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Not in his image : a study of male priesthood and catholic women

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Not in His image: A study of male priesthood and Catholic women

Nutter, Marilyn Faye Crnich, M.A.

San Jose State University, 1992

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NOT IN HIS IMAGE:
A STUDY OF MALE PRIESTHOOD
AND CATHOLIC WOMEN

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Social Science
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

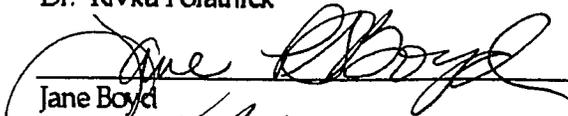
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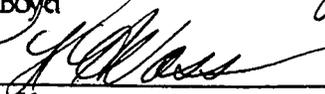
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ABSTRACT

NOT IN HIS IMAGE: A STUDY OF MALE PRIESTHOOD AND CATHOLIC WOMEN

by Marilyn Faye Crnich Nutter

This study examines the psychosocial effects of an all-male priesthood on Catholic women to understand how gender of the minister influences women's self-perception. Research was conducted through personal interviews with Catholic, Episcopal, and Gnostic women in order to compare socio-religious attitudes and behavior. The study shows that the gender of the minister is a determining factor in women forming an affinity to ministers in ritual. The data indicate that Catholic women are particularly affected by the exclusivity of the male priest figure, which reinforces the notion of male privilege and male divinity. Episcopal and Gnostic women are more open to feminine images in religious belief and ritual which have developed and are strengthened through their exposure to female ministers. The study challenges the Catholic Church's rationale for holding to male priesthood, and calls for a reconceptualization and a rearticulation of theological assumptions regarding women in Catholic ministry.

To my Mom who taught me to question
and my Dad who taught me to laugh

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How can I relate to the Church, my demon?...Going to Church breaks my heart because there are no symbols there to tell me God knows or cares that I'm alive as a woman. And it's *as a woman* that I am *human*.

Alla Renee Bozarth after her ordination to the Episcopal priesthood in 1974 (Bozarth 1978, 180).

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Symbols within a society help to tell us who we are and how we relate to the world around us. Symbolic representation of that which is considered divine in a particular culture is directly related to how men and women perceive themselves within that culture. Many social scientists agree that the "interpretation of cultures is basically the interpretation of symbols [and] religious symbols serve to produce and strengthen religious conviction" (Dillistone 1986, 115).

Some sociologists maintain that religion promotes social cohesion through shared symbolism, values, and norms (Macionis 1991, 453). However, if God is depicted in male images and referred to in masculine terms such as "father," "lord," and "king," it is difficult for women to associate their femaleness with anything godlike or spiritual. Within the structure of the Catholic Church, it is an all-male clergy who presides at the Eucharist, officiates at key sacramental celebrations and rites such as weddings, baptisms, funerals, etc., and offers forgiveness of sins to members of the congregation, half of whom are women. For Catholic women, then, the patriarchal concept of God is the substructure for spiritual symbolism and "norms," further reflected in the image and ritual action of the male priest.

This study will explore the relation between women and their priests/ministers in an effort to understand the psychosocial effects of an all-male priesthood on Catholic women and determine how gender of the minister influences women's self-perception. The term "relation" does not necessarily infer a "relationship," which would entail a somewhat reciprocal

association between a minister and women in the congregation. Rather, the study will focus primarily on the minister as the predominant *symbol* of religious conviction and authority within a socio-religious subculture. It is in reflecting on this symbol, especially in the context of worship and ritual, that women consciously or unconsciously make judgments and assumptions about themselves and the world around them. In his study of Western religion and the symbolism in the Catholic Mass, psychologist Carl Jung noted that the sacredness of the ritual, performed by and through the priest, dramatized what he termed "archetypal meaning" and had a direct impact on the individual unconscious (Jung 1969).

Within the Catholic Church, the male priest is able to minister to men on a level of gender equality and spiritual identity, but must also act as a makeshift representative of women, intervening for them and helping them rise above their secondary status as women. Further, it is an all-male hierarchical system that forms the authority structure of the Church, with women remaining at the bottom of the pyramid in which a sanctioned few exercise control in descending divine order. Excluded from all hierarchical decision making, women have no voice in the ongoing development of Church teaching and praxis. Mary Daly has stated that the exclusion of women from the hierarchy "contributes significantly to the process of inculcating inferiority feelings and causes psychological confusion" among Catholic women (Daly 1968, 23).

Women continue to be denied admission to the Catholic priesthood by the Magisterium (the ruling body of the Church), which often speaks eloquently of social justice and human rights in the world, but fails to see how blatantly these rights are denied to women within the Church. Theologian

Uta Ranke-Heinemann claims that the "apartheid practiced toward women by the Church's rulers violates justice, much as political apartheid does" (Ranke-Heinemann 1991, 135). This ruling body continues to maintain that women cannot be ordained because it is necessary for a priest to be male in order to truly represent Christ (in persona Christi). In other words, it is only through the symbol of maleness that there can be a true representation of Christ, both human and divine. For these reasons, many women within the Church feel isolated and alienated since they always seem to be on the fringe, and much of their energy is spent trying to conform to the male norm which has set them apart as the "Other" (de Beauvoir 1953, 167).

The Vatican Declaration and the Response

The Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood was officially released by the Vatican on October 15, 1976, and reflects the current official teaching of the Catholic Church regarding women in ministry. (See "Selected References," p. 92. Henceforth it will be referred to as "Declaration"). The "Declaration" was a reiteration of the Church's position that women cannot be priests due to tradition based on male "priesthood" as intended by Christ and defined within Scripture.¹ Although the "Declaration" agrees that women have always played an important part in the history of the Church and have contributed greatly to its apostolic growth, the Church claims it cannot give authorization for women to become priests because of "fidelity" to the example of Christ (par. 23). The Church's determination of the attitude of Christ, then, as well as its interpretation of the

¹The Church claims Christ's reference to himself as bridegroom in Mark 2:19 is an indication of this intention.

significance of his maleness has become the basis for the argument against women becoming priests. Christ may have had many followers who were women, and he did not hesitate to question Jewish authority in regard to the rights of women and subsequent treatment of women in Jewish culture. According to the "Declaration," however, this, in and of itself, does not prove that Christ would have wanted women entrusted with the priestly office. The document maintains that although supportive of women, Christ did not choose women for the special role of priest; thus, the "mind of Christ" was revealed and is unchangeable.²

The "Declaration" clearly downplays early misogynistic judgments made against women by the Church Fathers, deeming them to be unimportant and irrelevant in regard to religious practice. The document states:

It is true that in the writings of the Fathers one will find the undeniable influence of prejudices unfavorable to women; but nevertheless, it should be noted that *these prejudices had hardly any influence on their pastoral activity, and still less on their spiritual direction* (italics mine) (par. 6, sect. 5).

As one examines the history of the early Church and subsequent writings of the early Church Fathers, however, one is left with a very different impression of the damaging effects early teachings would have had in the lives of both men and women and subsequent bias against women in the development of their ministerial roles.

A number of theologians and historians, including Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruether, have traced the development of women's role in

²In contrast to the Vatican document, contemporary spiritual scholarship points out that Christ did not "ordain" men to the priesthood during his life, nor was ordination a practice in the early Church. The precepts of the cultic priesthood and sacramentality of Orders evolved in later stages of the Church's growth and expansion, reflecting the prevailing patriarchal culture and religious norms and practice.

Western Judeo-Christian tradition, uncovering the roots of patriarchal theology. In first-century Jewish culture, women were considered inferior and were totally under the dominion of their husbands. A wife was considered to be her husband's possession, unable to inherit property, divorce him, or repudiate him in any way. Her primary duty was to bear children, fulfilling the command to "be fruitful and multiply" (Daly 1968, 34). Although St. Paul testified to the equality of women and men in the Christian community, contradictory Pauline writings argued that women should be excluded from the ministry of preaching "the word," thereby reinforcing sexist role definitions. Early Christian accounts of the Genesis creation story, particularly those of Tertullian and theologians in the second and third centuries, depict Eve as being the temptress who is responsible for the Fall, thereby making the need for redemption a direct result of women's weakness and sinfulness (Ruether 1983, 167).

In the fourth century, Augustine made the argument that man was created in the image of God since he exhibited the power of reason, and woman, on the other hand, was inferior due to her irrationality. Augustine stressed the sinfulness of sex except for procreation, a belief deeply rooted in the concept of the Fall as being the result of woman's lustful nature (Anderson and Zinnser 1988, 255).

Augustinian views on women and sexuality were to influence the development of Christian theology and anthropology up to the time of the Early Scholastics (eleventh century). In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas, another highly influential Church authority, proclaimed that both men and women shared in the image of God, but it is in the *degree* of image that a distinction is made. Aquinas made the Aristotelian argument that males are

images of God to a "higher degree" than females, even though both men and women have the same capacity to seek God through the soul. Males, it would seem, are of the higher order, while females are merely "misbegotten males" (Osborne 1979, 67).

Certainly teachings such as these which were the basis of Christian belief at those times (and whose remnants remain even in this century) had a profound influence on both men and women in the developing Church and adverse consequences would have been reflected in Church attitudes and order. States Ranke-Heinemann:

The phobia about women, as found, say, in Augustine, could be viewed as a grotesque private aberration only so long as such pathological modes of behavior did not have legal consequences in the Church. But they did have consequences, which meant immense injury to women (Ranke-Heinemann 1991, 122).

Over the centuries, these early teachings have led to a distorted image of God, the elevated and exalted position of men, and the inferior, abject status of women. It is this heritage which has influenced Scriptural exegesis and authoritative teachings within the Church and is the rationale for discrimination against women as ministers in the Church today. It is this history of oppression which women carry with them and which colors their day-to-day experiences.

Looking at Women's Experience

Many historians and theologians have focused on the historical development of women's roles in the early Church in an effort to reclaim a hidden history of ministerial service and a hermeneutic of Scripture which is more affirming of Christian women. Certainly it is crucial to rewrite history with a new understanding of the important roles women played in the early Christian community. The predominant view of women in the Church today, however,

continues to be based along patriarchal lines of early Christian development. Women carry with them a legacy of oppression and discrimination based on cultural norms contained within a patriarchal Judeo-Christian heritage. According to theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether, it is this "reconstruction of the early Church from the point of view of male dominance which functions today as a social mythology" and which continues to determine women's self-understanding (Ruether, McLaughlin 1979, 30). Women continue to be defined within the boundaries of the male "norm" in regard to their own socio-religious development.

Given their restrictive roles within a patriarchal Church structure, women's spiritual experience is very different from that of men's in the same system. Simone de Beauvoir indicated there is a "specific inferiority" known only to Catholic women due to their relation to "God's representatives on earth: the pope, the bishop...the priest" (de Beauvoir 1953, 29). How does this "specific inferiority" influence the dynamic which is taking place between women and their ministers based on their own perceptions and observations as *women*? If their spiritual selves are reflected back to them in the male image, what does this tell women about their femaleness, their goodness, their worth as human beings? What does this tell them about the nature of the God they worship, the attributes and characteristics this God values, and women's place in a society that holds these attributes in high regard?

The Purpose of This Study

This study, by looking at women's experience as a starting point for spirituality, will attempt to answer some of those questions. The focus of the study will be the relation between women and the clergy, the term "relation"

referring to a sense of connectedness and affinity to ministers as mirroring images. The study will concentrate on three distinct groups of women who are involved in the process of defining their own spiritual identity: 1) women within the traditional Roman Catholic Church who have a male priest; 2) women within the Episcopal Church who have a female as well as a male priest in their community; and 3) Catholic women who have broken from tradition and their Catholicity to partake in the ritual of the Gnostic Church, with a female priest.

The purpose of this study is not to determine if women's consciousness has been raised regarding women's call to full participation in the ministry. It is assumed that most women will have some degree of familiarity with the issue of the ordination of women which is currently being debated within the Catholic Church. Rather, the study will attempt to determine how this knowledge is affecting women's lives. Do the women in each group see the gender of their minister as being relevant to the performance of his or her duties? Do they feel their spiritual needs are being met by their minister as preacher and as presider over liturgical worship? Are they able to relate to their minister outside the realm of liturgical functions as counselor, spiritual guide, or friend? Are they able to voice their opinions regarding their own spiritual and personal needs without fear of being patronized or criticized? Are they encouraged by the minister as model to exercise their own particular talents and gifts? And most importantly, is their minister able to call forth by his/her presence an awareness of their own interior spirituality and, in turn, help them connect with their experience of God?

Conclusion

Since the Catholic Church continues to defend its sexist policy regarding women and ordination through a narrow interpretation of Scripture-based tradition, many Catholic women are placed in the difficult position of desiring equal partnership in an institution whose existence depends upon their remaining in a "complementary" role.³ Women's only recourse is to depend upon their own spiritual self-understanding to guide them in their decision to remain active members of the Church. This spiritual struggle is difficult for many women who are torn between Catholic tradition and their own sense of social justice.

Through this study, I hope to be able to determine some of the problems of identification women are having with regard to the symbolic representation of the priest who is a key figure in Catholic ritual. It is primarily through this association that women are defined within the Church. Since women's experience of self is colored by their perception of the male as being more significant, women can mistrust their own experience as being somehow less valuable than the experience and "expertise" of men, and they may become deaf to their inner voice which guides them towards new spiritual awareness and personal growth. This inner conflict can result in women losing their sense of self, continually looking to others to define and determine boundaries of personal thought and behavior (Gundry 1987, 61).

³The Church has maintained that based on biological differences between males and females, women's role in society, although equal, is different and complementary to men's. Women's primary function lies in their capacity to bear and nurture children. The problem, of course, is a patriarchal society which rewards and values male behavior while restricting females to roles which are perceived as both non-threatening and powerless.

Old belief systems may continue to be important to Catholic women only because those beliefs have been deemed acceptable by a patriarchal system through a rigid and dogmatic authority structure. Women may be fearful of letting go of old beliefs, clinging desperately to those acquired symbols which give them some sense of continuity and identity. In actuality, however, it is experience which must either authenticate or reject received symbols and laws. Rosemary Radford Ruether has stated, "If a symbol does not speak authentically to experience, it becomes dead or must be altered to provide a new meaning" (Ruether 1983, 12). Carol Christ, in her study of goddess tradition, noted that "...women's experience, like all human experience, is a source of insight about the divine" (Christ 1987, ix).

The strength of the Church's position regarding ordination is dependent upon women remaining silent and invisible. Therefore, it is crucial for women's stories to be told so that new meanings of spirituality can be forged and change can come about. Ruether has posed the question, "If women are not able to represent Christ, is Christ able to represent women?" This is a question only women can answer for themselves.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies regarding women and the priesthood have centered mainly around the historical development of women's roles in the early Christian Church. Many feminist theologians are questioning traditional values and teachings of the Church that conflict with their own personal and political philosophies. They are no longer willing to accept a theology that is historically patriarchal and sexist in origin, and they are trying to create a new theology based not on a history of oppression, but on a history which reflects a more inclusive view of the important roles women played in the developing Christian community.

Women as Leaders and Ministers in the Early Church

In Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, feminist historians/theologians offer examples of powerful women in the early Christian community, and call upon all women to "appropriate their history, not merely to deplore their past exclusion but to vindicate the insights of this alternative tradition and use it to reshape and enlarge the vision and life of the Church today" (Ruether, McLaughlin 1979, 28). In an essay entitled, "Women, Power, and the Pursuit of Holiness in Medieval Christianity," Eleanor McLaughlin affirms that medieval mysticism fostered a more "feminine" vision of divinity than today in which God was perceived as mother as well as father. She examines the lives of powerful and deeply spiritual women, such as Catherine of Siena and Dame Julian of Norwich, who exemplified the essence

of this holistic notion of spirituality and were "models of human excellence and divine will" (p. 126).

In The Lady Was a Bishop, Joan Morris makes a brilliant and well-documented case for the re-establishment of the ordination of women. Morris asserts that the word "episcopa" or "bishop" applied to women as early as fifth century A.C.E. Women were ordained as abbesses and deaconesses in a ceremony which was exactly the same as that conferred upon the male abbots. According to Morris:

Dating from the fifth century, the Wisigothic Sacramentary gives instructions for the ordination of abbesses. In the prayer, it is stated that before God there is no discrimination of the sexes and that women, like men, are called to collaborate in the spiritual struggle. They were invested with sacerdotal robes, the pallium, and the miter. In the Sacramentary of the Moissac Monastery, the rite for the abbots and abbesses was identical. They prostrated before the altar and received the stole (Morris 1973, 13).

Morris makes the point that women could not consecrate the host due to long-standing superstitious beliefs and religious taboos regarding menstruation, reaffirming the notion that women were, by mere fact of their biological makeup, unclean and innately deficient. Morris concludes that the tradition of male-only priesthood is based partly on negative attitudes towards female biology.

Scriptural Interpretation and Tradition

In her book, In Memory of Her, historian and theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has reconstructed a new hermeneutic of Christian historical text from a feminist perspective. Schüssler Fiorenza attempts to explain Scriptural writings as they relate to the origins of Christian ministry based on an understanding of women's active role (as opposed to reactive role) within a

patriarchal structure. She calls for a feminist historical study which "allows women to locate their strength, historical agency, pain, and struggle within their common historical experiences as women in patriarchal society and family" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 86). Schüssler Fiorenza claims that women's roles within the Church were marginalized primarily with the patriarchalization of the Church under an administrative system which claimed an apostolic line of succession in an attempt to have greater control of the Church, its rapid expansion, and heretical out-groups. Her criticism raises serious questions of how to interpret Scripture as it was written within a patriarchal framework and illustrates the impact these and subsequent Church teachings had on women within an oppressive society.

Schüssler Fiorenza and other theologians and historians have done extensive research tracing the origins of the feminine image of Sophia in Judeo-Christian traditions. Sophia appears as Wisdom theology in the Jewish tradition (Hokhmah) and enters the early Christian era as "divine ruler of the cosmos" with Christ (Cady, Ronan, Taussig 1986, 14). Elaine Pagels, in her major historical work on The Gnostic Gospels, states that Sophia was considered Divine Mother/Creator by orthodox Christians as well as certain Gnostic sects in the first and second centuries. Feminine imagery in Christian tradition, however, was to disappear after the second century as writings about the Christ-Sophia were considered heretical by orthodox Christianity. The importance of Sophiology has emerged again with recent studies of Near Eastern goddess religions and Christian feminist theology. The Sophia principle also figures prominently in current Gnostic ritual, the celebration of the Eucharist commemorating the "marriage" of Sophia with her consort, Christ.

Since Church authority derives its strength regarding ordination from tradition borne of a patriarchal understanding, it is important to look at tradition from a feminist historical perspective in order to elicit a new understanding of its meaning. In Sexism and Church Law, theologian Francine Cardman defines the meanings of "tradition" in relationship to its effect on the lives of women in the Church. The concept of "Tradition" (capital "T") is seen as the gospel itself, Christ's presence in the Church. The term "tradition" (lower case "t") refers to the process and expression of the gospel as related to existent patterns of living. It is because there is a complicated, changeable interplay between the two that the Church is having difficulties interpreting Scripture which necessarily involves both. "The hermeneutical process," states Cardman, "thus has the double thrust of viewing both the past and the present critically" (Coriden 1977, 60). Christian anthropology, then, is seen as a dynamic process which involves cultural flux and change, and which must take into account the shifting roles of persons in society. Cardman feels that individual rights as defined within contemporary social structures must be considered when discussing the tradition of an all-male priesthood.

Women Priests, a Catholic commentary on the Vatican "Declaration," explores the status of women in the early Church, making the point that throughout Church history, women's roles have constantly changed from deaconess to nun, teacher, and modern-day scholar. In "Misunderstanding of Sexuality and Resistance to Women Priests," Sidney Callahan makes the argument against the need for the priest to have "natural resemblance" to Christ as stated in the Vatican "Declaration." Callahan points out that Christ's gender identity was never an issue in Scripture, even from the time he was conceived.

Scripture refers to Christ's humanity as "the word made *flesh*" (italics mine). Further, according to Callahan, Christ's conception through the Holy Spirit would have transcended human sexual mating of male and female. Callahan asks:

If God is beyond sexuality, and Jesus transcends sexuality, and the risen life transcends sexuality as we know it, how can male sexuality in the priesthood be a sacramental sign of the first born of the new humanity? (Swidler 1977, 292).

The Church, Sexism, and Ordination

In an essay entitled, "Ordination: What is the Problem?" Rosemary Radford Ruether traces the roots of Western patriarchal religion back to the warrior-king God who ruled in the Old Testament. Ruether contends it is the same symbolism that is used to denote the minister ruling over a "feminized laity" (Gardiner 1976, 31). She strongly denounces a God who is the reflection of male egoism, and calls for a reconceptualization of priesthood which she feels is incomplete in its exclusion of women. She goes so far as to call the existing structure within the Church "demonic" and opposed to the gospel. No such structures, she contends, were established by Christ. "Ministry," says Ruether, "must be regarded as the historical creation of the Church" (Gardiner 1976, 33). As ministers, both men and women would represent wholeness of the community and serve its needs, not be master over it. She calls for an end to the idolatry of sexism and a rediscovery of the meaning of ministry. States Ruether, "It is idolatrous to make males more 'like God' than females. It is blasphemous to use the image and name of the Holy to justify patriarchal domination and the law" (Ruether 1983, 23).

In Beyond Anger, Carolyn Osiek calls for the conversion and transformation of the Church from patriarchalism which supports submission of women under the guise of "theological justification" (Osiek 1986, 46). She calls on Catholic women who are frustrated by the Church's sexist stance to have the courage to work through their anger and fear and use their energy to revitalize and liberate the Church from the corruption of sexism and classism. Regarding ordination Osiek states:

...the celibate male is the norm of Christian personhood, for only he can image Christ to the community in this unique and special way...Thus the celebration of the Eucharist is the ever present reminder that, no matter what the rhetoric, women and men simply are not equal in the Church (p. 21).

Osiek goes on to suggest ways in which women can constructively cope with their angry feelings so that their presence in the Church will effect needed changes.

Conclusion

While it is important to have an historical, theological, and anthropological perspective on the development of ministerial roles of women within Christian tradition, the fact remains that current Church doctrine regarding women and ordination continues to have an impact on the lives of Catholic women independent of their knowledge of the historicity of these teachings. Those symbols and laws that have been determined to be spiritually significant by the Magisterium continue to define women within their own particular social groups. A stratification of male and female roles is an inevitable result of a patriarchal system which is dependent upon the concept of male superiority as a "divine right." Many women are thus caught in a web of confusion regarding their own spiritual expression and development, since

acquired symbols are not always meaningful in their practice of the Christian faith.

For some Catholic women, crisis of faith leads them away from the traditional Church for religious expression which is more inclusive of the feminine principle and which allows women to develop their own spirituality outside the restraints of male-dominated institutions (Russell 1974, 51). Recent studies of ancient goddess religions have emerged at a time when women are seriously questioning their roles within the Church.¹ The goddess has helped empower women and has allowed them to re-appropriate and re-evaluate their own feminine qualities and characteristics within the context of divine symbolism and religious expression. For many Catholic women, however, the struggle is ongoing and remains within the structure of the institutional Church which continues to defend its position regarding women in the ministry behind walls of sexism, silence, and indifference.

¹Since the focus of this study is women within the traditional Church, the topic of goddess worship is not explored. However, participants were asked about their impression of the goddess and this information is included in the Interview Chapter.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Finding Participants for the Study

In order to solicit volunteers for the study, I contacted local Church groups and organizations, asking for female participants who were involved in some form of Christian worship on a regular basis (Appendix A).

Catholic Women

Five Catholic women responded to a notice published in The Catholic Women's Network (CWN), a quarterly religious newspaper serving Santa Clara County and surrounding areas (Appendix A). According to the editors of CWN, their aim is to "open minds and prod readers to do their own thinking and evaluating of issues" especially those currently being debated in the Catholic Church. By doing so, they reach a wide audience of Catholic women with a range of viewpoints. I felt soliciting volunteers through CWN rather than individual parishes would elicit a greater response and provide a broader sample of Catholic women for the study.

Episcopal Women

Major changes have occurred within the American Episcopal Church in the last fifteen years, including the inclusion of women as part of their ordained ministry. Since the Episcopal hierarchical structure is somewhat similar to that of the Catholic Church in that it is predominantly male and reflects the attitudes of male authority, it has become a model for the possibilities of expanded awareness and structural change within the institution of the Catholic priesthood. Although not all members of the Episcopal Church accept women

as priests, women in the Church have been witness to a dramatic shift in attitude towards female ministers in the last seventeen years. By interviewing Episcopal women, I hoped to better understand their relationship to female ministers in their parish and determine which attributes they felt women were able to contribute to the ministry.

I, therefore, wanted to find an Episcopal Church in the area where there was both a male and a female priest. There are only a small number of female priests throughout the country working in parishes at this time. I was able to locate a female priest in the Menlo Park area. After I talked with her personally, she said she would insert a notice about the study in the Church bulletin (Appendix A), or make the announcement to a women's parish organization. She said she knew of several women that would probably be interested. The four women who volunteered were involved in the Church in varying capacities and were familiar with both the male and female priests.

Gnostic Women

Many Catholic women have become discouraged by the immovable stance of the Magisterium, finding it oppressive and seeing little hope for change in the near future. Longing for spiritual expression in a more feminine spiritual realm, these Catholic women are partaking in rituals that affirm their own unique feminine nature. Some women have chosen to break from tradition and their Catholicity and have participated in the Gnostic Eucharistic Celebration in Palo Alto as part of their spiritual expression. I wanted to include these women in my study because I felt Gnostic/catholic women could offer valuable insight into understanding perceived deficiencies within the traditional Catholic Church today and why many Catholic women are seeking alternative

forms of worshipping. (I used the term "Gnostic/catholic" to indicate a more tolerant and nontraditional approach to Christian philosophy).

The Gnostic Church in Palo Alto was the only one I located in the Bay Area, and the bishop invited me to talk with women after a Sunday service in order to solicit volunteers. Four women volunteered for the study.

Characteristics of the Women Interviewed

The thirteen women interviewed ranged in age from 33 to 60 years old. The median age for the whole group was 44.5 and the average age was 40. Ages of the Catholic women ranged from 38 to 55 years, the median age being 47, the average being 48 years. The Episcopal women ranged in age from 33 to 46 years and were somewhat younger than both the Catholic and the Gnostic women, the median age being 35 years, the average 37 years. Gnostic women ranged in age from 35 to 60 years, the median age being 45.5, the average 47 years.

Table I

Ages of Women Interviewed

| Women Interviewed | 31-40 Years | 41-50 Years | 51-60 Years |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Catholic | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Episcopal | 3 | 1 | |
| Gnostic | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Totals | 7 | 4 | 2 |

Although the Episcopal women were younger as a whole, they were old enough to have experienced the changes in the Episcopal Church over the last 17 years since women were first ordained as priests in 1974. As with Catholic women in the study, there was a wide spectrum of thinking among the Episcopal women in regard to women's issues, ranging from conservative to a more liberal stance. While age is an influential factor in this study, it is by no means determinative (i.e., one may expect younger women to be liberal and older women to be more conservative, but the opposite is often the case).

Both the Catholic and Episcopal women interviewed have chosen to remain within the institutional Church as a means of spiritual expression and communal interaction. Their views, therefore, while certainly their own, were often reflective of the traditional teachings/beliefs of their particular religious affiliations. Gnostic/catholic women who have chosen to break from the traditional Church (at least as far as seeking new forms of ritual expression), still considered themselves to be catholic in the sense of being part of the universal Christian Church that has a history rich in tradition. By virtue of their leaning towards Gnosticism, however, they had detached themselves from what they perceived to be a dogmatic belief system and their responses often reflected this solitary approach.

All participants had higher than a high school education and their occupations were diverse, but mainly professional. All the Catholic women had at least two years of college, one had a four year degree, and two had graduate degrees. They ranged in occupation from homemaker to liturgist, gerontologist/consultant, and micro-wave technician. The Episcopal women also had at least two years of college, one had a four-year degree, and two had

graduate degrees. Their occupations ranged from homemaker, to marriage and family counselor to insurance supervisor. One woman was currently studying for the Episcopal priesthood. She was able to relay firsthand the rejection and discrimination she has experienced within her own Church in pursuing the priesthood. All of the Gnostic women had graduate degrees. Their occupations were more focused in helping professions such as health educator, ordained bishop, socio-religious author and lecturer, and health care consultant. Three of the Gnostic women and one Catholic woman had extensive religious training and were well-versed in Church history and Scripture. They were very articulate in this regard and often displayed a more historical approach in responding to the questions presented.

Table II

| Women Interviewed | Education (College) | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------|--------------|
| | 1-2 Years | 4 Years | Over 4 Years |
| Catholic | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Episcopal | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Gnostic | | | 4 |
| Totals | 3 | 2 | 8 |

All participants were white, with the majority of Catholic women being from Western European/American descent, mainly Irish/English and Italian. Three of the Episcopal women were from Western European/American descent, mainly Irish/English and German, with one woman being from Jewish/Eastern

European descent as well. The Gnostic women were all from Western European/American descent, mainly Irish/English, Italian, German, and French.

Four of the Catholic women were married, and one was single (divorced). Two of the Episcopal women were married, and two were single. Two of the Gnostic women were married, and two were single.

Table III

| Women Interviewed | Marital Status | | |
|-------------------|----------------|--------|----------|
| | Married | Single | Divorced |
| Catholic | 4 | 0 | 1 |
| Episcopal | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Gnostic | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Totals | 8 | 4 | 1 |

Most of the women interviewed had a gross annual income (combined, if married) in the mid to upper range, with six women having an annual income over \$50,000.

Table IV

| Women Interviewed | Gross (Combined) Income | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| | \$10,000-20,000 | \$21,000-30,000 | \$31,000-40,000 | \$41,000-50,000 | Over \$50,000 |
| Catholic | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Episcopal | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Gnostic* | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Totals | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 6 |

*One interviewee did not respond to the question regarding income.

The women who volunteered for this study indicated an interest in the issue of women and the priesthood and were, therefore, possibly more aware of this issue than the average woman in their respective Churches. Because the interviewees were well educated, many in the area of religious studies, they were able to articulate their feelings and ideas in a very comprehensible manner. However, since I was mainly concerned with the image of the priest/minister as *symbol*, I was not particularly concerned with the women's theological or historical knowledge of the subject, but rather the psychosocial implications of the priest role as it impacts women's lives. In this regard, all women within the Church are affected by this role to some extent and have experienced similar feelings and ideas to varying degrees. While it would be difficult to generalize conclusions based on this small sample of women, I feel

this study offers valuable insights into a particular social process. Hopefully, a more thorough investigation of this subject will be done in future studies.

Interview Methods

Before doing the actual interviews with solicited participants, I did two pilot interviews to ascertain appropriate questions and overall strategy of the interview process. It was determined at that time to do informal interviews, using more structured guidelines to gather demographic data such as age, educational background, marital status, income, etc. The actual interviews were done in a conversational tone, with special attention given to nonverbal cues and reactions to concepts being presented. The interviews took between two and a half to three hours each and were done at a time and place convenient to the interviewees. A tape recorder was not used since many participants chose to meet in public places rather than in individual homes which made taping difficult, if not impossible, due to the increased noise level. (Some participants also found taping to be intimidating). Careful attention was given to accurate note taking, with important quotes taken verbatim. Questions were open-ended so that interviewees would not answer with a simple "yes" or "no" but were able to respond in a more comprehensive and complete manner.

Interview guidelines for each group varied slightly depending on each woman's particular religious tradition and background. Four major themes emerged during the course of planning the study and while doing pilot interviews, and actual interview questions were developed within four thematic categories: 1) Religious symbolism; 2) Sex-role socialization and sexuality; 3) Attitudes about women and work; and 4) Socio-religious development.

Prevailing patriarchal Catholic theology prohibits women from the priesthood office, thereby holding to predominantly male representation in Catholic decision-making and ritual. Therefore, questions were structured to elicit an understanding of each woman's perception of herself as defined by her own particular socio-religious subculture vis a vis this particular notion of women. How did each woman perceive God? Was this God seen as male? As female? How did each participant feel about being a woman? Was she comfortable with her female sexuality? What roles did she think women play within the family/work place/society? To what degree, if any, did the Church, particularly the ministry, help shape her personal, social, and spiritual self-understanding?

Through the interview process, patterns of socio-religious behavior and practice specific to Catholic women were determined and were compared and contrasted with the behaviors and practices of women in the other groups.

CHAPTER IV

INTERVIEWS

The number of questions asked during the interview session was approximately eighty, varying slightly from group to group (Appendices B, C, & D). The questions covered a wide range of topics in an attempt to understand each woman's particular social reality. Psychologist Anne Wilson Schaef has asserted that there is a continual interplay between a woman's experiences with "her sexuality, her theology, and the church" (Schaef 1981, 162). Therefore, I felt it was important to determine each woman's religious beliefs and ascertain how this spiritual understanding has influenced her own self-definition and self-perception. Consequently, questions were structured along personal, developmental, and attitudinal lines in regard to women's roles in the Church, the family, the work place, and society.

For the purpose of presenting the data, Catholic women in this study are referred to as Group C, Episcopal women as Group E, and Gnostic women as Group G. Women within each group are numbered one through four (five) and are referred to as either C, E, or G, followed by the appropriate number.

Religious Symbolism

Made in God's Image

Christian tradition teaches that humans are made in the "image of God." Each woman was asked to think of the images/qualities of God and what she thought it meant to be made in this image.

C1 stated that "we were made to love since God is love [and] we need to come to his likeness." C2 simply stated that being in the image of God means

we have intelligence and are not animals. C3 answered that God's image means "being a valuable person," someone who is important and worthwhile. C4 felt being in the image of God required people to embrace their humanness as "children of the spirit." C5 answered simply that we have an intellect so that "we may know him and know the people he loves."

E1 stated that because we came from God we are "stamped to do good." She was also drawn to the image of Mary. E2 described being made in the image of God as an experience of a "hand grabbing my heart." She also spoke of God as being both mother/father and having the experience of being "pregnant with the divine." E3 described being in the divine image as more a "process of our being formed to the *qualities* of Christ," which are love, compassion, healing, justice, and holiness as well as acceptance of our humanness. E4 described our being in the image of God as having "creative energy."

Gnostic women had no clear cut answers. They were more inclined to explain the *process* of how this image was changing for them rather than give concrete definitions of themselves in relation to this image. G1 said God's image has changed considerably for her since she became a Gnostic. This image "goes beyond gender," and may incorporate father/mother/lover/parent--"my every moment," she said. G2 explained that as a Catholic she never questioned the image of God since "rules were set in stone." Now possibly the feminine image of a "blessed mother" comes to mind, and the idea of having safety and security. G3 also stated that she had to break free of masculine images of God which she had learned in the "Baltimore Catechism." Now she does not see God as male, but as androgynous spirit--sometimes feminine, sometimes masculine.

G4 said she never had a definite image of God, but saw herself as "being cared for by a loving parent."

Summary

Being created "in God's image" had various meanings for women in each group. Catholic women were quick to answer and give concrete definitions. Two of the Catholic women referred to God in the male person. The Episcopal women gave the question more careful consideration, and images of God tended to have more feminine characteristics. Gnostic women, for the most part, were unable to answer the question directly. For them, being in the image of God was flexible and changeable, since God had the properties of both male and female. Conscious effort was being made to change former images of God in order to have a new understanding of themselves in relation to this image.

Changing Pictures of God

The interviewees were asked how they pictured God as a child. They were then asked if this picture had changed as an adult.

As a child, C2, C3, and C5 had pictured God as an older man with a beard. As an adult, this image seemed to fade and become less important to these women. Although C1 stated she never saw God as a male figure, she often used very masculine terms to describe God, such as "father/creator," "first person of the Trinity," (which in Catholic theology infers father), and Christ in "relationship to [his] father." She referred to persons in the Trinity as being "young, strong, virile figures." C2 insisted she had no real image of God and that having an image was "immaterial." C3 said she does not worry about an image, but sees God more as a "continuum of light." C4 said God as father was difficult

for her since her own father was an alcoholic and abusive. For her, God as "loving father" did not exist. As she worked on family issues, she was able to discover better images. She now sees God as father/mother/sister/brother. C5 stated she has no image as an adult, but sees God as spirit, and as Christ.

Images of God for Episcopal women were similar to those of Catholic women in that, as children, E1, E2, and E4 also saw God as a bearded male. E1 now saw God as an "energy force" and very loving. E2 saw God as nature, and as "God within." E3 stated she did not see God as a person, but more in terms of "deep security." In becoming adult, she came to understand God through her grandmother who took care of her after her parents' divorce. Male/female images of God are now important to her. E4 stated that for her, God has no form now. Although she said she can relate to the person of Jesus, she perceived God as "mother, father, energy, and love."

Again, Gnostic women tended to speak in relatively abstract terms when discussing God. G1 stated that she had to move beyond father images. She "consciously prayed to God as mother" in order to change this image. She now has experienced God as "light, a presence." G2 stated that as a Catholic, she was taught to "pray, pay, and obey." She has a difficult time imaging God now, although as a child, she related to Mary since her grandmother was a major influence in her life. As a child, G3 thought of God as an old man with a beard, and sometimes Christ. Now, she imaged God as the "spirit of others...friends and community...*that* is God." As a child, G4 saw God as an old man, and Jesus as a younger image. Later, she balanced the masculine images through Mary. Now she does not have a specific image, but is "tempted to say androgynous" although the image is more feminine.

Summary

As children, the majority of women interviewed imaged God as a bearded male. One Catholic woman in particular continued to use mainly masculine terms when describing God, and both Catholic and Episcopal women said they imaged Christ. For the most part, the Episcopal women seemed to have moved beyond personage and were inclined to describe God in abstract or androgynous terms. Gnostic women avoided personage altogether when describing God and former images were consciously dismissed as being irrelevant, confusing, and somewhat childish. Again, they seemed reluctant to restrict God to gender form.

Images of Goddess

Women in each group were asked to think of the word "goddess" and what images the term called to mind.

Most of the women reacted to the term "goddess" with emotions ranging from suspicion and fear to curiosity and indifference. Two of the Catholic women had the greatest amount of disdain for the image of goddess. C1 stated the term reminded her of the ancient goddesses that were violent and destructive, a very negative image. To her a goddess was one who "destroys and slaughters." C5 described the goddess as "weakness, lies, pride, and sickness." Three of the Catholic women thought of the goddess in more positive and mythological terms, describing her as being "beautiful," "regal," and "powerful."

The Episcopal women also had some problems with this term. E1 and E2 saw the goddess as being a powerful figure. E1 stated that the goddess is the "female image of God," while E2 saw the goddess as being both creative and

destructive, "not unlike ourselves." Both women felt the goddess was necessary to understand a feminine expression of spirituality, but needed to be developed within the context of Judeo-Christian tradition and "not overdone." A more conservative view was held by E3 who is currently studying for the Episcopal priesthood. She thought of "heathen images and fertility rites" which she considered to be negative. She saw a need for a more feminine God in ritual, but the goddess is "not [her] way of worshipping." The image of goddess was also somewhat negative for E4, who admitted she had an internal war going on regarding her concept of the goddess which she found powerful, fearful, and invigorating.

Most of the Gnostic women seemed to have moved beyond the goddess image as being significant in their spiritual lives and did not give it too much importance. G1 was uncomfortable with the goddess at one time because of the negative connotations but thought in terms of "mother" in order to come to a more feminine image of God as depicted in the Gnostic tradition. The term goddess brought up historical images for G2, which she found interesting, but unimportant. G3 also thought of goddess in historical terms and also as being both powerful and vulnerable. G4 said coming to know the goddess in an historical form was a "freeing experience" which helped her replace the "wise old man image" of God. She liked the goddess image because of its complexity and was comfortable with this feminine image.

Summary

Reaction to the term goddess was mixed. Catholic women seemed to be either fearful of the term because of the negative connotations it evoked, or to dismiss it as being purely mythological. Episcopal women were more aware of

the term as it is currently being used in feminist spirituality, which was both intriguing and confusing for these women since the goddess is contradictory to traditional Christian-based belief of male divinity. The Gnostic women tended to use the goddess as a vehicle to move beyond a patriarchal model of spirituality to a more feminine paradigm. Historical knowledge of the goddess was used as a jumping off point for spiritual development.

The Image of Mary

Women in each group were asked their perception of the Virgin Mary and if she was an important person in their spiritual lives.

Women in all groups had a strong attraction to the Virgin Mary. Many of the Catholic women were devoted to Mary and found in her strong images of motherhood, nurturance, strength, and forgiveness. Although C1 stated she tended to "recoil from sweet pictures of Mary," she also saw Mary as someone who was "waiting, suffering...helpless, but joyful." When C2 thought of Mary, her thoughts turned to Fatima (Portugal) and the rosary. (Mary had reportedly appeared to children there, instructing them to pray the rosary). She thinks of Mary as "a mother who cares for me and wants to help." She added, "I can tell her anything!" As a child, C3 did not perceive Mary as being a strong woman and was not able to identify with Mary since she felt she lacked a role model in her own mother. Now she considered Mary as someone who must have been "strong, wise, and very intelligent." C4 found the image of Mary as portrayed in the Church confusing; someone without much personality. In her estimation, Mary was always portrayed as being too passive and one who actually "did little mothering" since not much is written about her as a parent. The rosary was also

important to C5 who said her belief in Mary has deepened as an adult and she looks at Mary as "someone to emulate."

The Episcopal women, while also being strongly influenced by the symbol of Mary, had a picture of her that was more powerful, assertive, human, and even earthy. E1 pictured Mary as very loving but also as a woman who had experienced intense personal struggles. "She is my image of God," she stated, since she incorporates "God-like qualities." Mary is new to E2, who has learned more about her through the female priest in her parish who often speaks (metaphorically) of being "pregnant with the divine." This idea of human/divine was an important new concept for her, since it gave more "power to the magic." Mary also served as a symbol of strength for E3 who has turned to Mary in her own struggle for recognition as a priest within her religious community. She has made two trips to Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, where Mary is reported to be appearing to children in that small village. These trips have given her peace and a new perspective in her pursuit of the priesthood. E4 stated she admires Mary's openness to God, but quickly added, "not the Catholic version." She saw Mary not as submissive, but as strong, expecting (not waiting) to be filled.

While Mary was important to Gnostic women, she is strongly tied to Sophia, the feminine principle of the godhead within the Gnostic tradition. For these women, the images of Mary have been transformed from an impossible example of womanhood, to the "Divine Motherhood of God." G1 stated this is a difficult concept within Christianity because "Christians have not been conditioned to think of God as mother." Like Jung, she thought the importance of Mary in Christianity came out of the individual subconscious need for the feminine to balance out the masculine. Mary was also seen as a "primal

presence" for G2 but someone who has been manipulated by the Christian male culture. She now thought of Sophia as co-creator, and stated it was like "finding home...this image was waiting and there all the time!" G3 perceived Mary as being meek and genteel, and although important in Christian tradition, certainly not portrayed as someone as powerful as God. Sophia, on the other hand, is that part of the Trinity that is open to being male or female, whatever is lacking. "Wisdom *is* woman," she stated. G4 said the Church has changed Mary from an expression of Sophia to a "goody-goody image of virgin and mother." The historical knowledge of Mary/Sophia has helped her "put the pieces together [and is] a new pathway in the labyrinth."

Summary

Catholic women seemed to be split on the question of Mary. She was either perceived as a role model of nurturance and obedience, or was rejected as being too submissive and an unrealistic model for women. Episcopal women seemed intrigued with Mary and saw her as a powerful yet struggling woman to whom they could relate. Because the Episcopal tradition has not portrayed Mary as being a model of obedience, Episcopal women did not have difficulty identifying with Mary as a flesh-and-blood person. The Gnostic women had moved beyond traditional images of Mary towards the more divine feminine symbol of Sophia. Feminine images seemed crucial to Gnostic women to complete their picture of God, and old images of Mary did not fit into their present spiritual experience.

Sex-role Socialization and Sexuality

Messages About Being Female

Questions were posed to each woman regarding early messages she received about being female from various groups (family, school, church) in an effort to determine how social institutions had influenced gender identity.

When asked what messages were received about being female as a child, C1 stated her brother got many more things than she did, and, as a rule, "boys were rewarded for being aggressive," while girls were not. She was able to compete with boys in the classroom since she was a good student. As a small child, C2 was protected by her parents, although she did play games (cards, board games) with boys in her neighborhood. In school, she also was able to compete with boys, although she was not encouraged to go to a school which offered more college-directed courses. C3 said she wanted to be a lawyer when she was young, but was told by her parents that she would "starve to death." She was also told she could leave home when she married, and occupations that were presented to her were teacher, bank teller, nurse, etc. She excelled in school, although she felt it was not all right to be "too smart." Nothing that was female was valued in C4's family. Her father ridiculed her, leading her to believe that she was not competent. Later, after becoming active in the feminist movement, she entered a predominantly male career, where she experienced much discrimination. As an only child, C5 remembered playing with her dolls and having a "natural" desire to be a mother and not a tomboy. In school, she

considered boys to be "very strange individuals" and was accepting of her female role as portrayed on television since it matched her experience in her own family.

E1 said she fell back into stereotypical female role definitions even though her parents were open and encouraging, and she had no concept of being other than "a mother or a P.E. teacher." At age 25 she realized she could be other things..."a deacon instead of a deacon's wife." E2 thought boys were privileged and were more important in the family. She was taught "to adapt," although she did compete with boys in school. She was more apt to change herself by acquiescing to the needs of others. E3 was also able to excel in school, becoming an avid reader especially about "families that were perfect" to escape problems within her own family. She thought of being a research assistant to Congress, although "never a congressman." She was also a tomboy. In school, E4 noticed that girls were usually involved in arts and crafts, while boys were drawn to math and science courses. She felt she was bright, but she was also a tomboy, and received disapproval for being both from family and school. She was told to "wear dresses and have an interest in homemaking."

G1 was told there were certain things girls didn't do since they were "weaker." She felt like a second-class citizen because the Church told her to be "obedient to her husband, to have children and be quiet!" She said everything was defined for her. "Please men, be a good cook, and offer it up" was the advice given to G2 by her mother. She was also told to obey her husband since "his needs were first." She excelled in school, and was in college at the age of 16. G3 felt inferior to others as a young girl. She remembered always being "under the thumb" of her parents and always doing what she was told. In the Church, she said, women's role was to be subservient to the priest and male

authority. G4 remembered being different from boys at age eight or nine, which "became apparent with play" and the separation of boys and girls into various gangs in her neighborhood. She had discussions with her brother about males/females and thought it unfair that she had a menstrual period and boys did not.

Summary

There appeared to be no major differences among the women interviewed regarding early sex-role socialization. Women in each group received messages that made female roles appear to be limiting and less valued than those roles assigned to males. One of the Catholic women considered this role to be "natural." The other women, in thinking back, reacted to their early sex-role socialization with emotion that ranged from mild irritation to a sense of outrage. Women in all groups felt they were able to compete with males in the academic field, with many surpassing the limitations set by early familial and social influences. Two of the Gnostic women recalled early negative messages they received from the Church about being female.

Sexuality

Each woman was asked what early messages she received about sex.

C1 said she learned nothing from her family, but had a book about babies and "was given sanitary pads." She learned about sex in marriage from the nuns at school, which was presented positively for the most part. There was no double standard because "no one had sex" outside of marriage, unlike today, where "sex can be bought for dinner." C2 said sex was never discussed at home, but she was warned about the problems with "children being born out of

wedlock." She remembers being caught masturbating and being told it was wrong. Since sex was "not spelled out," it was difficult to know what was right and wrong. To C3, sex was the "great forbidden area." She was told that "nice girls didn't ask about sex," and that it had to be saved for marriage. There was much confusion and guilt growing up since normal feelings were considered to be wrong. Although C4's mother taught her about sex, her mother also assumed she would not be sexually active. She received a double message--be passive, yet be responsible for your (and men's) behavior. C5 stated she had no discussions of sex with her mother, nor with her friends. Her mother helped her deal with early menstruation (age 11). There was "tension" in dealing with her emerging sexual feelings and her responding body, but the "Church knew best...[sex] had to be controlled."

E1 had a strong memory of fear and shame about sex before marriage since her mother cared for unwed mothers. Even now, she still has a mistrust of using birth control and "taking a chance." She remembered hating menstruation, and being a girl. E2 said she felt the need for sexual expression, but feared pregnancy. There was much confusion about sex. Sex was natural, but it was her responsibility to "draw the line" since her mother told her "sex should be special." E3 received no negative messages about sex. Both her father and her grandfather had a positive influence on her. Menstruation was thought of as natural. Sex was an uncomfortable subject for E4. She was not really told it was bad, but was not encouraged to talk about it either. She enjoyed sexual experimentation, but being a Christian, thought it was "not right" to enjoy the experience.

Sex was not a concern for G1 until she left the convent. She had always been told that sex was sacred to marriage and she felt her sexuality was a hindrance to her spiritual life. It was only recently that she came to deal with her suppressed sexuality, acknowledging and integrating her "sensual side, and [being able] to open up to Eros." For G2, the message about sex from her parents was that it was "so important, I can't tell you...I may say the wrong thing!" There was never a question of having sex (before marriage). "I would never shame my mother or the Blessed Mother [Mary]," she said. G3 remembered that "nice Catholic girls didn't fool around." Her mother didn't talk about sex, but she learned from her father about "penises, vaginas, and babies." G4 learned about sex in school and "on the streets." In Catholic high school, she was expected to be a virgin, but there was no such expectation for boys. She also said there was a certain superiority in being a virgin. She felt badly about her attitude towards "those who had fallen, but [she] had to condemn the activity."

Summary

Women in all groups received little or no sex education as children. While there was confusion and negative feelings associated with emerging sexuality for most women interviewed, three of the Catholic women considered the Church as the ultimate authority in matters of sexual conduct. One Catholic woman still had problems dealing with masturbation. The Episcopal women were more open to sexual experimentation (before marriage) but still had problems with it in terms of Christian morality. The Gnostic women had similar problems dealing with sexual guilt while growing up. One Gnostic woman in particular felt sexual repression had become an obstacle to her own spiritual development.

Menopause and Mid-Life

Women in each group were asked if they had experienced menopause or any significant mid-life changes/crisis.

Three of the five Catholic women answered the question in terms of physical changes. C2 said she had experienced hot flashes and weight gain, but was pleased and relieved that there were "no more pads!" C3 also had hot flashes, mood swings, and weight gain. Though her body was changing and getting older, she was "not revolted by it." C5 had positive feelings about her aging body. She's had ERT (estrogen replacement therapy) since her ovaries were removed last year, and has a sense of being "wiser, more patient, and aging gracefully." Two of the Catholic women answered the question in terms of life changes. C1 was still dealing with the sadness of a miscarriage. For her, the "grieving process is ongoing." C4 stated she was experiencing a "career crisis" as she is currently involved in offensive weapons work and would like to have more of a "spiritual career."

All of the Episcopal women answered the question in terms of major life changes. Formerly a Catholic, E1 became an Episcopalian at age 28, while also becoming involved in a 12-step program. She had a calling to the priesthood, which was "hopeless in the Catholic Church." It was a freeing experience for her to be able to get in touch with her gifts, to "own them and not deny them." E2 had to come to terms with trying to be "superwoman." She realized she didn't know who she was, and through meditation, discovered that "underneath there was a poet who needed expression." She felt that one's spiritual life can either help or hinder a person in the passages of life. E3 remembered being profoundly affected by the divorce of her parents when she was 32. She had to realize that

she "cannot control other's lives" and that she is not responsible for what happens to others. A few years later, she experienced a calling to the Episcopal priesthood. Since E4 has no children, she was concerned about getting older and the fact that there is "no unbounded time." She felt women receive negative messages about aging "which makes us question who we are as persons."

Three of the Gnostic women answered the question in terms of spiritual crisis. G1 saw changes as being both physical and spiritual since she began questioning who she was and started looking for new definitions. She said she is still exploring, and her personal growth and development won't ever stop. She no longer belongs to a "large institutional Church." Although she said she needs to belong, it is not her "vocation to belong anymore." When G2 began to do research on the mystic Hildegard of Bingen, she entered what she termed a "dark night of the soul." She was trying to separate from her children, her mother, and "mother Church" which came like a "tidal wave of emotion." She realized that she was grieving for significant losses in her life. When her parents became ill, G3 became aware that she was growing older and she had to take over the role of parent to her mother and father. She also had problems with arthritis and could not do many of the things she used to do. G4 said that as she grew older, she found she needed to sever herself from the patriarchal Church and "start over." She found comfort and joy in the Gnostic ritual which took her "beyond laughter to deep emotion." She said she has "no fear of aging [and] an urge to see the other side." She is convinced that "all cultures have archetypal patterns" which confirms her belief in an afterlife.

Summary

Answers to the question of mid-life changes varied among the three groups of women. Most of the Catholic women answered the question in terms of physical changes they had encountered and did not seem to experience serious upheaval in their lives in terms of significantly questioning/changing their values or belief systems. (C5 did add that she had experienced serious depression about nine years ago, and went to a priest/psychologist. She claimed the experience strengthened her spiritually and she had a "recommitment to the faith"). Three of the Episcopal women pointed to changes in spiritual direction as being central to mid-life transition. They looked for new definitions of who they were in relation to their religious experience and practice and most women made major changes in their lives in this area. Three of the Gnostic women described mid-life in terms of a more painful spiritual awakening, which seemed a necessary counterpart to their need to let go of old symbols they found no longer meaningful.

Attitudes about Women and Work

Raising Children

All interviewees were asked if they felt women with small children should work outside the home and if men should have the option of being primary caretakers of young children.

C1 thought women are better at caring for children than men since they "are able to work in multiple ways while men are more self-centered." She thought women should work part-time in order to maintain their self-confidence, but "children should be their first priority." C2 also contended that women should

work part time so that they do not lose confidence. She felt men can stay home if that is agreeable to both parties, but there should be "no child care from the state." C3 had mixed feelings about women working. Although she stayed at home when her children were young, she remarked that she stayed home too long, since she had lost confidence and self-esteem. She said this decision depends on the woman and how she can handle the situation. She also felt that men should be able to stay home if they choose. C4 thought that primary care is not always given by the woman with the couples she knows, but is usually a 50/50 situation. In describing a male friend who is the primary caretaker, she said, "If I had a father like Bob, I would not have a problem with God the father." C5 thought it was better if women with small children did not work, but acknowledged that some women need to work. Fathers can stay home, but the "psychic care is different...women create warmth, mothering, and are the heart of the home," she said. She added that "the man is the head of the home."

Episcopal women were more apt to struggle with this question and opt for alternative forms of child care. To E1, better child care was primary, since many women are not able to stay home. She said men can stay home, but "it is unusual." E2 thought this decision should be up the individual. She contended it was the business world that should change. "Why 40 hours a week?" she asked. She remarked that problems of home/career put women in an impossible situation as they are not always able to meet the needs of their children. She felt men should be home if they have a good relationship with their children. While E3 contended that women should be home with young children, she empathized with women who need to work for financial/personal reasons. She felt husbands should be more involved in the care of children and some day care is good for

children. E4 thought a woman should not have to stay home, but must feel "centered and balanced." Men can also be good caretakers, as was shown in the Gulf War when women were away and men took care of the kids. "One way is not the only way," she added.

Gnostic women answered this question briefly and more directly. G1 said she would need to work because she would be bored if she stayed home. She thought parenting must be done by both spouses, with a third party for day care. She contended that children become more independent and responsible if they are raised in this way. G2 stated simply it should be everyone's right to choose. Some women (and some men) should be at home, but this is up to the couple. Although G3 stated she liked to "mom" and stay home, she realized this was not always possible. Men should be more involved, and "women should do whatever they need to do." G4 thought both parents working caused "tremendous tension" in the household. Even though there may be no gender division of labor, the couple usually has "definite mother/father roles." She felt men need more sensitivity training and should become more involved in child care.

Summary

Although sympathetic to women's need to work, Catholic women were inclined to think women should have primary care of young children. Two of the women believed women were better suited for this job by the mere fact of their being female. Episcopal women were more inclined to opt for better child care and saw the need for women to have a balance in their lives through work. This presented a problem for many of them in terms of who is actually responsible for child care. Gnostic women, on the other hand, did not see a problem with

women working, but felt it should be their choice and both parties should partake in caring for children. Three of the women felt strongly that working outside the home was a woman's right rather than simply an option.

Women in the Work Force

While women in the three groups did not have a problem with women as managers or supervisors in the academic and corporate world, some were uncomfortable with women holding typically "male" jobs. For the most part, women said they would seek the help of a female surgeon or fly in a commercial plane piloted by a female pilot if she were qualified to do those jobs. However, some differences occurred when asked if they would vote for a woman for president.

C1 thought a woman as president should be more thoughtful, "have a philosophical outlook [and] not be too reactionary." C2 stated a woman would have to be a Republican and anti-abortion--a "Margaret Thatcher type...strong." C3 felt a woman could be president because "women have the ability to think in larger units, not task by task." She said women are better suited for politics because they are "more circular, more whole." C4 simply stated she had no problem with a woman president. C5 also stated a president would need to be a "Margaret Thatcher type person."

Episcopal women also varied in their responses. E1 said she would vote for a woman if she had the same "clarity as a male, was articulate and had strong values for humanitarian sides of life." E2 said she would consider voting for a woman, although it would depend on the person. In her opinion, politics was "still a male arena and [the woman] would have to be a super person!" E3 stated she

would vote for a woman since she felt women have more "self-awareness [and are] usually more intuitive." She also wondered about women and PMS , although she acknowledged that "men go through problems, too." E4 simply stated she would vote for a woman candidate if she were qualified, adding that she had voted for Diane Feinstein for governor of California.

Gnostic women were more inclined to favor women in politics and were more pointed in their remarks. G1 said she would vote for a woman "because she *is* a woman." She contended a woman would "have to play the male game." G2 said voting for a woman would depend on her competency and stances on specific issues. "She would have to have a prochoice stand on abortion, and be pro-environment," she stated. G3 said there would be no problem voting for a woman for president as she does vote for women supervisors. G4 emphasized that having a woman president is her goal, but "people cannot deal with race, let alone gender." She was in favor of voting for someone like Pat Schroeder, since "she has a lot of integrity [yet] is still vulnerable."

Summary

While women in all groups favored a woman as president, they were markedly different in their considerations. Catholic women were more inclined to take a conservative stand based on their perception of a woman president being more relational, having strong family values, and being anti-abortion. While Episcopal women did not mention the abortion issue, they were concerned about a woman president being able to handle the job of president unless she had what they perceived as more aggressive, male-like qualities. Gnostic women had no problems with a woman as president and were more apt to vote for her *because* she was female, providing she took a feminist stance on political issues.

Women in Combat

The question of women in combat was received with some ambivalence and consternation, especially by more traditional Catholic women.

C1 argued that women should be in support positions only, since "men have more stamina." She also thought women in combat would present a problem since it would be necessary for men to protect women as "women did not have courage." C2 also had problems with women in combat, stating "society should protect women." She also thought that males are naturally more aggressive than females. C3 took a more moderate view, stating there would be no problem unless a woman is caring for a child, then there "could be a problem for the child's sake." C4 was more open to women in combat, stating "most promotions are due to combat experience." She added that "women may make us think more about war and change all the rules." She felt women officers could contribute to this change in attitude. C5 responded to the question with a definite "NO!" She also said men are more aggressive and "suited for combat [which is] against women's nature."

Episcopal women were more open to the possibility of women in combat. E1 thought women should be in combat if they volunteered for that duty. While she has "been touched by women [fighting] in the Gulf," she also thought combat is not good for either male or female, since "it rips families apart." E2 said combat is no problem if it is a woman's choice. She also expressed sadness that warriors are "protecting us so we can live a particular lifestyle." E3 also thought combat should be a woman's choice. Although women have the ability to fight, women as mothers would present a problem for her. E4 stated emphatically that

she is "anti-war...no one should be in combat!" She said both men and women should be in combat if needed, but it is a hard concept for her to accept.

Again, Gnostic women answered the question more directly and three of the women were more focused on combat as a woman's right. G1 pointed out that women in Israel have been fighting for a long time. If we truly believe in equal rights for women, "women should be able to fight also," she stated. G2 strongly declared it is a woman's choice to fight if that's what she wants to do and the woman understands the risks involved. "How many men have had their genitals shot off!" she added. G3 said women who join the armed forces should not be discriminated against. Although she would hate to see women leave their children, she said "men have left [their] children for years." G4 remarked that "both men and women should go into a psychiatric unit" for wanting to fight a war. Although she said combat should be a woman's choice, she also felt strongly that women would be giving up their "sense of personhood for self-preservation."

Summary

For most of the women interviewed, women in combat was an emotionally charged issue and one that was not dealt with easily. Catholic women were more inclined to feel that fighting was something that was "natural" and sometimes even honorable for males, but not for females. Women were seen as needing protection and having less ability, and courage, to fight. For the most part, Episcopal women struggled with the question of women in combat because they were against war as a political solution, and combat for both men or women presented a moral dilemma. While not in favor of war, Gnostic women viewed combat as a person's right and did not discriminate between men or women doing the job. For them, it came down to a matter of freedom of choice.

Socio-Religious Development

Since the focus of this study is the relation between women and their ministers and consequent effects on women's lives, the majority of questions asked were focused in this area. Each woman explained her own particular experience within her particular socio-religious group. This final area of study was broken down into three major sections: 1) The role of priest/minister in the Church and community; 2) The Church and sexual morality; and 3) Changing roles of women in the Church.

1) The Role of Priest/Minister in the Church and Community

Experience of Confession

Women in each group were asked about their experience of sacramental confession, if the experience had been positive or negative, and what role the priest played in this process.

Catholic women, for the most part, had a positive experience, although one Catholic woman felt confessing to a priest had been demeaning and abusive. C1 had a positive experience, adding that males are better suited as confessors since "they can [easily] dismiss faults of other people." She said women become too involved and would not be able to stand back, "hear and forget." Guilt is a major problem for C2 who said she had to find the "right confessor" who could help her "make a perfect act of contrition." C3 recalled a "faceless person" in the confessional as being a dangerous thing, and she came to "resent baring my soul to a man." As a teenager, she said the priest "asked too many questions about my sexual sins...I felt violated, defiled, and unclean." This experience was a pivotal point in her relationship with the Church. C4 said there was a need to

share her problems as an abused child with another person, and she found that need met through her confessor, although she said talking with a priest is not necessary for everyone. C5 had a fear of confession as a child, but said it has become very meaningful to her as she has become older.

For Episcopal women, confessing sins to God or another person was important although the particular role of priest was not primary in this process. E1 (formerly a Catholic) remembers confessing to a priest as being "very scary." She now finds 12-step programs to be valuable in looking at oneself and one's need for forgiveness. E2 thought a general confession was a good thing as it helps one "do an inventory [and] feel the forgiveness." Although E3 said sin can be forgiven directly through God, she has a female confessor whom she said is very useful to "help in the process." E4 thought it was necessary to share destructive behavior with another person. She preferred a female priest or a "male with a well-developed feminine side." She has also found support among other women.

Gnostic women were more philosophical about confession and saw it primarily as useful in coming to a greater self-understanding. G1 said her experience of confession had been dependent upon the confessor. Some priests were "mystically inclined" validating that "God is within" and bringing about a balance of the masculine and feminine. Forgiveness does not have to be mediated through a priest, she added. As a child, G2 stated that she "tried to think up sins" since confession was therapeutic and she always felt a sense of relief. She remarked that the male figure was formidable, however, and there was also great fear. "The tragedy of the Catholic Church," she stated, "is that it has stifled how loved we are." The idea of reconciling the self was important to

G3, and she felt there was a need to talk about mistakes with someone. She did not think Catholicism has helped her in the healing process, however, as she resented "an-all powerful man who had the power to say you are okay." She said the important thing is "to feel sorry inside yourself." G4 said she liked going to confession at one time "because of the counseling aspect." However, she claimed the significance of the sacrament is now gone, and the value of confession for her own spiritual growth "died in the mid-1960's." She found individuals whom she considers spiritual but who are not connected with the Church to be helpful in her own process of forgiveness.

Summary

Catholic women perceived the role of priest in confession as being important in the process of forgiveness of sins, although for one Catholic woman, confession had been a humiliating experience. (She wondered what the reaction would be if men had to tell *their* sins to a *woman*). Episcopal women saw the value of a priest as confessor, but more as a support and a mediator in their own process of seeking forgiveness. They found women, both priests and lay women, to be extremely valuable in this process. To Gnostic women, confessing to a priest was a thing of the past. While another person can be helpful as a spiritual guide or counselor, each woman felt she had to seek forgiveness from within.

Experience of Mass/Service

The women in each group were asked what part of the Mass/Service was meaningful to them, what role the minister plays in worship and ritual, and

if gender would make a difference in performance/sacredness of the ritual. Catholic women were asked to report their feelings when imagining a woman presiding at Mass. The Mass, or Eucharist, is defined as those prayers and ceremonies surrounding the communion service.

C1 said the important part of the Mass is the presence of the body and blood of Christ, which she considered an "honor and a treasure." She also found consolation in the community. For her, the priest is "standing in for Christ [and] does what Christ did." She saw the priest as "head of the mystical body" which, for her, was a positive role. While she said she has no problem envisioning women saying Mass, she also felt "they have no physical capacity for ordination...[since] being male is intrinsic to it." If the Church changed (which she said is unlikely) she would accept women as priests, but "only the Church has the ability to discern." C2 felt "going to communion" was the most important part of the Mass. The priest is there to perform a function which she said is "practical." She stated she would have no difficulties with a woman saying Mass but only "if Rome approves." She added that she "would have to get used to it." The Eucharist was also important to C3, who valued the tradition but felt "long-winded prayers are not relevant." The priest should "set the tone for the liturgy and be the presider who calls the community together." When asked about a woman as priest, she shouted "Hooray!!" She said the Church would be enriched since "women have gifts they can share." C4 said the Eucharist, singing, and community are the important parts of the Mass for her. Just as the "Indians believed if you ate the heart of an animal you take on the animal, we take on the aspects of Christ," she explained. The priest is the orchestrator, the conductor, but "we take it from there." She added that a woman as priest "would

be wonderful!" To C5, the entire Mass was important to her spiritual expression. "I know Christ is truly present to me and I to him, by faith," she explained. The priest is an "icon of Christ" and helps her by "imaging the bridegroom [and] inviting the bride to the banquet." If it was "official" that women could be priests, she would have no problem, but only if women "had the backing of the Church."

E1 said she likes the "readings, Eucharist, and homily" as well as a sense of community. She remarked that the Episcopal priest "isn't in the same elevated position [as in the Catholic Church], making us all co-celebrators." She remembered feeling "absolute joy" and excitement when seeing a woman preside at an Episcopal service. "There is a different energy from the male...he is more mechanical." She felt a woman brings feminine qualities to the ritual, such as "nurturing and caring." E2 found the service to be a "cleansing" experience. She said communion and community are important as well. Her experience varied depending upon who is presiding, a balance of male/female roles being important. While the female priest may be "more ethereal," she thought the male priest is more practical and "brings it home." The Eucharist is crucial to E3, who felt strongly that "God comes through other people and situations." The priest is both presider/preacher. She saw no difference between male or female priests as long as they "bring the people to God and God to the people" and act as intercessory. However, she said there are many men (both priests and parishioners) who are uncomfortable with women on the altar and added that "they must try to grow and not fight the experience." E4 said communion is the most important part of the service because the "then becomes now." Both male and female priests bring their own unique energy to the service. Since Christ had both male and female qualities, she felt a balance of both is important. "[Seeing]

pregnant women [presiding] at the altar is a wonderful experience...a beautiful, natural process," she added.

In addition to questions regarding ritual, Gnostic women were also asked what prompted them to seek spiritual expression outside the Catholic faith. G1 said she began to "experience God as mother" which was a turning point for her. She also felt called to be a priest/leader and said she had to follow her heart. In the Gnostic Church, "community brings the presence of Christ in the here and now moment." As a bishop, she perceived herself as "a channel who provides the space, ritual, moment, doorway" but does not control the community. Since she is able to bring her "integrated self to the ritual" she is not threatened by masculine images of God, but is able to balance the male/female images. G2 found Gnosticism to be "sensual and seductive." She loves the Gnostic liturgy, which "helps illuminate the Catholic ritual." She felt the energy is different with a woman as presider. Communion to her is a "wedding of the male and female." She is constantly being drawn back to the Gnostic ritual because of the strong feminine imagery which she found deeply moving. "I have wept many times," she said. G3 began her spiritual search back in college and is still questioning what she considers the "hidden agenda in the Catholic Church," (a desire to control others, especially women). The most important aspect of Church is community, a "sharing of the ups and downs." Eucharist is more "the sharing of a meal in the Gnostic Church," she said, "a communion of friends, not a communion of beliefs." She said there is a sharing of ideas in the Gnostic Church and it is not so authoritarian. "A female doesn't change God. God is present regardless of where I am," she stated. G4 said the Gnostic ritual is "an expression of the Sacrament through the feminine. She asserted that in the

Catholic Church, the priest often does not understand the need for community and the "meanings have been lost." To her, the priest should exist for liturgical action, not for the social role.

Summary

For all Catholic women interviewed, the Eucharist is an important part of Catholic ritual. While all Catholic women said they would accept a female priest, only two thought this change should take place. Three of the women would accept a female priest on the Church's authority, but this presented a dilemma for these women since they also felt maleness was essential in performing priestly functions. Eucharist was also important to the Episcopal women, but they saw it more in terms of a communal experience done with (not through) the minister. The ministerial role was described in terms of male and female characteristics and how each was important in order to have a more balanced and complete ritual experience. Gnostic women had very definite feminine images of God which demanded expression in a more female-centered environment. To these women, the Gnostic ritual is more a sharing of the self with others in order to come to one's own particular mode of spiritual expression. Also, Gnostic women were not inclined to look for authority outside of themselves to dictate socially acceptable means of ritual behavior but acted more instinctively and intuitively in this regard.

Role of Priest/Minister in the Community

Each woman was asked what they consider to be the main duties of the minister in their community, if they could relate to the minister on an informal basis, and if they would consider going to their minister for counseling of a

personal nature. They were then asked if gender would make a difference in this relationship.

C1 said the main duties of the priest are praying, hearing confessions, and being available to people. She had no problem socializing with priests since her work entails being in contact with many priests. She could go to a priest for counseling, but it would depend on the person. If the matter was very personal, she would go to a woman counselor *and* a priest. C2 said the priest should be supportive of Catholic education, and should write a newsletter for communication to "those [in the parish] who do not go to Church." His homilies should be "brief and to the point." She can socialize with some priests, but she is sometimes intimidated by them, adding that she is "not the type to socialize with priests." She would not go to a priest for marital counseling or advice. She could talk about these things better with a woman. A priest should be a counselor, a friend, and a "shepherd of the flock" was the opinion of C3. She also contended that nuns are really running the parish as "priests are not good business people." She had no problem socializing with priests. While she would consider going to a priest for counseling, she would prefer to go to an ex-priest, as a "faithful (celibate) priest could not relate to marriage problems." She felt gender might make a difference, but would depend on the circumstances. C4 stated a priest should create a spiritual atmosphere and "minister to the health of the people." One of her good friends is a priest, but she realized some people are intimidated by priests. She would want to go to a "trained therapist" for counseling, especially someone who has worked with victims of abuse. She had wanted a woman for a therapist, but chose a male who was highly skilled. C5 said a priest is responsible for the sacramental life of the Church. Priests are part of an

informal social group to which she belongs. She has gone to a priest/counselor when depressed. She feels gender would not make a difference for personal counseling, but spiritual counseling would be different since a priest may be better qualified.

For Episcopal women, the role of priest varied from the perceived role of the Catholic priest. E1 saw a priest as more a "facilitator of the community." Not only should s/he be involved in the sacramental life, but also with visiting the sick/dying and as a counselor and guide. She felt strongly that an Episcopal priest should have a more intimate relationship with others and always be "within reach." She has socialized with the female priest in her parish on a number of occasions. This was important to her as she has the "need to connect." She would go to a priest for counseling, but added she would not have gone to a Catholic priest since "he operates from a celibate model." Her spiritual director is a woman who can empathize with her since "she has been there!" E2 also said a priest must strengthen the relationship between God and the people and "facilitate spiritual growth." She claimed a female priest has helped her in her spiritual journey by bringing a female focus. There is "mutual counseling" between her and her priest "*because* she is a woman." For E3, the duties of a priest are mainly presiding over the congregation and preaching, but "a priest can also be teacher or a retreat minister." While she said she is comfortable with some Episcopal priests, she is even more comfortable with Catholic men (students) at the seminary whom she found to be very supportive in her studies. She revealed that she is currently going to a woman for spiritual/personal counseling and felt it is the "level of trust, not the gender, that would be important." E4 described the duties of the priest in feminine images of "spiritual

mid-wife, nurturer, [and] support to people in the congregation." The priest should also be a facilitator between the Church and the community. She felt women as well as men are called to do that since "they help people to come home to the spiritual part of the self." While she can socialize with both male and female priests, she said she is more comfortable with a female. Her spiritual director is a lay woman. She has gone to a male for counseling, but she thought it would probably be different with a female, especially regarding sexual matters.

Gnostic women compared the duties of the Catholic priest with a Gnostic minister. G1 said that a minister "provides space to celebrate the sacraments...until the community can acknowledge their own priesthood." As an ordained bishop, she perceived herself "as a mirror so that others can see themselves and see the divine." She is not able to socialize with Catholic priests since she claimed they are not ready to accept her. For counseling, she could go to a bishop at the Gnostic Church since "she can understand on a level of being a [female] bishop." Being in a process of transition, she also thought a male spiritual guide would also be important in order to have a balance. G2 felt the duties of the minister are counselor, presider at the service/sacraments, and guide, helping others through life's passages. She is able to relate to both Gnostic and Catholic ministers socially, but answered with a resounding "NO!" when asked if she would go to a Catholic priest for counseling. "It's the other way around...I could counsel them!" she asserted. She thought the female minister in the Gnostic Church is "real," while many Catholic priests are terrified of dealing with women since "priests are preoccupied with sex." She added, "The Church is dysfunctional [and] on a breathing machine." G3 said a priest should be a facilitator and a lecturer on spirituality. She should be someone to

talk to, a guide in our spiritual journey, helping us "find our own path towards goodness and the higher self." She has had no problem relating to priests/ministers in her home if they are "down to earth." She thought a minister in the Gnostic Church would be more open to what she would want to discuss, such as "past lives" (reincarnation). Gender would not necessarily make a difference in counseling. She would prefer a woman, although "some women are not good with people." G4 asserted the main duties of a priest "must be spiritual leadership, and liturgical direction," leaving administrative duties to others. The priest should also act as mediator "between the self and the selves of the community." She asserted that each person must "confront the divine within" entering into the ritual experience via the ministry. Gender would definitely make a difference to her because of what she termed "the limitation to males" in the Catholic tradition.

Summary

Catholic women saw the role of priest as mostly functional, as presider during ritual, dispenser of the sacraments, and as spiritual advisor. They expressed some fear and intimidation in socializing with a priest and a hesitation to seek help from a priest for personal problems. Two of the women considered a priest rather than a woman to be more of an authority in spiritual matters. Episcopal women saw the role of priest as both a facilitator and a link to the spiritual community. It was important to Episcopal women that the priest take an active role with members of the congregation, and availability of female priests seemed important to these women, especially in discussing personal problems in counseling. They also perceived the relationship between a female priest and a lay woman to be more reciprocal. Gnostic women saw the role of minister more

as a personal guide to facilitate one's own inner spiritual growth process. The role of minister had been demystified for these women, and they had come to a point of self-understanding that necessitated a change in their perception of the minister as an authority figure in matters of spirituality.

2) The Church and Sexual Morality

Abortion and Birth Control

The women interviewed were asked to give their opinions of the Church's stance on issues of sexuality as they impact women, specifically birth control and abortion. They were also asked what areas of sexual behavior they considered sinful.

C1 said there was confusion regarding the Church's stand on birth control. She agreed with the Pope that "birth control denigrates the female [since it] encourages unlimited sexual action without being open to procreation." While she had compassion for women who have had abortions, she thought "it takes more courage to have the child." Areas she considered sinful are sex outside of marriage, infidelity, adultery, and (sometimes) homosexuality. C2 also felt that the Church is correct in its teaching regarding birth control. Couples must be "open to human life," she stated. She has supported "Right to Life" organizations and felt strongly that a woman cannot deliberately "kill one [person] to save another." She said whatever the Church teaches is what she accepts. Although she thought "sexual sins are not the greatest sins," premarital sex, adultery, practicing homosexuality, and divorce/remarriage are wrong in her opinion. C3 was more open to practicing artificial birth control, stating the "Church should not be involved" in such decisions. She felt it is a "duty [of the

couple] to think about bringing a person into the world." She said she does, however, support the Church regarding its stand on abortion, but not because she is a Catholic. She thought a woman should have an abortion only if raped or for medical reasons, but otherwise must consider the life in the womb as being equally important to her own. She considered hurtful behavior, infidelity, and promiscuity as sinful, but felt homosexual behavior is not always wrong, unless promiscuous. C4 asserted "if the Church says 'no' to abortion, they must say 'yes' to birth control." While she morally disagreed with abortion, she admitted that "they will happen." Her concern was for the incest victim who may become pregnant. Pornography, child pornography, incest, and rape are things she considered sinful since they "rob people of their dignity and choice." C5 answered the questions very briefly, stating she supported the Church's view on both birth control and abortion. In her opinion, sexual sins are adultery, infidelity, activity leading up to adultery, active homosexuality, and masturbation.

E1 stated "we need to have birth control [since] it is necessary, healthy, and important." She also felt abortion may be necessary at times; but the decision to abort must be made through "conscience, Scripture, and prayer." She regarded homosexuality and promiscuity not as sins but as "tragic and painful ways of living." Adultery is wrong in her estimation. E2 did not like the term "sin" used in conjunction with sexual behavior. She said there is "great pain" in making the decision to have an abortion, but sometimes women have no choice. She was reluctant to list sexual behavior she considered sinful, stating the "Church is for those who are broken...no one could be in the Church if we were perfect." According to E3, there has been a shift in the position of the Episcopal Church regarding abortion towards a more "prolife" stance. While not

saying abortion is a "sin," she felt all human life is sacred. Birth control did not present a problem for her. She felt the priesthood should be open to "non-practicing homosexuals," but had difficulty with practicing homosexuals being ordained. While she stated "it is not their fault," she also said that "it is not God's plan that men should mate with other men. " E4 stated that she is both "prochoice and prolife." She said people must use their sexuality responsibly. While having no restrictions on birth control, she felt the decision to have an abortion was dependent upon the circumstances/problems of the women involved. She also felt homosexuality is not a sin if there is a responsible relationship, but admitted the issue of homosexual priests is causing problems within the Episcopal Church today.

G1 said she does not agree with the Catholic Church's stance on birth control and felt couples should be responsible and "space their children." While she considered herself to be prochoice, she also felt abortion should not be a birth control measure. However, she stated, if a woman is "not capable, she should not be forced to bear a child." She said irresponsible, indiscriminate sexual behavior is wrong especially "if using another person." A homosexual relationship can be all right in her opinion. "Some [homosexual] couples are very devoted," she added. G2 felt the Catholic Church's stance on birth control "reflects man's fear of women [and] amplifies their [priests] impotence in the celibate structure." To her, the "unpardonable sin is lack of intimacy." Homosexuality is not sinful, but "promiscuity is not life giving" for either homosexuals or heterosexuals. G3 felt the use of birth control is a personal decision. While not in favor of abortion, she did not see an alternative in some cases, such as incest/drug related pregnancies. She said abortion has to be a

woman's decision and "even God cannot make the decision for her." She regarded rape and sexual assault as sexual sins. While homosexuality was not sinful in her estimation, "it can be harmful" depending upon the couples involved. G4 said she does not agree with the Catholic Church regarding matters of sexual behavior. "Men [priests] will not get out of *their* skirts, so they must be in *ours* !" she remarked. She considered sexual sins to be bestiality, the use of children, and sexual manipulation. She found many homosexual relationships to be good, "even enviable."

Summary

Three of the Catholic women interviewed agreed with the Catholic Church's teaching on birth control and abortion and considered the Church the final authority in matters of sexual conduct. Two of the Catholic women felt birth control was not a problem, but wrestled with the morality of abortion, viewing it more as a necessary evil. All of the Episcopal women felt that use of birth control was a woman's right, and viewed abortion as being a painful decision but one which had to be made by individual moral conscience. Gnostic women were more outspoken about the injustice of the Church's stance on birth control and abortion and saw it as unfair and obtrusive. While abortion was not something to be taken lightly, it was seen as being purely a woman's decision and not dependent upon the precepts of a male-dominated Church.

3) Changing Roles of Women in the Church

Feminine Images of Christ

The women in each group were told of modern artists who have portrayed the figure on the cross as being female. (One such sculpture is

"Christa," by Edwina Sandys). They were then asked if they had difficulties imaging a "female savior...the daughter of God."

C1 said "God chose to be male because of limitations of history" and because it was necessary to be "single minded" which she felt was a male attribute. For her, the idea of a female savior did not coincide with the doctrine of the Incarnation, stating, "God became man " but quickly added that "just because God chose the male form, does not mean God is male." The idea of Christ being female was difficult for C2, since "he was a man and that's the way it is." She contended that Christ's maleness was all part of "God's plan." C3 felt that Christ did not have to be male. While the idea of a female savior "would be a culture shock," it was not a fundamental problem for her. C4 said it was essential for Christ to be born male "if he was to accomplish what he was to accomplish" since no one would have listened to a female in first century Jewish culture. She was intrigued with the idea of the "daughter of God" because she was not exposed to positive male role models as a child, which consequently "put a distance" between her and her perception of Christ. C5 said it was essential for Christ to be male because he is an "icon of [God] the father, [and] creative outflow from the father is a male act with creation being the feminine receptor." She said this is a "spiritual truth [expressing] who God is and the way he acts in creation."

E1 felt it was not essential for Christ to be male. She thought "icons of Christ as woman are wonderful because they break us out of our limited scope of [understanding] God." She has often imaged Christ as a woman, and it has great meaning to her. This feminine image is powerful because of its nurturing aspect. While she likes the Jesus image, she said male or female images alone are

incomplete and "we need both." E2 asserted the male image of Christ is necessary for men in order for them to have a "model of how men should act." Being human, not being male, is what is essential but "female energy has to come in some form," she added. For her, this form comes in the image of the "Father/Mother of the cosmos." E3 stated that it was not essential for Christ to be male, but it was necessary since he "could not be accepted as divine, let alone as a woman." She also said Christ had a feminine side and "he learned from women." To her, the concept of the "daughter of God" is culturally important and "could happen at this time...possibly now." While women today are "not crucified on crosses, they are suffering because of blind Pharisees who do not see us." E4 felt Christ's maleness was culturally necessary at the time but now she is not so sure. She has no problem with the male image and is comfortable with it.

While G1 thought it was probably necessary for Christ to be male since "Judaism is male-oriented," she did not feel his maleness was essential. Five years ago she would have had a problem with a female savior, but now she knows "God is beyond gender" and her attitude has changed. G2 thought that historically Christ would have to be male, but what was important was "how he treated females" and what he said about humanity. She often images "Sophia as co-creator--forget daughter!" This was a beautiful and important image for her. G3 remarked that if Christ had been born female, "no one would have believed in him." What was important was that "he had feminine qualities [such as] gentleness." She also wondered why we needed a "savior" and why it was necessary for "someone to die," either male or female. She referred to Christ more as the "great guide" and his gender was not relevant. G4 asserted that

"Jesus as savior took residence in a male person for that place in history," but there must be a separation between the Christ (savior) and Jesus (male person). She described Jesus as "an *expression* of the Christ." She felt the need for feminine symbols of divinity has grown out of this concept of *male-as-savior*.

Summary

Three of the Catholic women believed that the maleness of Christ was essential even to the point of referring to his being an "icon" for God as father. Two of the Catholic women seemed intrigued with the idea of a female savior, but were unsure how to integrate the image into their spiritual lives. Episcopal women were more open to the idea of a female savior, and for some, the feminine image of God was very strong and this image had changed their concept of Christ as having strictly male attributes. Gnostic women had moved beyond questioning the maleness of Christ to a more androgynous concept of the godhead which incorporated both male and female qualities/properties and which necessitated a change in attitude regarding the importance of gender in the Christ figure altogether.

Women and the Catholic Priesthood

Historically, the Catholic Church has claimed male sex a necessity for priesthood based on Jesus' reference to himself as bridegroom in Scripture as well as Pauline texts restricting women's role as ministers. The importance of the imagery of divine bridegroom was re-emphasized in the Vatican "Declaration" regarding women and the priesthood. The final questions asked were in reference to the Vatican's "Declaration" that maleness of the minister is essential in order to symbolize Christ as bridegroom of the Church. Each woman was

asked her opinion of this statement, and how she would respond to Catholic women who felt they had "a calling" to the priesthood. Finally, each woman was asked in what capacity women can best represent Christ.

C1 referred to St. Paul when asked about Christ as bridegroom, stating "the spouse has to be male" according to Scripture. In this regard, as "women take the semen, we take the person of God...in a receiving sort of way [since] God does the initiating." While "a calling can be genuine," she also felt "women need the discipline to forego questioning the Church's authority." To her, to be a Catholic means "let me follow, let me obey." She saw women's role as "mother" as being superior to all other roles, including the priesthood. C2 said she had no problem with the Vatican "Declaration", paraphrasing Mother Teresa of Calcutta's statement that "when men can give birth, women can be priests." She asserted a calling to the priesthood is "overrated [and] women must have nothing else to do" but be concerned about such things. She remarked that some women "lack common sense [and] women's *attitude* is the problem." Women can represent Christ by doing "works of mercy, feeding the poor, and clothing the naked." C3 had a problem with the image of bride/bridegroom saying it was "pretty weird." A calling for women, she felt, is just as authentic as anyone else's but "it is the Church that teaches [women] to deny that calling." She said women can represent Christ by being assertive and "agents for change as Christ was an agent for change." C4 said the idea of bridegroom was "absurd" and wondered why the Church couldn't be the bridegroom and the priest the bride. She also felt it is the Church that makes it hard for women to respond to the call to priesthood. She wondered in what way women *can't* represent Christ. "He doesn't represent me if he is representing only his maleness," she added. C5 strongly agreed with

the Vatican's statement, asserting "the Church is correct in its tradition and its understanding of St. Paul's writing in regard to women and their inherent inability to function in role of minister."¹ She said women can represent Christ through love, care, concern, and forgiveness. She referred to the "guidance of the Church" in continuing to hold priesthood as a "male office," stating women are called to their own particular "priesthood" in the natural order of being able to bear children.

E1 thought the idea of bride/bridegroom was "ridiculous." She felt the important part of being a priest was having a sense of bonding and commitment to the congregation. "Women can do this, too, [because] they have more nurturing energy." She would affirm a woman's calling to the priesthood and tell her to seek the advice of friends, ministers, therapists, and mentors to discern if the calling is genuine, since it is a "fearful and demanding process." She felt there should be no difference in how men or women represent Christ. E2 said women must be priests in order to "join with the males in the Church." The concept of bride/bridegroom "doesn't make sense" to her. While she said a calling would be difficult for women, she also felt women must "speak it and live it." Women can represent Christ by "giving birth to that part that is spiritual." E3 said the idea of bride/bridegroom and having an all-male priesthood is "limiting God's revelation of God's self" and the entire Church has suffered because of it. She said women "must be true to the Lord" in their calling to the priesthood. Women can bring a nurturing quality to the office since "it is easier for women to show emotion." For E4, Christ symbolizes a joining of humanity with God, which

¹This is a misunderstanding of St. Paul, who did not prohibit women from being ministers, but limited their ministerial roles in an attempt to gain control of the Church which was in danger of being divided by splinter groups.

is "not limited to gender." A calling should be discerned by women to see if it is authentic, but she said "rules can get in the way" of a calling, making it difficult for women. Women can be "teachers, preachers, [do] hospital ministry, and counseling."

G1 asserted that Christ "epitomized the daughter/sonship to God and trusted women as equals." She felt the Church is "unfaithful to Christ" in focusing on the male gender of the priest since "God made male and female and is [within] each." She thought one should examine a calling and "have the courage to step out and answer the call." She had to respond to the call and leave the institutional Church which took "strength, persistence, providence, and discernment." Women can represent Christ by being involved in Church community, liturgy, and ritual. Pastoral duties would be "just a matter of time." G2 said the bridegroom is a "ridiculous fixation on sexuality...a desire to control women." She said the image is "convoluted [and] is not coherent." A calling should be honored. "How dare the Church limit the Holy Spirit! This is the heart of sin--always fear!" she said. Women should not be content to be in the serving role but must strive for equality by being "part of the hierarchy in Rome." G3 asserted the concept of bridegroom "does not make sense." While she thought "symbols are fine," she also thought tradition is changeable as with the Latin Mass being changed into English. If a woman is called, she should "go for it" even if this entails giving up one's religion. A woman does not have to be a priest to represent Christ in her estimation. She can do this by being a "lover of peace, being angry when appropriate, a changer of the status quo, and a leader." G4 said the concept of bridegroom is "absurd [and] a bastardization of the sacrament." She claimed this is a wrong interpretation of Jewish writings. She

would be envious of a woman who was called to the priesthood, although she "would not want to live through the hell, [being] so close but so far." While she acknowledged there are women in seminaries today, she feared "they will die waiting" to be ordained. Women should have the intelligence, integrity, and courage to "take a leap and find a place" even if it is outside the institutional Church, she added.

Summary

Three of the Catholic women agreed with the Vatican's statement regarding male-only priesthood, referring to a woman's ability to mother as her "natural" and primary role in life. For these women, a "true calling" to the priesthood was almost a contradiction in terms since, in their estimation, only the Church, not the individual woman, had the ability to decide if a calling is genuine. Women could best represent Christ by serving the Church and others (outside of the ordained priesthood). Two of the Catholic women had a problem with the statement and thought the Church needed to change its stance in order to be truly representative of the entire Church population. They felt women should be in leadership roles rather than always in the background serving others. All of the Episcopal women strongly disagreed with the Vatican's statement and thought women could bring a nurturing quality to the role of priest. While motherhood was not considered a woman's primary role, the ability to bear children was seen as an enhancement, rather than a hindrance, to a woman's ministerial role. For the most part, Gnostic women reacted angrily to the statement, viewing it as being discriminatory and unjust. They felt women should answer the call to the priesthood, even if it meant enduring great hardships or

leaving the institutional Church. Most indicated that women could best represent Christ by being movers and shakers of a new Church order which rejects sexism as a social evil.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the relation between women and their priests/ministers in order to understand how gender of the minister influences women's self-perception. This study shows that gender is a determining factor in women forming an affinity to ministers in ritual and a primary consideration in choosing ministers as spiritual advisors, counselors, and friends. Catholic women in particular are affected by the exclusivity of the male priest figure, which necessitates the formation and perpetuation of religious beliefs to accommodate the male "norm." Mary Daly and Simone de Beauvoir have referred to this interaction in terms of the damage that is done to women's self-image and self-esteem.

By excluding women from the office of priesthood, the Catholic Church supports its claim that only men are able to symbolize Christ as bridegroom. For Catholic women, then, maleness is significant to religious belief and expression, whether or not they are aware of the theological arguments behind this doctrine. This study shows that the notion of male privilege in Catholic ministry has a direct impact on women's spiritual, personal, and social development.

In formulating my conclusions, I found it was impossible to lump the Catholic women into one category. They appeared to be divided into two camps: 1) Orthodox Catholics, i.e., those who follow the dictates of the Magisterium in all matters of faith; and 2) Progressives, i.e., those who take a more liberal stance and are in favor of major changes in Church teaching and practice. Hereafter, I refer to the three Orthodox Catholic women as "Catholic"

(capital "C"), and the two Progressive Catholic women as "catholic" (lower case "c") to infer a more tolerant position as is generally defined by the word. I continue to refer to the four Gnostic/catholic women simply as "Gnostic."

This study indicates that the Catholic women have difficulty relating to feminine images of God. In turn, their perception of male divinity demands expression through the male priest. The Catholic participants feel that women are not able to function in the role of priest, and they accept the Church-appointed role of mother as a sacred calling to their own particular "priesthood."

The Episcopal and Gnostic women in the study indicate that they have a more open and tolerant spiritual understanding which not only incorporates but necessitates utilization of female as well as male images in ritual. Due to the inclusion of women in the ordained ministry, Episcopal women are accustomed to feminine images in religious ritual which alters their perception of God as having strictly male form. Further, the Episcopal women perceive women's ability to bear and nurture children as an asset to the ministerial role. However, neither Episcopal nor Gnostic participants feel women should be restricted to social roles that are primarily maternal and nurturing.

For the most part, Gnostic women have broken away from the traditional Catholic Church precisely *because* feminine images are lacking. They expressed a need for more powerful female symbols in ritual as portrayed within the Gnostic tradition.

Major differences in religious and personal attitudes among the three groups of women emerged during the interview process. A closer examination

of these findings is outlined within specific areas of investigation presented to participants.

The Concept of God

God as Male

While the women in all groups imaged God as male when children, the study indicates that the Catholic women are more likely to continue this image into adulthood. Although the Catholic women said they have no real image of God, they repeatedly used male terminology when referring to God during the interview process, often without being aware they were doing so. The Catholic, Episcopal, and Gnostic women are aware of their tendency to use male terms and are more inclined to use inclusive language when relaying mental pictures of God. When Catholic women were asked about a female "savior," they were adamant in their adherence to Trinitarian Catholic theology, referring to Christ as "God-made-Man," and "Son of God the Father." For these women, God works in the world with a kind of male potency. They insist God is able to work in this particular "masculine" mode without actually being male; yet, Christ, as male, is an "icon" of this (paternal) divinity. Maleness, then, is important to Catholic women as a way of completing the picture of the fatherhood of God and the sonship of Christ. During the interviews, this theological assertion was often defended with conscious effort. *It is important to Catholic women that the image of God remain invulnerable to change since a restructuring of divine symbols strikes at the very core of orthodox Catholic beliefs.*

The Goddess and the Threat
of Feminist Spirituality

While many of the women interviewed are open to female spiritual images, most reject the image of the goddess as a viable symbol of divinity. When asked specifically about images of the goddess, Catholic women seemed especially uncomfortable. One Catholic woman in particular was suspicious and hostile towards any notion of the goddess or "feminist theology." She provided me with books, tapes, pamphlets, articles, and a seven-page treatise written by a priest in which he asserted my sociological approach to theological matters was "reductionism [and] written from the perspective of a non-believer." I feel that by relying upon a male authority figure outside herself to confront me, she revealed a dependency upon the priest-figure as being more knowledgeable, especially regarding "spiritual" matters.

The catholic and Episcopal women, although intrigued by the concept of "goddess," also have some problems with the term primarily because of the historical negative connotations it evokes. They have no problems imaging God in the female person, such as Divine Mother, or Mary, but are reluctant to go so far as to change the term "God" to "goddess" possibly because of its use within "pagan" religions.¹ Although Gnostic women are open to the goddess image, as a whole, they prefer the more traditional female images of Sophia or Wisdom.

¹Rosemary Radford Ruether has suggested the word "God/ess" in order to change the patriarchal concept of "God" to include both male and female characteristics (Ruether 1983, 67). While this would seem to be a more inclusive term in its written form, the fact remains that there is ambivalence in using the term "goddess" in oral communication.

Family Relationships and the Gender of God

There was a definite link between imaging God as either male or female, and a woman's relationship to a significant family member. The Catholic women who had positive male role models in their fathers have no problem imaging God as male. One of the catholic women, who had been abused by her father, has difficulty thinking of God as a loving father. Likewise, a Gnostic woman and an Episcopal woman who had been highly influenced by their grandmothers are comforted by the female image of God. *Family experiences, therefore, are a significant factor in formulating beliefs and assumptions about the personhood of God.*

The Role of Minister

The Significance of Gender

For the Catholic women, the concept of a male God is linked to the significance of the male Christ figure, which demands expression through the male priest. They indicated that maleness in religious ritual and spiritual expression is central to the sacredness of the Eucharistic liturgy. (I got the impression that Catholic women would have agreed with Thomas Aquinas that if a woman presided at Mass, the sacramentality of the act would somehow not *take*). The Catholic women said they need to image the "bridegroom," reiterating the Church's position that this image is essential to priesthood since Christ referred to himself as bridegroom in Scripture. However, Catholic women also revealed that they would accept a female priest *if she had the official blessing of the Church.* In this regard, the image of the male priest, rather than a necessary spiritual symbol, seems to be important as a way of

conforming to Catholic theology. Maleness is significant because it is deemed so by the Church, not necessarily because it "speaks" to each woman's spiritual experience. If the bridegroom image was the primary factor in religious expression in ritual for the Catholic women, I think they would have been more unyielding on the gender issue.

For Gnostic women, the symbol of the priest has to mirror their own womanselves; therefore, the image of "bridegroom" is an empty and irrelevant symbol. Episcopal women echoed almost the same opinion as the Gnostic women, except, for them, both the masculine and feminine images are important in ritual. This, I think, is due to the fact that Episcopal women are exposed to the ritual action of both the male and female ministers during the Eucharistic service.

Oddly enough, the woman who was studying for the Episcopal priesthood is the most conservative in her views regarding female priests. She thinks Church policy has changed too rapidly. (Her views could be due to the fact that she is studying at a Catholic seminary and is highly influenced by educators of Catholic theology). She feels people need time to get used to the idea of female priests presiding at the altar, the inference being that as women become more visible as priests, the arguments against their participation will become less important.

For the Episcopal women, a woman as priest and symbol of humanity has changed their perception of God as having strictly male form. *Therefore, there is a strong correlation between the emergence of female Episcopal priests and the move towards a more feminine concept of God.* In other words, a change in imagery has precipitated a change in theology. As the female priest

has become a familiar symbol in ritual, Episcopal women have altered their notion of the male-as-critical to spiritual belief and religious expression.²

The Minister as Friend and Counselor

The Episcopal and Gnostic women are more inclined than the Catholic women to form significant friendships with priests/ministers. Further, there is a reciprocity in the female/female relationship that is missing from the male/female relationship. Although the three Catholic women and one catholic woman interact closely with male priests, they did not indicate that the priests are open to deeper friendships that would entail *mutual* sharing and counseling. The Catholic women still consider the priest to be mainly an authority in spiritual matters, putting the level of "friendship" on a theological plane rather than a level of shared empathy and intimacy.

Most of the Catholic, catholic, and Gnostic women interviewed indicated a hesitancy in seeking help from a male priest in personal matters, such as sexual or marital problems. The Catholic women seem to feel that the priest's primary service is of a spiritual or functional nature, and they would, therefore, need to seek individual personal counseling from a person outside the ordained ministry. The Gnostic women and one catholic woman indicated a reluctance to go to a male priest because of what they consider to be a "deficiency within the celibate structure," i.e., they feel the priest has problems dealing with his own sexuality and interpersonal relationships, and, therefore, would not be able to help women deal with problems in these areas.

²Female priests are still experiencing some discrimination and are not accepted by all members of the Episcopal Church. However, they are gaining acceptance slowly since officially ordained in 1976.

Personal and Religious Attitudes Concerning Womanhood

Women as Nurturers

The Catholic women strongly believe that motherhood is a woman's primary role in society. One Catholic woman, who is working on a postgraduate degree, lamented that her miscarriage was so traumatic she still has a difficult time accepting the fact that she is childless. Although she is a career woman and appears to be very confident in her work and have a very strong self-image, she revealed that this was one area that has left her feeling deprived and empty, as if being a mother would make her more *valuable*. During our interview, she said on more than one occasion that she agreed with the Church that women are best suited for the nurturing role, with motherhood being superior to all other vocations, *including* the priesthood.

The ability to bear and nurture children is no less important to women in the other groups. Episcopal and Gnostic women are especially drawn to the image of *Divine* Mother, claiming they have become open to this image by their association with the female priests/ministers in their parishes. *However, rather than perceiving women's ability to bear children as opposed or superior to the ministerial role, they considered this ability an asset in helping women minister to people in the Church community in a spirit of maternal love, care, and nurturance.*

The Role of the Virgin Mary

The Virgin Mary plays a major role in the lives of the Catholic women as a model of motherhood and obedience. The Catholic women feel it is important to emulate the traditional Mary as a model of femininity. They also think it is

appropriate for women to be assertive insofar as they stay within the confines of their "proper" roles; that is, assertiveness is acceptable if tied to specific areas "suited" to women. This attitude is evident when Catholic women describe qualities they would like to see in a female presidential candidate, i.e., her first priority would need to be a concern for family issues.³

The catholic, Episcopal, and Gnostic women have a very different perspective of the traditional Mary figure, seeing her primarily as a prototype of womanhood promoted by the patriarchal Church and an impossible model for women in modern society. The Gnostic women especially indicated that they had to change their image of Mary to be more assertive and powerful, acknowledging her not only as the mother of God, but as a co-creator *with* God. These women do not reject Mary so much as the passivity and vulnerability of Mary as portrayed by the Church.

This kind of "theological tug-of-war" regarding Mary is currently going on within the Church as feminists and liberals are re-interpreting the Virgin's life, challenging the notion that she played a strictly passive role and arguing that she was actually a "feminist," especially in view of her behavior within a restrictive Jewish culture (Ostling 1991, 62-66).

Women as Passive

The notion of passivity in women was most evident when questions were asked about women in combat. While Catholic participants feel women can be assertive within certain areas of work, they still feel women needed the

³It is interesting to note that one Catholic woman considered "single-mindedness" a male characteristic which was an asset in political life, while a Gnostic woman thought that a woman's ability to "think in multiple ways" made her better qualified for public office.

protection of the male, especially in combat situations. The Catholic women think it is against women's *nature* to be aggressive, perceiving aggression in males as inborn and consistent with the way men operate in society. *This notion of male power and virility is analogous to the way Catholic women perceive God acting in the world.*

The Episcopal, Gnostic, and catholic women do not feel aggression is necessarily a male trait. While they feel women should have the right to choose a military career, most of these women are against war as a solution to social problems. Their views coincide with the opinions of many feminist scholars who assert that male aggression has developed partially as a result of a distorted spiritual mythology. This distortion led to a division of male and female social roles which *depicted* males as powerful and war-like and females as passive and helpless. Carol Christ, in her analysis of the Judeo-Christian warrior God, states:

I do not attribute war to the male nature, nor do I argue that women are incapable of warlike action, but I do believe that as feminists we must examine the equation of 'manhood' and power with war that has been the legacy of patriarchal cultures (Christ 1987, 74).

Female Sexuality and the Question of Abortion

While the women in all groups had the same kind of restrictive upbringing regarding their sexuality, the Catholic women seem the most affected by religious scrupulosity in sexual behavior. One Catholic woman in particular is still experiencing feelings of guilt about an incidence of masturbation which occurred when she was younger. A catholic woman clearly

recalls the painful process of recounting sexual sins in detail to a priest, a practice that caused her to suffer undue hardship and sexual guilt.

When discussing particular sexual behavior, such as homosexuality or masturbation, the Catholic women were more likely than the women in the other groups to label such behavior "sinful." The Gnostic women indicated that their attitudes towards human sexuality changed with their spiritual evolvment. As they became more open to feminine images in religious practice, they became more aware and accepting of their own sensual/sexual natures, and vice-versa.

All but the Catholic participants feel that artificial birth control should be available to women in order to responsibly regulate the birth of children. However, women in all three groups struggled with the question of abortion. Although abortion is particularly problematic for Catholic women in terms of Catholic morality, *it is no less difficult for women in the other groups who also consider abortion to be a moral dilemma.* However, the catholic, Gnostic and Episcopal women feel that since abortion affects primarily women's *lives--emotionally and spiritually--as well as their bodies*, they are the ones who must ultimately decide on the morality of abortion, not solely the Church. By letting the Church not only make the choice for them, but also dictate the morality of that choice, the Catholic women reveal what psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg would describe as a "conventional" or undeveloped level of moral development in which moral judgment is dictated by outside authority rather than individual conscience (Zimbardo 1985, 62).

The women in the other groups view abortion in the context of a patriarchal society which places little value on the needs of women and

children, and they are more empathetic in their understanding of the problems women face in regard to reproductive choice and child care.⁴

Many critics within the Roman Catholic Church who have spoken out against the Church's absolutist position on abortion claim that the bishops, by failing to dialogue with women, do not understand the tragic complexity of the social problems involved in the decision to have an abortion. States one Catholic historian, "Small wonder that some begin to suspect the influence of the male celibate's peculiar bias" in matters of sexual morality (Bokenkotter 1986, 352).

Mid-life Transitions

For Episcopal and Gnostic women, a shift in spiritual insight was linked to significant changes in mid-life. For one Gnostic woman in particular, this had been a very dramatic experience, and she was virtually "crawling on [her] hands and knees" in trying to find her way out of her psycho-spiritual confusion. This kind of "dark night of the soul" was a common theme among the Gnostic women. They had reached a point in their spiritual lives when old symbols were no longer meaningful to them because of their present life situations. These Gnostic women changed their spiritual awareness as a result of real-life dramas, indicating a kind of a latent spirituality that lay beneath the surface of their inherited religious beliefs. *A spiritual revelation or awakening emerged in the course of personal struggles, and as a result, feminine imagery in religious ritual became more prominent and necessary.* (One Gnostic woman, for

⁴These women seem to understand abortion as a race and class issue which primarily affects women in the lower economic strata. All the women interviewed were white and middle or upper class. Nonetheless, Episcopal, catholic, and Gnostic women were more aware than the Catholic women of the problems involved in the abortion issue.

example, revealed that the image of Sophia had been there "waiting all the time"). To go back to the old (male) symbols in the Church would be impossible, or at the very least, intolerable. They feel they had no choice but to go into uncharted territory, which took both great courage and a belief in their ability to trust their own instincts and inner voices.

While the catholic women did not experience such dramatic changes in mid-life, they have altered their relationship to the Church over the years as they have become more aware of women's issues. Their consciousness has been raised in regard to the unfair treatment of women in the Church, specifically the exclusion of women from the priesthood. They are able to maintain a relationship with the Church through their affiliation with more liberal Catholic parishes, priests, and organizations.

The Catholic women did not seem to experience drastic changes in their lives that would cause them to seriously question orthodox religious beliefs. They are content to accept the rules set down for them by the authority of the Church because they perceive those within this structure to be more knowledgeable in theological and spiritual matters, and this particular social construction fits their present reality. Individual conscience and intuition are not precursors to religious belief. Religious expression for these women is a rather passive experience--something that is done *to* them instead of being experienced *by* them. Their inner voices have been quieted through a long process of abiding by Church rules. The Catholic woman who had gone to a priest when depressed feels the priest was correct in his analysis that her depression was a problem requiring a "re-commitment to the faith" rather than a symptom of deeper psychological problems or a spiritual crisis.

This is not to imply that Catholic women are unhappy or dissatisfied within their own particular socio-religious systems. They seem content to live within the patriarchal Church, and they truly believe the Church should be the final authority in matters of faith, morals, and religious conduct. *For them to say that the Church should change its policy regarding women in the priesthood would be to act without authority and would necessitate letting go of a belief system which demands conformity and obedience.* If Church practice regarding priesthood was to change, theological arguments prohibiting the admission of women to the priesthood would need to change, also. This seems to be a frightening prospect for the Catholic women, since old symbols of ritual identification would need to be dramatically altered, demanding a reconceptualization of religious beliefs and behavior.

Matthew Fox, priest, author, and director of the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality of Holy Names College in Oakland, claims that Roman Catholics who "wait for papal orders" demonstrate a kind of religious fundamentalism in which patriarchy has "gone berserk" since it denies and represses the feminine principle in the world. This brand of fundamentalism, claims Fox, is the result of a "deep-seated fear triggered by the breakup of cultural patterns" (Fox 1988, 27).

Towards a new Definition of Church and Ministry

As indicated by the data, the relevance of traditional religious symbols is dependent upon a woman's particular social, political, and spiritual awareness and circumstance. As women become open to personal growth and development, old spiritual symbols, once meaningful, may no longer fit into their new scheme of reality. This is particularly true for Catholic women who leave

the Church because they find they are not able to operate effectively within the confines of a male-dominated institution.

The move towards acceptance of female ministers within the Episcopal and Gnostic Churches has opened new avenues of spiritual development and practice. This study shows that female ministers have changed women's concept of God to incorporate more feminine qualities and characteristics. A new and more holistic spirituality can result from exposure to religious symbols which reflect humanity in the image of the female as well as the male priest-figure. This phenomenon helps us to see the need for female imagery in Catholic priesthood in order to facilitate a more comprehensive spiritual understanding.

The inclusion and acceptance of female priests in the Episcopal Church challenges two main rationales for holding to the tradition of male priesthood as outlined by the Catholic Church, which are: 1) the need for the priest to image the bridegroom; and 2) the requirement that women remain in the "complementary" role. Certainly the Episcopal woman in the study who viewed herself, in relation to the female priest, as being "pregnant with the divine" defies these limited notions of gender identity. *This study indicates that imaging the bridegroom is not essential to the sacredness or sacramentality of Christian ritual. In addition, the very fact that women typically bear and nurture children can be viewed as an enhancement rather than a detriment to the priestly office.*

In the image of the female minister, women in the Episcopal and Gnostic Churches have found a place for feminine symbols that heretofore have been without form or substance. Catholic women who are not able to make this

same symbolic leap, however, are faced with difficult choices: to accept the limits set down by the Magisterium, or to find ways of coping with the restrictions either by leaving the Church or finding alternative means of spiritual expression, such as women's spirituality groups, etc. Often women sublimate their need for change because of fear of conflict, causing additional tension and confusion in their lives.

The Church as Dysfunctional

The conflict involved in women's relationships with the patriarchal Church is not unlike the conflict they may experience in their own relationships with men. In any patriarchal society, there is an inequity of power between males and females which is reflected in the formation of dominant and subordinate roles. Psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller and other theorists of human behavior have suggested that relationships are dysfunctional if women continue to play subordinate roles by accepting and maintaining: 1) a sense of inferiority; 2) a dependence, emotionally and/or financially, on males as authority figures; 3) an adherence to social roles that are considered "proper" as well as powerless and non-threatening to the dominant persons; and 4) a fear of moving out of the subordinate roles and causing conflict or possible ostracization (Miller 1986). Women can internalize these beliefs through their interaction with men (priests or husbands) who act as authorities and mediators in the "real" world which lies outside women's limited sphere of reality and safety. Miller has described relationships of dominance and subordination, stating:

Subordinates are usually said to be unable to perform the preferred roles. Their incapacities are ascribed to innate defects or deficiencies of mind and body, therefore immutable and

impossible of change or development. It becomes difficult for dominants even to imagine that subordinates are capable of performing the preferred activities. More importantly, *subordinates themselves can come to find it difficult to believe in their own ability* (italics mine) (Miller 1986, 7).

This description would certainly apply to the official Church's refusal to consider the ordination of women, as well as women's acceptance of the priestly role as unsuitable and, therefore, unattainable for themselves. This type of coercion, asserts Miller, can result in a destructive and abusive relationship which can be damaging to both men and women. *I would argue that women's relationship to the patriarchal Church is no less destructive or abusive if they continue to be told and to believe that they are innately deficient and incapable of being priests because of their sex.* Tragically, the inevitable result of this sexist notion of female deficiency is defilement of the feminine spirit, carried out subtly, amid candle-lit ritual and reverent prayer, through the image and action of the male priest as the dominant mediator of Divine Intention.

Beyond a Male-Only Priesthood

The ultimate problem of Christian ethics within the Catholic Church today is contained within the precept of the male as rightful heir to the priesthood office. It is men who are able to officiate at key rituals as well as make the rules by which Catholics live. This position of power is closely akin to the theology of God-as-male, working in the world as transcendent prime mover. Many Catholic women continue to believe that this particular ordering of the cosmos is correct, that their feminine receptive selves are waiting to be transformed by the God-semen at *his* initiating. The phallic symbolism contained within this brand of theology is vulgar as well as degrading and humiliating to women. It places women in the role of vulnerable handmaiden. It

reduces women to receptive womb, and, while paying lip service to women's equality-before-God, fails to acknowledge the individuality, uniqueness, and leadership ability of female members of the human race. It also denies the fact that males are part of the material world that needs to be transformed by placing them in the "higher," more spiritual realm of rationality and creativity. This is faulty logic as well as bad theology. If God's transcendent nature can initiate creation by infusing life into the receptive (feminine) material world, then is God *male* by nature? If not, (since God as spirit is beyond gender) then God must reflect both male and female essence since both come into being as a result of God's creative action. Why, then, can't women, as well as men, act as Church leaders, ministers, and priests? Wouldn't this complete the picture of God which is *incomplete* in its strictly male representation?

The male priest reminds women daily by his presence on the altar that the office of priesthood is somehow a "divine right" of men. Like all "good" women, many Catholic women fail to see the injustice of a social order that oppresses them, systematically and deliberately presenting a picture of their womanselves that is inaccurate and inferior. Acceptance of an all-male priesthood will change only when women reject this picture as inauthentic. As more women come forward, expressing their pain as members of an oppressed people, they will change the character of "Church" which can be complete only when it includes women as bearers and ministers of the Christian message.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
NOTICE FOR PARTICIPANTS

Notice as it appeared in the Catholic Women's Network
July/August 1990 Issue

(Wording changed slightly to pertain to Episcopal and Gnostic women)

Women Recruited for Research Project

Women are needed to participate in a research project studying the psychosocial effects on Catholic women in regard to the image of priest as agent of self-identification. Participants should be between the ages of 35-55, be currently involved in the Catholic religion, and be involved in some area of Catholic worship on a regular basis. Interviews will take between two and a half to three hours maximum. This study is being done by Marilyn Nutter as part of her Master's thesis project in Social Science at San Jose State University. Interested persons may call Marilyn at (408) 258-5634.

APPENDIX B:

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES--CATHOLIC WOMEN

NAME ADDRESS PHONE AGE
OCCUPATION
MARITAL STATUS HOW MANY YEARS CHILDREN
GRANDCHILDREN RELIGION OF SPOUSE CURRENTLY ATTEND MASS
WEEKLY MONTHLY
RELIGION OF CHILDREN RELIGION AT BIRTH CONVERT
PARENTS BOTH CATHOLIC PARENT(S) ACTIVE IN THE CHURCH
CATHOLIC EDUCATION HOW MANY YEARS COLLEGE EDUCATION
MARRIED IN CHURCH OCCUPATION OF SPOUSE ETHNIC
BACKGROUND
OTHER

FIRST MEMORY OF CHURCH AS CHILD FEELINGS ASSOCIATED
W/CHURCH

IMAGES OF CHURCH (STAINED GLASS WINDOWS, ALTAR, ETC)

AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE TOLD WE ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE. WHAT
DOES THAT MEAN TO YOU?

WHAT DID GOD LOOK LIKE TO YOU AS A CHILD/ADOLESCENT/ADULT?
ANY CHANGES?

WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD GOD?

WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD FATHER?

WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD GODDESS?

WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD MOTHER?

WHAT BIBLICAL FIGURE OR FIGURES CAN YOU STRONGLY IDENTIFY
WITH?

WHAT IMAGES OF MARY DID YOU GROW UP WITH? HAVE THOSE IMAGES
CHANGED AS AN ADULT? IS MARY AN IMPORTANT PERSON IN YOUR
SPIRITUAL LIFE? WHY/WHY NOT?

WHAT MESSAGES DID YOU RECEIVE FROM OTHERS ABOUT BEING FEMALE?

WHAT MESSAGES DID YOU RECEIVE FROM OTHERS ABOUT SEX?

WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT YOUR EMERGING SEXUALITY AS AN ADOLESCENT? ABOUT YOUR FIRST MENSTRUATION? ABOUT YOUR CHANGING BODY? ABOUT YOUR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE OPPOSITE SEX? (DATING EXPERIENCES)

(IF SUBJECT HAS CHILDREN) WAS THE BIRTHING PROCESS A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR YOU? WHY/WHY NOT? DID YOU HAVE A MALE OR A FEMALE DOCTOR IN ATTENDANCE? WOULD GENDER OF THE DOCTOR HAVE ALTERED THE EXPERIENCE?

WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH BREAST FEEDING?

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED MENOPAUSE? WHAT WERE/ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING TO YOUR BODY/SELF AT THIS TIME? POSITIVE/NEGATIVE

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED "MID LIFE CRISIS?" WHAT PRECIPITATED THE CRISIS?

DO YOU THINK THAT WOMEN ARE MORE INTUITIVE THAN MEN? IN WHAT WAY?

WHAT CAREER OPTIONS WERE PRESENTED TO YOU AS A YOUNG WOMAN?

WERE YOU ENCOURAGED BY PARENTS/SCHOOL TO GO TO COLLEGE?

(IF RESPONDENT HAS CHILDREN) DID YOU HAVE PRIMARY CARE OF YOUR CHILDREN AFTER THEY WERE BORN? WHAT PART DID YOUR HUSBAND PLAY IN THEIR CARE?

IF A WOMAN HAS YOUNG CHILDREN, DO YOU THINK SHE SHOULD WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME? PART TIME/FULL TIME?

DO YOU THINK A MAN SHOULD HAVE THE OPTION OF STAYING HOME AND CARING FOR CHILDREN IF HE CHOOSES?

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HOUSEWORK IF BOTH SPOUSES ARE EMPLOYED?

WOULD YOU PREFER TO WORK WITH OR BE EMPLOYED UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF MEN OR WOMEN? WHY?

DO YOU PERCEIVE WOMEN ACTING DIFFERENTLY THAN MEN IN THE WORKPLACE? IN WHAT WAY?

DO YOU THINK WOMEN SHOULD BE IN MANAGEMENT OR SUPPORTIVE ROLES IN THE WORKPLACE?

WOULD YOU FEEL CONFIDENT SEEKING MEDICAL HELP FROM A FEMALE SURGEON; VOTING FOR A FEMALE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE; FLYING WITH A FEMALE AIRLINE PILOT? WHAT WOULD HELP OR HINDER YOU IN MAKING THESE DECISIONS?

IF A WOMAN IS IN THE ARMED SERVICE, SHOULD SHE BE ALLOWED TO BE IN COMBAT?

BESIDES YOUR HUSBAND/SIGNIFICANT OTHER, WHO DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR BEST FRIEND?

WHAT DO YOU SHARE TOGETHER THAT YOU CANNOT (WOULD NOT) SHARE WITH YOUR HUSBAND/SIGNIFICANT OTHER?

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU VALUE IN MALES/FEMALES?

WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF SEXISM?

WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD PRIEST?

HAS THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION BEEN A PART OF YOUR EXPERIENCE GROWING UP CATHOLIC? WHAT FEELINGS FOR YOU ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS EXPERIENCE? HOW DID THIS ENCOUNTER WITH A PRIEST HELP OR HINDER YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD?

DO YOU BELIEVE SIN CAN BE FORGIVEN DIRECTLY THROUGH A PERSON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

IS THE MASS MEANINGFUL TO YOU IN YOUR EXPRESSION OF YOUR SPIRITUALITY? IN WHAT WAY? WHAT PART OF THE MASS HAS THE MOST MEANING FOR YOU?

WHAT ROLE DOES THE PRIEST PLAY DURING THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST?

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MAIN DUTIES OF THE PRIEST WITHIN THE PARISH SETTING?

ARE YOU ABLE TO RELATE TO THE PRIEST ON A MORE INFORMAL AND PERSONAL BASIS? (IN YOUR HOME, AT A SOCIAL FUNCTION)

WOULD YOU CONSIDER GOING TO A PRIEST FOR COUNSELING OF A PERSONAL (AS OPPOSED TO SPIRITUAL) NATURE? (MARITAL, SEXUAL PROBLEMS, ETC.)

WOULD GENDER MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO YOU IN DISCUSSING THESE ISSUES?

IF ALL CATHOLIC CHURCHES WERE FORCED TO CLOSE THEIR DOORS, WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN ORDER TO EXPRESS YOUR FAITH IN GOD?

DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD HAVE LAY MINISTERS IN THE CHURCH?

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT CELIBACY AND THE PRIESTHOOD?

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT PRIESTS W/FAMILIES, I.E. FORMER EPISCOPAL PRIESTS?

IF CATHOLIC PRIESTS WERE ALLOWED TO MARRY, WHAT ROLE WOULD THE SPOUSE PLAY IN THE PARISH COMMUNITY?

ST. PAUL HAS SAID GOD IS IMAGELESS. IF CHRIST IS THE IMAGE OF THE IMAGELESS, DO YOU THINK IT WAS ESSENTIAL FOR HIM TO BE BORN MALE? WHY/WHY NOT?

SOME MODERN ARTISTS HAVE PORTRAYED THE FIGURE ON THE CROSS AS BEING FEMALE. ONE SUCH SCULPTURE BY EDWINA SANDYS IS ENTITLED, "CHRISTA." DO YOU HAVE DIFFICULTIES IMAGING A FEMALE SAVIOR - THE DAUGHTER OF GOD? WHY/WHY NOT?

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE CHURCH'S STANCE ON ISSUES OF SEXUALITY AS THEY IMPACT WOMEN? (BIRTH CONTROL, ABORTION, ETC.)

WHAT AREAS OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR DO YOU CONSIDER SINFUL?

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT THAT A WOMAN IS CELEBRATING MASS. WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS AT THIS MOMENT? WOULD GENDER MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SACRAMENTALITY?

THE VATICAN COUNCIL IN 1976 ON WOMEN'S ORDINATION HAS REAFFIRMED THE TRADITION OF A MALE-ONLY PRIESTHOOD, STATING MALENESS IS ESSENTIAL IN ORDER TO SYMBOLIZE CHRIST AS BRIDEGROOM OF THE CHURCH. DO YOU AGREE WITH THIS STATEMENT? WHY/WHY NOT?

MANY CATHOLIC WOMEN GENUINELY FEEL THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS CALLED THEM TO THE PRIESTHOOD. HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO THEIR CLAIM OF A "CALLING?"

DO YOU THINK WOMEN CAN REPRESENT CHRIST WITHIN CATHOLIC TRADITION? IN WHAT CAPACITY?

IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE A SYMBOL FOR CHRISTIANITY (BESIDES THE CROSS) WHAT WOULD IT BE?

APPENDIX C:

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES--EPISCOPAL WOMEN

NAME ADDRESS PHONE AGE
OCCUPATION MARITAL STATUS HOW MANY YEARS
CHILDREN GRANDCHILDREN RELIGION OF SPOUSE
OCCUPATION OF SPOUSE CURRENTLY ATTEND MASS/SERVICE
WEEKLY MONTHLY RELIGION OF CHILDREN RELIGION AT
BIRTH CONVERT RELIGION OF PARENTS PARENT(S) ACTIVE
IN THE CHURCH EPISCOPAL EDUCATION HOW MANY YEARS
COLLEGE EDUCATION MARRIED IN CHURCH ETHNIC
BACKGROUND
OTHER

FIRST MEMORY OF CHURCH AS CHILD FEELINGS ASSOCIATED
W/CHURCH
IMAGES OF CHURCH (STAINED GLASS WINDOWS, ALTAR, ETC)
AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE TOLD WE ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE. WHAT
DOES THAT MEAN TO YOU?
WHAT DID GOD LOOK LIKE TO YOU AS A CHILD/ADOLESCENT/ADULT?
ANY CHANGES?
WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD GOD?
WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD FATHER?
WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD GODDESS?
WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD MOTHER?
WHAT BIBLICAL FIGURE OR FIGURES CAN YOU STRONGLY IDENTIFY
WITH?
WHAT IMAGES OF MARY DID YOU GROW UP WITH? HAVE THOSE IMAGES
CHANGED AS AN ADULT? IS MARY AN IMPORTANT PERSON IN YOUR
SPIRITUAL LIFE? WHY/WHY NOT?

WHAT MESSAGES DID YOU RECEIVE FROM OTHERS ABOUT BEING FEMALE?

WHAT MESSAGES DID YOU RECEIVE FROM OTHERS ABOUT SEX?

WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT YOUR EMERGING SEXUALITY AS AN ADOLESCENT? ABOUT YOUR FIRST MENSTRUATION? ABOUT YOUR CHANGING BODY? ABOUT YOUR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE OPPOSITE SEX? (DATING EXPERIENCES)

(IF SUBJECT HAS CHILDREN) WAS THE BIRTHING PROCESS A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR YOU? WHY/WHY NOT? DID YOU HAVE A MALE OR A FEMALE DOCTOR IN ATTENDANCE? WOULD GENDER OF THE DOCTOR HAVE ALTERED THE EXPERIENCE?

WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH BREAST FEEDING?

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED MENOPAUSE? WHAT WERE/ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING TO YOUR BODY/SELF AT THIS TIME? POSITIVE/NEGATIVE

DO YOU THINK THAT WOMEN ARE MORE INTUITIVE THAN MEN? IN WHAT WAY?

WHAT CAREER OPTIONS DID YOU ASSOCIATE WITH/WERE PRESENTED TO YOU AS A YOUNG WOMAN?

IF A WOMAN HAS YOUNG CHILDREN, DO YOU THINK SHE SHOULD WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME? PART TIME/FULL TIME?

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HOUSEWORK IF BOTH SPOUSES ARE EMPLOYED?

WOULD YOU PREFER TO BE EMPLOYED UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF A MAN OR A WOMAN? WHY?

DO YOU PERCEIVE WOMEN ACTING DIFFERENTLY THAN MEN IN THE WORKPLACE? IN WHAT WAY?

DO YOU THINK WOMEN SHOULD BE IN MANAGEMENT OR SUPPORTIVE ROLES IN THE WORKPLACE?

WOULD YOU FEEL CONFIDENT SEEKING MEDICAL HELP FROM A FEMALE SURGEON; VOTING FOR A FEMALE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE; OR FLYING WITH A FEMALE AIRLINE PILOT? WHAT WOULD HELP OR HINDER YOU IN MAKING THESE DECISIONS?

IF A WOMAN IS IN THE ARMED SERVICE, SHOULD SHE BE ALLOWED TO BE IN COMBAT?

BESIDES YOUR HUSBAND/SIGNIFICANT OTHER, WHOM DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR BEST FRIEND?

WHAT DO YOU SHARE TOGETHER THAT YOU CANNOT (WOULD NOT) SHARE WITH YOUR HUSBAND/SIGNIFICANT OTHER?

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE MALE QUALITIES? FEMALE QUALITIES? WHICH QUALITIES DO YOU VALUE?

WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF SEXISM?

HAS CONFESSION BEEN A PART OF YOUR EXPERIENCE GROWING UP EPISCOPALIAN? WHAT FEELINGS FOR YOU ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS EXPERIENCE? HOW DID THIS ENCOUNTER WITH A PRIEST HELP OR HINDER YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD?

DO YOU BELIEVE SIN CAN BE FORGIVEN DIRECTLY THROUGH A PERSON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

IS THE MASS/SERVICE MEANINGFUL TO YOU IN YOUR EXPRESSION OF YOUR SPIRITUALITY? IN WHAT WAY? WHAT PART OF THE MASS/SERVICE HAS THE MOST MEANING TO YOU?

SINCE 1976, THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH HAS ORDAINED WOMEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD. WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THIS DECISION? DESCRIBE THE FIRST MASS/SERVICE YOU ATTENDED AT WHICH A FEMALE PRIEST PRESIDED. WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS AT THAT MOMENT? HAVE YOUR FEELINGS/OPINIONS CHANGED SINCE THAT FIRST EXPERIENCE?

DOES GENDER OF THE PRIEST MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO YOU IN YOUR EXPERIENCE OF CHURCH/GOD? (SACRAMENTALITY) IN WHAT WAY? CAN (SHOULD) WOMEN REPRESENT CHRIST WITHIN THE EPISCOPAL TRADITION?

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MAIN DUTIES OF THE PRIEST WITHIN THE PARISH SETTING?

DO THESE DUTIES DIFFER DEPENDING UPON GENDER?

ARE YOU ABLE TO RELATE TO THE PRIEST ON A MORE INFORMAL AND PERSONAL BASIS? (IN YOUR HOME, AT A SOCIAL FUNCTION)

WOULD YOU CONSIDER GOING TO A PRIEST FOR COUNSELING OF A PERSONAL NATURE? (MARITAL, SEXUAL PROBLEMS, ETC.) FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

WOULD GENDER MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO YOU IN DISCUSSING THESE ISSUES?

IF ALL EPISCOPAL CHURCHES WERE FORCED TO CLOSE THEIR DOORS, WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN ORDER TO EXPRESS YOUR FAITH IN GOD?

DO YOU THINK LAY MINISTERS SHOULD BE PART OF THE CHURCH?

WHAT ROLE DOES THE SPOUSE OF THE PRIEST PLAY IN THE PARISH COMMUNITY?

ST. PAUL HAS SAID "GOD IS IMAGELESS". IT COULD BE SAID THAT CHRIST IMAGES THE IMAGELESS. IN THIS SENSE, DO YOU FEEL IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT CHRIST BE BORN MALE?

SOME MODERN ARTISTS HAVE PORTRAYED THE FIGURE ON THE CROSS AS BEING FEMALE. ONE SUCH SCULPTURE BY EDWINA SANDYS IS ENTITLED, "CHRISTA." DO YOU HAVE DIFFICULTIES IMAGING A FEMALE SAVIOR - THE "DAUGHTER OF GOD?" WHY/WHY NOT?

IS THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH INFLUENTIAL IN HELPING YOU FORM YOUR OPINIONS ON ISSUES OF SEXUALITY AS THEY IMPACT WOMEN? (BIRTH CONTROL, ABORTION, ETC.)

WHAT AREAS OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR DO YOU CONSIDER SINFUL?

WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE VATICAN COUNCIL IN 1976 ON WOMEN'S ORDINATION HAS REAFFIRMED THE TRADITION OF A MALE-ONLY PRIESTHOOD, STATING MALENESS IS ESSENTIAL IN ORDER TO SYMBOLIZE CHRIST AS BRIDEGROOM OF THE CHURCH. AS AN EPISCOPALIAN, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS STATEMENT?

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE VATICAN'S DECISION TO ALLOW MARRIED EPISCOPAL PRIESTS INTO THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD?

DO YOU THINK THERE IS A DIFFERENCE IN THE WAY MEN/WOMEN CAN REPRESENT CHRIST?

IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE A SYMBOL FOR CHRISTIANITY (BESIDES THE CROSS) WHAT WOULD IT BE?

APPENDIX D:

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES--GNOSTIC WOMEN
(FORMERLY/CURRENTLY CATHOLIC)

NAME ADDRESS PHONE AGE
OCCUPATION MARITAL STATUS HOW MANY YEARS CHILDREN
GRANDCHILDREN RELIGION OF SPOUSE CURRENTLY ATTEND
CATHOLIC MASS/GNOSTIC EUCHARIST WEEKLY MONTHLY
RELIGION OF CHILDREN RELIGION AT BIRTH CONVERT
RELIGION OF PARENTS WERE PARENT(S) ACTIVE IN THE CHURCH
CATHOLIC EDUCATION HOW MANY YEARS COLLEGE EDUCATION
MARRIED IN (CATHOLIC) CHURCH OCCUPATION OF SPOUSE
ETHNIC BACKGROUND WHEN DID YOU FIRST BECOME INTERESTED
IN GNOSTICISM HOW LONG HAVE YOU ATTENDED THE CHURCH OF
THE GNOSTICS OTHER

FIRST MEMORY OF CHURCH AS CHILD FEELINGS ASSOCIATED
W/CHURCH

IMAGES OF CHURCH (STAINED GLASS WINDOWS, ALTAR, ETC)
AS CHRISTIANS, WE ARE TOLD WE ARE MADE IN "GOD'S IMAGE." WHAT
DOES THAT MEAN TO YOU? AS A CATHOLIC? AS A GNOSTIC?
WHAT DID GOD LOOK LIKE TO YOU AS A CHILD/ADOLESCENT/ADULT?
ANY CHANGES?

WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD GOD?
WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD FATHER?
WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD GODDESS?
WHAT IMAGES COME TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD MOTHER?
WHAT BIBLICAL FIGURE OR FIGURES CAN YOU STRONGLY IDENTIFY
WITH?

WHAT IMAGES OF MARY DID YOU GROW UP WITH? HAVE THOSE IMAGES
CHANGED AS AN ADULT? IS MARY AN IMPORTANT PERSON IN YOUR
SPIRITUAL LIFE? WHY/WHY NOT? HOW DOES THE MARY FIGURE

COMPARE TO THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE, SOPHIA, IN GNOSTIC TRADITION?

AS A CHILD, WHAT MESSAGES DID YOU RECEIVE FROM OTHERS ABOUT BEING FEMALE?

WHAT MESSAGES DID YOU RECEIVE FROM OTHERS ABOUT SEX?

WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT YOUR EMERGING SEXUALITY AS AN ADOLESCENT? ABOUT YOUR FIRST MENSTRUATION? ABOUT YOUR CHANGING BODY? ABOUT YOUR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE OPPOSITE SEX? (DATING EXPERIENCES)

(IF SUBJECT HAS CHILDREN) WAS THE BIRTHING PROCESS A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE FOR YOU? WHY/WHY NOT? DID YOU HAVE A MALE OR A FEMALE DOCTOR IN ATTENDANCE? WOULD GENDER OF THE DOCTOR HAVE ALTERED THE EXPERIENCE?

WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH BREAST FEEDING?

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED MENOPAUSE? WHAT WERE/ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT WHAT IS HAPPENING TO YOUR BODY/SELF AT THIS TIME? POSITIVE/NEGATIVE

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED "MID-LIFE CRISIS?" WHAT PRECIPITATED THE CRISIS?

DO YOU THINK THAT WOMEN ARE MORE INTUITIVE THAN MEN? IN WHAT WAY?

WHAT CAREER OPTIONS WERE PRESENTED TO YOU AS A YOUNG WOMAN?

IF A WOMAN HAS YOUNG CHILDREN, DO YOU THINK SHE SHOULD WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME? PART TIME/FULL TIME?

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HOUSEWORK IF BOTH SPOUSES ARE EMPLOYED?

WOULD YOU PREFER TO BE EMPLOYED UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF A MAN OR A WOMAN? WHY?

DO YOU PERCEIVE WOMEN ACTING DIFFERENTLY THAN MEN IN THE WORKPLACE? IN WHAT WAY?

DO YOU THINK WOMEN SHOULD BE IN MANAGEMENT OR SUPPORTIVE ROLES IN THE WORKPLACE?

WOULD YOU FEEL CONFIDENT SEEKING MEDICAL HELP FROM A FEMALE SURGEON; VOTING FOR A FEMALE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE; FLYING WITH A FEMALE AIRLINE PILOT? WHAT WOULD HELP OR HINDER YOU IN MAKING THESE DECISIONS?

IF A WOMAN IS IN THE ARMED SERVICE, SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO BE IN COMBAT?

BESIDES YOUR HUSBAND/SIGNIFICANT OTHER, WHOM DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR BEST FRIEND?

WHAT DO YOU SHARE TOGETHER THAT YOU CANNOT (WOULD NOT) SHARE WITH YOUR HUSBAND/SIGNIFICANT OTHER?

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE MALE QUALITIES? FEMALE QUALITIES?

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU VALUE IN MALES/FEMALES?

WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF SEXISM?

HAS CONFESSION BEEN A PART OF YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A CATHOLIC?

WHAT FEELINGS FOR YOU ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS EXPERIENCE?

HOW DID THIS ENCOUNTER WITH A PRIEST HELP OR HINDER YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD?

DO YOU BELIEVE SIN CAN BE FORGIVEN DIRECTLY THROUGH A PERSON'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?

WHAT PROMPTED YOU TO SEEK SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION OUTSIDE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES IN THE CATHOLIC/GNOSTIC TRADITIONS? WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL CONFLICTS (IF ANY) IN RECONCILING THESE DIFFERENCES?

IN YOUR ESTIMATION, WHAT IS THE MOST MEANINGFUL PART OF GNOSTIC EUCHARIST? WHY?

DESCRIBE THE FIRST GNOSTIC EUCHARISTIC RITUAL YOU ATTENDED AT WHICH A FEMALE PRIEST PRESIDED. WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS AT THAT MOMENT? HAVE YOUR FEELINGS/OPINIONS CHANGED SINCE THAT FIRST EXPERIENCE?

HOW DOES THIS EXPERIENCE DIFFER FROM THE CATHOLIC MASS?

DOES GENDER OF THE PRIEST MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO YOU IN YOUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD? IN WHAT WAY?

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MAIN DUTIES OF THE Gnostic PRIEST? DO THESE DUTIES DIFFER FROM THOSE OF A CATHOLIC PRIEST?

ARE YOU ABLE TO RELATE TO A Gnostic PRIEST ON A MORE INFORMAL AND PERSONAL BASIS? (IN YOUR HOME, AT A SOCIAL FUNCTION) A CATHOLIC PRIEST?

WOULD YOU CONSIDER GOING TO A Gnostic PRIEST FOR COUNSELING OF A PERSONAL (AS OPPOSED TO SPIRITUAL) NATURE? (MARITAL, SEXUAL PROBLEMS, ETC.) A CATHOLIC PRIEST?

DOES GENDER MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO YOU IN DISCUSSING THESE ISSUES?

IF THE Gnostic CHURCH WERE FORCED TO CLOSE ITS DOORS, WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN ORDER TO EXPRESS YOUR FAITH IN GOD?

WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT CELIBACY AND THE CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD?

IF CATHOLIC PRIESTS WERE ALLOWED TO MARRY, WHAT ROLE WOULD THE SPOUSE PLAY IN THE PARISH COMMUNITY?

ST. PAUL SAID GOD IS IMAGELESS. IF CHRIST IS THE IMAGE OF THE IMAGELESS, DO YOU THINK IT WAS ESSENTIAL FOR HIM TO BE BORN MALE? WHY/WHY NOT?

SOME MODERN ARTISTS HAVE PORTRAYED THE FIGURE ON THE CROSS AS BEING FEMALE. ONE SUCH SCULPTURE BY EDWINA SANDYS IS ENTITLED, "CHRISTA." DO YOU HAVE DIFFICULTIES IMAGING A FEMALE SAVIOR - THE "DAUGHTER OF GOD?"

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S STANCE ON ISSUES OF SEXUALITY AS THEY IMPACT WOMEN? (BIRTH CONTROL, ABORTION, ETC) HOW DOES THIS STANCE DIFFER FROM THAT OF THE GNOSTICS?

WHAT AREAS OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR DO YOU CONSIDER SINFUL?

GNOSTIC RITUAL/TEACHINGS STRESS THE FEMININE PRINCIPLE AS BEING PART OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS TOWARDS WHOLENESS. IS THIS

CONCEPT IMPORTANT TO YOUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH/DEVELOPMENT? IN WHAT WAY?

WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE VATICAN COUNCIL IN 1976 ON WOMEN'S ORDINATION HAS REAFFIRMED THE TRADITION OF A MALE-ONLY PRIESTHOOD, STATING MALENESS IS ESSENTIAL IN ORDER TO SYMBOLIZE CHRIST AS BRIDEGROOM OF THE CHURCH. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS STATEMENT?

SOME CATHOLIC WOMEN GENUINELY FEEL THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS CALLED THEM TO PRIESTHOOD. HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO THEIR CLAIM OF A "CALLING?"

DO YOU THINK WOMEN CAN REPRESENT CHRIST IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION? IN WHAT CAPACITY?

IF YOU HAD TO CHOOSE A SYMBOL FOR CHRISTIANITY (BESIDES THE CROSS) WHAT WOULD IT BE?