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**Breaking Through the Stained-Glass Ceiling?
Case Studies on Female Catholicism
and Its Transnational Developments
Since the 1950s**

edited by
Valentina Ciciliot, John Maiden, Charles Mercier

Editorial

Valentina Ciciliot, John Maiden, Charles Mercier

Summary 1 Of Popes and Women. – 2 More sophisticated stories. – 3 Convergences.

Historical and sociological literature has shown how women in various spheres of life are often confronted with a ‘glass ceiling’.¹ The religious field is no different, and within Christianity a ‘stained-glass ceiling’ has often prevented them from accessing certain responsibilities and ranks. In recent decades, a noticeable process of ‘feminization’ has occurred.² Particularly within Protestantism, many denominations have now adopted diverse forms of women’s involvement at various levels, including ministries – ordained ministries as well, if ecclesiologicaly mandated.³ However, within Catholicism women have remained excluded from several hierarchical positions and other functions not only by subtle mechanisms of disqualification but also by explicit criteria. The symbolic barrier that prevents Catholic women from reaching the highest positions within the ecclesiastical hierarchy remains today a magisterial fact: John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, published in June 1994, which marked the irrevocable refusal to ordain women as priests (and consequently as bishops as well).⁴

1 Cf. for example, Portier, “Introduction”.

2 Scaraffia, Pelaja, *Due in una carne*. Valerio, *Donne e Chiesa*.

3 As an example, Da Rold, C. “Measuring Social Media Marketing Strategies of Christian Female Religious Leaders”.

4 John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*.

1 Of Popes and Women

This document, though, was not born out of a canonical, political or cultural vacuum, but out of a well-established Catholic tradition. In particular, it fits into the debates over the Catholic Church and modernity, between Catholic thought and feminist movements. The pontiffs of the twentieth century were the first to address the issue of women and their role in society and the Church with increasing interest. Magisterial interventions gradually intensified behind the impetus of the so-called ‘woman question’,⁵ which arose in the late nineteenth century and was advocated by feminist movements. Despite the fact that, in principle, the Catholic magisterium from the very beginning emphasized the equal dignity of women with men on the basis of a centuries-old theological tradition, practical applications only slowly adapted over time to the demands coming from an emancipating society, gradually moving away from an ecclesiastical tradition that could be defined as anthropologically misogynistic.⁶

Leo XIII (1878-1903) was the first pope to include women in a broader project of social and religious reform. He did not recognize feminism and the emancipationist movements as legitimate forms of thought; however, in what would later be called the ‘social doctrine of the Church’, which found its cornerstone in the encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891),⁷ the recruitment of women could take place with a view to re-Christianization. It was reiterated, however, that their best place was within the home, raising children and praising husbands.

His successor Pius X (1903-14), although without any explicit documents on women, made the first conditional openings toward women’s social apostolate, especially with a anti-socialist/anti-communist function. The political engagement of women was not allowed, but a religious-assistance activity was considered as an extension of that vocation and function considered to be exclusively feminine, i.e., the service to the others. During his pontificate, both the feminist battles but also the disagreements between the magisterium and Catholic forms of feminism became more acute. Suffice it to think of the

⁵ ‘Woman question’ is the expression used by Catholic historiography and the ecclesiastical magisterium to refer to issues related to the role of women within the *ecclesia*.

⁶ Cf. Piola, *Donna e sacerdozio*, 61-92; Dau Novelli, *Note sulla questione femminile nel Magistero della Chiesa*. Camp, *From Passive Subordination to Complementary Partnership*. Cf. Baronchelli, Sauro, *Il problema femminile*. It should also be kept in mind that women were excluded for a long time from the reasoning the church was elaborating on their nature and role, lacking sufficient education, especially of the official language of papal documents, Latin. Thus, the debate on the ‘woman question’ did not arise until later in a dialogical form.

⁷ Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*.

numerous feminist newspapers that – with different orientations and degree of autonomy from the ecclesiastical hierarchy – began to be published and read by Catholic women (*L’Azione Muliebre* by Elena da Persico,⁸ *Pensiero e Azione* by Adelaide Coari,⁹ Antonietta Giacomelli in *Ora presente*)¹⁰ and the creation of several women’s groups (the Unione femminile nazionale in 1900, la Lega cattolica femminile in 1901, la Federazione femminile milanese in 1905).¹¹

During World War I and the post-war period there were profound changes in the condition of women, who had been forced precisely by the wartime event to assume roles previously reserved only for men. A clear indication of support for the active role of women in society is concretely expressed by Pius XI (1922-39) in several speeches.¹² Noted indeed is the pontiff’s support for Catholic Action – the lay association disciplined by the ecclesiastical hierarchy and considered a suitable instrument for both sexes for the Christian restoration. However, the traditional submission of the wife to her husband remained the traditional Catholic view, as well expressed in the encyclical on marriage *Casti connubii* (1930).¹³ The progressive opening of the social field to women, therefore, did not proceed hand in hand with a real acquisition of autonomous public spaces, and there was no rethinking of feminine roles within the ecclesiastical structure. The emphasis on the woman as ‘angel of the hearth,’ which was also encouraged in that period by Fascism in Italy, determined within the pontifical tradition a sort of double level of interpretation of the woman question: on the one hand there was awareness of the factual reality – the emancipation of women – which was more or less tolerated, while on the other hand there was a parallel idealization of women that instead opposed their emancipation.¹⁴

The papal magisterium’s reflection on women continued during Pius XII (1939-58), particularly concerning the woman’s role outside

8 Gazzetta, *Innovazione nella conservazione*.

9 Gazzola, “Adelaide Coari”.

10 Scattigno, “Antonietta Giacomelli”.

11 The Federazione femminile milanese was directed by Adelaide Coari, one of the most open-minded and progressive exponents of Catholic feminism at the time, and it was dissolved with the endorsement of Pius X himself, who rather favored, although only after overcoming some significant delays, the birth of the Unione fra le donne cattoliche d’Italia (1909), which was more aligned with the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Cf. Dau Novelli, “Sorelle d’Italia”. About the feminist Italian Catholic movement, cf. Gaiotti De Biase, *Le origini del movimento cattolico femminile*. About Elena da Persico cf. Gazzetta, *Elena da Persico*.

12 Cfr. Pius XI, “All’Unione Femminile Cattolica Italiana”, 54-8; Pius XI, “Alla Gioventù femminile di Azione Cattolica”, 800-6. For the general context see Della Sudda, “Les défis du pontificat de Pie XI”; Della Sudda, “L’Azione cattolica femminile in Francia”.

13 Pius XI, *Casti connubii*.

14 Cf. Dau Novelli, *Note sulla questione femminile nel Magistero della Chiesa*, 78-9.

of the family. The *Allocutio ad mulieres a Societatibus Christianis Italiae delegatas* of October 1945 summarized Pacellian thought very well: he stressed the equality of man and woman - "it is the imperishable glory of the Church to have put this truth back into light and honor and to have freed woman from a degrading slavery contrary to nature" -, however it reaffirmed the traditional feminine inclination in marriage, motherhood or voluntary celibacy.¹⁵ Women's mobilization, especially in the second post-war period, took on a clear anti-communist political significance, just think of the encouragement for women also to exercise their right to vote - particularly in the Italian context - in defense of the Church.¹⁶

John XXIII (1958-63)'s encyclical *Pacem in Terris* marked an opening in papal thinking on the relationship between Catholic women and social action. Here the changes that have taken place globally are welcomed without fear or hesitation. The entry of women into public life is recognized as a 'sign of the times,' as one of the most important phenomena characterizing modern society along with the social-economic rise of the working classes and the political freedoms acquired by many communities.¹⁷ Women's emancipation was finally read in positive tones, although the Church continued to reserve criticism where the path became radicalized. Although, in what was arguably a striking omission, the Second Vatican Council did not specifically address the woman issue: the topic was touched upon in several passages, especially in reference to the enhancement of the laity, along with women religious the only other ecclesial space granted to women. The priesthood and the diaconate for women, on the other hand, were not mentioned in any official council document, although they were widely discussed within the broader Catholic scenario. For the first time, however, women auditors had been admitted to an ecclesiastical council (13 laywomen and 10 nuns).

From there on, the issue of expanding ecclesiastical spaces for women and access for them to the priesthood conditioned the entire subsequent development of magisterial thought. Paul VI (1963-78) intervened several times, culminating with the well-known statement of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith approved in October 1976, *Inter Insigniores*.¹⁸ As early as May 3, 1973 he established, in accordance with the requests of the synod of bishops two years earlier, a study commission on women in society and the Church, with the explicit instruction to exclude from discussion the topic of female

¹⁵ Pius XII, "Allocutio ad mulieres a Societatibus Christianis Italiae delegatas", 285-7 (English translation by the author).

¹⁶ Pius XII, "Allocutio ad mulieres a Societatibus Christianis Italiae delegatas", 294.

¹⁷ John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*.

¹⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores*.

priestly ordination.¹⁹ The commission continued its work until 1976 and concluded its activity with a request for an in-depth study on the issues of women's access to non-ordained ministries and in the liturgy.²⁰ The Montinian attempt to pursue on a prudent line of balancing tradition and innovation did not prove effective, and the controversy over women's access to the presbyterate in Catholic circles escalated. It was only with John Paul II's above mentioned apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* that the Catholic Church attempted to resolve the controversy in a seemingly definitive manner.

A new phase has perhaps opened with the current pontiff Francis, who from the outset has presented a more inclusive and collegial style.²¹ The issue of women's priesthood has been joined, if not replaced, by the issue of women's diaconate, which emerged in a concrete way through the establishment of two study commissions on this topic starting in 2016.²² A concrete step has been taken with the *Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* on January 10, 2021, when Francis authorized that women can be instituted as lectors and acolytes, which also allows them, under specific conditions, the distribution of communion, as this "renders more effective in the Church everyone's participation in the work of evangelization".²³ Although at present no definitive action has been taken to meet the expectations of several Catholic feminist groups, a different path seems now to be walked according to a more ecclesiastically and ecclesialogically inclusive vision of Catholicism.

2 More sophisticated stories

This special issue offers a collection of contributions with the intent to discuss the extent to which Catholic women have managed to 'break through the stained-glass ceiling', or at least acquire positions of influence and responsibility in the Catholic world, from the 1950s to the early 2020s. The transnational dimension of much of what follows adds a level of complexity to much of the existing historiography. Each article adds nuance and richness to the story that has just

19 Camp, *From Passive Subordination to Complementary Partnership*, 522.

20 Piola, *Donna e sacerdozio*, 81-2.

21 On Francis' synodality see Vian, "Sinfonia nella Chiesa". See also the final part of Béraud's article in this special issue.

22 Vatican News, *Istituita una nuova commissione di studio sul diaconato femminile*, 8 April 2020. The 2016 commission, due to discordant opinions, did not reach any conclusion, as Pope Francis said during the press conference on the plane upon his return from Macedonia (May 7, 2019). On April 8, 2020, the new Commission took office.

23 Francis, *Letter to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*.

been presented and enriches our understanding of the evolution of the place of women within Catholicism over the past 70 years.

Natalia Núñez Bargeño opens this special issue by questioning the idea that the end of Vatican II marked the beginning of the emancipation of Catholic women. According to her, a generation of lay women asserted themselves after the Second World War, in the context of the Cold War, by engaging not only in the ICOs (International Catholic Organizations), but also in theological debates. The legacy of these pioneers would be victim of a double omission: as Catholics, they would be little valued in secular historiography, which focuses on radical feminist movements; as women, they would be ignored by Catholic historiography, still centered on men. Her connected history approach allows her to uncover transnational networks of Catholic feminists active during the 1950s and to fill a gap concerning the contemporary participation of women in the development of global Catholicism. Her investigation also leads her to reassess the pontificate of Pius XII: she suggests that Pacelli accompanied and encouraged the involvement of women in public life, partly for strategic reasons (the fight against communism). His quoted speech of 21 October 1945 to members of Catholic Women's associations is quite explanatory: "[woman] must compete with man for the good of the *civitas*, in which she is equal in dignity to him... they both have the right and the duty to cooperate for the total good of society and of the nation".

The next contribution, authored by Mariangela Maraviglia, focuses on the Italian theologian Adriana Zarri (1910-2010). It considers the importance of the pre-council period in Catholic women's empowerment. Participation in the Gioventù femminile di Azione Cattolica in the 1930s played a determining role in Zarri's moral, cultural, religious and social education. The skills she acquired in that movement allowed her to enter the Catholic intellectual field, publishing two books in 1941. However, it was not until the early 1960s that she was recognized as a theologian in a context where theological faculties slowly opened their doors to women. The 1970s and 1980s marked for Zarri a gradual emancipation from the positions of the Catholic magisterium, particularly in matters of sexual morality, as well as an exploration of the links between Christianity and ecology.

The following article also leads to reassess the rupture that Vatican II would represent in the promotion of women. Clarisse Tesson returns to the proclamation, in 1970, by Paul VI, of two women doctors of the Church: Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena. She shows that this event, which broke with a thousand-year-old tradition that reserved this title for clerics (and therefore for men), was a consequence of the new ecclesiology of Vatican II, which considered that all the baptized, and not only ordained ministers, were called to be prophets, priests and kings. But Pope Montini never publicly presented his gesture as an encouragement for women to study and teach

theology. Their access to this field, long reserved for priests, was a gradual process that began in the 1950s with the creation of institutes of religious studies and continued into the 1960s.

The recruitment in 1965 of Josephine Massyngberde Ford to the University of Notre Dame as a New Testament and rabbinic scholar was one example of this gradual opening of Catholic theology to women. In his article, John Maiden opens with a discussion of how this pioneering woman participated in the CCR (Catholic Charismatic Renewal), of which Notre Dame was one of the cradles in the late 1960s. Addressing Ford's analysis, Maiden shows that the renewal had ambivalent effects on the women who participated. On the one hand, the spiritual upheaval produced potential new contexts in which women could take new spiritual roles: the assertion that any person could be a repository of the charism given by the Holy Spirit placed women on an equal footing with men. But, on the other hand, a literal reading of the scriptures, including epistles of St. Paul, inspired by particular varieties of Protestant pentecostalism, led to the entrusting of leadership to men. However, contrasting the approach to gender of Catholic charismatics in the United States in the United States, Maiden finds evidence of different approaches to the woman question in Catholic charismatic renewal, and in doing so provides a helpful case study of the movement as 'glocal'.

This same attention to geographical variations within Catholicism can be found in the next contribution, authored by Charles Mercier. His study of the place of women in John Paul II's WYD (World Youth Days) shows that, according to the countries where these great international festivals took place, the place of women had not been identical. It was in the United States, on the occasion of the Denver WYD in 1993, that feminist demands were most strongly expressed. But it was in the Philippines, during the Manila WYD in 1995, that women were given the most responsibility. Despite these nuances, the WYD case shows that in the 1980s and 1990s, the Catholic Church was still a patriarchal institution that entrusted most of the key positions to men. Women's access to power, however, could be achieved through women's congregations, through the patronage of a high prelate, or through the lack of available male personnel.

It is this last factor that Céline Béraud, whose contribution closes this special issue, puts forward. Beyond ideological and spiritual factors, the rise in power of some women also resulted from the decrease in the number of clerics and the new division of religious work. In France, during the 1980s, the shortage of priests led to women taking on functions that previously reserved for men. Women became chaplains in prisons or hospitals, or responsible for the celebration of funerals. But this dynamic partially stopped in the 2000s, in the context of a conservative turn among French Catholics on gender issues. In contrast to Rome's directives, which were becoming

more liberal, some parish priests forbade girls from accessing the altar (and thus from being altar servers), and asked women to stop doing the readings or distributing communion. Gendered devotional practices, reserved for men or women, also appeared, to emphasize the irreducible difference between the sexes, but also to try to bring men back into religious practice. The sexual abuse crisis in the late 2010s changed the balance of power once again. The link between the violence and the patriarchal character of the Church gave French Catholic feminists a new opportunity to make their voices heard. Their discourse, long marginalized in French Catholicism, found new audiences.

3 Convergences

In spite of the differences arising from the variety of times and places (asymmetries which show the need to take into account the contexts in which Catholic women are inserted when one tries to capture their condition), the comparison of these contributions allows the identification of a number of convergences, which seem to characterize the role of women within the Catholic Church since the 1950s.

First of all, most of the contributions shed light on the ambivalent relationship of Catholic women to power. Over the period studied, many Catholic women seemed to accept their subordination to men, and some saw it as God's will. Quoting sociologist Joseph H. Fichter, Maiden recalls that in the 1970s, "most charismatic women want[ed] men to assume the leadership and that [was] only by defaults that they [were] willing to do so themselves". In the early 2000s, Béraud encountered the same type of discourse among French Catholic women in charge of their parishes: even though their position within the Catholic Church was vulnerable and their legitimacy weak, women did "not speak out to demand better conditions to perform their tasks nor would they mobilize collectively". They declared they found "fulfillment" in carrying out their mission and accorded "utmost respect to the figure of the priest".

If this is true for several experiences shown in this special issue, it is noteworthy to mention that alternative visions emerged in other contexts in the same period: as an example, at the beginning of the 1990s the international movement "Wir sind Kirche", which was particularly strong in German-speaking areas, advocated gender equality access to ordained ministries for women and the overcoming of the division between clergy and laity. Although it has not been officially recognized by ecclesiastical authority, it adds more complexity to

the plurality of Catholic voices that should be encompassed when analyzing these phenomena.²⁴

Interestingly, the above-described submissive attitude was sometimes conceived as subversive, insofar as it was likely to subvert the mundane logic of power. The Filipina Henrietta de Villa, interviewed by Mercier, connected her refusal to command priests with the teaching of Jesus (“the last shall be the first”). From her perspective, it was by becoming humble servants that, paradoxically, women’s influence would grow. Women’s ability to disarm male domination was publicly expressed by Celina Pineiro-Pearson in 1952. Núñez Bargeño notes that in an address to the 1200 WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations) delegates gathered in Rome, she denounced “the incapacity of men, because of their violent nature, to achieve true peace and, thus, the need to include women to accomplish this fundamental task”. The value of the feminine approach to responsibility was theorized by Adriana Zarri in 1964, in her book *Impazienza di Adamo*. As Maravaglia notes, she “expressed a critical view of typically male activism, enhancing instead female qualities such as acceptance, openness and listening”. In the mid-1980s she reworded this intuition, advocating for the integration of “the dominant ‘masculine’ attitudes leaning toward activism and efficiency, with the ‘alternative’ and ‘feminine’ qualities of ‘welcome’ and ‘contemplation’”. In the beginning of the 1990s, Sister Ann Mary Walsh, appointed communication director for the Denver WYD, adopted the “so called male mindset to make the event work” while emphasizing her “maternal side”, which would have led her to “humanize”, better than men, WYD organization by paying attention to people, especially the more vulnerable.

Given these provisions, and although Mercier’s and Béraud’s contributions illustrate the experience of Catholic feminists who demanded equality in access to priestly ordination, the feminism of most of the Catholic women mentioned in this special issue does not appear to be structured by the objective of obtaining the same statuses as men. It is interesting to note in Mercier’s contribution that it was on anti-feminist positions that Mother Angelica, a US nun and founder of the conservative television station EWTN (Eternal Word Television Network), sought to establish her influence on American Catholicism in the mid-1990s. In most of this issue’s *herstories* (to borrow a word used by Núñez Bargeño) women adhered to a differentialist feminism, which proclaimed the equal dignity of men and women, while postulating a complementarity between the two genders. The Catholic institution itself encouraged this feminism, at the risk of essentializing cultural constructs and implicitly maintaining

²⁴ Wegan, “Wir sind Kirche”, 645-65.

women in their traditional roles as mothers and wives. This is particularly evident in Tesson's analysis of Cardinal Garonne's interpretation of the proclamation of Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena as Doctors of the Church. His valuing of the feminine way of teaching went hand in hand with a belief in women's unfitnes for theorizing, which is evident in these words quoted by Tesson: "They would not be at ease in a doctrinal presentation where one must make abstraction of one's self, of others, of life, to order ideas logically". The same devaluation of women's intellectual skills, hidden by a discourse of the superiority of their maternal function, can be found in the conservative Catholic press of the time. Cardinal Garonne and a part of Catholic opinion seemed blind to the historical reasons for the intellectual marginalization of women within the Catholic Church.

The special issue shows, however, that since the 1950s, the Catholic Church has promoted women in certain areas. Both in Núñez Bargaueño's contribution, focused on the pontificate of Pius XII, and in Mercier's, focused on the pontificate of John Paul II, the Catholic hierarchy put forward women in the field of international relations and public relations. In this, these papers complete an observation that had already been made in the field of national politics concerning the Interwar period.²⁵ This partial promotion as a precise Vatican strategy was probably based on the representation of women as having a vocation to be mediators, like the Virgin Mary. But this choice can also be explained by other tactical considerations - taking into account the strength that Catholic women represent on a global scale - or by communication strategies inspired by logics of tokenism.

This dynamic led to feminine empowerment, as shown in the path taken by Celina Pineiro-Pearson, an Argentinean social worker who became Vice President of the WUCWO. Like other women leaders of ICOs, she "traveled extensively, collaborating with other women and men across the globe and across different denominations". According to Núñez Bargaueño, "Catholic women in positions of leadership in ICOs became humanitarian and apostleship experts". The same can be said of Filipina Henrietta de Villa who climbed the ladder of responsibility from president of an association of Catholic women who washed liturgical dishes and linens to Philippine ambassador to the Holy See.

Several of the collected contributions show that the promotion of women within the Catholic Church was linked to the fact that, when they found themselves, sometimes by accident, in leadership positions, they appeared competent in the eyes of the Catholic hierarchy. Núñez Bargaueño notes that the record of ICOs' female leaders changed the view of part of the hierarchy and the Roman Curia. In

²⁵ Della Sudda, "The Women's League of Catholic Action".

the French Catholic parishes of the 1980s studied by Béraud, female leadership was often the result of a lack of available men. But once in place, bishops recognized the abilities of these women, sometimes valuing them more than priests. One of the women interviewed by Béraud reported her what her bishop said: “Now that I’ve seen how you work, I would not dismiss my pool of laywomen because the feedback I get is that you work at least as properly as a priest!”. However, this woman was not convinced that she would not return to the fold if there was an influx of presbyteral vocations.

We wish that the various contributions gathered here, which paint a nuanced picture of the evolution of the place of women in Catholicism since the 1950s, will allow us to better grasp the historicity of gender discourses and practices within the Catholic Church. We hope that this special issue, which testifies to the numerous transnational connections that are being established among researchers working on the history of contemporary Catholicism, will help to further highlight the changes but also the continuities in Catholic women’s experiences as well as the extent to which they have influenced Catholicism as a whole.

Lastly, we would like to thank Daiana Menti for her editorial work on this issue.

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Recovering the Legacy of the Thought of Catholic Lay Women (1945-62)

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Abstract At the crossroads of gender studies, theology and transnational, intellectual and cultural history, this article introduces a new perspective on the pre-history of the Second Vatican Council. The post-war and early Cold War period coincided with the rise of a generation of lay women who became true national and international apostolate professionals. The *herstories* of their legacies have been largely overlooked or confined by biographical or national boundaries. However, due to their influence on public policies and agenda setting, lay women were able to use 'female' forms of associationism as an entryway into male-dominated arenas, including theological debates, while simultaneously beginning to articulate their desire for greater participation in both broader society and the Church.

Keywords Catholicism. Gender. Agency. Lay Women. Transnational History. United Nations. Humanitarianism. Intellectual History. Personalism.

Summary 1 Revisiting the Legacy of Catholic Lay Women in the Pre-conciliar Years: a New Research Field or a New Perspective? – 2 Separating Women from 'All Those Gratuitous Flowery Adjectives, the Pedestals and Incense'. – 3 Catholic Lay Women in the United Nations and Second Vatican Council: Two Complementary 'Signs of the Times'? – 4 "The Hour" of Women: Towards a Genealogy of Transnational Networks of Female Catholic Thought (1945-62).



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1 Revisiting the Legacy of Catholic Lay Women in the Pre-conciliar Years: A New Research Field or a New Perspective?¹

To the 'strawberries on the cake',²
and to Prof. Aurora Morcillo (FIU),
in memoriam.

The study of the Second Vatican Council appears to be thriving. The last two decades have witnessed an exciting revival in scholarship.³ With the reactivation of the so-called culture wars, the Council's complex and diverse legacy, its purportedly unfinished reception⁴ and the role that its teachings might have played in the development of twenty-first-century Catholicism have recently returned to the fore in many ongoing debates. Thus, it may come as a surprise to know that significantly fewer works (and words) have been devoted to the analysis of women's participation in the Council.⁵ Most significantly, the *herstories* of the women who laid the ground for Vatican II (and for women's participation as auditors) are still lacking.

Given this gap, one might all too easily assume that Catholic lay (and religious) women did not play a noteworthy role in the pre-conciliar years. This presumption seems confirmed by the fact that scholarship dealing with the aftermath of the Council has boomed in recent decades.⁶ While this exploration of the great advances achieved by Catholic women since 1965 is necessary, it has also

1 This article was written under the auspices of two projects: "Modernidad y religión en la España del siglo XX: entre el consenso y la ruptura" (PGC2018-099909-B-I00, funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and ERDF A way of making Europe); "Sociedad internacional y europeísmo. La huella de las otras Europas" (PID2021-122750NB-C21). It is also part of Núñez Bargaño's MSCA Project 101108049 - TheoFem "Lay Women: International Experts and Theologians avant-la-lettre. Legacies and Entangled Histories (1945-1962)". The author also wants to thank Prof. Laura Pettinaroli and Prof. Mario Aguilar, for their kind invitation to share an early version of this work at the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics, School of Divinity-St. Andrews University (3 November 2022) and at the Séminaire annuel *Les archives du pontificat de Pie XII: recherches en cours. Gli archivi del pontificato di Pio XII: ricerche in corso* (École française de Rome, 10 January 2023).

2 "Women theologians are 'the strawberry on the cake', says Pope" by Hannah Roberts, *The Tablet*, 11 December 2014, cited in Madigan, "Women During and After Vatican II", 90.

3 Cf. Van Rompay, Miglarese, Morgan, *The Long Shadow of Vatican II*; Gabriel, Spieß, Winkler, *Catholicism and Religious Freedom*; Weiser, "Les experts au concile Vatican II"; Faggioli, *The Rising Laity*; Bonner, Denny, Fraser Connolly, *Empowering the People of God*; Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, to cite some of the most relevant works.

4 Clifford, *Decoding Vatican II*.

5 Cf. Madigan, "Women During and After Vatican II"; Heyder, Muschiol, *Katholikinnen und das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*; Valerio, *Madri del Concilio*; Perroni, Melloni, Noceti, *Tantum aurora est*.

6 Blasco Herranz, Moreno Seco, "Españolas en el catolicismo internacional"; Masquellier, "Ni vraiment dissidentes, ni complètement obéissantes"; Martínez Cano, "40 años

reinforced the overall impression that the preceding period was characterized by a logical evolution from “obedience to revolt”, or that the post-conciliar years were a “storm after the silence”.⁷ This unconscious narrative seems to imply that numerous aspects of their professional and intellectual lives changed for these women *only* after Vatican II happened. Suddenly, they were engaging in theological debates and proposing their own ideas about a diversity of topics: the laity, the gendered division of religious labour, the Church’s relationship to the world, a ‘feminist’ reading of the sacred texts. Did Catholic women really not think about or discuss these issues in the years preceding the Council?

Inspired by the thought-provoking work of Bosschaert, Derks, Desmazières, Henold, Bidegain and Rossi, this article introduces a new orientation for research into the pre-history of the Second Vatican Council.⁸ At the crossroads of gender studies, theology and the history of ideas and internationalism (in particular, transnational and cultural history), the article draws on work conducted at ISACEM (Istituto per la storia dell’Azione cattolica e del movimento cattolico in Italia Paolo VI) and the AAV (Archivio Apostolico Vaticano), as well as relevant publications by Catholic lay women held at the Maurits Sabbe Library (KU Leuven) and the Biblioteca Nacional de España.⁹ This work indicates that the growing public role played by lay women in local and international lay organizations was accompanied by a simultaneous development in their intellectual engagement in contemporary ecclesial, political and social debates. As a result of their efforts to influence public policies and set agendas, lay women were able to use ‘female’ forms of associationism as an entryway into male-dominated arenas, including theological debates. Although these women were a minority – often elite – they nevertheless made meaningful, and greatly overlooked, intellectual contributions.

de Teología Feminista en España”; de Dios Fernández, Mínguez Blasco, “De la obediencia a la protesta”; Henold, “Woman – Go Forth!” just to cite a few.

7 I cite here the formula used by de Dios Fernández, Mínguez Blasco, “De la obediencia a la protesta”, and by Govaart-Halkes, cited by Derks, “Changing Lanes”, 82.

8 Bosschaert, “Is there a Future for Contemporary Church History?”; Derks, “Changing Lanes”; Desmazières, “Généalogie d’un ‘silence’ conciliaire”; Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*; Bidegain, “El cristianismo y el cambio socio político de las mujeres”, and Rossi, *Uncharted Territory*.

9 I would like to thank Alejandro Dieguez, Paolo Trionfani, Simona Ferrantin and Alessandro Romano, for their kind support during my research stay at the Roman archives (June 2022). I also would like to thank *Resilience* (and notably Lieneke Timpers and Dries Bosschaert) for the TNA-Resilience scholarship that allowed me to conduct preliminary research at KU Leuven.

2 Separating Women from ‘All Those Gratuitous Flowery Adjectives, the Pedestals and Incense’

Research conducted by historians Della Sudda, Moreno Seco, Blasco Herranz, Margotti, Scaraffia and Zarri, and Van Osselaer suggest that Catholic women’s experiences in the twentieth century were not only complex, but also involved an active dialogue with the prescriptions of the Catholic Church and society on the whole.¹⁰ While the apostolic work of Catholic lay women has been the object of a significant amount of academic literature, their thought and their substantial work as international agents have not received the same amount of attention. Some publications have looked at the lives of certain Vatican II ‘mothers’, yet they have rarely transcended purely biographical¹¹ or relatively regional or national perspectives.¹²

The limited scholarship accorded to the intellectual and transnational work of these women seems to unconsciously mirror some of the gender conventions and essentialist views by which they were perceived at the time, that is, either as dedicated mothers or as purely spiritual and delicate beings. It is significant that when women finally entered the Council as auditors, they were often addressed by the appellation *pulcherrimae auditrices* (most beautiful female auditors). Australian theologian Rosemary Goldie argued that the comparison of women to flowers by the men in the parallel commissions was emblematic of the dangers of employing a different, romanticized language to speak about females.¹³ For Goldie, it was important to omit the “gratuitous flowery adjectives, the pedestals and incense” because women were asking to be “recognized [by the Church] as the full human persons they are, and treated accordingly”.¹⁴

10 Scaraffia, Zarri, *Storia delle donne*; Margotti “L’autre moitié de l’Église”; Della Sudda “L’action catholique féminine au XXe siècle”; Moreno Seco, “De la caridad al compromiso”; Blasco Herranz, *Mujeres, hombres y catolicismo*; Van Osselaer et al., “Charismatic Women in Religion” and Van Osselaer, *The Pious Sex*.

11 Salas Larrazábal, Rodríguez de Lecea, *Pilar Bellosillo*; Roussel, Ben Djaffar, *Marguerite Fiévez*.

12 Moreno Seco, “De la caridad al compromiso”; Duriez, *Femmes catholiques, femmes engagées*; Blasco Herranz, “Las Mujeres de Acción Católica”.

13 Much less known is the contribution to this discussion by the then president of the WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations), Pilar Bellosillo. On the need to integrate a Hispanic perspective into the transnational history of Catholicism, cf. Rodríguez Lago, Núñez Bargueño, *Mas allá de los nacionalcatolicismos*.

14 In this respect, while the role of English - and French - speaking Catholic women has received some attention, much less has been written about women from other regions of the world, including the Hispanic world. Of the 23 female auditors, 5 were Hispanic: Pilar Bellosillo (Spain), president of the WUCWO; Cristina Estrada, A.C.J. (Cuban-Spain), superior general of the Sisters of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart (Ancillae Sacri Cordis Jesu) in Spain, despite being born in Cuba; Margarita Moyana Llerena (Argentina), president of The World Federation of Catholic Young Women and Girls (WFCY-

Many studies continue to consider Catholic women as second-class citizens (perpetually dependant on, or primarily subservient to, a male authority figure). While Catholic women had to – and often continue to – operate within highly hierarchical institutional constraints, this condition should not be de facto interpreted as a complete absence of female agency. Two well-known cases of early modern Catholic women, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and Saint Teresa de Jesus (to cite two well-known Hispanic cases), show exactly how complex women’s relationships to male authorities could be. In more recent times, other examples come to mind, such as, for example, Lili Álvarez (1905-1998). Largely known for her successful career as a pioneering multi-sport athlete, Álvarez was also a committed Spanish feminist and outspoken journalist with a multi-faceted international career. Writing within the adverse context of the Franco dictatorship, in her book *Feminismo y espiritualidad* (*Feminism and Spirituality*) she used subtle rhetorical strategies to overcome political and religious censure, and to powerfully criticize the infantilization of Spanish women by the Church (but also, by extension, Francoist society as a whole). While her book does not fully question the concept of ‘biological’ difference, it creatively makes use of the teachings of one of the “Second Vatican Council celebrities” (i.e., Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens)¹⁵ to demand that the Church viewed religious women (and, consequently, lay women) as full “adults” in the room. In particular, she skilfully appropriated the art of the medieval ‘gloss’ (or text commentary) to *desvergonzadamente* (unapologetically) cite “the sacred authors of the Church” as a means to legitimize, or sacralize, her own ideas.¹⁶

As this example shows, some of the categories and perspectives used to study women and religion required regular fine-tuning. When approaching the deconstruction of gender roles, many scholars continue to perceive religion as a major obstacle to the advancement of civic and women’s rights. The supposedly straightforward equation between religion, patriarchy and the subordination of women is too often insufficiently problematized. It is precisely this secular/liberal concept of female agency (which is understood as inevitably secular) that the work of Mahmood, Braidotti and Scott has helped to deconstruct.¹⁷ Religious convictions may have led women to partic-

WG); Gladys Parentelli (Uruguay), vice president of the female branch of the MIJARC (International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth) based in Louvain; and Luz-Marie Alvarez-Icaza (Mexico), co-president of the Latin-American Christian Family Movement groups. Quote in text from Madigan, “Women During and After Vatican II”, 83.

15 The work she cites is Cardinal Suenens, *Promotion apostolique de la religieuse*.

16 Álvarez, *Feminismo y espiritualidad*, 20.

17 Cf. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*; Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times” and Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (in particular the chapter “Sexularism: On Secularism and

ipate in various forms of resistance, appropriation and even activism in a number of complex ways. In this respect, Scott eloquently observed that the acquisition of formal political and citizen's rights for women did not automatically translate into full social and economic equality. In fact, many first-wave feminist leaders drew on deeply held religious principles to advance their arguments. Similarly, Mahmood has demonstrated that 'agentival capacity' not only entails "a resistance to norms, but [...] the multiple ways one inhabits those norms"¹⁸ and, thus, that clear-cut divisions between secular agency and religious subordination should continue to be carefully re-evaluated.

Another reason for the invisibility of Catholic women in much ongoing research¹⁹ is that they fundamentally challenge some of the dominant frameworks from which the study of social movements, theology, transnational and intellectual histories and feminism have tended to be approached. Catholic lay women's experiences are often difficult to locate on the left-/right-wing political spectrum. In addition, their means of action and expression frequently elude conventional narratives and methodologies, as well as most canons of scholarship. While mapping the genealogy of Catholic lay women's thought and transnational work for the pre-conciliar period in full detail is beyond the scope of this article, the work offers a significant starting point from which to begin the process of recovering and reconsidering their legacies. By arguing that Catholic lay women were committed participants in international forums of religious and secular knowledge and transnational communities of care, the article demonstrates that it is important to continually question assumptions about widely known historical phenomena such as the Cold War, feminist waves and the Second Vatican Council.

Gender Equality"), as well as Giorgi "Gender, Religion, and Political Agency".

18 Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 15.

19 Two of the most significant examples are Patricia Owens' "Women and the History of International Thought", cf. <https://www.politics.ox.ac.uk/research-projects/women-and-the-history-of-international-thought.html> and Marta Verginella's EIRENE project, cf. <https://project-eirene.eu/>. Cf. Regulska, Smith, *Women and Gender in Postwar Europe*, along with Garner, *Shaping a Global Women's Agenda* important arguments. Cf. also Vuola, "The Exclusion of (the Study of) Religion".

3 Catholic Lay Women in the United Nations and Second Vatican Council: Two Complementary ‘Signs of the Times’?

In 1963 Pope John XXIII formulated the emerging role of women as being a clear ‘sign of the times’ in his encyclical *Pacem in terris*.²⁰ Although the period between the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Council was in many ways characterized by a return to ‘traditional’ gender roles and the spread of a Cold War ideal of domesticity,²¹ these relatively understudied years were also a time of considerable change.²² It was during those years that the bases for the social and ecclesial movements that would later shake the 1960s were laid. This foundational work was also carried out by women, many of whom have been omitted of traditional and alternative narratives because they do not comfortably fit the definition of a feminist leader, an international agent, or a Catholic thinker. Despite being mostly conservative in spirit, Catholic teachings did, in fact, engage with the changing situation of women to a large extent; and vice versa, women interacted significantly, though often not overtly, with Catholic and secular teachings. The American feminist Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, in the same context in which John XXIII was preparing to convene Vatican II.²³ She and her French counterpart, Simone de Beauvoir, were regularly cited by lay women (sometimes, though not always, as criticism), along with encyclicals and documents by other religious authorities, in their reflections about their apostolate in society and the Church.²⁴

In this respect, the Second Vatican Council could also be interpreted as a product of its time. Although the pre-conciliar years were marked by an impulse to expand the Church’s presence in society and the international arena, the history of this period has been largely written in strikingly secular and national terms. In the last two decades, research has begun to reaffirm the influence of Catholicism on

20 John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, paragraphs 126-9.

21 As new power struggles between East and West began to arise, the media often presented conservatism and, thus, the ‘traditional family unit’ as an antidote to the anxiety provoked by this uncertain political situation. Yet, parallelly, women’s increasing prominence in the workforce and growing access to education were prompting a re-evaluation of their role in society, thus undermining efforts to re-establish the supposedly ‘innate’ gender roles of men and women.

22 Feldner, Gorrara, Passmore, *The Lost Decade?*; Montero, Louzao, *Catolicismo y Franquismo*.

23 Madigan, “Women During and After Vatican II”, 79. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.

24 Álvarez, *Feminismo y espiritualidad*, 47; Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*; Pelletier-Baillargeon, “Un Concile pour le deuxième sexe?”.

post-war and Cold War European and world histories.²⁵ Although the pontificate of Pius XII coincided with a period of accelerated secularization, it also witnessed a renewed wave of religious effervescence,²⁶ along with the consolidation of the Catholic Church as an increasingly influential transnational agent.²⁷ Although women were an essential piece of this historical puzzle, most scholarship has tended to focus on the Vatican Curia, the hierarchy, male Catholic politicians, activists, and high-profile intellectuals.²⁸ However, the recently unsealed Vatican Archives of Pius XII have offered a new opportunity to reassess the role played by Catholic lay women in bringing about institutional, social, and religious change in the pre-conciliar years. One crucial aspect of this period was the Church's attempt to expand the ranks of lay ICOs (International Catholic Organizations). The overall objective was to counter the influence of communism in the international arena, while simultaneously providing a religious alternative to liberal-secular values. As a result, the expansion of the ICOs' sphere of action was promoted not only geographically, but also in newly formed international institutions. As ICOs were operating transnationally in the fields of health, social care, and humanitarianism (areas that, at the time, were generally associated with female action), this effort involved the greater engagement of lay women in public life.

Pius XII repeatedly called upon Catholic women to personally take on an active role in international post-war society. As early as 1945, the pontiff addressed women regarding the best way they could "maintain and strengthen the dignity of women" in the "current [i.e., post-war] circumstances" in which "Providence" had placed them.²⁹ The pope encouraged the expansion of women's apostolate efforts in the following terms:

Your entry into this public life took place suddenly, as a result of the social upheavals of which we are spectators; it matters little!

25 Cf. Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade*; Thompson, *For God and Globe*; Kirby, *Religion and the Cold War*.

26 Margry, *Cold War Mary*.

27 Pasture, "Religious Globalisation in Post-war Europe"; Levant, Pettinaroli, Sibire, "Le Vatican, un acteur religieux singulier dans un monde global".

28 Chappel, *Catholic Modern*; López-Chaves, *Los intelectuales católicos*; Kaiser, *Christian Democracy and the Origins of European Union*; Compagnon, *Jacques Maritain et l'Amérique du sud*; Chenaux, *Pie XII*. An exception is Brydan, *Franco's Internationalists*, in particular chapter 5 "Spain's Catholic Internationalists" which has a section on Maria de Madariaga. Also, on catholic nurses as 'moral experts', cf. Brydan, "Antagonistic Internationalists".

29 *Questa Grande Vostra Adunata. Women's Duties in Social and Political Life: Address of His Holiness Pope Pius XII to Members of Various Catholic Women's Associations*, 21 October 1945. Citation from the article "Anche il problema femminile è nella mente e nel cuore del Papa", 3 (Author's transl. of the Italian original from the 1955 article).

You are called to take part in it; will you perhaps leave to others, to those who become promoters or accomplices in the ruin of the domestic hearth, the monopoly of the social organization of which the family is the principal element in its economic, juridical, spiritual, and moral unity? The fate of the family, the fate of human society, are at stake... Therefore, every woman, without exception, must understand well her duty, her strict duty of conscience not to remain withdrew, she should rather take action (in the manner best suited to her particular circumstances) in order to contain the currents that threaten the hearth... There is yet another reason one must add to this compelling incentive for the Catholic woman to enter the path which today opens to her industriousness: **her dignity as a woman. She must compete with man for the good of the civitas, in which she is equal in dignity to him... they both have the right and the duty to cooperate for the total good of society and of the nation.**³⁰

Access to political activity through voting rights,³¹ along with the spread of communism, are two important elements that explain this pontifical call to women to reach out beyond the traditional sphere of the home, and to fully participate in the re-Christianization of national and international life. Yet, the use of the word ‘dignity’ suggests that Pius XII’s discourse may also be responding to possible intra-ecclesial tensions around ‘the woman question’ and in particular, to the way the defendants of ‘nouvelle theology’ and other ‘progressive’ Catholic thinkers might have conceived the multi-faceted role of women. In particular, his words can be interpreted as acknowledging the spread of what could be defined as ‘personalist feminism’,³² a current that had been developing since the early 1930s (although some of its ideas can be traced back even earlier), and that would increasingly advance an egalitarian perspective of gender roles, while preserving some of the more traditional ‘maternalist’ tenets.

One particular event that marked the greater involvement of lay

30 “Anche il problema femminile è nella mente e nel cuore del Papa”, 3 [in bold letters in the original].

31 Although the right to vote had already been granted to women in certain countries before and after the First World War (Finland 1906; Norway 1907; Denmark, Iceland 1915; Russia, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, the United Kingdom 1917; Germany, Austria 1918; the Netherlands, Luxembourg 1920; Spain 1931), in the aftermath of the Second World War another significant wave of universal suffrage spread largely across southern and eastern Europe: France 1944; Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary 1945; Italy (of particular importance in the Vatican context), Romania 1946; Malta 1947; Belgium 1948; Greece 1952.

32 I borrow the concept from Gauvreau, *Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution*, cf. in particular chapter 5 “The Epic of Contemporary Feminism”, 176. The relation of personalism to feminism will be examined in the last section of this article.

women in international forums was the 13th Conference of the IUCWL (International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues) in Rome. Held in 1952, it was at this gathering that the decision was made to change the name of the IUCWL to the WUCWO (World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations). The symbolic change from 'international' to 'world' is significant: it denotes lay women's aspirations to more actively contribute to the Church's efforts "to renew the face of the Earth"³³ in the post-war and early Cold War period. Similarly, in order to facilitate *liaisons* with the UN (United Nations) offices that had been established in Paris, as well as those existing in Geneva, the organization's headquarters would be transferred from the Netherlands to France.³⁴ Led by the work (and financing) of the US National Catholic Welfare Council, and particularly by lay woman Catherine Shaeffer,³⁵ the WUCWO formed part of the formal and informal diplomacy networks established on the post-war international stage. A select group of International Catholic Organization leaders participated in the San Francisco Charter Conference in 1945 to institute the UN.³⁶ In addition, between 1947 and 1948 the IUCWL was granted consultative status with the main UN agencies: UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) and the ILO (International Labour Organization).

Throughout the 1940s, Catholic lay women became involved in an ever-growing number of international projects and agencies, including the Commission on the Status of Women. Consultations were regularly scheduled between the WUCWO and different members of the national delegations belonging to the United Nations Secretariat. The WUCWO also helped other Catholic organisations that were themselves preparing reports for different UN commissions. To make more efficient recommendations, WUCWO consultants conducted preliminary exploratory work. This often included developing and conducting surveys amongst their national affiliates. Similarly, to

33 The phrase "*Rinnovando la faccia della terra*" comes from a translation from the English Catholic journal *The Tablet*, 20 October 1951, in ISACEM, fondo Unione donne di Azione Cattolica (UD), busta 236, fascicolo Internazionale - Congressi Mondiali Apostolato dei Laici (1, 2, 3). The liturgical symbolism is powerful here: "rinnovare la faccia della terra" is taken from Psalm 104:30. Its particular strength is directly related to the spiritual effervescence of the Pentecost.

34 Rossi, *Uncharted Territory*, 179.

35 Born in the United States, Shaeffer had a Master's degree in Economics and International Relations, she was a member of the National Council of Catholic Women and had worked since 1927 in the social action department of the National Catholic Welfare Council.

36 Rossi, *Uncharted Territory*, 5.

better brief delegates on the importance of Catholic values, Catholic lay women organized workshops to provide them with a more thorough knowledge of Catholic thought. This was a fundamental activity since, at the time, lay women did not have access to certain university degrees, most notably Theology. They were educated in structures that have received little academic attention, such as religious institutes, but also the educational communities established by local and international Catholic Action groups. Lay women needed to master Catholic concepts in order to spread the Church's mission and educate other women, particularly when they were called upon to take part in UN sponsored workshops organized in the so-called 'developing world'. In fact, just as the need to better prepare women for their domestic and apostolate efforts was central to the post-war/reconstruction period,³⁷ the social and civic international training of women's missions – along with the amelioration of the working conditions of women worldwide – were two of the central preoccupations of the WUCWO in the 1950s.³⁸

While the engagement of Catholic lay women was largely grounded in a traditional discourse, a growing sense of what would be called women's 'empowerment' today can also be detected. Following Catholic doctrine, lay women continued to present their role as 'the caring and/or pious sex', but this depiction was now presented as a powerful means to legitimize their right to contribute to crucial international conversations and to demand greater equality. This is, for example, what Argentinian social worker and WUCWO Vice President Celina Piñeiro-Pearson³⁹ championed in her speech to the 1,200 WUCWO delegates gathered in Rome in 1952. Entitled *The Proper Mission for the Laity in Today's World and Women's Responsibilities in it*, Piñeiro-Pearson's speech denounced the incapacity of men, because of their violent nature, to achieve true peace and, thus, the need to include

37 Due to the particular features of the Spanish case (i.e. the Civil War, 1936-39), the chronology is slightly different. Educational workshops were organized in 1945 by the dioceses of Madrid to train women 'catechists' charged with the 're-evangelization of the suburbs'. An estimated 2,034 women were trained as leaders of apostolate tasks that year. Cf. *Memoria diocesana* 1945, in AAV, Arch. Nunz. Madrid 1329, fasc. 1, ff. 154-66.

38 Cf. for example, *UMOFC (Union Mondiale des Organisations Féminines Catholiques) Congresso di Roma 1952-Carrefour Problèmes économiques et sociaux*, in ISACEM, fondo UD, busta 245 - Internazionale - metodi, studi, schemi; groupe de recherche internazionali UMOFC 1950-57, fascicolo Congresso di Roma Aprile, 1952; *Programme Provisoire* and *Congresso Bogotá Janvier 1957-57/1 UMO/Congrès/Amé. Lat.*, in ISACEM, fondo UD, busta 245 - Internazionale - metodi, studi, schemi; groupe de recherche internazionali UMOFC 1950-57, fascicolo Congresso di Roma 29-9/4-10 1957.

39 She was the first elected president of Argentina's FMJFC (Federación Mundial de Juventudes Femeninas Católicas), 1933-40, vice president of the WUCWO.

women to accomplish this fundamental task.⁴⁰ By referencing their ‘natural’ role as mothers, Piñeiro-Pearson asserted that women have the higher moral ground and, accordingly, a greater capacity than men to produce long-lasting social change.

Piñeiro-Pearson’s speech should be seen against the background of a wider process of the re/construction of the discourse of motherhood in the wider inter/national community, and the reforms of maternity rights legislation implemented during the post-war years in particular.⁴¹ Both religious and secular organizations competed to attract new members, and equally claimed to defend the rights of women as mothers, workers and citizens.⁴² Female activists and leaders from the left and right both appealed to women’s maternal instincts within the simultaneous and competing peace campaigns that took shape on both sides of the Iron Curtain in the context of the formation of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization).⁴³ These women, who belonged to different sides of the political spectrum, argued in surprisingly similar terms that their maternal predisposition could lead their nations away from nuclear annihilation, and that they were better prepared to consolidate a peaceful future. By connecting women’s local and international issues, they helped to spread and consolidate the message that the world of international action and politics was not the exclusive domain of men. However, Piñeiro-Pearson’s speech is also significant because it reveals the powerful lobbying capacity of the WUCWO. The vice president is very much aware that the organization could potentially speak on behalf of “us women, who are half of the entire population of the world” (mark the interesting resonance with Suenens’ famous words uttered during the Second Vatican Council). In her defence of the need for the greater involvement of Catholic women in international life, she very intelligently mentioned the fact that the WUCWO included an estimated 36 million women worldwide, many of whom were avid moral campaigners. If the echo of all these members was heard around the globe, she observes, significant advancements in world peace could be achieved.

⁴⁰ Piñeiro-Pearson, *The Proper Mission for the Laity in Today’s World and Women’s Responsibilities in it*, 1952, in ISACEM, fondo UD, busta 245 - Internazionale - metodi, studi, schemi; groupe de recherche internazionali UMOFC 1950-57 (Author’s transl. of the original French).

⁴¹ For an in-depth analysis of pre-war social reform as a gendered space and practice and a very well-constructed hypothesis with regards to “feminism as a social regeneration movement by women and mothers”, cf. Blasco Herranz, “The Power of Motherhood”. For the Italian case, cf. Schievenin, “A Law Made by Italian Mothers for Italian Mothers?”.

⁴² Pojmann, “For Mothers, Peace and Family”.

⁴³ For an analysis of the role of peace in Catholic Italian circles in the late 1940s and 1950s, cf. Moro, “The Catholic Church, Italian Catholics and Peace Movements”.

At this time, Catholic NGOs were operating in a context where Western governments were increasingly favouring secular transnational humanitarian action agencies.⁴⁴ However, as noted by Piñeiro-Pearson, lay women could serve as important actors on the religious battlefield of the post-war and early Cold War period. Indeed, this potential for mobilizing public opinion probably helped to transform the concept of their civic roles in the eyes of some members of the Church hierarchy and Roman Curia. As a result, Catholic lay women provided ever-growing support for the expansion of cooperation in UN projects around the world. Women like American Catherine Schaefer, Argentinian Celina Piñeiro-Pearson, Belgian Christine de Hemptine and Spanish Pilar Bellosillo, to cite but a few, travelled extensively, collaborating with other women and men across the globe and across different denominations.⁴⁵ Their work was helped by existing global networks of lay Catholics, as well as by the presence of missionaries. The several gatherings that took place in this decisive decade include the UNESCO General Conference of Montevideo (November-December 1954) and New Delhi (November 1956), and the UN sponsored Western Hemisphere Seminar on “Participation of Women in Public Life” (Bogota 1959). These seminars promoted women’s education, particularly, though not exclusively, in civic development, marriage and the family. They also provided the occasion to gather information on the political and religious situation in the countries that hosted them, especially regarding the influence of communism and the advancement of secularization. The findings were regularly reported to the Holy See.⁴⁶

As a result of this multi-faceted worldwide engagement, Catholic women in positions of leadership in ICOs became humanitarian and apostleship experts (although additional study including a social history of Catholic networks remains to be done to identify the extension and impact of their work).

In this respect, it is necessary to define the category of ‘Catholic lay women’ so often used to approach a phenomenon that is quite diverse in nature. On the eve of their appearance at the Council,

⁴⁴ Barnett, Gross Stein, *Sacred Aid*, 5.

⁴⁵ According to records at the ISACEM, there was a WUCWO meeting in London (June 1956) and a congress and several workshops in Latin America (a total of 12 countries were visited in 1956). A workshop in Moscow is also mentioned, as well as preparation of the ICOs conference (Bruges, 11-15 April 1957) and the World Congress for Lay Apostolate (Rome, 5-13 October 1957). Added to this document in pen is an additional reference to “Bruxelles, congrès des migrations”. Other meetings took place in Africa and Asia. Cf. *Ordre du jour provisoire de la Réunion du Bureau, Paris 1-3 Mars, 1957*, in ISACEM, fondo UD, busta 245 - Internazionale - metodi, studi, schemi; groupe de recherche internazionali; UMOFC 1950-57.

⁴⁶ Derks, “Changing Lanes”, 97; Pollard “Pius XI’s Promotion of the Italian Model of Catholic Action”, 766.

Catholic women were hardly united in perspective.⁴⁷ As with their male counterparts, lay women did not belong to a fully coherent ideological or social group. Whereas many of the women leaders in the pre-war period came from an elite background, leadership in post-war times increasingly fell into the hands of younger middle-class professionals.⁴⁸ This was exacerbated by the impact of the division, at least since the 1930s - although the timeline is slightly different for each country - of Catholic Action into 'specialization' groups by gender, age, and professional background (working class, peasant, student and 'independent' milieus).⁴⁹ The idea was to use 'specialized' apostolic techniques developed by middle-class professionals to improve re-Christianization and evangelization methods. Consequently, specialization made it possible for women Catholic Action leaders to receive better training and, thus, to achieve increasing professionalization and public engagement.

Other aspects of diversity within Church governance were also significant, particularly the intersection of local and national contexts in the global arena. The international and intellectual work of Catholic Action women must be viewed against the background of the tensions existing between the different Catholic Action models (for example, Italian, Belgian and French). Similarly, different cultural units existed. For example, in some workshops and congresses, women gathered according to linguistic blocs: English, Spanish, Portuguese, French. In this respect, although Christian Democracy was on the rise in post-war Western Europe, the persistence of the 'intransigent' line was still powerfully felt, particularly as the Cold War legitimized some of the most conservative lines behind the banner of anti-communism. In fact, Swiss historian Philippe Chenaux maintains that there were two currents competing for influence in the Vatican: one inspired by the French-speaking world and another one shaped by the "Hispanic model".⁵⁰ In the words of philosopher Jacques Maritain (cited by Chenaux) "the day may come soon, when we may witness a conflict tear the Church between a 'French' and a 'Hispanic' concept of religion's relationship to the world".⁵¹ Chenaux associates the first current with 'possibilist' figures in the Church, most notably, the cardinals Giovanni Battista Montini and Domenico Tardini (Secretariat of State), as well as Federico Alessandrini (*L'Osservatore Romano*) and Maritain himself, while the second group

⁴⁷ Derks, "Changing Lanes", 88.

⁴⁸ Della Sudda, "L'action catholique féminine au XXe siècle", 111.

⁴⁹ This division into specializations seems to echo, and in a very abstract way foreground, what is currently referred to as 'intersectionality'. Cf. Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins".

⁵⁰ Chenaux, *Pie XII*, 336.

⁵¹ Chenaux, *Pie XII*, 322.

was overtly favoured by the cardinals Alfredo Ottaviani and Giuseppe Pizzardo (also Secretariat of State). Chenu at times refers to this second faction as the “Vatican Pentagon”. Also playing a role in this phenomenon were the group of progressive Catholics represented by the *Cronache Sociali*; the neutralist sensibility of Giorgio La Pira; and the rising influence of American Catholics and Catholic philo-Atlanticism (closely related to increasing US influence in the world through the European Recovery Programme and NATO). Unfortunately, there is little detail regarding how Catholic women positioned themselves in all these crucial intra-ecclesial power struggles and “rival internationalisms”.⁵² An understanding of these transnational and intersectional perspectives would make it possible to problematize what are currently simple or apparently clear-cut North-South dichotomies.⁵³ To what extent were political, geographical and cultural divides bridged (or amplified) by religion in the 1950s? And to what degree did human – and women’s – rights help to conciliate or intensify spiritual and social tensions?

4 “The Hour” of Women:⁵⁴ Towards a Genealogy of Transnational Networks of Female Catholic Thought (1945-62)

Recovering the legacy of Catholic lay women as intellectual agents between the end of World War II and the Second Vatican Council faces the obstacle of finding documents that provide evidence of their contributions to crucial theological debates, perhaps because women left few traces of their intellectual activities or because the sources are scattered around the world and the WUCWO archive is currently not accessible. But researchers also may not be looking where (and how) they should. This concluding section of the article offers a hermeneutic proposal in this respect. Following Belgian theologian Dries Bosschaert’s compelling call to explore “travelling religious concepts” in contemporary religious history,⁵⁵ future research could address the

⁵² I take the expression from Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade*, 272. Blasco Herranz, *Mujeres, hombres y catolicismo*; Rochefort, Viennot, “L’Engagement des hommes pour l’égalité”, among others have also advocated for a history of Catholic women that includes their relationship with men. In the specialized Catholic Action, men’s and women’s lives stood, for the most part, in a complex relationship to each other.

⁵³ For a thorough analysis of the African (and mostly secular) case, cf. Barthélémy, *Sororité et colonialisme*. For the Catholic context cf. Christiaens, “Europe at the Crossroads of Three Worlds”. Cf. also de Jong, *Complicit Sisters*.

⁵⁴ Paul VI, *Address of Pope Paul VI to Women. Closing of the Second Vatican Council*, 8 December 1965.

⁵⁵ Bosschaert, “Is There a Future for Contemporary Church History?”.

intellectual and transnational lives of pre-conciliar women by considering the way in which ideas travelled across real or symbolic boundaries. Such a perspective involves moving beyond the customary way in which research on intellectual Catholic circles is conducted, looking less at what male figures of authority said, and more at what the women themselves were saying. In other words, it broadens the types of sources, and even the kinds of archives, consulted. It also pays closer attention to the work of disseminating and receiving ideas to explore alternative supports or means of expression, along with more or less subtle rhetorical strategies such as Álvarez's medieval 'gloss'. As noted above, it is particularly crucial for future research to explore transfers taking place beyond secular, religious and Cold War divides and, notably, those that occurred within international communities of thought, knowledge, diplomacy, and political and humanitarian action. Critically, the relationship was dialectical in nature: while lay women's work was aimed at emphasizing Catholic values in international forums, some non-Catholic principles and practices were also - probably unwillingly - being transferred to the religious sphere. From this perspective, and to cite Agnès Desmazières, the silences of the Council regarding women (and by extension, the experience of the women who prepared the Council) should not necessarily be understood as a complete exclusion of their perspectives, nor as the inexistence of their legacy.⁵⁶

The first two sections of this article examined how Catholic thought permeated the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations and was a fundamental piece of their preparation as leaders of apostolic work. Women were up to date on some of the central theological and political debates of the time thanks to conferences, workshops, small meetings and publications, such as the organization's bulletins and journals. In addition, due to their leadership positions within the ICOs, a select number of lay women had regular access to other important Catholic leaders, including bishops, members of the Roman Curia and the pope. This explains how lay women played a key role in the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate (1957), a congress that helped set the stage for the Council.⁵⁷ Yet it is very possible that their work was also fundamental during the First World Congress of the Lay Apostolate (1951). As Ruth E. Bennett from the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) argued, the women who participated in the First Congress not only were "leaders in the work of the Church in their countries", they were also women who would "take back to their own areas the inspiration and the information to enable their [local, national] organizations to continue and expand

⁵⁶ Desmazières, "Généalogie d'un 'silence' conciliaire".

⁵⁷ Desmazières, "Généalogie d'un 'silence' conciliaire".

their efforts to Christianize the life around them”.⁵⁸ Additionally, lay women like Maria Vittoria Donadeo and Rosemary Goldie became members of the COPECIAL (Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate) created by Pope Pius XII in 1952. These are but two of the most significant examples of the decisive international forums for shared reflection within Catholicism in the 1950s. These congresses allowed the hierarchy, the clergy, and the laity (women and men) to exchange ideas. In many ways the assemblies laid the foundations for some of the discussions that would later become central to Vatican II, such as the relationship between the hierarchy and the laity, and the broader relationship between the Church and the world.

In addition, the war, post-war and decolonization processes formed the backdrop for the evolution of Catholicism (and particularly lay women) during the period. While a new paradigm of theological ideas and political action had already begun to emerge in the interwar years (1920s-30s), it was the combined experience of the resistance, the living memory of wartime atrocities and the religious and political effervescence of the late 1940s and early 1950s that would profoundly shape what historian Gerd-Rainer Horn describes as the first wave of ‘liberation theology’ and Catholic activism.⁵⁹ It is important to further consider the transnational and gender aspects of this phenomenon, which involves a heavy two-fold transatlantic transfer of ideas between the English-, French- and Spanish-speaking worlds, a dynamic that also reached beyond Europe and the Americas through Cold War activism to embrace Africa and Asia. However, although women were certainly part of this vibrant context of exchanges (as their work within the ICOs demonstrates), little is known about the multifaceted ways in which they contributed to its development.

Accordingly, there is a real need to promote the study and analysis of women’s participation in the ongoing debates over a Catholic theological anthropology of the human person and to collect data to that end. Despite initial scepticism, Catholic doctrine began to consider the dignity of the human person as ‘possibly’ reconcilable with human rights and democracy in the context of the interwar years. This realignment of ideas resulted both in a revision in the thought of leading Catholic intellectuals, and a reconsideration of apostolate work and re-Christianizing practices. While the work of male thinkers is well known, the history of the way in which women interacted with – and contributed to – the advancement these ideas is yet to be written. Emmanuel Mounier’s *Révolution personaliste et communautaire* was

⁵⁸ Bennett, *World Congress and the Lay Apostolate a Challenge to American Catholic Women*, 12-13.

⁵⁹ Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology*.

published in 1934, the same year that Maritain proposed his concept of ‘humanisme integral’ (later, in 1942, Maritain would develop this concept into ‘Christian humanism’). In addition, in 1938, Pius XI argued that Christian teachings alone gave full meaning to the demands of human rights and liberty, mainly because it provided worth and dignity to human personality. In this way, human dignity was mobilized as part of the church’s internal theological and ecclesial debates, including those that discussed Catholicism’s struggles with modern society.⁶⁰ In the post-World War II context, and encouraged by Pius XII’s words during the conflict, human dignity continued to be considered and discussed within Catholics circles on different sides of the political spectrum.⁶¹ It also carried on its dialogue with the secular concept of human rights. For example, the Charter of the United Nations adopted in 1945 in San Francisco included the idea of ‘dignity’. Similarly, the concept of ‘human dignity’ was central to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Although the use of this concept did vary within secular and religious cultures, the existence of a common language indicates an intriguing proximity,⁶² a degree of competition,⁶³ and even the possibility of a complex two-way circulation of ideas.

Along with the concept of ‘human dignity’, Mounier’s theory of ‘personalism’ encouraged a rethinking of women’s roles in society and the Church. Mounier’s ideas pervaded transnational Catholic debates,⁶⁴ particularly the idea of a personalist form of social Christianity.⁶⁵ In the case of women, Mounier’s influential essay, “La femme est aussi une personne” (*A Woman is Also a Person*), along with other pieces authored by women⁶⁶ that formed part of Volume 45 of the renowned journal *Esprit*, denote the gradual, yet significant, spread of the concept in Catholic intellectual circles. This pre-war reflection explains how in the years after World War II – the very period most closely associated by historians with the reinforcement of older gender hierarchies and an extreme separation between spheres – the

60 Łuków, “A Difficult Legacy: Human Dignity”.

61 Chamedes *A Twentieth-Century Crusade*, 237-41; Pasture, “The Invention of European Human Rights”; Bennett, *Technicians of Human Dignity*; Menozzi, *Chiesa e diritti umani*.

62 Joas, “The Sacredness of the Person”.

63 Moyn, *Christian Human Rights*.

64 Gauvreau argues that there was a conservative and an ‘egalitarian’ version of personalism, which had deep implications for the way Catholics viewed gender roles, cf. *Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution*, 175-246.

65 There were different understandings of personalism; some versions were more conservative in nature, while others became increasingly progressive.

66 Mounier, “La femme aussi est une personne”; the essays authored by women were: Grépon, “La femme dans la cité des hommes: une cité en collaboration”; Le Cormier, De Corlieu, “Pour un statut personnel de la femme mariée”.

emphasis on ‘spiritual’ femininity would rapidly lead to the spread of a ‘personalist feminism’ in the context of Catholic Action. Thus, while there continued to be a great deal of conservative ‘maternalist’ language, a parallel ‘egalitarian’ current consolidated itself within the different specializations, most notably within the youth and worker sections. Emphasis on the dignity of the human person would transform the relationship between husband and wife (and thus, by extension, between the laity and the Church) as involving a reciprocal understanding of each partner.⁶⁷ It increasingly aimed at transcending traditional legalistic notions of hierarchy and subordination.⁶⁸ Significantly, this ‘revolution of mentalities’ and spiritual practices occurred within the supposedly non-political setting of the Catholic Action movements. In these groups, (young) women were increasingly placed on an equal level with (young) men.⁶⁹

In sum, this chapter has argued that the international work of lay women in religious and secular communities was fundamental in their acquisition of an increased awareness of the changed position of women in post-war society. Although personalist ‘feminists’ and other lay Catholic women usually distanced themselves from secular feminism, their involvement in a variety of transnational communities of care and knowledge led them to become vital transnational and apostolic experts. In the long run, their experiences contributed to deconstruct some of the pervading concepts of traditional theology, such as, for example, the ‘complementarity’ of the sexes. Parallely, Catholic women increasingly started to endorse other empowering notions (including that of ‘baptismal equality’) as a means to demand greater recognition within Church governance and decision-making.⁷⁰ Further study will allow us to have a more precise understanding of the extension and impact of their multifaceted transnational lives, notably for influential yet rather understudied years of the pre-conciliar period. Specifically, a social, intellectual, and global history of Catholic networks and thought (one which accords a rightful place to women) will be a significant asset to ongoing scholarly efforts aimed at recovering and re-evaluating the wider legacy of female transnational and intellectual agents. It will also greatly contribute to shaping the new research agendas that the engagement with their study can provoke.

67 Cf. Le Cormier, De Corlieu, “Pour un statut personnel de la femme mariée”.

68 These currents are comparable to what Chappel has termed ‘paternal’ and ‘fraternal’ Catholic modernisms, cf. *Catholic Modern*.

69 Gauvreau, *Catholic Origins of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution*, 181-2; Bidegain, “El cristianismo y el cambio socio político de las mujeres”.

70 On the work of women pressure groups created to influence Vatican - and not just UN - policy, cf. Derks, “Changing Lanes”. For a contrast with religious women cf. Guise-Castelnuovo, “Femmes en réseau et centralisation romaine”.

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Adriana Zarri: the Power of a Lay Woman's Voice

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Abstract Contemporary historiography has investigated the life and thought of many women philosophers and theologians, but until now has forgotten Adriana Zarri (1910-2010), an Italian journalist and writer very actively involved in the ecclesiastical, theological and social debate of the twentieth century. This article, based on published and unpublished sources, intends to shed light on her life, her theological insights, her radical commitment for a profound reform of the Catholic Church and the advancement of women, as well as her defence of civil rights and the environment. From the 1970s she became a point of reference for many people, believers and unbelievers, uncomfortable with Church conservatism and eager to reflect on the great changes in culture, morals and the society of their time.

Keywords Reform of the Catholic Church. Laicity. Trinitarian theology. Hermitic life. Ecological awareness.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 An Early Religious and Literary Vocation. – 3 A 'Lay' Catholic Woman among the 'Catholic Avant-Garde'. – 4 A New Female Theological Voice. – 5 A Monastic Life Immersed in the Cosmos and History. – 6 A Hermitage Where One can 'Breathe'. – 7 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

Adriana Zarri (1919-2010), a writer, journalist and theologian, is one of the few women who, as early as the 1960s, managed to make her voice heard within the Italian Catholic Church of the twentieth century. She wrote about theology before women in Italy were admitted to theological studies, elaborating an original Trinitarian concept that challenged the established traditions by giving more importance to the body, history, and the human dimension. She lived a form of lay hermitic monasticism, independent from the ecclesiastical hierarchy, while taking an active part in the ecclesial, social and civil debates that inflamed the second half of the twentieth century. She experienced 'cosmic communion' with the animals she raised and the fruits she cultivated, demonstrating an ecological sensitivity in synony with present-day crucial concerns and contemporary thought.

Although her writings had considerable circulation in Italy in the years preceding and following the Second Vatican Council, and despite the fact that the themes she debated upon as well as the choice to lead a hermitic life are still of considerable interest in historical research and contemporary religious studies, the literature on Adriana Zarri is almost non-existent.¹ Her name is mentioned in studies focusing on the *contestazione cattolica* or in summary books on the history of women, but she is never the object of specific attention.²

For both these reasons - the interest of the person on the one hand, and the absence of studies on the other - the proposal to write a biography of Zarri, which was put forward to me by the Associazione Amici di Adriana Zarri, appeared particularly stimulating. The Associazione gave me access to unpublished letters, manuscripts and youth diaries, as well as to Zarri's personal library. Its members, people who knew Zarri and found in her a spiritual point of reference, also made themselves available to release oral interviews.³ By adding to these her own numerous publications, as well as letters and documents kept in the archives of personalities and institutions with

1 Cf. the short section of the bibliography dedicated to the few writings and contributions on Adriana Zarri in Maraviglia, *Semplicemente una che vive*, 204. The most interesting studies will be indicated in the course of this article.

2 Among others Santagata, *La contestazione cattolica*, 40, 60; Saresella, *Dal Concilio alla contestazione*, 223, 427; Valerio, *Donne e Chiesa*, 91-2. Zarri is not mentioned in books concerning Italian twentieth-century female theologians, such as Militello, *Volte e storie*; Militello, *Donna e teologia*.

3 The documents are stored without any type of cataloguing at the home of a member of the Association. All these documents are referred to in this article with the acronym AAZ (Archivio privato Adriana Zarri). The library is kept inside a room at Zarri's last hermitage.

which Adriana Zarri was in contact,⁴ it became possible to reconstruct the life of a protagonist of Italian Catholicism and bring into light a personality that perhaps deserves to be known better than she has been so far.⁵ As the book, this article intends to sketch the portrait of a woman who was very active in the history of her time and managed to express, through her thoughts and way of living, yearnings and expectations still alive in men and women today.

2 An Early Religious and Literary Vocation

Adriana Zarri was born in San Lazzaro di Savena, near Bologna, on 26 April 1919, preceded by two brothers, in a family in which, thanks to a mill and a private farm, one did not suffer the poverty and hunger shared by the majority of the population.

Despite this apparently serene situation, her life as a child was afflicted by a dark inner tangle that she would later recall as a terribly conflicting attitude towards God, who owned every power and was fast to condemn, as depicted through her religious education.⁶ This conflict was later to be resolved through a powerful inner event, which occurred when she was eleven years old and led to a true 'conversion'. She reportedly spoke, although very rarely, of the sudden perception of God's presence as she watched the sunlit countryside:

I was looking out a window, it must have been spring, or perhaps the beginning of summer; the grass was tall, of an intense green. I was looking at the grass, the trees, the houses; I could hear the water from the canal, and suddenly I had the palpable sensation of God's love, that God was everywhere, that he was boundless warm love, a love that embraced me, swaddled me, and I was inside it.⁷

⁴ I visited, among others, the private archives of the bishop of Ivrea Luigi Bettazzi, the publisher Piero Gribaudo, and the ATI (Associazione Teologica Italiana) kept at the ISACEM (Istituto per la storia dell'Azione Cattolica e del movimento cattolico in Italia 'Paolo VI').

⁵ Since the publication of my book, three of Zarri's books have been republished: *"Tu". Quasi preghiere* (2021); *È più facile che un cammello* (2022); *La mia voce sa ancora di stelle*. An essay has also been written about her as a theologian capable of thinking in her time a Christianity "for the future": see Sodaro, "Adriana Zarri. L'eremita laica", 281.

⁶ Baldini, "Una donna nel deserto", 125.

⁷ "Ero affacciata a una finestra, doveva essere primavera, o forse l'inizio dell'estate, l'erba era alta, di un verde intenso. Guardavo l'erba, gli alberi, le case, sentivo l'acqua del canale, e improvvisamente ho avuto la sensazione palpabile dell'amore di Dio, che Dio era dappertutto, che era amore senza limiti, caldo, un amore che mi abbracciava, mi fasciava, e io c'ero dentro". Baldini, "Una donna nel deserto", 125.

The event presented the traits and was recalled with the language of mystical experience; it determined the beginning of young Adriana's theological reflection, soon intensified by the death of a dearly loved brother. As she would later write, she began to do theology "alone, in silence and in solitude", before taking up studies and courses in theology, which she was able to attend thanks to her membership, first in the GFCI (Gioventù femminile di Azione Cattolica) and later in the Religious Institute of Compagnia di San Paolo.⁸

Participation in the GFCI took place after the Zarri family moved to Bologna in June 1933, where Adriana, directed by her father to a professional school, was soon transferred to the classical studies program of a lyceum, due to her recognized intellectual gifts. There she received the foundations of an education that she soon supplemented with personal readings done at the Archiginnasio's library in Bologna.⁹

The youth branch of Azione Cattolica, reinvigorated and reorganized during the pontificate of Pius XI as an obedient and disciplined 'army' for the Christian reconquest of society, proved to her as to many members an "active and dynamic training ground for cultural and mental education".¹⁰ It was in that association, in which young leaders in particular were expected to read, study, learn to express their ideas and speak in public so as to spread the knowledge of Christian truths, that Adriana Zarri came across spiritual authors, exercised her dialectical skills and tried her hand at writing. In two booklets dated 1941, the future theologian discusses the moral intransigence and sexophobic obsession typical of the Catholic culture of the time, which celebrated the virtue of purity and execrated amusements and dances, considered to be at the origin of all modern debauchery.¹¹

From the time of these early works, Zarri demonstrated a predisposition for polemics, a tool she considered essential to the defence of truth and rights. The word "polemics", she wrote in her diary, was to her a "royal word, a proud word". She perceived herself as a "fighting spirit" with a "polemicist's mission" to which she wished to dedicate her life and "art".¹² Later, once the importance of history and the body

⁸ Zarri, "La narrazione teologica", 200.

⁹ Cf. Maraviglia, *Semplicemente una che vive*, 22-3.

¹⁰ Salvini, *Ada e le altre*, 32. Cf. also Dau Novelli, "Azione Cattolica e questione femminile". For the history of Azione Cattolica at that time, cf. Moro, "Pio XI: il Papa dell'Azione Cattolica". Adriana Zarri later argued against the uniformity and clericalization she identified in Azione Cattolica not only in the years of Pius XI but also after the Second Vatican Council: cf. Zarri, *Teologia del probabile*, 133-73.

¹¹ Zarri, *La grande crociata*; Zarri, *Febbre che sfibra*.

¹² Zarri, *Unpublished Diary 1941-43*, 14 May 1941, 8 July 1941, 19 July 1943, in AAZ.

had been redeemed in the light of greater awareness in the reading of the Bible, she would debate against the traditional readings that penalized sexuality, valuing and celebrating its fully human value.¹³

Besides Azione Cattolica, the other crucial institution for Adriana Zarri's education was the Compagnia di San Paolo, a congregation that offered both men and women a new – secular – form of religious life, i.e., the possibility of professing the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience not in a convent or monastery but while living in the world.¹⁴ She entered the congregation in 1942, probably inspired by Catholic personalities who were part of it such as Raimondo Manzini, then director of the Catholic newspaper published in Bologna, *L'Avvenire d'Italia*.¹⁵

Despite the opportunities for study offered by the institution, such as becoming acquainted with the classical heritage of Catholic culture, starting from the Gospels, Paul, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, the young woman soon felt ill at ease with the obligations as well as human and cultural constrictions of the environment. She felt the need for a new spirituality which would overcome the pessimistic and mortifying attitude of traditional ethics to consider human experience in its fullness. Like others, she was inspired by the reading of French authors and publications, whose greater freedom and novelty of thought offered lexicon and content to Italian Catholics eager for religious renewal.¹⁶ Zarri quoted the French journal *La Vie spirituelle*, but in her notes and between her lines one can also trace *Les études carmélitaines* and “extreme interest” for the “apostolate of presence and silence” of Charles De Foucauld's followers.¹⁷ In one of her small notebooks of the time she transcribed significant passages such as the following by the French philosopher Gustave Thibon, a friend of Simone Weil: “Tomorrow perhaps a new type of holiness

13 This topic is at the core of Zarri's *Impazienza di Adamo*, and her two novels *Dodici lune* and *Quaestio 98*.

14 The Compagnia di San Paolo, founded in 1921 by Don Giovanni Rossi, secretary of Cardinal Andrea Carlo Ferrari, was, in 1941, a religious congregation that united laymen, laywomen, and priests dedicated to social, educational and cultural apostolates; it had also acquired various newspapers such as the prestigious monthly magazine *Il Frontespizio* and the Bolognese newspaper *L'Avvenire d'Italia*. Meanwhile, in 1939, Don Giovanni Rossi had left the Compagnia and founded in Assisi the Pro Civitate Christiana association, with which Zarri would later collaborate. On the Compagnia di San Paolo, cf. Caracciolo, *La fede e le opere*; Toschi, *Per la Chiesa e per gli uomini*; Zizola, *Don Giovanni Rossi*.

15 Raimondo Manzini (1901-1988) was chief editor of *L'Avvenire d'Italia* from 1927 to 1960 and of *L'Osservatore Romano* from 1960 to 1978. Cf. Carli, “Manzini, Raimondo”.

16 Cadioli, Vignini, *Storia dell'editoria in Italia*, 94-5.

17 Zarri, *Letter to Giovanni Battista Penco*, 2 September 1946, in AAZ. Zarri, “Fra Pio X e il cardinal Ferrari”, 99.

will emerge in which lovers of God will be men to the core”.¹⁸ She felt a growing need to share everyone's humanity, without distinction of status or condition, which led her to leave the Company in 1949.

3 A 'Lay' Catholic Woman among the 'Catholic Avant-Garde'

For Zarri and her generation, to live “human life fully and nakedly” meant to live a ‘lay’ or ‘secular’ life.¹⁹ The word ‘laicity’ was a key-word for her as well as for the Catholic culture of the twentieth century; it meant regaining, with full conviction, ‘the goodness of things’, ‘the fabric of human existence’, with the declared intention of overcoming the age-old dualism between nature and supernature embedded in the theological tradition. This is what she conveyed in her first book, *L'arcobaleno delle ore*, which was published in 1947 under the pseudonym Jana Predieri: it was the first signal of her quality as a writer and of the originality of her thought.²⁰

It was thanks to that book that she came into contact with Mario Gozzini and Nando Fabro, respectively the souls of two leading magazines of the time, the Florentine *L'Ultima* and the Genoese *Il Gallo* for which she herself soon started writing.²¹ This is how she met that particular galaxy of personalities from the ‘Catholic avant-garde’ who struggled to restore evangelistic and social impetus to what they perceived as conservative and traditionalist Catholicism: among others Giorgio La Pira and Ernesto Balducci.²² Zarri was one of the few

18 Sentence written down in a small notebook kept in AAZ. Zarri indicated her source: “Thibon. *Ce que Dieu a uni*”.

19 Zarri, “La narrazione teologica”, 209.

20 Predieri, *L'arcobaleno delle ore*. Pseudonym obtained from the final part of her name (Jana) and from her mother's surname, Elide Predieri.

21 Mario Gozzini (1920-1999), an Italian writer, journalist and politician, was a strong advocate of the dialogue between Catholics and Communists in the post-war years. He was senator of the Italian Republic from 1976 to 1987. On his experience, also as a founder of the bi-monthly *L'Ultima*, cf. Scirè, *La democrazia alla prova*. Nando Fabro (1900-1988) was in contact with well-known Italian and French Catholics and was actively involved in the ecclesial renewal, particularly through the promotion of the monthly publication *Il Gallo*: cf. Zanini, *La rivista “Il Gallo”*.

22 Ernesto Balducci (1922-1992), priest, member of the Piarist order, was a prominent intellectual, friend and collaborator of Giorgio La Pira, and founder of the Florentine monthly *Testimonianze*, aimed at promoting the culture of peace around the world. Cf. Bocchini Camaiani, *Ernesto Balducci*; Giovannoni, “*Io amo il futuro*”. Giorgio La Pira (1904-1977), member of the Constituent Assembly of the Italian Republic, later deputy of the Democrazia Cristiana and mayor of Florence, distinguished himself through the promotion of social policies and his activism on the issues of peace and dialogue between the peoples of the Earth. Cf. Cortesi, M.P. Giovannoni, P.D. Giovannoni, *Giorgio La Pira* (with bibliography).

women essayists in a sphere that continued – even among the Catholic avant-garde – to be dominated by men.²³ At some point, it even seemed Zarri might move from Rome, where she had settled with her father after her mother's death, to Florence, to take on a leading role in a Catholic weekly they meant to launch in those fervent ecclesial and social times.²⁴

Her first novels, *Giorni feriali* and *L'ora di notte*, published in 1955 and 1960, signalled her vocation as a storyteller, which she would always cultivate alongside essay writing. They earned Zarri her first praises and a certain notoriety.²⁵ The number of journals and newspapers for which she wrote soon multiplied, securing what became her precarious but fundamental means of support. She wrote for Catholic publications of different orientation and circulation: from weeklies with local circulation such as *Il Nostro Tempo* of the diocese of Turin, to national periodicals such as *L'Osservatore della Domenica* (the Sunday edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*); from scholarly journals of the democratic Catholic tradition, such as *Humanitas* and *Studium*, to *Studi Cattolici*, close to Opus Dei; from the bimonthly publication of the Dehonian Fathers of Bologna *Il Regno* to *Orizzonti*, a weekly news magazine published by Edizioni Paoline.

In these writings Adriana Zarri focused on various themes and motives central to her reflections, siding against traditional conceptions of Catholicism and in favour of a profound reform of the Church. She treasured the lessons of authors such as Pierre Teilhard De Chardin and theologians censored in the 1950s by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, then later invited as 'experts' to the Second Vatican Council, such as Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, and Marie-Dominique Chenu, who would soon become her friend and correspondent. Zarri's denunciation was directed against the 'pathologies' she saw in religious life – 'integralism', 'clericalism', 'immobilism' –, against an authoritarian and absolutist conception of Christianity and intellectualistic preaching disembodied from history. She was in favour of re-evaluating the role and freedom of the laity inside the Church, and of a more interior spirituality, close to the ordinariness of daily life – which became her distinctive feature.

In the early 1960s, years in which the Second Vatican Council, first in preparation and later in progress, favoured debate and discussion, Adriana Zarri collected some of her articles in a volume with the significant title *La Chiesa nostra figlia*. The book received con-

23 Cf. Falconi, *La Chiesa e le organizzazioni cattoliche*, 564-5.

24 On this, cf. Maraviglia, *Semplicemente una che vive*, 36-40. About this blooming period for the Florentine Catholic Church and its leading personalities cf. Giovannoni, "La città e la Chiesa di Firenze".

25 Zarri, *Giorni feriali*; Zarri, *L'ora di notte*.

siderable attention not only in the devoted press but also in a journal of secular culture, *Il Mondo*, thanks to an article signed Celso, pseudonym of Carlo Falconi, who wrote it was the most mature and modern book, in thought and style, that a lay Italian Catholic had so far written on the Church.²⁶

4 A New Female Theological Voice

Adriana Zarri's originality and theological competence were confirmed by her next two books, written during the 1960s when theological faculties in Italy had barely started to admit women.²⁷ The first, *Impazienza di Adamo. Ontologia della sessualità*, published in 1964, aspired to free human sexuality from the age-old negative prejudice to which it had been relegated by Catholic tradition, by making it part of a vast Trinitarian design that she saw imprinted in humanity and the cosmos.

In her understanding, not only the relationship between the sexes, but every level of life was affected by the relational dynamics governed by the triune God: the movement of distinction, dialogue, and re-composition that existed between Father, Son, and Spirit were, in her view, imparted to the entire world, through the act of creation and the gift of incarnation. She intended to develop this intuition in three separate works, and though that project was never carried out, the Trinitarian dimension remained the fulcrum of Zarri's theological conception. She continued to put it forward, disseminated in essays, novels and texts of various types; it was her own personal contribution to what Piero Coda – a theologian with whom she would later develop a deep friendship – defined as the “great ‘return’ of the Trinity in the history of the twentieth century Church”.²⁸

Many years later, in 1980, in an article that appeared in the collective volume *Essere teologi oggi* – which *de facto* recognized her theological stature – she addressed the singularity of her approach to theology. Her theology, she wrote, was born from daily experience, it was “impure, contaminated, compromised through living”, it was born outside academic contexts, acquired “intuitively”, “sapiential”, and then translated into different forms. She reaffirmed what she understood since her youth: that she was both writer and thinker, author of pages of different literary genres but all animated by the same intention: that of transmitting her own vision and under-

26 Zarri, *La Chiesa nostra figlia*. Cf. Zarri, “Cattolici e laicisti”. She responds to Celso, “La donna e la teologia”; Celso, “La Chiesa nostra figlia”.

27 Valenziano, “Una narrazione ‘parzialmente’ autobiografica”.

28 Coda, *Dio Uno e Trino*, 232. Cf. Maraviglia, *Semplicemente una che vive*, 80.

standing. Taking inspiration from the new current of “narrative theology”, she coined an original definition for her production: “theological narrative”.²⁹

Impazienza di Adamo was itself a sort of ‘theological narrative’, an essay in which Zarri, in the light of biblical texts and patristic literature, expressed her conviction that the image of God was reflected in the difference between male and female. She conceived the reflection of the Trinity in humanity as a triple process: from the originally indistinct biblical Adam, woman was carved out as the expression of plurality, until they would later reunite in eschatological unity in the risen Christ.³⁰

Written at a time in which works highlighting the female condition such as *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir and *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan,³¹ this text was greeted with a certain interest.³² It was translated into French in 1968 and earned itself an extensive presentation in *Archives de Philosophie*,³³ but in point of fact it had no impact on theological discussion. Adriana Zarri herself never made any reference to these books by de Beauvoir and Friedan: she shared their desire to reflect upon the role of women and give it greater importance, but always starting from the metaphysical and religious foundation which, according to her, was at the basis of the difference between the sexes.

In the following years, certain limitations of Adriana Zarri's theology would be pointed out, including by devoted voices. *Impazienza di Adamo*, assuming sexual morphology as the keystone to define the sexes – with man being the one who ‘gives’ and woman the one who ‘receives’ – actually embalmed the roles in their diversity and did not redeem woman from persistent subordination.³⁴ Furthermore, her Trinitarian concept, presented as a total and all-encompassing interpretative scheme, underestimated the *mysterium iniquitatis* present in humanity and in history, making the reading of the evolution of reality more indecipherable than it appeared in her exposition.³⁵

However, the concept offered its creator keys to redefine Christian identity and new paths to follow within the Church, society, life, and personal faith. In particular, the idea of omnipotence and absoluteness that had made God so distant and fearsome dissolved in

29 Zarri, “La narrazione teologica”, 199, 210, 214.

30 Zarri, *Impazienza di Adamo*.

31 Beauvoir, *Il secondo sesso*; Friedan, *La mistica della femminilità*.

32 Cf. Somnavilla, Review of Zarri, *Impazienza di Adamo*; De Fiores, “Ricerche ontologico-psicologiche”.

33 Zarri, *L'impazienza d'Adam*; cf. Ladrille, Review of Zarri, *L'impazienza d'Adam*.

34 Cf. Militello, *Unpublished Essay*, 18 May 2019, in AAZ.

35 Cf. Piana, “Adriana Zarri. Una teologia del probabile”, 14.

the Trinitarian dynamic, while different approaches to Christianity were made possible by putting into new light concepts such as relationship, becoming, and plurality. From this dynamic emerged the dialectic of giving and receiving, regarding which Zarri expressed a critical view of typically male activism, enhancing instead female qualities such as acceptance, openness, and listening. Variety and diversity were recognized as values to be protected and cultivated by the Church, society and humanity, within the multiple and varied equilibrium of nature.

The other book of great theological commitment by Adriana Zarri came out in 1967. Its title, *Teologia del Probabile*, signalled the modern awareness of the 'historicity' of the human dimension, and a sense of 'relativity' which should become part of the new consciousness of believers. The book placed before the reader topics and issues discussed in the recently concluded Council or even removed from conciliar debate: liturgical reform, celibacy of priests, indissolubility of civil marriage, role of the laity in the Church, hierarchical function and infallibility of the pope, temporal power of the Church and its relationship with political power.

As is well known, these themes were then at the centre of debates and disputes that deeply shook the European and Italian Catholic Church, torn between innovation and tradition.³⁶ It comes as no surprise that *Teologia del probabile*, clearly sided with ecclesial renewal, aroused considerable interest and received numerous reviews.³⁷ In particular, it won its author the full consent of the Dominican theologian Marie Dominique Chenu, who had played an important role in the Second Vatican Council,³⁸ and who undertook, unsuccessfully, to have the book translated and published in France.³⁹ Chenu maintained a twenty-year-long affectionate relationship with Zarri. The 25 letters he sent to her testify about his appreciation for her theological thought, their common hopes and commitment regarding the reform of the Church, and Chenu's deep understanding of Zarri's contemplative vocation.⁴⁰

Further acknowledgment came in 1967 with her election to the board of the ATI, an association intended to foster a theology in tune with the times and capable of communicating with the contemporary

36 Among the numerous studies on the subject, cf. Verucci, "Il dissenso cattolico in Italia"; Santagata, *La contestazione cattolica*; the essays published in Inaudi, Margotgi, *La rivoluzione del Concilio*.

37 Various reviews, both favourable and critical, are preserved in AAZ.

38 On this commitment of Chenu (1895-1990), cf. Turbanti, "Il ruolo del p. D. Chenu".

39 Chenu, *Letters to Adriana Zarri*, 22 January 1968 and 27 June 1968, in AAZ.

40 There is no space here to analyze the relationship between the two correspondents, about which cf. Maraviglia, *Semplicemente una che vive*, in particular 58-9, 65, 77.

world. The association was open to non-academic scholars who could demonstrate theological competence.⁴¹ With this election ATI intended to recognize “the first lay and female public voice in theology”, as recalls Severino Dianich, theologian and co-founder of ATI.⁴² Zarri remained a member of ATI until her death, taking active part in the first councils and annual meetings, though her choice to lead a solitary life would soon put an end to her executive functions.⁴³

Those were the years in which Zarri distinguished herself as an ecclesial commentator, using her pen to ensure that the hopes triggered by the Council were not forgotten or betrayed. She wrote multiple articles, often sparking off combative confrontations which put an end to her contribution to institutional Catholic newspapers and conservative journals (*L'Osservatore della Domenica*, *Il Nostro Tempo*, and *Studi Cattolici*) in favour of new intelligent arenas of political and cultural debate such as *Politica* and *Settegiorni*.⁴⁴

Unafraid of arguing with renowned personalities or of expressing herself on issues of the utmost delicacy for the morals and culture of the time, Adriana Zarri quarrelled with the already prestigious scholar Elémire Zolla who had become the spokesperson for the vast resistance to liturgical renewal, in particular to the suppression of Latin in favour of vernacular languages.⁴⁵ She also attacked Jacques Maritain, who in *Le paysan de la Garonne* published in France in 1966, rejected the opening to the world and to history welcomed by the Council, holding it responsible for the rampant abandonment of the Christian faith. In other contributions Zarri questioned the formalism of fixed Catholic morals, which ignored the evolution of customs over time and in different social contexts; she contested the obligatory celibacy of priests and discussed the slow progress and difficulties of the ecumenical mission.⁴⁶ Her opinions earned Zarri contemptuous headlines in conservative newspapers as well as public and private reprimands sent to *Politica* and the ATI, including requests that she be expelled or else the sender would leave the association.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Cf. Segoloni Ruta, *Tradurre il Concilio in italiano*, 11-16.

⁴² Severino Dianich interviewed by the author on 5 September 2019.

⁴³ On this cf. Maraviglia, *Semplicemente una che vive*, 59.

⁴⁴ Cf. Saresella, *Dal Concilio alla contestazione*, 60-1 and 71-2.

⁴⁵ Cf. Maraviglia, “Adriana Zarri ed Elémire Zolla”. Elémire Zolla (1926-2002) was a historian of religion, scholar of Western and Eastern esotericism and mysticism. Cf. Cecchetti, “Zolla, Elémire”.

⁴⁶ Cf. Zarri, “L’abuso comincia dentro”; Bianucci, “La teologa Zarri”; Zarri, Preface to *Io amo un prete*; Zarri, “Ecumenismo in crisi”.

⁴⁷ Cf. for example, Vero Latino, “La papessa che catechizza il Papa”. Cf. Maraviglia, *Semplicemente una che vive*, 71.

If Adriana Zarri's scathing and fearless attacks on Catholic conservatism alienated all those who felt that such ideas threatened the existence of the Italian Church, more than a few recognized the value and importance of her voice. Among her numerous theological acquaintances, particularly close to her were the moral theologian Giannino Piana, the biblical scholar Paolo De Benedetti, and several Camaldolese monks, first among which Father Benedetto Calati.⁴⁸ She also established affectionate relationships with bishops intending to implement the Council's reforms, such as the Archbishop of Ravenna Salvatore Baldassarri (1907-82), and later with the Bishop of Molfetta Tonino Bello (1935-93), of Livorno Alberto Ablondi (1924-2010), of Pinerolo Pietro Giachetti (1940-2022), and of Caserta Raffaele Nogaro (1933), while corresponding actively with the Archbishop of Turin Michele Pellegrino (1903-1986) and that of Milan Carlo Maria Martini (1927-2012).⁴⁹

But Zarri at times even hurled polemics against people who shared her requests for renewal, such as the Florentine parish of Isolotto, which in 1968 became a symbol of resistance against ecclesiastical authoritarianism in Italy.⁵⁰ To her, "humanization of faith" did not in any way involve, as it did to some supporters of the Catholic dissent, the "loss of meaning in the concepts of redemption and mystery".⁵¹ Indeed, where she perceived that religious experience was being perverted, she became harshly critical. This happened upon the publication of Isolotto's catechism, which, she wrote, reduced Jesus to "a most noble revolutionary", omitting any reference to the "Kingdom of Heaven" and the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith.⁵² Fidelity to humanity and to the earth need not sacrifice the "quest for the Absolute" or the "thirst for God". These yearnings were indeed so crucial to her that at the end of the 1960s, she opted for a monastic and hermitic life, a decision that would mark the second part of her existence.

⁴⁸ Giannino Piana (1939), former professor of ethics at the Universities of Urbino and Turin, is a prolific author of studies and essays on ethical issues in contemporary culture and society. Cf. Benanti, Compagnoni, *Un'etica per tempi incerti*. Paolo De Benedetti (1927-2016) stands out for his original reinterpretation of biblical texts through the Jewish tradition of which he felt part by birth and by choice. Cf. Cattani, *Dio sulle labbra dell'uomo*. Benedetto Calati (1914-2000), scholar, specialist in the Fathers of the Church, was Prior General of the Camaldolese Congregation from 1969 to 1987. Cf. La Valle, *Benedetto Calati il monaco della libertà*.

⁴⁹ Letters kept in AAZ. Of particular interest, a thorough review sent to Zarri by Pellegrino concerning *Teologia del probabile*, on which he expressed specific criticisms but which he positively assessed as "stimulus to reflection and theological investigation beyond commonplaces". Pellegrino, *Letter to Adriana Zarri*, 8 January 1968, in AAZ.

⁵⁰ Cf. Scattigno, "Il mondo cattolico fiorentino", with bibliography.

⁵¹ Cf. Lanaro's analysis, *Storia dell'Italia repubblicana*, 385-6.

⁵² Zarri collected the published articles in the book *Il grano degli altri*.

5 A Monastic Life Immersed in the Cosmos and History

Among the personalities Adriana Zarri met during the Council years was the Bishop of Ivrea Luigi Bettazzi, who shared her hope that Vatican II would launch a major ecclesial reform.⁵³ It was thanks to him that Adriana eventually moved from Rome to the Piedmont where, in the autumn of 1970, at the bishops' summer residence, she founded a small community with two friars. She baptized the place with the evocative name of Hermitage of the Santa Kenosis.⁵⁴ There, for a few years, she welcomed people and groups in search of silence and prayer. However, living in a small community turned out for Adriana to be but the first step towards a more strictly hermitic form of monasticism – the ancient form of religious life that was then being rediscovered in the West, including in Italy⁵⁵ – for which she soon felt a calling.

She identified as the ideal place for her new life an abandoned farmhouse, without water, electricity nor telephone, called Molinaso, in the Perosa Canavese area near Turin, where she managed to stay from 1975 to 1984, and would often recall as the most intense period in her life. Upon moving there in September 1975, she sent a circular letter to her friends, in which she explained the particular nature of her choice. She wished to live in a “desert” because it was to her a “happy place where to encounter God and men” not a place to “hide away” as in a

shell, protected from everyone's difficulties. Into the desert you enter, you walk, and you immerse yourself, taking on everyone's reality and problems.

Therefore, she would not give up ‘direct’ intervention, because according to her, the hermit had to exercise “a critical conscience made more acute and vigilant by her perspective of detachment”.⁵⁶

She lived a form of lay monasticism, cadenced by regular prayer based on the Benedictine tradition on which she consulted Father Calati for advice,⁵⁷ but without vows nor obedience to any ecclesiastical hierarchy. A monastic life that she recalled in intense “letters

53 The bishop of Ivrea (1923) would often recall the event and its quest for renewal. Cf. Bettazzi, *Il mio concilio*.

54 Zarri chose this name inspired by the concept of Jesus Christ ‘emptying’ himself of his divine condition, found in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2: 7). She welcomed this concept as an invitation for the believer to seek poverty as a detachment from all “vanity”, “dissipation”, “alienation”. Zarri, *È più facile che un cammello*, 97-8.

55 Cf. Turina, *I nuovi eremiti*.

56 Zarri, *Un eremo non è un guscio di lumaca*, 7-11.

57 Zarri, *Letter to Benedetto Calati*, 19 September 1976, in ASC, sez. B, cass. XXVII, ins. 4.

from the hermitage”, which appeared in the magazine *Rocca* of the Pro Civitate Christiana of Assisi – for which she wrote from 1972 to her death –, later revised and made, in 1981, into one of her most read and best-loved books, *Erba della mia erba*.⁵⁸ In these she gave account of the freedom she took upon herself to create new rites, such as the ceremony of the “missa sicca”, in which, inspired by ancient customs, she celebrated the liturgy of the Word every day, then consuming the consecrated bread and wine she had been permitted to keep.⁵⁹ But above all she told her readers about her new daily life as a farmer and breeder and how it allowed her to experience the feeling of the divine she had first perceived in childhood and expressed in her Trinitarian theology. The beauty of her house, adorned with poor furniture and furnishings abandoned by others, her relationship with the earth and with plant and animal life, confirmed her perception of a circular relationship between God and the world. She had a profound conviction of an intimate “solidarity” between the Creator and his creatures, and was convinced that a “divine seed” lay buried “in the mortality” of beings.⁶⁰ She wrote:

We know that God is ‘other’; but he is Other inside; and his transcendent being is both above things and immanent within them. We say ‘Our Father who art in heaven’, which is a legitimate image, but we could also say: ‘Our Father who art on earth’. And the prevalence of one image over the other perhaps measures the distance – or proximity – that separates us – or brings us closer to the fullness of that realm that already is and is not yet; that does not yet invest us and already brushes against us.⁶¹

Before *Erba della mia erba*, Zarri’s new monastic and hermitic life favoured the flourishing of admirable books: in 1971 *Tu. Quasi preghiere*, in which the author, addressing the divine ‘You’ in the form of poetic dialogue, expressed passions and convictions that owed much to the *Song of Songs* and mystical literature; in 1975 *È più facile che un cammello*, meditations of a spiritual and sapiential nature based on

⁵⁸ Zarri, *Erba della mia erba*. It was later republished with other texts in Zarri, *Un eremo non è un guscio di lumaca*, 17-200.

⁵⁹ Zarri, *Un eremo non è un guscio di lumaca*, 173-6.

⁶⁰ Zarri, *Un eremo non è un guscio di lumaca*, 194.

⁶¹ “Sappiamo bene che Dio è ‘altro’; ma è un Altro dentro; e il suo essere trascendente e al di sopra delle cose è altresì un essere immanente e all’interno di esse. Noi diciamo ‘Padre nostro che sei nei cieli’; ed è legittima immagine, ma potremmo anche dire: ‘Padre nostro che sei in terra’. E il prevalere di un’immagine sull’altra forse misura la distanza – o la prossimità – che ci separa – o ci avvicina alla pienezza di quel regno che già è e non ancora è; non ancora ci investe e già ci sfiora”. Zarri, *Un eremo non è un guscio di lumaca*, 86-7.

passages from the Old and New Testaments; in 1978 *Nostro Signore del deserto. Teologia e antropologia della preghiera*, in which she proposed a radical rethinking of the act of praying along the lines of biblical, patristic and mystical tradition.⁶²

Through her way of life and her books Adriana Zarri became known as a master of prayer. She acted as companion of silence and contemplation for individuals and groups who, following strict rules, could share a few days with her in her farmhouse. However, keeping faith with her promise not to alienate herself from the world, she participated first-hand in the civil rights battles that divided Italy in the 1970s and 1980s, shattering the presumed unity of the Catholic world. Twice, at the time of referendums promoted by conservative Catholic circles, she sided with voters who upheld the laws that had introduced divorce and abortion in Italy, recognizing the need to overcome the clerical point of view in the relationship between State and Church, and to affirm the autonomy of the civil sphere from the religious one.⁶³

Her notoriety and stances cost her definitive marginalization from the traditionalist Catholic circle but also brought her new friends such as the writer and politician Rossana Rossanda, who invited her to write for the communist newspaper *Il Manifesto* of which she was a co-founder and for which the theologian signed articles until her death. Zarri and Rossanda were soon connected by deep understanding that went beyond life pursuits and cultural paths that were and would remain different.⁶⁴ Rossanda's friendship also sustained Zarri in the terrible adventure that led her to abandon her beloved Molinasso: the latest in a series of robberies during which, in January 1984, she risked losing her life.⁶⁵

6 A Hermitage Where One Can 'Breathe'

In 1986 a new chapter opened in Adriana Zarri's life. Thanks once again to Luigi Bettazzi's help, she was offered for free by the diocese of Ivrea the use of a small building complex called Ca' Sassino, at one end of the village of Crotte di Strambino (Turin).⁶⁶ She restored

⁶² Zarri, "Tu". *Quasi preghiere* (1971); Zarri, *È più facile che un cammello...* (1975); Zarri, *Nostro Signore del deserto* (1978).

⁶³ On the fierce debates born at that time, cf. Scirè, *Il divorzio in Italia*; Scirè, *L'aborto in Italia*. Zarri herself published a book-report on the referendum campaign against abortion law, cf. Zarri, *I guardiani del sabato*.

⁶⁴ Cf. Rossanda, "Le mie ore con Adriana". Rossana Rossanda (1924-2020) narrates her life in *La ragazza del secolo scorso*.

⁶⁵ Rizzo, "Rapinata tre volte".

⁶⁶ Cf. Maraviglia, *Semplicemente una che vive*, 96.

it, enlivened it with plants and animals using her architectural and creative wisdom, and began a “less rigid, more cordial and more humane” solitary existence, more prone to offer hospitality to individuals and groups.⁶⁷

In years in which many suffered from the intransigent and anti-modern positions of the ecclesiastical magisterium, Adriana Zarri's hermitage became “a place where everyone could lay down their burden and breathe”, where believers seeking new paths, divorcees, and homosexuals were welcomed without judgement, rejection or discrimination.⁶⁸ She herself accepted more readily invitations from grassroots groups, parishes, social clubs and associations who wished to hear her opinion on theological, ethical, and social issues ranging from the interpretation of the Bible to ecumenism, the death penalty, and themes of justice and peace.

In these years she achieved considerable popularity for her participation in a successful television talk show, *Samarconda*, hosted by the journalist Michele Santoro, who recalled her in a recent interview as “one of his masters of life”.⁶⁹ From 1988 to 1991, Zarri took part in the show as commentator on current events, or better as narrator of ironic and caustic “parables” denouncing political and ecclesiastical powers.⁷⁰

Denunciation characterized many of the articles she published in *Il Manifesto* and *Rocca*, but also in periodicals of various orientations such as the left-wing weekly *Avvenimenti*. In the same years, she started writing for the women's illustrated magazine *Anna* and the Franciscan monthly *Messaggero di Sant'Antonio*, periodicals in which Zarri tried her different expressive chords, including replying to readers' questions.⁷¹

She dedicated many articles to environmental issues, a topic that gained increasing attention in Italy from the 1980s onward. Aware of the “very old and incurably anthropocentric culture” which had hitherto dominated, she joined the quest for a new equilibrium between man and the environment, rejecting technical and scientific omnipotence as well as extremist environmental fanaticism.⁷² Zarri

67 Zarri, “Cammino di semplicità”, 109.

68 Ernesto Vavassori, a priest and very close friend of Adriana Zarri, interviewed by the author on 17 July 2017.

69 Michele Santoro interviewed by M. Mondo.

70 Cf. Placido, “Fa troppo freddo?”; Placido, “L'agonia di Minà”; Zarri, *Apologario*.

71 On all these publications she had her own columns. He wrote on *Il Messaggero* from 1986 to 1995 under the pseudonym Myriam; on *Avvenimenti* from 1990 to 2000; on *Anna* from 1994 to 2006.

72 Cf. Zarri, “Il padre-padrone dell'universo”; Zarri, “La salute della natura”. Many previous articles also deal with ecology: Zarri, “Riflessione sotto l'albero”; Zarri, “Ecologia e dintorni”.

developed a particular interest in the meaning of animal life and its possible eschatological perspective, a theme that still appeals to contemporary theologians.⁷³ She inserted animals, with full rights, into “the history of salvation” as recipients, with humanity, of the “new heaven” and the “new earth where justice dwells”.⁷⁴ She perceived the killing of animals for food as a specific and pressing problem, a dramatic act that she considered acceptable if dictated by vital need, but totally immoral if performed, as in the case of hunting, lightly and for fun.⁷⁵ She declared to be inspired in this by her friend Paolo De Benedetti’s “theology of animals” and might also have been influenced by the German theologian Eugen Drewermann’s thoughts on the “immortality of animals”.⁷⁶

It would be worth investigating the sources of Adriana Zarri’s inspiration on environmental issues. Here, however, we must limit ourselves to hypothesize that, although there are no clear links between her and ecofeminist thought, born in the 1970s,⁷⁷ nor direct contacts with theologians sensitive to ecofeminism, she must have come across writings suggesting a new theology of nature translated early on and discussed in Italy as well.⁷⁸ We know she was in friendly contact with the Liberation theologian Leonardo Boff who, precisely at that time, was imprinting to his quest an ecological and mystical turn aimed at taking care of the earth and its creatures.⁷⁹

Zarri was not a member of feminist or feminist theologians’ circles, but during the 1980s and 1990s she sometimes expressed herself on the female condition, then at the centre of an intense philosophical and theological debate. In particular, stimulated by the invitations of Cettina Militello, one of the first women theologians to become professor at a theological faculty in Italy, and by Luce Irigaray, the Belgian philosopher who first elaborated the concept of ‘sexual difference’, Zarri further developed the Trinitarian theological intuitions she had expressed in *Impazienza di Adamo* and in subsequent writings, though never methodically.

Thus in 1985, at a conference intitled *Donne: studio ricerca insegnamento della teologia*, she explained once again how the dynam-

73 Cf. Abraham, De Mori, Knauss, “Animali e teologie”.

74 Zarri, “Teologia degli animali”.

75 Zarri, “Una crisi sempre sospesa”; Zarri, “Gli animali nostri fratelli”.

76 Drewermann, *Sulla immortalità degli animali*; De Benedetti, *E l’asina disse*; De Benedetti, *Teologia degli animali*. These books are all kept in Zarri’s personal library.

77 Bianchi “Introduzione. Ecofemminismo”.

78 Most important among them: Ruether, *Per una teologia della liberazione della donna*; also cf. Moltmann (a theologian much appreciated by Zarri), *Dio nella creazione*.

79 Boff recalls his visits to her last hermitage, cf. Boff, “Adriana Zarri. I papaveri”. In *Ecologia, mondialità, mistica*, Boff quotes Zarri’s titles at pages 198 and 218.

ics of the sexes, which she saw inscribed in the Trinitarian image of God, served as a principle to contest the dominant culture: the dynamic relationship between the people of the Trinity invited, she claimed, to rethink our own ways of living and organizing society, by mixing the prevailingly “male” attitudes, linked to activism and efficiency, with the “alternative” and “female” qualities of “hospitality” and “contemplation”.⁸⁰ A few years later, she expressed herself anew on the richness of female “specificity”, when Luce Irigaray involved her in the book *Le souffle des femmes*, to reflect with other European theologians on women’s soul as a place of hospitality. According to Zarri, such richness resided in thinking of a God connoted not by the abstractness of “being” but by the warmth of “living”, and in nurturing “a contemplative attitude”, capable of “imagination”, “adventure”, and “abandonment”.⁸¹ Zarri’s own interest lay not so much in the discussion over the “special nature” of woman, which feminist theologians continued to question in those years.⁸² To her, indeed, woman’s special nature was already given: woman was the bearer of values to be highlighted as part of a universal heritage, so that a new world and a new way of thinking God could arise.

It is perhaps during the Ca’ Sassino years that Zarri produced the most mature fruits of her ‘theological narrative’, writing three novels that expressed once again, through characters and events, the questions and interpretations of their author.

In *Dodici lune* (1989), through the diary of pain of a writer who had lost his wife, she meditated on the omnipotence of God and the freedom of man, on the dialectic between body and spirit, on the relationship between man and woman, on what happens after death, and the eternity of hell, which Zarri denied.⁸³

One theme of the book was the splendour of sexual communion which the author recognized as the celebration, in the biblical and theological perspective, of the recovered unity of a divided humanity. This motif returned in the following novel, *Quaestio 98* (1994), a long existential parable about a monk who leaves religious life in search of authentic love, inspired by a passage in Saint Thomas’s *Summa Theologiae* which indicated, according to Adriana Zarri, the possibility of reliving, in the communion of bodies, the plenitude of the experience of God. Bold intuitions that won the agreement of readers who grasped the liberating intent to escape from an age-old sexophobic

80 Zarri, “Donna e teologia trinitaria”, 81-2.

81 Zarri, “Une théologie de la vie”. The book was translated into Italian. Cf. Zarri, “Una teologia della vita”. Forcina, *Soggette*, 112-13, comments on Zarri’s text.

82 Carr, Schüssler Fiorenza, “La donna ha una natura speciale?”.

83 On *Dodici lune*, cf. Genta, “Eretica Zarri”; Borgese, “L’eremita ha scritto un romanzo”.

education, and the charm of the eschatological utopia, but also attracted severe critical judgments by fellow readers.⁸⁴

Adriana Zarri's last theological novel, *Vita e morte senza miracoli di Celestino VI* came out in 2008 and put forth once again, as in a compact synthesis, all of its author's hopes in the story of a small countryside parish priest called to the papal throne, who, after taking on the evocative name of the thirteenth-century Pope Celestine V - the pope who eventually resigned - left St. Peter's for a modest apartment and began a series of reforms. He abolished compulsory celibacy for priests, opened to the ordination of women, established that bishops were to be elected by local churches, inaugurated a new sexual pastoral, and donated the Vatican State to Italy. The book reserved the surprise of a double ending: in the first, Celestine VI died very old as a pope; in the second, he resigned, deciding to go back to being a simple parish priest.⁸⁵

The writer, weakened by old age and illness, was taking leave of her readers through this will delivering hopes palely reflected shortly thereafter by Roman pontiffs. A few years after her death, on 18 November 2010, one pope - Benedict XVI - resigned from the papal throne, and another - Pope Francis - gave up the papal apartment.

Poor signals compared to the demands for radical reform that animated the life of Adriana Zarri, interpreter and promoter, from the second half of the twentieth century to the early 2000s, of needs and hopes that still challenge theological thought, the existence of the Catholic Church, and human aspiration.

7 Conclusion

To study Adriana Zarri is to meet a deeply original and independent woman, able to make the Italian Catholic Church listen to her even before it opened to the voice of women, breaking the 'glass ceiling' that prevented women from undertaking theological studies. She became a well-known orator, capable of expressing fears and hopes that were deeply-felt before and after the Second Vatican Council, and are still alive in the contemporary religious sphere.

Her independence may serve to explain why she is relatively absent from the abundant literature dedicated to the Catholic world and to the enhancement of twentieth-century women theologians. Indeed, as a journalist and writer condemning backwardness with po-

⁸⁴ Cf. Del Rio, "Zarri, amplesso in Paradiso"; Passa, "Amore, un assaggio di Paradiso". Cf. Maraviglia, *Semplicemente una che vive*, 111-12.

⁸⁵ Cf. Quaranta, *Vorrei un papa laico* (interview to Adriana Zarri). Zarri, *Vita e morte senza miracoli*.

lemical vigour and advocating reforms with equal force, she antagonized the conservative sectors of the Catholic Church. Besides, the fact of being a self-taught theologian that expressed her insights in essays but also in imaginative novels and poetry, while gaining her considerable recognition among Catholic progressists, marginalized her from academic theologians. Moreover, the fact that she expressed herself in favour of women's dignity but shunned from confronting her ideas with contemporary studies and research, kept her away from a more significant participation in feminist theology debates. To many, finally, her active engagement in most divisive battles regarding civil and social rights seemed to contradict the contemplative calling she had materialized in choosing to live as a hermit for the second part of her life.

Adriana Zarri's profile is therefore somewhat 'atypical', markedly autonomous, which perhaps caused her estrangements and misunderstandings but earned her very significant relationships and marked a life that was a source of inspiration for many. Some aspects of her life appear worthy of further research both to enrich the space and credit dedicated to women in a tenaciously masculine twentieth century, and for the implications with some developments in contemporary spirituality. Let us signal three aspects in particular: Adriana Zarri's intense collaboration with magazines and newspapers of the Catholic sphere, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when she was often the only female writer; her relationship with bishops and theologians, first among which Chenu and Pellegrino, who were willing to recognize dedication and worth in women, on which many colleagues would have disagreed; her spiritual thought, imbued with a deep perception of the presence of the divine in nature and aware of the need for a new model of relationship between living beings. This inclination above all invites further investigations. Adriana Zarri is, in her own way, an expression of the "Christian mystics" that Karl Rahner wished for in a much-quoted saying,⁸⁶ while many pages she wrote and first of all her life itself, reveal an ecological sensibility that, since the second half of the twentieth century, has never ceased to arouse new spiritual and theological consideration both within and beyond the confines of the Catholic Church.

86 "Christians of the future will either be mystics or cease to be". Rahner, *Nuovi saggi*, 24.

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Crossing the Stained-Glass Ceiling of Theology

The Proclamation of the First Women as Doctors of the Church

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Abstract In 1970, Pope Paul VI proclaimed two women doctors of the Church, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena. He therefore broke with a millenary tradition that excluded women from a title that recognized a form of magisterium in the universal Church. Indeed, teaching is the clergy's prerogative in the Roman Catholic Church. If the doctorate of the Church is a title given to saints who are already canonized, one can wonder if these first proclamations of 1970 legitimate a new position for women in theological teaching. It seems that they are contemporary with women's access to theological faculties, which were gradually opened to women after the Second World War, first as auditors, then as students, and finally as teachers. This article wants to interrogate these two concomitant events and to see whether the proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church opened a way for theological teaching in the Roman Catholic Church to women or not. After studying the way this novelty is presented by Pope Paul VI in his homilies of proclamation, the echo of the event will be put forward. Finally, discourse and practice will be confronted to see if the recognition of a posthumous title to women influenced women's condition in theology.

Keywords Women. Catholicism. Theology. Doctors of the Church. University.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Understanding Paul VI's Aim Through the Proclamation Homilies. – 3 An Ambiguous Reception of the Event by the Press. – 4 Confronting Discourse and Practice. – 5 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

In 1970, for the first time, two women were recognized as doctors of the Church. Hence, their writings were recommended to the universal Church as an important and sure contribution to the Christian doctrine. Indeed, this title inherited from the Byzantine Church was made official in the thirteenth century in order to promote models of both holiness and intelligence. It is a major event with regard to the long Church history of women and doctrinal authority but it was not perceived as such in a short-time context of crisis after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and of crystallisation of the relations between the radical feminism emerging and the Catholic Church. However, it may be understood as a gesture of recognition and encouragement towards women at a time when women's issues were becoming more important in the Catholic Church, since the 1960s. Since doctors of the Church are models given to theologians, one can wonder if this event could reflect a new access for women to theology. While most faculties opened their doors to women in the second half of the nineteenth century and welcomed them in greater numbers during the interwar period, those of theology remained masculine and clerical until the end of the Second World War.¹ More or less before the Second Vatican Council, theology was conceived as a preparation to the sacerdotal ordination, and therefore reserved to the clergy. The proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church does not change anything to the position of women in the hierarchical structures, since it concerns the field of holiness. But as it is contemporary of the arrival of women in the faculties of theology, it may be useful to see to what extent it reflects the eventual difficulties women could have to access a new position in the field of knowledge and therefore of power. What does the proclamation of women as doctors of the Church in 1970 teach us about the new relationship between women and theology? Did Pope Paul VI make a feminist move by proclaiming Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena doctors of the Church? I will first present the homilies of the proclamation so as to understand the pope's scope. Then, a survey of the press will show how the event was received by the faithful. Finally, I will confront discourse and practice to see if the proclamation had an impact on women's presence in the theological field.

First of all, it may be useful to remind ourselves what the doctors of the Church are so as to understand what was at stake in 1970. The famous *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (1940) defines them as

¹ Things are rather different in a Protestant context, theological studies opening to lays at the beginning of the twentieth century. But this article will focus on the Catholic context.

“ecclesiastical writers who have been honoured with this title by a solemn approval of the Church, on account of their holy life and perfect orthodoxy, but still more for their considerable science and profound erudition”.² Three conditions are required to be recognized as such: to be canonised, to have proposed an ‘eminent doctrine’ and to have been solemnly proclaimed by the pope or a council. Because of this title, doctors of the Church enjoy a special cult in the Catholic liturgy: for example, in the pre-conciliar liturgy, it was customary to recite the Credo to recall the services rendered by the doctor for the defence of faith. The title appeared in the Middle Ages and was used to distinguish the more eminent among the fathers of the Church thanks to a special cult. It was only in 1567 that the two categories were really differentiated when Thomas Aquinas was proclaimed, just after the Council of Trent. Since the eighteenth century, a real doctoral policy has been developed, as proclamations became more frequent, with a certain balance between the various religious orders and a kind of reflection of the evolutions of the theological field. It was not until the nineteenth century that the question arose for a woman: in their *Acta sanctorum* (1845), the Bollandists wondered if Teresa of Avila should be honoured as a doctor of the Church in view of the authority of her writings in the field of mystical theology.³ As she had not benefited from a solemn proclamation by the pope, they considered that she should not. Moreover, she could not be proclaimed because of Saint Paul’s harsh words about the teaching of women in the Church: “Let Women be silent in the Churches” (1 Co 14, 34). Since the interpretation Thomas Aquinas had given in his *Theological Sum* (II^a-II^{ae}, q. 177, a. 2), this precept was understood as an interdiction for women to teach the Church. For the medieval theologian, they could teach in the private sphere, to their children, but never publicly. And the role of the doctors of the Church is precisely to teach the universal Church. It is probably for the same reason that Pope Pius XI answered negatively to the Carmelite Order who asked him to proclaim Teresa of Avila in 1923, a year after the University of Salamanca gave her a doctorate *honoris causa*, in a context of renewal and debate about mystics.⁴ The answer was the same for Teresa of Lisieux in 1932, after a French Jesuit had proposed the idea of her proclamation in the first Teresian Congress: “*sexus obstat*”.⁵

2 Valton, “Docteur de l’Église”, 1510.

3 Vandermoere, Vanhecke, *Acta sanctorum*, 109.

4 Macca di S. Maria, “Il Dottorato di Santa Teresa d’Avila”, 104. On the context: Fouilloux, *Une Église en quête de liberté*, 47, 212; Minvielle, *Qui est mystique?*, 35-6; De Franceschi, “La défense doctrinale du système thomiste de la mystique étendue”.

5 Droulers, “Le Doctorat de sainte Thérèse de Lisieux”, 118. Since it is not the aim of this article to explain the failure of these first attempts to make women doctors of

2 Understanding Paul VI's Aim through the Proclamation Homilies

First, a study of the official texts accompanying the proclamations of the two saints in 1970 is necessary to understand in what sense the event can be seen as an improvement in the place granted to women in the formulation of faith. Indeed, as the title of doctor of the Church could be confused with the magisterial function devolved to the clergy, Pope Paul VI had to explain in what sense it could be given to women.⁶ He does it in the homily of the Mass in which Teresa of Avila was proclaimed, on 27 September, a week before Catherine of Siena:

En primer lugar hay que notar que Santa Teresa de Ávila es la primera mujer a quien la Iglesia confiere el título de Doctora; y esto no sin recordar las severas palabras de San Pablo: 'La mujeres cállense en las Iglesia' (1 Cor. 14, 34); lo cual quiere decir todavía hoy que la mujer no esta destinada a tener en la Iglesia funciones jerárquicas de magisterio y de ministerio. ¿Se habrá violado entonces el precepto apostólico? Podemos responder con claridad: no. Realmente no se trata de un título que comparte funciones jerárquicas de magisterio [...].⁷

For centuries, the doctorate of the Church was associated with theology and priesthood. This may explain why it could seem inconceivable to proclaim a lay doctor of the Church in the interwar period. Pius XI may have been all the more reluctant to give the title to women at a time when the first feminist revendications appeared in the Roman Catholic Church, because of a possible confusion between proclaiming women doctors of the Church and opening priesthood to women. A parallel could be made with the devotion to the Virgin-Priest, encouraged by Pius X in 1906 and then condemned in 1913 and in 1927 because of this possible confusion.⁸ In fact, between 1906 and

the Church, I would like to refer to an article where it is exposed: Tesson, "Des femmes docteurs de l'Église?".

6 To understand the way teaching is conceived in the Catholic Church, cf. Congar, "Pour une histoire sémantique du terme 'Magistère'"; Congar, "Bref historique des formes du 'Magistère' et de ses relations avec les docteurs".

7 "Let us first notice that Saint Teresa of Avila is the first woman to whom the Church granted the title of doctor of the Church; and this fact does not go without recalling the severe words of Saint Paul: *Mulieres in Ecclesiis taceant* (1 Co 14, 34): which means, still today, that women are not destined to have hierarchal magisterial position of ministry. Has the apostolic precept been violated? We can clearly answer: no. It is not, in reality, a title that confers a hierarchal magisterial position" (Author's transl.). Paul VI, *Proclamazione di Santa Teresa d'Avila Dottore della Chiesa*.

8 "Dévotions prohibées"; Laurentin, *Marie, l'Église et le sacerdoce*, 437 and ff.; Gazzetta, *Virgo et Sacerdos*; Galtier, "La dévotion à Marie 'Vierge-Prêtre'".

1927, seven protestant Churches had accepted women's ordination.⁹ In 1922, the Holy Office had opened an inquiry on the matter, after publications were made in that sense in a German journal, *Die Frau*.¹⁰

In 1964, when the Carmelite Order made a request to Paul VI for Teresa of Avila, the answer was different, even if the claims for women's ordination were increasing in the context of the Second Vatican Council.¹¹ The pope commissioned four theologians to study the possibility of proclaiming women doctors of the Church and all of them answered positively.¹² These could benefit from the theology developed at the Council which allowed to distinguish the doctorate of the Church, which authenticates a charism – a grace given for free to any faithful for the increasing of the whole community – and priesthood, which is a sacrament. As one can see, Paul VI also refers to the conciliar theology in his homily:

Realmente no se trata de un título que comparte funciones jerárquicas de magisterio, pero a la vez debemos señalar que este hecho no supone en ningún modo un menosprecio de la sublime de la mujer en el seno del Pueblo de Dios. Por el contrario ella, al ser incorporada a la Iglesia por el Bautismo, participa de ese sacerdocio común de los fieles, que la capacita y la obliga a 'confesar delante de los hombres la fe que recibió de Dios mediante la Iglesia (*Lumen gentium* 2, 11)'.¹³

The notion of 'common priesthood' allows women to profess their faith and to contribute to a better understanding of it. Exposed in the

9 Cf. the table "La place de la femme dans le ministère des Églises chrétiennes non catholiques", at a time the question was now up to date in the Catholic Church: the Fraternité des Remontrants (1915), the Union Congrégationaliste d'Angleterre et du Pays de Galles (1917), the Union baptiste de Grande-Bretagne et d'Irlande (1918), the Église Presbytérienne d'Angleterre (1921), the Union Congrégationaliste d'Écosse (1929), the Église Évangélique Luthérienne aux Pays-Bas (1929), and the Église Libre Unie d'Écosse (1929).

10 *Tendenze al Sacerdozio per le donne, voto del R.mo P. Drehmans (luglio 1922) e Supplemento al Voto dello stesso consultore (nov. 1922)*, in ACDF, Rer. Var. 1922, n. 7. The articles are the following: Adam, "Weibliche Geelsorger"; Poehlmann, "Zum weiblichen Priestertum".

11 It is precisely in 1964 that six women publish a text intitled "We Won't Keep Silent!", in response to Saint Paul's famous interdiction. Heinzelmann, *Wir schweigen nicht länger!*.

12 *Sacra Rituum Congregatio, Positio peculiaris*.

13 "It is not, in reality, a title which contains a hierarchal position of ministry but we must underline at the same time that it does signify in any way a lesser esteem for the sublime mission of women in the midst of the people of God. On the contrary, women, by entering the Church through baptism, participate in the communal priestly ministry of the faithful, which habitates and obliges to 'profess before men the faith received by God through the intermediary of the Church (*Lumen gentium* 2, 11)". Paul VI, *Proclamación de Santa Teresa de Jesús como Doctora de la Iglesia*.

fourth chapter of the constitution *Lumen gentium* (1964), it relativises the distinction between the clergy and the laity by putting forward what is common between them: baptism.¹⁴ Hence, any faithful is invited to worship God by offering him, as a sacrifice, his/her daily life. Even if the traditional opposition between the Teaching and the Taught Church remains, it becomes less important in ecclesiology whereas the image of the 'People of God' appeared. In that sense, the renewal of ecclesiology and the new place given to the laity made it possible to reconsider the question of proclaiming women doctors of the Church. In his homily, Paul VI does not speak of a new doctrinal function recognised to women but, more generally, he enhances the way the faithful contribute to the formulation of the Christian faith:

Y en esa confesión de la fe tantas mujeres han llegado a las cimas más elevadas, hasta el punto de que su palabra y sus escritos han sido luz y guía de sus hermanos. Luz alimentada cada día en el contacto íntimo con Dios, aún en las formas más elevadas de la oración mística, para la cual San Francisco de Sales llega a decir que poseen una especial capacidad. Luz hecha vida de manera sublime para el bien y el servicio de los hombres.¹⁵

Therefore, Paul VI says nothing about a reconsideration of women's participation to theology but recognises a new way to consider the formulation of faith, nourished by prayer. And indeed, the two figures he proclaimed were not theologians *stricto sensu*: none of them studied and they did not produce a systematic and speculative doctrine but wrote letters or autobiographical writings. Rather than using abstraction and concepts, they talked about their spiritual experience and indeed, both were great mystics. Their proclamation sounds like a consecration of the pluralism of theological forms claimed by the 'New Theology' in the 1940s and 1950s, whose representatives were at the forefront of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁶ Étienne Fouilloux wrote about the review *Dieu Vivant*, promoted by the French Jesuits in the 1940s-1950s:

On sait bien de quelle théologie *Dieu Vivant* ne veut pas: une théologie ancrée dans le substrat philosophique thomiste plutôt que

14 Paul VI, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium*.

15 "In this profession of faith many women have reached the highest summits, to the point that their words and writings have been a light and a guide for their brothers: a light which has been nourished each day by their intimate contact with God, and has reached the most noble forms of mystical prayer, for which Saint Francis de Sales does not hesitate to say that they possess a special capacity". Paul VI, *Proclamación de Santa Teresa de Jesús como Doctora de la Iglesia*.

16 Gibellini, *Panorama de la théologie au XX^e siècle*, 429-35.

dans les sources du christianisme; une théologie qui sépare: philosophie et théologie, pensée et prière, action et contemplation, incarnation et eschatologie; une théologie spéculative, enfermée dans ses syllogismes et ses déductions logiques; une théologie à prétention rationnelle qui évacuerait miracle, mystère et aspiration à la sainteté; bref, une théologie dans laquelle l'intelligence de la foi prime sur l'humble adhésion de foi.¹⁷

This review precisely gave a major place to Thérèse of Lisieux and to her 'experiential theology'. In this research of a 'new theology' nourished by spiritual experience, new models of doctors could be promoted: both Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena can be linked to the spiritual theology, a new field appeared in the interwar period thanks to a fusion between the mystical and the ascetical theology.¹⁸

In his homilies and apostolic letters accompanying the proclamation, Paul VI did not insist on the femininity of the two saints. He rapidly explained why women could be recognised as doctors of the Church in Teresa of Avila's homily but did not say anything about encouraging women to study and teach theology and mostly justified his gesture thanks to the theology of the laity developed in the last decades.

3 An Ambiguous Reception of the Event by the Press

In the media, the event was mostly presented as exceptional because of its novelty: for the first time, the Catholic Church proclaimed women doctors of the Church. Although he did not speak a lot about this, Paul VI seemed to underline this aspect by choosing to give the title not only to Teresa of Avila, as the Carmelite Order asked him, but also to Catherine of Siena. The Order of the Preachers itself had not made any request for Catherine of Siena and was quite surprised to learn the pope wanted to make her a doctor.¹⁹ It seems that Paul VI wanted to make clear that he did not only make an exception for Teresa of Avila. He also made of the proclamation a great event by innovating a new ritual of proclamation: whereas his predecessors used to write an apostolic letter, he chose to proceed to a solemn proclamation during a mass in the basilica of Saint-Peter, as for the proclamation of a dogma.²⁰

¹⁷ Fouilloux, *Christianisme et eschatologie*, 143-4.

¹⁸ Castellano Cervera, "Presencia de santa Teresa de Jesús en la teología y en la espiritualidad actual".

¹⁹ Ballestrero, *Autoritratto di una vita*, 212-13.

²⁰ De la Cruz, "Glosa a la bibliografía del doctorado teresiano".

For most of the people, the event was a sign that the Catholic Church recognised an equality between men and women in the spiritual values and the great contribution women had made in the Church's history. It appeared as a consecration of the equal rights between the two sexes the Second Vatican Council had recalled (*Gaudium et spes*).²¹ The press did not say much about their contribution to the doctrine, but Paul VI himself had spoken more about their action for the Church than of their writings. In his homilies, he insisted on their "sense of the Church" and action for it. Indeed, many parallels could be made with the life of the two doctors and that of Catholicism in 1970. Both had lived at a time of crisis: the period of the Avignon papacy and many divisions in the Church for Catherine of Siena, and the Reformation for Teresa of Avila. At a time when many controversies and divisions emerged in the Church, after the Council, Paul VI emphasises the model of obedience and love for the Church they could represent. When he announced the proclamations, in 1967, he was very preoccupied with some innovations emerged in the context of reformation, such as the *New Catechism* of the Church of Holland, published in 1966, which contained ambiguous positions on the Virgin Mary, the role of the pope, etc. This explains why, for the first synod, gathered in 1967, the subject chosen was the "crisis of faith". In the religious orders, the combination of the conciliar reformation and the wind of Mai 1968 led to a major crisis.²² Here is what Paul VI said about the reformation Catherine of Siena promoted at her time:

E che cosa intendeva essa per rinnovamento e riforma della Chiesa? Non certamente il sovvertimento delle sue strutture essenziali, la ribellione ai Pastori, la via libera ai carismi personali, le arbitrarie innovazioni nel culto e nella disciplina, come alcuni vorrebbero ai nostri giorni. Al contrario, essa afferma ripetutamente che sarà resa la bellezza alla Sposa di Cristo e si dovrà fare la riforma 'non con guerra, ma con pace e quiete, con umili e continue orazioni, sudori e lagrime dei servi di Dio' (Cfr. *Dialogo*, cc. XV, LXXXVI, ed. cit., pp. 44, 197). Si tratta, quindi, per la Santa di una riforma anzitutto interiore, e poi esterna, ma sempre nella comunione e nell'obbedienza filiale verso i legittimi rappresentanti di Cristo.²³

21 Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes*, 2, 29.

22 For the Order of Preachers in France, cf. Raison du Cleuziou, *De la contemplation à la contestation*.

23 "And what did she mean by the renewal and the reformation of the Church? Certainly not the overthrow of the essential structures, nor the rebellion against ministers, nor the free opening up to personal charisms, not the arbitrary innovations in cult and in discipline, as some would wish for nowadays. On the contrary, she affirms many a times that the bride of the Church will be beautified and that we will have to re-

If two exceptional figures were presented to the faithful, Paul VI did not insist on the model of action they could be for women, but for all the faithful, at a time of crisis in the Church. Paradoxically, the feminine aspect of the proclamation was much more underlined in the press than Paul VI had done. Moreover, although Paul VI did not say anything of the sort, some of the faithful understood the proclamations as a reaffirmation of the traditional feminine values. For them, the proclamation allowed an underlining of the differences between men and women at a time when they would have been shaken by radical feminism. In a letter supporting the request made by the Carmelite Order, sent by the *Institución Teresiana*, a network created at the beginning of the twentieth century to help the young women who entered at university, it was said:

Además, en la Santa de Ávila el Doctorado que va a proclamarse no disminuyo en nada su feminidad, sino que se conjugo, sublimándose con los caracteres que la antropología y la sociología señalan para la mujer perfecta, madre siempre en el cuerpo o en el alma y elemento de armonía serena en la sociedad de que forma parte. La Institución Teresiana, que desea promocionar a la mujer, 'pero como mujer y no como hombre', en expresión de su Fundador, estima que la concesión del título de Doctora a Santa Teresa de Jesús será optima ayuda a su importante misión.²⁴

As seen earlier, Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena had a different style of writing than the other doctors, because they did not study theology. This was understood as a proof of an inherent difference in the way men and women teach: women would teach more personally and would not be able to produce systematic writings as Thomas Aquinas did. In the lecture he made at the occasion of the proclamation, Cardinal Garrone, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, explained the new doctors taught as only women could,

form 'not through war, but through peace and calmness, through continual and humble prayers, in the sweat and tears of Christ's servants' (cf. *Dialogue*, chap. XV, LXXXVI, pp. 4, 197). Thus, it is that, for the saint, a reformation is before all else interior and then exterior, but always in communion and filial obedience to the legitimate representatives of Christ". Paul VI, *Proclamazione di Santa Caterina da Siena Dottore della Chiesa*.

24 "Furthermore, for the saint of Avila, the doctorate which will be proclaimed has in nothing diminished her femininity, but, on the contrary, combines with it, to sublime its characteristics that anthropology and sociology designate for the perfect woman, always mother in her body or in her soul, and element of serene harmony in the society of which she is part. The *Institución teresiana*, which hopes to promote women, 'but as a woman and not as a man', according to the words of its founder, believes that the reception of the title of doctor for Saint Teresa of Jesus will be an excellent aid for its important mission". Postulatory letter sent by Cardinal Arcadio M. Larraona, 28 February 1968, published in *Sacra pro Causis Sanctorum Congregatione, Urbis et orbis concessionis tituli Doctoris*, 8.

“not only because they did not go to school and take degrees, but because they are women and have something else to do. Or rather the same thing, but differently”:

Elles ne seraient pas à l’aise dans un exposé doctrinal où on doit faire abstraction de soi, des autres, de la vie, pour ordonner logiquement des idées. Elles restent présentes quand elles parlent plutôt que de remuer des concepts. C’est en fait d’elles-mêmes qu’elles parlent, de leur propre expérience. Et en même temps, tout en parlant d’elles-mêmes, elles s’adressent toujours à quelqu’un, elles sont toujours en dialogue [...].²⁵

Indeed, Catherine of Siena’s major writing is called *The Dialogue of Divine Providence* and is a discussion between the Father and her about diverse truths of the faith. Both saints have developed an intense correspondence, with all kinds of people. Cardinal Garrone continues his reflexion on the femininity of their writings:

Pourquoi dire qu’elles écrivent comme seule une femme peut le faire? L’Église dont elles parlent n’est pas d’abord vécue comme un système de pensée, bien qu’elle puisse en être un, mais comme une famille vivante, où on communique aux joies et aux peines de l’autre, où on ne peut se reposer quand la vie des autres est en péril. [...] Elles nous montrent un ‘climat chaleureux et humain de la maison de Dieu’, c’est ainsi qu’une femme, et elle seule, peut être le témoin de ce qu’est un foyer. Ainsi, leur apport ne peut en aucun cas être purement théorique, car elles ont toujours affaire directement à des êtres vivants qu’elles veulent connaître, aimer et servir, à commencer par leur Seigneur [...].²⁶

Finally, one last feminine aspect is underlined:

25 “They would not be at ease in a doctrinal presentation where one must make abstraction of one’s self, of others, of life, to order ideas logically. They remain present when they speak rather than exploring concepts. It is, in fact, of themselves that they speak, of their own experience. And at the same time, as they speak of themselves, they always address someone, they are always in dialogue [...]”. Garrone, “Sainte Catherine de Sienne et sainte Thérèse d’Avila docteurs de l’Église”, 26.

26 “Why say that they write as only women can? The Church of which they speak is not first experienced as a system of thought, though it may be one, but as a living family, where we communicate to the joys and sorrows of the other, where we cannot rest when the life of others is in danger. [...] They show us a ‘human and welcoming setting for the house of God’, it is thus that women, and only them, can be the witness of what a home is. Therefore, their contribution can never be purely theoretical, because they always encounter directly with living beings who they wish to know, love and serve, beginning with the Lord. [...]”. Garrone, “Sainte Catherine de Sienne et sainte Thérèse d’Avila docteurs de l’Église”, 26.

Ni l'une ni l'autre n'ignorent la force de séduction très pure et très réelle qui émane de leur personne. Elles ne s'étonnent pas de voir des âmes venir à elles, conquises par leur 'charme'. Mais elles ne gardent rien pour elles-mêmes. Chez elles, l'humain est merveilleusement mis au service du surnaturel. Leur charisme ne tue pas en elles la femme mais met toutes leurs richesses au service de la foi.²⁷

Another example is an article of *L'Homme nouveau*, "The Doctorate of a Woman", which entitles a paragraph: "she stays a woman", as if there was a contradiction between the doctorate and femininity.²⁸ Teresa of Avila would stay a woman because she teaches as a mother does, without complicated concepts, but with simple words, by making herself close to her reader:

Elle n'est pas l'égale [des docteurs], elle est bien plus. Elle fut leur mère. Ils l'ont tous reconnue. Elle a exercé pour eux, elle doit exercer encore pour nous une fonction qui est le don inimitable de la femme. Elle fut d'une manière éminente l'éducatrice.²⁹

Therefore, in the Catholic world, it seems that the event was understood both as the recognition of an equal contribution of men and women to the understanding of the doctrine and as an example of their diversity, because of the non-systematic theology Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena offer. Women do have access to the doctorate, but they are at the same time invited to keep their feminine way of teaching. In the echo to the proclamation, one can therefore see a mirror of women's conception in Catholicism at that time: there is no doubt on men and women's equality, but it is a kind of equality in difference because of the importance of the complementary between the two sexes. This idea will form the basis of the 'new feminism' promoted by Pope John Paul II later.

Of course, there is also a more progressive wing in the Catholic Church, but it is not this one that was at the forefront in the

27 "Neither one nor the other ignore the very pure and very real force of seduction which emanates from their person. They are not surprised to see souls come to them, conquered by their 'charm'. But they do not keep anything for themselves. For them, mankind is marvellously put to the service of the supernatural. Their charism does not kill the woman in them but puts all of their richness to the service of the faith". Garrone, "Sainte Catherine de Sienna et sainte Thérèse d'Avila docteurs de l'Église", 26.

28 "The Doctorate of a Woman", 20.

29 "She is not the equal of [the doctors], she is much more. She was their mother. They all recognised her. She exercised for them, she must exercise for us a function which is the inimitable gift of women. She was in an eminent way the educator". "The Doctorate of a Woman", 20.

proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church. If one looks at the actors working behind the scenes, in collaboration with the Congregation for the Cause of Saints, one can be surprised to discover most of them were linked to the conservative wing at the Second Vatican Council.³⁰ This can be interpreted as a sign of change in the way of considering the ‘women’s question’ in Catholicism: where there was opposition to the proclamation of women as doctors of the Church in the interwar period, there was none in the post-conciliar period. But in the light of what has been said, one can think that the proclamation may have been accepted because it could be put at the service of a reaffirmation of traditional values such as obedience, pontifical absolutism, primacy of the spiritual order over the temporal one, femininity, etc. Moreover, since the title was given posthumously, it did not necessarily imply changes for women in practice.

4 Confronting Discourse and Practice

One can therefore wonder if the recognition of Teresa of Avila and of Catherine of Siena as doctors of the Church reflects the end of an exclusion of women from academical theology. As it was just said, the title recognises an authority for women who lived centuries ago, and the pope did not present the proclamation as a step forward for women. However, it is concomitant with an evolution in the theological field, with the arrival of women in faculties which remained exclusively masculine for centuries. Therefore, it may be useful to have a quick look at the history of women’s access to theology as a discipline.

Since the thirteenth century and the institutionalisation of theology in a scholastic framework, women were excluded from the discipline *de facto* because they could not study at university. An important date would therefore be 1215, when the Fourth Lateran Council imposed the cloister to nuns and the University of Paris was created.³¹ Whereas women could play an important intellectual part in the monastic world, they became marginalised. The only language they could use to talk about God was therefore their individual experience, which was less and less valued. Michela Pereira has shown the progressive opposition between a rational, systematic theology, which has its own method inherited from Aristotelianism, while another kind of knowledge, linked to community practices, interior

30 Aniceto Fernandez, Anastasio Ballestrero, Cardinal Michael Browne, Cardinal Arcadio Larraona. The last two are mentioned as “sympathizer cardinals” by Roy-Lysencourt, *Les membres du Coetus Internationalis Patrum au concile Vatican II*, 79-89, 97-103.

31 Scattigno, “L’esperienza religiosa”, 11.

experience, consciousness of the body, was developing. There was a progressive discrepancy between a masculine and professional theology and a mystical and feminine one.

But things changed with women's arrival at university at the end of the nineteenth century, and moreover in the twentieth century, with the growth of the apostolate of the laity. On the one hand, there was an increasing demand for doctrinal formation from women, who were no longer satisfied with the piety that was proposed to them in the previous century. A good example is the *Cercle thomiste féminin*, created in 1925 by Emile Peillaube (1864-1934), a Marist father who taught at the Catholic Institute of Paris, whose aim was to base the spiritual life on dogma. It was a success and in the next few years, the Parisian model was imitated in other cities and the audience expanded to men.³² At the same time, the growth of women's activity in the public sphere justified giving them a stronger formation. In 1923 a special course was created at the University of the Sacred Heart in Milan to form women movement leaders, after Agostino Gemelli and Armida Barelli founded the *Gioventù femminile di Azione Cattolica*.³³ Specific structures were created, since theological faculties remained closed to women, at a time when they became more numerous at university. More generally, the apostolate of the laity grew and, in these national and international structures, women could take more responsibilities. One can think about Rosemary Goldie's case and about the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Apostolate of the Laity, created in 1952.³⁴ This Australian woman gave a presentation on the formation of the laity in 1953, spoke in front of the Catholic Action leaders of Portugal in 1957 and became the assistant of Vittorino Veronese, the Committee's president. In virtue of this function, she used to dialogue with many theologians associated with the preparation of those congresses.

On the other hand, the Holy See became aware of the need to offer a stronger doctrinal formation to nuns after the Second World War. The renewal of religious life was studied in various congresses held in Rome: the first International Congress of Religious (26 November-8 December 1950), the first International Congress of Educator Nuns (4-14 September 1951), and the first International Congress Superiors General of Institutes and Congregations of Pontifical Right (September 1952). This latter gave birth to the International Union of Superiors General.³⁵ A leitmotiv of all these congresses was

32 Jacquemet, "Cercle thomiste".

33 Garutti Bellenzier, "La spiritualità delle donne nelle organizzazioni laicali"; Della Sudda, "Les défis du pontificat de Pie XI".

34 Minvielle, *L'apostolat des laïcs à la veille du Concile (1949-1959)*, 301.

35 Nardin, Rocca, "Unione Internazionale delle Superiore Generali (UISG)".

the necessity of creating new structures of formation, adapted to the needs of the religious. This explains that the first decision taken by the International Union of superiors general was the foundation of the institute *Regina Mundi*, in 1954, whose aim was to welcome and help nuns from all over the world who came to study in the Roman universities.³⁶

In this decade, many institutes of religious sciences were created in many countries. These are intermediary structures: founded because faculties of theology remained reserved to the clergy's formation, they were often related to them in a second step. For example, *Regina Mundi* was aggregated to the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1970, in the faculty of theology. The same process has been studied by Madeleine Sauvé for the *Institut supérieur de sciences religieuses* of Montréal.³⁷ She noticed this institute was created in 1953, independently from the faculty of theology, because the latter could only award grades in theology and that in this time, it was not possible to award them to laics. Indeed, an important point to keep in mind is that in canon law, the laity includes all the faithful who have not received the sacerdotal ordination. Even if they made religious vows, nuns are part of the laity.

If we lack a precise chronology on this subject, we can say that the faculties of theology started opening to women in the 1940s, but only marginally. The first doctor in theology would be the Benedictine Anna von Bolschwing in 1946, in Vienna.³⁸ It is mostly in the German area that pioneers appear in this field, in the 1960s: Herlinde Pissarek-Hudelist in Innsbruck, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza in Münster in 1962, Helen Schüngel-Straumann in Bonn in 1969. In France, the faculty of theology of the Catholic Institute of Paris was authorised to admit women in 1958, and that of Lyon in 1963.³⁹

The emphasis put by the Second Vatican Council on the necessary formation of the laity (*Apostolicam actuositatem*)⁴⁰ may have encouraged this movement. It is in 1966 that the first woman arrived in the faculty of theology of the Pontifical Gregorian University, as an auditor. The next year, she could register as a student. In Italy, it was only in 1970 that a woman, Nella Filippi received a doctoral degree, at the Angelicum.⁴¹ What is interesting regarding our matter is that Paul VI intervened personally on her behalf, since it seemed to be still

36 Avonts, "Regina Mundi".

37 Sauvé, *L'Institut supérieur*, 28-69.

38 Capozza, "Voci inattese in lingua tedesca", 177.

39 Bressolette, "L'Institut catholique de Paris", 49; Moulinet, "L'université catholique de Lyon", 59.

40 Paul VI, *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity Apostolicam actuositatem*, 6, 29.

41 Valenziano, "Una narrazione 'parzialmente' autobiografica", 146.

complicated for women to be recognised as theologians in Rome. It seems that he had already played a role in Rosemary Goldie's nomination as a teacher in the Pontifical Lateran University in 1967. She had no academic title and had no scholastic formation in theology but had a good field experience in the theology of the laity she was invited to teach. It was first an experiment, at the Institute of Pastoral theology, and then it became a real discipline and Rosemary Goldie became a full professor in 1976. Once again, one can see the role of the increasing place recognised to the laity in the progressive 'de-clericalisation' of theology. In the Pontifical Gregorian University, the first woman teaching in the faculty of theology was Kari Børresen, as an invited professor, in 1977. Then, it was only in 1984 that a woman was nominated as a permanent professor.

Even if Paul VI himself made no link between these two interventions in favour of women in the academic field and the proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church, one can understand these two events as related. The second one did not directly influence the arrival of women in theology but can be seen as a gesture to encourage a better contribution of women. Pope Francis presented it in this way in his speech at the award ceremony of the Ratzinger Prize in 2018:

It is necessary that this contribution be encouraged, and that it finds a wider space, in keeping with the growing presence of women in the various fields of responsibility of the Church, in particular, though not only, in the cultural field. Since Paul VI proclaimed Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena Doctors of the Church, no doubt may be permitted regarding the fact that women can reach the highest peaks in the understanding of the faith. John Paul II and Benedict XVI also confirmed this by including the names of other women in the series of Doctors: St. Therese of Lisieux and St. Hildegard of Bingen.⁴²

5 Conclusion

Theology has been a clerical – and therefore masculine – discipline for centuries, since its institutionalization at university, of which women were excluded. They were more generally put apart from doctrinal teaching in the Church because of Saint Paul's harsh words (1 Cor. 14, 34) which were quickly understood in a strict way. Since teaching is a function linked to the pastors, it was feared women would ask for more if they were granted a certain form of public

⁴² Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis*.

teaching, according to the famous myth of the Pandora box. It was therefore taken for granted that women had to transmit the faith and not to define it.

In view of this traditional conception of magisterium linked to pastorship in the Catholic Church, the proclamation of the first women as doctors of the Church in 1970 may appear as a major change. Two main reasons may explain this rupture. On the one hand, women's arrival at university and the new needs for formation created by their increasing action in the public sphere progressively conducted to their access to doctrinal formation. On the other hand, the promotion of the apostolate of the laity in the twentieth century and a renewal of ecclesiology at the Second Vatican Council tended to reduce the distinction between the Teaching and the Taught Church.

Could the proclamation therefore be understood as a sign that the 'stained-glass ceiling' of theology has been crossed? There is nothing surer since the proclamation was not so much the occasion of recognizing a new role to women but to highlight a new way to conceive theology in the Catholic Church. Even more, for some Catholics, it was an occasion to reaffirm traditional feminine values such as maternity, docility, etc. The fact Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena were both considered as 'spirituals', more than as theologians, have been seen as a rebalancing of theology. Women's contribution to theology would be teaching 'by the heart', whereas men would be on the side of rationality.

If the proclamation of 1970 was perhaps considered by Pope Paul VI as an encouragement given to women in theology, they were no direct consequences of his gesture. Indeed, if women were now able to study theology at university, it remained difficult for them to become teachers, still today. The situation varies among countries: where theological faculties are integrated to the State's universities, it seems easier for laics to have access to theology, whereas things are more complicated when they're not. Indeed, in this last case, teaching positions are more accessible to the clergy or to religious who benefit of their community's support. Moreover, putting their competences at the service of the Church may be still difficult for women theologians. It is only in 2014 that some of them were appointed to the International Theological Commission and only in 2018 that some of them integrated the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as experts.⁴³ Even if Pope Paul VI gave a clear sign of gender equality in the theological field by proclaiming Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Siena doctors of the Church, one can see a 'stained-glass ceiling' remains for women who want to contribute to the doctrinal function in the Roman Catholic Church.

⁴³ Senèze, "Pour la première fois, le pape nomme des femmes".

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Charisma, Gender and ‘Glocality’: Catholic Charismatic Women in the 1970s

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Abstract This article addresses the role of women in Catholic charismatic renewal, with reference to the movement in both the United States and England. It examines the renewal in relation to a wider mid-century context in which the role of Catholic women was being re-evaluated. It looks closely at the role of women in Catholic prayer groups, showing how while a ‘rediscovery’ of the Spirit contributed, broadly, to a democratising tendency where the laity were concerned, the place of women was contested. It shows how the dominant approach to gender to emerge in the United States – a patriarchal model linked to high profile charismatic ‘covenant communities’ in the upper Midwest cities of South Bend and Ann Arbor – did not have the same influence in England, where a more egalitarian approach tended to develop. This study of gender in the Catholic charismatic renewal is therefore also a case study of the ‘glocality’ of the Catholic charismatic movement.

Keywords Charismatic Renewal. Gender. Catholicism. Glocality. Notre Dame. Covenant Communities.

Summary 1 An Englishwoman in South Bend: Ford and the CCRSC (Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services Committee). – 2 ‘Glocality’ and Gender in Catholic Charismatic Renewal: The English Experience. – 3 Conclusions.



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In 1970, the theologian Josephine Massyngberde Ford published *The Pentecostal Experience*, one of the first scholarly books to defend the experience of Baptism with the Spirit in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church.¹ “We must notice”, she asserted, “that the title of St. Luke’s second work is ‘Acts of Apostles’, not ‘*The Acts of the Apostles*’. Acts is meant to be a protocol for the normal life of the Church, just as the Gospels show Christ who is to be imitated by each of his followers”.² Ford had entered the ‘pentecostal’ experience of the Spirit at the end of the 1960s, following an extended period of dryness in her prayer life. Many others – both staff and students – at Notre Dame had the same experience around this time. Ford believed that a recovery of life in the Spirit was addressing a void left by “the decline in such public devotions as vespers, rosary recitations, and novenas”.³ It is likely that her interest in the Spirit had roots in her experiences before joining the Faculty of Notre Dame University in 1965. After finishing her doctoral studies in her native England, Ford had joined the staff at Makerere University College in Uganda, and a plausible reading of *The Pentecostal Experience* is that time spent in this region made her more open to supernatural realities. She said of the everyday existence of evil spirits it is “difficult not to believe what one has experienced”, describing how where the Holy Spirit was working “evil spirits or the devil often make direct attacks or are very active in certain insidious ways”.⁴ Ford became unequivocal in her endorsement of charismatic experience and practice for the contemporary Catholic Church.

By 1970, the small university city of South Bend, just four hours’ drive from Chicago, was a global hub for Catholic charismatic renewal. *The Pentecostal Experience* described the potential of charismatic prayer groups, arguing that their strength was the recognition of the Ephesians 4 claim that “some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”.⁵ Ford also saw potential pitfalls, like fundamentalism in the interpretation of Scripture or the human tendency to confuse the supernatural with the psychological. Another was the risk of slipping into parallel regimes of authority. “The charismatic movement”, she warned, “can give rise to much suffering”, and one problem was that certain in-

¹ Later, Ford appears to have preferred the spelling Massyngbaerde. The following three paragraphs draw on O. Garvey, “In Memoriam: Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford”, and on Schaal, “Waiting to Die”.

² Ford, *The Pentecostal Experience*, 9.

³ Cf. the report of Ford’s teaching in “Pentecostalism is Filling Spiritual Void”.

⁴ Ford, *The Pentecostal Experience*, 55.

⁵ Ephesians 4: 11-12 (New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition).

dividuals could become prominent and even “vie with the authority of the hierarchy”. The Ephesians 4 list of ministries, she asserted, made no reference to leaders. Rather, in the New Testament epistles, leadership was assumed to belong to “the bishops, the presbyters and, possibly, the deacons and deaconesses”. The answer, she argued, should be “to rotate leadership among both men *and* women in the prayer meetings”.⁶

Ford’s italicised ‘and’ was doing some heaving lifting. This article addresses the role of women in Catholic charismatic renewal, with reference to the movement in both the United States and Ford’s country of birth, England. In both places, from mid-century the role of women was being re-evaluated. These decades, for example, had seen greater involvement of lay women in the liturgical movement.⁷ In her transatlantic ministry, the English Catholic publisher Maisie Ward is one prominent example of a woman involved in the propagation of the lay apostolate.⁸ At Vatican II, while some in the hierarchy appeared to hold on to an ideal of female domesticity, others – such as Archbishop Hallinan of Atlanta – urged a more prominent place for women, including consideration of the possibility of their entrance to the diaconate.⁹ As the historian Mary J. Henold writes of the NCCW (National Council of Catholic Women), “they used the dual influences of the women’s movement and Vatican II to fling open the doors to a larger world of adult responsibility, committed female leadership, and engaged spirituality”.¹⁰ Change was in the air, and with this came tension. Margaret Mealey, of the NCCW, wrote in 1966: “By the action and pronouncements of Vatican II, women have been given their wings. But too many pastors and bishops are reluctant to let them fly”.¹¹ Neither were the laity convinced about women’s leadership: a 1979 poll in England showed that only 47% of Catholics supported the idea of women priests.¹² It was this flux concerning understandings of gender roles that charismatic prayer groups had to negotiate. While the ‘rediscovery’ of the Spirit contributed, broadly, to a democratising tendency where the laity were concerned, the place of women was to be contested.

The transatlantic setting and comparative approach of this article is adopted not primarily because of Ford’s American-English connections, but rather because of the transnational character of the

⁶ Ford, *The Pentecostal Experience*, 59.

⁷ Harmon, “The Liturgical Movement and Catholic Action”.

⁸ Harmon, *There were also Many Women There*, 134-50.

⁹ Chinnici, *American Catholicism Transformed*, 280-1.

¹⁰ Henold, ““This is Our Challenge! We Will Pursue It””, 199.

¹¹ Quoted in Henold, ““This is Our Challenge!””, 197.

¹² Clements, Bullivant, *Catholics in Contemporary Britain*, 86-7.

Catholic charismatic renewal. Its media and leaders moved in kinetic exchange between these contexts, with the United States the primary exporter. We shall see that the dominant approach to gender to emerge in the United States – a patriarchal model linked to high profile charismatic ‘covenant communities’ in the upper Midwest cities of South Bend and Ann Arbor – did not have the same influence in England, where a more egalitarian approach tended to develop. Alongside this, analysis of the English material draws upon the newsletters and magazines, hitherto unused by historians, of the National Service Committee for Catholic charismatic renewal in that country.¹³ What follows offers insights into the range of understandings of gender, ministry, and leadership amongst Catholic charismatics. In doing so, it also provides a case study on the ‘glocality’ of the Catholic charismatic movement; and how, as David Lyon says of contemporary religion (with reference to the theoreticians such as John Urry), “both local distinctiveness and global generality are simultaneously apparent, in interconnected ways”.¹⁴

1 **An Englishwoman in South Bend: Ford and the CCRSC (Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services Committee)**

In the years before she published *The Pentecostal Experience*, Ford had become one of only two women in the Faculty; and three years later, the first woman – a New Testament and Rabbinic scholar – at Notre Dame to receive tenure (she later also became the first woman to file a case of sex discrimination against the university, asserting that less qualified men were achieving promotion). She was also the first laywoman to be appointed to the Catholic Biblical Association of America.¹⁵ Ford had experience of breaking glass ceilings. In order to understand the tensions over gender amongst United States’ Catholic charismatics, the experience of Ford offers a telling case study.

The Pentecostal Experience very deliberately adopted throughout an inclusive terminology, and although gender is not a primary theme, it does operate close to the surface. A section of the book examined charismatic experience in the history of the Church, listing the likes of Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas as examples of individuals who had undergone “the full flowering of their apostolate in Christ” and “what Catholics call ‘a second

13 Private archive of National Service Committee (hereafter: NSC papers), in possession of the Author.

14 Lyon, “Wheels Within Wheels”.

15 “Woman Scripture Expert Talks Here”.

conversion' or 'a release of the spirit'".¹⁶ However, in Ford's *ressourcement*, the leading example – a person "in whom the ministries of the Spirit... were fully realized" – was Catherine of Siena.¹⁷ Ford offered an assessment of Catherine's ministry in relation to the gifts of the Spirit listed by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. In this analysis, she recognised in Catherine the gift of wisdom and knowledge, describing how "professional theologians came to interview her, hoping to catch her upon some theological point, especially misinterpretation of scripture, but they always went away more impressed with her wisdom and understanding". She afforded Catherine also with the gifts of faith, healing (for example, the healing of her confessor from the plague), prophecy, and discernment of spirits. It was not clear, Ford admitted, whether Catherine received the gift of tongues; but she reminds readers that Catherine reportedly "learned to understand the Latin office quite suddenly".¹⁸ Catherine was an inspirational figure to Ford for a further reason: now recognised as a doctor of the Church, her *Dialogue on Divine Providence* had been influential to prelates, and she was even given the opportunity to present her learning to the pope and cardinals, which Ford pointedly reminded readers was "a privilege denied to women at Vatican II".¹⁹ For Ford, the Spirit's work in Catherine of Siena had empowered her to influence the entire Church.

Ford's views on the appropriate status of women in charismatic renewal were encompassed in a wider interpretation of the role of the laity. Her pentecostal *apologia* addressed their function in the charismatic prayer group. She responded to the objection: "Instead of sharing religious experience, should it not be kept secret or even not 'indulged in' at all?". In answer, she referred to the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, a line of argument used more widely for equality for lay women in the post-Vatican II environment. Ford reasoned that prayer groups offered a context for the one body ministry described by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13 ("For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit"). For Ford, then, a central point was that the Catholic pentecostal prayer group should be democratising: "it means that everyone, *regardless* of sex, age, nationality, or even religious difference, should be allowed to follow the inspira-

¹⁶ Ford, *The Pentecostal Experience*, 10-11.

¹⁷ Ford, *The Pentecostal Experience*, 10.

¹⁸ Ford, *The Pentecostal Experience*, 12-13.

¹⁹ Ford, *The Pentecostal Experience*, 13.

tion of the Holy Spirit”.²⁰ Ideally, such a gathering would be a place where everyone played a role in the building up of Christ’s people. Crucially, for Ford, prayer groups did not require the setting up of new leadership structures. The leadership of the Catholic laity was to be found in the Church hierarchy; but in the prayer group “we are all each, each one with each other”.²¹

The prayer group model described by Ford was to be a context for the kind of lay involvement which many Catholic women, moderate and radical, were seeking after Vatican II. However, Ford’s approach was not dominant in the emerging Catholic charismatic renewal, either in the immediate vicinity in South Bend, or nationally. As Valentina Ciciliot has described in considerable detail, the male-led, complementarian communities People of Praise (1971) and True House (1971) in South Bend, along with that of The Word of God in Ann Arbor, Michigan, were vital to the emerging Catholic charismatic renewal nationally.²² The communities in South Bend and Ann Arbor provided most of the leadership and personnel for CRS (Charismatic Renewal Services) – a non-profit company which produced teaching materials and a pastoral newsletter for prayer groups, which became the widely read *New Covenant* magazine. Additionally, South Bend had responsibility for the major annual conference on Catholic charismatic renewal in the Notre Dame Football stadium; while the community in Ann Arbor produced the widely read course *Life in the Spirit* – which by 1975 had sold 70,000 copies.²³ CRS controlled the levers of a major media operation, and was assertive in this role, stating in 1974 its aim “to move forward aggressively in sales and service to the charismatic renewal and to the church as a whole”.²⁴ Oversight of the CRS came from a CCRSC – later known as the NSC (National Service Committee). Upon its incorporation in 1971, this group of seven was entirely male and included two coordinators from The Word of God, Steve Clark and Ralph Martin, a coordinator of True House, Jim Byrne, and a coordinator of People of Praise, Kevin Ranaghan. South Bend and Ann Arbor were, as I describe it elsewhere, a ‘cockpit’ of Catholic charismatic renewal both in North America – and, as we shall see, increasingly globally.²⁵

After True House community closed in 1973, The Word of God and People of Praise were left as the primary nodes of Catholic re-

²⁰ Ford, *The Pentecostal Experience*, 37.

²¹ Ford, *The Pentecostal Experience*, 60.

²² Ciciliot, “The Origins of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in the United States”.

²³ Jahr, “An Ecumenical Christian Community”.

²⁴ *Steering Committee of the Charismatic Renewal Services Board of Directors Meeting*, 18 June 1974, in *Sword of the Spirit Online Archive*, CCRSC Minutes.

²⁵ Cf. Maiden, *Age of the Spirit*, 113.

newal. Both were ‘covenant’ communities – by 1972, 500 individuals had made a covenant commitment to each other at The Word of God. The communities were Catholic led but ecumenical.²⁶ The expected level of commitment was high, and with this a particular emphasis was placed on submission to authority. The lay leadership structures of the community and family life were male, although ‘handmaidens’ were appointed to provide pastoral care for women. An influence on gender roles in these communities came from Protestant leaders in the charismatic renewal. These were men such as the Californian Lutheran Larry Christenson, author of the complementarian *The Christian Family* (1970);²⁷ but especially the non-denominational charismatics who were behind the magazine *New Wine*, such as Bible teaching luminary Derek Prince, who was convinced that “American men have abdicated from their three main responsibilities – as husbands, fathers and spiritual leaders. God is looking or for a man”.²⁸

As the membership of the CCRSC expanded, it remained entirely male – even if a minority did not hold to the South Bend and Ann Arbor view on gender and leadership. A larger Advisory Group for the CCRSC represented a wider range of opinion on the role of women, but in 1974 only two of its twenty-seven members were female.²⁹ The teachings offered in *New Covenant* magazine were almost exclusively male.³⁰ The 1973 list of contributing editors for the magazine included various male Protestants, but not a single Catholic woman.³¹ During this decade the magazine often included teaching on headship in the family.³² While explicit teaching on the role of women in prayer groups in *New Covenant* was rare, there was a general assumption that leadership should be male. For example, in teaching on headship and subordination in relationships by Bert Ghezzi, a member of the CCRSC based in Grand Rapids, it was said: “All are equals. For example, a husband is his wife’s equal and she is his equal before the Lord. But in their relationship, the husband has a position of headship and she a position of submission. It is a principle of order, a way of relating that helps our groups function

²⁶ “National News”.

²⁷ Christenson, *The Christian Family*.

²⁸ Prince, “Praying for the Government”, 11.

²⁹ “The Service Committee: An Updated Report”.

³⁰ Fichter, *The Catholic Cult*, 109. There were some exceptions. One important one was the influence of Dorothy Ranaghan, who co-edited with her husband *As the Spirit Leads Us*.

³¹ Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service Committee Minutes, 21-22 August 1973, in Sword of the Spirit Online Archive, CCRSC Minutes.

³² Pulkingham, “Headship in Christian Marriage”.

in unity and in peace”.³³ In a 1975 ‘question and answer’ piece on authority in charismatic communities, Steve Clark, of Ann Arbor, said of transparency and collegial headship: “Where there is a body of mature men exercising that kind of responsibility there is much less danger that any of them will fall into serious sin or perpetrate abuses”.³⁴ In addition, coordinators of the South Bend and Ann Arbor communities had a prominent role in setting up, with the cooperation in particular of non-denominational Protestant charismatic leaders, systems of lay authority for prayer groups and communities. Ralph Martin, Steve Clark, Kevin Ranaghan, and others took on leadership of the Men’s Shepherding Conferences – ‘shepherding’ being a kind of pyramid system of discipleship for charismatic communities and prayer groups. Thousands attended these male-only conferences in the mid-1970s.³⁵

It is not surprising that Josephine Ford found herself increasingly in conflict with the leadership in South Bend and with the CCRSC more broadly.³⁶ At the annual conferences at Notre Dame in 1969 and 1970 she had public disagreements with the CCRSC. In 1970 according to one report she tried to “seize a microphone” and then “refused to take a seat after she was subdued”.³⁷ Ford critiqued the local and national leadership in speaking engagements and articles; she was quoted, for example, in the *New York Times* of accusing leaders of “not recognizing the Spirit in Negroes or women”. At a conference at the Washington National Cathedral in 1974 she described the charismatic communities in South Bend and Ann Arbor as a “strong, rigid, male, white and nonrotating hierarchy”.³⁸ In 1971, the CCRSC refused to register her for the Notre Dame conference, but she attended anyway.³⁹ In March the following year, Kevin Ranaghan reported to the CCRSC Ford “continues a campaign of adverse letter writing. She continues to come to prayer meetings even after repeated personal requests not to come and also not to speak”.⁴⁰ Since the

33 Ghezzi, “Love and Order”, 15.

34 “Authority in Christian Communities”, 27.

35 On ‘shepherding’ cf. also Ciciliot, “Pray Aggressively for a Higher Goal”.

36 Developments are described in Ciciliot, “The Origins of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal”, 161-2.

37 “Pentecostalism Should not be Confused with Drug Experiences”.

38 Fiske, “Pentecostals Gain Among Catholics”; “Charismatic Movement May Become Too Rigid”. Writings by Ford criticising the direction of Catholic charismatic renewal in the United States could also be found in: “Neo-Pentecostalism within the Roman Catholic Communion”; “Mysticism and Roman Catholic Neo-Pentecostalism”; “Fly United-But Not in Too Close Formation”; “American Catholic Neo-Pentecostalism”.

39 “Pentecostalism Should not be Confused with Drug Experiences”.

40 *Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service Committee Minutes*, 16 March 1972, in *Sword of the Spirit Online Archive*, CCRSC Meeting Minutes.

previous summer there had been tensions with the university over the issue. Its President, Fr. Theodore Hesburgh, approached a member of the CCRSC about the treatment of Ford and warned that any continuation would have consequences for access to campus.⁴¹ A Notre Dame law professor had suggested that the CCRSC was violating Canon Law.⁴² Apparently, the chaplain of the university wanted to “exclude Pentecostals from campus”.⁴³ In 1972, Ford was allowed to register for the Notre Dame conference, but claimed her books were banned from the official stalls.⁴⁴ She spoke, tongue in cheek, of a CCRSC “Pentecostal Index”.⁴⁵ The absence of her books appeared to confirm the power of the CCRSC.

In a letter to the *National Catholic Reporter* after the 1972 conference, Ford described experiencing a policy whereby “The Eucharistic kiss of peace and the sacrament of penance are refused to the ‘excluded’ even though they are Catholics in good standing”. As well as experiencing the pain of exclusion, she felt the need to defend herself from assumptions she might be a radical feminist. She reminded readers of her involvement as an advisor to the US Bishops’ committee of the permanent diaconate and on Archbishop Leo C. Byrne’s of Minneapolis and St. Paul’s committee on the status of women. This she said “would seem to suggest that I am not an extreme member of women’s lib”, adding “the fact that the Notre Dame students nicknamed me ‘Minnie Mouse’ and ‘Mary Poppins’ also indicates that, in their opinion, I am not overaggressive”.⁴⁶ As a leading theologian and active pentecostal at a university now at the epicentre of the emerging Catholic charismatic scene, Ford was uniquely qualified for a role in its leadership. Yet, she claimed to experience rejection at the hands of a male leadership.

In *Which Way for Catholic Pentecostals?* (1976), Ford’s assessment of the state of Catholic charismatic renewal in the Church was crystallised as a typology. ‘Type 1’ was essentially the ‘male lay hierarchy’ – or ‘oligarchy’ – which was the dominant grouping of the CCRSC.⁴⁷ Her criticism of their Scriptural position on gender was blunt:

⁴¹ *Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service Committee Minutes*, 16 August 1971, in Sword of the Spirit Online Archive, CCRSC Meeting Minutes.

⁴² *Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service Committee Minutes*, 16 March 1972, in Sword of the Spirit Online Archive, CCRSC Meeting Minutes.

⁴³ *Catholic Charismatic Renewal Service Committee Minutes*, 16 August 1971, in Sword of the Spirit Online Archive, CCRSC Meeting Minutes.

⁴⁴ “Busting from Bud to Bloom”.

⁴⁵ Ford, “Charismatic Anathema”.

⁴⁶ Ford, “Charismatic Anathema”.

⁴⁷ Ford, *Which Way for Catholic Pentecostals?*, VIII.

There is something frightening in the way women of Type 1 groups have become subordinate to the men. If the national leaders insist on a literal interpretation of Genesis and all the Pauline texts on women (they do not refer to Jesus' teaching), then, to be consistent, they must also work for the restoration of slavery, which is accepted without question by St Paul, and the must also embrace civil obedience, which is taught in Romans 13 but is not espoused by Jesus.⁴⁸

The culture of subordination emanating from the covenant communities at South Bend and Ann Arbor through the media outputs and leadership structures of the CCRSC, she argued, had "been a great impairment to women in the Pentecostal movement and has led to the withdrawal or exclusion of many".⁴⁹

Ford also identified a 'Type 2', which had less influence on the levers of the national structure. The 'Type 2' milieu included the Benedictine monastery at Pecos, New Mexico, where monks worked "hand in hand with religious women"; the prayer groups in St. Louis, Missouri, which was led by two sisters when the primary leader Francis MacNutt was on his frequent healing ministry travels; and university prayer groups such as Boston College and Fordham.⁵⁰ In contrast to the focus on lay leadership at South Bend and Ann Arbor, Ford identified these 'Type 2' charismatics as "clerically and sacramentally orientated". Where gender was concerned, she observed that "Women are accepted as equals and not kept separate, and they minister similarly to men except for sacerdotal powers".⁵¹ Some women in these 'Type 2' circles, she observed, had ambitions to become deacons or perhaps, at a future point, priests.⁵² This approach to charismatic ministry, she argued, "encourages the talents of women and a devotion to Mary, both of which are essential to the mystic life because they bring with them a receptivity, a humanizing element, and sensitivity to the needs of others".⁵³ The model of ministry she identified amongst 'Type 2' charismatics was in line with the democratised life of the mystical Body of Christ which she outlined in *The Pentecostal Experience*.

Ford's typology was in some ways a blunt instrument. Her assessment was complicated, but ultimately rather supported by in broad terms, by another contemporary analysis, upon which she had

⁴⁸ Ford, *Which Way*, 131.

⁴⁹ Ford, *Which Way*, 12.

⁵⁰ Ford, *Which Way*, 71-80.

⁵¹ Ford, *Which Way*, 67.

⁵² Ford, *Which Way*, 67.

⁵³ Ford, *Which Way*, 70.

drawn. In *The Catholic Cult of the Paraclete* (1975), the Jesuit, Loyola University-based sociologist Joseph H. Fichter also examined the role of gender in the movement. His analysis was nuanced; sensitive to the spectrum of Catholic charismatics, who he divided into four groups: Heterodox (essentially the extreme of Ford's 'Type 1'), Pro-Heterodox, Pro-Orthodox and Orthodox (the most advanced of Ford's 'Type 1'). Fichter found that women, who he confirmed, unsurprisingly, made up the most participants in Catholic charismatic renewal, were able to "express themselves more often than men in witness, in prophecy, in spontaneous quotation from Scripture and in other paraliturgical ways".⁵⁴ In this sense, of course, the renewal was operating within a gendered model, widely evident in historic Catholicism, whereby women were deemed to be more given to mystical experiences in the body of Christ. However, he also found that women played a 'principal' role in 45% of the 155 prayer groups he researched.⁵⁵ Given the influence of the CCRSC, it is surprising that this percentage was so high.

Fichter, however, saw there was a tension in women's involvement. He found that "most charismatic women want men to assume the leadership and that it is only by default that they are willing to do so themselves".⁵⁶ Neither was the prominent role of women in some prayer groups necessarily an indication of a challenge from within charismatic circles to traditional notions of female domesticity, either at home or male leadership in the Church. Only 3 in 10 of Catholic charismatic women supported the Women's Liberation Movement and one-third female ordination. Traditional views of gender were strongest amongst those most influenced by Protestant evangelicals and pentecostals, the Catholic charismatics he labelled 'heterodox' (rather than 'fundamentalist') – which would have been those who identified particularly with the approach of People of Praise and The Word of God. Only 21% of 'heterodox' respondents thought the Church should support 'Women's liberation' and 32% were in favour of the ordination of women. This compared to 39% and 40% respectively for those in Fichter's 'Orthodox' Catholic charismatic category.⁵⁷ Fichter's analysis did not indicate to what extent traditionalist views about gender were determined by existing opinion or by charismatic teaching. However, his overall view was as follows: "although females far outnumber males in the charismatic renewal, they are being taught by the theoreticians of the movement to be submissive to male authority. Even the women themselves seem to accept this

⁵⁴ Fichter, *The Catholic Cult*, 109.

⁵⁵ Fichter, *The Catholic Cult*, 108.

⁵⁶ Fichter, *The Catholic Cult*, 108.

⁵⁷ Fichter, *The Catholic Cult*, 53-4.

subordination as the will of God”.⁵⁸ Fichter’s survey adds nuance to Ford’s picture but tends to support the overall thrust of her analysis about the wider influence of South Bend and Ann Arbor on gender.

2 ‘Glocality’ And Gender in Catholic Charismatic Renewal: The English Experience

The Catholic charismatic renewal globally has often been understood as something which originated in the upper Midwest of the United States, and specifically with the ‘Duquesne weekend’ in February 1967, when students and faculty discussed the book of Acts and experienced an outpouring of the Spirit. Indeed, renewal leaders in England tended to concur with a providentialist narrative of Duquesne as the ‘Jerusalem’ moment for the Catholic renewal. A 1978 *Good-news* article, for example, narrated the renewal from small American beginnings to global international conferences: “1967, a handful at Duquesne, Pittsburgh; 1975, the Rome Conference; and now, 1978, the astonishing experience of over 20,000 people at the International Conference in Dublin”.⁵⁹ Linear narratives have their attractions; however, as we shall see, in reality the beginnings of Catholic charismatic renewal in England were organic, involving transatlantic exchange but also indigenous emergences. Recognition of this is important when approaching an understanding Catholic charismatic renewal in ‘glocal’ terms.

The American CCRSC impacted on the emergence of renewal in England, as various examples attest. One of the earliest English charismatic prayer groups was established in London in 1970, and its founder, Gill Davies, had been influenced by reading a copy of South Bend leaders Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan’s *Catholic Pentecostals* (1969).⁶⁰ In 1977, looking back on the rise of renewal in England, Fr. Ian Petit OSB recalled that it had spread “by word of mouth and by books”, listing various titles associated with South Bend and Ann Arbor.⁶¹ Another prayer group, led by Mimi and Tim Turner, in Wimbledon, became a portal for American Catholic charismatic media, and by 1973 was established as a distribution centre for *New Covenant*.⁶² ‘Life in the Spirit’ discipleship seminars, based upon the manual of

⁵⁸ Fichter, *The Catholic Cult*, 105.

⁵⁹ “You Shall be My Witnesses”.

⁶⁰ Davies, “One of the Organisers of the First London Days of Renewal Shares Her Memories”, 22-3. Ranaghan, Ranaghan, *Catholic Pentecostals*.

⁶¹ Petit, “Where are We?”.

⁶² *Day of Renewal Newsletter*, December-January 1973. Jahr, “Regional Distribution Centres”.

the same name developed by Ann Arbor's The Word of God community, were in use in various locations by 1974.⁶³ By that year, English delegates were attending the annual international conference at Notre Dame, and visiting communities such as People of Praise and The Word of God.⁶⁴

It is not surprising, then, that the dominant American model of organisation associated with the CCRSC appeared in England. As in the upper Midwest and elsewhere in the United States, much activity centred around regional 'Days of Renewal'. Gill Davies, the lay organiser of the first of these, in London, originally had in mind "something akin to a Day of Recollection" but opted for a Day of Renewal "'as the Americans do' until we could think of something better".⁶⁵ As in the case of the CCRSC, an English body emerged to coordinate communication and pastoral support: the NSC.⁶⁶ In 1974, a first NSC-run conference, featuring both British and American speakers, was held at Hopwood Hall, just outside of Manchester.⁶⁷ A newsletter, *Day of Renewal* was published, replaced by the magazine *Goodnews* in 1975. Growth was steady, but modest. By 1976 the NSC were aware of 150 prayer groups in the United Kingdom, the vast majority of these in England.⁶⁸ By the mid-1970s, Catholic charismatic renewal in England was a coordinated movement, which borrowed from an American blueprint of organisation.

However, indigenous influences had been active in the English renewal from the beginning.⁶⁹ There are various examples. A layman, Esmond Gwatkin was Spirit baptised through the ministry of pentecostals at a congregation in Portsmouth, and soon established a prayer group in the nearby village of West Meon.⁷⁰ A Catholic schoolteacher and early advocate of renewal, Gabrielle Twomey, was baptised in the Spirit through the ministry of a pentecostal church in Hockley, Birmingham, before she set up a small group in Edgbaston.⁷¹ Fr. Peter Hocken, who became a prominent leader and historian of charismatic renewal, was amongst those to pass through

⁶³ *Day of Renewal Newsletter*, March-April 1974.

⁶⁴ Cf. for example, Petit, "American Visit-June 1974".

⁶⁵ Davies, "One of the Organisers of the first London Days of Renewal Shares her Memories".

⁶⁶ *Day of Renewal Newsletter*, November-December 1973; *National Service Committee minutes*, December 1973, in NSC papers.

⁶⁷ *Day of Renewal Newsletter*, March-April 1974.

⁶⁸ "Putting You in the Picture", 2.

⁶⁹ On the transnational dynamics of Catholic Charismatic renewal, cf. also Maiden, "The Emergence of Catholic Charismatic Renewal 'in a Country'".

⁷⁰ Balkam, "Charism and Institution, 1968-1978".

⁷¹ Bob Poole, "England".

Hockley around this time.⁷² Another example was that of Fr. Simon Tugwell, who with a handful of other Dominicans in 1970 was influenced by pentecostals through a prayer fellowship just outside of Oxford.⁷³ Tugwell became an influential charismatic teacher, with an approach quite different from the dominant model in American. According to Hocken, Tugwell became “fascinated by his encounter with flesh-and-blood Pentecostal faith, and was uninterested in the new movement arriving from the United States, which he saw as pre-packaged and highly organized”.⁷⁴ Tugwell’s *Did you Receive the Spirit* (1972) barely referred CCRSC literature, but did mention Ford – and specifically her warning against the tendency to set up a ‘catechumenate’ for baptism in the Spirit.⁷⁵ Despite the interest of English charismatics in CCRSC-sponsored media – and a liking for transatlantic visitors who seemed to offer expertise and ‘anointing’ – a distinctive identity developed. In July 1973, a writer in *Day of Renewal* asserted that vitality in renewal required achieving a balance between the universal and the local: either an international, “monolithic” movement or fragmented “close groups, settled in their local ways” would “stifle the Holy Spirit”. The author argued:

Perhaps our English tendency is towards the insular. Insularity works in two ways. It leads us to disparage what we have to give, and to be cagey about receiving. In prayer groups up and down the country the Spirit has been at work for some years now in and through our own tradition and temperament. No, we won’t say ‘genius’! But we need to have enough confidence in ourselves to believe that we have something worthwhile to offer to the world’s stock of spiritual wisdom. Equally, with our small numbers and as yet underdeveloped leadership, we can ill afford to neglect what is happening in other countries.⁷⁶

In its emergence and development, it is misleading to see the movement in England as simply an export of the dominant American model.

Furthermore, where there was transatlantic interaction, it was not only with the practitioners of the ‘heterodox’ (to appropriate Fichter’s term) model. Fr. Ian Petit, an important figure in the development of charismatic ministry in the north of England, had first experienced the charismatic renewal on a visit to the Benedictines of Pecos, New

72 Hocken, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”, 299-300.

73 Balkam, “Charism and Institution, 1968-1978”; Poole, “England”; Hocken, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”.

74 Hocken, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”.

75 Tugwell, *Did You Receive the Spirit*, 110; cf. also the reference to Ford at page 91.

76 “International Leader’s Conference”.

Mexico.⁷⁷ As we shall see, this link with Pecos was to be utilised by the English in the 1970s. Ecumenical pathways were also influential. Of particular significance was the friendship to develop between a lay Washington D.C. Catholic, Bob Balkam, and English noblewoman Lady Bronwen Astor. Balkam had in the mid-1960s set up the Gustave Weigel Society (an ecumenical organisation named after the priest who had attempted to forge Christian unity in the Holy Spirit). In 1969 Astor, and another ecumenist, Mary Tanner, persuaded Balkam to move with his wife and six children to England.⁷⁸ By 1971 he, Astor, Tanner, and others had inaugurated a charismatic community next to Astor's Tuesley Manor home, near Goldaming. Balkam became the preeminent figure in English Catholic renewal, but he tended to operate outside of the dominant CCRSC networks in the United States.

What were the characteristics of the English movement? The emphasis of teaching in *Days of Renewal* and *Goodnews* tended to be mutual ministry in the Spirit. As Fr. Joe Laishley, of Heythrop College, wrote in 1974:

Vatican II summarised much reflection when it described the people of God as a prophetic, priestly and royal people. This means that all Christians share knowledge of the mind of God to be communicated to others. The people are beginning to take seriously the idea that they have as Christians their own charisms - gifts of the Lord for the building up of the Body of Christ, gifts which are often rooted in natural and acquired abilities, as teachers, as healers, gifted nurses, doctors and counsellors of all sorts who help to heal people's psychic hurts, and so on and even as good organizers.⁷⁹

English renewal tended to focus on inner healing, personality, and interpersonal relationships, and it display a willingness to explore in some depth the psychological dimensions of these. In these areas of ministry, American teachers who did not fit the dominant CCRSC model, such as Fr. Francis MacNutt and Fr. David Garaets of the Pecos monastery, were influential.⁸⁰ In England, in contrast to the kind of renewal evident in South Bend and Ann Arbor, there was far less emphasis on submission and authority.

The distinctiveness of the English movement was evident in attitudes towards gender. Whereas the leadership of the CCRSC in the United States was entirely male, the NSC, upon its establishment in

⁷⁷ Poole, "England".

⁷⁸ Balkam, "The Spirit Blows Where It Pleases".

⁷⁹ Laishley, "Baptism of the Holy Spirit".

⁸⁰ "Report on the Fruit of the Spirit Conference"; "Coming Events" (1976).

England in 1974, was made up three men (Petit, Balkam and Alan Guile, a lecturer in electrical engineering at Leeds University) and three women: Sr. Bernade of the Holy Cross Convent at Chalfont St. Peter, and two laity, Jillyan Bray, from the Midlands, and Lisa Reynolds, a London based schoolteacher. In 1973, when the English sent a contingent to an international conference for Catholic charismatic leaders at Grottaferrata just outside of Rome, Gill Davies, Sister Bernade, and Sister May Manning attended alongside three male leaders.⁸¹ There was in practice a commitment to a balanced gender representation in the national leadership.

There were, nevertheless, a range of views on the role of women. Petit appears to have taken a fairly conservative line. In a *Goodnews* in 1976, he spoke about the challenge of finding teachers for prayer groups. “The normal Church teachers are bishops and priests”, he said, “but these on the whole have stood aside”. He was clear that this was “thus leaving the burden of sound teaching to fall on the shoulders of lay men, who through no fault of their own are often untrained in scripture and theology”.⁸² Petit’s editorship of *Goodnews* in the mid-1970s may have limited the voice of women in the magazine. Fr. Derek Lance, who later took on the editor’s role, seems to have been more open on the question. In a piece “Christian Leaders: Appointed or Anointed?”, he argued that all Christian leaders were, as in the case of King David of Israel, “found by God”; and seems very deliberately to have used gender inclusive language throughout, referring to leaders as ‘he/she’.⁸³ Some CCRSC-sponsored literature on complementarianism circulated in NSC circles, for example Ralph Martin’s book *Husbands and Wives, Brothers and Sisters* (1978) (in which it was argued that “the authority of the husband is directly linked to the unchanging reality of Christ’s authority in the Church and the Father’s authority in the life of the Trinity”) received some recommendation.⁸⁴ When it was reviewed in *Goodnews* the year after its publication, the teaching on headship was not highlighted as problematic, and it was merely said that “The difficult question of submission between husbands and wives (Ephesians 5: 24) is tackled and this should remove many misunderstandings”.⁸⁵ However, otherwise, complementarianism in leadership received very little attention in England, and in practice women had a far higher profile in leadership and teaching.

81 “Coming Events” (1973).

82 Petit, “A Chance - Alas, It can be Missed”.

83 Lance, “Christian Leaders: Appointed or Anointed?”.

84 *Conference of Diocesan Service Committees*, 2-4 February 1979, in NSC papers. Martin, *Husbands and Wives, Brothers and Sisters*.

85 Horner, Review of *Husbands, Wives, Parents, Children*.

At the first NSC national conference in 1974, a woman, Carol Bandini, a psychotherapist from Fordham University, was the main speaker. In the NSC *Newsletter* Jillyan Bray praised the “The combination of someone ‘spirit-filled’, and an authority in her field of psychotherapy”; drawing attention to her style, suggesting she “immediately captivated the entire conference with her quiet healing presence” and that weeks after one could “hear still her soft American voice”.⁸⁶ The invitation to Bandini seems to have been in no way controversial, as there was plenty of precedents of women teaching at Days of Renewal. Women religious took the platform at these events; with Sr. Bernade of the NSC and Sr. Mary MacAleese, a Parish Mission Sister in inner-city Liverpool, amongst the speakers, as well as various sisters from the USA.⁸⁷ The lay woman Lisa Reynolds also had a teaching role, speaking at events in London and sometimes, as we shall see, in joint sessions with clergy such as Fr. Mike Gwinnell.⁸⁸ In 1977, the Dublin-based lay missionary Frances Hogan led well attended conferences on reading and studying Scripture.⁸⁹ It is difficult to imagine a woman being offered this kind of responsibility at a CCRSC-sponsored event. Furthermore, married couples leading prayer groups, such as Tim and Mimi Turner, Alan and Betty Guile, from Leeds, David and Rosemary Billaux, from Ruislip, and John and Rosemary Theobald, from Hexham, often spoke at NSC events.⁹⁰ While priests did the majority of teaching on regional and national platforms, lay and religious women were very active.

Clearly for some women, the experience of the Spirit opened up new horizons in terms of an awareness of their own potential. A *Good-news* article by laywoman Joan Williams is telling. She described an impression she had received through the Spirit that she should pray for the gift of preaching and exercise this ministry in prayer groups. She recalled saying to God: “You must be joking Lord, a middle-aged, Catholic, nearly elderly lady of a nervous disposition and not a bit intellectual, to pray for preaching?” But as she prayed, she came to a realisation that she might now step into her own in this gifting, following in the footsteps of her father, who had been an Anglican priest.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Bray, “Report on ‘The Fruit of the Spirit’ Conference”.

⁸⁷ “Advert”; “And the Greatest of These is Love”; “Future Days of Renewal”, 5.

⁸⁸ *Newsletter of the National Service Committee for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, November-December 1973; “Future Days of Renewal”, 1; Condon, “Worth Abbey Conference”.

⁸⁹ Guile, “Week-end Meetings on Scripture”.

⁹⁰ *Newsletter of the National Service Committee for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, November-December 1973. *Booking Form = NSC Hopwood Hall Conference* (August 1975), in NSC papers.

⁹¹ Williams, “Are You Joking, Lord?”, 9.

In 1974, Sr. Bernade was apparently asked to speak to a group of priests about life in the Spirit, but declined, confiding to another member of the NSC: "I feel I am not really ready for that just yet - in spite of all I have said about gifts! You see the size of my FAITH... not even the size of a mustard seed when it comes to this".⁹² That she did not rule it out was indication of a confidence in her gifting.

The dominant form of Catholic charismatic renewal in the United States tended to seek to keep men and women a 'healthy' distance from each other. This was presumably in part to maintain a separation of spheres, but there was also anxiety that familiarity might result in sexual sin. A wariness of the potential for misunderstanding, or even for lines to be deliberately crossed, in the intimate setting of charismatic prayer meetings was sometimes evident amongst the English leadership. As one NSC document put it, "Christ was betrayed by a kiss, not once, but very often by Christian men and girls who just have not been taught. What passes for 'brotherly affection' among some charismatics stirs many girls' emotions so that they have trouble for days - and the men too. This is NOT of the Holy Spirit".⁹³ However, one could also find teaching on the mutuality of the sexes, including the notion that interaction between men and women was a sign of maturity. In 1972, a conference saw Fr. Mike Gwinnell and lay-woman Lisa Reynolds speak on "relationships and chastity". A newsletter report described about how in a prayer group situation "there will be relationships, some very close, between men and women and it was the purpose of Lisa and Fr. Mike to discuss how these relationships grow and how far they can go". Reynolds apparently argued: "We all need each other; we cannot live a one-sex existence. In this respect we have the marvellous example of Christ who easily related with people of both sexes and all ages".⁹⁴ A relaxed approach to relationships was a factor enabling women to take on a fuller role in the leadership of prayer groups.

There was a contrast between the dominant American model in attitudes towards Mary. In the United States, Ford argued that her 'Type 2' Catholics were more likely to emphasise a Marian dimension in charismatic spirituality.⁹⁵ Those in 'Type 1' circles tended not to make this connection. The *Life in the Spirit* manual contained no reference to Mary in the 1970s.⁹⁶ *New Covenant* did not print a proper teaching article on Mary in 1975.⁹⁷ Robert Hogan concludes in his

⁹² Letter from Sr. Bernade to Alan Guile, 9 April 1974, in NSC papers.

⁹³ *A Charismatic Teaching Crisis*, in NSC papers.

⁹⁴ *Day of Renewal Newsletter*, November 1972, 2.

⁹⁵ Hogan, "Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal", 348.

⁹⁶ Hogan, "Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal", 253.

⁹⁷ Hogan, "Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal", 335.

close study of Mary and charismatic renewal in the United States, “it cannot be said that Marian devotion was a widespread phenomenon by 1978”.⁹⁸ Convergences with Marian devotionism was more obviously evident in England. Lisa Reynolds spoke on “The Spirit and Mary” at a Day of Renewal in 1974. She urged those present: “Let us look at Mary. She who, more than any other human being, was so filled with the Holy Spirit that for all of us in the Charismatic Renewal she should be an inspiration. We who seek more and more to be filled with the Spirit should see in her a model of living in the Spirit”. Reynolds’ teaching pointed towards Mary’s femininity and motherhood:

She was ‘blessed among all women’... how often we forget her womanhood... and yet, if we look through the Gospels and note Jesus’ relationships with the women He met, His gentleness, His understanding, we can almost see the young Man growing up, with such a woman filled with warmth as mother. Her wisdom, love, strength, understanding her joy and peace creating an atmosphere of balance for a child to grow into a man.⁹⁹

At the first NSC conference in 1974, many of the Legion of Mary were present, so much so that there was a special meeting for them where the Magnificat was used “as their own personal canticle of praise”.¹⁰⁰ The interest in Mary increased during the decade, with a *Goodnews* editorial in 1978 commenting, “Mary seems to be making her presence felt again. For some she has always been a charismatic figure; for others their relationships with her has undergone a change”.¹⁰¹ In this acceptance of Mary, the English Catholics were again closer to the expression of renewal evident in Pecos and in the teaching of Francis MacNutt.¹⁰²

3 Conclusions

Catholic charismatic renewal emerged after a mid-century in which the role of women in the Church had been undergoing renegotiation. The renewal - and its central expression of the prayer group - was a context in which women might potentially have found new roles in ministry and leadership. In some instances, they did. However, as we have seen in the case of Ford, there were considerable frus-

⁹⁸ Hogan, “Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal”, 372.

⁹⁹ Reynolds, “The Spirit and Mary”.

¹⁰⁰ “The Legion of Mary”.

¹⁰¹ Lance, “Editorial”.

¹⁰² Hogan, “Mary and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal”, 251, 342.

trations also. Tensions over gender became more transparently evident in 1978, when following the submission of recommendations by a diverse sub-group of Catholic charismatic leaders, the American CCRSC (now known as the NSC) produced a statement on male and female roles in the American movement. This maintained some sense of formal 'neutrality' on the issue, attempting instead to emphasise a common purpose, but recognised that a diversity of views existed. It found too that gender roles were more ordered around male headship in covenant communities.¹⁰³ This article has explored the diversity of views and practices concerning gender in both the United States and England. The different positions articulated in the 1978 statement were evident to some extent in both countries; however, compared to the United States, in England a more egalitarian approach emerged. This demonstrates the 'glocal' dynamics of Catholic charismatic renewal. America had a significant influence on renewal in England: of 49 books recommended in a *Day of Renewal* of 1974, 31 were from the United State.¹⁰⁴ Importantly, American influence was not only from Fichter's 'Heterodox' end of the spectrum, associated with South Bend and Ann Arbor; transatlantic flows of more 'progressive' charismatic expressions - where assumptions about gender were concerned - such as those linked with the Pecos community, also helped to shape renewal in England. Local factors also contributed. English Catholic charismatics did not establish strong connections with independent evangelicals and pentecostals; and were less exposed to issues around 'shepherding' and 'discipleship' and the complementarian assumptions which tended to underpin them. Clearly, too, there a greater emphasis on Mary was promoted amongst the leadership of the English renewal. In England, the approach to gender would have been closer to the kind which Ford, the Englishwoman in South Bend, could have approved.

103 See discussion in Bobzien, *Headship: The Role of Women in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, 48.

104 *Newsletter of the National Service Committee for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*, November 1974, 16.

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Breaking through the Stained-Glass Ceiling During John Paul II's Pontificate? Women, Feminism and World Youth Days

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Abstract John Paul II's World Youth Days (hereafter WYDs) were mega-events that happened eight times between 1987 and 2002. They took place in Europe, Asia, North America and South America. Observing the role women played in these global gatherings of young Catholics provides essential insights into gender issues within Catholicism during John Paul II's pontificate. First, this paper shows that, within the organization chart of the WYDs, women faced a "stained glass ceiling", but a few did manage to obtain a position of responsibility. Secondly, the paper studies how Catholic feminist culture found a place in WYDs, even though theologically conservative prelates, who did not back the idea of an inclusive Church, often organized them. This second part is focused on the Denver WYD (1993), marked by several feminist performances, which led to strong disputes between liberal and conservative Catholics. The way in which women became involved in this debate and the reaction of the Catholic hierarchy is studied in the third part.

Keywords Catholic Church. Feminism. Agency. Tokenism. Gender issues. John Paul II.

Summary 1. Introduction. – 2 Women in the organization, a 'stained-glass ceiling'? – 2.1 Limited access to responsibilities – 2.2 Trajectories of access to responsibilities. – 2.3 Ways of exercising responsibilities. – 3 The place of women in the Catholic celebration. – 4 Women in controversy. – 5 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

For Giovanni Miccoli, “the variety of orientations, positions and impulses, often contradictory, at least in appearance”¹ characterizes the pontificate of John Paul II (1978-2005). This diversity favors the co-existence of divergent interpretations of his legacy, which are based on different words or decisions. The question of his action regarding the place of women in the Catholic Church is one of the issues under discussion.

For many feminist theologians, as Anne Soupa or Denise Couture, the pontificate of the Polish pope corresponds to a moment when the Catholic institution, structurally patriarchal, sought to curb with all its might the movement of women's emancipation. While reusing certain concepts of feminism, and while proclaiming the dignity of women, John Paul II shaped an androcentric theology, affirming, from an oriented reading of the biblical account of the creation of man and woman, that woman's vocation consisted in helping man.² This subordination was doctrinally translated in the letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* which irrevocably locked the door that would have allowed equal access to the priesthood, by declaring “that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful”.³ Regarding the internal organization of the Catholic Church, this has led to the implementation of “a division of roles between men and women that assigns to women functions of service to men”.⁴ In the international and political arena, the Holy See used women to promote an anti-feminist vision, aimed at keeping women in the home and preventing any change in gender norms.⁵ The subsequent discovery of abuse of women, especially nuns, by clerics promoted and valorized by John Paul II, has given credibility to this reading.⁶ The increasingly documented cases of violence and oppression, not only sexual⁷ but also psychological or even economic (one can think of the

1 Miccoli, *Le Pontificat de Jean-Paul II*, 7, (translated from French). On the complex and, in some cases, contradictory aspects of John Paul II's work, cf. also Menozzi, *Giovanni Paolo II*.

2 Soupa, “Le recul de la cause des femmes”.

3 John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, § 4.

4 Couture, “L'antiféminisme”, 24. Cf. also Pedotti, Favier, *Jean-Paul II*, 197-201.

5 Couture, “L'antiféminisme”, 26-7. The Holy See's own efforts to counter feminist movements, perceived as denying the difference between men and women, have resulted in putting women forward in delegations to represent its views at major UN conferences, including the 1995 Beijing conference on women. Cf. Lecomte, *Jean-Paul II*, 503.

6 Cf. the foreword of the 2004 edition of Schneiders, *Beyond Patching*, originally published in 1991.

7 Quintin, Raimbault, *Religieuses abusées*.

nuns placed at the service of cardinals and bishops in the Vatican, almost treated as indentured servants and very poorly paid)⁸ appear to be the symptoms of a Church that chose to continue to subordinate women to men, particularly within the clergy, even though Western societies were evolving towards greater equality.⁹

On the contrary, other analysts consider that feminists misunderstood John Paul II and point out the advances that took place during his pontificate. Historian Richard Camp formulates the hypothesis that the Polish pope tried to adjust “the papal ideology on women to modern demands for female social and political emancipation without abandoning the traditional claim that women have a unique, irreplaceable role in family, Church and society”.¹⁰ Georg Weigel, a Catholic neoconservative American intellectual, underlines the originality of Karol Wojtyła's thoughts on women's issues. By making the figure of Mary (mother of Jesus) pre-eminent over that of Peter (first apostle), he made the power and authority of priests subordinate to the holiness of Christ's disciples, whatever their function. According to him, the Pope was a differentialist feminist who believed that the true liberation of women did not come through the appropriation of male characteristics, which was another way of prolonging the domination of men, but through the deployment of their own originality.¹¹ In his biography published in 2004, journalist Bernard Lecomte mentions the apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988), which denounced the male domination of women, especially in sexuality. He also mentions the *Letter to Women*, published by John Paul II in 1995, designated as Women's Year by the United Nations. Wojtyła advocated the full integration of women “into social, political and social life”, recognized the value of feminist struggles of the past, and began to repent for the Church's contribution to the marginalization of women in society.¹² Lecomte also recalls that the years 1980-1990 were marked, in the Vatican, by the access of women to a level of responsibility that was minor, but unprecedented: in 2003, the Italian Letizia Pani Ermini was appointed president of the Pontifical Academy of Archaeology.¹³

The aim of this article is to shed light on this debate on the evolution of the place of women during John Paul II's pontificate, by making a double shift in relation to the works cited. The analysis is centered not on the discourses and decisions taken at the top of the Catholic

8 Malzac, “Le journal du Vatican dénonce l'exploitation des religieuses dans l'Église”.

9 Roy, “Abus sexuels dans l'Église catholique”.

10 Camp, “From Passive Subordination”, 524.

11 Weigel, *Witness to Hope*.

12 Lecomte, *Jean-Paul II*, 501-2.

13 Lecomte, *Jean-Paul II*, 505.

institution, but on the concrete functioning of the latter. The focus is not on the pope and his entourage but on women and their experience. In this, my approach is in line with the trends that have become classic in religious historiography over the last forty years. Under the crossed influence of the quotidian turn¹⁴ and gender studies,¹⁵ ‘feminine Catholicism’¹⁶ has been studied more and more from the point of view of women’s trajectories (and less and less from the point of view of the institutional framework).¹⁷ This approach has made it possible to highlight situations in which women were subordinated to men, but also situations in which women found in the Catholic universe a space where they could build and strengthen their agency.¹⁸

In this article, I will analyze John Paul II’s pontificate from this perspective, which has so far been applied mainly to the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. To do so, I will focus my analysis on the World Youth Days (WYD). Launched by John Paul II in 1985, these international world events provide essential insights into gender issues within Catholicism, both in its organizational structure (by studying women’s functions in the preparatory committees), in its rites and ceremonies (by analyzing the place women occupy in the celebrations) and in its internal debates (by observing women’s participation in the controversies generated by the gatherings). Having been held in different countries and on different dates (Argentina in 1987, Spain in 1989, Poland in 1991, the United States in 1993, the Philippines in 1995, France in 1997, Italy in 2000, Canada in 2002), the WYDs make it possible to identify, analyze and compare the different ways in which women have been able, if not to break through the “stained glass ceiling”,¹⁹ at least to reach a position of influence and responsibility. How did they get to these places, and how did they establish their authority? How did the institution react to their empowerment?

My research is mainly based on interviews with people involved in the organization of WYDs, on press articles and on ecclesiastical archives from the 1993 Denver WYD and the 1995 Manila WYD, stored in Rome, Manila, Washington DC, and Denver.²⁰

14 Tweed, “Catholic Studies After the Quotidian Turn”, 361-85.

15 Cova, Dumons, *Femmes, genre et catholicisme*; Brejon de Lavergnée, Della Sudda, *Genre et christianisme*.

16 Langlois, *Le catholicisme au féminin*.

17 Despite the recent revival of this approach. Cf. in particular Ciciliot, *Donne sugli altari*.

18 Cf. in particular the works of Della Sudda, “Militanti e professioniste cattoliche”, 742-63; Brejon de Lavergnée, *Le temps des cornettes*; Sprows Cummings, “Frances Cabrini”, 1-22; Duriez et al., *Femmes catholiques*; Massam, *A Bridge Between Spanish Benedictine Missionary Women in Australia*.

19 Gasquet, “La barrière et le plafond de vitrail”, 218-36.

20 Some of these data have already been used in my book: Mercier, *L’Église, les jeunes et la mondialisation*.

First, I will show that women faced a 'stained glass ceiling' within the WYDs' organization chart but a few did manage to obtain responsibility. Following the itinerary of three of them will help to identify the reasons why some women were able to gain access to power within John Paul II's Church. It will also shed light on how they conceived their responsibility. Secondly, the paper will study how Catholic feminist culture found a place in WYDs, even though theologically conservative prelates, who did not back the idea of an inclusive church, often organized them. This second part will be focused on the Denver gathering (1993), marked by several feminist performances which led to strong disputes between liberal and conservative Catholics. The way in which women became involved in this debate, and the reactions of the Catholic hierarchy will be studied in the third part.

2 Women in the Organization, a 'Stained-Glass Ceiling'?

2.1 Limited Access to Responsibilities

A study of the WYDs organization charts during John Paul II's pontificate reveals that women were underrepresented in positions of responsibility. This was partly a 'barrier' effect, specific to Catholicism: since a bishop, a function incompatible with the female gender, must supervise the preparations, women were systematically excluded from chairing organizing committees on an 'explicit' criterion. But the phenomenon must be understood in a broader context. In the 1990s, gender disparity in access to power, including the persistence of subtle mechanisms of disqualification, marked all sectors of social, economic and political life.²¹

Regarding the second level of the hierarchy, of the eight coordinators or general secretaries of World Youth Days under John Paul II, the Filipina Henrietta de Villa was the only woman. At the third level of the organizational chart, that of the heads of departments, women were also very underrepresented compared to men. At the Denver WYD, of the six department heads, Sister Mary Ann Walsh, director of communications, was the only female.²² At the Manila WYD, the ratio was the same, about one woman for every six men.²³ For the Paris WYD, the ratio dropped to 1 in 12.²⁴ The French edition was not

²¹ Laufer, "Le plafond de verre", 298-308.

²² *Corporate structure and organizational chart*, in UNDA, WYD 1993 collection.

²³ *Papal Visit '95 Manila*, 91, in APCL, WYD 1995 collection

²⁴ *Organigramme JMJ 1997* (1996), in Archives JMJ, 257.32.

part of the feminization of French Catholicism's middle management that had been observed by Céline Béraud.²⁵

Classically, lower positions were less masculinized. For instance, two women supported the Denver WYD's program manager: Terri Crovato, hired as executive assistant,²⁶ and Maureen Gross, hired as secretary.²⁷

If we look not at the national committees but at the Pontifical Council for the Laity (PCL), the department of the Roman Curia responsible for organizing WYDs, the same observation can be made. The supervision of the preparations was carried out by the president of the PCL, a cardinal or a bishop, and then by the person in charge of the youth section, a function occupied by priests throughout the period. The women employees, which included Giovanna Guerrieri, Carmen Apparicio, and Jo Grafil, were at the bottom of the organizational chart even though they carried out a large part of the work.

2.2 Trajectories of Access to Responsibilities

The career paths of the few women who have reached a position of responsibility in the WYDs organization charts are varied.

The story of Henrietta de Villa is particularly interesting and shows the complex role of the religious factor in women's careers.²⁸ Born in the second half of the 1930s into a family of the Filipino upper middle class, de Villa was educated in a Manila school run by "very strict" Belgian nuns, who made her aware of social justice issues while giving her a taste for excellence: "They couldn't stand mediocrity". Very active by temperament, de Villa became the executive secretary of Catholic Action at the school. Admitted to the university, she abandoned her studies before graduating because of her marriage. Her husband, who wanted her to be present at home, nevertheless allowed her to continue her involvement in the Mother Butler Guild, an association of "Catholic laywomen whose main concern would be to make and take care of priestly vestments and altar linens, as well as ensure the cleanliness and beautification of their respective parish churches".²⁹ The association, which overlapped perfectly with the domestic roles traditionally assigned to women, seemed fully reassuring for de Villa's husband, but was to prove to be an unexpected place for access to responsibilities. Beyond its official pur-

²⁵ Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs*.

²⁶ Crovato, *Letter*, 2018.

²⁷ Gross, *Interview*, 2018.

²⁸ De Villa, *Interview*, 2019.

²⁹ De Villa, "A Brief History of the Mother Butler Guild".

pose, the group played a fundamental role in the parishes, by organizing the collection of material resources which allowed them to function. As fundraisers, the members of the Mother Butler Guild occupied a central position within their community, in a process that seems similar to what Gilkes observed in African-American churches.³⁰ De Villa was quickly noticed for her initiative and ideas. In the 1970s, Cardinal Sin, archbishop of Manila, asked her, even though she was the youngest, to become the leader of the movement and to extend its outreach to all the parishes in Manila and then throughout the Philippines.³¹ She successfully fulfilled this mission. Realizing that he was trying “to hold back the talents God gave [her]” her husband changed his attitude towards her. He accepted her new responsibilities just as he agreed that his wife should become the coordinator of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1991, a landmark event in the contemporary history of Filipino Catholicism, which notably strengthened the participation of the laity in the life of the Church.³² De Villa saw this as the result of her prayers. Her appointment by Cardinal Sin as coordinator of the 1995 papal visit continued this upward trajectory. De Villa's success was based both on personal resources (linked to her education, her wealth, and perhaps the relational network that her parents and husband had built up)³³ and on a form of spiritual sublimation of her fate, which allowed her to consent to patriarchal expectations without giving up her desire to make use of her gifts.

Sister Mary Ann Walsh's story is different. Born into a modest family of Irish immigrants, she did not have the same relational and financial capital as Henrietta de Villa, but a talent for writing she developed during her schooling at the Sisters of Mercy in Albany, New York, a religious congregation in which she took her vows.³⁴ She attended the College of St. Rose in Albany (where she earned a master's degree in English) and Loyola College of Maryland (where she earned a master's degree in pastoral counseling) before beginning a career as a journalist for the Albany diocesan periodical. She then became a correspondent for a Catholic news agency in Rome and then in Washington, D.C.,³⁵ where she was hired as the communications director for WYD 1993 by the U.S. bishops' conference. In Walsh's case, the rise to a position of responsibility seems to be based on both personal talent and the strength of the network of

30 Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women ...*.

31 De Villa, “A Brief History of the Mother Butler Guild”.

32 On this event, cf. Moreno, *Church, State, and Civil Society*, 70-3.

33 Gasquet, “La barrière et le plafond de vitrail”, 12.

34 Walsh, *Facing Terminal Illness with Mercy*.

35 Guibson. “Sister Mary Ann Walsh”; “A Journalist's Life”.

American nuns. Perhaps there was also a symbolic reason: in a context where gender issues were becoming central in American society, recruiting a woman as director of communications could give the appearance of sexual equality within the WYD corporation and deflect accusations of discrimination against the Catholic Church. If this assumption was true, the hiring of this nun to fill the most media-friendly position on the WYD organization chart would be part of what Anglo-Saxons call 'tokenism,' the cosmetic practice of inclusion for branding purposes.³⁶

The trajectory of Jo Grafil, who assumed the position of secretary general of WYD Manila at the age of 35, is different again. With a degree in applied economics and close ties to the Salesians of Don Bosco, this young woman from the Filipino middle class should have gone to volunteer in Papua New Guinea. However, as she was involved in the national team of Catholic youth ministry and had helped to organize several gatherings, Cardinal Sin asked her to postpone her project, which she agreed to do, but not without some resistance. Devoting all her time to the WYD without being paid, her family supported her during the two years of preparations. She was not bitter about it, even though the Philippine Church in general, and the Archdiocese of Manila in particular, was rich. She was not the only one in this situation: "Since we were all volunteers, it created a special spirit".³⁷ The fact that positions of responsibility were based entirely or partially on volunteerism may explain why women occupied these posts since their spouse or family could support them. Except for the priests, who have no family responsibilities and whose dioceses provide for their subsistence, women would be more likely than men to accept these missions, given the traditional distribution of roles. However, this hypothesis must be considered with caution, as there were also laymen among the volunteer leaders of the organization.

2.3 Ways of exercising responsibilities

In the stories that these women tell of how they carried out their work, we can see different kinds of presentations of the Self and of the Church. When I asked her if it had not been difficult to work in this male-dominated world, Jo Grafil said that she had no difficulty because she had previous experiences of collaboration with the priests of the Salesian movement to which she belonged. She then paused and told me:

³⁶ Nesbitt, "Gender, Tokenism", 193-210.

³⁷ Grafil, *Interview*, 2019.

Actually, I work very well with men, better than with women, because I find that men have a higher level, I apologize... When they say yes, it's yes, no it's no. With women, it's always... I'm a very strict person. I am not a 'yes person'. When I say yes it's yes, no it's no [...]. I was respected, I was trusted. It was a very positive experience. [...] I had a voice, I was listened to. Some people said that I was actually the boss. I had a very good experience of the Church where I felt I had a place.³⁸

The feeling of being recognized for her competence by the Catholic hierarchy seemed to create an adhesion to qualities seen as masculine (ability to decide, rigor). Even if Jo Grafil does not adhere to universalist feminism, whose theses she may not be familiar with, she nevertheless came close to this way of thinking in that she relativized the effects of biological difference on behavior: as a woman, she could work the way men do and be recognized by them.

Mary Ann Walsh's discourse on her experience as a woman working for WYD is more in line with differentialist feminism, which is widespread in religious circles,³⁹ especially Christian ones, which see it as respectful of biblical anthropology. This feminism postulates that biological differences create specifically feminine qualities, complementary to male qualities, which ought to be more recognized and used so that social organization becomes less patriarchal and, therefore, more harmonious. In an article published in 2015, shortly before her death, Walsh highlighted how her feminine approach had helped to 'humanize' the organization of WYD:

A 19-year-old with a fatal disease wanted to meet the Pope. That became a priority, and I gave her a special place at Mass and made it happen. A male organizer objected, saying she should be with children to meet the Pope later. I argued that a 19-year-old belonged with adults. I saw a nuance that my male colleague did not.

While emphasizing that her "maternal side took over," she also acknowledged that she adopted a "so called male mindset to make the event work". She followed the advice of a friend of hers, Tim Russel, a well-known media man whom she had consulted before taking up her position:

Tim knew most of the people I would deal with were men and offered a common male approach. 'You own the pope, so you're in

³⁸ Grafil, *Interview*, 2019.

³⁹ Gasquet, "La barrière et le plafond de vitrail", 11.

charge!' It was an adult version of sandlot sports: whoever owns the ball decides what position he will play. ⁴⁰

In fact, the records show that Walsh did not hesitate to confront others head-on when the interests of the WYD were at stake. For example, through the media, she battled with a sheriff who threatened to ban the pope's Mass if the organizers did not cover all security expenses. She used this experience as an argument to promote greater access of women to leadership in Catholic organizations: "Women's gifts, which include intuition and relational skills, are not taken advantage of in decision making".⁴¹

Henrietta de Villa is in a similar vein when she describes how she carried out her role as coordinator of the 1995 papal visit. When I asked her if it was not too complicated, as a woman, to give orders to the priests who were hierarchically under her in the organizational chart, and if she did not experience misogyny, she replied:

Never. It's a grace of God. Because... you know, I guess it's also my nature: whenever I ask something of priests, I don't command. I don't want to make them feel that they have to obey me. Rather, I say to them: 'Father, could you help me, I don't know how to do it' [...]. It's a question of approach, of kindness. ⁴²

This self-presentation is consistent with de Villa's account of how she managed to persuade the Jesuit in charge of organizing the pope's trip to change the location of one of the WYD events (to satisfy the archbishop of Manila), or to convince the owner of Philippines Airlines to waive the fee for John Paul II's flight from Manila to Rome. This way of exercising responsibility, through a form of humility, kindness, or even 'gentle manipulation', could be referred back to the stereotypes about the power of women, who would formally accept male domination while developing their capacity to influence. De Villa pointed out that she was trained in this mode of relating to priests in the Mother Butler Guild. But she also connected this behavior to the male model of Christ, as described by St. Paul:

though he was in the form of God, [Christ Jesus] did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave. ⁴³

⁴⁰ Walsh, "Take These Gifts".

⁴¹ Walsh, "Take These Gifts".

⁴² De Villa, *Interview*, 2019.

⁴³ De Villa, *Interview*, 2019.

She mentioned passages from the New Testament to justify that one should “never think oneself better than others” and consider oneself “as the last, as a servant”. If one follows her, it is the application of the subversive approach to power that is characteristic of Christianity (“the last shall be first”) that is the cornerstone of her leadership. Her success in solving sensitive cases involving the Roman Curia and Filipino organizers led to her appointment in 1995 as Philippine ambassador to the Holy See.⁴⁴

3 The Place of Women in the Catholic Celebration

If we now look at the celebrations during John Paul II's WYDs, what place was given to women, the majority of pilgrims being women? The survey carried out by the PCL in 1989 during the Compostela WYD showed a proportion of 58% girls against 42% boys,⁴⁵ figures that were quite similar to those of a survey carried out by the weekly magazine *La Vie* on the young French participants in the WYD in Madrid (56% girls against 44% boys).⁴⁶

The WYDs have been a mix of large ceremonies around the pope and meetings in small, linguistically homogeneous groups, especially for catechesis. In the first editions of WYDs, catechesis was given mainly by men but also by some women, such as Chiara Lubich, president of the Focolare, a new community she founded in 1943, or Mother Teresa of Calcutta, founder and superior of the Missionary Sisters of Charity. However, since 1991, the year when WYD was held in Czechochowa, Poland, only bishops have been selected.⁴⁷

As for the great ceremonies, while the celebrants have been all male because of the Catholic rules of ordination, there has been a certain effort towards parity as regards the young people who took the podium. For the 1985 Palm Sunday gathering in Rome, the WYD prototype, the organizers wanted the Saturday vigil with the pope to be presented by a boy and a girl.⁴⁸ For the Paris WYD baptism ceremony, during the Saturday evening vigil, priority seems to have been given to ethnic and cultural diversity rather than gender equality, but parity was almost respected: the group of catechumens included four young women (Tahitian, Cuban, Kenyan, American) against six young men (French, Cambodian, Russian, Burkinabe, Taiwanese

⁴⁴ De Villa, *Interview*, 2019.

⁴⁵ Conseil Pontifical pour les Laïcs, *Que cherchez-vous jeunes pèlerins?*, 181.

⁴⁶ Barbier-Bouvet, “Qui sont les jeunes participants aux JMJ”.

⁴⁷ Duda, *VI Światowy Dzień Młodzieży*. 230.

⁴⁸ *Incontro con il S. Padre* (1985), in APCL, *Gathering 1985 collection*, 1.

and Bolivian).⁴⁹ While the altar servers were boys, the readings that the laity could provide during the Masses were generally equally distributed between the two sexes.⁵⁰ On the other hand, for the Denver WYD, there was not a single woman on the podium during the final Mass, the liturgy of which was prepared by the Italians.⁵¹ The American edition of the WYDs was, however, a pleasant surprise for Catholic feminists, insofar as the flaws in the organization made it possible to make some of their struggles visible on several occasions.

The first 'performance' highlighting women was not intentionally feminist according to its protagonists. It occurred on Friday, 13 August 1993, when 70,000 pilgrims gathered at Mile High Stadium to watch a mimed Way of the Cross. The theater company, commissioned by the organizers to present a mime of the Passion in the medieval tradition, chose to entrust the role of Jesus to a young woman, Christiana Brown, who was twenty-three years old. The director of the troupe, Franciscan Father Dan Anderson, explained that, of the four actors involved in the performance, it was she who most resembled the popular depictions of Christ, particularly because of her long black hair. According to Christiana Brown and Dan Anderson, the choice was devoid of any ideological bias. The WYD organizers, not consulted beforehand, did not have the opportunity to validate this option since, overwhelmed by last-minute tasks, neither Bishop Boccardo of the PCL, nor Paul Henderson (program manager), nor Father Schnurr (general coordinator), attended the dress rehearsal.⁵² Most of the young people, away from the stage and following the mime through the big screens, did not pay attention to the gender of Jesus. However, those near the podium and even more so, those watching the broadcast of the mime on the Catholic television station EWTN (Eternal Word Television Network), could see that Christiana Brown was female, even though the director sought to masculinize her by compressing her breasts and dressing her as a man.⁵³

The second event was intentionally militant. It took place during the Saturday night vigil. One of the mistresses of ceremony, Mev Puleo, a young Catholic theologian inspired by Liberation theology, was "frustrated by the evidence of patriarchy she saw" even if "the

49 "Hier, Paris encerclé", 3.

50 Issues related to the presence of girls and women around the altar are sensitive especially in French Catholicism. Cf. Béraud, "La cause des femmes dans le catholicisme français", 316.

51 Puleo, "Emcee for Pope Raises Justice Issues", 1.

52 Henderson, *Interview*, 2018; Crovato, *Letter*, 2018.

53 Niebuhr, "Use of Actress"; Keeler, *Letter to Cacciavillan*, 1993, in UNDA, MCN 51/05; *The Catholic World Report*, 20.

Pope struck her as such a kind and sweet man".⁵⁴ She decided to read, in the presence of the pope, an inclusive version of the Magnificat prayer attributed to Mary in the Gospel of Luke. She turned third person masculine pronouns used to refer to God into second person neutral pronouns: "He has filled the starving with good things" became "You have filled the starving with good things".⁵⁵ Mev Puleo, who had asked the prior permission of one of the organizers whom she knew "would say yes",⁵⁶ was part of a tradition of feminist affirmation during the U.S. visits of John Paul II. During his first stay as pope on American soil, in the fall of 1979, a nun asked him to allow the ordination of women during a ceremony in the National Shrine, the great basilica of Washington DC, which constitutes the symbolic heart of American Catholicism. In response to his refusal, several nuns refused to bow to him in protest.⁵⁷

The pronoun change she made seems innocuous, but it had strong symbolic resonance as the issue of inclusive language in liturgical translations pitted conservatives against liberals within American Catholicism. A few months earlier, Archbishop Stafford, the host archbishop of the Denver WYD, who belonged to the first camp, had denounced the inclusive liturgical translations approved in 1992 by the bishops' conference of his country in a letter to Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He saw in them the realization of the "feminist agenda", itself inspired by "secular modernity" which attacked "the sacramental efficacy of Catholic worship" in order to realize its project of "dissociation of sexuality from nuptiality".⁵⁸

The third initiative to include more women in the Catholic liturgy also took place during the Saturday evening vigil. It was connected to the "Pilgrim's Litany", published in different languages in the participants' booklet, and recited in the presence of John Paul II. Initially, the PCL was to provide all the prayers. However, when the American organizers realized that their Roman partner would not be able to carry out its mission in time, they wrote the missing texts in a hurry. The youth department of the Archdiocese of Denver took care of the litany.⁵⁹ With several students, Bill Jaster, who coordinated youth ministry in the diocese, wrote an inclusive prayer⁶⁰ in which both the motherhood and fatherhood of God were emphasized. Among the long

⁵⁴ Puleo, "Emcee for Pope Raises Justice Issues", 1.

⁵⁵ Keeler, *Letter to Cacciavillan*, 1993, in UNDA, MCN 51/05.

⁵⁶ Puleo, "Emcee for Pope Raises Justice Issues", 1.

⁵⁷ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 352-4.

⁵⁸ Stafford, *Letter to Ratzinger*, 1993, in AAD, WYD collection, 7.

⁵⁹ Keeler, *Letter to Cacciavillan*, 1993, in UNDA, MCN 51/05.

⁶⁰ Jaster, *Interview*, 2018.

series of invocations were “Womb of all” and “Mother of my heart”.⁶¹ Dennis Murray, who followed this dossier from a distance, considers that the approach was particularly legitimate:

Young men and women from all over the world were coming to Denver to experience the official Church caring for them and hearing their voice. Why would we not have prayers that would allow all of them, regardless of gender, to have the experience of being able to find themselves in that prayer?⁶²

In the heat of the preparations, Paul Henderson reread the texts that were to be sent to the printer, but Bishop Boccardo probably did not, for lack of time, and he gave his *imprimatur* without being aware of the content.⁶³

4 Women in Controversy

Ironically, of these three performances, it was the one that was presumably not intentionally activist that generated the most passionate reaction, not so much from pilgrims as from EWTN viewers. Liberal feminist Catholics could not believe their eyes. Ruth Fitzpatrick, the national coordinator of the Women's Ordination Conference, formed in 1975 to promote the ordination of women to the priesthood, declared:

I was watching it on TV and said to myself, ‘No, that’s not a woman’. Then the woman beside me said, ‘Hey, that’s a woman’. It’s amazing how conditioned you get by patriarchy. I never thought I’d see it! I was delighted!⁶⁴

When she heard the news, Maureen Fiedler, coordinator of Catholics Speak Out, another liberal Catholic organization, thought it was an external protest and not a performance that was part of the official program. When she realized what had happened, she felt galvanized, seeing it as an (unintended) recognition of her struggle:

The whole reason the Vatican claims women can’t be priests is that we do not image [*sic*] Christ. [...] But obviously, if they’re imaging Christ as a woman, someone in there thinks that we can

⁶¹ *Voices*, 3.

⁶² Murray, *Letter*, 2018.

⁶³ Henderson, *Interview*, 2018.

⁶⁴ *Voices*, 3.

image Jesus. [...] By their own hand they have demolished one of their major arguments.⁶⁵

On the other side of the spectrum of Catholic sensibilities, the show was also interpreted as a manifesto in favor of women priests. Mother Angelica, the powerful Mother Abbess of Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Alabama, founder and patron of EWTN, which broadcasted the Stations of the Cross, was offended. She felt that she had been duped and that she had unwittingly involved her subscribers in a feminist 'happening'. The day after the performance, speaking on air as she regularly did, she strongly criticized the mime that she called an "abomination to the Eternal Father".⁶⁶ Her team began to investigate to find out who was responsible for the "scandal". The following week, this nun, who believed she had some answers, intensified her admonitions, speaking of an "affront to the Holy Father".⁶⁷ She openly accused liberal Catholics of having instrumentalized the WYD for their own cause, in the same way that, in her opinion, they had been distorting the documents of the Second Vatican Council since the mid-1960s: "you have hidden your agenda in a mime, my agenda is not hidden",⁶⁸ she scolded. The bishops' conference, which had tried in vain to thwart Mother Angelica in her enterprise of building a Catholic audiovisual empire by unsuccessfully launching its own channel, was also targeted. Mother Angelica believed that liberal Catholics who had infiltrated the Church bureaucracy had engineered the affair.⁶⁹

Mother Angelica's comments, which had a powerful influence on EWTN viewers, were causing an influx of "hate mail" to the bishops' conference headquarters.⁷⁰ Bishop Stafford, who was spared by the abbess who saw him as an ally, also received many letters from outraged Catholics. Some correspondents amplified the affair, claiming that not only Jesus but also St. Peter had been played by women while the man in the troupe had played the Virgin.⁷¹

In a coordinated manner, twelve conservative Catholic personalities close to Mother Angelica went on the offensive on 8 September 1993, by writing an open letter addressed to the pope, Cardinal Ratzinger (prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), Cardinal Pironio (president of the PCL), Mons. Cacciavillan

⁶⁵ *Voices*, 3.

⁶⁶ *The Catholic World Report*, 20.

⁶⁷ *The Catholic World Report*, 20.

⁶⁸ *The Catholic World Report*, 20.

⁶⁹ Niebuhr, "Use of Actress in Jesus Role Stirs Dispute".

⁷⁰ Crovato, *Letter*, 2018.

⁷¹ Kelly, *Letter to Laghi*, 1993, in AAD, WYD collection, 7.

(apostolic nuncio) and Archbishop Keeler (president of the US Bishops' Conference).⁷² The letter was published in *Voices*, the magazine of the conservative Catholic organization Women for Faith and Family, whose president, Helen Hitchcock, appears to be the main instigator of the initiative. After giving their support to the president of EWTN, the signatories explained why the case of the mimed performance was so important to them. On the one hand, the show conveyed "the impression that the masculine gender of Jesus is a matter of indifference", and on the other, as part of the official WYD program, it misled many pilgrims "in a context of highly publicized dissent from the Church's constant teaching on ordination to the priesthood". Like Mother Angelica, they saw the performance as:

the latest indication of the continual suborning [...] of the Catholic faithful by those whose explicit agenda is radical 'reform' of the Church in a way directly contradictory to the Catholic faith.

The American Catholic hierarchy has been called to account. It responded along several lines of defense. The first one was to play down the affair. When questioned by journalists, WYD spokespersons, relying on a statement by the director of the Holy See's pressroom, recalled that the mimes did not claim to be historically accurate. Mary Ann Walsh disputed the fact that John Paul II had been offended and even claimed that he would have liked the performance: "you know he used to be an actor. He understands these things".⁷³ Writing to the apostolic nuncio a few days after the open letter,⁷⁴ Archbishop Keeler emphasized that the portrayal of Jesus by a woman had been motivated by pragmatic, not ideological, considerations, and that the theater company had expressed regret for the controversy its performance had caused. On the question of the litany, he partly defended the choices made, noting that "references to God as being 'the womb of all creation' are to be found in the writings of some of the Church Fathers".

The second line of defense consisted in discrediting the initiators of the cabal, who Bishop Keeler called "highly organized", by pointing out that the terms they used to describe the mime ("blasphemous, heretical and disrespectful") were "hateful" and "vociferous". The president of the American episcopate reproached the signatories of the open letter for being locked in a "paranoia" that prevented them from recognizing the pastoral success of WYD, and for interpreting a few meaningless problems in the light of their obsessions.

⁷² *Voices*, 3.

⁷³ *Voices*, 3; *The Catholic World Report*, 20.

⁷⁴ Keeler, *Letter to Cacciavillan*, 1993, in UNDA, MCN, 51/05.

The third line was to deny responsibility. Bishop Keeler reminded the nuncio that the inclusive litany was written by the services of the Archdiocese of Denver, and that Mev Puleo had been selected by the PCL. The vicar general of the Archdiocese of Denver responded to Catholics concerned that the pope was offended that it was the PCL which had approved the mime.⁷⁵ When Bishop Cordes, vice-president of the PCL, learned of it, he let Bishop Stafford know that he was angered that his collaborator had suggested that the Roman curia had endorsed the performance.⁷⁶ The archbishop of Denver responded his vicar general had merely repeated the talking points of the US Bishops' Conference.⁷⁷

Despite the displeasure of Bishop Cordes, the Vatican did not follow up on the crusade of Mother Angelica and her supporters, who, after learning about the contents of the letter sent by Archbishop Keeler to the apostolic nuncio, tried to go on the offensive again.⁷⁸ While the American organizers remembered the worried reaction of some members of the PCL just after the performance,⁷⁹ several members of the Roman Curia tried to put an end to the controversy.⁸⁰ Cardinal Pironio,⁸¹ president of the PCL, said that the pope and his entourage were delighted with the WYD, perhaps because the department he headed was partly responsible for the organizational flaws. In addition to their concern to spare one of the Holy See's services, the solidarity of the Roman prelates with their American counterparts may also be explained by their desire not to aggravate this paradoxical affair in which an abbess and Catholic women attacked the power of bishops in the name of anti-feminist and conservative positions.⁸²

During the following editions of WYDs, the question of the place of women in the celebrations no longer seemed to be as central an issue. The publication of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* in June 1994 irrevocably closing the priesthood to women, may have discouraged initiatives. This may also be due to the fact that Catholic feminism was less developed in the Philippines, France and Italy than in North America.⁸³ As for the Toronto WYD, the preparations seemed to be less conducive to unexpected happenings. While liberal Catholics ad-

75 Jones, *Letter to Schlafly*, 1993, in AAD, WYD collection, 7.

76 Cordes, *Letter to Stafford*, 1993, in AAD, WYD collection, 1, 39.

77 Stafford, *Letter to Cordes*, 1994, in AAD, WYD collection, 1.

78 Hitchcock, *Letter to Cacciavillan*, 1993, in CUA, WYD 1993 collection, 1, 54.

79 Henderson, *Interview*, 2018.

80 Foley, *Letter to Schnurr*, 1993, in CUA, WYD 1993 collection, 1, 54.

81 Buelt, *Interview*, 2018.

82 Coste, "Conservative Women and Feminism in the United States", 167-76.

83 On the weakness of feminism among French Catholic women, cf. Béraud, "La cause des femmes dans le catholicisme français", 311.

vocating for women's ordination were present at the Canadian WYD, they operated outside the official program. It was on the sidelines of the welcome days in Montreal that activists from the Mouvement Action Justice association asked WYD participants to fill out a survey on women priests.⁸⁴ In Toronto, while attracting media attention, the mass celebrated by Mary Ramerman,⁸⁵ ordained as a priest the previous year by an old Catholic bishop,⁸⁶ had a very limited impact on the participants.

5 Conclusion

The study of John Paul II's WYDs reveals different strategies for Catholic women to exert influence. The first strategy consisted in betting that a humble attitude and personal exemplarity would build a form of authority. This was the attitude of Henrietta de Villa, which was similar to that of the French nuns studied by Claude Langlois.⁸⁷ As Philippe Portier wrote, it was paradoxically by "an overkill of conformity" that they could escape gender assignment, and reverse their subordination.⁸⁸ The second strategy was based on the appropriation of a differentialist feminism, acceptable to the Catholic hierarchy. The argument consisted in showing that the inclusion of women in decision-making processes was an opportunity for the Catholic Church, because women had gifts that complemented those of men. This was the discourse of Mary Ann Walsh. A third strategy was to use the resources of feminism to fight the Catholic patriarchy. This choice of protest could be lived on the margins of the WYD (Mass celebrated by Mary Ramerman), or in the heart of it, by taking advantage of the spaces of freedom (initiative of Mev Puleo). A fourth strategy was to embrace and defend a patriarchal view of religion, to gain legitimacy within conservative Catholicism.⁸⁹ This was the trajectory of Mother Angelica. Finally, a last strategy, which was partly that of Jo Grafil, consisted in relativizing femininity, and endorsing so-called masculine values and practices.

The reactions of the male Catholic hierarchy to these female empowerment varied according to the context. The first two strategies seemed to be well received, both for ethical reasons and for strategic considerations (tokenism). The third was discouraged, but para-

⁸⁴ Cauchy, "À l'aube de la Journée mondiale de la jeunesse (JMJ)", 2.

⁸⁵ "Des catholiques pas très orthodoxes", A2.

⁸⁶ Bonavoglia, "One Woman Who Refused to Wait", 239-56.

⁸⁷ Langlois, *Le catholicisme au féminin*.

⁸⁸ Portier, "Introduction", 14 (translated from French).

⁸⁹ Ecklund, "Catholic Women Negotiate Feminism", 516.

doxically seemed to raise less concern than the fourth, as if Mother Angelica's conservative crusade was paradoxically more threatening to male power.

The diversity of these stories leads to a nuanced view of the evolution of the place of women during John Paul II's pontificate. Certainly, these accounts reinforce the idea that the Catholic Church, marked by a structural clerical culture, has entrusted the keys of the institution to ordained men, and placed women in a subordinate position. At the same time, however, these stories show the agency of Catholic women and their ability to play with constraints in order to develop certain forms of emancipation.

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From the Silent Revolution to Sexual Abuse Scandals The Question of ‘Women’s Place’ in French Catholicism

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Abstract In reviewing the way in which the question of ‘women’s place’ has been handled in French Catholicism since the 1980s, the article unveils three configurations, which, from a chronological point of view, partly overlap. First, during the silent revolution, the existence of a stained-glass ceiling was little decried. This has not, however, prevented women from assuming a wide range of positions and responsibilities in the Church. The second moment focused on the liturgy. It was not until the third moment, when sexual abuse scandals shook the Church’s reputation and influence, that the stained-glass ceiling was openly impugned in French Catholicism. Thus, this article, which constitutes the first existing synthesis on the place of women within this context, endeavors to account for the absence of mobilization in favor of women even though this French specificity definitely erodes at the end of the period under scrutiny.

Keywords Catholicism. Women. Gender. Feminism. Ordination. Liturgy. Sexual abuse scandals. France.

Summary 1 From the late 1980s, a silent revolution. – 1.1 The widespread feminization of pastoral lay-staff. – 1.2 A quiet metamorphosis – 2 From 2008 onwards, intra-church controversies over gender issues. – 2.1 Keeping women far from the altar. – 2.2 Controversies mirroring the internal plurality of French Catholicism. – 3 Since 2019, sexual abuse scandals as an opportunity structure to openly challenge the ‘stained glass ceiling’. – 3.1 A possibility for social transformation. – 3.2 The revival of Catholic feminism. – 4 Conclusion.



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The ‘place of women’ in Catholicism has been a recurring question over the last fifty years.¹ One the recent issue of the journal *Lumen Vitae* was judiciously entitled: “Where are the women?”.² The issue is worth being investigated.

The expression ‘the place of women’, widely used within the Catholic Church, even by the popes, is not subversive, compared to other formulations referring to the same phenomenon. It is preferred over ‘the women’s access to ministries’, a heavily theologically connoted term, or ‘gender issues’, a notion that remains highly controversial in Catholicism.³ On the surface, to speak of the ‘place of women’ in Catholicism is simply to evoke their statutory situation, i.e., their place in the exercise of ecclesiastical authority. Yet, the question also concerns the “arrangement between the sexes”⁴ in the liturgical space and the asymmetrical position of men and women in this confession. Indeed, this expression is meant to question the place of women - which is sometimes extended to the laity as a whole - and not so much that of men, at least the clerics. Ordination, accessible only to men (*vir*) according to canon law, functions as a rite of institution in the sense of Bourdieu.⁵ What is at stake is not so much the passage from one status to another as the separation of those who have undergone the ritual from those who are excluded from it (in this case, women).

This exclusion has been sanctioned repeatedly by the highest Catholic authorities since 1976 (in the *Inter Insigniores* declaration).⁶ In 1988, the Vatican confirmed that women cannot be ordained.⁷ In 1994, as the Anglican Church was ordaining its first female priests, John Paul II added in his apostolic letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* that “the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful”.⁸ John Paul II’s successors are in line with this stance. While Benedict XVI declared in 2006 that “it is rightful to question whether, also in the service of the ministry, we cannot offer more space and more responsibility to women”, he excluded their access to priesthood from the outset: “The priestly ministry is, as we

1 Cf. *Études*, 2017, “Quelle place pour les femmes?”.

2 Edited by Catherine Chevalier, summer 2022.

3 This has slightly changed since Pope Francis expanded lay ministry to catechist in the *Motu proprio Antiquum ministerium*, and open ministries to laywomen with the *Motu proprio Spiritus Domini* in 2021. He has also encouraged new lay ministries.

4 Goffman, “The Arrangement Between the Sexes”.

5 Bourdieu, “Les rites comme actes d’institution”.

6 Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaration Inter Insigniores*.

7 John Paul II, *Apostolic letter Mulieris dignitatem*.

8 John Paul II, *Apostolic letter Ordinatio sacerdotalis*.

know it, reserved to men”.⁹ In his interview with the Jesuit cultural reviews dated 19 September 2013, Francis posits that it is “necessary to make more room for a sharper presence of women in the Church”,¹⁰ and he referenced the “feminine genius” evoked by John Paul II, which is precious to the Church. He thus renewed a vague wish already expressed by his predecessors. As he was questioned by journalists a few weeks earlier, he cut off the debates concerning women’s accession to priesthood:

The Church has said no to the ordination of women; Pope John Paul II has said so in a definitive manner. The door is closed.¹¹

The persistent denial of women’s access to ordination in the Catholic Church sets this confession apart from the vast majority of secular activities in Western societies now open to women, as well as from a large number of Protestant denominations. Contrary to what happens within secular occupational environment, barriers are neither invisible nor concealed. The Catholic glass ceiling is, so to speak, a stained-glass ceiling. The barriers preventing women from participating in top leadership positions are “a particularly salient symbolic marker, providing further differentiation between the religious and general occupational settings”.¹²

This article will focus on the French case primarily, from the 1980s to the present day. Two reasons explain this geographical choice. First, although largely governed by norms that transcend borders, the question of the ‘place of women’ is significantly determined according to the different national contexts, depending on various factors both external and internal to Catholicism (the place of feminism in society, in theology and in Catholic women’s movements; the role played by bishops in relaying to the Vatican demands to make more ‘room’ for women in the Church; clerical demography; ecumenical pressure, etc.). Second, France is definitely an outlier with respect to other European or North-American Catholic countries in that the non-ordination of women in the Church has for long not been challenged, even though the process of feminization of the Church’s leadership at the local level is well advanced. This is evidenced in the several field surveys¹³ I have

⁹ *La Croix*, 6 March 2006.

¹⁰ Interview conducted at the end of August 2013 and posted online on 19 September on the website of the journal *Études*. Remarks he repeated in January 2014 before a delegation of Italian women, cf. *La Croix*, 26 January 2014.

¹¹ *Le Monde*, 30 July 2013.

¹² Adams, “Stained Glass Makes the Ceiling Visible”.

¹³ In depth interviewing and participant observations.

conducted over the last twenty years¹⁴ on the new forms of division of religious labor in French dioceses at the very beginning of the 2000s, on the place of little girls at Mass a few years later, on prison and hospital chaplaincies for the past ten years, and more recently on the sexual abuse scandals that have been disclosed concerning the French clergy.

In reviewing the way in which the question of ‘women’s place’ has been handled in French Catholicism since the 1980s, I unveil three configurations, which, from a chronological point of view, partly overlap. First, during the silent revolution, the existence of a stained-glass ceiling was little decried. This has not, however, prevented women from assuming a wide range of positions and responsibilities in the Church. The second moment focused on the liturgy. It was not until the third moment, when sexual abuse scandals shook the Church’s reputation and influence, that the stained-glass ceiling was openly impugned in French Catholicism.

Thus, this article, which constitutes the first existing synthesis on the place of women within this context, endeavors to account for the absence of mobilization in favor of women even though this French specificity definitely erodes at the end of the period under scrutiny.

1 From the Late 1980s, a Silent Revolution

Women do not only represent the majority of churchgoers, they also largely surpass the number of men within the pastoral lay-staff, counting for around 90% of the entire personnel.¹⁵ Yet this significant reality often passes unnoticed.

1.1 The Widespread Feminization of Pastoral Lay-staff

Women carry out pastoral functions close to those performed by priests. They are appointed to positions that used to be occupied solely by ordained men such as managing the parish, officiating to a certain extent in the liturgy or performing spiritual duties in the chaplaincies of public institutions. But, strictly speaking, titles such as ‘chaplain’ or ‘pastor’ are reserved only to priests. And some sacramental functions can be fulfilled only by priests, including cele-

¹⁴ Cf. Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs*; “Des petites filles à l’autel?”; *Le catholicisme français*; also Béraud et al., *De la religion en prison*.

¹⁵ Drawing on my own evaluation in the dioceses I investigated (cf. Béraud, *Prêtres, diacres, laïcs*) and on the survey conducted across all the French dioceses by the Catholic news outlet *La Croix*, 25 May 2012.

brating the eucharist, hearing confession and giving absolution, and anointing the sick.

In France, the first women to hold higher positions within the Church were often nuns, who played a pioneering role in the late 1980s. Their title, ‘sister’, their vows and sometimes their dress set them on a different level with respect to their laywomen. This “level above”¹⁶ legitimized their status in the eyes of churchgoers and made them acceptable substitutes to priests to some extent. However, due to the rapid demographic decline in religious female congregations, nuns have soon been succeeded by laywomen,¹⁷ most often married and with children.

Two factors account for this feminization. Firstly, women’s increasing participation unfolded in the post-Vatican II (1962-65) era. This council opened Roman Catholic schools of theology to female students. “While still excluding women from the ordained ministry”, the New Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983, opened new “positions to women on the diocesan level” such as diocesan chancellors, judges on diocesan courts, members of diocesan synods and financial and pastoral councils, administrators of priestless parishes.¹⁸ However, the key factor in the appointments of women was in actuality the increasing shortage of priests. Bishops who appointed women did so “more out of necessity than due to doctrinal beliefs in gender equality”.¹⁹ The New Code of Canon Law specifically included a provision for non-priests, in a context of “dearth of priests”, to participate “in the exercise of the pastoral care of a parish”.²⁰ Thirty years ago, in her book dedicated to lay women in charge of a parish, the American sociologist Ruth Wallace made this enlightening comparison:

Like the subject of the song, ‘Rosie the Riveter’, written during the Second World War, women are being recruited to help out in a manpower shortage crisis. Appointing women as chancellors of dioceses, as canon lawyers in the diocesan tribunal, and as administrators of parishes can free priests for other diocesan needs, just as women working in factories freed male factory workers to fight in Second World War. [...] In contrast to the Second World War manpower shortage, there is no anticipation of a future influx of male workers, because this shortage is due

16 Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor*.

17 According to canon law, nuns are laywomen too. But, in practice, laywoman is used more particularly to speak about non-members of the clergy and religious orders.

18 Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor*, 6.

19 Adams, “Stained Glass Makes the Ceiling Visible”.

20 *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 517: §2.

to retirements, resignations, and a steady decrease in recruitments [...].²¹

This did not fool the laywomen I interviewed at the beginning of the 2000s:

I said to my bishop one day: ‘If one hundred and fifty priests were ordained each year, we would no longer be needed as chaplains in the hospital in N.’ He replied: ‘No, now that I’ve seen how you work, I would not dismiss my pool of laywomen because the feedback I get is that you work at least as properly as a priest!’ I continue to believe that if they leave in the job, that’s because there are no priests...²²

Despite the declining number of Catholic memberships in France,²³ the staffing problem became more and more acute for bishops. Between 1997 and 2007, there was a 25% drop in the total number of priests (diocesan and religious), from 27,200 to 20,277. Between 2011 and 2019, there was an additional 20% decline of priests available for active ministry in French dioceses, from 11,000 to 8,990.²⁴ The Catholic Church could not respond to the demands for rituals, emanating also from highly irregular Catholic practitioners and even non-practicing Catholics – especially for celebrating funerals, nor ensure a presence in public institutions, such as prisons and hospitals, if laywomen were not enlisted.

1.2 A quiet metamorphosis

The fact that some women assumed more prominent roles in the Church constitutes one of the most important transformations that French Catholicism has undergone in the last forty years. However, it remains largely invisible to parishioners. Indeed, with the notable exception of the conduct of funerals, women do not perform worship service, whatever their abilities, experience and training; they only prepare people for the sacraments. Liturgy is the sticking point for a more substantial involvement of women. Now, in Catholicism, the

²¹ Wallace, *They Call Her Pastor*, 9.

²² Isabelle, 59 years old, hospital chaplain.

²³ According to the European Values Study (a representative international replication study, which has been carried out in five waves since 1981), 32 % of respondents in France stated that they felt linked to Catholicism in 2018 (53% in 1999; 70% in 1981). Regular Mass attendance (at least once a month) has declined in the same proportions, from 17% in 1981 to 7% in 2018.

²⁴ Source: Conference of French bishops.

liturgy is the place where the religious legitimacy lies and the vast majority of liturgical performances are still the monopoly of priests, some shared with permanent deacons. Men, already few in number among pastoral lay-staff, may be ordained deacons.²⁵ They then gain visibility in the liturgy as they wear an alb and a stole, and have several liturgical duties.²⁶ The lack of visibility of lay-staff also stems from the fact that French bishops have been slow and probably reluctant to accept the institutionalization of lay pastoral workers' positions. Even today, there are no national statistics produced by the bishops' conference on these figures.²⁷ How they are named also varies. They used to be known as '*animateurs laïcs en pastorale*', '*assistants pastoraux ou paroissiaux*' or '*laïcs en responsabilité*', and eventually received the title '*laïcs en mission ecclésiale*' at the end of the 2000s.

Even though their positions within the Church were vulnerable (low-paid - when paid -, part-time, fixed-term contracts) and their legitimacy - in the absence of ordination - limited to the engagement letter (*lettre de mission*) entrusted by their bishop,²⁸ women did not speak out to demand better conditions to perform their tasks and did not mobilize collectively. In the interviews I conducted in the early 2000s, most French laywomen declared they were happy with their situation and found fulfilment in carrying out their mission. They would show utmost respect to the priest, avoid any posture that could be viewed as feminist (such as the use of gender-neutral language in liturgical texts)²⁹ and strongly disapprove of dissident acts such as unauthorized ordination of women or 'irregular' Masses in which women would endorse the role of priests. The words of Dominique,³⁰ which I recorded during my fieldwork in 2003, are particularly telling on the matter:

Last summer, when I was in Montreal for the World Youth Day, I happened to read articles by Catholic feminists. I really cannot position myself that way because they position themselves in

25 The Second Vatican Council authorized the 'restoration' of the diaconate as a permanent order of ministry and decreed that it could be opened to married men, but not to women.

26 During Mass, they proclaim the Gospel, preach on certain occasions and serve as ordinary ministers of the eucharist. They may administer baptism and witness marriages.

27 Their number was estimated at about 9,500 in 2012 by a journalist from the Catholic news outlet *La Croix*, 25 May 2012.

28 Sometimes in the framework of a public announcement and a formal installation ceremony, but not always.

29 Which has penetrated the Catholic Church in North-America.

30 Dominique, 46 years old, head of a diocesan service.

terms of demands. That is really of no interest to me. I'm beyond that... I believe that pressing demands is useless, it only leads to hardening the opponent's position. American feminists, or at least from what I've gathered reading French Canadian women... it's as if they wanted to replace the power of men with that of women. They always position themselves in terms of power. And that is a problem. You have to think in terms of service. And writing *Dieue* with an 'e' does not help at all...³¹

FHE (Femmes et hommes en Eglise) founded in 1970 is the only Catholic collective, which at that time claimed to be feminist. It is also the only French collective connected to North-American organizations such as WOC (Women's Ordination Conference), L'Autre Parole et Femmes et ministères, and to interdenominational networks such as The Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. But it was quickly marginalized.

France is therefore characterized by a 'respectful' feminization, similar to what has been observed in other professions in the country.³² Contrary to what happened in Québec, the United States or the Netherlands, very few people among the clergy and the laity in France spoke out in favor of the ordination of women - as priests or even as deaconesses -, even among the women concerned. For example, in 2003, when I asked a woman chaplain if she had ever thought of becoming a deacon, she replied: "No, I have never thought about it because I know that they don't do that, I know that it's impossible". The French episcopal conference has never issued a public statement in support of women's greater participation in the Church. Some support - more implicitly than explicitly - for women's inclusion in ordained ministries came from two renowned theologians, Hervé Legrand³³ and Joseph Moingt,³⁴ but they have remained particularly isolated on that particular topic.

Since the end of the 'crise catholique'³⁵ (1965-78) and until the outbreak of the sex abuse scandals (i.e., from the 1980s to the 2010s), beyond the question of the place of women, any form of complaint and protest within the Church has been largely disqualified. Undoubtedly, such disqualification has been accounted for by the memory of the conflicts that shook the French Catholicism in the 1960s and 1970s.

31 In French, adding a final 'e' is generally a mark of the feminine. This echoes with current debates in the English-speaking world where some advocate that 'they' should be employed as the pronoun referring to God.

32 Cf. Marry, *Les femmes ingénieurs*.

33 Legrand, "*Traditio perpetuo servata?*".

34 Moingt, "Les femmes et l'avenir de l'Église".

35 Pelletier, *La crise catholique*.

Indeed, the younger generations of priests and faithful view this period as a deterrent for what they envision for the Church: they blame it for bearing a heavy responsibility in the decline of Catholicism in France. Besides, Catholics in general have been experiencing an acute feeling of becoming marginalized in France, which has led to stifling any form of internal protest that would reinforce the process of decline, both demographically (in terms of numbers of priests and figures of those identifying themselves as Catholics) and culturally.

As a consequence, the ‘stained glass ceiling’, although partially challenged by new, contingent practices³⁶ on the field, was never seriously criticized.

2 From 2008 Onwards, Intra-church Controversies Over Gender Issues

Already quite confined to operating in the backstage of the ritual, women, including those with important pastoral responsibilities, were further minorized in some French parishes in the last fifteen years.

2.1 Keeping Women Far from the Altar

Since the end of the 2000s, the visibility of women in worship has dramatically decreased in some parishes.

Altar boys, an outdated feature of service after Vatican II, revived at the turn of the twenty-first century. Some French priests, belonging rather to a more conservative current, decided to ban altogether girls from becoming altar servers, despite John Paul II’s approval.³⁷ They considered that altar service could be seen as a path to priesthood vocations.³⁸ In their view, since only men may become priests, only boys may serve the altar. This was clearly expressed by the priest in charge of the Service national de la pastorale liturgique et sacramentelle whom I interviewed in 2008: “Girls will never become priests. We shall not allow them to think they could. To-

³⁶ For instance, during my fieldwork on chaplaincies, some of my women interviewees shared with me that they often hear confessions informally and have to engage in a ‘bricolage’ around a ritual of repentance since they cannot officially give absolution.

³⁷ The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments sent on 15 March 1994 a circular letter to presidents of episcopal conferences that states that it is for each bishop to decide whether to allow female altar servers in his diocese. A later document, from 2001, adds that, even if a bishop permits female altar servers, the priest in charge of a church in that diocese is not obliged to recruit them.

³⁸ After Vatican II, the aim is to help children to engage more in the Mass and to deepen their understanding of what Mass is.

day, this path is not open to them". In this perspective, altar service is to remain a male business: that of priests, of young boys and their fathers, and of seminarians (within the framework of internships in parishes) who supervise them. It is a male activity, which is welcomed by the priest interviewed, even though most of other services in the Church are highly feminized.

In some parishes, boys and girls are separated into two groups: boys are serving the altar and girls, the assembly. Following the notion of complementarity of the sexes, groups of 'female assembly servers' (*servantes d'assemblée*) have been set up. When altar boys wear an alb, assembly girls wear a white T-shirt or a cape and are assigned tasks allegedly in line with their feminine identity (handing out mass hymn leaflets, taking care of the young, carrying the gifts without climbing the steps of the altar, etc.). In other parishes, the service to the altar is open to children, whether male and female, up until their early teen years: after that age, young girls disappear from the sanctuary. When I interviewed a priest in 2010 in a parish where this configuration was being implemented, he expressed some embarrassment:

The risk is that one thinks that men may have access to the sanctuary, when women may not. Immediately, the issue of purity and impurity arises. From a theological point of view, this is not proper... Let's say that there are masculine functions and feminine functions... okay... but let's not connect them to questions of purity... Or it may be a cultural issue. Practitioners are not ready to see a 17-year-old girl at the altar...³⁹

Beyond the case of altar girls, women were excluded from the sanctuary and, as a matter of fact, from some liturgical functions they had been performing for several years, such as serving the altar, distributing communion (as extraordinary ministers of the eucharist) and even reading scriptures at Mass. Even if Pope Francis allowed women to be formally installed as lectors and acolytes (roles reserved only to men according to canon law until 2021, but fulfilled by women on a casual basis), some local priests and bishops continue to ignore these changes.

Liturgical and more generally devotional practices are being promoted with the aim of differentiating genders, such as: single-sex pilgrimages - like the *Pèlerinage des pères de famille*, that combines physical activity and faith in order to reinforce manly identities,⁴⁰

³⁹ Gérard, 70 years old, parish priest.

⁴⁰ Practices and values that echo those of the Anglo-American muscular Christianity movement in the late nineteenth century - beginning of the twentieth century. Cf. Putney, *Muscular Christianity*.

whose counterpart is the Pèlerinage des mères de famille, which is meant to allow them to carve out some time for themselves; fraternal organizations, such as the Knights of Columbus;⁴¹ and finally prayer groups, such as the Hommes adorateurs du Saint Sacrement (Male Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament) in the diocese of Fréjus-Toulon and L'oraison des mamans (Mother's Prayer) in the dioceses of Paris and Lyon.⁴² These practices have been very popular within the conservative wing of French Catholicism. Since these practices were also endorsed by priests, it appears that the latter faithful genuinely believed that they act as good Catholics by embracing those gender identities "performed"⁴³ as 'truly' masculine on the one hand, and 'truly' feminine on the other.

2.2 Controversies Mirroring the Internal Plurality of French Catholicism

The presence of women in the sanctuary during Mass, a presence that used to be strictly forbidden before Vatican II, sparked controversies around the same time as the mobilization against same-sex marriage.⁴⁴ These controversies about the place of women in relation to worship are actually rooted in the broader anti-gender campaign⁴⁵ that some Catholics (including bishops, priests, and lay activists) orchestrated.

Such practices of exclusion of women were not unanimously accepted. They led to conflicts and tensions at the local level. Some groups fiercely opposed what they considered a clear form of discrimination. The Comité de la Jupe (the Skirt Committee) was founded by two Catholic women: the theologian and biblical scholar, Anne Soupa, and the journalist and publisher, Christine Pedotti, in 2008, who were offended by a sexist remark uttered by Cardinal André Vingt-Trois

⁴¹ The Knights of Columbus is a Catholic fraternal service founded in the United States in 1882 whose membership is restricted to practicing Catholic men. They have been established in France, in several dioceses since 2012.

⁴² Cf. Aubourg, "L'Oraison des mamans".

⁴³ Performing must be understood here in the sense given by Judith Butler: to 'perform' a gender identity is to behave in accordance with a socially constructed gender model (acting, representing according to a theatrical metaphor) and thus to make it happen. Cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

⁴⁴ The debate on marriage and adoption rights for same-sex couples was highly controversial in France. Among the opponents to the bill, some Catholics appeared as key protagonists, for they considered the bill a threat to the family. This condemnation of same-sex unions evolved into a critique of the so-called 'gender ideology', viewed as endangering mankind because it refutes alleged natural sexual differences and gender complementarity. Cf. Béraud, Portier, "Mariage pour tous".

⁴⁵ Kuhar, Paternotte, *Anti-gender Campaigns in Europe*.

on the radio.⁴⁶ To promote gender equality in the Church, they used a wide repertoire of contention that included mapping the exclusion of women from the liturgy (in collaboration with the Catholic news outlet *La Croix*, in 2012 and in 2022), organizing a women's conclave (72 female chaplains, catechists, theologians, historians - nuns or laywomen) in the parish of Saint-Merri in Paris (in March 2013)⁴⁷ and demonstrations in front of the building of the episcopal conference (in April 2013). For a long time, great caution prevailed in liturgical matters. It was only on Saturday 7 March 2020 (on occasion of the International Women's Rights Day) that the Comité de la Jupe organized a liturgical event, *Enfin, elles célèbrent* (Women finally celebrate), in a venue belonging to a women religious community in the 7th arrondissement of Paris. When I asked one of the founding members of the collective, who attended that day, why they did not engage in celebrating earlier on, she replied that they "had not authorized themselves do so until then". Yet, no aspect in this celebration I observed was in contradiction with by canon law (the eucharist was not celebrated).

Even though this activism was expressed with precaution, only non-radical demands - e.g. recognition of the ministry of chaplaincy, access to preaching by giving occasional sermons at mass, restoration of women's permanent diaconate - being put forward, the audience of the collective among French Catholicism has been limited.

Three conclusions can be drawn from these debates. First, the question of 'the place of women' remains open. More specifically issue of the place of women in the liturgy pits Catholics against each other, thus revealing the internal plurality of French Catholicism and the balance of power between its different poles. Transposing the analysis of Mark Chaves,⁴⁸ one can hypothesize that the positioning in relation to questions of gender highlights internal fragmentations within Catholicism that have arisen over the last fifteen years (as it is the case also in Protestantism and Judaism).⁴⁹ Second, keeping women far from the altar - like disapproving of same-sex mar-

46 In November 2008, the archbishop of Paris, asked of the place of women in worship services (and more specifically on the opportunity to open lay ministries of lector and acolyte to women), declared that women did not only "need a skirt" but also something 'between the ears' ("Le tout n'est pas d'avoir une jupe, c'est d'avoir quelque chose dans la tête"). Cf. *La Croix*, 22 November 2008.

47 When the college of cardinals (only men) gathered in Rome to elect the new pope, after the resignation of Benedict XVI.

48 According to Chaves, formal denominational policies abouts women's ordination possess a "symbolic significance". It signals a conservative or, on the contrary, a liberal agenda. Cf. Chaves, *Ordaining Women*.

49 Cf. Gasquet, "Le balcon, les pots de fleurs et la *mehitza*".

riage - “serve to project a level of conservatism”.⁵⁰ Third, the conservative trends within the French Church have the upper hand. But women and LGBT+ people appear to be bearing the brunt of this religious conservatism.

3 Since 2019, Sexual Abuse Scandals as an Opportunity Structure to Openly Challenge the ‘Stained Glass Ceiling’

Sexual abuse scandals in the clergy, that erupted in France in the last four years (2019-23), have major impacts on the Catholic Church, including how the issue of ‘women’s place’ is now being addressed.

3.1 A possibility for social transformation

Sexual abuse cases by priests made major headlines in 2019.⁵¹ The scandal reached its *acme* in the autumn of 2021 after the CIASE (Commission indépendante sur les abus sexuels dans l’Église)⁵² issued its report before being rekindled in the fall of 2022.⁵³ On these occasions, denouncing an exclusively male clerical power, which may have led to sexual abuses, helped to fuel a debate on women’s role in the Church of France on an unprecedented scale. Sexual abuse scandals had a major repercussion in France on Catholic public consciousness of gender inequalities between a male clergy and a female laity and on the contradiction between a high level of participation of women in dioceses, parishes and chaplaincies, and their non-representation among the top-level Catholic leadership. It constituted a powerful incentive to rethinking the place of women in the Church. In March 2019, when I observed a meeting organized in a Parisian parish discussing the scandals that were then breaking out, to my great surprise, the debate revolved more around how authority is exercised in the Church than the issue of sexual violence itself. Several people

⁵⁰ Adams, “Stained Glass Makes the Ceiling Visible”, 87.

⁵¹ The very starting point of the scandal is the Preynat/Barbarin case in the mid 2010s. Until then, French bishops considered wrongly that they have managed to keep the scandal at bay. But the Preynat/Barbarin case shattered their hopes.

⁵² The Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church estimated the number of victims and offenders, formulated explanatory causes and stated 45 recommendations. Cf. CIASE, *Rapport final*.

⁵³ It was exposed that Bishop Santier had engaged in an inappropriate behavior with young men during confession, which led to his condemnation by Rome at the end of 2021. This condemnation was covered up by the Catholic authorities even though they have pledged to be transparent on such misdemeanors.

spoke up to advocate that women should be given more responsibility and even be ordained. In 2021, the CIASE report stated that:

the presence of the laity in general and of women in particular in the decision-making spheres of the Catholic Church must be powerfully reinforced.⁵⁴

Such demands erupted much earlier in other countries. The United States, where feminism had already made rapid advances in the churches, was shook by such debates in the 1980s:

For the [American] feminist theologians, sexual abuse and violence were rooted in the patriarchal structure of the whole society, including the churches, and only by thorough social reconstruction could they be eradicated.⁵⁵

According to the historian Philip Jenkins, the American clergy's sexual abuses provided:

a weapon in the arsenal of reformers anxious to restructure the church away from the traditional concepts of hierarchy, male dominance, and clerical elitism.⁵⁶

I personally consider that the pragmatic sociology theoretical framework on scandals developed by Damien de Blic et Cyril Lemieux, is more accurate than Jenkins' analysis in terms of 'uses of abuses'. According to de Blic's and Lemieux's perspective:

[scandal] never leaves things as they were [...] it leads to repositionings, a redistribution of institutional cards [...].⁵⁷

Scandal always produces something new. but the transformations are not fully predictable. They constitute an opportunity structure for change.⁵⁸ The clergy sexual abuse scandal is:

intersecting with the narrative of the reforms of the Vatican II period [...] and has provoked a series of questions about ecclesiology from a systematic point of view.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ CIASE, *Les violences sexuelles dans l'Église catholique*.

⁵⁵ Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests*, 118.

⁵⁶ Jenkins, *Pedophiles and Priests*, 122.

⁵⁷ Blic, Lemieux, "The Scandal as Test".

⁵⁸ Tilly, Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*.

⁵⁹ Faggioli, "The Catholic Sexual Abuse Crisis".

Gender issues fully participate in those questions, like the liturgy, moral theology and priesthood celibacy.

3.2 The Revival of Catholic Feminism

A new generation of Catholic feminist activists have recently emerged, such as the collectives Oh My Goddess! and Feminism in the Church, which are now openly criticizing the ‘stained-glass ceiling’. The young Catholic women, members of Oh My Goddess!, claim to be intersectional feminists and ambition to speak with an inclusive voice. They put interviews on gender issues in the Church and podcasts of Sunday homilies online. As for Feminism in the Church, a group of young practicing Catholics concerned with gender equality in religion, it was founded in 2020 in the parish of Saint-Pierre de Montrouge in Paris where they had regularly organized conferences and events between 2020 and 2022.

And older Catholic feminists, such as Anne Soupa, have adopted a more radical stance. In May 2020, Anne Soupa publicized her will to become the next archbishop of Lyon, a position vacant due to the Cardinal Barbarin’s resignation in the context of the Preynat case.⁶⁰ Her aim was to expose the lack of visibility of women and their exclusion from the governance of the Church. In July 2022, seven women founded the collective Toutes Apôtres! (“All Women Apostles!”) in order to “make sure that Anne Soupa’s gesture does not only make the headlines but initiates a movement”.⁶¹ They advocate an inclusive Church and demand equal access to ordination regardless of gender, marital status or sexual orientation. Following Anne Soupa, they wrote to the papal nuncio to apply for ecclesial positions traditionally open only to men and declared they felt a deep call to the ministry as lay preachers, deacons, priests or bishops:

In order to accomplish its universal mission, we are convinced that the Roman Catholic institution must allow women to have access to the various ordained ministries and to take part in the govern-

⁶⁰ Bernard Preynat, a Catholic priest and boy scouts leader, has abused dozens of children during decades. The Lyon case broke in the mid 2010s when lawyers for nine adult plaintiffs – former boy scouts – took legal action against Barbarin, the archbishop of Lyon, saying he should have gone to police as early as 2010 when he spoke to the priest about the allegations. Actually, Preynat was first interviewed by church leaders in 1991 and was prevented from leading scout groups, but he was later allowed to teach children again and held positions of authority. Barbarin only suspended him and stopped him from working with children in September 2015.

⁶¹ Toutes Apôtres!, *Dare to candidate!*.

ance of our parishes, our dioceses as well as the Vatican. Then only can the Church be renewed.⁶²

This challenge has been met with fierce opposition. This was obvious in the controversy surrounding the “feminist Mass” that was celebrated in a private chapel belonging to a women religious community in the 15th arrondissement of Paris, on 3 April 2022:

[an] inclusive Mass, where women can finally celebrate God around the altar and in the service of the Word.⁶³

During the Mass, all the readings were performed by women, the commentary of the Gospel pronounced by a woman theologian but the eucharist was celebrated by a priest in conformity with canon law. The collective behind the event, Feminism in the Church, was flooded with “hate speech on social media, organized by groups close to the traditionalist movement”⁶⁴ [the correct quote is “a wave of hatred on social networks, organized by groups close to the traditionalist movement”] and have been excluded from the parish of Saint-Pierre de Montrouge. The demands for women’s access to ordination and ordination expressed in the synodal process and relayed to Rome in 2022⁶⁵ encountered also deep resistance. Intra-ecclesial conflict, which has emerged on gender issues over the past decade, remains sharp.

4 Conclusion

To state that the Catholic Church is an institution that discriminates against women is self-evident. Nevertheless, until 2018-19, arguments expressing such an opinion were extremely rare or very marginal within the French Catholicism. One of the effects of the sex abuse scandals is precisely to have allowed Catholics to speak out and to open challenge the stained-glass ceiling. The fact that Catholics claim to be feminists is not unrelated to a more global revival of feminism in France, in the wake of the #MeToo movement. The theological debate has thus regained momentum in French Catholicism. The cause of women appears to be one of its structuring axes.

But another, less visible, effect of these scandals is that it has become a burden on the budget of dioceses. In the fieldwork I have con-

⁶² Toutes Apôtres!, *About Us*.

⁶³ “A ‘feminist mass’ irritates the diocese of Paris”.

⁶⁴ “A ‘feminist mass’ irritates the diocese of Paris”.

⁶⁵ Conférence des Évêques de France, *Collecte des synthèses synodales*.

ducted since 2019, the women who are *laïcs en mission ecclésiales* are the ones that bear the brunt of budget cuts, whether regarding funding for their training or of their salaries (some missions that were fulfilled under a work contract are now carried out on a voluntary basis).

Besides, these debates are not specific to France. The recent German “synodal journey”⁶⁶ considers that it is one of the most pressing issues that the Church faces and the archbishop of Hamburg called for an open debate on the ordination of women considering that new arguments have emerged since 1994. Naming women deaconesses could be a first step in a gradual process of change. Two commissions on the question have been launched by the Vatican during Francis’s pontificate. But no decision has been made yet.

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⁶⁶ In response to a 2018 report on sexual abuse in the German Church.

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