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Publication date

2017

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

S & F online

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Bracke, S. (2017). Strange Questions, Queerish Souls? Resisting the Woman Question in a Contemporary Catholic Movement (Comunione e Liberazione). *S & F online*, 14(2).
<http://sfonline.barnard.edu/queer-religion/strange-questions-queerish-souls-resisting-the-woman-question-in-a-contemporary-catholic-movement-comunione-e-liberazione/>

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QUEER/RELIGION

Strange Questions, Queerish Souls? Resisting the Woman Question in a Contemporary Catholic Movement (*Comunione e Liberazione*)

by Sarah Bracke

Article acknowledgements.^[1]

Introduction

During a moment of light-hearted conversation in the aftermath of a recorded interview, Barbara jokingly complained that my question about being a woman within the Catholic movement she belonged to was way too difficult for her. We were lingering in a sunlit corridor of the headquarters of *Comunione e Liberazione* in Milan, and Serena, a friend and informant who worked in the building, joined us. Once she understood the subject of our conversation, Serena burst out in laughter and joined Barbara's assessment of "the woman question." "You know," Barbara continued on a more serious note, "I never really thought of myself as a woman." Serena, in full preparation for her marriage, wholeheartedly agreed. "Maybe only now I'm beginning to be convinced of the possibility that the concept might apply to me," she added with fine irony. I joined the amusement and declared that I knew what they meant; and that my realization that "the concept might equally apply to me" got me involved in Women's Studies in the first place. This was the cause of more laughter: "So you have to study it to know what it means?"

In this essay, I revisit my earlier ethnographic work within *Comunione e Liberazione* (CL) in an attempt to unravel some of the complexities of 'doing gender' within a contemporary Catholic movement.^[2] This revisiting takes place in the context of more recent conversations on the intersection of queer studies and religion, and with the aim of looking for "queer moments" within religious formations that are often assumed to steer away from all things queer.^[3] Within the scholarly literature, CL is usually considered in terms of "traditionalism" and has regularly been included under the rubric of "fundamentalism."^[4] The latter term has been extensively critiqued and deconstructed,^[5] yet its continued usage speaks to a first point of discussion that this essay engages with, that is, the symbolic usage of gender within the study of religion. The designation "fundamentalism" is indeed assumed to say something about gender relations and, vice versa, gender relations are often taken as a defining ground for what constitutes fundamentalism, that is to say, as a criterion of distinction between various religious formations. Thus the relationship between gender and fundamentalism has become somewhat tautological: gender relations in religious movements that are considered conservative or fundamentalist are assumed to take a particular—traditional or conservative—shape, while at the same time conservative gender relations are taken as a defining sign of fundamentalist religion. This tautological bind poses problems for an analytically sound demarcation of different religious tendencies, and also brings us to the limits of gender as an analytical category, as gender here tends to operate in a symbolic manner. That is to say, gender in this case operates as a boundary marker between fundamentalism and liberal secularism, rather than signaling an intricate field of power relations in need of empirical investigation. Gender relations, in other words, are readily taken as an indicator of where to situate a religious group on the theological and political spectrum, at the expense of a more careful inquiry into how gender relations are configured in a given religious environment. This symbolic function of gender tends to rely on assumptions of what 'conservative' and 'progressive' ways of doing gender are. A first stake of this essay, then, is to retrieve gender's analytical capacity in the study of a religious movement that aims to restore an encompassing Christian life within a secular world. I do so through revisiting some of my ethnographic studies on female religious biographies, and through considering situated understandings of femininity, womanhood, and the gendering of personhood within CL.

Traditionally, the assumption goes, men and women within the Catholic Church are seen as different but equal, and as complementing each other. This understanding of complementarity as a quintessential Catholic way of doing gender does not only prevail in society at large, where it belongs to a larger set of ideas about gender and religion. Since the development of Karol Wojtyła's theology of the body^[6] since the 1970s, the Vatican appears to have high stakes in suggesting that the idea of complementarity has a longstanding history within the Church. A genealogical analysis of complementarity, however, shows it is anything but a "traditional" principle according to which gender relations in the Catholic Church have been organized for

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many centuries. Scholarship on early and medieval Christianity has demonstrated that the doing of gender within the Church has been complex and varied.^[7] The turn to complementarity, moreover, has been exposed by Mary Anne Case as a mid-20th century innovation imported into Catholicism. At the theological level, this innovation occurred through the work of converts such as the former Protestant Dietrich von Hildebrand, while at a more pastoral and political level complementarity emerged in an attempt to reconcile commitments to separate spheres and the equality of the sexes.^[8] Case diligently traces the emergence of complementarity within the Church and connects its current prevalence to the Church's rejection of gender and demonization of "gender theory" or "gender ideology", in response to gender mainstreaming and various other ways in which insights from gender studies have spread through different sectors of society in the second half of the twentieth century.^[9] This brings me to the second stake of this essay: through a case-study of CL, I hope to make a contribution to a critical genealogy of complementarity within Catholicism, and more precisely through attending to a different approach to gender relations within the Church. This point is emphasized by a case study that does not come from progressive strands within Catholicism, including feminist and queer theologies, but rather from a movement that is understood as traditionalist and close to the Church hierarchy.

The essay concludes by engaging a third point, namely the question of how 'queer' this particular approach to gender is, and whether queer is an appropriate term to use in this context. This question is raised in the context of new conversations on religious studies and queerness, and queer Christianity.^[10]

Against the Particularized Treatment of Souls

Comunione e Liberazione finds its origins in Northern Italy in the early 1950s, when a young priest, don Luigi Giussani, filed a request to be transferred from teaching theology at a seminary to working with high school students. His request came in the wake of a train journey that was marked by an encounter with young people whom he found disturbingly ignorant of the Christian faith, at a time when Italy was assumed to be a deeply religious society. Giussani, however, intuited that such an assumption might be faulty, and that behind a religious façade a profound process of secularization was rapidly taking place. This led him to dedicate his life to reconstructing Christian religious life in a bottom-up manner. In 1954 Giussani began working as a chaplain at the Berchet Lyceum in Milan, where initially he gathered pupils within the existing structures of *Azione Cattolica* or Catholic Action, a lay movement that sought to encourage Catholic influence on society. Working within those structures, however, proved limited, and Giussani found the Catholic association within the lyceum to be far less organized and assertive compared to other student associations, notably the communist students.

He was particularly troubled by the sex-segregated structure of Catholic Action, with its separate chapters for boys and girls, which was characteristic for all organizing within the Church at the time. Vehemently rejecting this "particularized" treatment of souls, Giussani considered it undermined the realization of the human condition in general, which should be the only ideal to attain.

One of the fundamental pedagogical criteria of Catholic Action was effectively the 'personalized' treatment in relation to sex, age, and profession. That method, which appears to me to be in perfect contradiction with the unitary character of the human experience, is not unimportant in the association's failure. To be a woman, a man, a student or an engineer does not constitute an ideal. Only the realization of the human condition is in itself an ideal to attain; everything else is a circumstance and a particularity that only has sense when it is attached to the whole, to the fundamental problem.^[11]

The human soul, Giussani insisted, is fundamentally free from any particularities, and this became one of critical pedagogical principles of the movement he initiated. With this principle came novel ways of organizing, where boys and girls would mingle, which at the time was met with disapproval from the ecclesial authorities and led to inevitable confrontations. Giussani defended "mixity" in general terms, which included not only sex but other important dividing lines in Catholic organizations at the time, such as age and profession. Yet sex became the spearhead of his quarrels with, and rejection of, a particularized treatment. No doubt because sex-segregation was so entrenched in the organizational structures of the Church at the time, and mingling boys and girls in a Catholic youth movement represented a serious transgression of prevailing boundaries. Those boundaries were further animated by the Church's fear of sex, which, in Giussani's view, resulted into simplistic moralism.^[12] Gathering boys and girls in the same spaces and meetings, Giussani insisted, was more in accordance with the teachings of the Church than both the segregation and the moralism that characterized the organizational practices of the Catholic Church in Italy in the 1950s.

The practice of strict sex-segregated organizing in the Church at large was abandoned after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Giussani felt vindicated and his followers, who would only take up the name *Comunione e Liberazione* in 1971, considered themselves as forerunners of the Council. Within the on-going process of interpretation of the Council's outcomes, which was particularly intense in its immediate aftermath, Giussani would position his movement as a more truthful or authentic reading of the spirit of the Council, in comparison to other post-conciliar groups and tendencies with whom the movement often found itself in confrontation.^[13] The movement's rejection of sex segregation served this positioning well, and hence played an important symbolic role. Yet more than that, the rejection reflected deeply held beliefs about the personhood among Giussani's followers, as I came to observe during my initial fieldwork within the movement.

***Pero la tua domanda e un po' strana!* Resisting the Woman Question**

I first encountered the movement in 1998, while I was doing fieldwork on women and religious revivals in the Russian Federation. In 2000 I did a first longer stretch of fieldwork among young women in CL in Italy. Most of my interlocutors during this time were students, who typically lived in the movement's student houses. Many of them were not born into the movement but encountered it during their years in high school or college. In our conversations they typically went through great length narrating how they came to know the movement and how that religious universe became attractive to them as one to which they wanted to belong. In line with the other case studies of women and religious movements pushing back against secular culture that I was investigating at the time, I was particularly interested in the gender dimension of my interlocutors' stories, and was seeking the traces of sexual difference within our conversations. Yet more often than not I failed to find such traces in the case of CL, despite deliberate attempts to insert sexual difference in narratives that seemed to have fenced it out. *Did it make a difference that you were a girl at the time? Would that have been the same for your male friends? Was it important to you that this role model was a woman?*

My interlocutors did not have much to say to such questions, and the more I tried, the more the relative absence of a discourse on sexual difference became tangible. This eventually led to a moment I had hoped to avoid, i.e. to me fully laying out "the woman question." More concretely, I would ask my interlocutors, usually at the end of an interview, what being a Catholic woman meant to them, and what it entailed to be a woman within CL. Most often the question would come out somewhat clumsily or awkwardly, and almost always interrupted the respondent's own narrative. It also ran counter to my practice of doing ethnography, in which I prefer questions to emerge more organically in relation to what interlocutors bring to the conversation. In contrast, when it came to these young women in CL, "the woman question" looked for an elaboration on something that was not there. It interpellated the respondents in a way they resisted or were not used to. It was consistently experienced as "the difficult question," and often not understood at first. *Pero la tua domanda e un po' strana!* "Your question," they informed me, "is a bit strange."

Much more can be said about that strange question. Like the fact that my early attempt to explore the gender dimension of the biographies of pious women was so focused by the question of sexual difference and the assumptions upon which this focus rested. Yet it was also this focus that revealed my interlocutors' resistance to the question of sexual difference. Of course, I don't mean to suggest that sexual difference was absent from the lives of my interlocutors. Clearly they had been socialized in a sexually differentiated society, they identified as women, and most often presented as unambiguously feminine. Nor do I mean to suggest that the question of sexual difference was absent from the movement they belonged to. There is no doubt that CL upholds certain norms and values about gender relations and the movement belongs to the Catholic Church where discussions about sexual difference have been, and continue to be, topics of much debate, and became entrenched in theological visions and dogma. Rather, what I mean to say is that my interlocutors seemed to lack or resist an elaborate discourse on femininity, as well as the application of such discourse to one's own personhood. There was, in other words, a significant gap between my interlocutors' narratives about their selves and their religious belonging—that is to say, between them as religious subjects—and the language of sexual difference. And when I did push further, and wanted them to speak about sexual difference, there was a tendency to associate sexual difference with "the outside world." Sexual difference was relevant for Italian society at large, they would argue, giving examples such as the commodification of women on national television ("Have you seen any other country in the world where women presenting TV shows are almost naked?") or in the streets. In this vein they qualified my concern with sexual difference as a secular concern, a concern of secular society, where they perceived differences between men and women to be more pronounced than in their movement. If anything, they suggested, the movement attenuated or sheltered them from the ubiquity of sexual difference in society at large.

Sexual Difference and "Stages of Life"

This pushback against sexual difference raised many questions. Sharing some of these questions with a colleague at the Catholic University of Milan, who was also affiliated with the movement, led to a twofold response. On the theological level, she confirmed, sexual difference was indeed not relevant for CL, and this had been the case from the movement's inception. As a sociologist, however, she insisted that the movement should be held accountable for its male hierarchy. If sexual difference does not matter to the soul, as she put it, and this is how it should be, then why are all the leaders male? And yet precisely her question, as well as her desire for more female leaders, introduces the idea of sexual difference—a question which she insists to be irrelevant, at least for what really matters. The tension she put her finger on, and which she qualified as a tension between theology and sociology, resonates with the kinds of paradoxes Joan Scott^[14] identified when investigating how both accepting and refusing sexual difference in politics was constitutive to modern movements and struggles by women for the right to citizenship in France.

Of course sexual difference, and indeed the understanding of men and women taking on complementary roles, was not entirely absent from the narratives of my interlocutors. Yet references to sexual difference were characterized by two features. First, there was a tension between references to sexually differentiated roles—complementarity—on the one hand and the commitment to an undifferentiated soul on the other. These two potentially contradictory attachments were held together through what I came to understand as the crux of my interlocutors' vision on gender and sexual difference. The point of the matter, they insisted, was that the difference represented by sexually differentiated bodies was inessential, that is to say, that this difference is not situated on the level of the self or subjectivity. In the language of my interlocutors, sexual difference did not touch upon the soul. This is precisely what sets CL's vision on sexual difference apart from the (new) discourse on complementarity, in which womanhood (as well as manhood) acquires an essential dimension. References to complementary roles, in other words, remained in the shadow of a more ontological discourse on the unity of the soul—a unity that transgresses differences. This resonates with the early Christian idea that "being in Christ" undoes the opposition between men and women, and with the vision that sexual difference is considered as a characteristic of the fallen status of human beings. There is

indeed a longstanding history in which being a pious Christian is considered to entail a transformation of commonplace gender roles.^[15]

Second, references to complementarity were, to a large extent, reserved for stories of the family and married life. This also accounts for the fact that the students I was in conversation with, who had not (yet) established families of their own, spoke of complementarity in such half-hearted ways. If they hinted at complementarity, their articulations were marked by doubts and sometimes sounded like guesses. *I suppose that women might be more susceptible to their emotions when making a decision, right?* Their investment in discourses of womanhood, femininity, and complementarity remained low as they connected all of these to a “stage of life” they did not find themselves in. My married interlocutors, on the other hand, generally did have some interest in thinking about femininity, even if they remained committed to affirming the undifferentiated character of the soul. Sexual difference, in sum, was situated on the level of particular roles one might take up (e.g. in a marriage), but not on the level of a person’s very essence.

This distinction between the narratives of young students and married women raises the significance of “states of life” when it comes to understandings of sexual difference and constructions of femininity. In the Catholic vision that followers of the movement took very seriously, there are two “states of life”: either to get married and establish a family or to take religious vows. Students are considered to be in an undecided moment of life. This means that their life has not yet taken a more definite form, and that their time is one of discerning one’s vocation. As they move towards the end of their student years, the expectation grows that their vocation will be first discerned and then enacted. Only in the case of matrimony does sexual difference acquire some substance. The opening anecdote of this essay illustrates the point: Serena began considering that “the concept [of woman] might apply to me” as she was preparing for her wedding. Before that moment, which represents the transition from an undecided phase into one of the two accepted states of life, she simply did not feel interpellated by the category of woman. It is matrimony that introduces the interpellation of “woman” in her life, which is, from the very outset, entangled with that of “wife.” The practice of preparing for matrimony, including counseling sessions with a priest and the couple, suggests that taking up the position of woman/wife is a process of becoming that involves various kinds of preparatory labor and (spiritual) guidance. There is a certain understanding at work here that “one is not born a woman/wife,” but rather becomes one, and more specifically through a vocation.

Yet matrimony is only one of two possible “states of life” within the worldview of my interlocutors, and hence “becoming a woman/wife” as understood by Serena is not what all female members of the movement end up doing. The other state of life—religious life—offers a different matrix in which constructions of femininity and personhood take place. Religious life encompasses priesthood as well as the existing religious orders of nuns and monks within the Church, but also of new forms of religious life that emerged within CL, including a lay form of life that involves taking religious vows (*Memores Domini*). Sexual difference structures these forms of religious life in various ways: women do not have access to priesthood, and, in terms of living space, religious orders as well as lay religious life are organized in a sex-segregated manner. Here constructions and experiences of femininity and womanhood differ from the process of “becoming a woman” within matrimony. This is not to say that those who go on to take religious vows cease to be captured by the category “women” all together; that they would “become male” in the way Elizabeth Castelli^[16] has discussed. Yet it does suggest that sexual difference operates in distinct ways in relation to different “states of life”. Thus while becoming a woman is not confined to one particular state of life (matrimony), those involved in religious life go through another kind of construction of personhood, and femininity, than in the case of matrimony.

Memores Domini are a case in point. In a more recent period of fieldwork I did within the movement, in the winter of 2014, most of my interlocutors were *Memores Domini*. This lay form of life includes religious vows (chastity, poverty, obedience), and combines contemplation (observing moments of prayer and silence) with an orientation to the world (pursuing professional careers). It is, moreover, centered on celibacy which, within a Catholic context, has often been seen as the paradigmatic state of Christian life.^[17] Unsurprisingly, the discourse of sexual difference was rather absent from my interlocutors’ self-narratives. Yet at the same time, their lives remained haunted by sexual difference. *Memores Domini* live together in same-sex houses, which resonates with the tension or paradox mentioned before. This form of religious life, moreover, seems to be particularly attractive to women. Women who are called as *Memores Domini* go through a process of renegotiating dominant social expectations about sexuality, femininity, and motherhood, and renouncing not only sex but also marriage, motherhood, and property. This renunciation then enables women to access a level of spiritual commitment and authority that, at least to a large extent, transcends hegemonic notions of sex and gender and represents an exit from heteronormative reproduction. It has been argued, often in the context of early or medieval Christian life, that celibacy has allowed women to take up a “male” role.^[18] Many of my interlocutors, however, would oppose ascribing the piety they aspire to as male, and neither would they claim this piety as female.^[19] Instead, they would insist that sexual difference does not matter on the most essential level of personhood, i.e. that of the soul.

Undifferentiated Souls: A Queer Tradition?

This essay points to some of the ways in which gender is done within CL and how these ways do not align with the hegemonic binary heteronormative gender regime of society at large and is also at odds with the rise of a theology of the “complementarity of the sexes” within the Catholic Church. This non-alignment is reflected in CL’s insistence on the undifferentiated character of the soul, which runs counter prevailing discourses about sex and gender that emphasize ontological difference. The non-alignment is more pronounced in the case of religious vocations: women who take religious vows engage in constructions of femininity that exit the matrix of heteronormative reproduction.

Does all of this make my interlocutors queer? I ask this question in the context of contemporary debates on queer studies and religion, and queer Christianities.^[20] My answer to this question is no. This answer is partly informed by a concern with the political and descriptive limits of the notion of queer that I share with many others.^[21] This concern includes, but is not limited to, the affirmation that queer does not only signal pushing against the grain or destabilizing existing categories or norms, and resisting heteronormativity, but that it also has been about doing, as Anthony Petro puts it, and much of that activity has had to do with sex. If queer becomes a purely deconstructive move, Elizabeth Freeman reminds us, it risks “evacuating the messiest thing about being queer: the actual meeting of bodies with other bodies and with objects.”^[22]

This does not diminish the power and meaning of the de-essentialization of sexual difference within CL, which might perhaps be understood as ‘queerish.’ Lynn Gerber develops queerish in her study^[23] on conservative religious masculinity within the ex-gay movement, as she finds this conservative religious masculinity to differ significantly from hegemonic masculinity and uses “queerish” to mark the difference. The ex-gay movement challenges some of the strictures of hegemonic masculinity from a conservative direction, Gerber argues, in a way that expands the repertoire of legitimate gender expressions as well as allows for a considerable degree of male-male intimacy.^[24] Thus “queerish” attends to the sometimes subtle ways in which gender and sexuality differ from hegemonic norms. This strikes me as a useful concept to explore various religiously informed ways of doing gender. The same-sex households of *Memoires Domini*, with their same-sex intimacy and bonding as well as their distance from heteronormative femininity and reproduction, indeed lend themselves to finding queerish moments. Moreover, given the constitutive role of sexuality and heteronormativity in the formation of gender identity, which feminist and queer theory have elaborately discussed,^[25] the reconfiguration of sexuality through celibacy can be expected to impact the meaning of gender significantly, and further exploration of how this is the case might also lead to some queerish insights.

Yet more than queerish, this de-essentialization of sexual difference is very much aligned with older (early and medieval) traditions of Christianity. And this alignment, in contrast to queer and queerish, is also a genealogy that would make sense to my interlocutors, as a way of situating and understanding themselves. The kinds of gender relations that CL enacts effectively rely upon a longer tradition of an undifferentiated soul, which, in Giussani’s view, provides a much better ground to reconstruct Christian faith than the sex segregation and sexual moralism he associates with the modern world. We might argue that it is not the kind of pushback against sexual difference that can be found within CL that needs to be accounted for, but rather the recent invention of the complementarity of the sexes within the Catholic Church.

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Footnotes

1. I would like to thank the Women’s Studies in Religion Program at the Harvard Divinity School for funding part of the fieldwork this essay relies on, the workshop *At the Intersection of Queer Studies and Religion* at the Barnard Center for Research on Women for the conversations out of which this essay grew, Mary Anne Case for her thoughtful comments on an earlier draft, and the *S&F Online* editors for their care and patience. [Return to text]
2. My ethnographic work with *Comunione e Liberazione* began in 1998, and included an extended period of fieldwork in Milan in 2000, funded by the Gender Studies program at Utrecht University. In 2013-2014, I embarked upon a new round of interviews with women in the movement, funded by the Women’s Studies in Religion Program at the Harvard Divinity School. [Return to text]
3. I began thinking about this essay in the context of the workshop “At the Intersection of Queer Studies and Religion,” which took place at the Barnard Center for Research on Women on November 30, 2013. [Return to text]
4. See Dario Zadro, “Comunione e Liberazione: A Fundamentalist Idea of Power,” in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and William Dinges, “Roman Catholic Traditionalism,” in *Fundamentalism Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 66-101. [Return to text]
5. See e.g. Susan Harding, “Representing Fundamentalism: The Problem of the Repugnant Cultural Other” *Social Research*, 58:4 (1991), 373-393; Salman Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Press, 1997). [Return to text]
6. Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (London: Pauline Books and Media, 2006). [Return to text]
7. See e.g. Elizabeth Castelli, “I will make Mary Male”: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity” in *Bodyguards: The Cultural Contexts of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 29-49; Benjamin Dunning, *Specters of Paul: Sexual Difference in Early Christian Thought*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). [Return to text]
8. Mary Anne Case, “The Role of the Popes in the Invention of Complementarity and the Vatican’s Anathematization of Gender,” *Religion & Gender* 6:2 (2016). [Return to text]
9. Valérie Piette, Sophie Van Der Dussen, and David Paternotte, *Habemus Gender! Déconstruction d’une riposte religieuse* (Brussels: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2016); Sarah Bracke and David Paternotte (eds.) *Religion and Gender* (Habemus Gender: The Catholic Church and ‘Gender Ideology’), 6(2), (2016). [Return to text]
10. Kathleen Talvacchia et al., ed., *Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms* (New York: New York University Press, 2014). [Return to text]
11. Luigi Giussani, *Le mouvement Communione et Libération: Entretiens avec Robi Ronza* (Paris: Fayard, 1988). Excerpt translation by the author. [Return to text]

12. Luigi Giussani, *Le mouvement Communione et Libération: Entretiens avec Robi Ronza* (Paris: Fayard, 1988). [Return to text]
13. Salvatore Abbruzzese. *Comunione e Liberazione: Identité catholique et disqualification du monde*, (Paris: Éditions du CERF, 1989). [Return to text]
14. Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). [Return to text]
15. Elizabeth Castelli, "'I will make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity" in *Bodyguards: The Cultural Contexts of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 29-30. [Return to text]
16. Elizabeth Castelli, "'I will make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," 29-49. [Return to text]
17. Kathleen Talvacchia et al., ed., *Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms*. (New York: New York University Press, 2014). [Return to text]
18. Elizabeth Castelli, "'I will make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity"; Kathleen Talvacchia et al., ed., *Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms*. (New York: New York University Press, 2014). See also early feminist discussions about saints within the Church, like Simone de Beauvoir's commentary on Teresa of Avila (*Le deuxième sexe*, [Paris: Gallimard, 1949]) as well as Luce Irigaray's discussion about female saints (*Spéculum de l'autre femme*, [Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1974]). [Return to text]
19. Some interlocutors had an elaborate critique of movements or forms of spirituality focused on femininity. A specific target of this critique was the Focolare movement, which has a similar context of emergence as CL (mid 20th century, Italy), but was founded by a woman and the statutes of the movement stipulate that the leader of the movement has to be a woman. [Return to text]
20. Kathleen Talvacchia et al., ed., *Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms*. [Return to text]
21. Anthony Petro, "Celibate Politics. Queering the Limits" in *Queer Christianities: Lived Religion in Transgressive Forms*, ed. Kathleen Talvacchia et al, (New York: New York University Press, 2014). [Return to text]
22. Ibid, 41. [Return to text]
23. Lynn Gerber, "Grit, Guts, and Vanilla Beans: Godly Masculinity in the Ex-Gay Movement," *Gender and Society*, 29 (2015): 26-50. [Return to text]
24. Ibid. [Return to text]
25. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). [Return to text]