This remarkable day-long event concluded with a first-of-its-kind panel discussion in the heart of the Vatican.

Read the full transcript.

On March 8, 2015, International Women’s Day, a Vatican door opened a little wider for women in the Catholic Church. Voices of Faith, an initiative of the Fidel Goetz Foundation, whose slogan is “All Voices Count,” forged a brand new conversation about women’s leadership, ministry and roles in the Catholic Church. In a turn away from the usual pattern of having male clerics discuss and decide what is best for women in the Church, this conversation was about women by women.

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala of India, Tina Beattie of the U.K., Ulla Gudmundson of Sweden and Gudrun Sailer based in Rome joined moderator Deborah Rose-Milavec, Executive Director of FutureChurch for this first-of-its-kind discussion about women’s roles in the Church.

This event was truly unique because the panelists were able to speak clearly about their dissatisfaction with the traditions and practices in the Church that have subordinated women and robbed the Church of the many gifts women have to offer. The panel also shared their hopes and ideas for expanding women’s roles today.

Thanks to the generosity of Linda Pinto and CORPUS, a 41-year old faith community affirming an inclusive priesthood rooted in a reformed and renewed Church, you can read the full transcript of the hour-long discussion that took place on March 8, 2015 right here.

I dream of a Church where it won’t matter whether you’re a man or woman, and you just respond to the call to service....

Panelist Astrid Lobo Gajiwala
Deborah Rose-Milavec: Well, I want to welcome everyone back after that beautiful song. What a great way to start the second part of this event. The second part of our Voices of Faith event starts with our panel discussion. We've titled it, We Have a Dream because all of us here, and I'm sure all of you in the audience, have a dream about women's leadership in the church. And we're also be awarding the Women's Sowers of Development, Caritas Internationalis, and the Voices of Faith Prize after this, just so you know what's coming up.

My name is Deborah Rose-Milavec. I am the Executive Director of Future Church, a U.S.-based reform organization. My predecessor is Sister Christine Shank, who I think many people know. One of the things we do is work to create opportunities for Roman Catholics to participate fully in the life and leadership of the Church.

Today, I have the honor of moderating this discussion with four amazingly accomplished women who will talk about their experiences as women working in the Catholic Church. Today we heard a lot in the first part of this about women in society: how women are suffering, how women are being excluded, how their rights are being violated. And so we wanted to turn that lens a little bit. Can we take that lens and look inside the Church and see what is the place of women in the Church today?
And so they’re going to talk about their experiences, but they’re also going to talk about their dreams and their hopes and their ideas for how to create a better future for women’s leadership in the Church. So with me today I have Gudrun Sailer, Ulla Gudmundson, Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, and Tina Beattie, and I’m going to share just a little bit about each of them. None of this will give them the honor they deserve, but I’m going to keep it short for time’s sake.

Gudrun Sailer is originally from Austria, but has worked as a radio journalist in the German section of Vatican Radio in Rome for the past twelve years. She also works with German television news, talking about the Vatican and the Pope. She says, "I interpret [what the Vatican and the Pope are saying]." That sounds like a really important job. She has written three books about the Vatican, two of which are dedicated to the topic of women. She’s going to talk a little bit about her work today. Welcome, Gudrun.

Ulla Gudmundson is a writer and career diplomat. She’s a member of the Lutheran Church and served as Sweden’s ambassador to the Holy See from 2008 through 2013. She has served in many prestigious posts, has authored a book on NATO, and has written numerous articles and essays on security policy, international relations, religion, literature, and lots of other topics. She has written for the Tablet, and she regularly contributes to Osservatore Romano—the Vatican newspaper here—in their monthly insert on women in the Church. Welcome, Ulla.

Tina Beattie is a professor Catholic studies and the Director of the Dibgy Stuart Research Centre at the University of Rohampton. Her research interests focus largely on the role and representation on women in the Church. She has written and published extensively in the area of theology, art, psychoanalysis, Catholic social teaching, and human rights.

Her latest project focuses on maternal well-being, poverty, and international development in the context of Catholic social teaching, with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. Tina is part of the Theological Advisory Group for the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development and a regular contributor to the BBC Radio 4, the Guardian Online, and the Tablet. Welcome, Tina.

Astrid Logo Gajiwala is a scientist with a doctorate in medicine who established India’s first tissue bank at the Tata Memorial Hospital. She is a founding member of Satyashodhak, a feminist collective in Mumbai, who has done an amazing amount of work empowering women in India, and by extension, in the United States and other places.

She was the first woman to be invited to address the bishops of India at one of their plenary assemblies, and in 2008 she had a key role working with Sister Lily Francis and the bishops drafting the gender policy of the Catholic Church of India. Released in 2010, this policy is the first of its kind in the Catholic Church. It’s both practical and prophetic, as it relates to women’s full and equal participation in the Church.

Astrid is a member of the Indian Theological Association, has served as
assistant coordinator for Ecclesia of Women in Asia, is a member of Indian Women’s Theological Forum, and a member of the Indian Christian Women’s Movement. She has written and published extensively on the concerns of women and interfaith relationships since the 1980s. Welcome, Astrid.

So, let’s begin. I just loved Leslie Ann’s question this morning, “Where are the women?” It’s a beautiful question. And I think as we look at the Church we can ask that question with real legitimacy. Anyone who follows Pope Francis knows he has repeatedly said he wants to create a more incisive presence for women in the Catholic Church. And he says this is something he holds dear to his heart. That’s very touching, and I love Pope Francis.

And at the February Consistory, the cardinals seemed to agree. We know more women are being appointed to decision-making roles. For instance, Sister Mary Malone, who was here but I think is gone now, has been appointed as the first rector of a pontifical university in Rome. Still, you need only one hand, and actually only two fingers to count the number of positions women hold in the Holy See from undersecretary and up. So we see movement in the Church when it comes to women’s leadership, but we also see there is an urgent need for expanding the roles of women, especially at the highest decision-making levels.

So with that in mind, I’m going to start this off with an interactive conversation with our panelists. And I’m going to start with the question, “Tell everyone here and those out in the blogosphere about your experience as a woman working in the Catholic Church.” Talk about specifically where it has been satisfying, and maybe where it has been less so. So I want to start with Gudrun. Would you tell us a little bit about your experience?

**Gudrun Sailer:** Yes. I am a journalist at the Vatican, at the Vatican Radio at the German Section. And I would say I’m really fond of that job. There are quite a lot of women. Roughly 50% of all Radio Vatican journalists are women. But this obviously is quite a clerical environment and so sometimes I wonder if some cardinal would be more open to being interviewed if he were asked by priests and not by a laywoman like I am. But mostly this is not a question at all. And so I can really say this is a very good and respectful working environment, even if I have some career limits, being a laywoman in the Vatican.

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:** I know that you’ve written some books on women working in the Vatican. Tell us a little bit about how you got interested and a little bit about what you found in that work.

**Gudrun Sailer:** I came to Vatican Radio twelve years ago, as you mentioned. And before I was wondering, well, how is it going to be? Am I going to be the only women? But then I immediately discovered we are so many, and also in the Vatican. And as a journalist, I’m always keen on talking to other women who have Vatican jobs. So let’s say a press conference with about eight people on the panel, and there was the last person to speak—the woman. So I would
get to the woman afterwards and give her a voice.

And with this kind of work I wrote a book about women in the Vatican. This was about seven or eight years ago. So these were portraits of women working in the Vatican at that time. There [aren’t] many. I remember when I was writing the book and saying this to some friends, everybody asked me, "Wow, but this is going to be a very short book—three pages or so." [Laughter.] No it’s not.

And I did some research just for today because I wanted to know how many women are working today in the Vatican. And these are really recent numbers. I got them a couple of days ago. And I discovered that today there are 762 women working at the Vatican. This is about 20%, or a little bit less than 20%. It’s still not much but it’s much more than many people would guess, I think.

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:** But what kind of positions do they hold? That’s always really important. We know that women have been doing more of the servant jobs for many, many years in all sorts of spaces, so what are they doing?

**Gudrun Sailer:** I’m happy to say this is not the case in the Vatican. Many women working at the Holy See are university graduates, about 40% of them. And I have to explain a little bit. We have here working at the Vatican an employment scale with ten different degrees, ten being the highest. And most women working at the Holy See are at degree 7. And this is to say they are university graduates. So in this position you might maybe be an office leader or an historian or an archivist or a journalist. So it’s not the cleaning work that women do in the Vatican.

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:** Okay, great. Thank you, Gudrun. So let’s move to someone else. Why don’t we go to you, Ulla? Talk to us about your experience working at the Catholic Church.

**Ulla Gudmundson:** Thank you very much. First of all, it’s going to be very short if I speak about "in the Catholic Church" because I’m a non-Catholic. I’m very honored to be invited here as a non-Catholic. I would also like to add that I regard myself as a good friend of the Catholic Church who admires and respects this Church very much.

I’d also like to say that during the five years I was Sweden’s ambassador here, I met many interlocutors, male interlocutors, for whom I have a great deal of respect and admiration—for their spirituality, for their intellectual accomplishments, for their competence, etc., even though we didn’t necessarily look eye to eye on the issue of women, which is one issue where I really am critical of the Catholic Church, as my interlocutors in the Curia, I think, noticed. I hope they still find me respectful and polite, but not necessarily patient and tender, I don’t think.

One thing that strikes me when you come as a woman ambassador to the Vatican and you begin to move about the Curia having appointments in the State Secretariat, in the Pontifical Councils and the Academies is, I would say, actually, what my experience is, [there is] an absence of women. I have met one single woman in a senior executive
position in the Curia, and that was Flaminia Giovanelli, under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in Justice and Peace, an excellent person. But that’s it. So I think it’s a question of level. It’s also a question of where you find the women, what kinds of jobs and at what level.

You’re quite right: you can find women in the Vatican. In Vatican Radio, for instance, in the museums, in the Vatican library, etc., but none as a senior executive position in the Secretariat of State. I find this rather odd because it seems to me that the Church, which emphasizes so much the differences between women and men and the complementarity of women and men should be particularly eager to hear what women have to say for themselves and should be particularly eager to have a balance of men and women in its governing structures. So it’s a little bit illogical, it seems to me, this situation.

I was have been struck by the way women are spoken of by high representatives of the Catholic Church. I have lost count of the number of times where I’ve heard women addressed collectively as tender, patient, sensitive, motherly, empathic, gentle, etc. I think those are sterling qualities urgently needed in the world today, but I find that there’s something when they are collectively ascribed to a group of human beings. If I were to characterize myself, I would not use these adjectives. I would say that I’m a curious and adventurous person eager to explore the world, passionate about politics, passionate about ideas. And I don’t really feel this description fits me. I’ve had this experience many times.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: I heard you say or write some place that in your experience as ambassador, you felt that there was no difference between you and your male colleagues. Would you say that that was representative of women who reach higher levels, in your experience?

Ulla Gudmundson: Diplomacy is a male-dominated field, but I would argue that title and function always takes precedence over gender. If I represent Sweden, that is what counts and it doesn’t matter whether I’m a woman or a man. So I have never to my knowledge been treated differently by my extremely competent and pleasant interlocutors in the Curia. That is not the problem.

I find these sort of collectively ascribed qualities problematic because I think it doesn’t recognize that women are individual persons with different characteristics, different professions, different theologies, different political views. They’re individuals just like man. And I have the impression, for instance, when I read the working document for the family synod this coming autumn— that there is some fear in the Church among those people who wrote this document, in any case, of individuality or individualism. It seems to me that it is interpreted as equaling selfishness. To me that is adulthood. And I think we’ve heard in the testimonies today that it’s clear women want to be treated as adults, they want financial independence, because that means being adult in this world.
Deborah Rose-Milavec: Okay, could we come back to you, because you have many, many good things to say. Let's turn to Tina. Talk about your experience in the Catholic Church, Tina.

Tina Beattie: Well, I was a convert. I became a Catholic soon after the birth of my fourth child, having been a Presbyterian. I was living in Zimbabwe at the time. And soon after that we moved to Britain and I decided to do a university degree. I was a mature student. And as a new Catholic and a newcomer to European culture, I decided to do theology. It was in a secular university at the University of Bristol. And one of the reasons for my converting had been a great respect for the intellectual coherence and riches of the Catholic tradition, with its marrying together of faith and reason, of grace and nature, revelation and reason.

So I suppose, somewhat naively I thought, well, I'll go to university and the university is all about intellectual questioning; it's about rational thought; it's about pushing questions as far as they can go. And as a brand-new baby Catholic, I didn't recognize that's not always the way Catholic theologians are encouraged to think, particularly not if they're women who are also undergoing a certain conversion to feminism, which I was at the time.

So my theological career has been a learning process. It's been a very rich and creative experience. I feel, as a woman in the Church, that I'm very fortunate to be here at a time when, however much of a struggle we have to be heard, we are being heard, and today is evidence of that.

And I always think that when something is on the brink of momentous change, then the struggles become most intense and most ferocious. So, actually, I'm very encouraged when I see lots of attempts to keep women in their place in the Church because I think that means that we are seeing change happening.

And I guess, in the context of all this, when I read Pope Francis’s Apostolic letter, Evangelii Gaudium, I think, this is the Church that I dream of. This is the messy, free, faithful, joyful community that when I joined the Church all those years ago in Zimbabwe I glimpsed very strongly.

And some of the reasons I glimpsed that are some of the things we've heard today from our earlier speakers—that passion for social justice allied to the huge beauty of the Catholic cultural tradition. These things are to me worth fighting for and worth preserving and worth promoting, and I just long for the day when women are full and equal partners in that struggle.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: Thank you, Tina. So let's move to Astrid. Tell us about your experience in the Catholic Church. What interesting things would you like to tell us?

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala: Well, I have mainly worked within the institutional structures. And I must admit my experience is rather mixed. So I find it very frustrating that women are excluded from decision making because all kind of governance is linked with ordination. And so I have served as vice president of my parish council, but as we all know, the parish council is merely a consultative body, and
ultimately everything depends upon how the parish priest exercises his power.

And, well, I've been a consultant for the Women's Commission for decades, and the truth is that all we can do is make recommendations. We don't have a vote and there is no accountability. It's just that we recommend things. And so I find there are a lot of places where women are excluded and I don't understand why.

So for instance today we have feminist theology, which is taught. We have women professors in seminaries. And you have women teach homiletics to seminarians, but they cannot preach the homily. Recently we have introduced married deacons. And I don't know if this is the same everywhere, but at least in India, the wife accompanies the spouse through the whole process, the training. And then at the end of it all, the husband gets ordained as a deacon and the wife doesn't. So I don't see the logic of this.

And also, we have now introduced one more layer. First you had only the priests and now you have the married deacons. And, well, the women are one layer below. And you even have the women religious who are working so much in parishes, and I believe in some parts of the world are even managing parishes. But they cannot be ordained as deacons. So for me this is problematic.

But on the other hand, I've had some wonderful experiences, at least in the Indian church. And to focus on one particular one, in 1992, Bishop Bosco Penha from Mumbai was appointed to give a keynote address on women at this Catholic Bishop's Conference of India, their plenary assembly. And what I liked was that of his own accord he felt, how can I as a bishop talk about women. And he took this decision to us, requesting whether I would not mind speaking, and I said, "No, I don't. I accept it."

And I spoke at this meeting. And I was very well accepted even though I wasn't really invited. The sum total of this meeting was that at the end of the meeting the bishops instituted Women's Desk under the Commission for Laity. And there was another woman who was present, Sister Cleopatra and they appointed her as the secretary of that Women's Desk, and I was appointed as a consultant.

And of course later, this Women's Desk was made into—Bishop Bosco himself became the chair. And I must say he worked very hard to make this into a full-fledged commission, and a few years later, in 1996, it became a Commission. I remember he used to tell us—he was a very new bishop at that time—and he would say, "Yes, you women have all your demands, but ultimately, it is I who have to face the bishops." But anyway, he got us our Commission.

And then we formed, a couple of years before 2008—at that time we had Bishop John Thakur, who was the chair of the Women's Commission, and he put forward to the standing committee that they could have their plenary assembly focused again on the empowerment of women. And it was very nice of the standing committee to agree to this.
So in 2008 we had this tremendous meeting. But before that, what was nice was...so it was agreed that this would be the team. And Sister Lily Francis, who was then the secretary of the Women’s Commission, was entrusted with the whole organization of this entire meeting. And I think she went about it in a beautiful manner.

What she did was, she first of all organized—I was part of that organizing committee with her—and she organized this national-level consultation and a number of smaller consultations at the grass roots level, the idea being that you find out from the women themselves what are their expectations, what are their concerns, so that we could then put this on the agenda of the bishops. And in fact, there was also a survey that was conducted to kind of assess how much has the Church made a difference in people’s lives.

So all of this was brought to the meeting. And we got to choose our speakers, so there were five of us. I was one of the keynote speakers. There were four other women. And what was really nice was there were 40 women who were present at that plenary assembly of bishops, so I think this is a first in the history of the CBCI.

And the end point of that was that the bishops brought out a statement. And there were recommendations—again, for the first time we were three women who were present on that drafting committee of the statement—three women, three bishops. And at that meeting, the 2008 meeting was when they decided that they would bring out a gender policy. And what was nice was, they said that it was time-bound. So they said within the next one year they would bring out this gender policy, and they did. And so in 2010, we had the gender policy being released by the CBCI.

And for me what was very important was, how did this gender policy come about? In fact, here, too, once they decided that they had a gender policy, again they threw it back to the Women’s Commission and they said, “You give us a draft.” And Sister Lily Francis took it on. She formed a drafting committee. I was present on that drafting committee. And we drafted the policy and gave it to the bishops. And of course they revised it, they reviewed it, and they made some changes which we were not too happy about. But, okay, the end product was still a good document. This (she holds up gender policy document), by the way, is the gender policy of the Catholic Church of India.

And what I liked about it was that I really felt respected. They trusted the women to articulate their own vision. They gave us the freedom. So that was the first part. And the second part was that they owned this document. So this is a CBCI document. But we all know that it’s also a women’s document because the women worked along with the bishops to get this document out.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: Thanks, Astrid. This term ‘gender’ has some very negative connotations in the Church at this time, and of course, what do you mean by that, and we hear even the Pope saying that it’s sort of like the nuclear option. So what did the Indian bishops mean by this term?

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala: Well, actually, when the Indian bishops use the words ‘gender
policy’ I think they were very simply talking about discrimination against women. So they were talking about it. And in India women have a very low status, so they were looking at that. And then also they were looking within the Church in terms of the equality of women and in fact, they actually say in their policy is that the ultimate goal of the policy is to achieve equality between man and woman, and this forms the basis of the policy.

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:**

Thanks. We’ve heard a little bit about the experience, but we also want to hear about the dreams. We know that there has been improvement of women in leadership. For instance, there have been five women appointed to the International Theological Commission, which is about 17% of the membership now.

And I think one of the most outstanding models we have now is Cardinal Sean O’Malley’s Commission for the Protection of Minors. In that Commission, out of 17 members, eight are women. And one of them especially I know about because I’ve studied the issue for a while—is Marie Collins from Ireland, who had long been on record with saying that the bishops ought to be held accountable. Now, I wondered [what would happen] when she was appointed to the Commission, because sometimes you wonder what’s going to happen to a woman’s voice once she actually gets onto a commission. But I think it [her voice] has been strong and clear.

And I think in that sense, there are some sterling models for how it could be with regard to women’s leadership in the Church. I happen to think that’s one of them. But we still know there is much room to grow. So I’m going to ask each one of you to say a little bit about your own dreams and hopes for women in Church leadership, women in decision-making roles in the Catholic Church. What do you want to see enhanced? What do you want to see changed?

Why don’t we start with Tina.

**Tina Beattie:** Well, I’ll pick up where I left off last long time. The Church, in *Evangelii Gardium* is to me very far along the path of fulfilling the dream. But what I would dream of is a church that proclaims the full equality and dignity of male and female made in the image of God should be an absolute beacon to the world, not of a kind of glossy illusion of having no problems, which I fear sometimes does happen. When we hear about women in the Church, we do get this very glossy language of a sort of romantic, maternal fantasy sometimes.

And I think it wouldn’t be saying I wish the church could be this unreal community of men and women all getting on, but I wish the kind of struggles that we have to understand and discover the meaning of our humanity, gendered in complex ways, desiring and struggling in complex ways, that we were addressing those issues in the way that the world would look at us and say, “this is how one can struggle with the complexity and tragedy of the human condition.” Instead of that, the tragedy is that we’re part of the tragedy. The world looks at us and says—our daughters look at us and [say], "But, Mum, why on earth would you hang on in a church
like that, when in everywhere but the Church you are recognized and
valued for who you are?"

So the dream would be that the dignity and the equality that we have
being made in the image of God were the face that the Church presents
to the world, and that would have to be an absolutely fully equal face in
every aspect of the Church for that to be credible.

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:** So put a little skin on that. How would it
actually look? *[Laughter.]* Really, let’s be a little practical. One of the
things we do in the Church is talk in very global ways. We want to
have greater presence for women in the Church, a more incisive
presence. And I’m always interested in, what does that mean? Let’s
talk about it. One of the reasons I love the gender policy is because it
puts some skin on the game. It’s a road map; it’s a path; it’s a way.

And I think we need more of that in the Church right now. We have a
lot of “we need more [of an incisive presence].” We have a whole
chorus of voices now, including everybody all the way up to the top,
saying this. But my question is, how do we get it done? And so it’s a
very practical, pragmatic question I have.

**Tina Beattie:** Well, put some skin on it. We are told that the
question of ordination is ruled out. Now, if we’re asked to accept that
and respect it, we have to see that in every single other situation there
is full and equal promotion of women’s leadership in the Church, that
every single position that not require ordination is equally filled by
men and women. That would be one way of doing it, and there’s
absolutely no reason why that can’t happen.

But the other thing I would like to see would be an ability to be honest
and authentic about the struggles that we face and not to find that
because we’re threatening some kind of unreal ideal we have to keep
silent. So my interest is in term ‘mortality.’

Every day 800 of the world’s poorest women die through childbirth-
related causes and thousands more are left with permanent injuries.
Now, you will search in vain for a reference to maternal mortality in
Catholic social teaching or even in the most glowing encyclicals about
poverty. That to me is a sign of how far we have to go before
we have real skin on the faces of suffering women and voices
that can speak about the complexity of that suffering
and what a real ethical
response to it would look like.

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:**
Thanks, Tina. Gudrun, would
you like to speak to that a little
bit?

**Gudrun Sailer:** Yes. I would
wish two things to change.
One is canon law and the
second is mentality. I must
explain a little bit. Canon law,
as you might know, there's a
big gap. Not between males
and females, not between men
and women, but the big gap
that there is in the canon law is
between clerics and lay people.

And there has been an
interesting proposal and
suggestion from Cardinal
Reinhard Marx, who is the
cardinal from Munich. And he
said in a recent interview to
*America* magazine, we have to
look at canon law and we have
to look theologically on it and
see which roles really require
priests. Because, as you said,
Astrid, the leadership stuff is
connected to priesthood, to ordination. And the cardinal explained that we can also revise this in order to have more women in leadership positions in the Catholic Church.

But it’s not all about juridical questions—the presence of women at decision-making levels. It’s also about mentality. And also this I would wish to change. This is a matter that goes top-down and not bottom-up. That was also explained by Cardinal Marx. So it is the Bishops and the Pope who have to decide, who have to begin that change. And there’s a long way to go.

And it’s right what you said, Ulla—there are only two undersecretaries in the Vatican now, but as far as I can speak—I can speak only for the Vatican – I think with the things changing, we see right now in this historic moment we can also have also ten or twenty undersecretaries or even secretaries in real decision-making posts in the Vatican in the next couple of years.

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:** Thanks, Gudrun. So Ulla, tell us a little bit about your dream.

**Ulla Gudmundson:** Well, I would love to see the Catholic Church giving the freedom to both women and men to realize their full human potential, to emphasize more the common humanity of women and men and less the differences. If this happens I think we will know whether we are more alike, whether we are more different. We will have empirical evidence for that.

And I would like to see women have the opportunity to be strong, courageous, intelligent, to exercise all these qualities. And I would also like to see men to have the opportunity to be tender, patient, sensitive, etc.—*[laughter and applause]*—because I think it’s insulting and diminishing to men to imply that they are incapable of these qualities.

I agree with Pope Benedict, who said that fathers also have to give children unconditional love because God is our Father and we think he gives us unconditional love. And I think Pope Francis is a shining example of ‘feminine genius’—I just love that.

Thank you. I love that. She said this to me. I had to have her say it here. That turns that concept of ‘feminine genius’ on its head when you apply it to, of course, Pope Francis, who is out there with his arms wide open like every mother in every family, and lots of good fathers too. That notion of ‘feminine genius’—I just love that.

Thanks, Ulla. That’s just brilliant. Astrid, tell us what you think.

**Astrid Lobo Gajiwala:** Well, I dream of a church where it won’t matter whether you’re a man or woman, and you just respond to the call to service irrespective of whether you’re a man or a woman. I also dream of a church which moves from
power over, which is, I think, very characteristic of clericalism, to power with and power for, which is so characteristic of servanthood.

I also dream of a church where men and women would participate equally in all decision making so that they both will contribute to the policies, the structures, the teachings, and the practice of the church. And both will engage ministry.

I also would love a church where we were conscious and use inclusive language in our translations, in our liturgies, in our documents. I feel awful when I heard the word 'man' being used generically. I really, genuinely feel left out. And in today’s world, in the 21st century, I think it’s time that we changed our language. And when I speak of language, I would also love to see a church where God is liberated from male constructs. Women experience God so differently and I wish there were a place for this to expand our understanding of the mystery of God.

And I dream of a church where women can give the homily like Kerry did this morning. [Applause.] And also, where we can hear more stories of women in the lectionary. I think it’s time that that was revised so that we begin to see how much women have contributed to the growth and the progress of the Church, so that our contribution can be affirmed and treasured just like you do with the male contribution in the Church.

And of course, since I come from the Indian church, I also dream that our gender policy will not remain a dead letter but will be a read letter and will be implemented. And I’m happy to say that we are doing this in some ways, at least in the church in Mumbai I know it’s happening; possibly in other dioceses also. So, yes, those are some of my dreams.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: Thank you very much. We have a few questions that will trouble our souls a little bit. As women work for leadership roles in the Church...in the first part of this event today, many of the people talked about women we all care about and who our hearts bleed for. There’s no question about where we stand on this. But sometimes when you’re working for women’s roles in the Church, more leadership roles in the Church, there’s a criticism about that.

We hear things like, "Oh, that’s just white Western women’s concerns and that really isn’t a concern for anybody else in the Church." And you’ll often hear people talking about where the Church is growing in the global south and these aren’t the concerns of women in other regions. And Gudrun said, in one of things that she wrote to me, sometimes women are accused of secularization. Any time we want to push a boundary, that’s a nice way to come back and say, "You’re just falling prey to secularization."

But my question for all of you is, is this movement—this desire, this hunger, this work for women’s leadership in the Church—the product of secularization? Is it a gospel impulse? Is it something that comes out of our Catholic social teaching? Where does it come from? And how do we defend it, if you want to defend it or stand the charges? Let’s start with Tina.

Tina Beattie: Well, the whole earthly life of Jesus is framed in silencing men and giving women permission to
speak. After the Annunciation, who are the first people to preach the
good news of the incarnation to the world? It's when Mary goes to
visit Elizabeth. It's the greeting to Mary and Mary's response in the
Magnificat. After Jesus rises from the grave, the men all disappear
and then He appears to the women. And Mary Magdalene was called
the Apostle to the Apostles because she was given the good news to go
and preach.

I think from the very beginning and certainly in the early church,
Christianity introduced unto human consciousness, new possibilities
about the equality of men and women, and then very quickly became
institutionalized and fearful of what that might mean.

Paradoxically, I think secularism today is showing us what
Christianity looks like, not in all its aspects but in the vision of gender
equality, I really think that secularism is giving back to the Church a
gift that we've forgotten how to use. And I think we can learn from
that. We can most certainly in some places challenge. But in order to
have the credibility to challenge, we have to show that we've taken on
the positive, good aspects of it.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: So you would say that the impulse for this
really comes from our earliest traditions, traditions that we may have
forgotten.

Tina Beattie: Yes. And I think it's always been there in forgotten
and neglected traditions. There's a lot of work today on the
vernacular theologies of the Middle Ages. We call them the 'women
mystics' but that's to kind of pigeonhole them into a very special
category. The women who did not learn scholastic Latin in the
Middle Ages began to do their own forms of vernacular theology,
which are more and more being recognized as orthodox, equal to the
systematic tradition.

And I think it's not just taking on modern values of equality but
retrieving our histories and the forgot voices and discovering it's been
there all along. The Catholic tradition has done more than any other
historical human tradition to preserve the voices of women. But

unfortunately, that has always been a struggle to get those
voices heard and celebrated and developed through the
ages. There's a saying that men
learn by standing on the
shoulders of giants. Women
have had to start at ground
level in every generation
because nobody has kept our
traditional wisdom alive as a
resource for us.

That's what women historians,
feminist theologians are doing
in the Church today, and I've
yet to see any of them quoted or
celebrated in the official
teachings of the Church.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: Gudrun, what do you think
about the question? And you
brought this up. Some say it's a
product of secularization.
What do you think?

Gudrun Sailer: Well, I think
that the Church in its history
has always been inspired by
secular environments and
surroundings. This is from the
beginning on. And this is also
significant because the Church
is made not to be closed up into
itself, but it has to be in the
world and it has to meet the
needs of people today, always
today. And this is also what Saint Paul, Saint Pope John [XXIII], and Vatican II said: You have to interpret the signs of the time in the light of the Gospel.

What you’re talking about, the empowerment of women in general, is a sign of the times, all the history of emancipation. And it’s not about secularization or imitating the world as it is out there, but it’s about recognizing, realizing that excluding women from the Church does not conform to the Gospel. It’s not what the Gospel wants.

And I think that we are underway but there's a long way to go.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: Thank you. Astrid, do you want to speak to that?

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala: Well, I feel a little sad sometimes that we call ourselves a prophetic church, but we're always chasing what’s happening out in the secular world. They seem to be leading the way and we’re following. And very often we follow because we are almost pushed to the wall and we have no choice, and I think that’s a little sad.

I also think it’s important for us to realize—well, I suppose that’s what comes with seeing the signs of the times—that God is not just present in our Scriptures and in our tradition, but God is present in the world and God speaks through other cultures, it speaks through the social sciences, speaks through other religions, and we have to be open to this. So that’s why, when you use the word ‘evolving,’ I think that’s so important.

So I don’t know what you mean by secularization because God speaks everywhere.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: Ulla?

Ulla Gudmundson: Well, I would agree with what you just said, Astrid. I would also agree with you, Gudrun. And I think we also agree that the Church has always developed and has a dialectic relationship with the secular world and it has always been inspired by secular models when it has built its institutions.

And I agree that there’s an awful lot to be found in tradition. There needs to be ressourcement and aggiornamento, the same as introduced in Vatican II. I would argue that some of the women theologians who are now being cold-shouldered by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith have the same position as Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac, Yves Congar had in the 1950s prior to the Council, and we all know what happened in the Council.

I would argue, a bit provocatively, that the attitude of women is a remnant of the pre-conciliar Church and this is also a remnant of outdated Aristototelianism, pre-Darwinian Aristototelianism. We used to think that God created the world in six days, and elephants and squirrels, and some had always looked the same. And then Darwin came along and said, well, it’s more complex than that. I think the Church has to learn that with regard to the characteristics of women and men.

And this Church, if you look at it, has shown amazing capacity
to grow and change and take in new scientific ideas and new ideas from the secular world, so I’m pretty hopeful.

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:** Yes, I think as you read Congar and look back at how he was experiencing those days and times, it’s a little bit comforting. You don’t feel so alone when you’re feeling the frustration and the struggles of moving our issues forward and opening things up. So it’s really important.

I would like to trouble us with just one more concept. We’re running close to about the last five minutes or so, so we won’t go much longer. But there is also another term that I think is worth discussing here, and this is this term of complementarity that we see used quite often in the Church. And I think it’s an interesting term. I think, in and of itself, it’s a beautiful term—that we all complement each other.

The question is, I guess, how is it used in the Church? And we know that if you look at it historically, Pius XI was explicitly saying that women were subordinate to men. And then Pius XII begins, as I can see it, in most recent history—he brings this term in and he says that women and men are equal in dignity, but they complement each other in that women have certain roles. They are mothers. Men have other certain roles. And so this continues.

And so I would just like to throw this out there, and we’ll everyone just a tiny bit of time on that. So Gudrun, do you have anything to say on complementarity?

**Gudrun Sailer:** I have very little to say on that. I can only say from my personal experience as a family mother, we are very complementary, but it’s just the opposite. I have the role of a male in the family and my husband is the one who does all the cooking and the cleaning. So I think every family has to do that deal in itself.

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:** And I think, when I look at the gender policy of the Catholic Church of India, I think they have the truer sense of complementarity. It’s just that: it’s about the gifts and how they complement each other. [Tina], do you have something quick to say?

**Tina Beattie:** I heard someone who thought that it meant that every day a husband should tell his wife she looks nice. [Laughter.]

**Deborah Rose-Milavec:** Ulla, anything quick?

**Ulla Gudmundson:** Well, I think, as you said, complementarity is a historical concept. I have to share very quickly an anecdote. A very high-ranking person in your Church said to me once, “My church develops in this way. First, something is prohibited. Then it becomes allowed but only as an exception. Then the bishops see that this works very well and then it becomes admitted. And then it becomes compulsory [Laughter].” And he said, “We’re at point one with women female ordination.”
Deborah Rose-Milavec: I love that. Astrid, quickly.

Astrid Lobo Gajiwala: I really don’t have much to add. I agree with what Gudrun said, and also earlier, where Ulla spoke - are not gender based; it’s just human qualities.

Deborah Rose-Milavec: So I want to just end very quickly with a thank you to Chantal. I think that she has been a wonderful leader for us, really leading forward the conversation for women in the Church. And I have to just tell you that today, at the mass with Bishop Couto, I have never been, in my 60 years as a Catholic, at a mass where someone preached the equality between women and men so clearly. And I just have to tell you that this [the Mass] and all the people who have come before us [today] have been just a tremendous gift for which I am deeply grateful as a grandmother of eleven and mother of six. I have a lot of skin in this game. I want to see the Church go on.

Thank to you all. Thanks to everybody on the panel.

[End of panel discussion.]