FOCUS E-News
March 5 - 18, 2018 Edition

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March 21, 2018, 8pm ET
Fr. Joseph Healey, MM

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Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity

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From the Executive Director's Desk
This year, the Voices of Faith event in Rome on March 8 left tears of joy on my cheeks and a heart bursting with love and appreciation for my colleagues, friends, sisters, and brothers as their carried out their courageous and prophetic work.

I have been a part of the Voices of Faith effort for the last four years. In the first year I invited to join, Chantal Goetz, the Managing Director, and I launched the first panel discussion with Tina Beattie, Astrid Lobo-Gajiwala, Gudrun Sailor, and Ulla Gudmunson. I served as moderator and the panel's task was to shine a light on justice for women within the institutional church.

Since then, our March 8 event has consistently featured a marvelous panel discussion with women commenting on the challenges facing the Church in terms of women's authority and roles. Cardinal Pietro Parolin oversaw the event until this year.

This year, Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastry for Laity, Family and Life, oversaw the event. When the speakers’ names for the event were submitted for approval, Cardinal Farrell chose to exclude three. One of the women excluded was former president of Ireland, Mary McAleese. Another was Ssenfuka Joanita Warry, an advocate for LBGTQI justice in Uganda where being gay means you can lose your life.

After a round of unsatisfactory communications with C. Farrell, Voices of Faith decided to move the event outside of the Vatican so that the speakers could be
The event might have gone off without much controversy, except the press learned about the exclusions. As the story broke, Cardinal Farrell's decision to ban the former president of the Republic of Ireland from speaking in the Vatican landed with a thud in the middle of his ecclesiastical authority.

As they day approached the stage was set for some very fine truth telling.

Mary McAleese began with a resounding and brilliant critique of the historical and current biases that keep women out of meaningful positions of ministry and governance.

It is more than worth the time to read her speech in full, but she made several key points implementing structural change.

1. McAleese lays to rest the false argument that working for women's equality in the Church is the concern of a privileged few and that the Church's business should be to concentrate on helping women at the margins.

She rightly states that because the Catholic Church is the "pulpit of the world" (quoting Ban Ki Moon), its overt patriarchalism acts as a powerful brake on dismantling the architecture of misogyny where ever it is found.

2. Women's equality is rooted in the Gospel. It arises from divine justice. It cannot arise from "ad hoc papal benevolence."

3. We need a credible
strategy. All the papal pronouncements in the world mean nothing if there is not a concrete strategy for change.

McAleese's experience in building bridges across a war torn country makes her a credible voice in this struggle.

She states, "Today we challenge Pope Francis to develop a credible strategy for the inclusion of women as equals throughout the Church’s root and branch infrastructure, including its decision-making. Failure to include women as equals has deprived the Church of fresh and innovative discernment; it has consigned it to recycled thinking among a hermetically sealed cosy male clerical elite. It has kept Christ out and bigotry in."

And there are a few more prophetic utterances that just strike at the heart of both the challenges we face and the solutions.

- "The Catholic Church has long since been a primary global carrier of the virus of misogyny. It has never sought a cure though a cure is freely available. Its name is 'equality.'"

- "Pope Francis has said that 'women are more important than men because the Church is a woman.' Why not ask women if they feel more important than men? I suspect many will answer that they experience the Church as a male bastion of patronizing platitudes."

- "Francis has said a "deeper theology of women" is needed. God knows it
would be hard to find a more shallow theology of women than the misogyny dressed up as theology which the magisterium currently hides behind."

- "John Paul II has written of the 'mystery of women.' Talk to us as equals and we will not be a mystery!"

More Good News Proclaimed

The day, as a whole, was filled with many moments of inspiration and, as I wrote earlier, I often found myself weeping with joy at the words of hope offered by my colleagues.

This was true as Luke Hansen, SJ, spoke. Luke served as an intern for FutureChurch in 2015-16. I have watched him willingly place himself in the tensions that exist between the official stands of the Church on women and his experience of working with women. He has purposely sought a formation that goes beyond the confines and assumed privileges of a Jesuit education to learn from women, both young and old.

When asked if the denial of women in the priesthood is a form of spiritual abuse, Luke responded, "From the gift of the friendships I've had and the women I've listened to who have felt, experienced a call to ordained ministry as deacons, as priests, it would certainly seem so, because for them, that sense of call, which, when I hear them describe their vocation story and I ask them about it, seem so familiar to my own story.

What attracts them to ordained
ministry is what attracts me: a positive experience of the Church, of priests who I admired when I was younger, priests in my life as a Catholic adult who I was drawn to, who I found inspiration in, who I saw making a difference in people's lives.

This is the reality that draws these women to this ministry. And obviously, it puts them in a very complicated, confusing, painful situation to not have the opportunity to even explore that call. It's not an insistence on a right to ordination, which is not a right. It's a call that comes from the community and it's confirmed by the community. I haven't thought of the language of spiritual abuse, but what I've seen is that it's really painful.

When faithful, prophetic voices such as Mary McAleese and Luke Hansen rise up, I know this Church will continue to be led by God's own Spirit. It will not only survive, it will be strengthened by those who are courageous enough to call it to conversion and transformation so that it can be effectively serve as God's own heart and hands in a world hungry for love, justice, and peace.

Read the full transcript of the panel discussion here.

Deborah Rose-Milavec
Executive Director

**Jesuit priest says Pope must listen to the voices of women**

Luke Hansen, SJ, panelist for the 2018 Voices of Faith event, "Why Women Matter" urges Church leaders to listen to the voices of women.

Hansen wrote in America
My first encounter with the Voices of Faith event happened on International Women’s Day in 2015. From my desk, I watched the live stream of the event that took place inside the Vatican and featured the stories of Catholic women working on the frontiers of the church in areas like education and health care for girls and women as well as initiatives that supported migrants, refugees and victims of human trafficking.

The event featured a panel in which five accomplished women raised critical questions and spoke about their hopes and dreams for the leadership of women inside the Catholic Church.

I immediately felt inspired and encouraged by this creative and unique initiative, which sought to be a place of encounter and a bridge between the frontiers and the central government of the church. The participants highlighted the leadership of women already being exercised in the church but also insisted that this leadership be expanded to every area of the church’s life.

This year, the fifth year of the Voices of Faith event, I had the privilege of speaking on the panel at the event. In light of the upcoming synod on young people in October, the event mainly featured the voices of young women.

One of the inspirations guiding Voices of Faith this year was a letter Pope Francis wrote to young people in preparation for the synod. “Do not be afraid to listen to the Spirit who proposes
bold choices,” he said. “The Church wishes to listen to your voice, your sensitivities and your faith; even your doubts and your criticism.”

It is providential that this year’s event took place in the Aula of the Jesuit Curia in Rome, where the Jesuits meet for general congregations to elect a new superior general and discuss important business.

In this same hall in 1995, the Jesuits issued a major statement on women in church and civil society in which we heard a call “to change our attitudes and work for a change of structures” in regard to “respect, mutuality and equality between men and women” and to “translate theory into practice not only outside, but also within, the Church itself.” Asking for the grace of conversion, all Jesuits were invited to “listen carefully and courageously to the experience of women” and to “align themselves in solidarity with women.”

On the panel at Voices of Faith, I spoke about the strong presence and influence of women throughout my Jesuit formation. I have had women as professors of Scripture, ethics, sacraments and even homiletics. I learned Ignatian discernment from a Dominican sister who was my spiritual director for three years.

I prepared for priestly ministry with women: studying with them and collaborating with them. Women have been my supervisors, colleagues and friends.

Along the way, I have tried to
listen and learn from these women, especially as they shared their diverse experiences as Catholic women and raised critical questions about the church we love. On the panel, I emphasized that this friendship and regular collaboration with women is essential for any man preparing for priestly ministry.

In response to other questions, I spoke about my hopes for the Papal Commission on the Diaconate of Women and of the joy and pain of women who experience a call from God to serve within the Catholic Church as ordained ministers but live with the reality that it is not possible to fulfill that vocation today.

The women who spoke at this year's event are exemplars of faith and courage in their work with refugee women, girls education and Catholic-Jewish relations.

As just one example of many, Ssenfuka Joanita Warry, a Catholic, spoke powerfully about the double discrimination she faces as a woman and a lesbian in Uganda. She described the violence that results from the criminalization of homosexuality. Her dear friend, she said, “paid the ultimate price” after a local newspaper published names and photos of L.G.B.T. persons. She asked why homosexuality is still criminalized in parts of the Catholic world. Since messages from the churches in Uganda are treated as messages from God, she explained, “our religious leaders hold the key to protection of L.G.B.T. persons.”

The courage of these women gives me courage. There were
many powerful moments of honesty. At some points, I saw people in tears because of the beauty and power of what was shared.

In response to the final question of the panel, “Why are you still Catholic?” Elisa Orbananos Hernando, who works for the Jesuit Refugee Service in the Great Lakes region of Africa, said, “I’m still in love.... I love the church that made me the person I am today, and I try to love in return.”

I hope the event has a ripple effect that inspires and encourages more women to speak about their experience of how God is at work in their lives and in the church—a church that needs every voice.

**Diagnosing and treating misogyny**

Christine Schenk, CSJ, author of the bi-weekly column, Simply Spirit, sized up the significance of the most recent Voices of Faith event with eloquence.

Schenk wrote that previous Voices of Faith events were hosted at the Vatican, but this year Cardinal Kevin Farrell denied permission for McAleese and Ugandan advocate Ssenfuka Joanita Warry to speak because of their support for LGBTI persons' rights.

Farrell's decision to ban such a high-profile figure as McAleese, let alone Warry — who works in a country where homosexuality is punishable by life in prison — only provided a worldwide media megaphone.

Rather than silence the
Schenk also quoted one of McAleese's most important diagnosis and cur. According to McAleese, "The Catholic Church has long since been a primary global carrier of the virus of misogyny. It has never sought a cure, though a cure is freely available. Its name is equality."

Read more

UN: The Time is Now

Male celibates advise to Pope on what women want is Ludicrous

Cardinal Farrell defends banning

The archbishop agrees with McAleese

Patsy McGarry reports that the Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin has agreed with claims by Mary McAleese that the main reason for negative attitudes to the church in Ireland relates to its restrictions on women.

“Her challenge to the internal culture of the Church today was brutally stark. Some may find it unpleasant or unwelcome. I must accept the challenge with the humility of one who recognises her alienation,” Dr Martin said of the former president’s comments.

In the keynote address to a Voices of Faith conference in Rome on Thursday marking International Women’s Day Mary McAleese quoted the Archbishop. “Just four months ago the
Archbishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin felt compelled to remark that “the low standing of women in the Catholic Church is the most significant reason for the feeling of alienation towards it in Ireland today,” she said.

Mickens hints that Pope Francis may be ready for a change at Communications after photo is doctored

Robert Mickens is guessing that Pope Francis may be getting ready to make a mega change in the mega communications arm of the Vatican.

He writes that 55-year-old Msgr. Dario Viganò is probably one of the most unpopular officials in the entire Roman Curia, at least among the several hundred employees that fall directly under the Secretariat for Communications of which he is the prefect.

Further, he has been spotted doctoring photos and telling half-truths.

According to Mickens, Viganò bent the truth when he presented a letter from Pope Benedict supporting supporting the Francis brand of theology.

Vigano's report quoted the former pope: “I applaud this initiative,” – writes Pope Benedict – “It contradicts the foolish prejudice of those who see Pope Francis as someone who lacks a particular theological and philosophical formation, while I would have been solely a theorist of theology with little understanding of the concrete lives of today’s Christian.” (sic.)
But Vatican Media omitted an important section of Benedict's letter, which sets his comments in a rather different context: “I do not feel that I can write a brief and dense theological page about [the books] because for my whole life it has always been clear that I would write and express myself only on books that I had also truly read. Unfortunately, even if only for physical reasons, I am not able to read the eleven little volumes (volumetti) in the near future, all the more so in that I am under other obligations to which I have already agreed.”

In plain English, he said: “Thanks, but no thanks. I have more pressing things to do, now and in the future, than read these little pamphlets.”

The same Vatican Media then released a video of Msgr. Viganò (in Italian with English subtitles), in which the prefect also intentionally omits any reference to the fact that Benedict XVI declined an invitation to write an essay for the series of short books/essays. In addition to this, the Secretariat for Communications, through the Holy See Press Office and on the Vatican News website, offered a touched-up “artistic” photo of Benedict’s letter with the collection of books.

“The doctoring of the photo is significant because news media rely on Vatican photographers for images of the pope at events that are otherwise closed to independent media,” noted the Associated Press’ correspondent in Rome, Nicole Winfield.
The assessment is blistering.

“Most independent news media, including The Associated Press, follow strict standards that forbid digital manipulation of photos,” Winfield noted.

“No element should be digitally added to or subtracted from any photograph,” according to AP norms, which are considered to be the industry standard. Read more

Vatican releases full Benedict letter expressing concern over Francis' theology

Will George Pell go to trial?

The Associated Press reports that the alleged victims of the most senior Vatican official charged in the Catholic Church sex abuse crisis finished testifying to an Australian court Wednesday. A hearing began last week in the Melbourne Magistrate Court to determine whether prosecutors have sufficient evidence to put Australian Cardinal George Pell on trial.

Pope Francis' former finance minister was charged in June with sexually abusing multiple people in his Australian home state of Victoria. The details of the allegations against the 76-year-old cardinal have yet to be released to the public, though police have described the charges as "historical" sexual assault offenses — meaning the events are alleged to have occurred decades ago. Read more

Catholic Reformers want Royal Commission report released
Australia will have a plenary council

Catholic News Service reports that Australian bishops expressed gratitude to Pope Francis for authorizing an Australian plenary council, a meeting in which decisions become binding on the Church in the country.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane, chair of the Bishops’ Commission for the Plenary Council, asked people to “join in prayer as we embark on this journey together as God’s people in Australia.”

“We sincerely hope the preparation and celebration of the plenary council is a time when all parts of the church listen to and dialogue with one another as we explore together how we might answer the question: ‘What do you think God is asking of us in Australia?’” he said in a statement.

The Australian bishops had asked that Perth Archbishop Timothy Costelloe serve as president of the council, and Francis endorsed the nomination.

Read more

Will the bishops learn?

This week young Catholics will land in Rome. But what will the bishops learn from them?

The National Catholic Reporter editors made a proclamation that should hung from banners in St. Peter’s Square and tattooed on the forehead of every attending bishop. Young people are not the problem.
Thomas Reese, SJ, points out that "the young people going to Rome are from this pool of loyal young Catholics, who have been chosen by their national bishops' conferences, religious communities and seminaries to meet with the pope. One of their challenges will be to represent not only themselves but also those of their age group who are disenchanted with the church."

But, truth be told, isn't this the responsibility of the bishops to make sure they have chosen a diverse group of candidates?

Reese also makes two other critical points:

1. The church has a big problem with young people, which means that it has a big problem with its future. Almost half of Catholics who identify as unaffiliated (48 percent) left Catholicism before reaching age 18. As a result, only 18 percent of Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 identify as Catholic.

2. The pope understands that a bunch of old, celibate bishops are not going to come up with solutions for the Catholic Church's failure to attract or keep young people.

So if the bishops are picking candidates that do not represent the experiences of those who are "going, going, and gone", does the Synod have a chance for real success? Read more

Synod tiptoes into the digital world, but are they thinking big enough?

The Church's evolving approach
Church needs daring of the young according to Francis

Pope Francis asks Argentines for forgiveness for offending them

Megan Cornwell reports that Pope Francis has written a highly personal letter to the people of Argentina thanking them for their support and good wishes on his fifth year as head of the Church and asking for forgiveness if he has offended them.

The letter, written in the Pope’s native Spanish, was made public this weekend by the Argentine Bishops’ Conference at the Holy Father’s request.

In it the Pope says he was moved by the fact that “people from different religious, political and ideological backgrounds” came together to express “their closeness to me on the fifth anniversary of my election.”

Francis received a congratulatory letter from Argentines to commemorate his fifth year at the Vatican.

Read more

Pope Francis at five

The pontificate of Francis is being examined from a number of angles given the five year anniversary of his election.

Francis still has the support of many Catholics, but he has lost some of his support because he has not been aggressive enough in rooting out clergy sex abuse according to Nicole Winfield.

Further support has faded because he has failed to
address the priest shortage by ending mandatory clerical celibacy.

While many reformers see the pope as too slow moving, others see his reforms as a disaster.

Ross Douthat complains that Francis is ceding too much authority to local bishops.

But John Gehring notes that along with disrupting business as usual in Rome, the pope has empowered a new generation of “Francis bishops” in the United States to speak out with renewed vigor on issues beyond abortion and birth control, insisting that being prolife also means addressing income inequality, climate change, and treatment of immigrants. Read more

Que Viva el Papa

What will religious life look like?

Sr. Linda Romey is not afraid of the future. And she refuses to look away from the challenges religious communities face.

In her Global Sisters article, she writes that she believes some women are still drawn to give all. But there are also major stumbling blocks for post-boomer generations in the way most of us currently live religious life. Likewise, for many of those faithfully living religious life now as they have done for decades, making a transition to a new iteration of the life is outside the realm of what they are able to imagine or transition to. So how to proceed?

Take a plant cutting and let it
grow in new soil: Keep the constitutive elements (lifelong consecrated celibacy and community) and replant them. Engage today's seekers in open and honest dialogue and then give them space to create community. Resist fear; trust in God to lead us even when we can't imagine the outcome. When their stumbling blocks are structures we deem essential to our living of the life, we must be open to letting them try living it in new ways. When our wisdom and experience and faith challenge them, they must be open to learn from us and take the time to study and prepare themselves theologically and spiritually as well as ministerially and psychologically.

But don't expect all current religious to forgo what has defined their lives for 50, 60 or 70 years. Start a new shoot, feed it, water it, nurture it in new soil without uprooting the old plant.

And what might some of those stumbling blocks be?

One might be canonical status in a church that does not accept the equality of women and has a long history of oppression of women. So the new shoot can experiment with noncanonical status (which does not mean non-Catholic).

Or authoritarian governance structures that lack good evaluation and feedback processes that foster ongoing evolution — let the new shoot try different models.

Or agreement on what is essential to formation programs for women today, what areas
need more development, what can be let go? The role and place of technology in modern religious life is an area in need of further reflection and understanding. It will be a daunting task, but the only way to do it is to begin. What about those who aren't called to religious life as defined here?

The support, wisdom and resources of religious can contribute to that which already exists in many places: intentional community, a commitment to Gospel life held together by a desire to minister, to live in community, to share resources, to find some modicum of security. Read more

**The tensions between Church reform and pushing an agenda**

Massimo Faggioli writes that the Catholic Church does not seem quite able to manage the expectations of reform. The ancient motto ecclesia semper reformanda (“the church is always in need of being reformed”) has taken on a slightly new meaning in our day where leaders are measured more by their ability to reform rather than to govern. And this stands in contrast with a genuine theology of reform.

So it is no surprise that much of the analyses marking the fifth anniversary Pope Francis’ election focused on the pope’s reforms.

Some pundits expressed disappointment at the pontificate’s failure to deliver on a number of particular reforms, such as that of the Roman Curia (the most arduous test for all
popes at least since 1588, when the “modern” Roman Curia was created) or concerting the role of women in the church. But it should be clear by now that for a theologian and cleric like Francis, church reform means something much more profound. It goes deeper than just “institutional reform” and focuses more on the change of mentality and habits. Read more
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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.