bible. I am Sarah, I am Elizabeth, I am the woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, I am the woman who poured the oil over Jesus’s head, I am Veronica. I came here today with the help of my patron saint, St. Joan of Arc, hoping that you would ordain me. Would you ordain me?²³

By this time, ordained men were surrounding Sevre-Duszynska, ready to remove her. She walked back to her seat. During the sign of peace many minutes later, Bishop Williams came to her, giving her a hug; she hugged him in return.

Actions like this one continued. Armed with her alb and stole, Sevre-Duszynska continued her protests wearing priestly dress. Doing actions she describes as “witnessing to the bishops,” Sevre-Duszynska regularly spoke out in favor of women’s ordination. In 2001, she went to the (annual USCCB?) bishops’ conference in Washington D.C., using a journalists’ pass to enter. When she got the microphone, she began reading her statement for Justice for Women in the Church. She made it about halfway through before someone turned off the microphone, thereby silencing her. She has also joined WOW in protest, holding banners saying “Ordain

²³ Janice Sevre-Duszynska, interview, July 19, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage

women,” in eight languages, on the edge of the Vatican as the bishops met for conferences in Rome. Sevre-Duszynska has gone to conferences where she stands, sometimes for hours, calling out to the bishops as they go to and from their meetings: “Bishops, remember to speak out for us women. Remember that Christ calls both men and women to the priesthood. Ordain women! Become Easter-morning men!” When calling for the men to be “Easter-morning men,” Sevre-Duszynska explains that she is summoning the men to remember mothers and sisters, as Jesus did when he appeared to women—first, according to scripture—on Easter morning; to listen to their consciences; to embrace liberation and set aside fear. Implied in her invitation is a challenge, if not to the bishops’ masculinity, then to the types of men they have become. Sevre-Duszynska’s actions—her body and her words of protest—juxtaposed with those of male bishops brings into stark relief their *inaction*, specifically on the women’s ordination issue.

The bishops may overlook Sevre-Duszynska’s pleas for women’s ordination, but they do not entirely overlook her. At one conference, Sevre-Duszynska reports that Cardinal George of Chicago said to her, “Janice, you are not a Catholic.” To this Sevre-Duszynska responded, “I’m a Christian...and I think Jesus would be doing this, too.” In spite of George’s initial slight, the next day he asked Sevre-Duszynska if she would like any tea or cookies. Bishop Williams from the notorious Lexington ordination approached Sevre-Duszynska at a conference and asked her, wasn’t she tired from standing for so many hours? Indeed, Sevre-Duszynska has stood for hours at a time, a small woman wearing an alb and cincture (and stole?), occupying the same physical space as scores of Catholic bishops. These men showed concern for Sevre-Duszynska, and specifically for her body: was she nourished? Hydrated? Physically comfortable? As she stood before them, some bishops responded to her bodily needs, and thereby to her physical presence. Her body was not allowed on the altar as a child, nor *in persona Christi* as an adult Catholic female, nor in conferences as a dissenting Catholic. Yet at the events where she witnessed,

Sevre-Duszynska's body—perhaps because of the way she dresses herself, positions herself, and inserts herself into male-dominated spaces—challenged authority and even drew reactions from authority figures.

Sevre-Duszynska's own concern for bodies manifests in her peace activism. In addition to witnessing to bishops about women's ordination, she has spent decades doing faith and justice work. She participates in interfaith peace vigils in Lexington, KY. She regularly takes part in SOA Watch, an organization that protests the School of the Americas, in Fort Benning, Georgia, a military facility (now named Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) that has for decades trained Latin American military officers. Some SOA graduates went on to commit tragic human rights abuses, and Maryknoll priest Roy Bourgeois formed SOA Watch in the early 1990s. Sevre-Duszynska has been arrested a number of times, sometimes while wearing her alb and stole, and thus she made a statement not just about the need for peace and an end to violence, but also about the connections between women's priesthood and social justice. To be sure, her social activism and women's ordination activism have bled together. At times when witnessing to bishops, she would call out, "Why do I have to spend my time witnessing to you on this issue [of women's ordination] when it should be a given in our church?" What *should* be receiving focus, Sevre-Duszynska then tells the bishops, are problems of war, peace, and justice; the killing of people in Iraq, the billions of dollars spent on war, the rejection of grassroots people's needs.

When she became ordained a priest through RCWP in 2008, Sevre-Duszynska's subjunctive performance around women's ordination became a reality. Although this came from *contra legem* actions and not changes in Church teaching, Sevre-Duszynska now serves as a priest. Her embodied actions continue. Sevre-Duszynska's deep commitment to bodies (through SOA

Watch and other social activism) and awareness of her own embodied performances (in her vested protests) connects to the import she places upon Jesus's incarnation. For Sevre-Duszynska, what is of utmost importance is the fact that Jesus *became human*, taking on a real, flesh-and-blood body and living among the people. As Sevre-Duszynska thinks of Jesus, he was a leader who accepted consequences—even bodily consequences. For Sevre-Duszynska, “priesthood is being with Spirit on the edge.” Priesthood is being willing to lay down your life for another, as Christ did. This kind of priestly leadership is what Sevre-Duszynska wants from the Roman Catholic Church and what she envisions for her own priestly ministries: “It’s not just statements and encyclicals,” she says, “It’s putting your bodies on the line.”²⁴ Sevre-Duszynska’s personal theology and Christology plays out in her embodied activism, for both women’s ordination and social justice.

Dressing the Part: Womenpriests in Clerical Vestments

Elsie McGrath has a t-shirt that reads, “This is what a woman priest looks like!” She does not wear the t-shirt when presiding over liturgy at Therese of Divine Peace: there, she typically wears an alb and a colorful stole that reflects the liturgical calendar. Whether she wears her t-shirt or her vestments, McGrath is participating in a signification process that informs RCWP’s public performance: she is communicating her identity as a priest and simultaneously inviting her audience to rethink their image of a Roman Catholic priest. In both cases—either in a t-shirt announcing her ordained status or in vestments that announce for her—McGrath’s body becomes the vehicle for this resignification process marking RCWP’s desire for a reformed priesthood.

²⁴ Janice Sevre-Duszynska, telephone interview with author, January 23, 2011.

Preoccupation with what RCWP's ordained women wear has percolated throughout the movement's brief history, often in conjunction with questions around clericalism. The pageantry and spectacle surrounding the Roman Catholic liturgy invariably connects to the celebrant's own costuming. To be a priest is to dress the part. While the level of clothing formality differs widely, depending on the priest, the occasion, and the parish setting, the quintessential priest wears an alb, chasuble, and stole when saying Mass and wears a black shirt and Roman collar when not. Small wonder, then, that the Roman collar or liturgical garments direct some viewers' minds first to hierarchical power, and only second toward holiness and pastoring. RCWP's women are aware of this reading (i.e., vestments contribute to "making" the priest in the Catholic imagination), yet that does not mean their own use of vestments is unambivalent. Debates over how womenpriests should adorn their bodies play out both in and outside of RCWP, as what women wear is read both as a deliberate rejection of patriarchalism *or* a reinscription of clerical power upon a female body.

There is a tension here that cannot be overlooked. On the one hand, wearing clerical vestments allows womenpriests to "look the part," which is a crucial facet of their priesthood performance. On the other hand, clergy vestments often signal and symbolize clericalism and patriarchy, and women-in-vestments might appear to be imbibing and projecting clerical power. Womenpriests are therefore caught in something of a catch-22 where vestments are concerned. RCWP's strategy involves putting women in vestments so as to show that womenpriests do presently exist. An audience not used to seeing a woman in priestly vestments can get accustomed to the newly introduced visual. I have explored elsewhere (chapter 5) how powerfully the image of a woman saying mass strikes some practicing Catholics who have before only ever experienced the Eucharist at male hands. Likewise, the image of a woman wearing the alb and colored stole—processing in to mass or holding her hands over the gifts—can be

transformative for some viewers. Not all viewers, however, find the image of a female priest in traditionally male vestments transformative. These Catholics are likely to look past the transgressive element of the female-body-in-vestments and see instead the replication of patriarchal dominance, or they see a female body encased in traditional clericalism and, therefore, not transforming the priesthood at all.

For the most part, RCWP's women wear vestments but use them simply. One would not likely find a womanpriest wearing the elaborate garments that ornament the bodies of male priests, bishops, and cardinals at formal occasions. Speaking on RCWP's behalf, Patricia Fresen explained that womenpriests' vestments are "simple," and not "elaborate or expensive." For example, unlike male bishops who wear mitres, RCWP eschews this practice. Fresen explains that decorative vestments and headwear do not reflect a pastoral role, but rather the Church's deliberate emulation of emperors' and kings' dress, starting in the fourth century.²⁵ But at the same time, RCWP's women tend to allow their vestments to reflect their ordained status as either deacon, priest, or bishop. At ordinations I have attended or viewed, womenbishops do not wear mitres or carry staffs, but their garments reflect their distinguished status—as she who bears and conveys apostolic succession. In Rochester in May of 2010, deacons wore stoles over their left shoulders and cinched at the right waist; priests wore red stoles around the back of the neck and down the front of the body; and ordaining bishop Andrea Johnson wore golden robes, a gold, patterned stole, and a cross around her neck. Even ordination attendees unfamiliar with Catholic garments would have been able to distinguish the women. I have been told that, in the movement's early days, onlookers attending ordinations could not tell bishops from priests from deacons. Perhaps in response to this criticism, and certainly owing to ordained women's

²⁵ Patricia Fresen, "A New Understanding of Priestly Ministry," in *Women Find a Way*, 32.

personal dress preferences, RCWP's women have worked to distinguish themselves at formal occasions while simultaneously distinguishing themselves from ornately fashioned ordained men.

Also unlike the official Church, RCWP does not provide or issue vestments to its ordained women, and so women must find their own liturgical dress. This leads to considerable variation. Even at ordination ceremonies, women may all wear certain colored stoles, but those stoles are not uniform. Womenpriests get their vestments from church supply stores, catalogues, and online vendors; the Danube Seven found a female dress maker who makes vestments for priests and acolytes and who was willing to make garments for the women. Joan Houk explained that some womenpriests struggle to *fit* into vestments worn by men. After some searching, the 5'1" Houk found a place in Wisconsin that makes vestments specifically for women.²⁶ Not surprisingly, many of these vestment-makers typically provide garments for Protestant clergy; now, illegally ordained Catholic women are becoming customers. Lastly, a number of women receive vestments as gifts from family, friends, and supporters. Houk has two chasubles, a cream-colored one (which she made herself from Joann's fabric) and a red one bestowed upon her by a United Church of Christ community where Houk co-celebrated. Houk also has a number of stoles: one was an ordination gift from her husband, one made by the womenbishops in Europe, and one made by a Mercy sister in Peru. Houk spoke about fellow RCWP women who receive beautiful stoles from enthusiastic husbands.²⁷ Thus, women display their personalities and their personal relationships—and not just their ordained status—when they vest.

²⁶ Joan Houk, telephone interview with author, January 8, 2011.

²⁷ Joan Houk, telephone interview with author, January 8, 2011.

Womenpriests who spoke to me about vestments reported dressing more formally for certain events and much more simply for weekly liturgies. Marie Bouclin mostly wears the alb and stole at liturgy, and she will add a chasuble for more important occasions.²⁸ Likewise, Mary Frances Smith only occasionally adds a white chasuble to her alb and stole.²⁹ When Gloria Carpeneto presides over liturgies held at St. John's UCC, she wears an alb and stole, but when she presides over liturgies held in home churches, she wears only the stole.³⁰ Theresa Novak Chabot loves the sensory experiences of the Roman Catholic tradition and maintains that vestments *are* important. She's only paired her alb and stole with the more formal chasuble twice, however, once for a special thanksgiving mass and once for the baptism of the three Wood daughters.³¹ At a Call to Action conference liturgy, Bridget Mary Meehan wore the chasuble with her alb and stole. Typically, however, she allows the community with which she celebrates to determine whether or not she wears liturgical vestments. For Meehan, this decision-making opportunity reflects RCWP's commitment to sharing authority and empowering their worship communities.³² All in all, the women's attention to their dress standards' degree of formality reflects an attention to audience, and a desire to signal either simplicity or propriety, as the occasion dictates.

The Roman collar is a visual cue for an "off duty" Catholic priest, yet RCWP's women are often conflicted about wearing one. Mary Ann Schoettly reported that she has worn the Roman collar twice. Once, it made her uncomfortable, as she felt it too "showy" and not about

²⁸ Marie Bouclin, email interview with author, April 26 & 27, 2011.

²⁹ Mary Frances Smith, email interview with author, March 4, 2011.

³⁰ Gloria Carpeneto, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2011.

³¹ Theresa Novak Chabot, telephone interview with author, January 20, 2011.

³² Bridget Mary Meehan, "Holy People, Holy Music, Holy House Church," in *Women Find a Way*, 92.

ordination at all. The other time she wore it, she was in Rome demonstrating for the ordination of women. This felt to her “very appropriate...it made a statement that could not have been made otherwise.” Typically, though, Schoettly avoids the collar and opts instead for a small pin bearing the RCWP logo. She knows few people who see it will know its meaning, but it serves to remind *her*.³³ Once ordained a priest, Monique Venne planned to make herself a beige—and not black—clergy shirt, for those “very few occasions when I think I need to be identified as clergy by those who don’t know me.”³⁴ For her part, Marie Bouclin does not even own a clerical collar. Dana Reynolds, who has left the RCWP movement and now works for a non-denominational church, used to wear vestments but no longer does. She felt people perceived and treated her differently when she wore the collar—even when she was driving in her car. She concedes that there is value in the collar: an individual who is hurting might approach someone wearing the collar and find safety there. But Reynolds found the collar and the vestments to be “a wall,” and she did not want to be part of that division.³⁵ Another womanpriest shares Reynolds’s concern and has criticized others in the movement for having an unhealthy understanding of priesthood—which manifests in the fact some women wear the Roman collar. At a regional Call to Action conference, this womanpriest saw some fellow RCWP’s women wearing the collar, which she interpreted as an attempt to stand out as “the priest” and to draw a stark line between ordained and unordained people.³⁶ Overall, womenpriests seem aware of clerical problems “the collar” might bring. No womanpriest reported wearing the collar regularly, and those who wore it did so deliberately while those who did not expressed reasons for avoiding it.

³³ Mary Ann Schoettly, email interview with author, January 8, 2011.

³⁴ Monique Venne, email interview with author, March 27, 2011.

³⁵ Dana Reynolds, telephone interview with author, December 14, 2010.

³⁶ Womanpriest, telephone interview with author. (I do not wish to identify this womanpriest as she critiques her colleagues in the small RCWP movement.)

To be sure, issues around clericalism and traditionalism do figure into the RCWP calculus of performed priesthood and vestment wearing. RCWP works hard to position itself as an anti-clerical alternative to traditional priesthood. The vestments the women wear, however, sometimes suggest to onlookers a replication of clericalism. Longtime women's ordination activist and writer for *Equal wRites*, Mary Byrne, wrote an editorial in the wake of RCWP's Pittsburg ordinations in 2006. She felt conflicted about RCWP's actions. She affirmed the womenpriests' "resemblance to Jesus" but bemoaned RCWP's need to retain Roman rites and apostolic succession. Perhaps what troubled her most was the visual image of priestly multitudes around the Eucharistic table. When all the ordained RCWP women came to the altar to concelebrate the Eucharist, Byrne (and, she reports, others around her) read the action as involving an overwhelming lot of priests. Byrne writes that she and another exchanged "sad glances," and the latter whispered, "It's still the same priestly caste." Wearing vestments, surrounding an altar table, and intoning the words of consecration, the Eucharist signaled to some attendees *not* women's power and inclusion in the Church's sacramental life, but rather women as part of the clerical hierarchy. Byrne concludes her editorial with questions: what does a renewed Church and a renewed priesthood *look* like? How is a woman a "priest" in ways that are not simply imitative of men? Women must not, she argues, simply don the emperor's clothes. But what women *should* do, in terms of clothing, is uncertain, for supporters of women's ordination and RCWP itself.³⁷

RCWP's women agree that the ornate vestments worn at times by some high-ranking Vatican officials smack of hypocrisy and heavy-handed clericalism. As I spoke with some

³⁷ Mary Byrne, "To Ordain or Not to Ordain...", *Equal wRites* (Ivyland, PA) September – November 2006: 9-10. The image of several womenpriests celebrating Eucharist in Pittsburg is, I believe, the cover photograph for *Women Find a Way*.

womenpriests and their congregants at Living-Water community in Baltimore, Maryland, our conversation turned to Church leaders and their clothing. Headlines announcing “the Pope Wears Prada” have appeared widely, in reference to Pope Benedict XVI’s red loafer-style shoes.³⁸ Cardinal Raymond Burke—who is notorious in RCWP circles for his role in the uproar surrounding the 2007 St. Louis ordination—has also been criticized for his garments, notably, his red *cappa manga* (a long train he has worn celebrating mass and which requires attendants to guide and straighten) and his red *galero* (a red hat adorned with tassels).³⁹ Implied in the criticism these men and other Vatican officials have received, from some Catholics, non-Catholics, and womenpriests, is the suggestion that the men care more about bodily adornment than pastoral care. For progressive Catholics, especially, who feel the Vatican often demonstrates misplaced priorities, a reflection on high-ranking clergy’s clothing points to a perceived hypocrisy in the Church’s upper echelons. It is one thing to dress in ways marking oneself physically as a priest—to be sure, RCWP itself does this. But it is another thing altogether to ornament the body in expensive and ostentatious fashions.⁴⁰ This is something, then, that RCWP wishes to avoid. Drawing the line, however, between clerical preening and pastoral signaling is difficult. For RCWP and for the Church leaders, what seems to one person a way of retaining tradition may read to another person as clerical pride.

³⁸ The Vatican, for its part, denies the rumor that the shoes are Prada and instead insists the moccasins are made by an Italian cobbler. The Vatican issued this objection in its newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, and the article is summarized here: Richard Owen, “The Pope wears Prada? That’s cobblers, says the Vatican,” *The Times*, June 26, 2008.

³⁹ Thomas C. Fox, “Is this prelate disobeying a pope?” *National Catholic Reporter*, April 9, 2011, ncronline.org.

⁴⁰ One can find online an almost limitless supply of images depicting the pope, cardinals, and high-ranking bishops in ornate clothing. I suspect the media and Vatican onlookers fixate on this clerical clothing for a number of reasons, not least of all because it is unusual in contemporary culture for men to ornament themselves in this way. This is a kind of crossing of gender lines—a move that seems surprising given the Church’s moralizing around issues of bodies and sexuality, and given the gender essentialism marking Catholicism’s theological anthropology.

To conclude, the importance of vestments for signaling and performing an embodied priesthood should not be overlooked. Certainly, Janice Sevre-Duszynska's protests took on an additional element because she dressed the part. Wearing a simple alb and cincture and sometimes adding a stole, Sevre-Duszynska's dress told onlookers that she was ready for priesthood. Her apparel elevated the sincerity and seriousness of her protest. Nowadays, when she protests at SOA Watch—again in a simple clerical garb—she communicates not only her priesthood, but a Roman Catholic commitment to social justice activism. Given her own passion for incarnational theology, it seems fitting to compare Sevre-Duszynska's simplicity and concern for justice with Christ's: would Jesus be wearing simple clothing and working for justice, as Sevre-Duszynska is, or would Jesus be richly ornamented and denying ordination to women? Sevre-Duszynska's own embodied, adorned performance of priesthood suggests her belief in the former. Simply put, for womenpriests, vestments matter. Marie David acknowledges that vestments are an important part of the liturgical "dance" that womenpriests take part in. She vests for liturgy and wears the collar in ecumenical circles where she feels it is important that she be identified as a priest.⁴¹ David does not believe vestments *make* her a priest, but they help her be *seen* as a priest. Monica Kilburn-Smith would be content to avoid vestments altogether, but she knows these are a crucial visual that helps connect people to God and the Holy. Putting a female head over those vestments, then, becomes an important "visual prophecy" for the Church and its members.⁴² In sum, womenpriests have different relationships to clerical vestments, but the movement embraces vestments—in some form—as breaking down Vatican gender distinctions, giving women the opportunity to embody not only Christ, but the

⁴¹ Marie David, telephone interview with author, February 11, 2011.

⁴² Monica Kilburn-Smith, telephone interview with author, April 20, 2011.

quintessential “Roman Catholic priest” that grips contemporary imagination, for Catholics and non-Catholics.

Sexual Identity and Identification: RCWP’s Non-Celibate Bodies

RCWP’s practice of ordaining married and “out” lesbian women is one of the most transgressive things the movement does. The group’s rejection of mandatory celibacy also aligns the movement with scores of progressive Catholics whose vision for priesthood reform often starts with the option of a married clergy. RCWP’s women signal their non-celibate status in their ministries (among people they know and serve) and in their public personas (in online biographies and local news announcements of ordinations). And yet, as I explore in this section, although RCWP’s women are sexually transgressive in embracing non-celibacy within a priesthood context, many are quite sexually traditional in terms of Catholic gender roles.⁴³

The womenpriests’ public biographies yield information about the women’s sexuality and sexual identities, performing their sexuality in particular ways. Like hagiographies depicting the lives of early saints or conversion narratives explaining one’s path to God, womenpriests’ bios fall into particular patterns. Themes arise; language shapes; a typology of “womanpriest” arises. As I investigated in Chapter 4, womenpriests’ biographical information tends to emphasize education and career backgrounds; some women will also describe feeling called to

⁴³ My analysis in this section draws primarily upon my reading and interpretation of the women’s public sexual identities, as obtained from websites, newsarticles, and public interviews. I am thinking about the public performance of sexuality, advertent and inadvertent.⁴³ By approaching gender as a performance, and by thinking about a female priesthood as needing to be performed and constituted (as it is almost entirely brand-new in Roman Catholicism), I look to public expressions of sexuality alongside priesthood. When relevant, I will add information that cannot be gleaned from public statements, as a way of juxtaposing what womenpriests reveal to particular audiences and what they do not. To be sure, my research has not involved in-depth interviews around womenpriests’ sexual practices or preferences. On the few occasions when I felt comfortable asking about such things, I sensed the women were surprised that I would probe any connections between priesthood and sexuality. I wonder also whether the women are fairly sexually conservative, as Catholics are often raised to be and as women of a certain generation often are. One woman suggested to me that, if I wanted to talk about sexuality, I would best begin by asking her fellow womenpriests about gender and genderedness. This, she implied, might segue into my interests in non-celibate women priests.

priesthood from an early age or hearing the Holy Spirit summon them in adulthood. In addition, the vast majority of women provide clues to their own sexual histories, whether directly or indirectly. They do this by mentioning their husbands; by listing numbers of children and grandchildren; by identifying themselves as divorced, or as “single” with children, or as widowed; or by calling themselves a “lesbian” or using the word “partner” followed by a female name to mark themselves as lesbians.⁴⁴ Thus, anyone seeking information about individual womenpriests would likely learn from their bios something about the women’s sexual bodies.⁴⁵ Several ordained women who are divorced, widowed, lesbian, or mothers and grandmothers do *not* give such information in their biographies, to be sure. But the general bounty of information about the women’s partners and families is, both directly and indirectly, information about their sexual selves. The women’s public personas, then, become that of priests with sexual histories. Most significantly, these are sexual histories that sometimes deviate from but more often coincide with Church teaching about women’s sexuality.

In talking about their roles as mothers, womenpriests intimate that “priesthood” and “*motherhood*” can become linked. As I argued in Chapter 5, the women depict themselves as having life experiences that—in their minds—naturally extend to ordained ministry. To identify oneself as a wife, mother, or divorcee is a way for womenpriests to signal a connection and an understanding with the people they serve. Instead of just seeing a priest as “Father,” womenpriests invite consideration of “Mother.” Although to be clear, RCWP’s women do not take the title “Mother” (and in fact reject most titles, opting to be called by their first names or,

⁴⁴ Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “Ordained,” Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>. The number of women who mention husbands, children, and grandchildren are multifold. Roberta Meehan identifies herself as divorced; Mary Ann Schoettly and Mary Styne are single with children; Genevieve Beney and Juanita Cordero are widowed; and Cheryl Bristol says she is a lesbian, while Janine Denomme’s and Judy Lee’s biographies mention female “partners.”

⁴⁵ I do not suggest that RCWP’s women are intentionally communicating about their sexuality when they list this kind of information.

sometimes, “Reverend”), womenpriests insert a maternal physicality into the Roman Catholic priesthood, by the fact of being embodied female and, in some cases, mothers. As a seventh grader, Kathleen Kunster told her parish priest that she had a vocation to the priesthood. He responded that women could not be priests because they could not be a “father to the people.” Kunster thought to herself, “I can be a mother to the people.”⁴⁶ Now an ordained woman, Kunster reports in her bio that she is a mother (to one daughter), and grandmother (to four), and a great-grandmother (to two). As a priest who is a mother, Kunster and many of her fellow womenpriests bring mothering into Catholic pastoring. Pope John Paul II acknowledged the importance of maternal qualities in the priesthood with “Holy Thursday Letter to Priests” in 1988. There, he heralded the maternal qualities of the (all-male) priesthood and held up Mary—the Mother of Jesus—as the model. Speaking to priests about their role in “the Church’s motherhood,” he wrote, “if each of us [ordained men] lives the equivalent of this spiritual motherhood in a manly way, namely as a ‘spiritual fatherhood,’ then Mary, as a ‘figure’ of the Church, has a part to play in this experience of ours.”⁴⁷ The Pope’s solution to combining motherhood and priesthood is to direct priests to see the maternal aspects of their ministry; Kunster and womenpriests, in contrast, insert motherhood into priesthood by themselves being mothers and/or by having female bodies that “read” as motherly. They self-consciously fashion themselves as maternal in their public performances of priesthood.

The links between the female body and motherhood are, according to Roman Catholic teaching, self-evident and spiritually directed. Thus, womenpriests who are wives and mothers, and who indicate these roles in their biographies, perform and complicate “correct” Catholic

⁴⁶ Kathleen Kunster, “Biography of a Priest,” in *Women Find a Way*, 152-54.

⁴⁷ Pope John Paul II, “Holy Thursday Letter to Priests” (March 25, 1988) www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents, 4. See also Deborah Halter, “Motherhood in a Manly Way,” *The Papal No.*, 74-5.

femaleness. As noted above, the Catholic Church and John Paul II especially have stressed a particular way of being both female and faithful, which involved being a wife and mother. John Paul II would talk about women's "female genius" to suggest that a woman's unique biological abilities extended to and dictated her ideal social and cultural contributions. Roman Catholic womenpriests are, by and large, married (or formerly married) with children (and grandchildren). They have, therefore, attained the womanly ideal as laid out by the Church. Perhaps these women who are now ordained through RCWP did, at earlier stages in their lives, imbibe the Church's teachings on female genderedness and sexuality—teachings that were largely reinforced by the surrounding culture. As such, these now-deviant womenpriests have performed and lived Roman Catholic teaching by marrying and having children. While they obeyed Catholic teaching and cultural messages regarding families, they now place greater emphasis on gender equality in the Church (re: priesthood) than on adhering to strict gender binaries. Many of the women make public the fact they are mothers and grandmother and are (or were) wives, and this shows that they have performed their sexuality "correctly," in the Roman Catholic calculus. Where they break from gendered and sexual correctness is in breaking Canon Law 1024 and becoming ordained.

A pressing question must be considered: have the womenpriests shifted in their adherence to the Church's gender complementarity, or has their adherence taken on a different form? I would suggest that it is because of gender complementarity that many womenpriests believe it critically important for women to be ordained. The RCWP movement has invoked a statement from Sister Joan Chittister when countering Church statements banning women's ordination. Speaking about the importance of women's presence in the Church, Chittister said that without women, "We look at questions with one-half of the human brain, we make decisions with one-half of the human brain, we see with one eye and we stand on one leg, and

our decisions show it.” On the RCWP website, Chittister is referenced in RCWP’s “Response to Cardinal Rigali’s Statement on the Ordination of Women in Philadelphia”: “In refusing to recognize the priestly vocations of women, Sister Joan Chittister said quite accurately that the Roman Catholic Church forces itself to see with one eye, hear with one ear, and walk with one leg.”⁴⁸ These statements from progressive Catholic women can be interpreted as underscoring Church-sanctioned gender complementarity, with men bringing particular gifts and abilities to ministerial priesthood and women, alternatively, bringing different gifts and abilities. In this line of argument, women are needed in priesthood because priesthood needs women to give it fullness. This becomes an example of how RCWP’s women have imbibed some Catholic and cultural teachings about gender difference, thus reflecting the ways they perform and practice Catholic womanhood.

The example of Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger and her husband, Michael Mayr, is also instructive. Speaking about the need for ordained women, Mayr-Lumetzberger explained that women will “open the second eye of the male church.” Michael Mayr echoed something similar, saying that he misses the “motherly role” in the Church, as male priests cannot fulfill it. His marriage has taught him that one spouse is only half of the entity of human life: two are needed to make the whole. Mayr-Lumetzberger also used a marriage analogy. Asked about her love for the Church, she said she knows that most of the priests and bishops are very pious and faithful. But they need help getting to the future, and Mayr-Lumetzberger sees RCWP as offering the Vatican a kind of marriage relationship. She explained that, in a marriage, the woman—the wife—has to take care of the relationship, prepare meals, and look out for the good of the

⁴⁸ “Obedience and Action,” *On Being with Krista Tippett*, American Public Media (October 4, 2007), <http://being.publicradio.org/programs/obedienceandaction/transcript.shtml>; Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “Response to Cardinal Rigali’s Statement on the Ordination of Women in Philadelphia,” Roman Catholic Womenpriests, April 26, 2009, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/response01.htm>.

marriage. Similarly, RCWP will help the Church: “They will not find it alone... We are the pathfinders and we give them ideas.”⁴⁹ Marriage language and imagery allows Mayr-Lumetzberger and her husband to argue for women’s ordination. RCWP’s women have not rejected Vatican teachings about gender and sexuality outright, but rather, have taken up these teachings and are now using them to form an argument. The Vatican and RCWP founding member Mayr-Lumetzberger agree that equality and gender complementarity can and do go hand-in-hand.

Then there are womenpriests who are not part of a gender-complimented pair, including celibate women and lesbians. Several womenpriests were consecrated women religious immediately before joining RCWP, and therefore these women presumably lived and (since they are not to my knowledge partnered) continue to live celibate lifestyles. Patricia Fresen, Suzanne Dunn, Jeanette Love, and Bridget Mary Meehan all were religious sisters before pursuing priesthood. If the model Catholic woman—Mary—is “virgin, wife, and mother,” these celibate women have adhered to Catholic teaching about women’s sexuality. Other women, however, and in intimate relationships with women and/or identify as lesbians. Janine Denomme was ordained to the priesthood in May 2010, just over a month before passing away. She is remembered “in memoriam” on the RCWP website, and she is described as the “cherished partner of Hon. Nancy Katz.” Judy Lee’s biography says “since 1989 she has lived with Judy Beaumont, her awe-inspiring partner.” Victoria Rue and her “partner” Kathryn Poethig celebrated their twenty years together with a marriage ceremony in 2008. Cheryl Bristol is “lesbian by birth, Catholic by choice, [and] called to the ministry for many years,” according to

⁴⁹ Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, interview, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.; Michael Mayr, interview, July 25, 2005, Jules Hart, *Pink Smoke*, Documentary Footage.. It must be noted that both Mayr-Lumetzberger and Mayr are native German speakers, and these interviews were conducted in English. It is possible they would have explained things a bit differently and used different words had they been using their native tongue.

her biography.⁵⁰ Bristol also has a son, and when I asked her what she feels she specifically brings to her ministry, she did not mention being a lesbian, but being a mother. Still, she admits that her sexual orientation shapes her attitudes, and since most people to whom she ministers knows she is a lesbian, she hopes this makes it easier for them to talk to her about LGBT issues. She critiques the Church's position on gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people as discrimination, and she says LGBT people need from a church what all people need: "a place to find inspiration to grow spiritually and a springboard from which to live out their faith." Now as an ordained womanpriest, Bristol has found her place in the Catholic Church, building her ministry upon her experiences as a mother and a lesbian.⁵¹

Not surprisingly, Roman Catholic Womenpriests rejects the Church's teaching on homosexuality—which is most simply defined as "love the sinner, hate the sin"⁵²—and publicizes its liturgical outreach to gay and lesbian Catholics. Many work with DignityUSA, which is a reform group promoting equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Catholics. Dignity argues that LGTB Catholics can and should be encouraged to live out their sexuality in ways consistent with Christ's teachings, i.e., in committed, monogamous partnerships.⁵³ Not unlike RCWP, Dignity's members often hold worship outside of Roman Catholic churches; moreover, priests who preside at Dignity's Eucharistic celebrations are sometimes outside the official Church, either as former or illegally ordained priests. RCWP's website advertises the fact that Eileen DiFranco is "the first woman priest to preside at Dignity, Philadelphia"; Regina

⁵⁰Roman Catholic Womenpriests, "Ordained," Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>.

⁵¹ Cheryl Bristol, email interview with author, June 1, 2011.

⁵² Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

⁵³ DignityUSA, "Statement of Position and Purpose," Dignity USA, www.dignityusa.org/purpose.

Nicolosi “celebrates Eucharist with Dignity and other small-faith communities”; Canadian womanpriest Linda Spear is President of Dignity, Montreal. Toni Tortorilla is a gay-rights activist who joined with a sympathetic priest in starting an outreach ministry to gays and lesbians in her home state of Oregon. And in 1988, nearly two decades before her ordination with RCWP, Victoria Rue con-celebrated Mass with an openly gay priest in conjunction with Dignity’s New York City chapter; Rue followed this with other LGBT outreach.⁵⁴ All told, RCWP’s publicized work with gay and lesbian Catholics signals the group’s concern for LGBT people in terms both spiritual and sexual. Instead of dismissing gays and lesbians’ rights to sexual intimacy with a partner—because they cannot marry sacramentally within the Church—RCWP’s support for Dignity and LGBT issues indicates a willingness to embrace homosexual Catholics as entire people, soul and body. Womenpriests’ own embodied presence at Eucharist alongside LGBT Catholics’ sexually distinct bodies performs a progressive Roman Catholicism.

Yet even when this support for LGTB Catholics is considered, there is still an element of heteronormativity and traditional gender identity being inscribed by and upon Roman Catholic womenpriests. As their biographies show, the majority of womenpriests have been married and have children. Other women have lived a celibate lifestyle as vowed women religious. The number of women who identify as lesbians or whose sexualities are not remarked upon in some way is significantly smaller. The implications of these connections between a type of sexuality and a progressive, female priesthood—especially as they are performed publicly—cannot be overlooked. When the majority of RCWP’s ordained women are heterosexual wives and mothers, and when a small but sizable number are former nuns, then RCWP participates in the constitution of a type of priesthood: a sexually traditional, heterosexual priesthood.

⁵⁴ Roman Catholic Womenpriests, “Ordained,” Roman Catholic Womenpriests, <http://romancatholicwomenpriests.org/ordained.htm>

The group is taking steps to reform the priesthood by including women, but RCWP is not yet “queering” the priesthood in terms of gender identity. Gender still matters. More specifically, traditional gender roles still matter. Although RCWP makes gender *roles* a focus of their activism, the group gives little attention to gender *identity*. RCWP’s public discourse does not complicate the notion of “woman”; rather, the group holds up a traditional idea of woman as capable of priesthood. She is a liberated and educated woman, to be sure, but she also fits into the triad of “virgin, wife, and mother” so often celebrated by the Church. Simply put, RCWP is transgressive in inserting a traditional woman—wife and mother, or celibate—into Catholic priesthood; RCWP is not transgressive when it comes to challenging gender binaries. By and large, the group sees men and women as having different gifts but equally able to express those gifts. Perhaps gender complementarity makes good sense as a stage in RCWP’s development. If the movement’s goal is to get women included in the priesthood, they would want to include “women” as women are traditionally understood in Roman Catholic thought. To skip that step and go straight to blurring gender boundaries and queering Catholic priesthood would be to overlook the priesthood potential of (traditional) Roman Catholic women altogether.

A Ministry of Female Presence

Marie Bouclin’s priesthood ministry is built around her experiences with women who have been abused by ordained Catholic men. Her 2006 book, *Seeking Wholeness: Women Dealing with Abuse of Power in the Catholic Church*, grew out of work for her Master of theology degree.⁵⁵ Speaking of her research, she explains, “Women who have suffered violence at the hands of a

⁵⁵ Marie Evans Bouclin, *Seeking Wholeness: Women Dealing with Abuse of Power in the Catholic Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006). Marie Bouclin is RCWP’s first Canadian bishop. She is married and has three adult children and two grandchildren.

priest know full well that as long as there are no women standing ‘in loco Christi’ at the altar, all women are at risk of being raped and exploited and harassed with impunity.”⁵⁶ In arguing for women’s ordination, and then in seeking ordination herself, Bouclin contends that an exclusively male body at the Eucharistic table prevents women who have been victimized by male priests from healing and reconciling with the Church. Bouclin’s own personal experiences connect her to the women she serves. She worked for her diocesan bishop as executive secretary and translator. In 1992, when she was cited by a local reporter as saying that the Church discriminates against women in employment practices, her bishop punished her for embarrassing the Church. He gave her the option of resigning or taking a demotion, whereby she would have no contact with the public. She accepted the demotion at first, but she explains that, after a month, she felt she “had no choice but to leave.”⁵⁷ News of her story spread, and women reached out to Bouclin in support. Many shared with her similar stories of discrimination and abuse of power. Bouclin’s ensuing work became a type of ministry built around healing and helping such women.

Amid the Roman Catholic sex abuse crisis, stories about abused children have commanded the most attention. Bouclin instead focuses upon two types of female adult victims: the first, women who have had sexual relationships with a pastor or spiritual advisor, and the second, women who worked for the Church but either were underpaid or unfairly dismissed. Bouclin considers both groups of women to be victims of “abuse,” i.e., the abuse of clerical power. Bouclin’s research revealed that these women struggle to place any blame upon the male priest(s) involved; rather, the women assume full responsibility themselves, which erects a barrier to healing. Bouclin elaborates:

⁵⁶ Marie Bouclin, “Call to Ministry: Binding the Wounds of Clergy Abuse,” in *Women Find a Way*, 48-54: 52.

⁵⁷ Bouclin, “Call to Ministry,” in *Women Find a Way*, 48.

These women were taught to believe that priests do not lie. Priests are invested with Holy Orders; they are therefore holy men. These women were taught that priests speak for God and act in God's name, and that only priests—always male—have been entrusted with the most sacred source of grace, the Eucharist. These women were taught that faith in God means unquestioning intellectual assent to unchallengeable beliefs, and that salvation hinges on obeying the teachings of the Church as transmitted by the priest.⁵⁸

For women victimized by Church employment practices, a priest's sacramental power translated to power in the workplace. For women sexually abused by priests, the sacrament of Holy Orders made the priest an inherently trustworthy figure, even if his actions seemed discordant. When priests are the sole dispensers of salvific grace, via the sacraments, a laywoman's relationship to her priest becomes immediately fraught, with power differentials on social and spiritual levels.

Bouclin sees the sexual abuse of women by priests as even more damaging, going beyond professional misconduct to the violation of a woman's body *and* soul. This form of abuse cuts right to a woman's Catholic identity and spiritual state. Bouclin elaborates, "For those of us who are given a glimpse into the hearts and souls of these women, we discover that these women have been sexually seduced, emotionally violated, and had their consciences raped."⁵⁹ Bouclin's work revealed a pattern of sexual abuse, in which a priest (perhaps a pastor or a spiritual director) would persuade a woman (already vulnerable, perhaps because of the death of her husband, problems in her marriage, or a history of abuse by violent men) to begin a sexual relationship with him. A woman would likely hear that the priest loved and needed her, that he alone knew and loved her, that a vow of celibacy did not prohibit sexual relations, that her soul would benefit from a physically intimate relationship with him. When the priest ended the relationship, she was left emotionally and spiritually bereft: a man who stood in the place of God, who was the conduit of sacramental grace, had used and abused her. What is more, an

⁵⁸ Bouclin, "Call to Ministry," in *Women Find a Way*, 51.

⁵⁹ Bouclin, "Call to Ministry," in *Women Find a Way*, 51.

abused woman would not be able to seek counsel within her church, as the institution would protect the priest and she would have no recourse.⁶⁰

Bouclin places some blame on Church teachings about women and priesthood. She asserts that because women cannot be ordained and thus do not have decision-making or sacramental power, women largely feel powerless to change their situation within Catholicism. Being a woman becomes less about performing an *action* and more about performing a *rhetorical construct*—a construct that historically casts women either as sexual objects (and temptresses) or as pliant children. Bouclin sees this as the Church’s “subtle ploy”: “overvaluing symbolic womanhood (in the form of Mary) and at the same time refusing to grant women full human status.”⁶¹ In stark contrast, ordained men, in her view, hold all power within the institutional Church. Priests make decisions, stand in for Christ, and enact God’s will on earth. Women cannot be priests; instead, women are taught to obey priests. Many laypersons develop an “uncritical reverence” for priests, which prevents them from seeing priests as capable of wrongdoing.⁶² In sum, teachings about women and about priests combine to give ordained men unilateral power over the former. Bouclin does not overlook other factors at play in this abuse. She concedes that abused women often manifest characteristics of co-dependency, whereby the women lack self-esteem, do not maintain strong personal boundaries, and find themselves seeking to please others. She also acknowledges that only a minority of priests would abuse their power in harmful ways. Still, she suggests that the Church’s patriarchal dominance is especially damaging for these vulnerable women who would more readily imbibe teachings about female

⁶⁰ Bouclin, “Call to Ministry,” in *Women Find a Way*; Bouclin, *Seeking Wholeness*.

⁶¹ Bouclin, *Seeking Wholeness*, 47.

⁶² Bouclin, *Seeking Wholeness*, “Chapter 3: Power and the Priesthood,” 22-40.

powerlessness and the need for an external *male* mediator to provide the grace needed for salvation.

For Bouclin, then, women need to minister to abused women because male ministers may reenforce female powerlessness or remind women of their abuser. Bouclin's research has shown that women who have been sexually abused by a priest often find the person of Jesus Christ frightening. Because priests stand in as Christ in Roman Catholic sacraments, any images of Christ may press upon an abused woman's vulnerability and woundedness. Bouclin suggests that a solution to this problem can come from allowing women ministers, women *priests*. To date, male priests dominate the role of Christ on earth. In Bouclin's mind, "The wounded women of the Roman Catholic Church need ministers who will come to them *in persona Christi*, with the love and compassion of Christ."⁶³ Womenpriests can deliver this love and compassion to wounded women, first and foremost because they are not men.

Bouclin's concern here comes down to a theology of the spiritual care of abused women. Women who have been abused within the Church are less likely to trust spiritual comfort at the hands of a male priest who represents the institutional Church. Moreover, Bouclin attests that women who accuse priests of abuse are less likely to be believed so long as there are no women in the Church's power structures. She takes the Protestant example as instructive here: it was not until Protestant churches began ordaining women that accusations of clergy sex abuse were readily believed.⁶⁴ All the more important, then, that women like RCWP's seek ordination. When Bouclin herself discerned a call to priesthood, she believed God wanted her to minister to these

⁶³ Bouclin, "Call to Ministry," in *Women Find a Way*, 52.

⁶⁴ Bouclin credits Reverend Dr. Marie Fortune of the FaithTrust Institute for providing this information. Bouclin, "Call to Ministry," in *Women Find a Way*, 50.

vulnerable women who had been abused or exploited by ordained men.⁶⁵ She admits such ministry is incredibly challenging, and she asks herself, “Can I possibly model a different kind of priestly, Christ-like presence?”⁶⁶ Her work with abused women tells her that it is imperative that she does so.

If we revisit the previous section’s analysis considering the ways RCWP tends to take on and not challenge traditional gender roles, we see that there is something significant here about *being* female. For women abused by male priests, the male priest’s body becomes inscribed with damaging power displays, whereas a female priest’s body can become inscribed with pastoral care and empowerment. The divide between male and female bodies is important because it is important to abuse victims like the ones Bouclin has served. Whereas the Church teaches that only the male body may be a priest and hold sacramental power, Bouclin’s experiences teach that male bodies may be barriers to some Catholics’ spiritual growth. Bouclin’s work suggests that if the Church is to nurture the souls of spiritually damaged individuals, it needs to consider female priests—who have female bodies—as conduits for sacramental grace. Bouclin’s example underscores how the perceived differences between male and female bodies—and between male and female priests—may allow for (women)priests to minister and sacramentally serve people who otherwise would suffer from a damaged relationship with God and the Church. When male bodies abuse, womenpriests’ bodies can empathize, emulate Christ, and extend sacramental influence.

Theologizing Biology: Deconstructing the Male-Female Dichotomy

⁶⁵ Bouclin, email interview with author, April 26 and 27, 2011.

⁶⁶ Bouclin, “Call to Ministry,” in *Women Find a Way*, 51-2.

Thus far in this chapter, I have shown how RCWP's women tend to adopt and extend traditional gender roles. The transgressiveness of RCWP's actions comes not from destabilizing gender, but from inserting women/female bodies into the Catholic priesthood. Womanpriest Roberta Meehan, however, offers a counter example. Meehan is a biologist who has taught at the university level and written a number of science textbooks. One of her current passions is "biotheology": she seeks to combine biology with theology as she demands that the Church re-examine its male-only priesthood. She has written a document titled "Biology for Theologians: A Scientific Look at Male-Only Ordination," and she is looking to expand this research and extend her argument. Though the language in her article occasionally becomes technical, Meehan has a specific audience in mind and wrote this document in a way she hoped "any bishop could understand."⁶⁷ In this article, Meehan asks questions that would sound familiar to students of cultural theory: what is male? What is gender? What is sexual identity?⁶⁸ Meehan's public protest against Canon 1024 draws on her own expertise with biology, which she combines with theological questions. She challenges the Church to explain how it differentiates between male bodies and female bodies.

Canon Law 1024 states plainly, "Only a baptized male validly receives sacred ordination." But, Meehan argues, there is nothing straightforward about this dictum. What is "male," she asks, and what makes "maleness" essential for ordination? She critiques the Church for using the term "male" in a way that implies common knowledge, yet the Church has not defined "male" biologically and, in fact, seems unaware of recent biological findings related to sex and gender. The Church posits a strict male/female dichotomy, whereas biology today does

⁶⁷ Roberta Meehan, telephone interview with author, April 10 and 14, 2011.

⁶⁸ Roberta Meehan, telephone interview with author, April 10 and 14, 2011.

not. This is not surprising given the Church's origins in western philosophy (and Aristotle's hierarchical distinction between male and female) and medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas's emphasis on women as "defective" males. But scientific understanding of sex and gender has evolved significantly since then, and because Church teaching on male and female stems from what Meehan calls a "false" scientific premise, the conclusions stemming from that premise are automatically invalid.⁶⁹

Meehan calls her response the "polydimensional-continuum theory," which unpacks terminology and problematizes simple gender binaries. She lays out the biologically distinct but interrelated terms "sexuality," "gender," and "sex." Sexuality is conscious, subconscious, and unconscious and describes one's physical being and reproductive niche. Gender is a social manifestation of sexuality, connected both to physicality and culture; as such, gender cannot be essentially defined. Sex is a physical manifestation of sexuality that is both internal *and* external. Historically, an individual's sexual identity has been determined based upon "gross observation of the external genitalia." Instead, Meehan contends that the *physical expression of sex* is part of a polydimensional continuum. Meehan identifies six dimensions that must be considered when determining sex: external genitalia, internal gonadal structure, chromosomal identity, genetic expression, nervous system response, and hormonal response. In short, genital visibility is not enough to determine whether one is male or female. Drawing upon biological research, Meehan explains that sometimes, a person appears male (based upon external genitalia) but has a female internal gonadal structure. The converse sometimes occurs. In terms of chromosomes, science has shown that the XX chromosome does not always indicate female, nor does XY indicate male. More important than chromosomal composition is the presence of the SRY (Sex

⁶⁹ Roberta Meehan, "Biology for Theologians: A Scientific Look at Male-Only Ordination," Womenpriests.org, <http://www.womenpriests.org/body/meehan2.asp>.

determining region of the Y chromosome) gene. Meehan also says that some people are “sexual mosaics,” are hermaphrodites, or do not have the standard number of chromosomes. Biological discoveries, then, make it difficult to say that male and female are mutually exclusive and essentially distinct.⁷⁰

Meehan carries these biological questions into the issue of male-only ordination. How can the Church define “male” as a theological category determining suitability for ordination if it has not addressed the question biologically? Given that much of this biological information is recent, what would the Church say about ordained persons who are externally male but have female internal gonadal structures? Would this person be “validly” ordained? Conversely, Meehan posits it likely that individuals with female external structures and male gonadal structures have been denied ordination. What of those people? With these questions in mind, Meehan asks the Church what criterion it will use in the future to determine maleness or femaleness; she then asks the Church to explain *why* that criterion and not others. Meehan states that a physical requirement for ordination could well come down to the SRY gene, which is one piece of DNA. Becoming increasingly provocative, she then inquires whether any priest shown to not have that SRY gene must have his ordination invalidated. She concludes her article with a “call to the Church”: before the Church can continue its position of a male-only priesthood, it must define male and explain the criterion it uses to define male. If the Church fails to do so, it is guilty of faulty logic, i.e., not defining its terms. Moreover, she asserts ominously, should the Church neglect current biological research on sex and gender, it “could easily repeat the problems caused by the Galileo incident.”⁷¹ Thus, Meehan implies that the male-only priesthood

⁷⁰ Roberta Meehan, telephone interview with author, April 10 and 14, 2011.

⁷¹ Roberta Meehan, telephone interview with author, April 10 and 14, 2011.

could prove not only biologically untenable, but embarrassing for the Roman Catholic Church, given its problematic history with science.

Meehan explained to me that these biological arguments have everything to do with womenpriests, because by neglecting biology, the Church invalidates Canon 1024 altogether. Not only does biology suggest how difficult it is to define “male,” but the Church does not even attempt its own working definition of “male.” The Church then should not use “male” as a criterion for priesthood. “We are all the same!” Meehan exclaimed. “We have different expressions of [gender], but there is nothing that can define male or female.”⁷² Biologists have not even defined “male,” Meehan says. And culturally, there is nothing that can be said to be an exclusively “male trait” or “female trait” across all of time and space *except* for reproduction.

Meehan agrees that men and women are different—but she does not see those differences as biological. As a way of offering an illustrative example, she explained that biologists do not tend to believe in race, but she does see differences between different “racial groups”—owing to culture and not to biology. She sees a need for womenpriests because she believes Catholicism needs different types of people who can address different needs in society. “Do we need women priests? Yes! We need priests of all types.” She then added with a laugh, “I think that if we had everybody being welcomed to discern vocation to the priesthood, we would end up with a good cross-section of people, male and female—and maybe even a few Martians, I don’t know!—who all could relate to different people.”⁷³ In terms of including women in the priesthood, Meehan is concerned both with biological accuracy and honoring individuals’ calls to serve in distinctive ways. As a biologist and theologian, Meehan rejects the Church’s teaching on

⁷² Roberta Meehan, telephone interview with author, April 10 and 14, 2011.

⁷³ Roberta Meehan, telephone interview with author, April 10 and 14, 2011.

gender complementarity. She knows that some of her fellow womenpriests accept it and use it to argue for women's ordination, but she points out that not every ordained woman shares her scientific background. Meehan seems most concerned with an acknowledgement of human difference, not *between* groups (e.g., male versus female, black versus white) but *within* groups; these differences need not divide but can expand ministerial opportunities. The more diversity that exists within the priesthood, the more people who can be served.

RCWP's women likewise hold very different ideas *within* their group about what it means to be female, to have a woman's body, to be a *womanpriest*. Meehan represents one end of that spectrum. Like the majority of womenpriests, she acknowledges and embraces differences between genders. Meehan, however, explicitly locates those differences in social, cultural expressions and expectations, and not in gender essentialism. To Meehan's mind, the Church does not understand biological categories; what is more, the Church uses loaded terms like "male" and "female," "man" and "woman" in uncritical, unreflective ways. Meehan's "Biology for Theologians" does not even accuse the Church of gender essentialism: her critique cuts even deeper as she says the Church does not understand the biology behind the terms it uses regularly—terms that invite one group to priesthood while prohibiting another group from ordination. If material bodies are the reason women cannot be ordained—whether because of Jesus's (presumed to be) male body, the (presumably) male bodies of the Twelve, or the fact that women bodies are not the same as male bodies—Meehan's argument shows why the Church must consider biological materiality before she and other scientists are convinced.

Concluding Thoughts and Lingering Questions

With bodies as with ordinations, sacraments, and ministries, RCWP again rests at the intersection of tradition and transgression. At times RCWP engages in gender normalizing

practices, and at other times, the group engages in queering practices. In normalizing terms, many of RCWP's women subscribe to the notion that men and women are inherently different, and some of their arguments for women's ordination rest upon essential gender difference. In this way, the group underscores a form of gender complementarity—which is currently the foundational Catholic teaching about gender—and contends men and women bring distinct gifts and abilities to the ministerial priesthood. In contrast, in transgressive terms, womenpriests are seeking to overturn those understandings of male-female difference that profess “maleness” as essential for priesthood. Here, womenpriests echo decades of Christian feminism and cite Galatians 3:28: “In Jesus Christ, there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free.” In this formation, gender does *not* matter, because Christ has made gender distinctions moot. This RCWP intersection of tradition and transgression, then, holds an undeniable tension: sometimes gender is irrelevant to priesthood, but sometimes the female gender is an important difference that must be brought to priesthood.

It is important to remember, however, that the Church's position on gender holds its own inconsistencies. For Vatican leaders like Pope John Paul II to extol the virtues of “feminine genius” while simultaneously affirming a male-only priesthood seems to deny the Church the benefits of a distinct, coexisting male *and* female sacramental and ministerial priesthood. By extension, it makes sense that RCWP's women—who have been inculcated with Catholic gender complementarity and particular experiences as twentieth-century Western women—would find themselves arguing simultaneously for gender essentialism and gender neutrality. Their own experiences bar them from strict black-and-white, either-or thinking, whether it is Roberta Meehan using biology to deconstruct gender binaries or Marie Bouclin affirming a woman's ability to minister in ways men cannot. As Gloria Carpeneto told me, she hesitates to subscribe to gender essentialism, but she does think women—like all people “on the margins” (to harken

back to Chapter 4)—bring a “certain experience” that informs their perspective.⁷⁴ The womenpriests acknowledge the cultural and social constructedness of some gender norms, but they also see themselves as possessing some distinctly “female” traits. The value lies in womenpriests’ ability to do things male priests do, but in distinctly female ways. Perhaps, then, RCWP’s position is less about ambiguity and more about real-life navigation of complex religious and cultural issues.

RCWP’s activism also hinges on a difference between male and female. Given that the Roman Catholic Church’s ban on women priests rests upon the argument that women are not “male” and only males can receive baptism, it becomes imperative for RCWP’s performed priesthood to include bodies marked as female. Janice Sevre-Duszynska’s protest against the male-only priesthood achieved poignancy in large part because of Sevre-Duszynska’s own small-framed, *female* body, dressed in simple priestly garments, standing beside ornately vested, larger-statured *male* bodies. Marie Bouclin’s ministry to victims of priest abuse starts from the premise that some Catholics who would respond negatively to the male priestly body would find spiritual and sacramental comfort from a priest with a female body. To reiterate Bishop Regina Nicolosi’s argument in favor of ordaining womenpriests, it is worth going *contra legem* because that brings “a woman’s body up on the altar.” For RCWP, to include women in traditional Catholic priesthood demands reforming that priesthood, keeping some elements of tradition while infusing it with innovation. If RCWP is going to change the priesthood, it must create an environment within Catholicism that is prepared to accept a range of gendered bodies—and not simply *male* bodies—in the role of priest, *in persona Christi*.

⁷⁴ Gloria Carpentero, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2011.

Because this Christological modeling and representation is so important to RCWP, questions about womenpriests' bodies must come back to theology. Notice how the women connect their embodied activism to theological concerns: Janice Sevre-Duszynska talks about her priesthood alongside incarnational theology; Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger links female priesthood with theological anthropology; Marie Bouclin sees a woman's priestly presence as offering theological healing; and Roberta Meehan's "biology for theologians" proposes the validity of a gendered female in the priestly role. Theology stands at the heart of the women's concerns. When a woman's body stands at the altar *in persona Christi*, she emulates the divine in ways that only men have. Andrea Johnson has written that she was motivated to pursue priesthood because of her "deep sense that the only voice, the only face of God that was being experienced by Catholic believers at liturgy was that of a male. My experience...impressed upon me the hunger that people felt for a feminine face and voice of God."⁷⁵ Johnson has drawn upon her own experience—as an American Catholic female born in the twentieth century—to think theologically about the need for gender equality within priesthood. Womenpriests are motivated by theological considerations and their own spiritual search for God: a God who speaks to them as women.

To include the female body in priesthood is, for RCWP's women, to communicate women's divinity. In the experiences of many womenpriests, all too often, a female body is an impediment to holiness. Rose Marie Hudson recalls feeling disadvantaged as a child because she was a girl; she could outplay her male classmates, but she could not be on the boys' sports teams because she was female.⁷⁶ Eileen DiFranco holds similar memories. She was a tomboy but faced

⁷⁵ Andrea Johnson, "How Could I Not Do This?" in *Women Find a Way*, 65.

⁷⁶ Rose Marie Dunn Hudson, "I Think I See a Priest," in *Women Find a Way*, 102-7: 103.

limits on what she could be, do, and wear.⁷⁷ Reflecting upon her interview with Regina Nicolosi, and specifically Nicolosi's comments about the Church's resistance to sexuality, Mary Frances Smith writes, "For the hierarchy, it seems, it's the female body that is the barrier to the acceptance of the value of female intellect."⁷⁸ The womenpriests' stories invariably connect their struggles for social acceptance to a lack of female divine imagery within their religious faith. As a result, womenpriests seek to make women's bodies a vehicle to the sacred.

One recurring theme in womenpriests' discourse about theology and female embodiment is *birthing*. Olivia Doku uses birthing language to describe RCWP's vision of a reformed priesthood. She writes, "I do not believe that a more feminist model [of priesthood] simply can be superimposed over the current patriarchal model. Rather, I believe a new model of priesthood is being birthed."⁷⁹ Gloria Carpeneto places importance upon the fact that a woman *can*, physiologically, give birth, whether or not she is a mother. Carpeneto sees an element of mystery within the female body, specifically an inability to control the reproductive processes of menstruation or gestation. Yet for Carpeneto, there is something wondrously divine within that physiological mystery.⁸⁰ Marie David also thinks a lot about birth metaphors when describing her priesthood. She understands her ministries and her worship community as being in a "process of birth." Once while meditating, she was working with clay, and she asked God for an image that would show her God's presence. David proceeded to sculpt a pregnant woman, hands on her belly, about to give birth. She explained that this image works because "God needs us to co-create, and God is all powerful!" When giving birth, a woman needs to know when to push, when to hold, and when to celebrate. These stages are like those through

⁷⁷ Eileen DiFranco, "A *Contra Legem* Life," in *Women Find a Way*, 56-7.

⁷⁸ Mary Frances Smith, "An Interview with Regina Nicolosi," in *Women Find a Way*, 133-38: 137-38.

⁷⁹ Olivia Doku, "From Resentment to Peace," in *Women Find a Way*, 146.

⁸⁰ Gloria Carpeneto, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2011.

which David, her community, and RCWP have gone. The analogy of giving birth, then, provides a window to the holy, a communication with God, an expression of divine mystery. The material, biological female body—i.e., women’s distinctive role in reproduction—becomes sacralized.

Perhaps, then, RCWP’s approach to the problem of women’s ordination is the right one for this moment: simply, women must be ordained. That is to say, women—with women’s bodies, feminine features, and common female experiences—must be permitted to stand *in persona Christi*, to make sacramental gestures, and to emulate the divine.⁸¹

In a very real sense, RCWP is separating “male” from “priest.” Because the “Roman Catholic priest” identity is so strongly engrained in the cultural imagination, any intervention that unsettles that long-held identity becomes a viable form of resistance. Butler has recommended parody as a way of dismantling gender identity; drag is an example. Yet parody is not an option for RCWP’s women. Parody implies imitation with the intent to mock, trivialize, or make humorous, and RCWP has no intention of mocking, trivializing, or taking lightly the Roman Catholic priesthood.⁸² Without question, RCWP approaches its ordinations, sacraments, and

⁸¹ And what of contemporary cultural theory? RCWP holds an intriguing position to gender and bodies vis-à-vis cultural theory like Judith Butler’s. Butler rejects the kinds of biologically determinative moves that RCWP’s women make. Where some of RCWP’s women would contend that their differences *as* women make them suitable for priesthood in ways distinct from men, Butler would respond that cultural conventions have so inscribed bodies that gender and sex *seem* natural but are, in fact, cultural constructions. Butler has been critiqued for making untenable the claims of some social activists, including feminists. When subjectivity is not innate but rather discursively produced (as Butler argues), political programs that start with a premise of human agency are undermined. Positions like those held by many 1960’s and 1970’s feminists become unhinged. Still, Butler leaves opportunities for resistance. Even though Butler removes an individual’s subjectivity and bodily materiality, she champions resistance via the performance effects of signification. The political aim becomes not a matter of emphasizing, for example, that women are so different from men that their presence would enrich the Roman Catholic priesthood, but rather becomes a matter of destabilizing altogether the *identity* of Roman Catholic priest—an identity often connected solely to the priest’s male gender.

⁸² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence is a fitting example of a group that uses drag parody to trouble gender identity and heteronormativity. This activist queer group often features gay men dressing as Catholic nuns in full habit. See the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence website, www.thesisters.org.

ministries with reverence and earnestness. So what RCWP does, in terms of resistance and in lieu of parody, is perform a female-centered priesthood. Doing so exposes the limitations of the “male priest,” not because a male priest can be seen as a cultural construct, but because he does not and cannot offer the same pastoring potential that women offer. In short, RCWP is not queering the priesthood by removing gender from the equation, but the group *is* queering the priesthood by troubling and unsettling the (gendered) identity of the Roman Catholic priest.

RCWP may go only so far in disassembling gender binaries, but this is understandable given the group’s location within Roman Catholicism and alongside second-wave feminism. Most at stake for RCWP’s women—in addition to gender equality and the opportunity to live out one’s call—is theology. Who is God? Does God have a gender? What is God’s relationship to different genders? While RCWP may not be challenging male-female difference, the group is challenging Roman Catholicism’s male-only divinity. The group will not deny that Jesus was male or that he spoke about God as “Father.” But RCWP will argue that Jesus’s own maleness does not preclude females from standing and acting *in persona Christi*, nor does using “Father” to describe God preclude God’s divine feminine aspects. Womenpriests modify the “Our Father” prayer to say “Our Mother/Our Father”; womenpriests sometimes write “God” as “Godde,” changing not the pronunciation but feminizing the spelling; womenpriests will imagine the Holy Spirit as “Wisdom Sophia.” Coming from the mouths of *women* embodying the priestly role, these theological modifications take on greater meaning. And so, although RCWP is not unraveling the gender binaries of material, human bodies, the group is forcing a queered, non-gendered Divine.

CONCLUSION:

RCWP'S PERFORMED PRIESTHOOD

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that RCWP's process of actualization and the womenpriests' personal processes toward priesthood demand a negotiation of tradition and transgression. RCWP's guiding strategy seeks to reform the Catholic priesthood while maintaining the sacred and sacramental aspects of Roman Catholicism. As the RCWP example shows, there is no simply way to be "both/and"—*both* traditionally Roman Catholic *and* transgressively innovative. As a result, the movement and the womenpriests have to discover ways to retain Roman Catholic tradition—so that they can still claim to be *Roman* Catholic—while transgressing Canon Law and the Vatican's insistence on an all-male priesthood. Likewise, RCWP and its womenpriests have to uncover avenues for resistance and transgression—so that they can claim a "valid if illegal" Roman Catholic priesthood—while maintaining those aspects of tradition that they love and that their congregants see as distinctly Roman Catholic. What RCWP does, then, I call "transgressive traditions": the group is transgressing traditional Roman Catholic teaching, to be sure, but simultaneously retaining certain Catholic traditions so as to claim legitimacy and perform legitimately.

RCWP is charting new territory on the contemporary Catholic landscape. There is no discernable line between transgression and tradition, and so RCWP's navigation demands constant negotiation and renegotiation. The hierarchical Church does not provide tutorials for attaining faith-filled, Church-wide change. That the Vatican has declared all of RCWP's women

excommunicated *latae sententiae* reveals just how unwelcome and provocative RCWP's actions are. That some Catholic feminists have disdained RCWP's efforts reveals just how fraught the road to reform can be. Thus by necessity, RCWP's evolution reveals constant movement between the poles of tradition and transgression. If the group strays too far in one direction, it gets dismissed as something completely "other" than Roman Catholicism; if it strays too far in the other direction, it fails to reform the priesthood and instead becomes an instance of "add women and stir." There is no measurable way to determine when RCWP becomes something that is "not Roman Catholic." Certainly, some critics—the Vatican included—would point out that the moment the women seek ordination using the Roman rite, they have put themselves outside of the Church and ceased being Roman Catholic. Similarly, there is no way to know when a reform movement like RCWP has reformed "enough," when they have sufficiently modeled a reimagined priesthood. In this way, other critics—such as those feminists who see RCWP as too traditional in its enactment of Catholic priesthood—would suggest that the moment womenpriests replicate patriarchally constructed sacramental gestures and embodied performances, they have failed to reform. To be sure, charting new territory means having no road maps to follow.

And yet even without road maps, and amid constant experimentation and innovation, patterns have emerged in RCWP's performed female priesthood. This dissertation has looked at the ways RCWP straddles tradition and transgression in the history of women's ordination efforts, ordination ceremonies, sacraments, ministries, and embodied action. It is worth briefly revisiting some of those ways RCWP retains Roman Catholic tradition while transgressing Catholic authoritative structures. First, RCWP places great emphasis on apostolic succession. From the movement's early days, the Danube Seven wanted to ensure that their ordination stood validly in this apostolic lineage. While RCWP acknowledges that apostolic tradition may

be modified in the future (and, in fact, has already been modified at womanpriest Jane Via's Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community in San Diego, CA), for now apostolic succession signals RCWP's ordained legitimacy. Second, RCWP's women place emphasis on the seven Catholic sacraments, yet they offer new models of clergy-lay stratification within those sacraments. While RCWP—like the Roman Catholic Church—heralds the Eucharist as the most august of all sacraments, it offers *concelebration* of the Eucharist, where the priest *and* the lay congregation transform bread and wine into body and blood. In another transgressive move, RCWP has eliminated mandatory celibacy. Yet the group is quick to emphasize that this is not entirely innovative within Catholic history; instead, they argue, there was no mandatory celibacy in the early Christian centuries. Moreover, RCWP's modification re: celibacy can be reframed as a way of ensuring a continuation of Catholic tradition (i.e., sacraments, liturgies, and ministries) amid declining vocations and growing Catholic populations. In this way, one tradition (celibacy, codified in the eleventh century) is set aside so the (more important, in RCWP's view) Catholic sacramental tradition can continue into the twenty-first century. Likewise, RCWP values the person of the Catholic priest but wants to sever the connection between institutional dictates and priestly salaries. Thus, RCWP's women are worker priests, supporting themselves through careers, retirement accounts, or donations; they are not dependent upon a Church system that pays their bills while demanding their obedience. In a final example, RCWP's women keep some traditional priestly dress, as most women will wear vestments—however casually—while presiding at sacraments. They keep the familiar visual image, then, in their performance of priesthood, and they add women's visages to a formerly all-male picture. And yet, because they equate formal vestments with clerical power, RCWP's women tend to wear understated dress.

I conclude, then, that RCWP seeks to retain aspects of Roman Catholicism that helps them argue for legitimacy while at the same time eschewing aspects of traditional Catholicism

that smack of clericalism and lay subordination. Here, RCWP's varied motivations find friction: the group wants to ordain women to the priesthood that men have enjoyed for two thousand years. Yet the group also wants to reform this priesthood and not simply adopt it as is. This means that sometimes RCWP denies priesthood power (i.e., the power that male priests currently enjoy) before fully claiming it as their—as *women's*—own. I offered two sacramental examples: some women say they do not think any priest receives an “indelible mark” at ordination; some also say that nothing magical/supernatural happens at the moment of eucharistic consecration. In rejecting this Catholic sacramental specialness (and thus modeling a reformed priesthood), the womenpriests downplay clerical power yet preclude women from enjoying the power male priests claim. Still, and running counter to this example, sometimes RCWP replicates power differences between laity and clergy without fully offering a reformed and more egalitarian priesthood. At the 2006 Pittsburg ordination, women's ordination advocates participating in the liturgy read RCWP's Eucharistic actions as being of “the same priestly caste.” As a cluster of womenpriests surrounded the altar table, blessing the Eucharist, some read this gesture as an affirmation of clerical power. Thus, by emulating Catholic sacramental spectacle and allowing women to perform familiar priestly gestures (and therefore presenting themselves as legitimately ordained), the womenpriests look like priests but fail to convince potential supporters that they are reforming and reimagining Catholic priesthood.

Why does this tension matter? What does this apparent ambivalence tell us about Catholic reform efforts and the challenges of adding women *contra legem* to the Catholic priesthood? Quite simply, it shows the very significant challenges of inserting women into a system that is not only hierarchical and sacramental, but also laced with sacred mystery and supernatural power. Roman Catholicism is distinctive because the Church is an essential mediator between the believer and the divine. *How* the Church mediates is through Christ's

sacramental presence. How the sacraments bestow grace is a matter of faith—faith in a mysterious and supernatural process. RCWP is distinctive not only because it seeks to place women into priesthood structures, but because it simultaneously distances itself from the kinds of power moves that allow priests to claim sacramental specialness. RCWP simply cannot reform Catholic priesthood without reforming Catholic sacramental economy and priestly persona. So far, the group has consciously worked to insert women into priesthood but has been much less deliberate about reframing and repackaging Catholic sacraments and sacred mystery.

To transgress and transform the priesthood while retaining parts of Catholic tradition is an undeniably challenging task, as RCWP is discovering, and two qualifications must be made. The first: As the sole movement ordaining Roman Catholic women within a purportedly *Roman* Catholic tradition, Roman Catholic Womenpriests is forced to be all things for all ordinands. Whereas the 2000-year old Roman Catholic Church has developed a multitude of religious orders for individuals seeking a consecrated or ordained vocation, RCWP is the lone group that claims to ordain women within a Roman Catholic lineage. It is no surprise, then, that diversity exists within RCWP. In a relatively small group of about 125 women worldwide, one finds women with a variety of ways of being Catholic. RCWP accepts women who are extremely theologically progressive, women who are drawn to mysticism, and women whose theological orientation is more traditional. RCWP attracts women who celebrate the conventional hallmarks of Catholic worship, such as incense, stained-glass, and the rosary, as well as women who are inclined to leave much of that behind. RCWP offers a space for those women who enjoy donning vestments and the Roman collar and those women who dress as simply as possible. RCWP draws women who want nothing more than to live out a Roman Catholic priesthood vocation, and RCWP draws women who feel called to help guide the Church toward a reformed

priesthood. Diversity within RCWP should not surprise us, even as this diversity makes RCWP's reform efforts more muddled.

What is illuminating about this diversity is that so many women—with diverse backgrounds, with different motivations for wanting to change the priesthood, with various familial and personal commitments—see in RCWP a vehicle for hope, transformation, and community. RCWP's women have in mind a multitude of audiences, people and institutions they hope can and will be affected and converted as a result of their ordained ministries. Some womenpriests think primarily about the Vatican; others think about Catholics in the pews, those who want a reformed priesthood and those who have not yet imagined what a reformed priesthood might be; still others think about future generations of women and girls who might feel called to priesthood but would otherwise have no avenue toward ordination. And yet despite these myriad imagined audiences, RCWP's women find in the RCWP movement the ability to speak to a range of individuals, those sympathetic to their actions, those unaware of or unconvinced by their actions, and those horrified because of their actions. Again, at this stage in its development, RCWP must be all things for all people.

A second qualification pertains to RCWP's pragmatic efforts alongside its political ones. As much as RCWP longs to transform contemporary Catholic priesthood, the movement aims primarily at pastoral work. That is to say, the womenpriests seek to influence first the lives of on-the-ground Catholic believers, and only second the institutional Church. Bishop Andrea Johnson knows about the theoretical and theological debates rumbling amid RCWP's actions, but she explains, “We don't have the time, energy, or inclination to get involved in [those] debates. *We are about pastoral ministry.*”¹ Womanpriest Jane Via agrees with Elisabeth Schussler

¹ Andrea Johnson, telephone interview with author, May 11, 2011.

Fiorenza that ordination is problematic, but she believes that, practically speaking, “women’s ordination is one way to provoke that transition [from a purely patriarchal structure into an inclusive discipleship of equals].” Via added with a nod to RCWP’s impact: “In just seven years, the RCWP movement in the U.S. has had a bigger impact on the institutional church than feminist theology has had in forty years.”² There is something to be said, then, for RCWP’s strategies. If the Vatican is responding to RCWP’s actions, even in dismissive anger, then, by their lights, *something* is working. Womanpriest Eileen DiFranco also hears and understands the criticisms RCWP receives, but she explains, “RCWP is basically a practical organization whose goal is to ordain women who will then model a new priesthood by forming egalitarian communities. How priests do that varies... We basically do the best we can, in the face of some serious difficulties.”³ In short, RCWP’s women know that they cannot do everything all at once, in part because the obstacles are so large and in part because theirs is a small movement. When it comes down to it, the womenpriests opt not for engaging academic discourse or theological treatises, but for performing a pragmatic, pastoral, priesthood ministry.

Scholarly Contributions

What does a rigorous case study of Catholic women’s religious innovation mean for various academic disciplines? I contend this project holds significance for the fields of Catholic studies, Religious studies, women’s studies, and performance studies.

² Jane Via, telephone interview with author, November 22, 2010.

³ Eileen DiFranco, email interview with author, January 4, 13, & 18, 2011.

In terms of Catholic Studies, this dissertation helps to break down the simple divide between liberal Catholics and conservative Catholics. I have shown that there is no tidy way to understand either contemporary Catholics or present-day Catholic reform movements. RCWP is certainly a reform group—and the women have various ways they want to see this reform take place—yet to “reform” the Church for RCWP does not mean to leave it and create a Catholic alternative. Instead, it means sticking with the Church, “validly but illegally,” keeping the “Roman” label, and trying to model a new way of being Roman Catholic and a new way of understanding the Roman Catholic priesthood. In thinking of historical analogs, one might look to the motivational differences between English groups coming to New England in the early 17th century: the Separatists wanted to separate from the Church altogether, to live in relative isolation and worship as they saw fit. The Puritans, in contrast, wanted to “purify” the Church, to be a “city on the hill,” a beacon heralding best practices and modeling (what Puritans understood to be) the best direction for reform. In this comparison, RCWP is the Puritans. The group is not ready to leave the Church altogether. Rather, as retaining the “Roman” adjective indicates, the group wants to change the Church from within, showing other Roman Catholics how a reformed church looks, feels, sounds, and worships. This means for RCWP retaining much traditional Catholicism. The group keeps those things it sees as traditionally and legitimately Roman Catholic. The group keeps historical precedents in view (as with the ordination banners of Bishop Theodora and the Apostle Junia) while acknowledging a Catholic history that has largely excluded women; the group looks to a future Roman Catholic Church (where women hold priesthood authority on par with men) while believing that only with *contra legem* efforts today can the Church reform tomorrow. If these tensions seem disingenuous at worst or conflicted at best, let me suggest that this ambivalence reveals something significant about contemporary Catholicism: the people who want to reform the Church—and who care

enough to brave excommunication and public debate—love deeply the Roman Catholic tradition. As womenpriest Monica Kilburn-Smith told me, “I have a loving rage and a raging love for the Catholic tradition.”⁴ Kilburn-Smith and her fellow womenpriests must and do hold these tensions in tandem. Unlike so many Catholic women who left the Church to be ordained in other (Protestant) traditions, RCWP’s women have *stayed*. And unlike Catholic women (and men) who do not try to challenge the Church on matters of disagreement, and who privately go against the hierarchy’s teachings (as with the issue of birth control), RCWP’s women publicly oppose the hierarchy with voice and body. RCWP must not be dismissed simply as a schismatic group turning away from the Church. Rather, RCWP’s actions and protest style reveal a cadre of Catholic women who deeply love Roman Catholicism: its traditions, liturgies, sacraments, and ministerial potential. That this love takes the form of deliberate disobedience says more, I contend, about contemporary Roman Catholic reform efforts than about 120 individual women seeking ordination through RCWP.

This study of RCWP also reveals religious reform processes and partnerships, specifically in the contemporary, North American context. RCWP is making a mark, however small, on twenty-first century Catholicism: the women’s automatic excommunication and the Church’s continued statements against women’s ordination since RCWP’s formation attests to this. Significantly, as I have shown in this dissertation, RCWP has gotten help from non-Catholics. In fact, RCWP relies heavily upon Protestant and Jewish groups. Women ordained in Protestant traditions have served as role models for RCWP’s aspiring priests; the Episcopalians’ Philadelphia Eleven offered RCWP’s Danube Seven a *modus operandi* for a “valid if illegal” women’s ordination ceremony; Protestant and Jewish churches have offered worship space for RCWP’s ordination ceremonies and weekly liturgies. Moreover, the public support from

⁴ Monica Kilburn-Smith, telephone interview with author, April 20, 2011.

interfaith groups—whether in hosting RCWP’s sacraments or processing in vestments at RCWP ordinations—communicates criticism of Roman Catholicism both implicitly and explicitly. Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist, and even Muslim support for womenpriests pushes deeper the question, “*why not* Catholic women’s ordination?”

I would further suggest there is some anti-Catholicism within these alliances between RCWP’s women and their vocal non-Catholic supporters. Specifically, when I use the term “anti-Catholicism,” I am thinking about an anti-clerical, anti-hierarchical sentiment that has characterized much tension between Catholics and non-Catholics on the North American landscape. Certainly, anti-Catholic efforts in American history (which were often connected to anti-immigrant sentiment as well as anti-Rome) have centered upon suspicion about papal power and the viability of a hierarchical Roman Catholicism within an American democratic framework. While American Catholics have undeniably entered the political, social, economic, and cultural mainstream since the mid-twentieth century, traces of anti-Catholic sentiment persist in the media, popular culture, and the (especially evangelical) Protestant mindset. Papal power, priests’ authority, sacramental centrality, and an emphasis on the Church as sacred mediator between the believer and God all contribute to present-day anti-Catholicism. RCWP’s existence—as well as the group’s determination to incite public debate and perform priesthood publicly—gives non-Roman Catholic religious groups a forum for challenging Roman Catholic authority while paradoxically supporting certain faith-filled Roman Catholics. These groups are not simply or tidily anti-Catholic since they are activists for the *Roman Catholic* Womenpriests movement. The institutional Church may suffer, then, from Protestant or non-Christian antagonism while RCWP benefits, but these non-Catholic groups *are* promoting RCWP’s women’s decision to remain Roman Catholic.

Questions around anti-Catholicism must be applied to RCWP's women as well. Despite being Roman Catholic, RCWP's women voice many quintessentially "anti-Catholic" criticisms in their pro-women's ordination protest. Like nativists and Know-Nothing activists of the mid-nineteenth century, and like media personalities crying out for Catholic reform in the wake of the ongoing Catholic sex-abuse crisis, RCWP's women criticize papal authority, sacramental mystery that elevates the priest above the laity, a detached-from-real-life magisterium, mandatory celibacy, and teachings about women's roles in the Church. Perhaps the women have imbibed and then applied some of the anti-Catholic sentiment stirring about American religious culture. It may indeed be possible that the womenpriests are staunchly Roman Catholic while being anti-Catholic. We have seen a multitude of tensions in RCWP's positions—certainly this dissertation's title of "Transgressive Traditions" attests to this ambivalence—and tension around the issues of anti- versus pro-Catholic might well be added to the mix. But I caution against any effort to juxtapose historical anti-Catholicism with RCWP's anti-institutional protests. As I have argued throughout, RCWP's women see themselves as fundamentally and foundationally Roman Catholic. They do not believe the path they have chosen is a simple one. A multitude of women have told me, in some way or other, that it is not easy to be ordained through RCWP. The womenpriests talk about loss, of leaving "the church they know" behind, or missing some of the music, the incense, the stained glass. Kathy Vandenberg wrote, "This is not for the faint of heart. It was and continues to be the hardest decision I have had to make."⁵ To be against aspects of the faith is not to be against the entirety of the faith, in their way of thinking.

Perhaps, then, it is time for scholars to re-evaluate what is meant by "anti-Catholicism" in the twenty-first century context. The term "anti-Catholic" is just too vague for our purposes here. RCWP's women and their vocal supporters are not against all things Roman Catholic; like

⁵ Kathy Vandenberg, "Prophetic Obedience," in *Women Find a Way*, 125.

so many reformers, they instead pick and choose what they wish to retain and what they aspire to transform. It is hard to imagine anti-Catholics of the mid-nineteenth century, for example, supporting the womenpriests in *remaining* Roman Catholic, or in *reforming* Catholic tradition. Yet that is exactly what is taking place currently around the RCWP movement. Protestant and Jewish supporters are not seeking to transform RCWP's dissatisfied women into Protestant converts; rather, non-Catholic supporters are helping the women challenge and reimagine Roman Catholic authority. Likewise, if RCWP's women were as anti-Catholic as some critics assert, they would not risk reputations, relationships, or—most dramatically—their eternal souls in this reform effort. I suggest, then, what may at first glance look and sound like anti-Catholicism is, in fact, a potent pro-Catholicism that is unafraid to simultaneously criticize and celebrate. In the case of RCWP, to be against the Church (hierarchically) is actually to be very much with the Church (spiritually)—*if* the Church is less about institutional authority and more about sacred traditions, sacramental expression, ministerial outreach, and emulation of a social-justice Christ. In sum, when we examine the motivations behind RCWP and their supporters' actions, we see that the term “anti-Catholicism” needs as much parsing as the richly loaded noun “Catholicism.”

This study also offers a rigorous assessment of an emerging religious reform movement in its nascent years. Studying a group that is constantly changing is undoubtedly demanding; I have felt at times like an archer trying to hit a moving target. But I trust the benefits will outweigh the research challenges. Rarely do scholars have access to emergent groups in the process of constant negotiation and renegotiation. RCWP offers this glimpse into religious innovation in the making. RCWP marks a valuable addition to Religious Studies because it can be examined in terms of its written statements, its speeches, its performed worship practices, and its emerging theology. One wonders what students of Religious Studies would have learned had they witnessed as richly, for example, the first decade of a small “protest” group in early

sixteenth-century Germany; or a new monastic order in the middle ages; or a first century “gnostic” church. Whatever happens for RCWP in the future, the group offers scholars fodder for thinking about religious change and transforming religious authority. I do not go so far as to call RCWP a New Religious Movement—at least, not yet. At present, RCWP sees itself as a transitional movement that will someday be reconciled with a reformed Roman Catholic Church. For now, it is best to understand RCWP as part of Roman Catholic reform efforts. If, however, RCWP eventually evolves into its own entity (and becomes essentially an NRM without “Roman” connections⁶), or merges with another religious group (and becomes an interfaith experiment), or dissolves altogether, this dissertation will have captured the movement in its organic early days. While my target has been constantly moving, I have managed to take a rich snapshot of RCWP at a particular moment in time. Although it is easy to see the movement is constantly changing, swirling and stretching beyond the issues I tackle here, I have found a way to “catch the cloud and pin it down,” if only to show how nearly impossible such a task can be.

Because RCWP is so new, research has not come from traditional sources, and my approach here offers a method for studying contemporary religious groups. I see myself using a kind of “cyber archive.” That is to say, information about the RCWP movement comes not from archdiocesan archives or religious orders’ archives, but from internet resources that perform the movement’s existence and hold clues to its historical development. RCWP has grown much in the few years since I have been studying the movement, and many of these changes are evident on the group’s website, romancatholicwomenpriests.org. This website has witnessed to the movement’s growth; the website has also become a kind of historical document

⁶ An important article on New Religious Movements—how they are defined and how they endure—comes from Rodney Stark, “How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model,” in *The Future of New Religious Movements*, eds. David G. Bromley and Phillip E. Hammond (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2987): 11-29.

in the way it preserves parts (albeit selectively) of RCWP's brief history. What is more, RCWP's women have become adept at using sites like YouTube and Google Videos to publicize their sacramental and ministerial actions. While RCWP uses these online resources to perform their existence and reach their audience, these videos, images, and online content pieces have become, for me, a storehouse of information on a young and emergent Roman Catholic reform movement. My work with this "cyber archive," then, steps into new methodological territory. By treating these sources as primary—and not simply secondary source documents—I get a sense of RCWP's self-understanding and self-display as well as its organic evolution in the early twenty-first century. Likewise, Jules Hart's *Pink Smoke* documentary film footage it not yet archived (though it will be), and thus Hart's one-hundred film hours offers a "video archive," which captures RCWP in the early years of 2005 to 2010. And so, because RCWP does not yet have its own archive, and because RCWP's women are spread across Europe, North America, and now Latin America, they communicate among themselves primarily through email and listservs. I suspect RCWP will develop an archive in the future; in the meantime, however, technology makes possible access to the womenpriests and their sacramental and ministerial actions. Thus, my approach has made meticulous use of (cell)phone interviews, electronic video footage, film interviews, and online archives.

For fields of women's studies and feminist studies of religion, I suggest that RCWP further underscores the existence of *feminisms* (instead of a singular *feminism*) in today's religious landscape. Most readers should find it shocking that a group of Catholic women acting *contra legem* and being excommunicated in order to change the priesthood could be considered too traditional and conservative. That is RCWP's situation, however, as they are not reform-minded enough for some Catholic feminists. As radical as they seem, RCWP's women are actually staking out a middle ground between Catholic tradition and Catholic innovation. This manifests

also in RCWP's generally traditional understanding of femininity; while RCWP's women extend "female genius" (to evoke Pope John Paul II's term) beyond the roles of wife, mother, and virgin to include priesthood, most of the womenpriests want to include ordination alongside traditional female roles. Thus, the movement has not gone so far as to challenge gender identities and gender essentialism. Because one of the most innovative groups in contemporary reform Roman Catholicism stresses gender equality but retains gender essentialism, scholars can see where theoretical ideas (like Judith Butler's) have taken hold and where they are either unknown or overlooked. RCWP is committed to institutional change for Catholic women and pastoral support for Catholic homosexuals and lesbians...yet the group is not yet ready to queer the priesthood and explode gender norms altogether.

RCWP also exposes a tension between theological reform and gender-equality reform. RCWP seeks to include women in the Roman Catholic priesthood while it simultaneously hopes to model a renewed priesthood and thereby a renewed Church. These reform-minded moves are fraught with theological changes, yet RCWP has not made this reformed theology explicit. To be sure, RCWP cares deeply about including a woman's body at the altar, thereby allowing a feminine *imago Christi* and, by extension, a feminine *imago Dei*. This is a profound theological move within the Roman Catholic mindset, and certainly, RCWP's women believe that a female priest will inspire and affirm generations of Catholic women and girls in a way a male priest cannot. And yet, Catholic sacraments are completely linked with theology and priesthood. RCWP thus reveals how difficult it is to add women into a sacramental tradition without clearly changing the tradition's theology. RCWP needs a more explicit theological engagement with the Catholic sacramental economy and priesthood role if it is to make lasting reforms. To be sure, the RCWP movement has a theology—yet RCWP consists of diverse women with different personal theologies, and I suggest that, if their goals are to be realized, the movement's

theologians need to help all members understand and expand RCWP's feminist theological commitment.

Finally, my dissertation shows how a performance-studies intervention enriches Religious Studies research. Performance studies demands an emphasis on bodies, public actions, and ritual forms while it also maintains a commitment to theoretical frameworks and cultural theory. Without a performance studies framework, RCWP's nuanced display of transgression alongside tradition would not appear so clearly. Had I simply looked at RCWP's public speeches, I would have primarily seen the group as a radical Catholic feminist cadre driven by anger at women's exclusion from sacramental priesthood. Had I confined my work to RCWP's published writings, I would not have appreciated how certain Catholic feminists critique the RCWP movement for retaining too many traditional trappings of Roman Catholicism. Without attention to bodies, rituals, sacraments, and ministerial gestures, it would have been exceedingly difficult to find the "tradition" in RCWP's "transgressive traditions." Roman Catholicism is a vastly embodied religion, one that succeeds in disciplining practitioners' bodies and inviting bodies into the worship experience. As such, RCWP's own reformed priesthood draws upon the Catholic, embodied, traditional resources—consciously and unconsciously. Had I not used ethnographic research or watched hours and hours of RCWP sacramental performance, I would not have *seen* and *felt* the way bodies remain central to RCWP's protesting priesthood. Had I constrained myself to interviews, I would have missed the ways RCWP's women keep and creatively reimagine Catholic liturgical and sacramental foundations. Performance studies was essential to this project's arguments and conclusions; without it, any study of RCWP would have been limitingly one dimensional. I have aimed to model a performance-centered approach for other scholars who need to include bodies, ritual gestures, and actor-audience encounters in their research.

“By their fruits you shall know them”: The Future of the RCWP Movement

I only reluctantly speculate about the future of RCWP. I do this because, if I have done my job well in this dissertation, I have managed to ignite the reader's concern for the real people who comprise and support the RCWP movement. Much is at stake for these womenpriests; they have invested and sacrificed a great deal. Much is also at stake for recipients of RCWP's ministerial priesthood; they are finding spiritual comfort in a Catholic framework, often for the first time in many years. Still, years of research on the Catholic women's ordination movement and RCWP does not provide me with a crystal ball, not least of all because RCWP's institutional future within Roman Catholicism has much to do with hierarchical decisions—and that is a process to which I have no access and little insight.

I also speculate about RCWP's future because my own position vis-à-vis this project is that of a “Catholic feminist.” Put simply, I identify as both a Catholic and a feminist. What and how these terms mean is a dissertation-length study in itself. What I hope my dissertation has shown is that there are many forms of Catholic feminism (not to mention the myriad forms of Catholicism or of feminism), and a “Catholic feminist” label reveals only so much. In other words, to say I am Catholic and feminist is to divulge little about my relationship with the institutional Church or my attitude toward RCWP. Suffice it to say—and this I will reveal—I care deeply about both, as a scholar and as a cradle Catholic.

Therefore, I understand and appreciate the womenpriests' deep concern for the Roman Catholic Church and RCWP's role in the Church's future. I have asked a number of the women about their own hopes for RCWP's future. Their answers vary. Ida Raming prays often for the

RCWP movement and hopes the movement continues to grow in strength and numbers.⁷ Mary Kay Kusner says she does not “have any illusions” that the Vatican will change in her lifetime, but she does see RCWP as a force for truth, love, and grace to make a positive impact.⁸ Mary Ann Schoettly hopes and believes that someday, RCWP and independent Catholic communities will be recognized as the “People of God,” just like the “Official Church,” modeling “alternate, yet legitimate ways of being Catholic.”⁹ Eileen DiFranco acknowledges that RCWP’s women are sometimes a “fractious bunch” who have all in some way “been burned by the hierarchy.” She wants RCWP to work together as a group toward a more permanent system of governance. She wants RCWP to model the “discipleship of equals [with] no eminence of degree.” She concludes with a nod to the people on the margins whom RCWP aspires to serve: “I’d like us to be able to minister to people on the edges who have been hurt by the church and fill in the gaps the church has left by closing people’s hearts and minds to the presence of God.”¹⁰

I would suggest that the real question about RCWP’s future is not about its legality in Vatican eyes, but rather about the group’s ability to remain a viable option for women who want ordination. The Philadelphia Eleven’s actions may have seen official validation for Episcopal women within years of the group’s “valid if illegal” ordinations, but that has not happened for RCWP and, I suspect, is unlikely to happen. To measure RCWP’s “success” strictly by the ultimate outcome vis-à-vis the institutional Church’s acceptance is, I believe, far too limiting. To be sure, some womenpriests want nothing more than to be seen as validly and legally ordained in the hierarchy’s eyes. And, it must be noted, many of these womenpriests are optimistic that the

⁷ Ida Raming, email interview with author, January 9, 2011.

⁸ Mary Kay Kusner, telephone interview with author, September 17, 2009.

⁹ Mary Ann Schoettly, email interview with author, January 8, 2011.

¹⁰ Eileen DiFranco, email interview with author, January 4, 13, and 18, 2011.

Church can and will change in their lifetimes. Whether or not this change happens, however, need not be the sole indicator of RCWP's Church-reforming achievements. The group can be called "successful" if it continues to grow and evolve; if it reaches women from different racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds; if it expands its sacramental ministry outward to other persons of faith and spiritual seekers; if it codifies theological positions that explain women's sacred power in light of a female priesthood; if it builds relationships with Catholic groups—ordained and lay—with which it disagrees. When individuals find hope and spiritual fulfillment in RCWP's actions, the group succeeds. As the womenpriests have said, to me and to their wider audiences, in words that paraphrase Paul's Letter to the Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8: 28-31). Or, in another paraphrase, "By our fruits, you will know us" (Matthew 7:16). The women know they face incredible obstacles, but they believe God is on their side, and they believe God will guide them to where they need to go next. By existing and continuing to exist, RCWP performs a valuable protest, one that captures and embodies some of what progressive Catholics most wish for the Church. By growing faith communities and offering ministries, RCWP performs valuable pastoral work that blends charitable outreach with Catholic spirituality. By putting women's bodies in the priesthood position, RCWP performs an emerging theology and Christology whereby the feminine can also be the divine. I contend that these changes—these contributions to contemporary Roman Catholic life—exist independent of RCWP's future merging with the institutional Church.

Certainly, things have not been entirely smooth for RCWP. This movement consists of strong, educated women who have spent decades fighting for what they believe in. The ordained women are also deeply spiritual Catholics who simultaneously feel love for and exasperation with their Church. Conflicts, disagreements, and changes-of-heart are bound to arise. For some years, differences of opinion around leadership and authority existed between parts of the

European RCWP group, headed by Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, and the rapidly expanding North American movement. The groups have since reconciled—all are currently featured on the RCWP’s website—but have essentially “agreed to disagree” about some facets of priesthood reform. In 2010, RCWP-USA experienced a split when a handful of ordained women created the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests. Note that here, “women priest” is two separate words. Like RCWP-USA, the Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Unlike RCWP-USA, the Association uses a consensus model for decision-making, as opposed to the parent group’s democratic model.¹¹ Women from across the worldwide RCWP family have told me that disagreements arise, and not infrequently. Conflict seems to center upon leadership and authority, theology and priesthood preparation programs, and retaining tradition versus being innovative. If these issues sound like warning signs, let me report that the women themselves tend to see these as “growing pains” to be expected within a dedicated group of passionate women who must do much of their decision-making remotely, communicating via email or Skype or cellular phones. When one adds to this the fact that womenpriests are exceptionally busy, trying to marry their sacramental ministries with family and career demands, it actually seems significant that the group functions as well as it does.

In addition to challenges around group dynamics, some individual womenpriests have left the movement. Dana Reynolds was RCWP’s first North American bishop, and she ordained a number of women in her tenure. Consecrated a bishop in 2008, Reynolds had separated from the RCWP movement by 2010. She was quick to tell me that she harbored no ill-feeling toward RCWP or her fellow womenpriests. Rather, she came to feel pulled in a different direction than what RCWP afforded her. Exhausted from a demanding ordination schedule and health complications related to multiple sclerosis, Reynolds spent months convalescing and reflecting

¹¹ Roberta Meehan, telephone interview with author, April 10 and 14, 2011.

on her faith journey. She came to believe that God wanted her elsewhere; specifically, she said, “It became clear that God was calling me to a place where there are no walls of church, beyond the confines of Roman Catholicism, out into the world and into the unknown.” Reynolds wanted something less formal than RCWP, with fewer boundaries and more uncertainty. Ultimately, Reynolds found a local, non-denominational church where she acts as priest, preacher, presider, and pastoral caregiver. She feels “free in the spirit” and able to be present with the people she serves without needing to meet certain expectations. RCWP, then, became a stop on Reynolds’s faith journey. Being ordained has fueled her vocational fire and led her closer to her own spiritual self-discovery.¹²

Norma Jean Coon also left the RCWP movement, not because she wanted fewer formalities and boundaries like Reynolds, but because she wanted to be reconciled with the Roman Catholic Church. Whereas Reynolds’s departure from RCWP was gradual and amicable, Coon’s defection was public and severe. Coon was ordained to the diaconate in January 2007 in Santa Barbara, California. She created a website (www.normajeancoon.com, now deactivated) and on February 8, 2011 announced, “I wish to renounce the alleged ordination and publicly state that I did not act as a deacon as a part of this group except on two occasions, when I read the Gospel once at Mass and distributed Communion once at this same Mass.” In acknowledging that she was seeking formal reinstatement, Coon averred her obedience to Church teachings: “I confess the authority of the Holy Father on these issues of ordination and recognize that Christ founded the ordination only for men.” In becoming a kind of public apostate from the RCWP movement, Coon also wrote, “Formally, I relinquish all connection to the program of Roman Catholic Womenpriests and I disclaim the alleged ordination publicly

¹² Dana Reynolds, telephone interview with author, December 14, 2010.

with apologies to those whose lives I have offended or scandalized by my actions.”¹³ For their part, RCWP’s women let Coon go quietly. Administrator Suzanne Thiel announced that Coon was no longer a member and no longer affiliated with RCWP. Bridget Mary Meehan, one of the group’s media representatives, obliged Coon by removing photographs and videos of Coon from RCWP’s website. Meehan told the *National Catholic Reporter* that there are “no hard feelings,” that Coon is following her conscience, and obeying God and primacy of conscience are hallmarks of RCWP’s actions.¹⁴ News articles and my own research interviews suggest Coon had personal struggles, related to family and health, that propelled her toward wanting an end to her excommunication and reinstatement with the Church. Moreover, Coon exhibited visceral discomfort with her diaconal ordination within hours of being ordained, and RCWP’s women who observed this were immediately concerned.¹⁵ The group knows that *contra legem* ordination and *latae sententiae* excommunication are not for the faint of heart: womenpriests risk losing family, friends, faith community, and soteriological certainty through the Church. Coon needed reconciliation with the institutional Catholic Church; leaving RCWP was the sole way this could happen.

It remains to be seen whether more women will leave RCWP, either for ministerial opportunities with fewer Catholic parameters or for reinstatement with the patriarchal Church. What is significant is that the two women who left RCWP did so for wildly dissimilar reasons: it is not that RCWP failed Reynolds and Coon in the same ways, but that Reynolds’s and Coon’s spiritual strivings led them to look elsewhere. Again, it is difficult for a movement as small and

¹³ These words come from Coon’s personal website, now unavailable. Citations from her website can be found in articles such as Zoe Ryan, “Woman Deacon Recants, Seeks Reunion with Church,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 14, 2011, 1, 8.

¹⁴ Zoe Ryan, “Woman Deacon Recants, Seeks Reunion with Church,” *National Catholic Reporter*, March 14, 2011, 1, 8.

¹⁵ Andrea Johnson, telephone interview with author, May 11, 2011.

as controversial as RCWP to truly be all things for all people—and yet, this is what it is trying to do. Compounding Reynolds's and Coon's departures are the women who are no longer in RCWP because they have died. To date, ordained priests Janine Marie Denomme, Iris Muller, and Mary Styne have passed away. They remain present on RCWP's website, memorialized as women who did not live to see their ordinations validated, but who served others as womenpriests, however briefly.

In considering the future of RCWP, one might consider future academic avenues as well. This project is necessarily preliminary: much more work should be done on Roman Catholic Womenpriests, and I hope future scholars will take up this mantle. Understanding of RCWP would benefit immensely from localized, sociological studies. While this project has focused almost exclusively on RCWP's members, future studies should attempt to engage with members of womenpriests' faith communities. Who are these members? What brought them to a womanpriest-led liturgy? What do they wish for the future Roman Catholic Church? Second, more work can be done on womenpriests vis-à-vis ethnic, racial, and economic questions, both in terms of the womenpriests' own identities and in terms of their ministries. The Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests is ordaining Latin and South American women with increasing frequency; womanpriest Chava Redonnet wants to start a ministry for Latino and Latina Catholics around Rochester, New York. With the center of the Roman Catholic world increasingly located in the Global South and in Spanish-speaking communities, how is RCWP expanding to include and serve these populations? Third, RCWP is doing some very innovative liturgical work. Some of this work corresponds with other para-liturgical groups, and some of it is unique to RCWP. A student of Catholic liturgical practice would likely uncover more tensions—or, perhaps, collaboration—between tradition and transgression in RCWP's sacramental and Mass-based work. Finally, a theologian needs to turn attention to RCWP. By

analyzing the womenpriests' public statements, liturgical performances, and one-on-one interviews, a theologically-trained scholar can place RCWP's theological forays in a larger Catholic and twenty-first century Christian context. In short, RCWP is a wonderfully rich Catholic reform movement, and it is small enough for a close and in-depth study. I hope my project is just the beginning of academic explorations of RCWP.

Concluding Thoughts and Lingering Questions

For years, RCWP's ordained women have fielded questions about their stake in Catholicism: why do they not simply leave Roman Catholicism for a tradition that *does* ordain women. Some people suggest—in tones sincere or suspicious—that the women should become Protestants. Most often, the womenpriests are asked why they don't become Episcopalian, as this tradition is closest to Catholicism in sacramentalism and liturgical structure. I myself have repeatedly called the womenpriests' actions *protests*—does this not suggest that there is a spirit of *Protestantism* in their actions? My conclusion is that *no*, RCWP's women are not simply Protestants in Catholic priestly vestments. What I need to make clear is that asking the womenpriests *why* they stay Catholic is to misunderstand religious identity and identification, and to entirely misunderstand present-day Catholicism. These women *are Catholic* in that they cannot see themselves as anything but. It speaks to the Roman Catholic Church's power at shaping lives and sculpting worship behaviors that women like RCWP's so closely and intimately identify with it. Even when they feel deeply wounded by the Church—by its actions and inactions, by its prescriptions and prohibitions—they want to stay within it. They believe that to leave the Church behind would be to leave themselves behind. It is not so simple a matter as going elsewhere when one's present position ceases to satisfy: the women I have studied are not

stirring up trouble for trouble's sake; rather, they believe it their responsibility as faithful Catholics to move the Church through its current crisis and non-wholeness toward something that better approximates Christ's mission on earth. Perhaps my favorite reason for staying—because it echoes the performance language of embodied presence and absence that has become so familiar to me—comes from Mary Kay Kusner: “I would rather make an impact on the church with my presence than with my absence.”¹⁶

Moreover, to suggest these trouble-causing women should simply become Protestant sounds to me a value-laden position. Catholics who tell the womenpriests to just “become Protestant” seem to hold a low opinion of Protestant identity, suggesting that to “be Protestant” is to be “anything but” Roman Catholic. This overlooks the complexities within the myriad of Protestant identities. Likewise, Protestants who suggest that RCWP's women are quintessentially “Protestant” seem to do so as a way of championing Catholics who stand firm against certain Church practices. They hold a particular disdain for aspects of Roman Catholicism, and they celebrate any individual or group who “sees the light” and makes moves counter to the Church's. Both positions are problematic. Both positions miss the distinctiveness of Catholicism. The point is not simply institutional loyalty (or lack thereof): the point is the power of sacraments to mediate between human and divine. RCWP's women certainly have conflicting ideas about sacraments, but they do not dismiss sacramental power. If there is one thing womenpriests agree upon, it is the centrality of the sacraments.

Still, RCWP is certainly not Roman Catholic in terms of deference to hierarchical authority. If the Pope is indeed Catholic (a conclusion which some Catholic feminists have

¹⁶ Mary Kay Kusner, email interview with author, September 17, 2009.

challenged¹⁷), then RCWP proudly stands outside of his purview. The point is not to honor the males in power, they say; the point is to honor God and personal conscience. RCWP is pushing the bounds of “Church.” The movement believes deeply in the sacraments and sacred mysteries of the Church. Yet RCWP does not believe in the unequivocal power of the Church patriarchy. What, then, *is* the Church? The ordained men making the rules? The people in the pews? Sacramental action embodied in believers? Depending on how Church is defined, RCWP can either comfortably claim a Roman Catholic identity or stand outside of the Church. Detractors seek to define Church so as to place RCWP outside; RCWP’s women, in contrast, understand Church in ways that locate themselves firmly in the faith-filled center of Roman Catholicism. Definitions—though hotly debated—have never mattered so much.

So what, then, *is* RCWP? Neither comfortably Roman Catholic nor tantamount to Protestantism; neither within official Church authority structures nor outside of priesthood leadership; neither wholly transgressive nor purely traditional. Some of the womenpriests themselves have asked this question. Is RCWP a support group for disenfranchised women? A seminary or religious order in the early years of formation? Dana Reynolds sees RCWP as a diaspora: a group of women presently scattered away from their homeland, but looking to return in the future, when they can, when it is safe. Other women, including Reynolds and Chava Redonnet, liken RCWP’s activities to the early Christian Church in Acts: conflicted and a bit confused, but still faith-filled and energized with the Holy Spirit.

And yet, what RCWP is and has achieved is not, at present, as significant as what RCWP has modeled and is modeling. The group probably cannot simultaneously reform the priesthood entirely and give women priesthood authority—the two are truly mutually exclusive. Perhaps this

¹⁷ Joanna Manning, *Is the Pope Catholic? A Woman Confronts Her Church* (New York: Crossroad, 2000).

is what Joan Houk was intimating when she said, “It’s not until you are on the inside and struggling that you realize: [reform] is very difficult.”¹⁸ But amid these theoretical and theological difficulties, RCWP’s ordained women can and do model. RCWP performs what it believes the Church can do and still needs to do. RCWP has not yet reformed the institutional Church, but the group has modeled and is modeling a theoretically and theologically reformed priesthood. Meanwhile, the group’s strengths lie in providing ministerial outreach, inspiration, and a worship home to/for people who do not feel nurtured by the Catholic Church. These Catholic women are performing the possibility, potential, and power within Roman Catholic priesthood.

¹⁸ Joan Houk, telephone interview with author, January 8, 2011.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Secondary Sources

- Alcoff, Linda. "The Problem of Speaking for Others." *Cultural Critique* (Winter 1991-92): 5-32.
- Anderson, Patrick, and Jisha Menon, eds. *Violence Performed: Local Roots and Global Routes of Conflict*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Avella, Steven M., and Elizabeth McKeown, eds. *Public Voices: Catholics in the American Context*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Bales, Susan Ridgely. *When I was a Child: Children's Interpretations of First Communion*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Barlow, Philip, and Mark Silk, eds. *Religion and Public Life in the Midwest: America's Common Denominator?* Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004.
- Bednarowski, Mary Farrell. *The Religious Imagination of American Women*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Bell, Catherine, "Performance," in Taylor, Mark C., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Bial, Henry. *The Performance Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Bogad, L. M. "Sturm and drag: The fabulous camp-pains of Miss Joan Jett Blakk." *Electoral Guerrilla Theatre: Radical Ridicule and Social Movements*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Bonavoglia, Angela. *Good Catholic Girls: How Women are Leading the Fight to Change the Church*. New York: Harper Collins, 2005.
- Braun, Willi and Russell T. McCutcheon. *Guide to the Study of Religion*. London: Cassell, 2000.
- Brekus, Catherine A., ed. *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Briggs, Kenneth A. *Double Crossed: Uncovering the Catholic Church's Betrayal of American Nuns*. New York: Doubleday, 2006.
- Bromley, David G., and Phillip E. Hammond, eds. *The Future of New Religious Movements*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987.

- Brown, Karen McCarthy. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Butler, Sara. *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church*. Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2007.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: Zone Books, 1991.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker, Stevan Harrel, and Paula Richman, eds. *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986.
- Byrne, Julie. *O God of Players: The Story of the Immaculata Mighty Macs*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Byrne, Lavinia. *Women at the Altar: The Ordination of Women in the Roman Catholic Church*. London: Mowbray, 1994.
- Canon Law Society of America. *The Code of Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*. James A. Coriden, Thomas J. Green, and Donald E. Heintschel, eds. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.
- Cary, Patrick W, ed. *American Catholic Religious Thought: The Shaping of a Theological and Social Tradition*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004.
- Castelli, Elizabeth A. *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Catterall, Peter. "What (If Anything) Is Distinctive About Contemporary History?" *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 4 (October, 1997).
- Chaves, Mark. *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- . "Ordaining Women: The Diffusion of an Organizational Innovation." *American Journal of Sociology* 101 (1996): 840-73.
- . "The Symbolic Significance of Women's Ordination." *Journal of Religion* 77 (1997): 87-114.
- Chinnici, Joseph P. *Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in the United States*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996.
- Chinnici, Joseph P., and Angelyn Dries, eds. *Prayer and Practice in the American Catholic Community*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000.

- Clark, Elizabeth A. *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.
- . “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the Linguistic Turn,” *Church History* 67, no. 1 (March 1998): 1-31.
- . “Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History,” *Church History* 70, no. 3 (September 2001): 395-426.
- Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Coakley, Sarah. *Religion and the Body*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Coburn, Carol, and Martha Smith. *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Conquergood, Dwight. “Lethal Theatre: Performance, Punishment, and the Death Penalty.” *Theatre Journal* 54 (2002): 339-367.
- Cummings, Kathleen Sprows. *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Davis, Cyprian. *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*. New York: Crossroad, 1990.
- Day, Dorothy. *The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day*. New York: Harper, 1952.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- De Hart, Jane Sherron. “Oral Sources and Contemporary History: Dispelling Old Assumptions.” *Journal of American History* 80, no. 2 (September, 1993).
- Diamond, Elin. *Performance and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Dolan, Jay P., 1936-. *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1985.
- . *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.
- . *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
- Drucker, Malka. *Women and Judaism*. Westport: Praeger, 2009.

- Fielder, Maureen and Linda Rabben, eds. *Rome Has Spoken: A Guide to Forgotten Papal Statements and How They Have Changed Through the Centuries*. New York: The Crossroads Company, 1998.
- Fisher, James Terence. *The Catholic Counterculture in America, 1933-1962*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- . *Communion of Immigrants: A History of Catholics in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Foster, Susan Leigh. "Choreographies of Protest." *Theatre Journal* 55 (2003): 395-412.
- Franchot, Jenny. *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Fuoss, Kirk. *Striking Performances/Performing Strikes*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997.
- . "Lynching Performances, Theatres of Violence." *Text and Performance Quarterly* (Jan 1999).
- Ganoczy, Alexandre. *An Introduction to Catholic Sacramental Theology*. New York: Paulist Press, 1984.
- Gaskell, Caitlin N. "All Are Welcome: The Roman Catholic Women's Ordination Movement and the Motivations of Participants." Undergraduate Honors Thesis, Washington University, 2009.
- Gleason, Philip. *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Griffith, Colleen M. *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women's Strategies for Reform*. New York: Crossroad, 2009.
- Griffith, R. Marie. *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Griffith, R. Marie. *Born again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Grimes, Ronald, "Ritual," in Braun, William and Russell T. McCutcheon, *Guide to the Study of Religion*. London: Cassell, 2000.
- Gross, Rita M, "Where Have We Been? Where Do We Need to Go?: Women's Studies and Gender in Religion and Feminist Theology," in *Gender, Religion, and Diversity: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Ursula King and Tina Beattie (New York: Continuum, 2004): 17-27.
- Hall, David D., ed. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

- Halter, Deborah. *The Papal 'No': A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican's Rejection of Women's Ordination*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004.
- Henold, Mary J. *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Jackson, Shannon. *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice*. New York: Oxford, 2004.
- Kane, Paula, James Kenneally, and Karen Kennelly, eds. *Gender Identities in American Catholicism*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001.
- Kenneally, James J. *The History of American Catholic Women*. New York: Crossroad, 1990.
- Keller, Rosemary Skinner, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds. *In our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women's Religious Writing*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.
- Kelly, Liam. *Sacraments Revisited: What Do They Mean Today?* New York: Paulist Press, 1998.
- Kertzer, David I. *Ritual, Politics, and Power*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- King, Ursula, and Tina Beattie, eds. *Gender, Religion, and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Koehlinger, Amy L. *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Lepecki, André, ed. *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004.
- Lerner, Gerda. *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Macy, Gary. *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Madigan, Kevin and Carolyn Osiek, eds. *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Madison, D. Soyini. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005.

- Madison, D. Soyini, and Judith Hamera, eds. *The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2006.
- Maffeis, Angelo. *Ecumenical Dialogue*. Trans. Lorelei F. Fuchs. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2005.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Massa, Mark Stephen. *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice*. New York: Crossroad Pub., 2003.
- McAdam, Doug. "The Framing Function of Movement Tactics," *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- McAuley, Gay. *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- McClory, Robert. *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission*. New York: Crossroad, 1995.
- McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- McEnroy, Carmel. *Guests in Their Own House: The Women of Vatican II*. New York: Crossroad, 1996.
- McGreevy, John T. *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003.
- . *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- McNamara, Jo Ann. *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Moon, Helena. "Womenpriests: Radical Change or More of the Same?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 115-134.
- Moore, R. L. *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Morgan, David. *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.
- . *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Morgan, David, and Sally M. Promey, eds. *The Visual Culture of American Religions*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

- Muñoz, José Esteban. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- . “The White to be Angry: Vaginal Crème Davis’s ‘Terrorist Drag.’” *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Nadell, Pamela Susan. *Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women’s Ordination, 1889-1985*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998.
- Nilson, Jon. *Nothing Beyond the Necessary: Roman Catholicism and the Ecumenical Future*. New York: Paulist Press, 2005.
- Orsi, Robert A. *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- . *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Osiek, Carolyn, Margaret Y. MacDonald, and Janet H. Tulloch. *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.
- O’Toole, James M. *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Perucci, Tony. “Guilty as Sin: The Trial of the Reverend Billy and the Exorcism of the Sacred Cash Register.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 28 (July 2008): 315-29.
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Plummer, John P., and John R. Mabry. *Who are the Independent Catholics?* Apocryphile Press, 2006.
- Pollock, Della, ed. *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Pollock, Della and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. *Remembering: Oral History Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Prell, Riv-Ellen. *Women Remaking American Judaism*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007.
- Raming, Ida. *The Exclusion of Women from the Priesthood: Divine Law Or Sex Discrimination? : An Historical Investigation of the Juridical and Doctrinal Foundations of the Code of Canon Law, Canon 968, 1*. Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1976.
- Rappaport, Roy A. *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

- Reinelt, Janelle G. and Joseph R. Roach, eds. *Critical Theory and Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992.
- Roach, Joseph R. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Ronan, Marian. "Living it Out: Ethical Challenges Confronting the Roman Catholic Women's Ordination Movement in the 21st Century." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 149-69.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican: A Vision for Progressive Catholicism*. New York: New York Press, 2008.
- . *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford and Eleanor McLaughlin, eds. *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979.
- Schrager, Samuel. "What is Social in Oral History?" *International Journal of Oral History* 4, no. 2 (June 1983): 76-98.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Schultz, Nancy Lusignan, ed. *Veil of Fear: Nineteenth-Century Convent Tales by Rebecca Reed and Maria Monk*. West Lafayette: NotaBell Books, 1999.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad, 1983.
- Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Summer 1991).
- . *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
- Sentilles, Sarah. *A Church of Her Own: What Happens when a Woman Takes the Pulpit*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2008.
- Shore, Bradd. "Marginal Play: Sport at the Borderlands of Time and Space." *International Review for the Society of Sport* 29, no. 4 (1994): 349-65.
- Slim, Hugo, and Paul Thompson. *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1995.
- Smith, Anna Deavere. *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1997.

- States, Bert O. "Performance as Metaphor." *Theatre Journal* 48.1 (1996): 1-26.
- Steinfels, Peter. *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
- Stout, Harry S. *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991.
- Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Swidler, Leonard and Arlene Swidler, eds. *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*. New York: Paulist Press, 1977.
- Taves, Ann. *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986.
- Taylor, Mark C. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Taylor, Sarah McFarland. *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Tentler, Leslie Woodstock. *Catholics and Contraception: An American History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Turner, Victor Witter. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1988.
- . *Between Theater & Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- . *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969.
- Tweed, Thomas A. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006.
- . *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Tweed, Thomas A., ed. *Retelling U.S. Religious History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1994.
- VanderMeer, Philip R. and Robert P. Swierenga, eds. *Belief and Behavior: Essays in the New Religious History*. Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991.
- van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977.

- Wallace, Ruth A. *They Call Her Pastor: A New Role for Catholic Women*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992.
- Weaver, Mary Jo. *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.
- Weaver, Mary Jo, ed. *What's Left?: Liberal American Catholics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Weaver, Mary Jo and R. Scott Appleby, eds. *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Wickstrom, Maurya. "Robots, Gods, and Greed." *Performing Consumers: Global Capital and its Theatrical Seductions*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Zarrilli, Phillip B, ed. *Acting (Re)Considered Theories and Practices*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Zikmund, Barbara Brown, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia M.Y. Chang. *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Primary Sources: Interviews

- Rose Marie Hudson, July 9, 2009
 Marybeth McBryan, July 17, 2009
 Elsie Hainz McGrath, July 9, 2009
 Patricia Hughes Baumer, August 17, 2009
 Nicole Sotelo
 Dorothy Irvin
 Mary Kay Kusner, September, 17, 2009 (email and telephone)
 Gabriella Velardi-Ward, January 9, 2010 (telephone)
 Laura Singer, November 17, 2010 (telephone)
 Jane Via, November 22, 2010 (telephone)
 Dana Reynolds, December 14, 2010 (telephone)
 Chava Redonnet, January 6, 2011 (telephone)
 Joan Houk, January 8, 2011 (telephone)
 Mary Ann Schoettly, January 8 and 9, 2011 (email and telephone)
 Ida Raming, January 9, 2011 (email)
 Eileen DiFranco, January 4, 13 and 18, 2011 (email and telephone)
 Theresa Novak Chabot, January 20, 2011 (telephone)
 Janice Sevre-Duszynska, January 23, 2011 (telephone)
 Marie David, February 11, 2011 (telephone)
 Gloria Carpeneto, February 16, 2011 (telephone)
 Mary Frances Smith, March 4, 2011 (email)
 Monique Venne, March 27, 2011 (email)
 Roberta Meehan, April 10 and 14, 2011 (telephone)
 Michele Birch-Conery, April 19, 2011 (telephone)
 Monica Kilburn-Smith, April 20, 2011 (telephone)
 Marie Bouclin, April 26 and 27, 2011 (email)
 Rachel Wood, May 10, 2011 (telephone)

Andrea Johnson, May 11, 2011 (telephone)
Morag Liebert, May 20, 2011 (email)
Suzanne Thiel, May 25, 2011 (telephone)
Alta Jacko, May 28, 2011 (email)
Cheryl Bristol, June 1, 2011 (email)

Primary Sources: Select Websites

Association of Roman Catholic Women Priests
(www.associationofromancatholicwomenpriests.org)
Call to Action (<http://www.cta-usa.org>)
Catholic Network for Women's Equality (<http://www.cnwe.org/>)
Corpus (www.corpus.org/)
Ecumenical Catholic Communion (<http://www.ecumenical-catholic-communion.org/index.html>)
Federation of Christian Ministries (www.federationofchristianministries.org)
Future Church (<http://www.futurechurch.org>)
Global Ministries University (<http://www.globalministriesuniversity.org/>)
Intentional Eucharistic Communities (<http://www.intentionaleucharisticcommunities.org/>)
Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community (www.mmacc.org/)
Roman Catholic Womenpriests (<http://www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org>)
Römisch-katholischen Priesterinnen (www.priesterinnen.net)
Southeastern Pennsylvania Women's Ordination Conference, *Equal wRites Newsletter*
(www.sepawoc.org)
Spiritus Christi Church (www.spirituschristi.org)
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops ([usccb.org/](http://www.usccb.org/))
Voice of the Faithful (<http://www.votf.org/>)
We Are Church (<http://www.we-are-church.org/>)
Women Priests for the Catholic Church (www.womepriests.org/)
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual. (<http://www.his.com/~mhunt>)
Women's Ordination Conference (<http://www.womensordination.org>)
Women's Ordination Worldwide (<http://www.womensordinationworldwide.org>)

Primary Sources: Select Vatican Documents

(most available online at the Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/phome_en.htm)

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. "Decree of Excommunication Regarding the Attempted Priestly Ordination of Some Catholic Women." August 14, 2002.

—. "Decree on the Attempted Priestly Ordination of Some Catholic Women." June 10, 2002.

—. "Inter Insigniores: Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood." October 15, 1976.

—. "Regarding the crime of attempting sacred ordination of a woman." May 29, 2008.

—. “Warning Regarding the Attempted Priestly Ordination of Some Catholic Women.” 2002.

Pontifical Biblical Commission, Vatican. “The Report of the Pontifical Biblical Commission.” 1976.

Pope John Paul II. “Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year.” August 15, 1988.

—. “On the Genius of Women.” June 29, 1995.

—. “Ordinatio Sacerdotalis: On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone.” May 22, 1994.

Pope Paul VI. “Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Commission on the Church in the Modern World.” December 7, 1965.

—. “Humanae Vitae.” July 25, 1968.

—. “Lumen Gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.” November 21, 1964.

Primary Sources: Select News Articles and Books

Allen, John L. “For Catholic theology, the future is global and lay-led.” *National Catholic Reporter*, December 24, 2010, 4a.

———. “Infallibility Debate Intensifies: Australia Case Latest in Tensions that Have Swirled Since Vatican I.” *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 2011, 10 and 12.

———. “Seven women ‘ordained’ priests June 29.” *National Catholic Reporter*. July 1, 2002.

Archer, Greg. “Roman Catholic Female Priests Growing in Numbers: An Insider’s Perspective.” *The Huffington Post*. June 12, 2009.

Bayly, Michael J. “‘We Are All the Rock’: An interview with Roman Catholic Womanpriest Judith McKloskey,” *Progressive Catholic Voice* (online forum), August 2008.

Detroit Ordination Conference (1975). *Women and Catholic Priesthood: An Expanded Vision: Proceedings from the Detroit Ordination Conference*. Ed. Anne Marie Gardiner. New York: Paulist Press, 1976.

Fiorenza, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. “We Are Church—A Kindom of Priests.” Speech given at Women’s Organization Worldwide Conference in Ottawa, July 2005.

Fresen, Patricia. “Prophetic Obedience: The Experience and Vision of Roman Catholic Womenpriests.” Speech given at the Southeast Pennsylvania Women’s Ordination Conference, March 2005.

- . “Why I Want to be Ordained.” *Catholic New Times*. November 30, 2003.
- Hart, Jules. *Pink Smoke Over the Vatican*. Documentary film footage. 2005-2010.
- Heyward, Carter. *A Priest Forever: One Woman’s Controversial Ordination in the Episcopal Church*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1999.
- Hinman, Kristin. “The Church Ladies.” *Riverfront Times*, November 8-14, 2007.
<http://www.riverfronttimes.com/>
- Hunt, Mary E. “Different Voices/Different Choices: Feminist Perspectives on Ministry.” Speech given at Women’s Organization Worldwide Conference in Ottawa, July 2005.
- Irvin, Dorothy, ed. “The Rebound 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007: The Archaeology of Women’s Traditional Ministries in the Church.” Self-published by Irvin and purchased directly from Irvin.
- Marchocki, Kathryn. “Catholic Woman Acting as Priest.” *New Hampshire Union Leader*. October 8, 2010.
- McGrath, Elsie Hainz, Bridget Mary Meehan, and Ida Raming. *Women Find a Way: The Movement and Stories of Roman Catholic Womenpriests*. College Station: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing, 2008.
- Meehan, Bridget Mary, and Regina Madonna Oliver. *A Promise of Presence: Weekly Reflections and Daily Prayer Activities*. Sofia, 2007.
- Povoledo, Elisabetta. “Vatican Asserts Rule That Bars Female Priests.” *New York Times*, May 30, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/>
- Raming, Ida. *The exclusion of women from the priesthood : divine law or sex discrimination? : An historical investigation of the juridical and doctrinal foundations of the code of canon law, canon 968, 1*. Trans. Norman R. Adams. Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1976.
- Roberts, Tom. “Canon Lawyer questions Marykoll’s move against Bourgeois.” *National Catholic Reporter*, September 20, 2011, 7.
- . “Support, Criticism Swirl around Bourgeois.” *National Catholic Reporter*, November 20, 2008.
- Ruether, Rosemary Radford. “The Church as Liberation Community from Patriarchy: The Praxis of Ministry as Discipleship of Equals.” Speech given at Women’s Organization Worldwide Conference in Ottawa, July 2005.
- . “Women priests offer differing approaches to valid ordination.” *National Catholic Reporter*. August 10, 2010.

Rygelski, James. "Archbishop says women seeking ordination risk excommunication." *Catholic News Service*, November 8, 2007, <http://www.catholicnews.com/>

Sanford, Peter. "Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger: 'Defying the Pope? It's not like paying a parking fine.'" *The Independent*. April 24, 2011.

Schaeffer, Pamela. "Though church bans women priests more and more women are saying 'Why wait?'" *National Catholic Reporter*, December 7, 2007, <http://www.ncronline.org>.

———. "WOC gathers to promote women's ordination amid conflicting visions, goals." *National Catholic Reporter*. December 1, 1995.

Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux. Washington: ICS Publications, 1976.

Winter, Miriam Therese. *Out of the Depths: The Story of Ludmilla Javorova, Ordained Roman Catholic Priest*. New York: Crossroad, 2001.