

We thank God for our families and friends; and we pray for those who are far away or alone – in hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, and the military.

We thank God for our dwellings; and we pray for those who must wander, with no place to live.

We thank God for our health; and we pray for those who are ill, or deprived of the resources to maintain their health.

We thank God for our food and drink; we pray for those who hunger and thirst.

We thank God for the free exchange of ideas; we pray for all who are oppressed.

We thank God for our safety; we pray for those who are in the way of danger – particularly those who are caught in the crisis unfolding in Mumbai.

We thank God for our jobs; we pray for those who are unemployed or underemployed.

On this Thanksgiving Day in the United States, may God bless all of you. May we never lose sight of all we have to be grateful for. And may we remember to share our blessings with those who are less fortunate.

This lengthy essay, *Equality of Women: The New Testament*, appeared on the Crisis in American Catholicism blog. It was written by Robert J. Willis, Ph.D., and provides a historical overview of the roles of women in the Church. You may read the entire article at <http://rjwillis.wordpress.com/equality-of-women-the-new-testament/>

First, from his Introduction:

On October 15, 1976 Pope Paul VI approved the “Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood,” *Inter Insigniores*. The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) prepared and published this work. It concluded that “the Church ... does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination” (Intro., para. 5). Its principal theological rationale stems from the following:

The Christian priesthood is therefore of a sacramental nature. The priest is a sign, the supernatural effectiveness of which comes from the ordination received, but a sign that must be perceptible and which the faithful must be able to recognize with ease ... In such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man (para. 27).

The document does not elucidate its understanding of “with ease,” nor does it explain how modern Christians may easily recognize Christ, a man of the people, in the splendor of a wealthy Church, or may without much difficulty uncover the image of a meek and humble Christ draped in the hierarchical trappings of a medieval monarchy.

... Any appeal to “The Church’s Constant Tradition” (*Inter Insigniores*, Part I), depends not only on consistent hierarchical practice or on relevant statements by Church Fathers and Councils; it also requires the *consensus fidelium* (“the consent of the faithful”), during the life of Jesus and among his early believers as well as down through the Christian ages. Did Jesus leave his followers examples of discrimination against women because of their gender? Did he and his early disciples exclude women from

authoritative roles in the fledging community? In a male-dominated Hellenistic world and in the context of patriarchal Judaism, were god-seekers able “to recognize with ease” Christ’s image in, and understand his message through, his female disciples? In our time and place do Christians agree with the Sacred Congregation’s opinion that they would find it “difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ” simply because of her gender?

Near the conclusion of Vatican II, the council fathers produced, and Paul VI declared, “The Decree on Ecumenism” (*Unitatis Reintegratio*). To our purpose, it urged: “all are led to examine their own faithfulness to Christ’s will for the Church and, wherever necessary, undertake with vigor the task of renewal and reform.” (chap. I, para. 4).[...](#)

Our all-male hierarchy has staked its claim about women’s ordination with stubborn determination. If we do not stand with them, then we must spell out our own position, one grounded in faith and in our perception of the Lord’s message.

In the pages that follow I will indicate how, in and through the ministry of Jesus and the decisions of his early disciples, we may recognize the authoritative, gender-blind roles of women in the New Testament.

Willis then proceeds to examine the the scriptural stories of Jesus’ mother, Mary, as well as the stories of other women from scripture and the history of the early Church to emphasize the significant roles that they played in the community, as apostles, deacons and administrators (bishops).

He follows this with an examination of the ineffective leadership in the Church and the dwindling number of priests/presbyters today.

Would people have a problem seeing Jesus, the Christ, in a female priest?

The Vatican answers that question with a resounding: “Yes.” But do the Christian people agree?

Most Protestant denominations accept women ministers. We do not routinely hear complaints about them being less Christ-like than their male counterparts, less able to lead their people in belief in, and service of, God. Given their experience, this portion of Christianity disputes with the Vatican’s doctrinaire assessment, one based on theological deduction. The facts belie any assertion that women cannot image Christ.

In First World countries, women compete for and hold the highest political positions, they manage corporations with a worldwide reach, they preside over prestigious universities, and they take prominent roles in all phases of art and entertainment. For the most part, modern societies have banned discrimination solely on the basis of gender. Overt sexism does still exist in rural areas and among the less educated, socio-cultural remnants of Western patriarchal civilization; covertly, it remains in the locker-room mentalities of “old boys networks,” and in ongoing efforts by its minions to keep the choice jobs and the richest rewards in male hands. Educated lay Catholics generally reject sexism as contrary to the example of, and teachings of, Christ.

Willis concludes with a quotation from Hans Küng.

Hans Kung, commenting on scattered sexist passages in the Pauline and deuteropauline portion of the New Testament, describes with deep feeling the true Christian position. I can do no better than end with his words:

No commands for women to be silent or submissive issues from the lips of Mary and Jesus. Neither knows any "Eve myth" which makes women responsible for all the evil in the world. Neither knows any vilification of sexuality, any degradation of the woman as an object of pleasure or defamation as a universal seductress. Nor does either know any law of celibacy, though strikingly Jesus was unmarried; nor do they know any fixation on marriage. To this degree the apostle Paul interpreted the cause of Mary and Jesus sympathetically when he wrote about Christ, the exalted Lord, "For freedom he has set us free." "And where the Spirit of this Lord blows, there is freedom." In the sphere of this freedom there is no place for sexual discrimination, devaluation of women, making sex taboo, emotionality, feminine corporeality, submission to a male hierarchy. In the sphere of this freedom which Christ embodies, "there is neither male nor female, for you all are 'one,' in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 5: 1, 2Cor. 3: 17, Gal. 3: 27).

The following article is from the Web site, CommonDreams.org . It appeared on November 25th. It does not only describe the events that accompanied the SOA protest, but it also provides further information about the status of Fr. Roy Bourgeois.

With Jon Sobrino at the SOA Protest

by John Dear

Thousands of us gathered this weekend for the annual funeral procession at Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, there to call for the close of the notorious "School of Assassins," where the U.S. trains the Latin American death squads that, over the past few decades, have killed hundreds of thousands. We gather there each year around November 16th -- it's the anniversary of the massacre of the Jesuits in El Salvador. This year, the sole Jesuit to have survived the attack, liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, was our guest of honor.

Born and raised in Spain, Jon moved to El Salvador in 1958 and has lived there ever since, teaching theology at the UCA, the Jesuit university.

He directs the Oscar Romero Pastoral Center, located on the site where the six Jesuits were assassinated. His many books include *Christology at the Crossroads*, *Companions of Jesus*, *Jesus the Liberator*, *Christ the Liberator*, *Spirituality of Liberation*, *The True Church and the Poor*, and *Archbishop Romero*. Reprimanded by the Vatican, he carries on urging us through his books to side with the poor, to defend and advocate for them, and in the process, to understand that God places them at the heart of reality.

On Friday night, in the packed ballroom of the Howard Johnson Hotel, Pax Christi awarded him with its annual book award for his latest, *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Orbis Books).

The book speaks poignantly about our Jesuit brother Ignacio Ellacuria, the theologian and university president killed in 1989.

... "We need to remember the martyrs. The martyrs were people of great love and love is a rare commodity in the world. They practiced compassion to the end. We need to thank them, because they are saving us from our total inhumanity."

Hearing his words took me back some twenty-three years, 1985, to El Salvador, where I lived one long summer. We were a small group of U.S. Jesuit scholastics, full of ideals, a little wet behind the ears. The day before we were assigned work at refugee camps in war zones, we sat awestruck before Sobrino as he admonished us. "You will be overwhelmed with sorrow," he said, "but you will learn joy, because the poor will teach you how to be human."

He's been saying it all his life, teaching that the poor can redeem our humanity. If only we defend them, walk with them, share our lives with them, become one with them. They will convert us.

Jon survived the attack those many years ago -- he happened on that day to be in Bangkok. In my own book, *A Persistent Peace*, my autobiography, I relate our welcoming him in the San Francisco, just a few days after the others had died. We organized and got out the word, and the Monday after the massacre, a thousand gathered around San Francisco's Federal Building and there demanded an end to military aid to the death squads of El Salvador. Arrests were made -- 128 all told, including eighteen other Jesuit priests. A matter to me of some satisfaction.

Similarly, this past Sunday morning, thousands gathered at the gates of Fort Benning. As Fr. Roy Bourgeois, founder of the SOA Watch movement, addressed the crowd, six people walked onto the base, a matter of trespass in the eyes of officials. The six were arrested.

The courage of the six filled us with hope, their arrests made us grieve, as we grieved all those killed by the SOA. It was, alas, a compounded grief. For news had come down from the Vatican that Fr. Roy, after 36 years with the Maryknoll Order, has been excommunicated. A consequence of his support for the ordination of women.

The pain converged -- on one hand, for SOA victims, on the other, for Father Roy. But our spirits did not go under. The purpose of our gathering did not fall to the confusion. Said Roy: Keep pushing the government to close the SOA. Do what you can in the months ahead. Shut down the school and next year we can stay home-or have a party. The weekend over finally, Jon Sobrino took my arm and pulled me aside. The weekend amazed him, he said. He had no idea there were so many North Americans siding with the crucified people of Central and South America. "This is such a good thing!" he said with joy and wonder. "I'm so glad I came."

John Dear is a Jesuit priest, peace activist, and author of over twenty books, including his new autobiography, "A Persistent Peace," (with a foreword by Martin Sheen, Loyola Press, available from www.amazon.com). Earlier this year, Archbishop Desmond Tutu nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. For information, see: www.johndear.org and www.persistentpeace.com
