FOCUS E-News
April 2 - 8, 2018 Edition

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**Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity**

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*Read a review of Chris' book by Brian O. McDermott, SJ, in America Magazine*

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From the Associate Director

The New York Times called it “a conceptual and artistic triumph”; America Magazine weighed in, saying it was “live TV at its best.” And depending upon your tastes, NBC’s live broadcast of Jesus Christ Superstar on the night of Easter may very well have been those things.

But for many women who have discerned a call to ordained ministry or greater leadership in the Christian community and those who support expanded roles for women in the Church, the production was also a call to action -- an opportunity to correct a centuries-long wrong and reclaim a woman so sorely needed for our times.

“Everything’s [not] alright” with the rock opera’s portrayal of Mary of Magdala. Misinformed by centuries of errant biblical scholarship, ignorance of early Christian history, false artistic renderings, and bad theology, Jesus Christ Superstar becomes a part of that same tradition and delivers a Mary of Magdala that quite simply never existed. Though, remarkably, it also captures a sense of her prominence and faithfulness in the song, “Could We Start Again Please?” which correctly places her on par with Peter.

Mary of Magdala was not the anonymous repentant woman who washed Jesus’ feet (Luke
nor was she Mary of Bethany who is scolded by Judas for anointing Jesus (John 12: 1-8). And there is certainly no evidence to suggest that Jesus and Mary were lovers. Rather scripture and early Christian texts reveal Mary of Magdala as a woman of means who supported Jesus’ ministry with her own resources, one of the few disciples who stood by him even as he died on the cross, the first witness and preacher of the Resurrection, and an important leader in the early Christian community.

It wasn’t until 1969 that the Vatican took any step to correct the record. And so, while it may be understandable that Jesus Christ Superstar, first composed around 1970, would have gotten her all wrong, any further misrepresentation of this significant woman of Scripture and history is no longer acceptable. In 2018, good information is too readily available. And today, the stakes are simply too high. Our world, and especially the Christian community – women and men – need the real Mary of Magdala.

As Christian denominations – even the Catholic Church – reflect on the possibility of expanding roles for women, the Mary of Magdala who was a leader among the disciples and who was the first to experience the risen Jesus and commissioned by him to go and preach the Resurrection must be a part, if not the starting point, of the discussion.

As an unprecedented number of women run for political office in the United States, they deserve to draw faith, hope and inspiration from the Mary of
Magdala who was at first dismissed by the male apostles when she brought them the Good News of Jesus’ Resurrection but nevertheless persisted and became known to her contemporaries as every bit the leader Peter and Paul were.

And as women courageously share their experiences of sexual harassment and violence through the #MeToo movement, we as a Christian community must stand with them: to believe them; to defend their reputation; and to vow that we will never again allow the powerful and influential to abuse or silence them. And may our reclaiming of the true Mary of Magdala be a symbol of our commitment to that Christian call.

Russ Petrus
Associate Director & Program Director

**Exposé on FOCUS**

National Catholic Reporter Heidi Schlumpf recently released a three-part exposé on the activities and funding for the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS).

It is worth reading. Schlumpf's investigations show how conservative elements within the Catholic Church are ramping up their efforts to evangelize younger adults.

She reports that the Colorado based outreach program that was founded 20 years ago, now has organizers on 137 campuses and an annual budget of 57 million. With 800 employees, FOCUS has proven it can have a substantial influence on younger Catholics.
Yet, many of those who have participated are not aware of FOCUS's varied conservative ties to Legatus, Napa Institute, Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, Chiaroscuro Foundation, and other conservative organizations. The organization has also faced criticism for its lack of diversity.

FOCUS intends to expand. The plan is to nearly double the number of college and university campuses where FOCUS sends missionaries in the next five years, to 250 schools, Zimmer told NCR. Read more

**French cardinal to face criminal charges for cover up of clergy sex abuse; Prefect of CDF summoned as well**

La Croix International reports that French Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, archbishop of Lyon, is being put on trial for covering up child sex abuse by Father Bernard Preynat.

Archbishop Luis Ladaria Ferrer, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and five other Catholic Church officials are being summoned for allegedly being informed of the priest’s past abuses and not reporting them to authorities.

A Lyon court on April 4 set the date to Jan. 7-9, 2019 for the criminal trial, the most prominent church sex abuse case to date in France, reports the Associated Press.

The case was earlier postponed because Archbishop Ladaria Ferrer’s subpoena and some of the case materials were not translated in due time into Spanish and Italian.
Cardinal Barbarin and some of the other defendants stand accused of leaving the priest in contact with children, knowing he had a history of sexual assault. The priest retired in 2015.

The cardinal has admitted to some "mistakes" in the management and nomination of certain priests but has denied any attempt to cover up the case, the report said.

If convicted, the defendants could face up to three years in prison and a 45,000-euro ($53,000) fine. The penalty would be increased to up to five years in prison and a 75,000-euro fine for failing to help a person in danger. Read more

Voices of Faith event just one indicator that #timesup for fully equality in the Catholic Church

Kate McElwee, Marianne Duddy Burke, and Mary Hunt penned a powerful letter holding up the Voices of Faith event as another critical indicator of change on the horizon towards women's full equality in the Church and the world.

They write that another key message is that for the Catholic Church, as for other abusers of women, Time's Up. The Voices of Faith speakers articulated what is true for millions: We will no longer spend our valuable time educating celibate male clerics on the realities of women's lives, nor will we wait patiently for changes in imperialistic policies that dehumanize and endanger us. We are walking on, finding new ways to be church and new ways
to live spirituality that are truly liberating; ways that recognize that we, as much as our brothers, carry and shine the divine light, as our Ugandan lesbian sister Ssenfuka Joanita Warry put it so powerfully.

This event also highlighted that the work of the church must be about many forms of justice, rather than about enforcing doctrinal ideology. Gender injustice is at play when women are excluded from priesthood and thus decision-making in the Roman Catholic church. This is the same sort of gender injustice that causes discrimination against women worldwide. Read more

**Archbishop gets real about misogyny, clergy sex abuse, and Tuam graves**

In an interview with Miriam O’Callaghan on RTÉ Radio One, the Archbishop said he would like to see a stronger female presence in the Church.

“I believe that is achievable... But it depends on the ability of the male priesthood to reach out,” he said.

However, he added that he did not believe he would see female priests working within the Church in his lifetime.

When asked about the former Irish President Mary McAleese’s recent controversial comments in which she described the Catholic Church as an “empire of misogyny” he said:

"Misogyny is present, it is obviously present in the church. There is a danger in an all male presbyterate that misogyny can enter. You can have a men’s
club and I think all of us have to examine our consciences to see where we are on this. How do we change it is the question. Mysonyism is a sign of human immaturity and that is a worry."

Read more

**Long-maligned Mary Magdalene now seen as stalwart disciple**

Alon Bernstein and Isaac Scharf writes that if there’s a feminist figure from the Bible for the #MeToo era, it could very well be Mary Magdalene.

The major character in the life of Jesus was long maligned in the West and portrayed as a reformed former prostitute. But scholars have adopted a different approach more recently, viewing her as a strong, independent woman who supported Jesus financially and spiritually. The New Testament tells how Jesus cast demons out of her. She then accompanied Jesus in his ministry around the Galilee, before witnessing his crucifixion, burial and resurrection in Jerusalem, which is being commemorated by Christians this week and next. The Roman Catholic Church and Western Christian churches observe Easter on Sunday, Eastern Orthodox Christians a week later.

Pope Francis took the biggest step yet to rehabilitate Mary Magdalene’s image by declaring a major feast day in her honor, June 22. His 2016 decree put the woman who first proclaimed Jesus’ resurrection on par with the liturgical celebrations of the male apostles. Read more

**Easter as a #MeToo moment**
"But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense."
-- Luke 24:11

John Blake writes that the men refused to listen to her story. She was publicly smeared as a whore. And when she emerged as a celebrated advocate, powerful men tried to silence her because she threatened their status.

Nevertheless she persisted. The woman we're talking about, though, is not a leader in the #MeToo movement -- the viral campaign raising awareness about sexual assault and harassment against women. She is Mary Magdalene, the first person Jesus appeared to after his resurrection, according to the New Testament, and the first person to preach the good news that he had been raised from the dead.

Some of the same behavior that led to the #MeToo movement also shaped the Easter story, some scholars say. For billions of Christians around the world, Easter Sunday is a celebration of a risen savior. Yet what happened to Mary Magdalene shows that Easter can also be seen as something else -- a #MeToo moment, some pastors and biblical scholars say.

They say Easter is also a story about how charismatic female leaders such as Mary Magdalene -- and even Jesus himself -- were victimized by some of the same behavior that sparked the #MeToo movement: the sexually predatory behavior of men, the intimidation of women
and an orchestrated attempt to silence women who drew too much attention when they spoke up. One of the most obvious links between Easter and #MeToo, some say, is the way Mary Magdalene has been slut-shamed.

She has been falsely portrayed in books and films as a penitent prostitute rather than what she really was, says Claire L. Sahlin: "The foremost witness of the resurrection and a visionary leader of the early Christian movement."

"The #MeToo movement recognizes that men in authority used their power to sexually abuse women and silence their voices," says Sahlin, an associate dean and professor of multicultural women's and gender studies at Texas Women's University.

"Mary Magdalene also was a victim of men in authority who used their power to silence her voice."

Mary Magdalene, as played by Anne Bancroft in the film "Jesus of Nazareth," announces the resurrection to the skeptical disciples.

Is it possible to see the Easter story through the lens of the #MeToo movement, or are some pastors and theologians twisting the central story of Christianity to fit a "feminist ideology"? One New Testament scholar captured the tension between interpreting the Bible and seeing it through a modern lens when he wrote about a push to make biblical translations more gender-inclusive. Read more
Vatican verdict against Guam Archbishop too lax

Joshua McElwee reports that a Vatican tribunal’s guilty verdict last month against a Guam archbishop, hailed by some as the first instance of the Catholic Church successfully prosecuting a bishop accused of abusing minors, appears likely not to have been made in direct relation to allegations of sexual abuse by the prelate.

A number of prominent canon lawyers say the punishment announced for Agana Archbishop Anthony Apuron — removal from office and a prohibition from living on the U.S. island territory — simply seems too lax to indicate the bishop was found guilty of abuse.

The canonists, speaking in interviews since the March 16 announcement of the verdict from a five-judge apostolic tribunal of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, said the expected punishment for sexual abuse of a minor would usually be laicization, known formally as dismissal from the clerical state.

"It must be that he wasn't found directly guilty of sexual abuse," said Oblate Fr. Francis Morrisey, a former president of the Canadian Canon Law Society who has advised numerous Vatican offices and local bishops' conferences. "Otherwise, I think he would have been dismissed from the clerical state."

Msgr. Frederick Easton, a former president of the U.S. Canon Law Society, said the punishment for
Apuron did not appear proportional to a finding of guilt in regards to sexual abuse. "One would have thought ... if the bishop were found guilty of sexual abuse of minors, that could easily be a reason for dismissal from the clerical state for him," said Easton, who also served for 31 years as the judicial vicar for the Indianapolis archdiocese.

Easton, Morrisey and two other canon lawyers said it seemed more reasonable to assume Apuron was found guilty of a so-called "boundary violation," such as solicitation in the confessional. Read more

**Francis, underrated as a theologian**

Massimo Faggioli argues that in his now-famous letter about Francis’s theology, Benedict XVI rejected the "foolish prejudice of those who see Pope Francis as someone who lacks a particular theological and philosophical formation."

Benedict also insisted on an "interior unity" between his papacy and that of his successor. Nevertheless, it is clear, five years into Francis’s pontificate, that Catholic theology—at least in Europe and North America—has yet to receive and fully explore the theology of Jorge Mario Bergoglio. There have been notable exceptions and new efforts are underway. But the fact that we had to wait until the fifth year of this pontificate for an Italian philosopher, Massimo Borghesi, to write the first intellectual biography of Jorge Mario Bergoglio is significant.
It underscores the difference between the way this pope has been understood and the way the two previous popes were. From the beginning of their pontificates, John Paul II and Benedict XVI were treated as serious theologians. Francis, by contrast, has been treated—even by some of his admirers—as if he were less interested in theology, and less intellectual in general. Read more

**England and Wales representative defends youth pre-synod document**

In *The Tablet*, Bernadette Kehoe reports that the young person chosen by the bishops of England and Wales to attend the Vatican’s pre-synod meeting on youth has defended the final document that was produced amid criticisms that it did not accurately reflect the level of support for more traditional liturgy.

"As a process, it was really strong,” twenty-one year old Isaac Withers told *The Tablet*. He explained that the first draft of the document was read out and 53 attendees took to the stage to give their reaction. A second draft was then produced which he said received a standing ovation from two-thirds of those present and the final document was then produced: “So there was a real feeling of being represented. It’s so unusual to have a church document that represents so many people” he said. He described the process as unfiltered and authentic: “It’s a hard task to give voice to the world and its issues but I really do think it represents so many voices.”
Three hundred 16-29 year olds from around the world were invited to Rome to help formulate a document that the Vatican describes as a “compass” and “navigational aid” for the bishops who are attending October’s synod on ‘Young people, faith and vocational discernment.’ Fifteen thousand more participated online through Facebook groups. Withers, who is currently an intern at the bishops’ conference of England and Wales, was part of the small, core group that drafted the final paper. Read more

**Fr. Brendan Hoban of the ACP says the Church's decline is self-inflicted**

Fr. Brendan Hoban writes that while Catholics lament the decline of their Church — the collapse of its authority, the waning of influence, the implosion of regular practice, the crisis in vocations — much of the decline is self-inflicted. That’s a difficult truth. We are where we are not just because circumstances conspired to make it all happen, but because we don’t seem to know where else we might be.

While Ireland moves on without us, we’ve failed spectacularly to navigate the impulses of the modern world and seem content to maintain the moat that separates us from an Ireland that has changed (and continues to change) beyond recognition.

The second papal visit in four decades conveniently bookends two different worlds: Pope John Paul II, in 1979, striving to convince us that we were on the brink of a new and glorious age
and confidently lecturing Catholics on contraception and divorce; and Pope Francis, in 2018, probably not even acknowledging the 50th anniversary of Humanae Vitae, the papal letter that banned artificial contraceptives for Catholics, which, ironically, coincides with his visit in August. Read more

**The critics take on the Pre-Synod youth**

In La Croix International, Massimo Faggioli argues that the Catholic Church and the world’s constitutional democracies are today facing the same critical challenge – how, as institutions, they can credibility represent their people. We saw this in the church several days ago after some 300 young people who met in Rome to offer their views on the next session of the Synod of Bishops issued their final document.

Their text was just the latest occasion for the usual critics of Pope Francis, especially in the United States, to once again take aim at the pope. The critics accused the teens and young adults that drafted and approved the final document of merely parroting the pope and being manipulated by him. The young authors of that document have officially denied the allegations.

Interestingly, in denying the charges, the youths also pointed out the gap between the healthy ecclesial ethos modeled by their gathering in Rome and the polarization that has become so evident among Catholics in the United States. Many young people around the
globe asked one of the U.S. participants, Katie Prejean, whether “Americans are really at each other’s throats all the time” and if they hate each other as much as it appears from the outside.

This criticism of Francis is a new form of what the 81-year-old pope has called the “hermeneutic of conspiracy” (actually tame in its English version compared to the original Italian, “ermeneutica cospirativa”). Francis used the phrase during the 2015 assembly of the Synod of Bishops to denounce those who claim certain development currently underway in the church are the product of a scheme or plot. Read more

**Lettergate**

Christopher Lamb writes that in the drama following a doctored photo, wild claims about the Pope’s supporters deliberately creating fake news and the resignation of the Vatican communications prefect, Mgr Dario Viganò, the most significant point about the “Lettergate” scandal has been obscured.

At the root of this dispute is the long-running squabble over the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the gathering that lay down the foundation stones for contemporary Catholicism, and a fixation with the need for “continuity” in the life of the Church. The letter written by the Pope Emeritus was released by Mgr Viganò in an attempt to shore up support for Pope Francis among those critics who contrast him negatively with his predecessor. This initiative reveals an insecurity among some in the Vatican – and of course it spectacularly backfired.
when it emerged that part of Benedict’s letter had been withheld, and the photo of the letter which was sent to journalists had been doctored. Mgr Viganò later stepped down.

Straining to present a continuity narrative between this Pope and Benedict was Mgr Viganò’s biggest mistake. He fell into the trap of imagining that popes should follow one another in a seamless, almost monochrome way. Read more (Subscription)

**Francis wants the bishops to listen**

Christopher Lamb writes that if there is one thing that Pope Francis wants the world’s bishops to start doing more, it’s listening. This week he sought to switch the Church’s broadcasting from “transmit” to “receive” by attending a gathering of 300 young adults who had come to Rome to give their input into a synod of bishops meeting in October that will focus on young people, faith and vocational discernment. Francis has insisted that young people must be at the heart of the deliberations, to ensure that the bishops are given a realistic picture of everything from millennial culture to what life is like for 20-somethings in the developing world. The bishops must lead – but their leadership should include walking behind the flock on occasion, as well as being in their midst and – sometimes – out in front.

On Monday morning the Pope threw himself into an intimate, four-hour-long dialogue session at the Mater Ecclesiae College in Rome, in the first such pre-synod gathering of its kind. At the same time, Francis has given the green light for the Church in Australia to hold a plenary council in 2020, the first such gathering
since the 1930s – and its focus will be “listening to the Spirit”.

The Pope wants the Church to find its synodal gear, where both problems and future mission are faced collectively. “The journey of synodality is the journey that God wants from his Church in the third millennium,” Francis said during a 2015 speech marking the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops. “A synodal Church is a listening Church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn.”

At the meeting in Rome, Francis mingled with young people posing for selfies, listening to their speeches and then posing for a big group photo. The Vatican has long experience of carefully stage-managing encounters between popes and various groups – but this event had a fresh, spontaneous, open atmosphere to it. No topics had been declared too hot to handle, and the Pope urged the participants to speak out “courageously”. Read more

Donate $125 or more and receive a copy of Sr. Chris Schenk’s groundbreaking book, Crispina and Her Sisters!

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Crispina and Her Sisters will open your eyes to the role women played in the shaping and expanding Christianity

As co-founder of FutureChurch, Christine Schenk, CSJ spent decades researching and writing about women in early Christianity. Like many feminists who have recovered the history and importance of women's authority, ministry and leadership in early Christianity, Schenk's book, Crispina and Her Sisters unearths new evidence that women held prominent roles in shaping and spreading Christianity. The book has already received accolades from prominent scholars such as Gary Macy, Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, and Joan Chittister, OSB.

The book was released mid-December. FutureChurch is offering a free copy of Chris's book for a donation of $125 or more. Learn about women in early Christianity and support FutureChurch at the same time.