

sense of inner power of life and fruitfulness. In this situation, it had clear alternatives and the power to choose between them. It had even previously thought through, as a Community, its possible general obligations regarding corporate dissent.⁴ Here, it seems to me, its decision was a decision not just to submit to its own lack of power, but a decision not to allow its own power to be diffused by the direct action of an external power. It was a decision to build on its present power in order ultimately to be more faithful to the truth and to its healing ministry. Concretely, that meant a decision which prevented such possible sanctions as the removal of Community officers, investigation of community hospitals, etc., and which allowed continuing community dialogue and collaborative response.

4. The fourth judgment operative in this experience and decision was a judgment about the nature of power itself—or at least the use of power within the Church: Power is essentially for the sake of empowering others. This judgment was joined with basic presuppositions about the nature of the Church, the Church's ongoing search for truth, the capacity for community (and church) to sustain pluralism and authority, the possibilities for reform of church structures in the direction of just access to power, openness, collaboration, and concern for both individuality and communality. The judgment was also joined with an analysis of the concrete historical situation in which the events were unfolding. Though I cannot here explicate either the presuppositions or the historical analysis, it is crucial at least to note the importance for both of them of a view of power which is ultimately not for the domination of others but for their empowerment.

The decision of the Sisters of Mercy must still be reviewed and critiqued, by those within the Community and without. The answer to the question, "Why did this group of women agree to be silenced?" seems to me to be this: "In order that theirs and other voices may ultimately prevail." The danger, of course, is that the silence will grow, and that power in the Church will be more and more isolated, especially from the experience of women. But this story is unfinished. The wisdom of the decision of the Sisters of Mercy may become manifest only when their voice is once again heard.

MARGARET FARLEY, R.S.M.
Yale University

WOMEN AND POWER IN THE CHURCH: A BLACK-CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

Random House College Dictionary defines "power" in many different ways. Among these, "power" is fundamentally "the ability to do or act; capability of doing or accomplishing something." In contrast the *RHCD* defines "authority" as "the power to judge, or command," or "a power or right delegated or given, . . . usually because of rank or office, to issue commands and

⁴Context and criteria for corporate public dissent are delineated in a document approved by the Tenth General Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy of the Union, April, 1977.

to punish for violation." A third term pertinent to our deliberations is "influence," "a personal and unofficial power derived from deference of others to one's character, ability, station, or importance." In ecclesiastical language "authority" might be translated into the concept of "office" with its *power of order* and *power of jurisdiction*, while "influence" corresponds more appropriately to the *power of charism*.¹

Within the local church of the United States at present, the possibility of black women and black men exercising power of authority is very limited. Black women, like Hispanic, white, native American, and Asian women, are excluded from ordained ministry as well as from the official lay ministries of acolyte and lector by official church documents.² Black women and black men are covertly limited from exercising their charismatic gifts on behalf of the black Catholic community and the broader Catholic community because of the racism which continues to permeate the institutional structures and social relationships of the Catholic community.

In some ways, the social and institutional structures of the Catholic Church of the United States parallel those of the society in general. The United States is a pluralistic society dominated by a coalition of white males who form a bloc of unilateral power by which the interests and welfare of minorities are considered solely as they relate to the well-being of these white males and their families.³ Although one can speak of some limited social integration of the white society with that of blacks and other people of color, the vast majority of blacks and whites do not engage in any significant primary relationships. The vast majority of white society views blacks through negative stereotypes of inferiority while at the same time manifesting either fear of or indifference to their presence. Blacks are consequently marginalized. While the vast majority of black society is isolated from the social and professional relationships of white society, most blacks still must interact with whites to obtain some of their basic human needs, i.e., food, clothing, shelter, education, employment, etc.⁴

Black Catholics within the Church remain extremely marginalized as indifference has replaced open hatred.⁵ This indifference is rationalized as appropriate because of the small numerical presence of blacks within the Church. (One fails to acknowledge the "Catch 22" of the situation. Blacks are marginalized because of their small number in the Church but their small number in the Church is largely due to the racist dynamics within its structures which in turn result in *de facto* exclusion.) The most recent statistics indicate that in 1982 black Catholics number approximately 1.5 million, including approximately 300 black priests, 161 black deacons, 110 black deacon candidates, 100

¹See Karl Rahner, *Theology of Pastoral Action* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) for a discussion of the relationship between office and charism, pp. 37-63.

²See Sarah Butler, MSBT, (ed.) *Research Report on Women in Church and Society* (New York: Catholic Theological Society of America, 1978) for a fuller discussion of the issue of women's ordination and participation in official ministries.

³See Bernard M. Lomer, "Two Kinds of Power," *Criterion* (Divinity School of the University of Chicago) 15, 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 12-29 for a discussion of unilateral and relational conceptions of power.

⁴See Andrew Billingsley, *Black Families in White America* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962).

⁵U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day: "Brothers and Sisters to Us" (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, Nov. 14, 1979) p. 6.

black brothers, 700 black sisters, 200 black seminarians, 5 black bishops (one ordinary) and 3 black major superiors of women (for the three black religious congregations).⁶

Marginalized people do not have access to the power of institutional authority. Though the blacks who are bishops, pastors, and major superiors of women participate in the ecclesial power structures at some level, their effective impact on the broader Catholic community is not highly visible or measurable. The real problem regarding the exercise of power in the Church for many blacks and black Catholics is that blacks do not exercise significant institutional authority in the black Catholic community.

All too often in the very places where Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans and Asians are numerous the Church's officials and representatives both clerical and lay [male and female] are predominately White.⁷

Despite the negative forces of racism and indifference which attended the presence of black Catholics within the Church of the United States, despite their *de facto* exclusion from the authoritative power of its hierarchical structures, it is quite evident that the black Catholic community has been gifted with a variety of gifts for the building up of the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel. The biographies of such black Catholic women as Elizabeth Adams (*Dark Symphony*, 1942), Helen Caldwell Day (*Color, Ebony*, 1951), Ellen Tarry (*The Third Door*, 1955), and Dr. Lena Edwards (*Medicine, Motherhood and Mercy*, 1979) reveal that each of these black Catholic women were led by the Spirit to deepen their journey with the Lord by joining the Catholic Church. Through its sacraments and faithful members they were led to an expression of their personal union in concrete ministries needed in the black community. These individual stories are rooted in a long history of black Catholics who stood up against the oppressive tides of the nation and continued to hope and build ministries of service which were sacraments of salvation to slave and freed blacks alike.

As early as the 1820s, while the institution of slavery still was a strong force in the United States, black Catholic women from Cuba (Elizabeth Lange) and Santo Domingo (Elizabeth Balas, Rosina Boegue and Almaide Duchemin) were the first negroes in the United States to take religious vows. Rev. Jacques Joubert, with whom the two Elizabeths had shared their vision of a school for negro education, suggested that the women form a society to give their work greater stability. In 1831 the Oblate Sisters of Providence of Baltimore were approved as a religious Congregation by Gregory XVI.⁸ One attempt to found a bi-racial community in Kentucky in 1824 by Rev. Charles Nerinckx failed when his successor discontinued the negro side. In 1842 the second successful Congregation of black women was founded in New Orleans by Henriette De Lisle and Juliette Gaudin, two free-born negro women. This foundation, the

⁶Hard statistical data regarding black Catholics is difficult to ascertain. These statistics are adjusted from 1975 data circulated by the National Office of Black Catholics.

⁷"Brothers and Sisters to Us," *op. cit.* p. 12.

⁸"Where He leads me I will follow," excerpts from the official Diary of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, Baltimore, MD, and Maria M. Lannon, "Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange" (Washington, DC: Josephite Pastoral Center, 1976).

⁹Mary Francis Borgia Hart, SSF. *Violets in the King's Garden* (private publication, Holy Family Sisters, New Orleans).

Sisters of the Holy Family, was supported by the vicar general of the diocese and a French immigrant woman, Marie Jeanne Aliquot. These women provided for the needs of the abandoned slaves and orphaned children.⁹ The third congregation of black women religious was founded in 1916 in Savannah by Mother Theodore and Rev. Ignatius Lissner. The original intent of this foundation was to fulfill the state legislation which required negro children to be educated by Negroes. This Congregation is presently in Harlem.¹⁰ The first black Catholic priests ordained for the United States were the Healy Brothers (1854, 1858, 1864). These men and others were not permitted in the seminaries of the United States and so were educated in Paris, Rome and Belgium.¹¹ The black lay Catholic movement was nationalized with the first Colored Catholic Congress in Washington, DC, in 1889. The aim of the three Congresses was to explore the ways in which lay members could assist in the mission of the Church to "convert and educate our race."¹²

Compelled by the "signs of the times" the contemporary black Catholic movement, comprised of the National Black Clergy Caucus (1968), the National Black Sisters Conference (1968), the National Black Seminarians Association (1970), the National Black Catholic Lay Caucus (1970) and interconnected by the National Office of Black Catholics (1970), shares the common agenda of confronting institutional racism within the church of the United States and assuming indigenous leadership of the black Catholic community. In 1975, the Sisters of Judith were founded in Detroit "to answer the need for lay leadership development and greater involvement in the Church in the Black Catholic community." These women are trained to minister to their families, their community and the parishes within their geographic area and are commissioned by the local bishop.¹³ All of these foundations and associations as well as many others (Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver, Archdiocesan Black Catholics/Chicago, Offices of Black Catholics) are the result of the movement of the Spirit which has led black Catholics to assume the leadership of their communities, to become subjects of their own ecclesial history. All are efforts to enrich the entire black community with the Catholic tradition as it concretely objectifies Jesus' liberating message of salvation.

Those black Catholics who have been awakened to their baptismal obligation to proclaim the Gospel well understand the teachings of the Decree *Ad gentes*:

If the Church is to be in a position to offer all humankind the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God then it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his Incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the persons among whom he lived . . . (10)

Various types of ministry are necessary for the implanting and growth of the Christian community and once these forms of service have been called forth from the body of the faithful, *by divine call*, they are to be carefully fostered and nurtured by all. (15)

¹⁰*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary (FHM)," p. 49.

¹¹*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Negroes in the U.S. IV—Apostolate to," p. 312.

¹²*Three Catholic Afro-American Congresses* (New York: Arno Press, 1978).

¹³From the Constitutions of the Sisters of Judith, Detroit, Michigan. Information available from co-foundress Sister Elizabeth Harris, 159 Burligame, Detroit, MI 48202.

Black Catholics today are certain that the Church will not be firmly rooted in the black community until that community has ministers of salvation who are drawn from its own members.¹⁴ In the black community, new ministries are emerging under the power and authority of the Spirit, and the community stands ready for those who hold the powers of orders and jurisdiction to acknowledge and confirm these ministries as it has the emerging ministries of the past.

One might wonder why this statement does not clearly single out women in ministry as being a particular problem within the present context of the Church. While the black community acknowledges the problem of sexism in the Church and society, in most conversations within the community and in most data collected regarding the problems of ministry facing black Catholic ministers, it is agreed that the problem of racism is far more insidious and pervasive. We are grateful to our white sisters for their insights regarding the harshness of sexism within the Church and as black women we share the pain of being its victims. With our black brothers we share the intense pain of racism. One must note that although there are sexist patterns in the relations of black men and women, in the emerging forms of ministry and in the developing conference which addresses questions of implanting the Church more firmly in our community, a conscious effort is being made by our most perceptive and mature leadership (both male and female) to build the community and Church together as a sign of Christ's presence and active offering of salvation to the entire black community.

JAMIE PHELPS, O.P.

The Catholic University of America

WOMEN AND POWER IN THE CHURCH: A NEW TESTAMENT REFLECTION

Because of time and space limitations I have sacrificed both elegance of expression and much of the nuance demanded by a volatile subject to brevity and clarity of position for the purpose of provoking thought and generating discussion. Let me begin by stating some presuppositions.

First, all mollifying rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, I regard it as a fact that *the male hierarchy and women in the Church are involved in a power struggle*, perhaps more serious in nature and far-reaching in consequences than any in the history of the Church. These men are struggling to maintain power over women in order to maintain exclusive power in the institution. Although some of the hierarchy may still think that their domination of women gives glory to God there is sufficient evidence to the contrary available, if they choose to consult it objectively, to make the claim to invincible ignorance increasingly open to a charge of bad faith. Women are struggling to break

¹⁴Austin Flannery (ed.), "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity," *Vatican Council II* (New York: Costello Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 824-25, 831.

¹⁵Eugene Hillman, *The Church as Mission* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965). See particularly his ethnic-cultural understanding of "The Nations," pp. 100-20.