

EDITORIAL

SOME years ago a woman religious, a nurse, who was on retreat, came in and sat down beside me. 'My prayer today has been very deep,' she said, 'because, if I were sexually active, this is the time of the month when I would conceive.'

I have told people of that encounter many times since, because it came to have for me something of the quality of a conversion experience. Why had I never made that connection before? How did my body interconnect with my prayer? What did it really mean to pray *as a woman*? Was it different from praying as a man? Did the fact that men and women had different bodies mean that they experienced the world differently and prayed differently? It was the beginning of a journey for me, the opening of a door to new growth and a more integrated sense of myself as a woman before God. The journey continues for me, and I thank that retreatant whose name I don't even remember — for the gift I received from her.

This issue of *Source* is an exploration of the theme *Women Praying* and contains reflections not just from SHCJ, but from other women and from one married couple. The article by Jack and Sandra Holt brings to mind what might have been for Cornelia and Pierce, and leads naturally into Joanne Sullivan's weaving together of Cornelian and Ignatian themes. Joanne's simple format is one that people might well develop for themselves and use further as the year of jubilee approaches.

However, no doubt the first thing you will have noticed about this issue is its new look. Our thanks to Eileen McDevitt and Wayne Gradon for their work on the new layout and format. Please let us know how you like it.

We continue to hope for subscribers to *Source*. A subscription in any currency is acceptable; we ask for at least £6 or \$12 or 50 naire or 2000 cedis per annum. If you know of anyone who would like to subscribe (or anyone who could not afford to subscribe but would be pleased to receive a copy of *Source*) please contact one of the editors.

Once again we invite contributions, suggestions and responses to published articles. The next issue will be devoted to the theme Racism. Copy for the first issue of the year should reach the editor by the beginning of the previous September; for the second issue by the beginning of February.

Judith Lancaster, SHCJ

Women/Worship in Crisis

Mary E. Sullivan, SHCJ

THE crisis about which I speak involves our forms of communal prayer and our language for prayer. In attempting to articulate the crises, I have tried to choose my words wisely. 'Worship' provides a broader context for describing all the kinds of prayer I mean than the more specific term and highly structured form we more commonly use, 'liturgy'. 'Worship' can better bear the weight of controversy which finds expression today in christian and non-christian, western and non-western, traditional and non traditional religious literature and debate.

In our century as never before, we have experienced the impact of far-reaching social change. 'Ritualizing' — religious and otherwise — is a term used by social sciences to name a wide range of stylized, repetitive human behaviors by which all people everywhere express meaning, explore values and mark significant moments of their lives. Modern communications have made us aware, as never before, of how much we have in common and how, in every culture, people are questioning older ritual patterns which no longer communicate the truth of their new social relationships.

World-wide today a new feminist consciousness is emerging, providing the impetus to critique both religious ritual and social change:

... whenever feminist consciousness is emerging, people are to explore ritually, and then to embody fully, a future of relationships different from what has long been believed to be the truth of things.¹

New consciousness, like new wine, must find suitable vessels in which to age and come to fruition. In the past three decades in our own catholic tradition we have experienced vast changes in the way we view our church as well as the liturgical forms and language through which we pray:

... *Liturgy is one of the crucial places where the church's self-understanding expresses itself and seeps into christian consciousness. Worship is where new understandings make a formidable appearance. Liturgy is where the consequences of the Second Vatican Council have been singularly telling.*²

Through use of the vernacular and reform of our rites and sacraments we have experienced dramatically ritual's potential to mediate religious experience. Yet for many today, women and men, the language and form of our liturgy falls painfully short of what is needed to support their religious experience and to address the feminist concerns rising from this new consciousness. Ironically, although these last three decades have known nothing but liturgical change, the liturgy itself, in form as well as language, is experienced as most resistant to change. Perhaps it is time to ask why the church's reformed liturgy does not (and cannot?) provide a means by which women can fully en flesh, express and celebrate this new emerging consciousness.

As women religious who value liturgical and communal forms of worship and who give expression through them to our most cherished beliefs, what can we say of this crisis as we experience it today? I, of course, am speaking out of an American catholic context and will be reflecting on some of the liturgical and other forms of worship I have experienced in this part of the world and in our American province. We know and we experience this as difficult territory, fraught with all kinds of dangers and dead-ends. (Has it not been difficult even to articulate some of the problems we experience at public celebrations of vows, jubilees, eucharist and communal prayer because we know how divisive the discussion could become?)

We know from experience of ministry as well as membership in local parish communities how this crisis has divided members of our church, causing confusion and pain between pastor and congregation and tension among pastoral staffs. Many of us, no doubt, know women whose struggles with this crisis have been the occasion for leaving one or several of the following: parish/congregation, religious community, ministry, church affiliation.

No, this is not an easy topic, but I believe we must begin to address the issue, and join in 'conversation' — a very timely word in the present vocabulary and experience of the American province.³ The perspective of women who dialogue in faith and attend to the truth in love is much

needed in our times. By not addressing this significant part of our lives we run the risk of not attending to a means of growth for us as a community of women, and not providing the experiences needed to move us forward with greater understanding and clarity.

Although I have been immersed for the past fifteen years in academic training and pastoral ministry in what we might call our normative tradition of ritual worship, liturgy (that is, the sacraments, rites and communal celebrations of the People of God gathered as church) I am well aware of its limitations as a prayer form and the frustrations many experience with it today. As I read the words of Marjorie Proctor-Smith in the Introduction to *Women at Worship* I knew she was speaking to my experience as well as that of many others working in the field of liturgy:

*For women who choose to remain within their religious tradition there must be constant critique and frequent compromise... Such a position requires a kind of 'double vision' that enables women to see the truth of their tradition's ritual practices and also to see what that tradition might become.*⁴

Often I must promote a more conservative stance than I myself believe should be the case, and it is at these times that I look at bits of wisdom from women whose journeys are similar to mine:

*It seems to me that... [the slow process of liturgical revision and renewal] calls us to ask ourselves some serious questions: Are we willing to work for a cause in which we believe, with no guarantee that we ourselves will reap the benefits? Are we willing to recognize that before all else this work is God's, not simply ours? Are our personal goals so important that to achieve them we are willing to jeopardize the unity of the church and the unity of the Eucharist?*⁵

Here in the diocese where I work such a breach of unity has caused much misunderstanding and damage to the work of liturgical renewal. It has been caused by the opinions of a woman religious, Mother Angelica. Last Fall she launched a powerful campaign among her TV viewers. That campaign, supported by wealthy, conservative catholics (many of whom

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live in this diocese) and by many well-meaning but misinformed homebound elderly who watch her religious program on TV, was powerful enough to have the American bishops deluged with mail right before their vote on the work of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), the inclusive Grail Psalter project. The letter writers obviously think that ICEL is an arm of the devil, rather than of the Conference of English-speaking bishops. Anything having to do with changing of language was misconstrued as being against church teaching, and anything having to do with inclusive language was seen as a feminist manipulation of liturgical texts. Sadly, there were not enough positive votes among the bishops to carry the project, even though the project was directed by a board of their fellow bishops.

Bishop Emil Wcela, an auxiliary in our diocese and an advisor to this project, spoke out against the misrepresentation of facts and Mother Angelica's means of presenting her own private teachings as official church teaching. The result was another very ugly assault on this fine bishop, and a rather curious anomaly: the conservative right questioning the bishop's authority to teach, while giving Mother Angelica's uninformed opinion the weight of church teaching.

While we know from experience that there are other compelling reasons for further revision of liturgical texts (strengthening biblical allusions, making theological themes more precise, promoting ecumenical sensitivity, improving proclamation) making the language of prayer more effective is the reason most significant to these reflections on Women/Worship in Crisis. The language we use to speak to and of God in prayer is a powerful vehicle of belief. Liturgical language carries a heavy, three fold burden: it must support what we believe about God, about who we are who address God, and about our identity within the community of believers. A tag-phrase for a basic principle of liturgical theology, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, reminds us that the way we pray is the guide for what we believe. Giving voice to belief is the purpose of our worship. Is it any wonder then that this crisis in liturgical language has caused such discord in the church?

Dr. Gail Ramshaw, liturgical languages scholar, in a splendid essay, 'Choosing Words for the Church,' helps us to understand why this

crisis seems so critical today. She reminds us that our faith is grounded in a long, liturgical tradition:

Christianity is among other things a tradition of words, having a revealed name for God, a set of labels for holy things, certain categories for the self, and a vocabulary for the world. To pray in Christ is to use a certain set of words, and passing on the faith is to a great degree instruction in vocabulary.⁶

Today we have come to a point in time when it has become all too apparent that 'the church's language must constantly change because vernacular speech continuously changes.'⁷ The changes we have seen in three brief decades have no parallel anywhere in the history of christianity, for in no other age has such a complete revision of rites ever been undertaken. Also, at no other time has language changed so rapidly as in our century. While christians have always been 'a people of translation, Hebrew to Aramaic to Greek to Latin and on and on,'⁸ we have experienced as never before that

. . . changing the words of our prayer and praise is a momentous event, and it both signals and produces a revolution in the religious mindset. Yet words change out from under us, and we must keep on translating.⁹

Our language changes so quickly. We need only cite one text from our present Sacramentary (1973) as an illustration. In the early 1970s Eucharist Prayer IV was a favorite, poetic and pleasing in its lovely account of salvation history. It was often chosen in the American province for religious professions and special feasts. Today it is rarely chosen because of its frequent use of 'man', 'men', 'him', to refer to human persons, male and female. Attempts by presiders to substitute first person plural pronouns, changing for example, 'You formed man . . . and set him over the whole world' into 'You formed us . . . and set us . . .' were never satisfactory, for they lost the whole sense of movement through salvation history. In the space of ten years, the text became one of the most problematic for American catholic assemblies.

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In the States the debate over language in the liturgy has reached boiling point. No doubt it is fuelled by the ideas and issues of women. We turn on the TV and hear and see Mother Angelica. We pick up religious magazines and theological journals and read about some exciting work of Sister Elizabeth Johnson who challenges our almost exclusively male images of God as idols rather than icons that evoke the presence of God.¹⁰ The debate is all around us, and women religious find themselves on both sides of the issue.

I believe, with Gail Ramshaw and others, that it is the challenge put to us by christian feminists which most shakes our comfortable positions, our formulas and images of God, our understanding about ourselves, the pray-ers, and about our identity within the community of believers. I know this has been my experience. For the majority of us today — women, women religious, members of the Society — this new consciousness has been dawning slowly. Each comes to it at her own pace, perhaps moved most by temperament, life experience or ministry. This movement raises such difficult questions as

How are my images of God changing?

What does it mean to be a woman today, a catholic woman, a religious? What does it mean to pray as a woman?

What needs to change when we pray as community, so that women and women's experiences can be appreciated?

These kinds of questions have to affect the way we pray; certainly we bring them — consciously or unconsciously — to each experience of prayer, both personal and communal. I do not find in my experience of praying liturgically, however, either the *form* or the *focus* to answer them. There are other forms of communal, ritual prayer which more readily invite personal and communal reflection on these themes: less structured, more spontaneous and including ingredients we also associate with liturgy, such as readings, proclamation, movement, music, symbols. These ingredients, however, in less structured prayer forms speak more directly to the issues raised by such questions.

For these reasons I suggest that we depend too much on our experience of liturgical prayer forms and expect from them more than the form can offer:

Liturgy in its very nature and purpose is ecclesial. Liturgical prayer is communal, requiring full, active, conscious participation in the prayer of the church. For an action to

be communal, the interaction and inter-relationships of all present must contribute to the experience. The liturgical assembly is convened as the body of Christ in response to the call to give worship to God. Its interaction is public, and the interrelationships of the assembly verify the essential traits of what it means to be church. Thus, for example, the assembly includes a differentiation of functions under a publicly recognized presidency. When the actions of the assembly move the community along the continuum of common meanings in the direction of realized, common ecclesial meanings, . . . its worship can properly be called 'liturgical'.¹¹

When for any reason we do not recognize the ecclesial dimension of liturgy and move the form toward privatization either for reasons of devotion or because we are not following sound liturgical principles, we change the nature and purpose of liturgical prayer.

There are many ways we can do this, but perhaps we need to look at some of the practices we find happening at liturgies today, especially at the eucharist when most of the participants are women. We might see co-presiders (a priest and a designated woman), hear non-biblical readings, and hear the presidential prayer shared among many. These choices are not made because of lack of knowledge or appreciation of liturgical principles; we know that they are happening in response to one of those questions concerning women's issues and identity in the church.

The crisis once again in loving our tradition of liturgical prayer causes a kind of 'double vision'. We find ourselves overlooking or abandoning the liturgical principles we would, in other circumstances, promote.

I believe as a community of women religious we owe it to one another to begin a 'conversation' about our prayer forms. We need to provide for ourselves and for one another the kinds of prayer forms which promote personal as well as communal, corporate as well as ecclesial, growth. We need to understand how our issues-in-crises affect our ability to pray as one body, in one voice. We need to do our best to choose more inclusive language in whatever experiences of worship we use so that liturgy will not become a

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divisive issue among us. When we are participants in the liturgy we need to promote that 'one voice of prayer' whereby our own prayer — personal and corporate — will foster *common meanings*, not only for this particular gathering and assembly, '... but for the wider contemporary church and the worship assemblies that have been shaping the christian tradition for centuries.'¹²

Glory be to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to God from generation to generation in the church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

Notes

1. Mary Collins, 'Principles of Feminist Liturgy' in Marjorie Proctor-Smith, Janet R. Walton, eds. *Women at Worship* (Louisville KY: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1993) p. 24.
2. Regis A. Duffy et al, eds. *Alternative Futures for Worship Vol. I*, General Introduction (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987) pp.19-20.
3. I summarize here the purpose and some of the principles guiding our 'Conversation':
Our purpose is to move to more mutual understanding by
 - understanding how the issue affects people
 - understanding the key facts — weighing the costs and consequences of each idea and opinion
 - hearing with respect the perspectives of others
 - finding out what makes mutual understanding so difficult
 - working through conflicting emotions
4. Marjorie Proctor-Smith, *Women at Worship*, p. 2.
5. Janet Baxendale SC, 'Inclusive Language and the Liturgical Prayer of the Church' in *FDLC Newsletter* 20:2 (March-April, 1993) p.1.
6. Gail Ramshaw, 'Choosing Words for the Church' in *Worship Searching for Language* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press) pp.87-88.
7. *Ibid*, p.87.
8. *Ibid*, p.89.
9. *Ibid*, p.89.
10. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female' in *Theological Studies* 45 (1984) pp. 441-465; and *She Who Is, The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1992)
11. See J. Fortuna, 'Daily Eucharist, Privatization and Community' in *Liturgy in Daily Life*, *Journal of the Liturgical Conference* 7:3, pp.22,24. Here what I have done is to combine the ideas of several authors who say that to move liturgy away from its ecclesial meaning is a move towards privatization.
12. *Ibid*, pp.22-23.

African Women Praying

SHCJ Novices, African Province

Judith Anomneze, Chika Eze, Pauline Ibekwe, Rose John, Francisca Niameh, Virginia Nweke, Margaret Ogunlade, Stella Okpunor, Justina Ugwu

AN African woman's prayer permeates every aspect of her activity and shapes her approach to life. In performing her various roles, she does not set aside any particular time for praying but prays continuously in daily undertakings, in cleaning the house, cooking, buying and selling, working in the office, taking care of the sick and in all the many other things in which she engages. Certainly, she believes, and demonstrates in her activity, that prayer and living are integrated. Depending on the favour she is asking for, often petition takes priority in her prayer followed by thanksgiving. As she prays she has different personal pet names she gives to her God, names like *Echeta obe esie ike* ('the one you remember and you are full of courage').

In ordinary daily living the African woman believes God is present everywhere and in everything. For this reason she wakes up in the morning offering her life, family and whatever comes to her mind to God. The simplicity of how she deals with God is very striking and it reveals an overwhelming spontaneous relationship; for instance during the day as she does her work, often with a baby on her back, you will hear her singing choruses of praise, thanksgiving or petition and it is always interesting to notice her demonstration, sometimes with gestures of hand in supplication, of total submission to the will of God. Many a time, too, observing her well, one could not help but think of Mary, our mother, and her fiat to God's will. And bringing it more closely home, one might also