

## SPYING IN THE PROMISED LAND: SACRAMENTAL SIGHTS THROUGH WOMEN'S EYES

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### INTRODUCTION\*

With the title of this essay, I harken back to the biblical story of the spies sent to explore the Promised Land, a land reportedly of milk and honey.<sup>1</sup> While two spies returned with grapes, pomegranates, and figs, the others brought back tales of terror, leading the people of Israel to wonder about this land. The biblical narrative has rich resonances in liturgical history,<sup>2</sup> yet as my guiding motif here, I focus on the spies' *divergent reports* of the land they saw. I also imagine these spies to be women.

What do women see when looking into the promised land of sacramental life?<sup>3</sup> What did they witness fifty years ago? What do they note today? What might they glimpse of the future? The task of sketching answers to these questions—especially with a view to the worldwide church—is overwhelming. To begin with, there are more than 600 million Roman Catholic women around the globe today. Often, they form the majority of the liturgical assembly in local parishes; yet as theologians in North America, we are able to hear these women's voices only through multiple mediations.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Roman Catholic women worldwide have as many different experiences and visions of sacramental life as there are individual women. The simple fact of having two X chromosomes does not suffice to establish globally shared "women's experiences."

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\* I dedicate this essay to the memory of my friend Kazuyo HiRose (d. February 29, 2012), a Japanese convert to the Catholic faith, who discovered in the church's sacraments and in the voices of Catholic women deep wellsprings of joy.

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<sup>1</sup> In Numbers 13:1–14:9, the twelve "spies" (the Hebrew term is better translated "scouts," as in the NAB revised edition) were Israelite men, one from each of the twelve tribes.

<sup>2</sup> Two spies carrying an oversize bunch of grapes appear, for example, in the thirteenth-century Redemption Window of Canterbury Cathedral. A millennium earlier, the land of milk and honey was on the sacramental horizon of the practice of blessing a milk-and-honey cup offered to the newly baptized.

<sup>3</sup> The act of seeing has its own sacramental valences, e.g. for medieval women mystics when approaching the sacrament of the Eucharist (see Gwenfair Walters Adams, *Visions in Late Medieval England: Lay Spirituality and Sacred Glimpses of the Hidden Worlds of Faith*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 130 [Boston: Brill, 2007], ch. 4, esp. 134–137). Even today, eucharistic adoration seems to be particularly important for women. See, for example, the testimonials overwhelmingly by women on the website for eucharistic adoration by the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters in Philadelphia (available at <http://savior.org/testimonials/>, accessed on May 22, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> A website on "Women in the Church" is maintained by Spring Hill College (<http://www.shc.edu/theolibrary/womenrel2.htm>, accessed on June 12, 2012). The site offers some access to global Catholic women's voices, especially from Africa and Australia. Nevertheless, many Catholic women worldwide live on the margins of global theological flows; many are not literate; many speak languages that few contemporary theologians understand; many practice pieties that the academy rarely maps.

With those caveats in place, I approach my theme in three steps. I begin with a look back, at the preparations for the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. I then highlight four postconciliar developments of special importance for women's sacramental practices. I conclude with a spy's report of what I consider promising and/or simply inescapable sightings on the sacramental horizon.

### SPYING IN THE LAND OF 1962: PREPARING FOR THE OPENING OF THE COUNCIL

When spying with women's eyes, one not only sees a line of priestly men slowly moving toward Saint Peter's, but, in looking more closely, one may also spot a Swiss lawyer, Gertrud Heinzelmann. On May 23, 1962, Heinzelmann submitted a formal protest and petition to the Council's Central Preparatory Commission, insisting that the Church honor the equality of women with men, and ordain women to the priesthood.<sup>5</sup> In her native Switzerland, Heinzelmann had long been engaged in the legal battle for women's right to vote. The complex motives underlying her petition to the Council's preparatory commission became visible only later (e.g., Heinzelmann valued virginity, and dreamt of the ordination of celibate women only). None of this stopped her in 1962 from claiming to write for half of humanity.<sup>6</sup> Unsurprisingly, many women active in the Church took exception to the petition, insisting not only that they were able to speak for themselves, but also that they spoke with a much deeper knowledge of ecclesial life than Heinzelmann, who for many years had not been a practicing Catholic.<sup>7</sup> In 1962, many of the then 300 million Catholic women worldwide greeted the coming Council with a sense of excitement and hope.<sup>8</sup> I offer some examples below.

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<sup>5</sup> The German text of Gertrud Heinzelmann's formal petition can be found in her book *Wir schweigen nicht länger! Frauen äußern sich zum 2. Vatikanischen Konzil* (Zurich: Interfeminas-Verlag, 1964), 79–99. English translation available at <http://www.womenpriests.org/classic3/heinzell.asp>, accessed on May 17, 2012. Details of Gertrud Heinzelmann's life and work can be found in the biography by Barbara Kopp, *Die Unbeirrbare: Wie Gertrud Heinzelmann den Papst und die Schweiz das Fürchten lehrte* (Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Heinzelmann was by no means alone in using this terminology at the time. Léon-Josef Cardinal Suenens, in his famous conciliar intervention, called for the missing "half of humanity" to be represented at the Council (quoted in Carmel Elizabeth McEnroy, *Guests in Their Own House: The Women of Vatican II* [New York: Crossroad, 1996], 96). Similarly, Pope Paul VI in his message to women at the closing of the Council described women as constituting "half of the immense human family" (quoted in Ivy A. Helman, *Women and the Vatican: An Exploration of Official Documents* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012], 25).

<sup>7</sup> The struggle Heinzelmann had embraced was not as new as she herself thought. Catholic voices in support of women's ordination had emerged decades earlier. In 1938, for example, Dr. Josephine Mayer published a learned defense of women's ordination to the diaconate, as part of a larger discussion in the Liturgical Movement of women's sacramental agency; see Josephine Mayer, "Vom Diakonot der Frau," *Hochland* 36:1 (1938/1939): 98–108.

<sup>8</sup> The numbers are an approximation (since the *Annuario Pontificio* for 1962 does not give the numbers of Roman Catholics worldwide) based on statistics provided by CARA on its website: <http://cara.georgetown.edu/CARAServices/requestedchurchstats.html>, accessed on March 2, 2012. The first year for which numbers are given there is 1970, when the Catholic population worldwide was listed as 653.6 million—just about half of what it is in 2012.

The Spanish president of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, Maria del Pilar Bellosillo, was invited to the solemn opening of the Council, and later became an auditor.<sup>9</sup> She represented a Catholic women's organization that at the time had 36 million members around the globe. The Kenyan Catholic Wangari Muta Maathai, twenty-two years old and educated by Loretto sisters,<sup>10</sup> was studying at Mount St. Scholastica College in Atchison, Kansas. Maathai later founded the Green Belt Movement and became the first African woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. A young Filipina, Guillermina Mananzan, was readying for perpetual vows as a Benedictine nun in 1962. As Sister Mary John Mananzan she would become one of the best-known feminist theologians from the global south. Gladys Parentelli, a 27-year-old Uruguayan Catholic was involved in organizing a rural youth labor movement in 1962. Parentelli was elected a Council auditor by Pope Paul VI, and was present at the final conciliar session.<sup>11</sup> Also in 1962, Mother Angelica dedicated her newly-founded monastery of Our Lady of the Angels in Alabama, where she later established the global Catholic network EWTN. In Paris, the Belgian Catholic Christiane Brusselmans was completing her studies at the Institut Catholique; she was later to become an influential catechetical advocate for children, and a pioneer in the implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation in the United States. In India, the Padma Shri award was bestowed on Mother Teresa for her distinguished service. In my Catholic parish in Germany, I received a little prayer leaflet, with a photo of Pope John XXIII and a prayer for the Holy Spirit to move in this council. I felt empowered that my prayers would shape what happened in Rome. Finally, women were of course also present behind the scenes at the Council in stereotypical feminine roles (e.g., cooking and cleaning).

What might these glimpses back to 1962 have to offer? I lift up two insights in particular. First, there is the irreducible diversity of women's lives around the globe, marked by quite different "temporalities of struggle."<sup>12</sup> Second, and related to this, is a necessary caution about who we assume speaks for "women" (I say this knowing full well that this is what I am supposed to do here). In 1962, women's voices were already noticeably diverse, affected by different social locations and by differing engagements with ecclesial life, to name only two markers of difference. What was true in 1962 has certainly been true for the fifty years since. Increasing diversity in women's lives may, in fact, be one of the hallmarks of the ensuing decades. This increasing diversity is part of a larger set of cultural trends, which includes fundamental shifts in women's lives, a growing acknowledgement and indeed appreciation of diversity, and a subsequent move toward hyper-differentiation. I begin my spying in the land of postconciliar developments with a look at these cultural trends.

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<sup>9</sup> See WUCWO's website at <http://www.wucwo.org/en/Main/Section-10/Section-1039/History%20of%20WUCWO/>, accessed on April 20, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> The information is from a 2007 interview Wangari Maathai (available at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/november-9-2007/profile-wangari-maathai/4544/>, accessed on June 13, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> McEnroy, *Guests in Their Own House*, 88.

<sup>12</sup> The expression is Lata Mani's, who borrows from Chandra Mohanty and develops the notion in her "Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception," in *Knowing Women: Feminism and Knowledge*, ed. Helen Crowley and Susan Himmelweit (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1992), 306–22.

## SPYING IN THE LAND OF POSTCONCILIAR DEVELOPMENTS

The first sight to note is that the postconciliar reforms coincided with fundamental shifts in women's lives (especially in the north Atlantic world). Among these shifts—largely a result of the second wave of the Women's Movement—were vastly expanding educational opportunities, the sustained entry of women into work beyond the domestic realm, the rise of sophisticated reproductive technologies, diversifying family patterns, and increasing attention to gender-specific inequalities, for example in employment opportunities, career trajectories, earnings, and health care. One might say, in shorthand, that the traditional narrative of “woman” broke off, irrevocably so.

A second sight to register about the postconciliar land is this: in tandem with women's increasingly visible participation in society, the years following Vatican II saw an expansion of the active participation of women in liturgical and sacramental life. Sacramental practices morphed (e.g., a sharp decline in confessions), and new forms of ministry emerged, especially in the realm of lay ecclesial ministries. Women entered positions of pastoral leadership as they began to work as directors of liturgy, youth, and education, as hospital and prison chaplains, campus ministers, interior liturgical designers, etc. Some advocated for women's inclusion in the recently restored permanent diaconate.<sup>13</sup> Catholic women also led informal, lay-centered prayer groups, championed liturgical dance, and practiced faith healing.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, women began to serve on diocesan committees and exercise ecclesial jurisdiction as chancellors of dioceses and as judges on marriage tribunals. Today, women make up 80 percent of ecclesial lay ministers in parishes in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Both lay and religious women alike are prominently engaged in social justice struggles; some have paid with their lives for this faith commitment. Last but not least, we study and teach theology—even the Vatican's International Theological Commission now has female members.<sup>16</sup> The list of expanding ecclesial ministries does not, however, imply that women simply abandoned traditional sacramental practices. Rather, the religious practices of Catholic women diversified. Catholic women around the globe continue to practice age-old popular devotions, many of them traditionally in women's hands.<sup>17</sup> Women also continue to join contemplative orders for a life of prayer, and there are women who warmly embrace the magisterium's pronouncements on liturgical life.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, other Catholic

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<sup>13</sup> See Katharine E. Harmon, “An Historical Perspective for Women and Sacrament: The American Deaconess Movement in the Roman Catholic Church, 1964–1976,” *Studia Liturgica* 41 (2011): 186–210. The advocacy struggle for the ordination of women to the permanent diaconate continues, especially in German-speaking and North American contexts.

<sup>14</sup> A prominent example of a Catholic charismatic faith healer is Barbara Leahy Shlemon. See James P. McCartin, *Prayers of the Faithful: The Shifting Spiritual Life of American Catholics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2010), 140–148.

<sup>15</sup> Patricia Wittberg, “A Lost Generation?” *America* 206:5 (Feb 20, 2012): 13–16.

<sup>16</sup> For the full list of current members, see [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_index-members\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_index-members_en.html), accessed on May 26, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> To name but one scholarly exploration here: Robert A. Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Helen Hull Hitchcock, “Pope Benedict XVI and the ‘Reform of the Reform,’” in *Benedict XVI and the Sacred Liturgy: Proceedings of the First Fota International Liturgy Conference 2008*, ed. Neil J. Roy and Janet E. Rutherford, Fota Liturgy Series (Dublin: Four Courts, 2010), 70–87. Helen Hull Hitchcock is the founding director of Women for Faith & Family. See also her

women create and celebrate women-identified liturgies, writing their own prayers, songs, litanies, and blessings.<sup>19</sup> Some Catholic women have sought priestly ordination. Some are choosing to leave the Church behind.

A third sight to highlight in the postconciliar land is the emergence of feminist theology as a critically important reaction to dominant, unmarked, male accounts of normative Christianity.<sup>20</sup> Initially a Western and largely white discourse, feminist theology soon differentiated. Today, a plurality of feminist theological voices exists, among them Womanist, Latina, African, postcolonial, Dalit, ecofeminist, queer, and intercultural—as well as various combinations thereof. There are also Catholic “new feminists,” who critique—with a touch of irony—“*traditional* feminism” (which the Vatican for its part has labeled “radical”).<sup>21</sup>

The subject of sacraments and sacramentality was largely absent from early feminist writings, but this absence did not go unnoticed for long.<sup>22</sup> Key themes of sacramental theology resonate with a feminist vision after all, as Susan Ross has rightly noted, among them an emphasis on embodiment and materiality.<sup>23</sup> Why then the occlusion of the sacramental? A number of different explanations have been advanced, such as the feminist emphasis on the sacramentality of *all* of life, which eclipses attention paid to the traditional sacraments,<sup>24</sup> or “the widespread conformity of Anglo-American feminist theory to post-Enlightenment epistemologies,”<sup>25</sup> and feminist theology’s “unconscious alliance with liberal Protestantism.”<sup>26</sup> These explanations all hold some truth, but I think it wise to insist that multiple reasons are at work in this occlusion, some of them related to larger cultural trends. Among those is a broad disenchantment with and suspicion of traditional institutions, including religious institutions, of

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1992 collection of essays, [\*The Politics of Prayer: Feminist Language and the Worship of God \(San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992\)\*](#).

<sup>19</sup> A passionate witness to the importance of feminist worship and spirituality is provided by Miriam Therese Winter, “Feminist Women’s Spirituality: Breaking New Ground in the Church,” in *The Church Women Want: Catholic Women in Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 23–31.

<sup>20</sup> See *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Sheila Briggs (New York: Oxford University, 2012), 1.

<sup>21</sup> See the essays in *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*, ed. Michele M. Schumacher (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> To some degree, the disinterest in sacraments in feminist theology continues to this day, see the 2011 *Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* where the term “sacraments” is invoked only once in almost 600 pages, and that in a quote about something else. Since I myself wrote the entry on “feminist ritual practice,” I have to take responsibility for playing my part in the occlusion of the sacramental in this handbook. That the occlusion is more than incidental is confirmed by other recent volumes in feminist theology, for example *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology*, ed. Kwok Pui-lan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), where the theme of sacraments or sacramentality is simply absent. The chapter written by the Filipina Catholic theologian Carmelita Usog on “women’s spirituality” is about justice struggles. *Feminist Theologies: Legacy and Prospect*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) includes a chapter on “Prayer as Poetry” by the Jewish poet and liturgist Marcia Falk (139–54); Christian sacraments are not on the horizon here.

<sup>23</sup> Susan A. Ross, “Church and Sacrament – Community and Worship,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (New York: Cambridge University, 2002), 224–42, at 233.

<sup>24</sup> Ross, “Church and Sacrament,” 226.

<sup>25</sup> Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, “Exploding Mystery: Feminist Theology and the Sacramental,” *Feminist Theology* 12 (2004): 228–236, at 232.

which sacraments are perceived as a sign. At least three other reasons play a part. To begin with, feminist theology initially grew through an anti-hegemonic impulse, distancing itself from traditional theological discourse.<sup>27</sup> Early feminists, I think, mistrusted the lingering dogmatic-juridical odor around the sacraments—in questions about validity, minister, and recipient—rather than appreciating the incense that is the sacraments' main olfactory marker. In addition, the sacraments, when seen primarily through an anti-hegemonic lens, signaled problems: confession to a Father? Ordination that excluded women because of their gender? Feminist theologians focused on the control of a male hierarchy over definitions and access to the sacraments, and therefore on women's *exclusion*.<sup>28</sup> This emphasis led them to overlook women's agency, for example the fact that in the sacrament of marriage the woman who marries is minister of the sacrament, and that Catholic women, contrary to popular opinion, do preside at worship, be it at parish-based liturgies of the hours, convent rites, or occasional liturgies "in women's hands."<sup>29</sup> Lastly, feminist theology, as a consciously contextual theology, often found that the stark, immediate needs of women rather than the seeming finesses of sacramental theology required its fiercest attention. These heart-breaking needs of women around the world range from basic access to water, food, health care, and education to freedom from domestic violence, maternal dying,<sup>30</sup> sex trafficking, son preference, female abortions, and HIV/AIDS infection, to name just a few.

By the 1990s, feminist theologians began to engage the "sacramental imagination" in more sustained ways.<sup>31</sup> Important to name here are Susan Ross, with her ground-breaking book *Extravagant Affections*, and the German theologian Regina Ammicht-Quinn, who edited a collection of essays attending to women's lives as sites of sacramental wisdom.<sup>32</sup> More recently,

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<sup>27</sup> Kathryn Tanner's essay "Social Theory Concerning the 'New Social Movements' and the Practice of Feminist Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 179–97, intervened decisively in that distancing.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Christine E. Gudorf, "The Power to Create: Sacraments and Men's Need to Birth," *Horizons* 14 (1987): 296–309, esp. 299; and Susan A. Ross, "God's Embodiment and Women: Sacraments," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 185–209, esp. 185. The emphasis on exclusion seems rooted not only in "the anger and pain of women excluded from sacramental ministry" (Susan Ross), but also in feminist theory's grounding in an oppositional understanding of power that is inscribed into all gender differences. This grounding has recently been critiqued by the historian of gender Jeanne Boydston, who argues that the practice of gender is not inherently and always about power differentials, since gender is not practiced everywhere in oppositional binaries. See Jeanne Boydston, "Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis," *Gender and History* 20 (2008): 558–83.

<sup>29</sup> See the documentary *Worship in Women's Hands: A Video Documentary*, co-produced by Carol Thomson and Teresa Berger (Durham, NC: FireStream Media, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> About 287,000 maternal deaths were reported for 2010 by a consortium of United Nations agencies. Current estimates confirm a continuing decline in numbers, yet 800 mothers still die every day. See <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/mothers/MMEstimates2012>, accessed on May 22, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> The term appears in 1997 in the subtitle of Mary Catherine Hilker's important book *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997); for her elaboration of the sacramentality of the preached word and of women preaching the Gospel, see esp. 58–70, 144–65.

<sup>32</sup> Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998); and Regina Ammicht-Quinn and Stefanie Spendel, eds., *Kraftfelder: Sakramente in der Lebenswirklichkeit von Frauen*, (Regensburg: Pustet, 1998), esp. 161–83.

the British Catholic theologian Tina Beattie has turned to “redeeming sacramentality”<sup>33</sup> while her compatriot Elizabeth Stuart has pleaded with feminist theologians to “step into the incense,” i.e., to “reclaim the mysterious and the sacramental.”<sup>34</sup> Several other theologians engaged in various ways of “redeeming sacramentality” can be named here, among them Catherine Mowry LaCugna (of blessed memory), Ann Loades, Mary Grey, Siobhán Garrigan, Susan Roll, and some of the authors in *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology*.<sup>35</sup> By now, women’s voices in sacramental theology are quite diverse and can be found everywhere on the broad spectrum of theological positions.<sup>36</sup> The “new feminist” Michele Schumacher even envisions a “feminist sacramentality of the body” that accords “sacramental meaning” to Christ’s masculinity.<sup>37</sup>

In connection with this latter, “new” feminist voice, I have to complicate the picture of the postconciliar land by adding a fourth sight to the third, feminist one. The fourth is the sight of many Catholic women around the globe who lived the postconciliar years *sans* feminist theorizing, or indeed resisting it. I am thinking here, for example, of women in strictly enclosed contemplative communities, and of Eastern rite Catholics (Chaldean, Ruthenian, Maronite, Ukrainian, Armenian, Melkite, Syriac, etc.), as well as of North American women who find traditional forms of Catholic faith and practice compelling. The majority of Opus Dei members are women,<sup>38</sup> and a CARA survey in 2009 showed that women favor the Tridentine Mass in larger numbers than men.<sup>39</sup> There are also the delightful, old, tough women, still in our midst

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<sup>33</sup> Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 290–311.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Stuart, “Exploding Mystery,” at 236, 228. See also her essay “Sacramental Flesh,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 65–75.

<sup>35</sup> To cite but some of these voices here, in chronological order: Mary Grey, “Beyond Exclusion: Towards a Feminist Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” in *The Candles are Still Burning: Directions in Sacrament and Spirituality*, FS Christiane Brusselmans, ed. Mary Grey et al. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1995), 3–12; *The Sense of the Sacramental: Movement and Measure in Art and Music, Place and Time*, ed. David Brown and Ann Loades (London: SPCK, 1995); Siobhán Garrigan, *Beyond Ritual: Sacramental Theology after Habermas* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004); Susan Abraham and Elena Procario-Foley, eds., *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology: Shoulder to Shoulder* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), esp. part 3; and Susan Roll, in her presentation “Women and Prophetic Sacramentality” at the 2010 annual convention of the CTSA (available at [www.ctsa-online.org](http://www.ctsa-online.org)).

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Susan K. Wood, “The Liturgy and Sacraments,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Catholicism*, ed. James J. Buckley et al., Blackwell Companions to Religion (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 340–53. Recently, Kimberly Hope Belcher has shed an intriguing new light on sacramental participation in infant baptism in her book *Efficacious Engagement: Sacramental Participation in the Trinitarian Mystery* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011). Not an overtly “feminist” inquiry, Belcher’s work can nevertheless be read as attentive to maternal ways of knowing, for example in her consideration of breast feeding, infant exposure to language, the “first bath” (103–7) and the “prelinguistic, nonlinguistic, and extralinguistic dimensions of grace” (43).

<sup>37</sup> Michele M. Schumacher, “The Unity of the Two: Toward a New Feminist Sacramentality of the Body,” in *Women in Christ*, 201–31, at 211. For a stringent critique of this feminism as “Catholic backlash against feminism” see Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 23–26, at 23.

<sup>38</sup> 55% of Opus Dei members worldwide are women; cf. John L. Allen, *Opus Dei: An Objective Look Behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 179–205, esp. 180. For voices of Opus Dei women themselves, see Marie T. Oates et al., eds., *Women of Opus Dei: In Their Own Words* (New York: Crossroad, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> The survey results are available online at <http://cara.georgetown.edu/NewsandPress/PressReleases/pr082409.pdf>, accessed on May 1, 2012.

who definitely did not experience themselves as powerless and marginal in the Catholic Church of the past.

If nothing else, these women invite us to acknowledge some liturgical losses that have marked the postconciliar years, losses that affected women's sacramental practices. Important here is the large-scale loss of practices of popular devotion and sacramentals.<sup>40</sup> Many of these had been in women's hands, and most of them were more sensory and lavish than Catholic liturgy as such. The liturgical isolation of the Eucharist, which was one consequence of the decline of popular devotions, proved deeply problematic, in my view. The Sunday Mass is experienced differently when it is the only liturgical practice of the week, rather than being part of a broad spectrum of devotional-sacramental practices that pervade the everyday, be they pilgrimages, Friday fasting, the Angelus prayer at noon, novenas, eucharistic adoration, the blessing of children at home, grace at meals, or the rosary, to name just a few.

In an interesting twist on this decline—a twist owing largely to contemporary migratory movements—practices of popular piety, while they have waned, have also found new homes. The growing importance of *Quinceañera* celebrations in the United States is one case in point. For the Catholic blogger *Rebel Girl*, these celebrations are “the 8th Sacrament,”<sup>41</sup> at least in Hispanic Catholicism in the Americas (and what a gender-specific sacrament this is). *Quinceañera* celebrations have spread so widely in the United States that a bilingual *Quinceañera* ritual was approved in 2007. Another example of the migration of popular devotions, in this case into cyberspace, is the emergence of online eucharistic adoration,<sup>42</sup> pilgrimages, and shrines. Women's altars had already migrated somewhat earlier into the expansive and diffuse realm of women's spirituality.<sup>43</sup>

Another postconciliar loss has to do with the revision of the sanctoral calendar and the presence or absence of female saints within it. Since women's history is significantly less documented than the history of elite males, the historicity-driven calendar revision after Vatican II meant the loss of more female than male saints in the liturgical calendar, despite women's already significant underrepresentation there.<sup>44</sup> Maybe these sightings of losses (and more could be named)<sup>45</sup> help to account for women's divergent reception of postconciliar liturgical developments.

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<sup>40</sup> With “practices of popular devotion and sacramentals,” I refer to what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* named “*pia exercitia*” (SC 13, 60). Regarding these, Peter Phan has rightly noted: “It is commonplace that what the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) called the *pia exercitia*, the so-called popular devotions, did not get, both at the council and during its aftermath, the attention proportionate to the important role they played in the life of ordinary Catholics... This neglect of popular devotions was even more pronounced and widespread in the postconciliar reforms,” *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines. A Commentary*, ed. Peter Phan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2005), at 1.

<sup>41</sup> See <http://iglesiadescalza.blogspot.com/2010/04/quinceanera-8th-sacrament.html>, accessed on May 2, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Via webcam from the Chapel of Divine Love of the Holy Spirit Adoration Sisters in Philadelphia (available at <http://savior.org/default.htm>, accessed on June 13, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> See Kay Turner, *Beautiful Necessity: The Art and Meaning of Women's Altars* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999).

<sup>44</sup> For details, see Gisela Muschiol, “Wer braucht den Drachentöter noch? Heiligenlegenden nach der Revision des römischen Kalenders,” *Diakonia* 31 (2000): 127–31. Among the women saints who disappeared were Barbara, Thecla, Jovita, Dorothea, and Domitilla.

<sup>45</sup> I explore these issues further in my essay “*I ♥ Latin Mass? Sonntagsgottesdienst und*

Where do women in the Catholic Church go from here, as we move from a time properly described as “postconciliar” deeper into the twenty-first century? What will the future hold? What new sightings might appear on the sacramental horizon?

### SPYING FORWARD: SACRAMENTAL SIGHTINGS ON THE HORIZON

In what follows, I present a set of six sights that either will or should shape sacramental practices in the years to come, particularly for women in their diverse ways of being Catholic. If my look back has revealed anything, it is that there is no one way of “being Catholic while gendered female” in the twenty-first century. We are more than 600 million human beings and have many different and indeed divergent ways of living sacramentally. Some women are presently enduring profoundly discouraging times, e.g. the women of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. At the same time some women are entering the Catholic Church with deep joy. Others are leaving the Church behind, in the United States especially women from the youngest generation of Catholic adults.<sup>46</sup> Is there any shared vision in sight? Here is my spy’s report.

I begin with a background check, namely by confessing twin theological hopes of mine. One is that sacramental theology will continue to reroot itself deeply in the liturgical enactment and performance of the Christian faith. The other is that this liturgical performance of faith will once again be seen to encompass more than the modern narrowing on the *cultus publicus* allowed for.<sup>47</sup> With this narrowing of the meaning of “liturgy”—now limited to official, written texts, authorized by the highest ecclesial authority—other liturgical expressions came to be relegated to the margins.<sup>48</sup> Categories such as “popular piety” and, later, “paraliturgies” emerged to denote the manifold ritual practices increasingly written out of the construal of “liturgy” proper. I for one consider this narrow disciplinary bounding of the “liturgical” problematic and inadequate, not least for a view of women’s sacramental practices.<sup>49</sup>

Broadening the liturgical and anchoring the sacraments within this broadened liturgical performance of the faith leads one to the church as *Grundsakrament*.<sup>50</sup> Sacraments are never

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Frauenleben,” *ET-Studies* 2 (2010): 265–81.

<sup>46</sup> The sociologist Patricia Wittberg recently drew attention to this in her essay “A Lost Generation?” (see note 15). She notes especially that millennial Catholic women (born between 1981 and 1995) are the first generation of American Catholic women who are less devout and less orthodox than their male counterparts. At the same time, these women remain disproportionately more interested in things “spiritual” than men their age.

<sup>47</sup> More on this in my recent book *Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical Tradition: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy’s Past*, Ashgate Liturgy, Worship, and Society Series (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> See Arnold Angenendt, *Liturgik und Historik. Gab es eine organische Liturgie-Entwicklung?* *Quaestiones Disputatae* 189 (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2001), 142.

<sup>49</sup> See C. Clifford Flanigan et al., “Liturgy as Social Performance: Expanding the Definitions,” in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001), 695–714, and Gerd Althoff, “The Variability of Rituals in the Middle Ages,” in *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography*, ed. Gerd Althoff et al., Publications of the German Historical Institute (New York: Cambridge University, 2002), 71–87.

<sup>50</sup> The church as *Grundsakrament* points to Christ of course, the *Ursakrament*. See, *inter alia*, Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sakramententheologie*, Leitfaden Theologie 17 (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1987), 47–52, on the historical trajectory of the notion. English translation: Herbert Vorgrimler, *Sacramental*

merely a ritual transaction between minister and recipient. They are, rather, concelebrations in the truest sense of the word; the whole gathered assembly and each person present within it concelebrate. What might this mean for women? Searching for an answer to this question will lead to my first sacramental sighting forward. My argument develops as follows. The ecclesial community at worship is always gendered,<sup>51</sup> and even if women are typically the majority of those present, men are not excluded from participation by reason of their gender. In addition, there might be an intersex person in the assembly,<sup>52</sup> possibly a transgender person, and maybe also someone who identifies beyond established gender labels as queer or gender-non-conforming. This then, is my first sacramental sighting forward: in a liturgical body count of the ecclesial assembly,<sup>53</sup> the Body of Christ is dominantly female, and at the same time multi-gendered.<sup>54</sup> One thing this ecclesial Body of Christ definitely is *not*, is unambiguously male.

My second sacramental sighting emerges out of this recognition. In the dominantly female, multi-gendered Body of Christ, gender is performed in profoundly unstable ways. Here are some glimpses of this instability. In its Head at least, the Body of Christ might be considered male—yet Christ “was male but born of no male matter.”<sup>55</sup> In most ecclesial assemblies, the presider is male, yet priestly masculinity is defined around a sexual abstinence that renders the priest, liturgically at least, hyper-generative.<sup>56</sup> The presider also stands *in persona ecclesiae*, a male body standing in for an ecclesial Virgin Bride, who is also both *casta meretrix* (the “chaste whore”) and *mater ecclesia* (Mother Church), pregnant with life, giving birth, and nursing. And there is Mary, the Mother of God, who is both the daughter of the Father as well as the mother

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*Theology*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992); and Nathan D. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments*, Theology in Global Perspective Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), esp. 252f.

<sup>51</sup> I do not mean to suggest here that gender always and everywhere is a primary marker in the ecclesial assembly. On the contrary, worship invites us to resist the absolutizing of sexed identity, since Christian faith forms subject positions that relativize all markers of difference.

<sup>52</sup> The Intersex Society of North America defines its advocacy group as “people born with an anatomy that someone decided is not standard for male or female,” (available at <http://www.isna.org/>, accessed on May 7, 2012). A concrete example of the sacramental complications such a condition can cause is the South African [Sally/Selwyn Gross](#), who was born intersex, then male-identified and raised as a boy, later to become a Dominican priest. Gross transitioned when medical tests showed that hormonally s/he was primarily female. For more information, see <http://queeringthechurch.com/2011/09/22/how-a-woman-became-a-dominican-priest-and-teacher-of-moral-theology/>, accessed March 23, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> I owe the initial idea for this to Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 141.

<sup>54</sup> See Stuart, “Exploding Mystery,” 234. Graham Ward developed the notion of the “multi-gendered body of the Church” out of the “displacements” of the gendered body of Jesus Christ in his 1998 essay “Bodies: The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank et al. (London: Routledge, 1998), 163–81, at 176.

<sup>55</sup> Stuart, “Exploding Mystery,” 234.

<sup>56</sup> More on this in *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *Genders and Sexualities in History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Lynda Coon, “‘What is the Word if not Semen?’ Priestly Bodies in Carolingian Exegesis,” in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (New York: Cambridge University, 2004), 278–300; Jacqueline Murray, “Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity,” in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004), 24–42.

and sometimes the bride of the Son.<sup>57</sup> We clearly are beyond the realm of actual, constrained, gendered bodies here. Rather, we have entered the land of a deeply fecund and profoundly gender-fluid liturgical symbolic.

What if we rendered visible our liturgical tradition as just such a land? Is it possible to spy a land with a powerful stream of natality running through it, where God the Father can give birth and might have breasts, where Jesus' eucharistic body certainly is "no longer Christ as simply and biologically male,"<sup>58</sup> and where Jesus's gift of himself in the Eucharist can be understood as nursing. This is the land where Jesus's body on the cross is in labor, torn open, bleeding, groaning, and in the midst of all the violence to the maternal body, giving new life; where monks can understand themselves as receptive, submissive brides, or as pregnant women, careful not to abort but to bring to full term the new life that grows within them;<sup>59</sup> where the Spirit can be glimpsed as a mother, giving new life in baptism (as in the early Syriac tradition), or as a male lover, who inseminates the baptismal womb of the font (in many Western sources); where Mary is venerated as a priest, the *virgo sacerdos*, the first to offer us the body and blood of Christ. And what if, rather than claiming all these Christian gender instabilities to be "queer," we simply acknowledged them for what they (also) are: deeply and wonderfully traditional? This indeed *is* our liturgical heritage: a land where liturgy is embraced through images of lush sensuality, as the erotic, life-giving encounter between God and human beings at worship.<sup>60</sup> Tina Beattie puts it thus:

The liturgy...allows us to come out of ourselves, into a space of gendered sacramentality where we become brides and grooms, lovers and mothers, parents and children, friends and companions in the ever-present wedding feast of God with creation.<sup>61</sup>

Beattie's allusion to God's wedding with creation points to a theological question I have so far sidestepped, namely, how insistence on a liturgically-focused sacramentality relates to broader notions of sacramentality. Why should we return to liturgy as a foundational sacramental site rather than to anthropological givens, creation, history, the everyday lives of women, or the struggle for justice (to name just a few)?

I address this question in my third sacramental sighting. To begin with, turning to the liturgical tradition is not a turning away from other sites of sacramentality. It is, rather, a turning to all the other sites with utmost passion and clarity, a passion and clarity sharpened, deepened, and nourished by liturgy. There is a good reason, I submit, for re-turning to the liturgical tradition and the sacramentality of the sacraments at this point in time. Today, spiritual

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<sup>57</sup> The latter theme appears, for example, in the Mariology of Hans Urs von Balthasar who draws on an early Christian theme.

<sup>58</sup> Ward, "Bodies," 168.

<sup>59</sup> The theme appears repeatedly, especially in early Cistercian writings, and finds a particularly powerful expression in Gueric of Igny's second sermon on the Annunciation (PL 185, 123). English text in Gueric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons* Vol. 2, trans. by the Monks of Saint Bernard Abbey, Cistercian Fathers Series 32 (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 39–46, esp. 45.

<sup>60</sup> This erotic reading of sacramental realities is widespread not least with regard to the Eucharist, here understood as love-making. See for example Hans Urs von Balthasar's question (with a focus on male agency): "What else is his [Christ's] Eucharist but...an endless act of fruitful outpouring of his whole flesh, such as a man can only achieve for a moment with a limited organ of his own body?" Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (London: SPCK, 1975), 150. See Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 144, for a critique.

<sup>61</sup> Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism*, 289.

sensibilities are quite attuned to the everyday sites of God's presence in the world. This contemporary rediscovery of the sacramentality of "everything" was a necessary reaction to a particular construal of the spiritual as otherworldly, church-focused, and priest-centered. But the "Everyday God"<sup>62</sup> celebrated in contemporary spirituality needs more than the everyday for us to comprehend that "there is nothing ordinary about an incarnate God."<sup>63</sup> As women, we have claimed our "quotidian mysteries"<sup>64</sup> as deeply sacramental, pregnant with holiness and divine presence, be they the love shared around a breakfast table, the insights based on the playfulness of our cats, or the deep wisdom of a compost heap that turns lemon rinds and coffee grounds into life-giving soil. This shift of spiritual gravity has been a vital affirmation in a culture that continues to code women's lives as trivial. And yet, having discovered the sacramentality of the everyday, we do well to reclaim the sacramentality of the liturgy itself—the Church's feasts and fasts, its symbols and images, its pregnant words and gendered bodies, so far from the "sterile masculinities"<sup>65</sup> that seemed to dominate scouting reports of the liturgical tradition. This liturgical tradition, after all, is not separate from or opposed to quotidian and material realities. Rather, it has its own ancient materiality woven into its very fabric: gendered bodies, water and wine, oil and bread, light and incense. With this ancient materiality, the liturgy opens up a world beyond either the religious flavor of the day or my own contingent life and world with its kitchen table, cat, and compost heap. There is more to encountering the Divine Presence than the spiritual experiences mediated by my middle-class existence and its trappings.

So much for three core theological convictions that I hope will shape sacramental practices of women as well as everybody else in the future. I would be remiss, however, if I did not also address broader cultural trends that I think will shape future sacramental practices. I choose to highlight the following three from among many possible ones and add them to my spy's list.

My fourth sacramental sighting emphasizes the rapid change in contemporary understandings of gendering processes, a change that has complicated how we interpret the relationship between gendered embodiment and liturgical life. This change has brought gender differences beyond "women" to the forefront of liturgical politics (e.g., in questions about the ordination of openly gay Christians, same-sex marriage, "queer worship"—all of which do relate to women's lives of course, be they lesbians, trans, or gender-non-conforming). These changes do not mean that the subject of women and sacramental practice has become an agenda of the past; the majority of worshippers today are still women, after all. What is needed, however, is a more complex narrative of what it means to be gendered female in the church today since more than one alternative is available. How does the church respond to a person born intersex and surgically forced into being a girl? Or to a transgender man (female to male, without sex reassignment) and a transsexual woman (male to female, body-reassigned) and the couple they might choose to become?<sup>66</sup> What about Christians who define themselves as queer or gender-

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<sup>62</sup> This is the title of a beautiful song by Bernadette Farrell.

<sup>63</sup> Siobhán Garrigan, "Worship in a Violent World: Deconstructing *Ordinary* Liturgies," *Reflections* 91:1 (2004): 23–31, at 24.

<sup>64</sup> The expression is Kathleen Norris's; see her little volume *The Quotidian Mysteries: Laundry, Liturgy, and "Women's Work,"* 1998 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> The expression is Tina Beattie's. Frances Croake Frank's poem "Did the Woman Say?" often quoted by feminist theologians, poignantly spells out such sterile masculinity as "dry old men, brocaded robes belying barrenness." The poem opens Ross's essay, "God's Embodiment and Women," 185f.

<sup>66</sup> I did not invent this scenario.

non-conforming, and check “other” rather than “male” or “female”? These questions have to be raised as part of attending to questions of women and gender in years to come.

Quite different from this is the fifth sacramental sighting, which focuses on those women who should be here but are not, i.e., the world’s “missing” women. There are roughly 160 million of them, women who should be walking the earth but are not—owing to large-scale selective abortions, son preference, female infanticide, maternal deaths, abuse, neglect, the uneven distribution of resources, etc. In a world where two X chromosomes continue to spell such dangers to women’s very existence, we must insist on linking sacramentality to the flourishing of women, especially those whose lives are threatened. Catholic women around the world have done immensely important work here, both in their scholarly labor and in their activism.<sup>67</sup> Not least of all, the linking of women’s suffering with the abuse and violation of Mother Earth seems to me crucial in this time of planetary emergency.

My sixth and last sacramental sighting simply lifts up for consideration another contemporary trend that is reshaping how we live, namely the new information technologies, and a developing sacramentality in cyberspace. Some of the characteristics of this cyberspace sacramentality are attractive particularly for women, not least because their agency is less circumscribed than in many offline religious contexts.<sup>68</sup> Women committed to traditional concerns of Catholic domesticity have also found the blogosphere an open space for their voices.<sup>69</sup>

### ENDING WITH A SPY MYSTERY

To summarize in two sentences what I have argued here: whoever is committed to women’s lives will have to take the diversity of Catholic women and their sacramental practices seriously. Whoever is committed to the church on its journey through time needs to take women’s lives seriously.

Two points remain for me to stress in conclusion. First, not simply any sacramental sighting can lay claim to truthfulness. Critical, constructive theological reflection becomes crucially important at this point. And it is here, in the subjects and sites of such reflection, that the change over the last fifty years has truly been amazing—in large part owing to the entry of women into the hallowed halls of academia. Women as Catholic theologians are here, and we are here to stay.<sup>70</sup> I for one give thanks to God for this calling.

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<sup>67</sup> To cite but two examples from North America: the “Sister-to-Sister” initiative seeks to empower sub-Saharan women to address HIV/AIDS issues (see <http://allafrica-sistertosister.org/index.html>). Rosemary Carbine, in a carefully argued essay in *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology* (173–92) charts an intriguing way of linking women, sacramentality, and a justice-oriented public church.

<sup>68</sup> I am thinking particularly of the internet’s challenges to traditional structures and sources of authority, as well as of online forms of gaining ritual expertise. For more on this see Heidi A. Campbell, “Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (2012): 64–93.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, the “Women of Grace” blog (available at <http://www.womenofgrace.com/blog/>, accessed on 6 June 6, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Pope Benedict stressed the “special contribution” of women to theology in a 2010 General Audience, see [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/audiences/2010/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20100908\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100908_en.html), accessed on May 17, 2012. The recent document of the Vatican’s International Theological Commission, “Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria,” also

Last but not least, a word on the image of the Promised Land I have invoked throughout. You may by now wonder what on earth I think this Promised Land might be. The time has come to acknowledge that my Promised Land is part of a grander spy mystery, if you will. In the end, the true Promised Land is not a place but the ultimate Mystery (μυστήριον, *mysterium*, *sacramentum*) of the life-giving presence of the Triune God. And if nothing else, “sacramental grace” surely means that we are not left to our own crutches in limping toward this Promised Land, but that God Herself is in search of us and comes to meet us—in the sacraments of the church, and in the sacramentality of all life.

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names the “new theological voices, especially those of laymen and women,” among the “fundamentally positive developments” since Vatican II (no.1). See [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_doc\\_20111129\\_teologia-oggi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_teologia-oggi_en.html), accessed on May 8, 2012. Sister Sara Butler, M.S.B.T., was a member of the sub-commission that prepared the study.