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# A Rhetorical Analysis of Catholic Feminism: Understanding Prophetic and Deliberative Responses to the Institutional Catholic Church

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A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF CATHOLIC FEMINISM: UNDERSTANDING  
PROPHETIC AND DELIBERATIVE RESPONSES TO THE INSTITUTIONAL  
CATHOLIC CHURCH

by

Mridula Mascarenhas

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## ABSTRACT

### A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF CATHOLIC FEMINISM: UNDERSTANDING PROPHETIC AND DELIBERATIVE RESPONSES TO THE INSTITUTIONAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

by

Mridula Mascarenhas

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014

Under the Supervision of Professor Kathryn Olson

This dissertation contrasts the Catholic Church's rhetorical framing of feminist activism within the Church against the rhetoric of two organizations that speak on behalf of Catholic feminism. The study conceptualizes the engagement between the Church hierarchy and the feminists as a chorus of voices, each claiming to advocate for authentically Catholic principles. The rhetorical voice of each agent is analyzed to uncover underlying rhetorical strategies. The dissertation argues that although the Church establishment, through the use of the doctrinal voice, claims a contradiction between Catholicism and radical feminism, Catholic feminists attempt to dissolve the alleged contradiction with the use of two rhetorical strategies: the prophetic voice and the deliberative voice. The concept of the prophetic voice, developed from Darsey's (1997) theory of prophetic rhetoric, explains how Catholic feminists make sense of the rejection or censure they receive from the Catholic hierarchy and how they argue for their role in returning the Church to the fundamentals of the Gospel message. The concept of the deliberative voice, borrowed and adapted from its civic-political context, illuminates the vision of the Catholic feminists for a renewed Church. The deliberative voice serves as a

rhetorical counterpoint to the doctrinal voice. In contrast to the latter, it insists that Truth need not be revealed exclusively through doctrinal authority. The combination of the prophetic and deliberative voices allows Catholic feminists to argue that taking a radical stance against patriarchy and hierarchy does not enact a deviation from Catholicism, but is instead consistent with the Gospel message. However, the prophetic and deliberative voices rest on contradictory assumptions of certainty and openness, respectively. This tension constrains Catholic feminists from fully realizing the rhetorical potential of either voice. Nevertheless, the obligations of the Catholic feminist identity impel the women to alternate between the two voices. Each group of Catholic feminists highlighted in this study privileges one voice over the other, depending on its level of engagement with the Church hierarchy. Finally, this dissertation argues that the rhetorical work undertaken by Catholic feminists demonstrates the potential for integrating progressive and fundamentalist rhetorical stances, challenging the conventional assumption that these two positions are inherently incompatible.

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Dedicated to the loving memory of Dr. Renee A. Meyers, who began this journey with  
me and gave me the gift of believing in me.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	p. 6
Chapter 2: Theory and Methods.....	p. 39
Chapter 3: The Vatican Addresses Radical Feminism.....	p. 65
Chapter 4: The RCWP Redefines Priesthood.....	p. 95
Chapter 5: The LCWR Defends Feminism.....	p. 128
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	p. 153
References	
Appendix     Interview Guide.....	p. 201

## Chapter 1: Introduction

I begin by contrasting two quotations. They represent the voices of an American Catholic nun and an American Catholic priest, respectively. Both refer to the controversy between the Catholic Church's central authority, the Vatican, and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), an organization that represents the majority of U.S. Catholic nuns.

What we want is to finally, at some end stage of the process, be recognized and understood as equals in the church, that our form of religious life can be and *is* respected and affirmed. And really, we want to get to the point where there is an environment -- not just for us, but for the entire Catholic church -- for the ability to openly and honestly search for truth together, to talk about issues that are very complicated. There is not that climate right now.

-Sr. Pat Farrell, Past President of the LCWR<sup>1</sup>

If by dialogue they mean that the doctrines of the church are negotiable and the bishops represent one position and the LCWR presents another position, and somehow we find a middle ground about basic church teaching on faith and morals, then no. I don't think that is the kind of dialogue that the Holy See would envision.

- Bishop Leonard P. Blair, Delegate for the Vatican Assessment of the LCWR<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Response given to a journalist's question at an LCWR Press Conference in August 2012 (as cited in Manson, 2012, para. 17).

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from an interview on NPR's Fresh Air, broadcasted on July 25, 2012 (as cited in "Bishop Explains Vatican's Criticism of U.S. Nuns," 2012, para. 8).

Read against each other, these claims illuminate a key conflict between the tradition-bound institutional Catholic Church and its more progressive members. For the Vatican, Catholic doctrine is a settled matter. The Vatican asserts that it is the Magisterium, comprising the Pope and the Catholic bishops, who have the exclusive authority to formulate, safeguard, and enforce doctrine. In the eyes of the Vatican, to be a Catholic demands fidelity to the doctrine and to the Magisterium. Progressive Catholics who question Church teachings are caught in a dilemma. Many accept the Vatican's equation between Catholicism and loyalty to the Magisterium. So when their convictions clash with Vatican rules, they often choose to leave the Church and abandon their Catholic identities. According to a Pew report, one out of every ten American adults identifies as an ex-Catholic ("Pew Research," 2011). However, not all Catholics give up their Catholic identity due to doctrinal differences with the Church. A unique subset of Catholics are both its most loyal adherents and its fiercest critics. They see themselves not as consumers who can give up on the Church and transfer their loyalties elsewhere, but as "partners who share in the church's beliefs, practices, and mission" (Pogorelc & D'Antonio, 2008, para. 4). Highly loyal members tend to "make every effort to engage organizational leaders if they think they have a chance to influence a decision and gain a favorable outcome" (para. 7). My dissertation focuses on Catholics in this sub-group. I have chosen to examine the rhetorical efforts of two organizations of women, who enact the paradox of adhering to Catholicism while simultaneously challenging Church traditions. My goal is to illuminate how these Catholic feminists align progressive

convictions with their Catholic identities, despite the Church hierarchy's efforts to protect Catholicism from progressive feminist influences.

### **Author's Positionality**

At the outset, I would like to clarify how my own life experiences and interests have influenced this study. Clancy (2013) has noted that "a statement about the values, beliefs, interests, and ambitions" of the researcher "that might shape the research interest and thus its focus" constitutes a disclosure of positionality (p. 13). Since researchers' interpretive efforts are guided invariably by the social positions they occupy, a disclosure of their social memberships that are salient to the topic of study helps contextualize the research findings.

I was acutely aware of my convictions, both Catholic and feminist, that became activated throughout my dissertation project, particularly during the personal interviews that I conducted with representatives of the two organizations that I studied. I outline here a summary of my personal investment in the research questions as a way of acknowledging the situatedness of my analysis. My dissertation combines two deep and meaningful personal curiosities for me: the rhetorical possibilities for integrating fundamentalist and progressive epistemologies and the rhetorical possibilities for feminist arguments within the Catholic Church. The former interest developed over the course of my decade as an immigrant in the United States. Between 2002 and 2012, I was drawn to vigorous, sometimes vitriolic, political and social debates enacted on television screens, in living rooms, in coffee shops, and on virtual forums. Simultaneously, I noticed a

collective longing for an abatement in rhetorical attacks and a desire to move beyond oppositional rhetoric to the core of controversial issues. To further complicate my understanding of American public discourse, my studies in the rhetoric of social movements and public deliberation introduced me to contradictory models for engaging with rhetorical adversaries. Literary critic Kenneth Burke, for instance, advocated a model of democracy that privileges an incessant dialectic instead of consensus, fueled by constant challenges to the status quo, so that no single perspective can claim to be “the perspective of perspectives” (as cited in DePalma, Ringer, & Webber, 2008, p. 315). Lozano-Reich and Cloud (2009) insisted that social movements should rely on incivility, because “appeal to civility has historically been a form of gender discipline” (p. 221). On the other hand, rhetorical practices such as dialogue (Black, 2008), deliberation (Burkhalter, Gastil & Kelshaw, 2002), and invitational rhetoric (Foss & Griffin, 1995) advocated civil and collaborative approaches.

Given my interest in communication between adversaries, particularly those who subscribe to seemingly incommensurable beliefs, I chose to focus on the struggle between Catholic progressives and the Vatican. My decision to pursue a study within the context of the Catholic Church was inspired by my own Catholic identity and experience. I was baptized Catholic at birth and raised in a traditional Catholic family in Mumbai, India. My kindergarten, elementary, middle-school, and high school years were spent in a convent-run school under the strong influence of Catholic nuns. I also enrolled in a Jesuit college for my Bachelor’s degree. My childhood, youth, and early adulthood can be described as thoroughly Indian Catholic, a unique amalgam of cultural-religious

experiences that blend Roman Catholic tradition and Indian culture. Because my neighbors, classmates, and friends were not only Catholic, but Hindu, Muslim, and Zoroastrian, my Catholicism, while very much dictated by the Vatican, made space for an unquestioned acceptance of other religions. The challenge of validating other faiths as I was simultaneously cultivating my Roman Catholic identity, combined with the natural adolescent impulse to question authority, periodically interrupted my fervor for Catholic traditions and rituals with nagging questions about their legitimacy, particularly when I observed discrepancies between Church teaching and practice. However, challenging the Church in my social circles was anathema. None of the adults I knew questioned Church teachings. Consequently, I never took up my doubts with those who represented Catholic authority for me: the nuns at my school or the priests at church. Instead, I tried to work through these questions on my own, resigning myself to being a conflicted Catholic.

It was not until I moved to the United States and discovered variations in American Catholicism that I encountered a way of being both passionately Catholic and expressing skepticism of, and sometimes explicit opposition to, Catholic traditions. Since Roman Catholicism is regarded as one of the most tradition-bound branches of Christianity, declaring and practicing a Catholic identity while critiquing time-honored traditions enacts a paradox. Caught in this liminality, I became intrigued with how progressive Catholics negotiate rhetorical spaces within the confines of Catholic discourse to argue for changes in the Catholic Church, a curiosity which grew into the central focus for my dissertation.



## Preview

To answer my research question in the dissertation, I examined the public rhetoric of two women's groups that have provoked Vatican censure for pursuing radical feminist agendas. I also interviewed two representatives from each group to delve deeper into the rhetorical work that justifies an alignment between feminist positions and Catholicism. The two feminist groups in my study represent different relationships to the Church hierarchy. Members of the first group, the Roman Catholic Women Priests (RCWP), have been excommunicated from the Catholic Church for defying the Church's Canon Law that prohibits women's ordination. The second group, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), is an organization under Vatican jurisdiction that is comprised of the leaders of women's religious congregations in the United States. In 2013, the Vatican issued a Doctrinal Assessment that indicted the LCWR for committing serious doctrinal errors by pursuing radical feminist theologies. Although the seriousness of the Vatican's censure differs between the two organizations, both have been singled out for their feminist agendas. The RCWP and the LCWR regard their censure as unfair. They insist that they are committed to the Catholic Church and argue that their feminist voices simply echo the Gospel message and Jesus's radical example, which should be guiding principles for the Church.

In this dissertation, I decode the rhetorical voices employed by the Church hierarchy, the RCWP, and the LCWR. I argue that the institutional Church, which speaks in the *doctrinal* voice, restricts the influence of feminism in the Church by framing certain feminist positions as detrimental to authentic Catholicism. Catholic feminists

respond to the doctrinal voice by alternating between the *prophetic* and the *deliberative* voices through which they seek to highlight the consistency between their feminist positions and Catholicism. However, the prophetic and deliberative voices, which demand certainty and open-mindedness respectively, are inherently contradictory. This tension limits the women from fulfilling the rhetorical potential of either voice.

Nevertheless, the RCWP and the LCWR choose to speak with both voices because the Catholic feminist identity impels prophetic certainty even as it demands an openness to collaborative discernment. The prophetic and deliberative voices each allow the women to articulate a different facet of Catholic feminism and to gain a different rhetorical leverage in their struggles with the Vatican. This difference is highlighted by juxtaposing the RCWP's privileging of the prophetic voice over the deliberative voice against a reversed rhetorical configuration by the LCWR. The contrast in the groups' relative emphasis between the prophetic and the deliberative voices can be traced to a key difference in the rhetorical constraints confronting each organization of women, namely their status as outsiders or insiders, in the eyes of the Catholic Church hierarchy.

In the rest of this chapter, I will introduce the two women's organizations - the RCWP and the LCWR. In each case, I will describe the controversy between the women and the Church hierarchy. In the final section of the chapter, I will justify the study of feminist challenges in the Catholic Church, by arguing that the two case studies shed valuable light on feminist rhetorical strategies within a religious context and on the rhetorical possibilities for engaging fundamentalist and progressive epistemologies.

### **The Woman Priest and the RCWP**

A Catholic woman priest is an oxymoron, a heresy, and many would insist, an impossibility. The Church's Canon Law 1024 stipulates that only men baptized in the Catholic Church may be ordained as priests. The Church's rule cites the scriptural evidence that Jesus selected only men to be his apostles. In 1994, Pope John Paul II issued a letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which reiterated the Church's unequivocal commitment to the tradition of male priesthood. The letter was issued in response to the debate about women's ordination that had emerged in the Anglican Communion and was beginning to stir discussion in Catholic communities as well. In the letter, the Pope stated firmly that "the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful" ("*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*," 1994, para. 12). The letter insisted that Jesus's choice of men for his twelve apostles did not reflect the patriarchal culture of his time. Instead, the letter claimed that "Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner," which is borne out by his consistent efforts to endorse "the dignity and the vocation of women" (para. 5), contradicting prevailing social norms.

John Paul II's letter also made it clear that the Church values the contributions of women and that "[t]he presence and the role of women in the life and mission of the Church, although not linked to the ministerial priesthood, remain absolutely necessary and irreplaceable" ("*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*," 1994, para. 8). The letter circumscribed the ministries to which women can belong, identifying specific roles through which women have been called to serve the Church, including "the holy martyrs, virgins and mothers of

families, who bravely bore witness to their faith and passed on the Church's faith and tradition by bringing up their children in the spirit of the Gospel” (para. 9). Lest gender differentiation be perceived as an implication of male superiority, the letter added a reminder that eternal reward is based not on earthly hierarchy, for “[t]he greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are not the ministers but the saints” (para. 10).

Given the Church’s unequivocal stance, Catholic women cannot hope to participate in the priesthood. For many Catholic women, this is an unquestioned and unproblematic reality of membership in the Church. But for others, particularly those who have dedicated their lives to the Church through various ministries, the ecclesial glass ceiling can be a source of heart-break. Several RCWP members have been drawn from the ranks of Catholic nuns and parish workers. They experienced the frustration of devoting their lives to the Church without full participation and equality alongside their male colleagues. Diane Dougherty, a former nun who was ordained in 2012 as a Roman Catholic woman priest (RCWP), traced her priestly vocation back to her childhood. When she finally decided to answer her calling, Dougherty faced ex-communication from the Church she wanted to serve. She described the rejection as “extremely hurtful” (“Former Nun Claims to Become Georgia’s First Female Catholic Priest,” 2012, para. 9). RCWP Bishop Patricia Fresen’s longing to be a priest emerged after she earned a doctorate in theology in Rome and began teaching male seminarians in her native South Africa. Fresen’s initial response to her desire to be a priest was to admonish herself for her stupidity and to suppress the calling she felt. But a serendipitous trip to Germany and an encounter with two women who were among the very first to be ordained as Roman

Catholic priests altered the course of Fresen's life. She was ordained in Barcelona, Spain, in 2003. Upon returning to South Africa, Fresen's parish reported her to the Vatican. She was ordered to renounce her ordination or leave the Church. Although devastated by the ultimatum, Fresen elected to surrender her job, her family, and her religious congregation (she had spent much of her adult life as a Dominican nun) and move to Germany, where she pursued her priestly ministry. Fresen likened herself and her sister rebels to "the black sheep of the church," a metaphor that gains additional significance in light of Fresen's past as a nun who defied apartheid laws in South Africa (Kelley, 2012, para. 1).

The Church's ban against women's ordination is articulated by the RCWPs and their supporters as a denigration of female dignity and is linked to other experiences of injustice and discrimination. Fr. Roy Bourgeois, expelled from the priestly order of the Maryknolls for participating in a 2008 ordination of a Roman Catholic woman priest, accepted his punishment in solidarity with others on the margins of the Catholic Church, claiming "[I]t's just sort of a glimmer of what women in the Catholic church and gays in the Catholic church experience daily" (Smith, 2012, para. 3). Bourgeois admitted that dismissal from the priesthood is a heavy and painful burden to bear but situated his individual hardship within a larger movement for justice in the Church. He insisted, "The Vatican and Maryknoll can dismiss me, but they cannot dismiss the issue of gender equality in the Catholic church" (Smith, 2012, para. 17).

The RCWP is a relatively new movement that began in 2002 when Argentinean Bishop Romulo A. Braschi ordained seven women on the banks of the river Danube in Europe. Since Braschi was an ordained male Catholic Bishop (although the Church

considered him a schismatic), the women ordained by him insist on their legitimacy as Catholic priests. Their claim draws on the tradition of Apostolic Succession which applies to the ordination of male priests in the Catholic Church. According to this tradition, legitimate priesthood can be conferred only by a Catholic bishop, tracing the succession of priests back to Saint Peter to whom Jesus entrusted his ministry. After the ordinations on the Danube, the Vatican responded swiftly by ex-communicating all seven women from the Catholic Church (Forster, 2008). Despite this punishment, the ranks of the RCWP continued to grow, provoking the Vatican to enhance its warning by decreeing automatic excommunication on those who pursued or performed female ordinations. The RCWP, whose ranks now include over 145 women priests worldwide, reject their excommunications and continue to claim a Catholic identity. In response to the Vatican's decree, the RCWPs assert they "are loyal members of the church who stand in the prophetic tradition of holy obedience to the Spirit's call to change an unjust law that discriminates against women" ("Ordinations," 2012, para. 1).

Movements besides the RCWP have also been sounding the clarion call for female Catholic priests. The Women's Ordination Conference (WOC), which was created in the United States in 1975, is one such voice. A 2005 Gallup/CNN/USA Today poll revealed that fifty-five percent of U.S Catholics support women's ordination (Poole, 2012). A 2010 New York Times/CBS poll indicated that this figure has risen to fifty-nine percent (Bratu, 2012). That the Vatican is concerned about the small but growing women's ordination movement became clearer still in 2010 when it designated female ordination a *delicta graviora*, a serious crime against the Church on par with the sexual

abuse of minors by priests (Levitt, 2012). In Chapter 4, I analyze how the members of the RCWP argue for a redefinition of Catholic priesthood through the use of the prophetic and deliberative voices. The next section in this chapter focuses on the second group of women that I chose to study, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), and their censure by the Vatican.

### **The Catholic Nun and the LCWR**

The terms nun, sister, and woman religious are used interchangeably in common parlance. Juridically, a Catholic nun and a Catholic sister are differentiated by the vows they take. Both live in religious communities and commit to poverty, chastity, and obedience. However, nuns profess solemn vows and sisters make simple vows. The key distinction between these two types of vows is the right to ownership of property and temporal possessions. Solemn vows require a nun to renounce all ownership, while simple vows permit legal ownership of property and inheritance, although sisters relinquish their right to use or gain revenue from these assets. In practice, nuns tend to lead contemplative lives secluded from society in cloistered or semi-cloistered communities. Sisters, in contrast, often live and minister actively in society. Since both nuns and sisters commit to a way of life that is designated by the Catholic Church as Religious Life, they are frequently referred to as women religious (“What Is The Difference Between A Nun And A Sister?,” 2012). In this dissertation, I will be treating the terms nun, sister, and woman religious synonymously.

Widows, separated wives, reformed prostitutes, and virgins formed the earliest communities of women who renounced familial and social ties to immerse themselves in the fervor of a nascent but vibrant Christianity (McNamara, 1996). Early Christianity flourished in charismatic communities defined by their conviction that “the spirit of prophecy restored in messianic times was present in their midst” (Ruether, 1985, p. 11). A feminist reading of Christian history asserts that traditional gender hierarchies lost salience in these communities, as it was believed that the second coming of Christ would transcend cycles of birth, life, and death. Therefore, the familial structure which relied on patriarchy would be no longer be necessary. In the new covenant of Christ, men and women would be equals. When the return of Christ did not materialize as an apocalyptic event, the early Christian church, which had thus far functioned without the goal of historical legacy, had to fashion itself as an historical entity.

Toward the end of the first century, itinerant Christian communities began to settle into institutional patterns, absorbing the same hierarchical and patriarchal structures that characterized contemporaneous religious and social life. The resurgence of patriarchy suppressed the centrality of women in Christian communities. However, feminine spirituality, which had been nurtured among the early Christian believers, did survive and multiply in the form of “communities of virgins, recluses, cloistered nuns and caregivers” who explored spiritual paths based on chastity (McNamara, 1996, p. 2). Virginity was significant to this way of life because “it wiped out gender differences and turned women into men by giving them independence and the authority to pursue a lofty spiritual calling” (McNamara, 1996, p. 3). As women religious, females achieved the



same discipline as male ascetics by subjugating flesh to will in the active choice of virginity.

Murao (1990) has characterized the nun as a social paradox. While the nun is a “woman apart from society and men,” she has and continues to be a subject constituted and confined by patriarchal discourse (p. 1). Chastity, although obligatory, was never central to the male monastic life, which elevated obedience, poverty, and humility as its essential virtues. However, for women religious chastity “tended to be promoted as an end in itself” (McNamara, 1996, p. 4). The extolling of virginity is read by feminists as a reflection of male anxiety about the power of female sexuality, a concern that led church leaders to confine women religious to cloisters. Although convent walls dampened the threat of sexual temptation for male clergy, the prospect of a secluded sisterhood, devoid of male influence, was disconcerting enough that male clerical leaders retained authority over religious sisters through various measures of oversight (McNamara, 1996). Since the sixteenth century, however, many female religious orders have abandoned the confines of the cloister to live among and serve the poor, ill, and marginalized. Their decisions to exchange secluded life for active ministry were often criticized by the Church hierarchy (Michaelides, 2012).

The history of Catholic nuns in the United States reveals an emerging feminist consciousness from the 1950s onwards. Catholic nuns have played a significant role in the United States since the eighteenth century, but historical records of their lives and work are not abundant (Kolmer, 1978). As early as 1727, Ursuline nuns were beckoned from their native France by the colonial governor of New Orleans to provide health care

(Levin, 2011). The service of women religious as nurses during the Civil War earned them a respected place in American public life. Kolmer (1978) speculated that eighteenth and nineteenth century American nuns did not sympathize with secular women's movements of their time because their lives were still largely regimented by cloister rules. Since they were in the early phases of setting up their congregations, women religious were more likely to have negotiated their clashes with male clergy in practical ways rather than to have galvanized a feminist consciousness or recognized a kinship with lay feminist movements. By the 1950s, however, American Catholic nuns had begun to nurture a solidarity with secular feminist struggles and to confront Church patriarchy by making sense of religious life through a feminine subjectivity. Around this time, at the behest of the Vatican, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious was born.

### **The Leadership Conference of Women Religious**

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) currently has approximately 1,500 members who are leaders of various congregations of Catholic women religious around the United States. They represent more than eighty percent of the 57,000 women religious in the country. The LCWR was created in 1956, on recommendation from the Vatican, with a three-fold mission: to support the spiritual efforts of women religious across the United States, to foster collaboration across religious, clergy, hierarchy, and Catholic associations in the country, and to reinforce the ministry work of women religious. The first iteration of this organization was named the Conference of Major Superiors of Women (CMSW). In 1964, the CMSW held their first national conference where the Executive Committee decided that Sr. Mary Luke Tobin,

who was elected National Chair at that event, should be sent to Rome to listen to the third session of the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II is widely acknowledged for modernizing Church practices in unprecedented ways. No women were included in the initial deliberations of the Council. A few women were invited to observe but not vote in the later proceedings, and Sr. Tobin was one of the twenty-two women who were present.

In 1970, the CMSW altered its regional configuration from six to the current fifteen regions, and all members were given voting rights to elect national officers. A year later the organization adopted a new name, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and solidified its commitment to working for social justice issues. It was also the year that some members of the Conference formed a sub-group out of concern that the LCWR was distancing itself from authentic Church teaching about religious life. Over time, the LCWR has expanded its intervention in feminist concerns, such as global and national human rights issues, and has amplified its commitment to acknowledging, studying, and promoting feminine spirituality and the place of women in the Catholic Church.

In 1979, when Pope John Paul visited the United States for the first time, Sr. Theresa Kane, then President of the LCWR, welcomed the Pope publicly on behalf of American women religious. Sr. Kane's speech seemed like a traditional greeting until she shocked her audience by using the public opportunity to plead with the Vatican to consider women as equal partners in the Church's ministries. Although Sr. Kane did not articulate the request for female ordination explicitly, her implication surfaced boldly, as she claimed on behalf of her sisters:

As women we have heard the powerful messages of our church, addressing the dignity and reverence of all persons . . . . Our contemplation leads us to state that the church in its struggles to be faithful to its calls to reverence and dignity of all persons must respond by providing the possibility of women as persons being included in all ministries of our Church. I urge you, Your Holiness, to be open to and respond to the voices coming from the women of this country who are desirous of serving in and through the Church as fully participating members. (as cited in Michaelides, 2012, pp. 20-21)

Sr. Kane's audacity was met with both enthusiastic endorsement as well as sharp criticism, outside the LCWR and within. Some congregations of nuns abandoned the LCWR because they disapproved so strongly of her action. In the years since, the LCWR has maintained its feminist orientation and its dedication to endorsing feminine spirituality.

### **Controversy with the Vatican**

The historical timeline on the LCWR's website currently ends with the year 2011. It does not refer to what is perhaps the most significant event in LCWR history. The year 2012 was a challenging year for the LCWR because the organization was singled out for censure by the Vatican. The LCWR's clash with the Vatican goes back to the year 2008, when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), a Vatican authority, commissioned a Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR. The Vatican cited three reasons for conducting its investigation. First, it expressed concern over the addresses delivered during the LCWR annual conferences, finding in them "serious theological, even

doctrinal errors” that threaten to “[move] beyond the Church” (“Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious,” 2012, p. 2). Second, the Vatican chastised the LCWR for advocating positions regarding women’s ordination and pastoral care for homosexual persons that deviate from the Church’s teachings on these subjects. And third, the Vatican criticized the LCWR for promoting in their programs a “radical feminism” (p. 3) that questions key doctrinal tenets, such as the Catholic sacraments, the Holy Trinity, and the divinity of Christ.

The CDF released its Assessment Statement on April 18, 2012, following a series of meetings from 2008 to 2011 between the Vatican, Bishop Leonard Blair of Toledo, Ohio (who was appointed as the CDF’s delegate in the investigation), and the leadership of the LCWR. The Doctrinal Assessment concluded that an Archbishop Delegate, assisted by two Bishops, would be appointed to oversee the LCWR and review, guide, and approve their work and their programs, for a period of up to five years. The Delegate, who will oversee the LCWR, was charged with multiple areas of oversight. These included: revising LCWR Statutes to “ensure greater clarity about the scope of the mission and responsibilities” of the LCWR (“Doctrinal Assessment,” p. 7); examining the LCWR’s programs and publications so that they align more closely with Church teaching, including vetting speakers at key LCWR events; revising formation material for LCWR members to ensure “a deepened understanding of the Church’s doctrine of faith” (p. 7); re-examining the LCWR’s liturgical practices; and finally, monitoring the LCWR’s connections to other organizations that may conflict with Church teaching. To

work on these objectives, the Delegate was given permission to create an advisory team comprised of priests, women religious, and experts.

The LCWR's omission of the crisis with the Vatican on its historical timeline does not imply that the organization is reluctant to publicly acknowledge or respond to the controversy. The organization has issued a variety of statements about the Vatican's intervention. These include press releases and public addresses by its leaders, which are available on its website. I contend that the timeline omission indicates a pause for rhetorical sense-making, as the LCWR reflects internally to understand and articulate the Vatican's mandate within its historical and spiritual journey. It also argue that it indicates a reluctance on the part of the LCWR to legitimate the censure until deliberations with the Vatican have been concluded.

LCWR leadership has acknowledged that it was both surprised and pained by the Vatican's indictment. Its response to the Assessment has been strategically ambivalent. This rhetorical posture was enacted by outgoing President, Sr. Pat Farrell, during her address at the 2012 LCWR Annual Assembly. Sr. Farrell alluded to "the care with which LCWR members have both responded and not responded, in an effort to speak with one voice" (Farrell, 2012, p. 1). She framed the Vatican's investigation as a crisis and offered her sisters a paradoxical approach to addressing it. She explained that it would be a misstep to take the Doctrinal Assessment too seriously, but that minimizing the implications and potential embedded in the crisis would also be imprudent. She outlined six ways in which LCWR members and their congregations could "navigate the shifts" (p. 2). Although Sr. Farrell called for a response of civility toward the Church

hierarchy, her tone was resolute as she concluded her speech with a prediction about the inevitability of change in the Church. For her parting words, Sr. Farrell chose an expression that she connected historically to the era of dictatorship in Chile. First in Spanish, and then in English, she asserted, “They can crush a few flowers but they can’t hold back the springtime” (p. 2). Sr. Farrell’s rhetorical choices illustrate key features of the collective voice with which the LCWR has responded to the Vatican’s indictment of its feminist spirituality. In Chapter 5, I will explain how the LCWR combines an orientation of humility with firm resolve through the use of the deliberative and prophetic voices.

### **Why Study Feminist Struggles in the Catholic Church?**

I was motivated to pursue my dissertation topic with the aim of uncovering the rhetorical possibilities for feminist agendas within the robustly patriarchal institution of the Catholic Church and, consequently, illuminating the rhetorical possibilities for advocating progressive ethics with faith-based arguments.

Feminist struggles in the Catholic Church promises constitute a fruitful case study because they offer insights into how women balance a feminist consciousness with their commitment to a religion that has a strong patriarchal tradition. Catholic nuns and lay Catholic women have long been represented in stereotypical ways. According to Michaelides (2012), nuns appear in popular culture as dour disciplinarians or as benign and surprisingly playful women. Lay Catholic women have been portrayed as perpetually pregnant wives, resilient working-class mothers, or as tainted rule-breakers. The Catholic

feminist does not commonly figure among these stereotypes. I argue that 2012 was a year in which Catholic feminism, embodied in the persona of the Catholic nun, emerged significantly in American cultural consciousness for two reasons. Not only did nuns make national headlines for their censure by the Vatican; they were also in the news for being visible and vocal in protests against Republican economic policy during the run-up to the 2012 United States presidential campaign. The two occurrences were not unrelated. Sr. Simone Campbell, executive director of Network, a Catholic social justice lobby, noted that it was precisely the unwelcome notoriety confronting American women religious in the wake of the Vatican's investigation that inspired Network to capitalize on the public attention. A group of nuns drove on a bus through nine states in a two-week period, with the agenda of exposing economic injustices in Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan's budget plan. Sr. Campbell explained:

After the Vatican issued the document censuring the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and named their collaboration with Network as a problem organization, we thought, "how can we use this attention to be of service to the people that we care about?" Having this much attention — we're not used to that as Catholic sisters. It seemed like a great convergence to have this notoriety used for the sake of our mission. (as cited in Fredericks, 2012, para. 3)

The "Nuns on the Bus" combined both culturally familiar and unfamiliar images of the nun. Most of the protesting nuns met the visual stereotype of older, genial women, yet their audacity in challenging Paul Ryan, an avowed Catholic, on his interpretation of Catholic Social Teaching belied the cliché. Their efforts to redouble rather than mute their



feminist claims for economic justice, in the wake of the Vatican's criticism of their radical agendas, exposed a steely defiance. Through the LCWR's response to the Vatican and through the Nuns on the Bus movement, the American public was introduced to a woman who, despite being trained in the culture of patriarchal religion and bound by its confines, strived to assert a feminist influence in religious and political contexts.

The RCWPs offer yet another representation of Catholic feminism. The women who have broken Church Canon Law insist that their defiance does not constitute an exodus from the Church, but a return to the Church as God willed it. Their feminism represents a reclamation of the Church rather than a dismissal of it, even though their ordinations enact an unambiguous breach of tradition. Frustrated with waiting for the Church establishment to embrace its sisters as equals in the ministry of priesthood, the RCWP movement claims that it is "no longer asking for permission to be priests . . . but tak[ing] back our rightful God-given place" ("About RCWP," 2012, para. 1). Although the RCWPs seek to redress the inequities protected across millennia by a patriarchal tradition in the Church, they do not advance their feminist cause as a new historical development. Rather, they insist they are seeking a revival of the gender equality that characterized the early Christian communities and that was later suppressed by a patriarchal transformation of the Church.

### **A Church in Flux**

Tracing the trajectory of feminist movements within the Catholic Church is significant for the future of American Catholicism. With 1.18 billion global members, Catholicism represents the world's largest Christian denomination and its community of

faithful is second only to the population of Muslims world-wide (Rocca, 2011). Although the Catholic Church is distributed globally, I chose to center my analysis on American Catholicism since the LCWR is a U.S. organization and the RCWP has a substantial U.S. presence. Steinfels (2003) asserted that the American Catholic Church stands on the brink “of either an irreversible decline or a thoroughgoing transformation” (p. 1). Prior to 1960, the American Catholic Church was threatened by suspicions about its political power. Those doubts came from outside the Church. Since 1960, however, the American Catholic Church has been fractured from within, primarily by debates about the Vatican’s teaching on sex and women. An overwhelming majority of American Catholics, 82 percent according to a recent Gallup poll, reject the Vatican’s prohibition of artificial contraception (Newport, 2012). Women’s ordination receives less support, but the endorsement for female priests is by no means marginal. Close to sixty percent of American Catholics favor women’s ordination (Levitt, 2012). Although the Catholic Church is facing a severe shortage of priests in countries such as the United States, the Vatican remains resolute in its ban on women’s ordination. The tension between the Church’s doctrine on an exclusively male priesthood and the pragmatic need for more priests, along with an accretion of sympathy for feminist struggles within and outside the Church, create conditions that are ripe for progressive challenges to Catholic tradition.

Kelly (1982) went so far as to predict the rise of a *Vatican Three Church*, a less rigid religious community that makes fewer official demands on its members, de-emphasizes the supernatural doctrinal aspects of Catholicism, and accentuates humanistic dimensions such as fellowship, personal conversion, and service to the poor. While

progressive theologians and bishops frame modifications in Catholic theology and practice as limited conciliations that do not undermine the core of Catholicism, defenders of orthodoxy, like Kelly, regard these trends with great anxiety, as deviations from and rejections of the doctrines that have defined the Catholic Church for millennia.

American Catholicism is battling a membership crisis, having suffered the greatest loss of members as compared to other religions in the United States. While a quarter of the American population remains Catholic, immigration from traditionally Catholic Latin American countries is largely responsible for that statistic. Loyalty to the church is also generational. Millennials, individuals born after 1978, are the most likely to leave (Pogorelc & D'Antonio, 2008). Many blame the exodus from the Church on the discovery, in early 2002, of priests' sexual abuse of minors. However, Steinfels (2003) argued the Catholic Church in the United States was in turmoil prior to the sex abuse scandal. He pointed to the unprecedented changes ushered in by the Second Vatican Council along with the cultural upheaval of "the sixties" to explain the tensions that have animated the American Catholic Church for the last fifty years.

The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII, summoned Catholic bishops from around the world in four sessions between 1962 and 1965. The Council was tasked with re-envisioning the church for contemporary times. Its impacts on the Church were revolutionary, but not entirely anticipated. The Council recommended more participative decision-making at all levels of the Church hierarchy, modernization of liturgy and other practices, a recognition of secular theories of social progress, and an acknowledgement of the historicity of the Church as a social institution (Jablonski, 1989).

The *aggiornamento* or updating of the Church unleashed a wave of ripple effects that eventually began to worry the authorities in Rome. Buoyed by the call to greater participation, priests, Catholic theologians, and lay Catholic leaders began recommending modifications to Church teaching and practice. American nuns were also swept up in the tide of reform that followed Vatican II. Heeding the call to modernize and respond to social needs, the sisters replaced an emphasis on dogma and doctrine with a commitment to social justice work in the communities they served. Therefore, the Vatican's punitive Doctrinal Assessment, which criticized the nuns for changes that had been inspired by the Second Vatican Council, delivered a painful blow to the LCWR. That the indictment came in the same year as the 50th anniversary of Vatican II was especially distressing to them (Neuman, 2012).

### **Rhetorical Challenge for the Vatican**

The tension between centralization and democratization creates a significant rhetorical challenge for the Church hierarchy. Although Catholicism is controlled in Rome, it lives in communities across the world. Therefore, the institution of the church needs to define and defend a unified Roman Catholicism amidst Catholic pluralism in practice. Newman (1990) noted that the Catholic Church is committed to “both universality and organicity,” pursuing “a communion of particular Churches within a universal Church” (p. 58). As such, the Church must be “hierarchical in its bone structure but vibrant and flexible in its muscles” (p.58). Feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether (1985) observed that the trajectory of Christianity has been consistently marked by a conflict between two visions: “church as spirit-filled community and church as

historical institution” (p. 11). The vision of the Church as a community of practice is especially salient for the RCWP who identify themselves as ministers for “grassroots communities” and believe that they are responding to the call of “the *sensus fidelium*” or the voice of the people (“About RCWP,” 2012, para. 1). *Sensus fidelium* is a theological concept well-known in the Catholic Church. It acknowledges that “unerring truth” can be “sensed or recognized by the entire body of the faithful - from the *Magisterium* to the last of the laity” (Penrice, 2010, para. 3). The legitimacy of *sensus fidelium* was emphasized greatly during the Second Vatican Council. However, traditionalists argue that the spirit of democratic reform ushered in by Vatican II, in the name of *sensus fidelium*, has mistakenly weakened belief in the authority of the Roman Magisterium (Penrice, 2010).

Pogorelc and D’Antonio (2008) have explained the dilemma of Catholics caught between the Church as a local community and the Church represented by the Vatican. Catholics who are not compelled by loyalty are more likely to exit the Church because of their frustration with its dogmatic traditions. However, a subset of Catholics remain fiercely loyal Catholics while simultaneously critiquing the Church. They consider themselves “as partners who share in the church’s beliefs, practices, and mission” (para. 4). Loyalty to the church is a deliberate choice for members of the LCWR and the RCWP. While the LCWR is currently engaged in dialogue with Church hierarchy, the RCWPs’ disobedience of Church law suggests that they have turned their backs on the Church establishment. Yet, the RCWPs’ own rhetoric defies this conclusion. The RCWPs affirm that they desire “neither a schism nor a break from the Roman Catholic Church” (Meehan, Doko, & Rue, n.d., p. 1). Instead, their radical break with authority

and tradition reflects both an unwillingness to wait for a change of heart in the male hierarchy in Rome, and a willingness to bide their time as outcasts until the process of historical and spiritual renewal transforms the Catholic Church.

The future of the global Church, and particularly the American Catholic Church, is uncertain. A generation of Catholic leaders who were steeped in pre-Vatican II culture is being succeeded by a leadership molded in the reforms of Vatican II. Catholics in their twenties and thirties, who represent the future of American Catholicism and who are most vulnerable to leaving the Church, “remain a religious blank . . . await[ing] a definitive religious imprint whether from the New Age or MTV culture, the media, the Vatican, or rival forms of liberal and conservative Catholicism” (Steinfels, 2003, p.11). Theologian Paul Philibert has cautioned that the Church could see “more exasperated defections . . . until meaningful lay consultation and participation become a greater part of parish and diocesan life” (Pogorelc & D’Antonio, 2008, para. 12). While on the one hand younger Catholics are vulnerable to leaving the Church because they believe its traditions are outdated, on the other, an unexpected and contradictory revival of traditionalist Catholicism is gaining popularity among younger Catholics around the world. The weekly number of Latin masses has risen from 60 in 1991 to 420 in 2012. The return to the Latin mass and pre-Vatican II traditions is interpreted by some as a trendy backlash against the liberalism of current times. But Pope Benedict XVI himself endorsed the revival of the Latin mass, which may be read as a sign that Roman authorities regret having allowed the winds of change to sweep through church doors fifty years ago (“A Traditionalist Avant-garde,” 2012). In this volatile context, the efforts of the LCWR and

the RCWP can either resonate with disaffected and younger Catholics and revitalize the Church, or threaten and alienate those who believe the future of the Catholic Church lies in a return to orthodoxy. The ways in which the Vatican chooses to engage with, intimidate, or ignore progressive feminist voices can have an impact on the Church's future in the United States. Confrontations with its constituents need not undermine the Church in the long-run. Hinze (2011) has argued that the Church can benefit from listening to the frustrations of its people and that moments of impasse, even though they may seem bitter and intractable, can yield insight because they serve as "a crucible for compassion, where baser forms of pain yield purer forms of love-in-action and a truer, more purified understanding of the identities of self, others, and God" (p. 479).

Due to a recent unexpected change in the institutional Church, the clash between conservative and progressive Catholicism has surfaced even more clearly. At the beginning of 2013, the world was jolted by the unexpected news of Pope Benedict's resignation. His successor Pope Francis, within a year in office, has already inspired curiosity and admiration in Catholics and non-Catholics alike, for his deliberate rejection of papal traditions that symbolize ostentation and power and his efforts to refocus the Church's attention from dogma to social justice. Many herald Francis's papacy as ushering in a new era in the Church and as a catalyst for the much needed revitalization of Catholicism (e.g. Kargbo, 2013; Contenta, 2013). Progressive voices in the United States have loudly cheered the pope's efforts and expressed hope that the Catholic Church will soften the rigidity of its institutional traditions to focus on the needs of the Church community. Conservative voices have also expressed support for the pope while

emphasizing that his actions do not negate Church doctrine or teaching (Worcester, 2013). Despite his highly acclaimed breaks with tradition, Pope Francis has given no indication of softening the Church's stance on women's ordination (McClory, 2013) or on the CDF's Doctrinal Mandate for the LCWR (Martin, 2013). Under Pope Francis's stewardship, the Church continues to remain a patriarchal institution. I focused on the rhetoric of the institutional Church, the RCWP, and the LCWR in the time-span preceding Francis's succession to the papacy. However, in the concluding chapter of my dissertation, I consider how Pope Francis has been transforming the Church's institutional voice, and the implications of these changes for Catholic feminists.

### **Building a Bridge between Fundamentalism and Progressivism**

Shedding light on the rhetorical matrix that constitutes the struggle between tradition and change in the Catholic Church has the potential to not only clarify rhetorical configurations within a single institution but also to provide insights on a question of broader interest - the epistemological dynamics between faith and reason. Dillon (1999) showed that the discursive efforts of pro-change Catholics "illuminate the place of reason in doctrinal debate" (p. 165). She challenged both Foucauldian and Habermasian accounts of reason's role in transforming political conditions. Her study of the advocacy work of progressive Catholics denied Foucault's pessimism that reasoned discussion is ineffective in changing conditions of power because it simply participates in the discursive field already contoured by those conditions. According to Dillon, the Foucauldian hope for social change is restricted to quotidian experiments in subverting



and transgressing power structures rather than in the force of reasoned debate to redress power imbalances. The Habermasian project, in contrast, elevates reason in the struggle to determine the common good and invests hope in a deliberative community that allows decisions to proceed from a free discussion and critique of ideas. Nevertheless, Dillon found that the Habermasian model was also inadequate in explaining the change efforts of progressive Catholics because the “ideal speech situation” demands that “the weight of tradition, dogma, and emotional attachments [be] bracketed” (p. 164). She disagreed with Habermas’s separation of faith from reason and found instead that “faith and reason are compatible in practice for contemporary Catholics, and enable them to critique and transform aspects of Catholicism while simultaneously preserving its doctrinal and communal tradition” (p. 166).

The ways in which faith and reason are rhetorically intertwined become significant when we consider the tendency in secular discourse to position the two in inimical relationship to each other. Sokolowski (1995) has described Christian faith as being simultaneously in alignment with reason and yet transcendent beyond reason. This paradox has profound implications for how Christians understand themselves and are understood by others. Although the synergy of faith and reason can be a hard-sell for secular audiences, the relationship between the two epistemologies is by no means a settled matter within religious circles either. Gula (1989) observed that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a renewal movement in Catholic moral theology gravitated toward the notion of “autonomous ethics” which focused its concern “not so much on the God who reveals morality, but on the human person who discovers it” (p. 1). The mode of

discovery was human reason. This perspective was subsequently confronted by “faith ethics” which sought to reinstate the role of revelation in moral guidance (p. 1).

Currently, Catholic moral theology is vitalized by the tension between these two perspectives, as theologians seek to understand morality as an amalgam of reason and revelation.

The epistemologies of faith and reason clash frequently outside of religious contexts as well. Contemporary public discourse in the United States on a variety of high stakes issues such as health care, environmental protection, and medical research, routinely galvanizes arguments that emerge from rational and as well as faith-based epistemologies. Crowley (2006) has drawn attention to the strong voice of the Christian Right in current judicial and policy debates. She argued, “Discussion of civic issues stalls repeatedly at this moment in American history because it takes place in a discursive climate dominated by two powerful discourses: liberalism and Christian fundamentalism” (p. 2). The two positions draw from different sources: fundamentalism from intangibles like “belief, passions, values, desires,” and liberalism from reason relying on “empirical evidence” (p. 61). Therein, according to Crowley, lies the impasse.

At the heart of the contemporary political and cultural war in the United States is the question of whether biblical values ought to govern civic matters. The struggle within the Catholic Church between traditionalists and progressives reflects a mirror image of this political debate. In the context of the Catholic Church, the key question is reversed. Church reform efforts seek to re-align biblical interpretations with developments in civil rights and social justice. Dillon (1999) has pointed out that pro-change Catholics reaffirm

their commitment to scripture and doctrine even as they seek to interpret these resources in light of their advocacy for change. Not surprisingly, the Church hierarchy reacts with suspicion and in defense of scriptural and Church traditions, which it considers sacrosanct and transcendent beyond social change.

For the Vatican, feminism is a secular threat encroaching on revealed truths. Therefore, the RCWP and the LCWR bear the rhetorical burden of proving that their faith is not incompatible with their feminism. Progressive women who hold steadfastly to their Catholic identity must argue that the reforms they urge do not originate from secular ideology alone, but are in fact consistent with God's revelation. Therefore, the rhetoric of pro-change Catholics can illustrate the challenges and possibilities of placing faith and reason in creative and fruitful conversation. Reform-seeking Catholics, who balance what are typically identified as liberal values with a reverence for a tradition-bound belief system, provide a rich rhetorical example to assess the promise of integrating fundamentalist and progressive epistemologies.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the research questions that guided my dissertation. In the next chapter, I trace out the theoretical and methodological frameworks underlying my research, and I justify the conceptualization of my analyses as a chorus of rhetorical voices. Chapter 3 explains the Vatican's use of the doctrinal voice to contain feminist influences in the Catholic Church. Chapter 4 illustrates how the RCWPs use the prophetic and deliberative voices to argue for the entry of women into the priesthood and for a

renewal of the priestly ministry. Chapter 5 addresses how the deliberative and prophetic voices emerge in the LCWR's response to the Vatican's Doctrinal Assessment. In chapters 4 and 5, I also identify the rhetorical tension created by the juxtaposition of the prophetic and deliberative voices. I explain how this tension is addressed by privileging one voice over the other. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes key arguments from the previous chapters and explains how my research contributes to rhetorical theory and to understanding the possibilities for engagement between fundamentalist and progressive voices.

## Chapter 2: Theory and Methods

This chapter summarizes the theoretical perspectives that support the rhetorical analyses presented in the Chapters 3, 4, and 5. I also describe the methods I used to collect and examine the rhetorical texts that informed my analyses. First, I will summarize the main arguments of this dissertation. I argue that the institutional Catholic Church constructs an incompatibility between feminist claims and Catholicism through the use of the doctrinal voice. The features of doctrinal rhetoric secure the teachings of the Magisterium from feminist challenges to its authority. Thus, the doctrinal voice presents a rhetorical constraint for Catholic feminists who wish to dissolve the contradiction between feminism and Catholicism. The rhetoric of Catholic feminists advances arguments that can be understood in terms of two rhetorical voices: the prophetic voice and the deliberative voice. Through each voice, Catholic feminists claim that authentic Catholicism does not necessitate an unquestioning obedience to the Magisterium. In arguing for the compatibility between Catholicism and feminism, Catholic feminists demonstrate the rhetorical work of integrating fundamentalist and progressive epistemologies.

I have conceptualized my dissertation as a chorus of voices. I define *rhetorical voice* as a composite of rhetorical strategies that include substantive arguments and stylistic features. I selected this structural approach because it allows me to analyze the issue of feminism in the Catholic Church from the perspectives of multiple agents. By juxtaposing the voice of the Catholic hierarchy against the voices of two groups of Catholic feminists, my goal is to illuminate the rhetorical tension between the Church as

institution and the Church as community. First, I will organize the theoretical concepts that guided my dissertation in terms of three voices: the doctrinal voice, the prophetic voice, and the deliberative voice. Following this theoretical section, I will explain how I constructed each rhetorical voice from relevant texts related to the Vatican, the RCWP, and the LCWR. My texts include publicly available documents as well as four transcripts, which were derived from personal interviews that I conducted with representatives of the RCWP and the LCWR.

### **The Doctrinal Voice**

The Vatican faces the challenge of maintaining its centralized authority over the Church. This is especially difficult in a culture defined by postmodernity. Newman (1990) asserted that the values of pluralism and contingency that mark the postmodern ethic are antithetical to the transcendence and atemporality proclaimed by the institutional Church. I contend that the Church hierarchy meets this challenge through the use of the doctrinal voice. I derive the concept of the doctrinal voice from the doctrinal genre outlined by Roderick Hart (1971). Genres are “groups of discourses which share substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics” (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978, p. 16). Generic forms are employed across situations that share rhetorical characteristics because they meet the configuration of rhetorical expectations activated by those situations. While a genre implies rhetorical potentiality, my concept of the doctrinal voice signifies the activation of specific features of the doctrinal genre in actual instances of rhetoric. The concept of the rhetorical voice integrates a collection of rhetorical examples that together

construct a composite of arguments, both in substance and style. In describing the Vatican's doctrinal voice on particular feminist issues, I am able to identify key arguments made by the institutional Church regarding these issues, and to explain how these arguments are styled so as to make them impervious to challenge.

Hart (1971) identified four features of the doctrinal genre: reliance on an indoctrinated audience who can be counted on to decode truncated arguments, reliance on doctrine as a resource for arguments, clear roles for rhetors that are designated by doctrine, and, finally, a defined relationship between rhetor and audience that is also derived from doctrine. Hart called doctrinal rhetoric "the rhetoric of the true believer" (p. 249). He identified doctrinal speech characteristics in the public communication of a range of organizations, including the American Communists, John Birchers, Roman Catholics, and Mormons, proving that the genre of doctrinal rhetoric cuts across varied philosophies. I suggest that the common thread among the users of doctrinal rhetoric is their adherence to a fundamentalist orientation, which, as Crowley (2006) noted, shows a preference for "deductive argument as a means of reasoning" (p. 143). Such an epistemology demands that the foundational premises, from which claims are derived, be accepted unquestioningly with faith.

Doctrinal rhetoric exhibits a truncated argument pattern in which warrants supporting data-claim inferences are rarely articulated. Hart (1971) maintained that an indoctrinated audience is "especially 'dependable'" since it is "willing to contribute a good deal to the rhetorical enterprise by filling in the speaker's logical gaps" (p. 251). Hart offered the example of a speech by a Catholic Bishop who urged his audience to

support the civil rights movement by offering three primary elements of data, namely “(1) The Vatican exhorts us to; (2) The American bishops demand it; (3) Catholic social workers urge our help” (p. 251). Hart observed that for these data to work argumentatively, they must be supported by a warrant that asserts ““The Catholic Church is authoritative and good”” which the rhetor relies on the audience to provide (p. 251). An argument that does not state all its required assumptions, because the rhetor counts on the audience to fill in the missing elements, is known in rhetorical theory as an enthymeme (Walton, 2001). Hart described the substantial reliance on enthymematic arguments by doctrinal rhetors as “rhetorical permissiveness” (p. 252).

Doctrinal rhetors rely primarily on doctrine to construct their arguments. Since doctrine is typically considered as the “unequivocal last word,” it supplies “the reservoir of ideas from which each speaker draws” (Hart, 1971, p. 255). Doctrinal speech displays insularity since it “springs from and points to the doctrine” (p. 257). Consequently, doctrinal rhetoric draws minimally from external sources. For the rhetoric of the Catholic Church, this means that empirically based data are almost never cited to make arguments. Justifications are harnessed predominantly from previous doctrinal texts. Jablonski (1989) observed, “Doctrinal speakers assert rather than demonstrate their points” (p. 417). This creates the effect that “*doctrine circumscribes all* [emphasis in original] - doctrine exists imperviously, doctrine investigates problems, and doctrine solves problems” (Hart, 1971, as cited in Jablonski, 1989, p. 419). Hart observed that doctrinal rhetors tend to make frequent use of the verb “to be” indicating the importance to



doctrinal rhetoric of “stable entities, static relationships, and other certain and permanent phenomena” (p. 257).

The doctrinal genre configures speakers and listeners in particular roles. The role of the audience is primarily to assent to the propositions of doctrinal rhetoric, although the audience is often called on to play a constructive role as well, by filling in many of the enthymematic gaps in the arguments. This creativity is bounded, of course, by the constraints of doctrine. However, doctrinal rhetors do not claim authority for themselves. They typically assume the role of “agents . . . who speak for the doctrine, not for themselves” (Hart, 1971, p. 258). Therefore, doctrinal rhetoric tends to be devoid of personal opinions or personal warmth. On the other hand, quotations tend to be plentiful in doctrinal rhetoric, since the rhetor draws primarily from the authority of a well-established rhetorical tradition. Doctrinal rhetors and their audiences are linked through the weight and stability of past tradition and through evocation of group identity. Doctrine is presented as “the-product-of-the-group,” and doctrinal rhetors often emphasize “common purpose” and “group destiny” (p. 260). The power of doctrine over rhetorical choices is highlighted in Hart’s observation that:

Doctrine affects rhetoric from beginning to end: it can constitute the exigence, distinctively flavor the rhetorical atmosphere, and determine the scope, limits, and results of the interaction. Doctrine seems to coach the actors, write the script, and even (by setting rhetorical potentialities) close the curtain at the propitious moment. (Hart, 1971, p. 261)

Thus, doctrinal rhetors are overwhelmingly constrained by doctrine. However, the doctrinal genre can be extremely persuasive for an indoctrinated audience, precisely because doctrinal constraints establish authority.

Jamieson (1973) has argued that while generic speech “guarantees a sense of continuity [and] maintains the institution’s identity from century to century” (p. 165), it also enforces “expectations which any future institutional spokesmen [sic] feel obliged to fulfill rather than frustrate” (p. 165). As such, the doctrinal genre confers legitimacy on the pronouncements of Catholic officials but simultaneously renders them intransigent toward movements for reform, and relatively unresponsive to temporal exigencies. For example, despite a great deal of international pressure to speak out against the atrocities being perpetuated in Germany during the Holocaust, Pope Pius XII in his 1942 Christmas address included only a single reference to the horrors in Nazi Germany. The Pope’s speech, like papal rhetoric in general, was significantly lacking in the mention of specific names, places, events, or groups. The Pope was roundly criticized for his perplexing silence on the genocide. Rather than attributing the Pope’s omissions to a misguided rhetorical strategy or malevolent intentions, Kari (2006) has read them as an artifact of his obedience to the ecclesiastical style, which demands endorsement of transcendent truths not tethered to specific historical moments or locations, but applicable in any era or context.

Jablonski (1989) noted that, despite the stability of doctrinal rhetoric, it is not immune to generic modification. She offered an example of doctrinal flexibility in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, an event that “fractured the philosophical

commonality shared by Catholics and set the stage for the development of an increasingly critical - and pluralistic - community of hearers” (p. 418). Jablonski observed that the U.S. Bishops’ pastoral letters showed modifications to the doctrinal genre in the period after Vatican II. For example, their letters displayed greater sensitivity to the audience’s potential skepticism and were more likely to convey the personalities of their authors. However, a few years after the initial fervor surrounding Vatican II, the letters showed a reduction in these new features. They became increasingly “traditional” and “dogmatic,” demonstrating that “doctrinal rhetoric has the capacity to direct, control, and finally absorb the impact of change” (p. 419). Thus, although it displays marginal flexibility, the doctrinal genre remains a stable and resilient rhetorical framework for the Vatican, allowing it to safeguard doctrine from temporal and local influences.

### **The Prophetic Voice**

To be accepted as divinely inspired, faith claims must carry a sign of their divine origin. Progressive religious voices are confronted with the rhetorical burden of demonstrating that their advocacy for change derives not from secular but from Spirit-guided convictions. Of course, it would be naive to assume that religious rhetors do not attend to non-spiritual exigences in making rhetorical choices. These pragmatic circumstances will necessarily surface in their rhetorical strategies. However, I maintain that constructing faith-based arguments requires balancing the tension between adapting the message to the audience in order to be efficacious and deliberately eschewing strategy to avoid sully what the rhetor and, ultimately, the audience believe is faith-inspired

and unalterable. Darsey's (1997) concept of prophetic speech is an example of rhetoric that attempts to authenticate itself by claiming a transcendent origin. Darsey contended that the Hebraic tradition of the Old Testament prophets exalted "the logic of the sacred principle, that is, immutable law, beyond the reach of humankind" (p. x). The prophets resolutely avoided adapting their messages to their audiences. Darsey described this rhetorical stance as "meaningful incivility" (p. x). He claimed that the prophetic tradition is a productive antithesis to the ancient Greek rhetorical tradition that has long dominated Western theory and practice of rhetoric. The Hebraic prophetic tradition challenges the Hellenistic model on basic assumptions. "Prophecy shatters the unity of rhetoric" because, in the prophetic tradition, *inventio* (creation of the message) and *actio* (utterance of the message) are not the acts of a single rhetor (p. 16). Prophecy is "a performance from script" (p. 16) and the script is attributed to a divine source. In fact, biblical narratives about prophets often describe them as reluctant messengers of God's Word.

Darsey attached a male pronoun to the prophetic voice for two reasons. First, he noted that biblical prophets were exclusively men. Second, he argued that the prophetic genre, both in its Hebraic roots as well as applied to radical rhetoric in the American political context, subscribes to "a patriarchal theology that explicitly holds virtuous action in opposition to 'effeminacy'" (p. xi). Woodyard (2010) contested Darsey's masculinization of the prophetic genre. She argued for "depatriarchalizing rhetorical theory" by drawing attention to female rhetors who have also employed the substantive and stylistic features of the prophetic genre. Woodyard observed that prophetic rhetoric is not necessarily a masculinized practice. Rather, it is grounded in the prophet's marginal

position relative to a social group. As Darsey (1997) himself conceded, the prophetic genre is “shaped in large part by its significant opposition to the status quo” (p. 6).

Woodyard noted that modern-day prophets have emerged from marginalized groups.

Their voices have led civil rights and feminist movements. For Woodyard, female rhetors are not excluded a priori from the prophetic genre and, in fact, they are appropriately situated to claim prophetic ethos because of their marginal status in a patriarchal society.

Since patriarchy can be targeted as “the very root of injustice against which the prophet rebels” (Woodyard, 2010, p. 28), female rhetors also participate in the prophetic tradition.

Prophetic rhetoric refuses audience adaptation, but it is not defined by the whimsies of the prophet. Prophets are anchored by their antipathy to the existing social order, which they condemn as unjust and as a sign that the people have rejected their covenant with God. Since prophets judge the audience’s values as corrupt, they cannot not appeal to those values in constructing their message. This contrasts starkly with Hellenistic rhetorical practice, in which rhetors seek specifically to identify with and mobilize their audience’s values. To the extent that prophets lament their audience’s values and insist on repentance, they remain symbolically separated from the audience, at least until their prophecy is fulfilled and the audience feels remorse. Until then, prophets must bear the burden of slander, rejection, and even martyrdom at the hands of their audience. However, the prophets’ compulsion to speak the truth is so resolute that they accept their rejection as a prophetic burden and persist in delivering their message despite their audience’s hostility.

Although prophetic rhetoric challenges the fundamentals of Hellenistic rhetorical theory, Darsey (1997) retained the Aristotelian tripartite division of rhetorical performance into *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*, for his theorization of the prophetic genre. *Prophetic logos* is the divine word spoken by the prophet. *Prophetic pathos* is the crisis which compels the prophet to speak. The crisis is usually a chaotic time that represents a rupture of divine order and “a threat to the self-definition of a people” (p. 23). *Prophetic ethos* is the prophet’s complete surrender to divine command and consequent disregard for self. Martyrdom becomes “an outward manifestation of . . . the private, personal submission to the call” (p. 32). Prophets regularly confront accusations of madness and fanaticism, but endure these slights to accomplish their purpose as divine emissaries who must challenge a corrupt and hardened people in order to reform them.

The primary means of establishing prophetic ethos is the prophet’s own claim to speak on behalf of a divine source. Steadfastness to this claim, despite insult and threat, culminating at times in an act of martyrdom, is the most convincing display of prophetic ethos. Whereas the Hellenistic rhetorical model prescribes appropriate development of the rhetor’s character to convince the audience of the rhetor’s ethos, prophetic ethos is evoked by effacing rather than building the prophet’s self. Not only are prophets symbolically hollowed out to serve as vessels for the divine message, they also confront negation through calumny, torture, and, sometimes, physical death at the hands of an inhospitable audience. The prophet’s failure in the eyes of the audience “can become constitutive of the [prophetic] ethos, as personal failure is transmuted into public vindication projected onto future time” (Zulick, 1992, p. 140). Prophets act without

concern for “personal success” (p. 140) and are compelled instead by *kairotic* urgency and the hope that their suffering will eventually bear fruit through the reformation of their audience.

I found Darsey’s (1997) and Woodyard’s (2008, 2010) conceptualizations of prophetic rhetoric useful in analyzing the rhetoric of the RCWP and the LCWR. Both groups of Catholic feminists explicitly claim prophetic ethos. Arguing that they enact a prophetic role in the Catholic Church, the members of the RCWP and the LCWR frame their censure by the Church hierarchy as a prophetic burden. With the use of the prophetic voice, the women validate feminist claims by connecting them to the “logic of the scared principle” (Darsey, 1997, p. x). In Chapters 4 and 5, I will explain how the RCWP and the LCWR, respectively, defend their positions by assuming a prophetic role.

### **The Deliberative Voice**

I propose the deliberative voice as a rhetorical counterpoint to the doctrinal voice. Doctrinal rhetoric is the voice of the institutional Church, while deliberative rhetoric emerges from the communal Church. The juxtaposition of doctrinal and deliberative rhetoric reveals the tension between the centralized authority of the Vatican and communities of lay Catholics who desire change in the Catholic Church. I constructed the concept of the *religious deliberative voice* from the building blocks offered by the rhetorical tradition of democratic deliberation. The term *deliberative* appears frequently in communication literature dedicated to theorizing and evaluating democratic processes of public participation in political and civic decision-making. This line of work derives

from the Habermasian “model of critical rationalism” (Hauser & Benoit-Barne, 2002, p. 261). The deliberative process has been examined theoretically and empirically at multiple levels, including interactions in dyads, face-to-face or online groups, organizations, across mass media, and even at national and global levels (Gastil, 2008). Burkhalter, Gastil and Kelshaw (2002) defined deliberation as “a combination of careful problem analysis and an egalitarian process in which participants have adequate speaking opportunities and engage in attentive listening or dialogue that bridges divergent ways of speaking and knowing” (p. 398). Deliberation incorporates three essential criteria: the inclusion of all stakeholders in the political process; participation opportunities for all individuals to raise problems, articulate their opinions, and persuade others; and potential for the outcome of enlightened understanding, wherein each participant emerges from the process better able to articulate not only personal views but opposing perspectives as well (Gastil, 2008). Mansbridge et al. (2010) noted that a lack of coercion is the defining characteristic of the deliberative process. They also observed that “reason-giving is required and central” to deliberation and that participants are obligated to support their positions with reasons that others can understand, as well as to listen to the reasons offered by others (p. 65).

The deliberative process must reconcile divergent points of view on the issue being discussed, as well as conflicting meta-communicative practices such as ways of speaking, modes of reasoning, or discrepant value hierarchies. Western modes of rational logic tend to hold hegemonic value in deliberative contexts. Critics argue that favoring arguments grounded in reason can prove problematic when the issues for discussion involve moral



conflicts that evoke non-rational forms of discourse (Black, 2008). Crowley (2006) observed that the process of deliberation favored by liberals privileges fact and reason over faith and value, and consequently holds little promise in sorting through civic issues with rhetors who subscribe to fundamentalist ideologies. Theorists and practitioners have responded by making an effort to include dialogic components in group deliberative models, so as to free deliberation beyond the constraints of reason-dominated group discussion. Black (2008) described the dialogic moment as one of “profound mutual awareness of the other person” (p. 95) and maintained that the conventional approach of distinguishing between dialogic and deliberative communication blinds us to the potential for dialogic moments to emerge in the course of more rationally driven discussions.

In its civic tradition, deliberation rests on the premise that the solution to a problem is best determined through a dialectical process in which varied perspectives and arguments engage each other in a rational process. The logic of rationality ensures that an engagement between contrasting positions will yield the most prudent outcome. This model of deliberation can be extended to religious contexts. Although faith and reason are typically pitted in antagonistic relationship, Dillon (1999) has shown that the discursive efforts of pro-change Catholics “illuminate the place of reason in doctrinal debate” (p. 165). The deliberative ethic in religious contexts is similar to its secular counterpart because it validates multiple voices. The difference between the two, however, lies in the commitment of the religious deliberative voice to a transcendent Truth that is believed to work through the dialogic process. Whereas civic deliberation privileges reason and dismisses faith, religious deliberation regards reason as the means through which divine

revelation may occur. The religious deliberative voice resists the notion that divine revelation is granted exclusively to an elite few. It endorses a process of collective discernment, in which dialogue between the faithful can promise a fuller realization of divine will.

The open-mindedness necessary for the deliberative process may appear antithetical to faith-based convictions. However, for progressive Christians, rather than impeding the deliberative process, faith in transcendent Truth allows them to surrender to collective discernment. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) arrived at its decision to accept homosexual clergy through a church-wide deliberative process. An ELCA-commissioned document, which served as a study guide for the discussions on sexuality, reflects the religious deliberative voice, reassuring participants that “the Holy Spirit is present and active among all in the conversation” and that “[e]ach participant has a part of the truth” (“Journey Together Faithfully,” 2003, p. 6). Within a Christian deliberative framework, faith secures the deliberative process. Participants feel free to engage with multiple perspectives because they trust the Spirit to guide them through the process to Truth.

Hinze (2006) provided a vision and rationale for dialogue and deliberation in the Catholic Church. He identified the process as “dialogical discernment and decision-making” (p. 254). In this model, dialogue serves as the means for discerning divine will. The process requires participants to maintain a deliberative spirit, which is defined by the admission that neither party is exclusively privileged with the Truth, but that Truth can emerge through the dialogic process. Hinze defined dialogical discernment as a process in

which “participants freely and creatively enter the conversation” and through which “deeper dimensions of the topic can be revealed and new courses of action and mission opened, and the very transfiguration of self, community, and God can occur” (p. 254). The entwining of faith and reason in the religious deliberative process is apparent in Hinze’s observation that in a fruitful deliberation process:

[M]embers . . . have prepared for the conversation by gathering relevant information, studying reports and pertinent literature, talking to people with special knowledge as well as with the people who are affected by the topic being discerned, and praying to be disposed to the movement of God’s Spirit in the conversation. (p. 255)

Hinze (2006) has noted that although the deliberative spirit within the Catholic Church, ignited by the Second Vatican Council, was eventually subdued by “the reassertion of a muscular hierarchical vision of the church,” there continues to be an ongoing momentum toward a “dialogical vision” (p. 239). The process of dialogical discernment was a notable development post Vatican II, when efforts to engage the *sensus fidelium*, or voice of the Catholic faithful, intensified. However, the deliberative process has also been strongly criticized within the Catholic Church. Cardinals Dulles and Ratzinger cautioned against a “procedural approach to dialogue,” which they contrasted against the preferred Platonic and Augustinian models in which dialogue serves simply to refine understanding of a priori Truth (Hinze, 2006, p. 242). Various dialogic initiatives in the Catholic Church, such as the Call to Action conferences and the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, have provoked condemnation by Church officials.

Critics link dialogic trends within the Church to the rise of liberalism and “self-interest politics,” which promote a “relativistic and ultimately individualistic approach . . . that rejects classical norms and authorities” and encourage “cafeteria Catholics who pick and choose which beliefs and practices to embrace” (p. 241).

Nevertheless, Hinze (2006) has argued that a deliberative approach in the Christian sphere is not a modern trend but is, in fact, a revival of “ancient conciliar, synodal, collegial, and chapter practices of the church” (p. 255). The Christian Church has been shaped and influenced by 21 ecumenical and general councils, starting with the First Council of Nicaea in 325 to the most recent, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The deliberative spirit of these councils is reflected in an excerpt from the main decree of the Second Constantinople Council in 553. The decree acknowledged that preceding councils addressed issues through debate because “it was established that when the disputed question is set out by each side in communal discussions, the light of truth drives out the shadows of lying” (as cited in Tanner, 2010, p. 61).

Although the deliberative voice in the Catholic Church has a long and rich history, the privilege of deliberation has traditionally been reserved only for the Church’s clergy. Since Vatican II however, “there has been an unprecedented effort to foster greater involvement of members of the church in these collaborative efforts of discernment” (Hinze, 2006, p. 257). Vatican II galvanized lay Catholics into active participation in their parishes and dioceses. Yet, progressive Catholics believe that the Church has not fulfilled the promises of Vatican II. They argue that non-clerical Church

members are restricted to consultative roles only, limiting the influence of their voices vis-à-vis the Church hierarchy (Hinze, 2006).

The desire for stronger lay participation is justified, by progressive Catholics, with the theological concept of *sensus fidelium*. The Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican II has clarified *sensus fidelium* in the following way:

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. ("Lumen Gentium," 1964, Chapter 2, Section 12)

Those who advocate for more deliberation in the Catholic Church emphasize the notion of *sensus fidelium* to argue for a greater responsiveness on the part of the Church hierarchy to the voices of non-clerical Catholics. Critics of the deliberative model, on the other hand, insist that progressives mistake *sensus fidelium* for "a form of Magisterium by Gallup" (Archbold, 2012, para. 1). In 2012, Pope Benedict cautioned against a false interpretation of *sensus fidelium*, clarifying that:

[I]t is not some kind of public opinion of the Church, and it is unthinkable to mention it in order to challenge the teachings of the Magisterium, this because the *sensus fidei* cannot grow authentically in the believer except to the extent in which he or she fully participates in the life of the Church, and this requires a

responsible adherence to her Magisterium. (“Pope Address to International Theological Commission,” 2012, para. 7)

While deliberation has been a consistent feature at the various clerical councils that have influenced the Catholic Church, the practice has been confined within Church hierarchical structures. Thus, the debate surrounding deliberative initiatives centers on how responsive the ecclesial structure ought to be to the needs and experiences of the Catholic laity.

Post Vatican II, women religious in the United States were at the forefront of practicing, enhancing, and sharing techniques for dialogical discernment (Hinze, 2006). This investment ultimately proved to be a lightning rod for the Vatican’s disapproval. The 2012 Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR criticized the organization’s emphasis on “dialogue . . . when sisters disagree about basic matters of Catholic faith or moral practice” because “it is not clear whether this dialogue is directed towards reception of Church teaching” (“Doctrinal Assessment,” 2012, p. 6). The Vatican’s disapproval of the LCWR’s dialogic practices reflects an authoritarian approach to the dialogic process. The concept of dialogue advocated by Church officials defends “the hierarchical, centralized authority in the Catholic Church as the medium for transmitting and conveying the truth of tradition already established . . . rather than . . . advancing an approach to dialogue interested not only in handing on but also in generating, developing or revising the truth of the living tradition of the Catholic faith” (Hinze, 2006, pp. 260-261). The approach of the Catholic hierarchy aligns with a Platonic vision of dialogue, in which dialogue becomes “an aesthetic genre for conveying the philosopher’s truth already known, or as

an imaginative device for the philosopher to explore dimensions of his or her own position in order to deepen it” (p. 261).

In contrast, a communal vision of dialogue favors the input of the voice of the faithful into the hierarchy’s formulation of Church teaching. The religious deliberative voice challenges the centralization of authority and seeks to include a greater diversity of voices in discussions about practices of faith and directions for the Church. The deliberative voice challenges the notion that divine Truth can only be mediated through the office of the Magisterium. It favors a processual approach to determining God’s will, believing that neither party is privileged with full access to the Truth and that a prayerful and collaborative process of discernment will move the entire group to a deeper understanding.

The religious deliberative voice is consistent with feminist principles of rhetoric. Foss and Griffin (1992) compared and contrasted Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory with their construction of a feminist rhetorical theory based on the work of the feminist activist Starhawk. Burke proposed that human social interaction is pervasively ordered according to ranking structures of superiority and inferiority and that rhetoric becomes the means by which the order is maintained or disrupted. In contrast, Starhawk’s perspective affirms a fundamental condition of equality and views hierarchy as “an unnatural state that oppresses and destroys the inherent value of beings” (p. 335).

In Burkean rhetorical theory, mystery is maintained because it shrouds hierarchical differences, creates the need for identification, and maintains the status quo by encouraging piety to the established order. For Starhawk, mystery lies in the limitless and

unknowable cosmic power which is manifested in “ordinary life processes” such as “blood, breath, heartbeat, the sprouting of the seed” (Foss & Griffin, 1992, p. 334). These sources of mystery are common to all. Unlike the Burkean concept of mystery which rests on the principle of difference; for Starhawk, attention to mystery “reveals commonalities by allowing individuals to tap into the life force they all share” (p. 341). The religious deliberative voice reflects this feminist understanding of shared mystery when it recognizes the capacity for divine insight in all members of the community and in the potential for the Spirit to speak through all voices. In my dissertation, the religious deliberative voice is represented by the constellation of arguments made by Catholic feminists to counter the Vatican’s emphasis on hierarchical authority and doctrinal control. Unlike civic deliberation which privileges rationality, religious deliberation melds reason with a fundamental belief in divine guidance. As such, the religious deliberative voice represents the rhetorical possibility of integrating fundamentalist and progressive ethics.

Since the Catholic feminists I studied speak in both the prophetic and the deliberative voices to advocate their positions, I also examined the interaction of these voices. I argue that the prophetic and deliberative voices constrain each other. The prophetic stance demands certainty, which precludes the condition of open-mindedness that the deliberative voice requires. The stronger the deliberative voice, the more tempered the prophetic stance must be. Both voices cannot simultaneously speak with equal intensity. Each group of women I focused on emphasizes one voice relative to the other. The RCWPs’ defiance of Canon Law, at the expense of being ex-communicated



from the Church, demonstrates the unyielding obstinacy of the prophet. Their demand for women priests is unequivocally radical when contrasted with the centuries-old tradition of male-only priesthood. Conversely, the women of the LCWR, who continue to remain under the Vatican's jurisdiction, tread more carefully. The changes they hope for in the Church are reformatory rather than radical. Their position vis-à-vis the Vatican is defensive rather than offensive. They are asking not to be misunderstood by the Church hierarchy and for their principles and practices to be recognized as legitimate expressions of Catholic religious life. Accordingly, their rhetoric emphasizes the deliberative rather than the prophetic voice. Even though the women of the LCWR make prophetic claims, their prophetic voice is considerably muted in favor of expressing an openness to deliberation with the Vatican.

### **Methods**

For this research project, I chose to intersect two methodologies. In this section, I will explain my rationale for drawing on both rhetorical and qualitative paradigms, and outline the specific rhetorical and qualitative methods I used. I will start by explaining why I chose to complement a close textual analysis of public documents with a qualitative analysis of interview data. I also will highlight the compatibility of assumptions between the two methodological approaches. Next, I will explain how I gathered textual evidence and applied the close textual analysis method. Finally, I will end by detailing my process for conducting the interviews, and preparing and analyzing the interview transcripts.

In defining the scope of my research, I was inspired by a key objective. I wanted to discover how Catholic feminists experienced and expressed their dual identities within the context of a religious institution that has traditionally set up a opposition between Catholicism and feminism. My project was simultaneously concerned with the experience of *being* a Catholic feminist (a phenomenological question), and the articulation of an integration between Catholic and feminist identities (a rhetorical question). As I will elucidate in Chapters 4 and 5, Catholic feminists speak alternatively in the prophetic and deliberative voices to justify mutuality between Catholicism and feminism. The two rhetorical voices rest on antithetical assumptions of certainty and open-endedness respectively. A phenomenological understanding of the Catholic feminist identity allowed me to make sense of the women's use of contradictory rhetorical approaches. The personal stories, revealed through the interviews that I conducted with representatives of the RCWP and the LCWR, provided glimpses into lived experiences that emphasized paradox, and explained the women's choice to speak in both prophetic and deliberative voices. A strictly neo-Aristotelian approach that focuses on the efficacy of rhetorical messages obscures the phenomenological significance of, and need for, speaking in both voices. As it turned out, focusing on the identity of the rhetors, specifically as a phenomenological experience, illuminated why Catholic feminists advocate prophetically for a more deliberative Church.

A hermeneutic understanding of phenomenology shares certain assumptions with rhetorical theory. Phenomenological study, traced back to Edmund Husserl, is an "investigation of subjectivity" (Wertz, 2011, p. 126). Phenomenological inquiry is

committed to understanding the endeavor of “*finding-oneself-in* [emphasis in original] relation to the world” (Freeman & Vagle, 2013, p. 729). The hermeneutic turn in phenomenology emphasized that experience is constituted within symbolic worlds. Freeman and Vagle (2013) highlighted Heidegger’s “radical ontological fusion of language and being” (p. 727) and noted that “linguisticity” or “the capacity for language” is what “structure[s] our thinking about the world” (p. 725). According to Freeman and Vagle, the phenomenological concept of *intentionality* fuses the Cartesian split between subject and object, and insists that “human consciousness was always consciousness *of* [emphasis in original] something” (p. 729). Intentionality describes the “interconnected meaning fabric . . . that runs through all relations” (p. 728). It emphasizes the role of meaning structures that are prior to and generate the individual experience. It assumes that experience and identity are only possible within worlds of meaning that are always already in play.

The primacy of symbolic structures that prefigure and configure experience is a common assumption between a phenomenological hermeneutic approach and rhetorical methods. What a phenomenological approach adds to rhetorical analysis is an understanding of the experience of *becoming* and *being* rhetorical subjects. Rhetorical analyses typically foreground the rhetorical processes that create the experience of consubstantiality between audience and rhetor. Such analyses tend to background subject consciousness as the taken-for-granted necessary apparatus through which rhetoric functions. I argue that phenomenological analyses do the reverse, placing subjective consciousness at the center while recognizing that this consciousness is inextricable from

the already available meaning making structures that transcend the individual subject. My dissertation goals were to understand the symbolic resources that feminists draw from in constituting and justifying a Catholic feminist identity, as well as to apprehend the subjective experience of negotiating this identity. Accordingly, I chose to complement my rhetorical approach with interview data that was grounded in a phenomenological framework. Insight into the subjective experiences of Catholic feminism shed light on the ways in which a Catholic feminist identity compels and constrains the Catholic feminists' rhetorical choices.

### **Close Textual Analysis**

I combined analyses of two types of texts: publicly available documents and transcripts from in-depth interviews that I conducted with four women whose organizational affiliations identified them as Catholic feminists. The interviews allowed me to access the particular women's subjective experiences of *being* Catholic feminists, while the rhetorical analysis of public documents pieced together the symbolic world in and through which Catholic feminists experienced and articulated their identities. The rhetorical analysis allowed me to capture the the "meaning fabric" (Freeman & Vagle, 2013, p. 728) out of which subjective experiences of Catholic feminism arise. The interview analyses, in contrast, became the means through which I gained insight into specific, unique instantiations of this rhetorical potential.

Chronologically, I started by collecting and analyzing public texts related to feminism within the Catholic Church, in order to identify rhetorical structures that emerged in articulations by various stakeholders. Once I started to identify patterned

ways in which Catholicism and feminism have been dissociated or aligned, I developed interview questions and prepared to find interviewees. I will first explain the specific methods I used for the rhetorical analysis, following which I will outline and explain the choice of methods I used for conducting and analyzing the interviews.

Brummett (1984) has observed that “in rhetorical studies, the distinction between theory and method is much weaker” than in the social scientific domain (p. 99). In fact, the application of a method entails using “an insight engendered by the theory” to elucidate a practical example of rhetoric. Applying this principle, I used concepts derived from three theories I have outlined earlier in this chapter, namely, the doctrinal voice, the deliberative voice, and the prophetic voice, to uncover the rhetorical arguments and styles of the Catholic Church hierarchy, and two groups of Catholic feminists, the LCWR and the RCWP. More specifically, I employed close textual analysis. Jasinski (2001) has noted that a close reading of a rhetorical text requires the rhetorical critic to “linger over words, verbal images, elements of style, sentences, argument patterns, and entire paragraphs, and larger discursive units within the text to explore their significance on multiple levels” (p. 93). By focusing on elements of the rhetorical text, the critic tries to determine what the text “is designed to do” and “how it is designed to do it” (Leff & Sachs, 1990, p. 256).

Since I wanted to understand how the institutional Church and Catholic feminists interacted on the legitimacy of feminism within Catholicism, I operated from a neo-Aristotelian paradigm. I identified a rhetorical situation for each agent: the Vatican, the LCWR, and the RCWP, and then proceeded to show how each agent’s rhetorical choices

met the demands of their respective rhetorical situations. This approach is consistent with the practice of close reading which focuses on tracing the “intentional dynamics of a text” or, in other words, highlighting the ways in which the rhetor uses language to accomplish rhetorical goals (Leff, 1992, p. 223).

My analyses in the next three chapters rely on whole texts as well as textual fragments that I have woven together in order to trace patterns of argument. The whole texts appear in Chapter 3 and are drawn from the doctrinal archives of the Vatican. Specifically, I analyzed *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which is John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter clarifying the Church’s prohibition of women priests; *Inter Insigniores*, which is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s 1976 Declaration explaining the Church’s position against women’s ordination; two decrees of excommunication against members of the RCWP; and the 2012 Doctrinal Assessment which summarized the Vatican’s censure of the LCWR. Although I analyzed each of these documents separately, my goal was to distill a pattern across them. I foregrounded how the Vatican uses the features of doctrinal rhetoric to control the influence of feminist claims on the Church. In Chapters 4 and 5, I assembled a textual collage that represents the prophetic voice and the deliberative voice for each group of Catholic feminists, the RCWP and the LCWR respectively. I derived these fragments primarily from texts published on the official websites of each group. In addition, I have accessed textual examples from media reports and media interviews. Finally, I drew substantial textual evidence, throughout Chapters 4, 5, and 6, from the four transcripts that I prepared from audio-recorded interviews with representatives of the RCWP and the LCWR.

## **Interview Data and Analysis**

To secure insights into how Catholic feminists rhetorically experience and construct their dual identities, I interviewed two representatives each of the RCWP and the LCWR. I used a phenomenological perspective in developing my interview questions. Wertz (2011) has maintained that a phenomenological approach works “to faithfully conceptualize the processes and structures of mental life, how situations are meaningfully lived through as they are experienced” (pp. 124-125). My interview questions were designed to access the interviewees’ rhetorical experiences of negotiating their Catholic and feminist identities against the patriarchal traditions of the Church. I have already discussed above how a rhetorical and a phenomenological approach can be mutually enriching and how they are both grounded in assumptions of the constitutive power of symbols. Both methods recognize the “social situatedness and potential for agency on the part of the human being, who constructs the world through and is in turn constructed by, language” (Wertz et al., 2011 p. 283).

Herda (1999) pointed out that interview questions can arise from “initial categories” that are “derived from the literature, one’s interests, one’s experiences, or a combination” (p. 96). The categories of questions I developed for my interview guide were gleaned from my reading of relevant literature, informal conversations with individuals who were connected to the Catholic Church, and my own experiences as a Catholic feminist. Although my rhetorical analysis had already sensitized me to patterns in the arguments made by Catholic feminists, namely the prophetic and deliberative voices, I kept my interview questions purposefully open-ended, because I wanted my

interviewees' own rhetorical constructions of their experiences to emerge during the interviews. I wanted to create conditions in which I could glimpse "*phenomena as they are lived* [emphasis in original] in contrast to beginning with hypotheses" (Bogard & Wertz, 2006, p. 388). Therefore, I deliberately avoided mention of the prophetic and deliberative voices in my interview questions. These were analytic categories that emerged through my rhetorical analysis, but I did not know yet whether they would be meaningful to my interviewees. My interview guide included eight to ten main questions, depending on whether the interviewee was a member of the LCWR or the RCWP. Each main question was oriented to a different facet of the experience of Catholic feminism, including topics such as what being Catholic meant to the interviewees, their encounters with Catholic Church hierarchy, and their sharing of experiences with other members of their organizations. The entire list of questions appears in the Appendix at the end of the dissertation.

One of the steps in qualitative research is "participant selection and entry," which includes not only identifying individuals to study but also gaining access to them and securing their consent to participate in the research (Herda, 1999, p. 97). I identified my interviewees based on their potential to provide me with insights into each organization's collective rhetorical voice. Since the LCWR has a clear organizational structure, I chose to interview the President of the LCWR during 2012-2013, Sr. Florence Deacon, as well as the LCWR's Executive Director, Sr. Janet Mock. The RCWP deliberately eschews a hierarchical structure. It identifies itself as a movement, and as such, does not have an organizational leadership framework similar to that of the LCWR.



Since each woman who defies Canon Law and receives ordination serves, in effect, as a leader of the movement in her local community, I decided to interview two RCWP members, Alice Iaquina, an ordained Roman Catholic woman priest, and Irene Senn, a Roman Catholic woman deacon who received ordination a few months after I conducted the interview with her.

Herda (1999) has observed that “timing, flexibility, and persistence are often the critical elements needed to gain entree” (p. 97) and this was true of my interview process. I relied on informal conversations with several preliminary contacts to receive eventual introductions to my interviewees. For example, a woman I had become friends with through a local parish alerted me to Sunday Eucharistic services that were celebrated by RCWP Alice Iaquina. I attended the service one Sunday, where I met Alice face-to-face. She had already heard about me through our mutual friend and agreed to participate in my research. RCWP Irene Senn, who at the time was preparing for ordination, also happened to be at the service I attended. Upon hearing about my project and my need for interview participants, she volunteered to be an interviewee. Gaining entree with the LCWR leadership proved much more challenging because of the formal nature of the organization and because the LCWR’s President and Executive Director were frequently sought after for media interviews in the wake of the Vatican’s 2012 Doctrinal Assessment. I made contact with several individuals who knew Sr. Deacon, to request a direct means of contact with her. I also sent emails to Sr. Mock, as well as to the LCWR’s Associate Director for Communications, Sr. Anne Marie Sanders, both of whom had publicly available email addresses. Eventually, it was the impact of multiple individuals,

whose spheres of influence overlapped, that resulted in both Sr. Deacon and Sr. Mock agreeing to my interview requests.

Prior to conducting the interviews, I secured approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. As per the research protocol approved, each interviewee was approached, either in person or via email, with a brief explanation of my research project which emphasized the interviewee's potential to contribute to the research. The approved Consent Form offered interviewees the option to remain anonymous in the final report, or to be identified by name and organizational position. All of the women elected to be identified. Each interviewee was also asked for permission to record the interview, with the understanding the interview transcripts would be stored securely and accessed exclusively by the researcher or any future research collaborators. Because of the sensitive nature of the information the interviewees shared with me, each was also given the option to either terminate the interview at any point, or to indicate during the interview which portions of the recording, if any, they wanted to eliminate from the final transcript. Three of my interviews were conducted face-to-face. The final one, with Sr. Janet Mock, was conducted online via Skype video chat. The interviews lasted between forty-five minutes to an hour-and-a-half.

I personally transcribed each interview after listening to its audio-recording. Herda (1999) recommends the researcher's personal involvement in the transcription process, because in the act of transcribing the researcher "lives through the conversation experience again" (p. 98). Wherever possible, I noted disfluencies, pauses, and significant changes in tone that occurred throughout the interview. Disfluencies have been

eliminated from the interview excerpts that I embedded in my final analyses, however, since I focused on linguistic rather than paralinguistic meaning. For the analysis, I read the transcripts to understand each individual interviewee's narrative. Then, I compared and contrasted transcripts. Although, I was careful not to bias my interview questions with the theoretical categories I had begun to define from my rhetorical analysis, it became apparent early in analyzing the transcripts that the interviewees' responses echoed the prophetic and deliberative voices evident in the public texts. After preliminary readings of the transcripts, I conducted a thematic analysis in which I isolated "significant statements" (Herda, 1999, p. 99) made by the interviewees, and analyzed them to uncover the rhetorical work they accomplished. In particular, I noted when these statements echoed characteristics of the prophetic and deliberative voices.

In melding rhetorical analysis with a phenomenological hermeneutic approach, I have consciously fallen short of one goal that drives phenomenological scholarship, and that is to allow a multiplicity of subjective experiences to emerge by foregrounding variations in interviewees' experiences. The stories my interviewees told me did indeed reveal unique subjectivities. But, I was also struck by the overwhelming similarities in how they articulated their identities. Further, each interviewee revealed an explicit consciousness of shared identity, that is, of belonging to sisterhoods of women who have struggled within the confines of patriarchy. My interviewees' journeys were clearly both individual and collective. Accordingly, while the interview excerpts I have included in my analyses speak uniquely for each individual woman who voiced those observations, I

focused on extracting, from their multiple voices, the underlying rhetorical patterns that ran across their experiences.

Before I end this chapter, I must recognize the contingency of the observations that follow in my analysis chapters. While the rhetorical approach focuses on the text rather than the rhetorical critic, my simultaneous commitment to a qualitative paradigm requires me to be reflexive about how my data collection and analyses were influenced by my own experience as a Catholic feminist. Early in the interview process, I revealed to each of my interviewees my personal reasons for undertaking this research. Although, my role as interviewer was confined to asking questions and probes, and I spent most of the interview time listening, I did become engaged in a more mutual conversations toward the end of each interview, particularly if my interviewee displayed a curiosity about my thoughts on Catholic feminism. I was acutely aware of my consubstantiality with each interviewee throughout the interview, particularly when her insights and struggles mirrored by own. At times, I chose to let my interviewees know how their responses resonated with me. I usually waited until the end of the interview to share my reactions as I did not want to exert influence over my interviewees' narratives. Conducting the interviews was not simply enlightening with respect to my academic objectives, but was also personally transformative. Recognizing the transformative potential for the qualitative researcher, Herda (1999) has observed:

The researcher's orientation toward the research event as a whole gives opportunity for one to become a different person than before the research took place. It sets the researcher in a reflective and imaginary mode, thus opening new

ways to think about the social problems that drew one to the research in the first place. (p. 87)

In reading and re-reading the narratives of my interviewees, my understanding of how Catholicism and feminism intersect deepened and influenced how I understood my own subjectivity. As a result of my dissertation work, and in particular because of the interviews I conducted, I came to grasp more deeply my own place within a sisterhood of women who believe in a synthesis between Catholicism and feminism. At the same time, I also became aware of the rhetorical tensions and limits that animate articulations of the Catholic feminist identity. Field research creates the responsibility to “bring to light our prejudices and fuse our present horizon of understanding with new understandings from the histories of others” (Herda, 1999, p. 90). In that sense, my analyses that follow in the subsequent chapters represent more than my exposition of the interviewees’ experiences. Rather, they represent a fusion of horizons between the researcher and her participants.

This chapter has outlined the theoretical constructs, namely the doctrinal voice, the prophetic voice, and the deliberative voice, that guided the analyses of my textual data. It has also explained my rationale for integrating rhetorical and qualitative research, specifically for drawing on close textual analysis and the phenomenological hermeneutic tradition. I have detailed the methods I used to assemble relevant texts and my approaches to analyzing them. The next chapter begins my analyses with a description of the Vatican’s doctrinal voice. Specifically, I argue that the Vatican uses the doctrinal voice to contain and control feminist influences in the Catholic Church.

### **Chapter 3: The Doctrinal Voice Addresses Radical Feminism**

From the perspective of the Church hierarchy, the Catholic Church needs to be cautious about the contingent, localized, and temporal values of a postmodern ethic (Newman, 1990). The Vatican claims a “single deposit of faith” that applies universally (“Catechism of the Catholic Church,” 1993, Section 86). Moreover, the authority for teaching that faith is claimed exclusively by the Magisterium. The Vatican asserts, “The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him” (“Catechism of the Catholic Church,” 1993, Section 100). The Church teaches that Jesus’s apostles entrusted the deposit of faith, comprising twin strands of sacred Scripture and living Tradition, to their successors who became the Church’s first bishops. The faith has subsequently been safeguarded and handed down exclusively through the Apostolic Tradition. The Vatican’s claims of a centralized teaching authority and a single deposit of faith clash with the pluralism and contingency that define a postmodern society.

Newman (1990) has identified radical feminism as a significant postmodern threat to Catholicism. The Catholic Church maintains that the feminist movement which emerged in the 1960s engendered an unnatural competition between the sexes because it challenged biblical anthropology and re-interpreted women’s roles, particularly those related to marriage and family, as patriarchal constructs (“Safeguarding the Human Being,” 2010). The Church establishment argues that “ideological feminism” with its emphasis on “gender, empowerment, and reproductive rights” has fueled global cultural changes that are antithetical to the “Christian vision” for “the dignity of women, the man-

woman relationship, family, motherhood, and sexuality” (“Safeguarding the Human Being,” 2010, p. 8). In a letter to the United States Bishops, Pope John Paul II cautioned that “a radical feminism which seeks the rights of women by attacking and denying fundamental, clear and constant moral teaching does not reflect or promote the full reality and true dignity of women” (John Paul II, 1989, para. 25). The Church recognizes that, on the one hand, social change has improved conditions for women globally, but it argues that these changes have also created new uncertainties about men’s and women’s roles, which the Church assumes responsibility to clarify.

The Catholic Church regards the male and female sexes as equal but not identical. In his Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II asserted that efforts to secure equal rights for women should not encourage women to adopt masculine characteristics at the expense of the “essential richness” of femininity (John Paul II, 1988, Section 10). He clarified that “[t]he personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different” (John Paul II, 1988, Section 10). The difference is valued as a complementarity that is “a precious asset for the Church and society” (John Paul II, 1989, para. 26).

Despite its reservations about feminist agendas, the Church is careful not to denounce feminism entirely. It acknowledges and supports the need to advance women’s causes. However, it frames feminist agendas that contradict Church teaching as radical, dissociating Catholic feminism from secular feminism. The Church’s characterization of radical feminism is similar to Cathcart’s (1978) definition of radical rhetoric. Drawing on Burkean concepts, Cathcart defined radical rhetoric as that which professes impiety to the

existing order. The Vatican uses its teaching of the Catholic faith as the touchstone against which radical feminism is exposed. By this definition, radical is that which falls outside Catholic doctrine. Since Catholicism has traditionally claimed a single teaching authority, what contradicts Catholic teaching is identified as inauthentic and subversive.

A review on the Vatican's website of the 2010 book *Women, Sex, and the Church* characterizes the female contributors to the book as Catholic feminists, who renounced radical feminism after experiencing the futility of a feminist ideology that erases gender differences. The two sides, radical feminism and Catholic feminism, are sharply contrasted in the review. Radical feminism, described as an effort to erase differentiation between the sexes, is indicted for cultivating "an abyss between oneself and one's body, between affectivity and sexuality, between personal structure and social vocation, between desires and fidelity" (Grappone, n.d., para. 3). In contrast, Catholic feminism, defined by its respect for a Christian anthropology, accepts the complementary and equal differences between male and female as part of the divine plan and promises "the perfect integration of body and spirit [and] a balanced response to the legitimate desires for a family and social engagement" (Grappone, n.d., para. 3). For the institutional Church, legitimate and illegitimate feminism are differentiated according to their piety to Church teaching. A celebration of womanhood that is consistent with Church teaching constitutes genuine Catholic feminism, whereas feminist ideology that questions Catholic doctrine is identified as radical and dangerous.

In this chapter, I elucidate the Church establishment's rhetorical framing of radical feminism. I focus my analysis on Church documents that address two groups of



women, the Roman Catholic Women Priests (RCWP), and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). I analyze Pope John Paul II's letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's Declaration *Inter Insigniores*, both of which articulated the Church's unambiguous ban on female ordination. I also analyze the Church's decrees of excommunication on women who pursue female ordination and on the male bishops who perform these ordinations. Finally, I analyze the Vatican's Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR, a document that reprimanded the LCWR for pursuing radical feminist agendas. Through a close textual analysis of these documents, I describe the Church hierarchy's rhetorical stance toward feminist positions that challenge Church teaching. I argue that the Magisterium protects its teaching authority and its doctrine on the differentiation of the sexes by framing certain feminist arguments as heretical or radical. The criteria against which feminist claims are designated as such lie firmly under Vatican control, since radicalism and heresy are defined by impiety to Church doctrine and the teachings of the Magisterium. With the use of arguments from doctrine, the Church deflects feminist challenges from non-doctrinal sources. In this manner, Church hierarchy maintains authority over how secular social change may or may not lead to adaptation in Catholic doctrine.

Doctrinal changes are not typically highlighted in the Catholic tradition. Catholicism has historically adopted a rhetorical stance of intransigence rather than responsiveness to social change. It is not that Church teaching has ignored secular developments in scientific and social realms, but the process of adaptation is slow and cautious. Modifications to doctrine are only approved by the central authority of the

Magisterium, and changes are interpreted with the symbolic resources of Catholic doctrine. The centralization of authority in the Church is challenged, however, by the Church as a community of practice. Although Catholicism is controlled in Rome, it lives in Catholic parishes across the world. The Church is present and active in local communities, where official Catholic precepts regularly clash with contexts of day-to-day living, resulting in many variations of practicing Catholic identity. This conflict creates a rhetorical challenge for Church hierarchy. Newman (1990) observed that the Catholic Church must be “hierarchical in its bone structure but vibrant and flexible in its muscles” (p. 58). The Church needs to protect a unified Roman Catholicism amidst Catholic pluralism. This rhetorical goal both necessitates and is served by the use of doctrinal rhetoric (Hart, 1971).

As outlined in Chapter 2, the doctrinal voice is marked by condensed arguments because the rhetor can count on an indoctrinated audience to fill in necessary warrants. The doctrinal voice also relies almost exclusively on doctrine for evidentiary support. These rhetorical principles allow doctrine to be protected against arguments that draw their evidence from non-doctrinal sources. In the rest of this chapter, I illustrate the use of doctrinal rhetoric in official Church documents that address the issue of radical feminism. Through the doctrinal voice, the institutional Church invalidates feminist claims that challenge Church doctrine. The Church controls these feminist influences by arguing that they defy doctrine and weaken the unity of the Church.

### **Women's Ordination - A Heresy**

In this section, I analyze three Church documents that justify a ban on women's ordination as Catholic priests. I demonstrate how the doctrinal voice of the Church hierarchy dismisses the feminist issue of female ordination by framing it as a heresy. Pope John Paul II's 1994 Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* represents the Church's official stance on the question of female priesthood. The letter is better understood in conjunction with an earlier Church document, *Inter Insigniores*, a declaration issued in 1976 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). Both texts offer a clear statement on the Church's belief about women priests and, in the course of explaining this position, outline the Church's view on the historic and contemporary role of women in the Catholic Church. The third text that I analyze is the Church's decrees of excommunication on the women who seek ordination and on the male Catholic bishops who ordain them. My analysis of these texts focuses on their rhetorical features, particularly those that conform to the doctrinal genre.

The four features of doctrinal rhetoric are: reliance on an indoctrinated audience who can be counted on to decode truncated arguments, use of doctrine as an evidentiary resource for arguments, clear roles for rhetors that are established by doctrine, and, finally, a relationship between rhetor and audience that is also defined by doctrine (Hart, 1971). I argue that through the use of these elements of the doctrinal rhetoric, the Church frames the movement for female priesthood as a feminist agenda that is so antithetical to Church teaching that it is not only radical, but ultimately heretical. In 2010, the Church

designated female ordination as a *delicta graviora*, or grave crime, thus placing it on par with sexual abuse of minors by the clergy (Levitt, 2012).

### **Ordinatio Sacerdotalis**

Pope John Paul II's 1994 Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* used rhetorical features of the doctrinal genre to assert definitively that the Church cannot ordain women priests because divinity was incarnated in the male sex, in the form of Jesus Christ, and because the priest acts *in persona Christi*, thus necessitating male embodiment. While John Paul II claimed papal authority to teach this truth, he affirmed that male priesthood is divinely ordained and therefore the Magisterium has no authority to amend the tradition. By assigning ultimate authority for the male clerical tradition to God, the Catholic Church protects the tradition against feminist claims that male priesthood is the consequence of a patriarchal rather than a divine view of women.

Adhering to the conventions of an apostolic letter, Pope John Paul II's missive began by addressing the Catholic Bishops as the Pope's "Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate" ("*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*," 1994, para. 1). Despite its personal greeting, the rest of the document adopts the doctrinal voice and shuns the stylistic elements that typically mark the rhetorical form of the public letter. Fulkerson (1979), in a close textual analysis of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, noted that King achieved "identification with the audience" and a "conciliatory tone" through the abundant use of personal pronouns. Fulkerson counted 139 instances of the word "I" among the letter's forty-eight paragraphs. Although King's letter carried the force of classical oratory, it enhanced its rhetorical power by the use of stylistic devices that

modeled the “personal warmth and associative structure of a letter to a friend” (p. 127). Unlike King’s letter, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* remains firmly embedded within the doctrinal genre and steers away from stylistic moves that typically infuse a letter with warmth.

When speaking in the doctrinal voice, the rhetor’s persona is substantially suppressed. The personal pronoun “I” appears only three times in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. Two of these occurrences are saved for the letter’s conclusion, at which point their function is to convey authority rather than to build consubstantiality with the audience. In the conclusion, Pope John Paul II summarized the argument of his letter by stating, “I [emphasis added] declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful” (“*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*,” 1994, para. 12). Immediately following this categorical claim, the Pope closed his letter with, “Invoking an abundance of divine assistance upon you, venerable brothers, and upon all the faithful, I [emphasis added] impart my apostolic blessing” (para. 13).

The papal claim to authority in the conclusion of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* deserves closer scrutiny because it is juxtaposed, paradoxically, with an abdication of authority. The Pope simultaneously asserts and delimits his authority by claiming that his position is vested with the power to speak for the Church on the matter of women’s ordination, but that the Church herself has no authority to admit women to the priesthood. This final pronouncement in the letter enacts a strategic assignment of power. With the use of the pronoun “I,” the pope claimed the authority to speak for the Church, but ascribed the

tradition of male-only priesthood to the divine plan, and not to the authority of his office. He clarified that male priesthood was the explicit will of Christ who selected “twelve men whom he made the foundation of his Church” (“*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*,” 1994, para. 6). He also asserted that “the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his Church” (para. 1). By assigning ultimate authority for sanctioning priesthood to Christ, Pope John Paul II confirmed that the Church is bound to follow the unalterable choice that Christ made.

Although doctrinal rhetoric establishes a position of authority for the doctrinal rhetor, the Magisterium claims that its doctrinal pronouncements are ultimately guided by divine mandates. By identifying an exclusively male priesthood among divinely ordained truths, the Vatican affirms the Church’s inability to admit women into the clergy, even as it exercises its authority to make that determination. This claim serves to deny the feminist charge that male priesthood is the consequence of an historical patriarchal bias. *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* responds to the charge of discrimination by insisting that the tradition of male priesthood is consistent with “theological anthropology” (para. 4). The letter rejects the claim that Christ’s choice of male apostles was simply an artifact of his patriarchal culture, arguing instead that Christ often broke contemporaneous tradition to affirm the status and roles of women, and so his choice of male apostles to build the Church was deliberate and in accordance with God’s will.

To further challenge implications of patriarchal bias, the Letter is careful to acknowledge that the Church regards women as equal to men and that male priesthood is not an artifact of historical bias but a reflection of the divine plan for differentiation of

roles between men and women. As with other doctrinal documents, however, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* does not offer extensive evidentiary support and justifies its claims by appealing to Church doctrine, scripture, and previous Church tradition. The letter remains within the field of doctrinal resources and explicitly detaches itself from historical and social contexts, except to define rhetorical exigences that require clarification from the Magisterium. For example, Pope John Paul II justified *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* as a response to the debate about women's ordination that had begun to emerge in spheres of Catholic discourse following the Anglican Church's consideration of the same issue. However, he separated Church tradition from this historical debate, by quoting exclusively from scripture and from prior doctrinal pronouncements, including the CDF's Declaration *Inter Insigniores*, his own Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, comments by Pope Paul VI, and the Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*.

### **Inter Insigniores**

In 1976, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican office charged with protecting Catholic doctrine throughout the world, issued the Declaration *Inter Insigniores*, which is a longer, more elaborate document than *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* and served as a key resource for the latter. *Inter Insigniores* comprises seven sections that build the argument for excluding women from the priesthood. The Declaration argues that the claim to female priesthood is motivated by a desire for social advancement, which is not supported by God's will. The document asserted, "[T]he fact of conferring priestly ordination only on men . . . is a question of unbroken tradition throughout the

history of the Church . . . and is still observed because it is considered to conform to God's plan for his Church" ("Inter Insigniores," 1976, Section 4). The Declaration was structured as a rebuttal against possible arguments in favor of ordaining women priests. This structure was necessary because the Declaration was provoked by the demand for greater participation of women in Church ministries and specifically by the pressure exerted on the Catholic Church to join other Christian denominations in admitting women as pastors. In making this argument, the CDF needed to balance a consideration of social changes in women's roles against the Church's steadfast tradition of an exclusively male priesthood.

The doctrinal voice is evident in *Inter Insigniores* because the CDF configured its arguments solely from Scriptural and doctrinal resources, dismissing empirical evidence of patriarchal bias within the Church. To clarify that the Church's position does not support patriarchy, the document began by acknowledging the need to eliminate sex-based discrimination. Rather than socio-historical support for this claim however, the Declaration turned to the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, which declared that discrimination of basic human rights, particularly sex discrimination, must be abolished because it contradicts God's plan. Confirming its support for women's equality establishes the Church hierarchy as a reasonable ally in overcoming discrimination against women. The denial of a patriarchal bias allows the Vatican to argue that its stance against women's ordination is not discriminatory; rather, it is simply an enforcement of divine will. The Declaration also clarified that, while Christianity affirms the equality of all baptized persons, "equality is in no way identity,



for the Church is a differentiated body, in which each individual has his or her role” (“*Inter Insigniores*,” 1976, Section 6). The Church’s “equal but different” argument claims that women are not barred from the priesthood due to an inherent inferiority, but that they are called by God to fulfill different roles in the Church. The Declaration applauded the contributions of Catholic women, including saints, missionaries, and wives who have “a profound influence on their families, particularly for the passing on of the faith to their children” (“*Inter Insigniores*,” 1976, Introduction). Thus, the Church valorizes specific roles for women, claiming that women have been divinely ordained for their own particular missions in the Church, which are no less important than the priesthood.

Consistent with the doctrinal rhetoric, *Inter Insigniores* established a clear relationship between rhetor and audience that grants the rhetor considerable authority. The Declaration framed the Magisterium as the Church’s sole teaching authority and as the Shepherd of the Catholic flock. Both characterizations, in turn, construct a relationship between the Church hierarchy and the Catholic faithful in which the latter are dependent on the hierarchy for instruction on the mysteries of the Catholic faith. The theme of mystery is prominent in *Inter Insigniores*. The document does not elaborate on its claims with much evidence. When support is provided, it is drawn exclusively from doctrine and scripture. For example, Section 2 of the Declaration argued that women cannot be priests because Jesus chose only men to be his Apostles. The CDF maintains that Jesus’s choice cannot be ascribed to the patriarchal traditions of his time because his treatment of women often broke with patriarchal norms. Several biblical passages were referenced to prove Jesus’s respect for women, particularly, the women who were among

his followers. As is the customary style of the doctrinal document, scriptural evidence was rarely quoted in full, however. Rather, scriptural paraphrases were accompanied by parenthetical citations of biblical verses. The examples enumerated in *Inter Insigniores* include one that is often cited by those who oppose the Church's ban on female priests, namely, that the risen Christ first appeared to women and that it was a woman to whom Christ gave the responsibility of announcing his Resurrection to his Apostles. The CDF acknowledged that such an example may seem encouraging for those who demand female priesthood, but it cautioned that "the questions that the Word of God brings before us go beyond the obvious" and therefore "to reach the ultimate meaning of the mission of Jesus and the ultimate meaning of scripture, a purely historical exegesis of the texts cannot suffice" ("Inter Insigniores," 1976, Section 2). Thus, the CDF positions itself as the sole scriptural authority, silencing other readings of scriptural texts. Elsewhere in the Declaration, the CDF clarified:

[P]roblems of sacramental theology, especially when they concern the ministerial priesthood, as is the case here, cannot be solved except in the light of Revelation. The human sciences, however valuable their contribution in their own domain, cannot suffice here, for they cannot grasp the realities of faith: the properly supernatural content of these realities is beyond their competence. ("Inter Insigniores," 1976, Section 6)

The claim above reflects the CDF's reliance on an indoctrinated audience who will accept that divine mysteries are not accessible to reason and that the faithful must accept the Magisterium's authority to interpret these mysteries.

In *Inter Insigniores*, the Vatican addressed the contradiction between its assertion that doctrine transcends social changes and its efforts to modify Catholic doctrine in response to some of those changes. The CDF admits that some of the early Church justifications for rejecting female priests were based on unfair prejudices toward women which are no longer considered valid. Following the truncated argument structure, these invalid prejudices were not named or elaborated in the document. Instead, they were deemed inconsequential or flawed because they were motivated by a “desire to clarify by reason the data of faith” (“*Inter Insigniores*,” 1976, Section 1). The document attributed former doctrinal prejudices against women to faulty reasoning, thus securing the Magisterium’s authority to interpret the mysteries of faith, despite its previous errors.

Pitting reason as the culprit against faith, the Magisterium insists that reason is insufficient to understand divine mysteries, which need to be interpreted by the Church’s teaching authority. Regarding Catholic teachings that have been modified over the centuries, the CDF declares that it is the Magisterium who bears the responsibility for deciding whether and how the Sacraments can be altered. To account for modifications in Sacramental practice over time and across different cultures, the CDF dissociates the Sacraments into substance and form and asserts that the Church is only authorized to modify the Sacraments in form, when necessary, but that the substance of the Sacraments have been already determined by Christ’s example, which the Church is bound to follow. The CDF maintains that Christ’s maleness, which is embodied by the Catholic priest during the Eucharistic celebration, is a matter of Sacramental substance rather than form. *Inter Insigniores* (1976) argued that:

[W]hen Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this “natural resemblance” which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man: in such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. (Section 5)

The Church insists that Christ’s incarnation in the physical male form was an essential part of God’s plan for his Church and remains an essential part of the Eucharistic ritual. As in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, the Vatican claims authority for safeguarding this tradition, but also asserts that it is powerless to modify the tradition since male priesthood was instituted by Christ himself. To support the assertion that the priest acts *in persona Christi*, “taking the role of Christ, to the point of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of consecration” (“*Inter Insigniores*,” 1976, Section 5), the CDF cited previous doctrinal pronouncements by the Second Vatican Council, the 1971 Synod of Bishops, a 1973 Declaration by the CDF, and brief scriptural references from *Cornithians* and *Galatians*. The scriptural references were accompanied by doctrinal exposition to ensure uniform interpretations that have been authorized by the Magisterium. In this way, *Inter Insigniores* protects Catholic teaching from the threat of feminist readings of scripture and Church tradition.

Feminists asserts that male priesthood represents the Church’s patriarchal prejudice and its belief in the inferiority of the female sex. The Vatican, on the other hand, affirms the dignity of women and the equality of their contributions to the Church, even as it maintains that God has willed different ministerial roles for women and men. Church authorities view the demand for female priesthood as motivated by the secular “goal of social advancement” (“*Inter Insigniores*,” 1976, Section 6), whereas its own

tradition of male priesthood enacts divine will. In contrast, feminists who challenge Church teaching believe their advocacy for women's ordination follows Christ's example of radical equality toward all. Official Church teaching about, and the feminist challenge to, male-only priesthood diverge in their demarcation of sacred versus profane, what is willed by God, and what is the consequence of human disobedience of God's will.

Together, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* and *Inter Insigniores* uphold clearly and unambiguously the Church's ban on female priests. They argue, using the doctrinal voice, that sex-role differentiation is part of the divine plan. The truncated and insular argument pattern of the doctrinal voice allows the Vatican to protect this claim from sociological and historical commentaries that attack sex-role differentiation as a mode of patriarchal subjugation. The Vatican contends that feminist challenges to male priesthood reflect a profane and secular influence that distorts God's plan for his Church. The use of doctrinal rhetoric also maintains the Vatican's teaching authority and configures the Vatican and the Church members in a hierarchical relationship which requires that genuine Catholics trust and remain loyal to the Magisterium.

### **Decrees of Excommunication**

Since the Church's prohibition against female priests did not deter a group of women (the Danube Seven) from seeking ordination as Catholic priests, the Church issued a notice of excommunication for their defiance, indicting them as heretics because they "formally and obstinately reject a doctrine which the church has always taught and lived" ("Decree on the Attempted Ordination," 2002, para. 8). In addition, the Church designated these women as schismatics because their ordinations were performed by a schismatic bishop and so "even though not formally adhering to his schism – [the

women] thereby made themselves accomplices in schism” (para. 7). The excommunication was deemed a “*ferendae sententiae* penalty, imposed after the guilty party has been duly warned” and has refused to repent (para. 5). Compatible with the patterns of doctrinal rhetoric, the decree asserted the authority of the Magisterium and found the women guilty, among other things, for insisting that “the magisterium of the Roman Pontiff would be binding only if it were based on a decision of the college of bishops, supported by the *sensus fidelium* and received by the major theologians” (para. 9). The Vatican maintained that such a position denies “that the teachings of the supreme pontiff on doctrines to be held definitively by all the faithful are irreformable” (para. 9). Through the decree of excommunication, the Church made clear that fundamentals of the Catholic faith cannot be generated outside the Magisterium and that the Magisterium remains the only voice of authority regarding the Catholic faith. The Church also argued that feminists who demand that the Magisterium must listen to the *sensus fidelium* on essential matters of faith are breaking the ecclesial communion that is vital to the Church.

The decree of excommunication, although a serious penalty, did not prevent further ordinations, and the group of Roman Catholic Women Priests continued to grow internationally. In 2008, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued another decree, this time a decree of automatic excommunication, on anyone attempting female ordination. Automatic excommunication or the *latae sententiae* penalty denies the offender the benefit of due process by the Vatican. The decree of automatic excommunication reinforced the Church’s ban on female priests and served as a formidable warning to those pursuing ordination. The notice described female ordination as a “delict” against the Church and asserted the authority of the Congregation for the

Doctrine of the Faith “to protect the nature and validity of the sacrament of holy orders” (“General Decree Regarding the Delict of Attempted Sacred Ordination of a Woman,” 2008, para. 1). The decree of automatic excommunication demonstrated that the Vatican considers claims for female priesthood so irreconcilable with the Catholic faith that those who act on those claims are instantly excluded from participating in the Catholic sacraments. Through automatic excommunication, the Vatican enacted the ultimate rejection of the demand for female priesthood and emphasized the impossibility of simultaneously supporting women’s ordination and remaining a loyal Catholic. Two years later, the Vatican felt compelled to issue an even more formidable deterrent. In July 2010, female ordination was assigned the weight of a *delicta graviora*, a grave crime. The primary focus of the 2010 *delicta graviora* decree was the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests. However, by including female ordination in the same class of sin as pedophilia, the Vatican calibrated, in the grimmest terms, the consequence of disobeying the Church’s law against female priesthood. In the next section, I describe the use of the doctrinal voice to discipline what the institutional Church regards as a less serious, but nevertheless troubling, manifestation of feminist Catholicism.

### **The Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR: An Intervention against Radical Feminism**

The Church hierarchy safeguards Catholic doctrine by regularly intervening in particular cases that it deems threatening to Church teaching. On April 18, 2012, the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) enacted such an intervention by issuing a Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious

(LCWR), an organization that represents the majority of U.S. Catholic nuns. The CDF's Assessment highlighted "serious doctrinal problems" that conflicted with Church teaching and mandated a solution to rectify the LCWR's doctrinal errors ("Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, p. 2). The Assessment highlighted three key concerns. First, it argued that speeches delivered during the LCWR's annual assemblies reflect theological positions that contradict and undermine Church doctrine. Second, it claimed that members of the LCWR enact "corporate dissent" (p. 2) by challenging the Vatican's positions on topics such as women's ordination and homosexuality. Third, the Assessment argued that the LCWR programs encourage "radical feminism" with "commentaries on patriarchy" and other "theological interpretations" that contradict "the revealed doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the inspiration of Sacred Scripture" (p. 3).

Although tensions between the Vatican and the LCWR had been brewing prior to Vatican's investigation of the organization, the Doctrinal Assessment delivered an unexpectedly harsh judgment on the LCWR. Following the publication of the Assessment, the LCWR released a public statement expressing that it was "stunned by the conclusions of the doctrinal assessment . . . and taken by surprise by the gravity of the mandate" ("LCWR Statement from Presidency on CDF Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, para. 1). The nuns also received reassurances from other supporters after the Doctrinal Assessment was issued. For example, leaders of seven groups of Franciscan friars in the United States published an open letter to convey their apprehension that "the level of ecclesial oversight" prescribed by the CDF could "quash all further discernment," which has been so far a strength of the LCWR (Martin, 2012, para. 8).



The likelihood that the Doctrinal Assessment would generate resistance and counter-criticism seems to have been accounted for in certain rhetorical choices evident in the document. In crafting the Doctrinal Assessment, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) needed to strike a rhetorical balance. I contend that the Vatican's Doctrinal Assessment both used and modified features of the doctrinal voice in order to issue a firm warning against radical feminism without alienating female members of the Church. The doctrinal castigation is softened by two rhetorical buffers: the *pastoral gesture* and the *dialogic gesture*. The rhetorical gestures of pastoral concern and openness to dialogue mitigate the potential for the Doctrinal Assessment to be read as an example of patriarchal control. Although the mitigating strategies in the Doctrinal Assessment soften the harshness of the indictment, they are careful not to leave room for a feminist rebuttal. While the Vatican communicates its respect and appreciation for the work of Catholic nuns in the United States, the Doctrinal Assessment sounds a clear warning that Catholic feminism meets its limits in Catholic doctrine as it is taught by the Magisterium.

#### **Doctrinal Voice in the Vatican's Assessment of the LCWR**

The Vatican's Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR used the doctrinal voice to legitimate its argument that some of the LCWR's agendas are radically feminist. The characteristics of doctrinal rhetoric facilitate the Vatican's criticism of the LCWR because they establish a clear relationship between the Vatican and the LCWR, in which the Magisterium is positioned as the teaching authority and the LCWR is obligated to maintain fidelity to the Magisterium.

The Doctrinal Assessment began by asserting that the charism of religious life is actualized through obedience to the Bishops and the Pope, particularly in a social environment fraught with influences that undermine Church teaching. Following the truncated argument structure common to doctrinal rhetoric, the Assessment did not elaborate on its claim about the secular dangers that threaten Catholicism. Instead of citing empirical data, the document remained firmly embedded in doctrine, making its claim about the threats to Catholicism through the voice of Pope John Paul II, who in his 1996 Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* asserted that the Church should serve as “the pillar and bulwark of truth” especially for those dedicated to religious life as they “resist the particularly strong centrifugal and disruptive forces at work today” (as cited in “Doctrinal Assessment,” 2012, p. 1) The extended quotation from John Paul II which includes an emphasis on “ecclesial communion” and the need for Church members, including religious, to demonstrate “allegiance of mind and heart” to the teachings of the Magisterium (as cited in “Doctrinal Assessment,” 2012, p. 2), established, from the outset, the rhetorical relationship between the Vatican and the LCWR.

Within the doctrinal genre, the rhetor is privileged to omit evidence and warrants and to rely on the indoctrinated audience to fill in enthymematic gaps. This pattern of truncated argument is consistent throughout the Doctrinal Assessment. The areas of concern, named in the Assessment, were explained briefly in three short paragraphs without the elaboration of evidence. Although the Vatican had conducted an investigation of the LCWR between 2008 and 2012, and had exchanged correspondence with the LCWR during that time, the conclusions of the investigation which were made publicly

available are restricted to the eight-page Assessment. An example of a truncated argument in the Doctrinal Assessment is the CDF's charge that the LCWR promotes radical feminist ideas. This claim was articulated in the following paragraph:

The Cardinal noted a prevalence of certain radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith in some of the programs and presentations sponsored by the LCWR, including theological interpretations that risk distorting faith in Jesus and his loving Father who sent his Son for the salvation of the world. Moreover, some commentaries on "patriarchy" distort the way in which Jesus has structured sacramental life in the Church; others even undermine the revealed doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the inspiration of Sacred Scripture.

("Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, p. 3)

This passage demonstrates vividly the argument style of the doctrinal voice. The assertion of radical feminism is categorical, but the claim is not followed by evidence from LCWR rhetoric. The rhetorical audience of women religious and Catholic laity is relied on to accept the Cardinal's observations, by supplying the warrant that the Cardinal represents Church authority and should therefore be trusted by faithful Catholics. In a later section, the Assessment indicated that the investigation included a doctrinal appraisal of speeches delivered at LCWR events over a ten-year period. The study was presented to the LCWR leadership for their response. However, the final Doctrinal Assessment did not enumerate examples from that study. Instead, the argument about the LCWR's radical feminism was constructed primarily of claims that were supported by asserting the Vatican's teaching authority.

The Church hierarchy's definition of radical feminism is calibrated according to its own teachings. The feminist themes expressed in LCWR rhetoric are recognized as dangerous because they are "incompatible with the Catholic faith," they "risk distorting faith in Jesus," they "distort the way Jesus structured sacramental life," and they "undermine the revealed doctrines . . . and the inspiration of Sacred Scripture ("Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, p. 3). To agree with each of these sub-claims, the audience must not only accept the Vatican's authority in interpreting faith and Scripture, but it must also accept the Vatican's interpretation of the LCWR's feminist rhetoric. The Doctrinal Assessment does not lead its audience to conclusions via a claim-evidence-warrant structure. Instead, by omitting specific examples of LCWR rhetoric as evidence, the Vatican implies that its reading of the LCWR's feminism is authoritative and accurate. This rhetorical move mutes the voice of the LCWR in the document and ensures that the Vatican maintains rhetorical control of the Doctrinal Assessment.

The Doctrinal Assessment, nevertheless, reflects a few significant gestures of rhetorical sensitivity toward its audience. First, the Vatican emphasized that the Assessment arose out of its pastoral responsibility to ensure that none of the Catholic flock go astray. The *pastoral gesture* allows the Vatican to foreground an ethic of care rather than an ethic of judgment toward the LCWR. Second, the Assessment included rhetorical elements that communicated the Church hierarchy's openness to dialogue with the LCWR. The *dialogic gesture* mitigates the monologic tone that is typical of the doctrinal voice. Together, the pastoral gesture and the dialogic gesture serve to diffuse the tension of a confrontation between an all-male hierarchy and an all-female organization. I argue that, at a deeper level, the pastoral and dialogic elements of the Assessment do not

contradict and instead reinforce the document's doctrinal voice, allowing the Vatican to control how the issue of feminism is rhetorically defined in this controversy.

### **The Effect of the Pastoral Gesture**

The Doctrinal Assessment relied substantially on the pastoral gesture to justify the Vatican's investigation of the LCWR. The pastoral gesture communicates concern rather than criticism. In a pastoral capacity, the Catholic priest assumes the role of successor to Christ, the divine Shepherd. Foucault has argued that the pastoral trope functions as a basis of power for Church authorities, because the role of the shepherd includes disciplining wayward sheep. The discipline is loving because it arises, not from an impersonal authority, but rather from the shepherd's intimate knowledge and concern for each member of the flock, a relationship that, according to Foucault, is epitomized in the Catholic ritual of confession (Kaylor, 2011). In this section, I trace the use of the pastoral gesture in the Doctrinal Assessment and argue that, while it mitigates the harshness of the Vatican's indictment of the LCWR, it also authorizes the Vatican to discipline the LCWR and fixes a hierarchical imbalance that grants the Vatican greater rhetorical power in the controversy. The pastoral relationship, while communicating an ethic of care, configures a power dynamic between shepherd and flock. Within the pastoral framework, the LCWR is positioned as incapable of self-determination, vulnerable to straying, and dependent on the Vatican to correct its missteps and shepherd it within the boundaries of Catholic teaching.

The Doctrinal Assessment clarified early on that it "arises out of a sincere concern for the life of faith" among religious communities ("Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, p. 2),

thus establishing a tone of pastoral care for the rest of the document. The pastoral gesture is invoked more explicitly when the document claimed that the Pope performs the role of “Chief Shepherd and Pastor of the Universal Church” and “[n]ot least among the flock to whom the Pope’s pastoral concern is directed are women Religious” (p. 4). The pastoral charge is supported with a biblical quotation from Luke 22:32, in which Jesus entrusts the apostle Peter with the responsibility for nurturing the faith of his brothers and sisters. The Vatican’s intervention in the LCWR is described in the Doctrinal Assessment as the Holy Father’s “pastoral outreach to the Church in the United States” (p. 4). The pastoral gesture also frames the LCWR as vulnerable to error. Specifically, the document pointed to “secularized contemporary culture” that can have “a negative impact on the very identity of Religious as Christians and members of the Church . . . and on their authentic Christian spirituality, moral life, and liturgical practice” (p. 6). The document asserted that a greater emphasis on Catholic doctrine will protect Catholic religious from the deleterious influences of secular culture.

The strongest invocation of the pastoral gesture occurred when the document criticized the LCWR for allowing speakers at its annual assemblies to present views that contradict Church doctrine. The CDF claimed that the Church’s Pastors should hear such views as “a cry for help” (“Doctrinal Assessment,” 2012, p. 2). In this way, the Vatican rhetorically neutralizes perspectives that challenge doctrine by framing them as unwitting, yet unambiguous, signs of spiritual distress. By regarding those who express theological opinions that challenge Church teaching as not only misguided but unaware of their own spiritual confusion, the Vatican does not allow for the possibility that the

Catholic faithful, including Catholic women religious, may experience authentic spiritual insights that are not approved by the Magisterium.

The Doctrinal Assessment restricts the possibility of spiritual truth not sanctioned by the Magisterium by specifically warning of “a mistaken understanding of the dynamic of prophecy” which “justifies dissent by positing the possibility of divergence between the Church’s magisterium and a ‘legitimate’ [emphasis in original] theological intuition of some of the faithful” (“Doctrinal Assessment,” 2012, p. 5). Prophecy that challenges the teachings of the Magisterium is dismissed as inauthentic and dangerous. The CDF made a clear distinction between mistaken prophecy that is “directed *at* [emphasis in original] the Magisterium and the Church’s pastors” and genuine prophecy which is “regulated and verified by the Church’s faith and teaching office” (p. 5). Catholic faithful who claim spiritual insights that challenge the Magisterium are negated as drifters from the flock. Thus, although the pastoral gesture in the Doctrinal Assessment delivers disciplinary action from an ethic of care, it maintains a hierarchical relationship of shepherd-flock, which minimizes the influence that the LCWR, or other lay Catholics, may have on the Church’s institutional authority.

### **The Effect of the Dialogic Gesture**

The doctrinal voice and the pastoral gesture ensure a monologic tone throughout the Doctrinal Assessment, effectively silencing the voice of the LCWR. Nevertheless, the Assessment does include elements that suggest the Vatican’s openness to dialogue. I argue that, while the Vatican’s dialogic gesture serves to soften its criticism of the LCWR, it does not diminish the Vatican’s rhetorical position as the teaching authority of

the Church. Although the dialogic ideal is supposed to configure the parties in dialogue as rhetorical equals, the Vatican retains its rhetorical authority by limiting the topic of dialogue to the implementation of the Doctrinal Assessment's solutions. The validity of the Assessment's claims about the LCWR's doctrinal problems are excluded from the possibilities for dialogue. The dialogic overtures in the Assessment communicate the Vatican's respect for LCWR members, but the hierarchy's definition of dialogue clarifies that it does not grant the LCWR a position of equal authority at the dialogue table. In this section, I identify how the Vatican's dialogic gesture expresses esteem for women religious while simultaneously offsetting this rhetorical effect with a narrow definition of dialogue, which restricts the LCWR's ability to convince the Vatican that its feminism is compatible with Catholicism.

In a public statement issued on August 10, 2012, Archbishop Sartain, who was selected to oversee the Doctrinal Assessment's recommendations for reform of the LCWR, claimed:

Along with the members of the LCWR, I remain committed to working to address the issues raised by the Doctrinal Assessment in an atmosphere of prayer and respectful dialogue. We must also work toward clearing up any misunderstandings, and I remain truly hopeful that we will work together without compromising Church teaching or the important role of the LCWR. I look forward to our continued discussions as we collaborate in promoting consecrated life in the United States. ("Statement by Archbishop J. Peter Sartain," 2012, para. 3)



Several words in this passage construct a dialogic image of the Church hierarchy. By positioning himself “[a]long with the members of the LCWR,” Sartain blurred hierarchical distinctions between himself and the women of the LCWR and defined his role as the LCWR’s assistant. Consistent use of the first person plural “we,” along with promises to “work together” and “collaborate,” enhance the dialogic tone of Sartain’s claim. However, the Archbishop was clear that collaborations with the LWCR cannot undermine Church teaching, implying limits to the dialogic possibilities. An indoctrinated audience would link Church teaching to the authority of the Magisterium. Therefore, Sartain’s caution established that, in the process of dialogue, the Vatican retains the greater authority. In the above quotation, when Sartain identified what cannot be compromised in the course of dialogue, he appeared to validate the importance of the LCWR by placing concerns about the LCWR’s role alongside considerations about Church teaching in the same sentence. However, since the Doctrinal Assessment included multiple claims which argue that religious life must be carried out in communion with the Magisterium, the Vatican ultimately asserts that even the role LCWR, rather than being determined by the women religious themselves, is subject to the boundaries determined by the Magisterium.

Boys (2007) has noted the discrepancy between dialogue as an image-management strategy and *dialogue as practice* in her analysis of the U.S. Bishops’ press statements addressing the clergy sex-abuse scandal. The bishops’ statements used dialogic terms to emphasize “pastoral listening” (p. 13) and to reassure the Church community that its leaders were attentive to the trauma of the sex-abuse survivors. Boys concluded that the press statements reflected “political uses of dialogic terminology” that

presented “a dialogical image” of the Church (p. 12). In contrast, she noted that, in practice, the Catholic Bishops treated dialogue as a “resource” (p. 16), by controlling which victim advocacy organizations were granted a place at the discussion table along with Church hierarchy. The contrast between a dialogic image and a commitment to the practice of dialogue is highlighted in a statement by Bishop Leonard Blair, the Delegate in charge of conducting the Doctrinal Assessment. He argued:

If by dialogue they [the LCWR] mean that the doctrines of the church are negotiable and the bishops represent one position and the LCWR presents another position, and somehow we find a middle ground about basic church teaching on faith and morals, then no. I don't think that is the kind of dialogue that the Holy See would envision. (“Bishop Explains Vatican’s Criticism of U.S. Nuns,” 2012, para. 8)

Thus, although the Church hierarchy expresses willingness to work collaboratively with the leadership of the LCWR, it simultaneously asserts that doctrinal truths are a settled matter and that there is no room for challenge, re-interpretation, or dialogue with respect to them.

In the Vatican’s Assessment of the LCWR, the distinction between dialogic image and dialogic practice emerges in the rhetorical ambiguity with which the Church hierarchy frames its dialogic orientation. On the one hand, the hierarchy positions itself as a collaborator with the LCWR, but the terms of this collaboration are clearly set by the Vatican. From the perspective of the Church hierarchy, “the doctrine of the faith has [already] been revealed by God in Jesus Christ, presented in written form in the divinely inspired scriptures, and handed on in the Apostolic Tradition under the guidance of the

Church's Magisterium" ("Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, p. 3). The Doctrinal Assessment promises that its solutions will be collaborative, but insists that Catholic teaching itself cannot be collaboratively decided. The extent to which the LCWR can actively engage with the Vatican in working through the Assessment remains to be seen. However, Bishop Blair offered an indication of the limits of dialogic possibility when he claimed that the dialogue will address "how to have the LCWR really educate; and help the sisters to appreciate and accept church teaching" ("No 'Middle Ground' Possible with LCWR on Key Issues" 2012, para. 4). From the hierarchy's perspective, the call to dialogue invites the LCWR to recommend ways in which Church teaching can be upheld among its members. It does not, however, offer the LCWR a voice to argue for the compatibility between its feminist convictions and its Catholic identity. Thus, the dialogic gesture is able to soften the harshness of the Doctrinal Assessment without diminishing the rhetorical authority of the Vatican.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the doctrinal voice protects the Vatican's claim as the sole teaching authority for the Church. Analyses of the the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, the CDF's Declaration *Inter Insigniores*, the decrees of excommunication for female ordination, and the Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR, reveal how the doctrinal voice constructs and dismisses certain feminist positions by framing them as heretical or radical. The use of the doctrinal voice allows the Vatican to rhetorically constitute faithful Catholics as those who respect the authority of the

Magisterium. Accordingly, Catholics who challenge this authority risk exclusion from the body of the Church's faithful. Radical feminism is one such challenge to the authority of the Magisterium. The term "radical" is also a symbolic resource controlled by the Vatican. The Church hierarchy measures feminist claims against Church doctrine to determine whether those claims deviate from Church teaching and the kind of punitive actions needed against them. Since the doctrinal voice relies heavily on doctrinal sources for evidentiary support, the Vatican's claims remain resistant to arguments that challenge its traditions from a sociological or historical perspective.

#### **Chapter 4: The RCWP Redefines Priesthood**

In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which a radical movement of Catholic feminism has responded to the Catholic Church's prohibition of female ordination. The Roman Catholic Women Priests (RCWPs) have defied the Church's Canon Law 1024, which reserves the priesthood exclusively for Catholic males. These women have sought ordination as Catholic priests and currently minister to communities in the priestly role. Both, the women in this group and the Vatican, define the RCWP movement as a radical deviation from institutional Catholicism. However, the women refuse to yield their Catholic identities. They insist that they desire "neither a schism nor a break from the Roman Catholic Church" (Meehan, Doko, & Rue, n.d., p. 1). Instead, they hope that their radical act will inspire a deep renewal of the Church, particularly its clerical tradition.

The first female ordinations took place in Europe in 2002. Seven women - Dr. Ida Raming, Dr. Iris Müller, Dr. Gisela Forster, Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger, Adelinde Roitinger, Dagmar Celeste, and Pia Brunner were jointly ordained, on June 29, in a ceremony that took place on the river Danube. The women who birthed the RCWP movement have come to be called the Danube Seven. The ordinations were performed by two male Catholic bishops. Thus, the women claim that they participate in the tradition of Apostolic Succession. This tradition, which the Catholic Church traces back to the apostle Peter, insists that for an ordination to be valid, it must be performed by a legitimately ordained Catholic bishop.

The Church's stance against women's ordination is unequivocal. Chapter 3 has outlined the Vatican's arguments against female ordination. Foremost of these is the

assertion that the priest acts *in persona Christi*. Since Christ was incarnated as a man and chose only men to be his apostles, the Catholic Church maintains that it cannot allow women into the priesthood. The Church argues that its tradition of male priesthood is simply following Christ's choice and, therefore, God's plan for the Church. To enforce the Church's doctrine against female ordination, the Vatican excommunicated the Danube Seven. Despite the serious consequences of excommunication, the RCWP movement has continued to grow. The Church hierarchy's subsequent official pronouncements against female ordination suggest that the institutional Church does regard the women priest movement as a threat, even if a marginal one. In 2008, the Catholic Church further sharpened its stance against female priesthood by decreeing that female ordination incurred excommunication *latae sententiae*, or automatic excommunication without due process (Stewart, 2008). And in 2010, the Vatican deemed female ordination a *delicta graviora* or a grave crime, in the same category as the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests (Levitt, 2012).

The Church's exclusion of women from the priesthood is read by feminists as a sign of its deeply entrenched patriarchal bias. In a co-written statement, three Roman Catholic Women Priests claimed that their excommunication by the Vatican exposed "the sins of the Fathers" (Hainz McGrath, Meehan, & Raming, 2008, p. 1). The RCWP movement insists that female priests and bishops were regularly ordained in early church communities and that the male priestly tradition was only a later assimilation from patriarchal cultural contexts. The RCWP movement refuses to accept male priesthood as a sacred mandate and regards it, instead, as a secular evil that has corrupted the Church.

RCWPs argue that Christian scripture and tradition confirm an early period “rich in the call and participation of women in all dimensions of ministry” (Meehan, Doko, & Rue, n.d., p. 2). They claim that the institutional Church has consistently, over centuries, suppressed the participation of women, especially in the clerical role. Giving up on the possibility for reform in the Church through direct persuasion of the hierarchy, the RCWP movement asserts, “We women are no longer asking for permission to be priests. Instead, we have taken back our rightful God-given place ministering to Catholics as inclusive and welcoming priests” (“About RCWP,” 2012, para. 1).

By seeking ordination despite the Church’s clear ban, the RCWP movement has resorted to a radical argument. Radical rhetoric is defined by its strong rejection of the prevailing social order such that the ruling establishment is compelled to strike out against the radical protestors, revealing the very abuse of power that the protestors wish to expose (Cathcart, 1978). While the RCWPs reject the Church’s law against women priests, they do not reject Catholicism in its entirety. Rather, members of the RCWP movement see their exile as a transitional phase, that will ignite reform in the Catholic Church through a renewal of the priestly ministry. Although RCWPs acknowledge that their ordinations are radical vis-à-vis Church tradition, they do not accept their excommunications and insist on the validity of their ordinations and their loyalty to the Catholic Church. In this chapter, I argue that the RCWP movement is able to synthesize rhetorics of impiety and piety through the use of the prophetic and deliberative voices.

RCWPs argue that their disobedience of Church law is a prophetic act that calls the Church back to its Gospel roots. The prophetic voice, driven by the “logic of the

sacred principle” (Darsey, 1997, p. x), challenges the prevailing social order in order to urge the people to reform their ways. Prophets are often met with apathy or ridicule from their audiences. This torment is embraced, however, as a prophetic burden that must be endured until the prophets are vindicated by the sacred principle. Prophets regularly confront insult and derision, but endure these slights to accomplish their purpose as divine emissaries who must challenge a corrupt and hardened people in order to return them to the sacred path.

RCWPs also speak in the deliberative voice, arguing for a more community-oriented model of the Church. The deliberative voice emphasizes the communal and evolving aspects of the Catholic faith. The RCWPs’ vision for an inclusive Church, which promotes equality over hierarchy, is articulated in their reconceptualization of the priestly role. The deliberative voice emphasizes divine revelation as ongoing rather than completed and as communal rather than hierarchically mediated. As such, deliberative rhetoric emerges as a rhetorical foil to the Vatican’s doctrinal rhetoric which insists on the primacy of already-revealed Truths that are safeguarded and passed on by an exclusive authority.

### **A Fire Grows in My Heart and Belly: The RCWP’s Prophetic Voice**

The rhetorical challenge of exhorting a community to repentance from the position of an outcast has biblical precedent in the voices of the Old Testament prophets (Darsey, 1997). Prophets are rhetorically defined by their strong criticism of the existing social order, which they condemn as unjust, and as a sign that the people have rejected



their covenant with God. To the extent that they lament their audience's values and insist on repentance, prophets remain symbolically separated from the audience, at least until their prophecy is fulfilled and their audience feels remorse. Until then, prophets must bear the burden of slander, rejection, and even martyrdom at the hands of their audience. Often in the Old Testament, the prophets' diatribes were directed toward an entire community that had grown morally weak. But, prophets also targeted those at the top of the hierarchy. Darsey (1997) has noted that, "[t]he most accessible evidence of a prophet's radicalism is his opposition to the regnant power structure . . . even rulers were subject to the overarching covenant with Yahweh" (p. 20). The Hebrew prophets "measured the performance of kings . . . and found the substitution of power for righteousness" (p. 20).

RCWPs defend their disobedience of Canon law with arguments that echo the prophetic voice. Their criticism is targeted primarily at the hierarchical Church for turning the priesthood into a position of power rather than service, and for guarding the priesthood as a privilege that is not extended to women. The RCWP movement hopes that its prophetic enactment of a more inclusive priesthood will kindle change in the Church by demonstrating to the Church hierarchy that a renewed priestly ministry is more faithful to Christ's example and can better serve the needs of the Catholic faithful.

In Chapter 2, I explained the basics of the theory of prophetic rhetoric. Here, I elaborate further on my conceptualization of the prophetic voice and explain how RCWPs defend their radical position using prophetic arguments. Darsey (1997) described prophetic rhetoric as "meaningful incivility" (p. x). He recognized it as a rhetoric driven

by “a sense of mission, a desire to bring the practice of the people into accord with a sacred principle, and an uncompromising, often excoriating stance toward a reluctant audience” (p. 16). Prophetic rhetoric seems, at first glance, to be irrational because it does not make an effort to accommodate the values of its audience. The classical Greek rhetorical tradition advocates a keen responsiveness to the audience so that the rhetor’s message makes sense within the audience’s value framework. Prophetic rhetoric, however, abandons audience adaptation because prophets claim to be vessels for divine *logos*. Darsey observed, “The prophets of the Old Testament were spokesmen for Yahweh. They were called to deliver a message that was not their own, often against their will” (p. 16).

For the RCWPs, the prophetic *logos* is a renewed priesthood that reflects the true mission of Jesus Christ and welcomes both men and women who are called to serve as priests. To establish *ethos* within a Catholic rhetorical framework, RCWPs need to demonstrate that their desire for ordination does not represent a striving for personal advancement nor is it a secular feminist goal to gain equality for women in yet another bastion of patriarchy, but that the women’s vocations to the priesthood are a genuine summons by God. The Vatican clarifies that “to consider the ministerial priesthood as a human right would be to misjudge its [sic] nature completely” (*Inter Insigniores*, 1976, Section 6). It also maintains that “[t]he priesthood is not conferred for the honour [sic] or advantage of the recipient, but for the service of God and the Church” and that “[t]he priestly office cannot become the goal of social advancement” (*Inter Insigniores*, 1976, Section 6). RCWPs are aware of the rhetorical burden to prove that their quest for female ordination is not a self-serving advocacy. The effort to authenticate their vocations to the

priesthood as a genuine call from God is evident in the autobiographical accounts of many RCWPs. Their personal stories emphasize the helplessness of the prophet in the face of divine summons. Collectively, these autobiographies serve as a rhetorical argument for the RCWP movement.

Narratives of the personal ordination journeys of RCWPs comprise a significant part of the movement's rhetoric. The 2008 book *Women Find A Way*, edited by members of the RCWP, compiles autobiographical sketches of Roman Catholic women priests. These accounts include the story of each woman's discernment of the priestly vocation. Overwhelmingly, the stories reveal the initial reluctance of the women to heed their calls to the priesthood because of the obstacles they knew they would encounter, including the ultimate consequence of being excommunicated from the very Church they wished to serve. Their eventual submission to the will of God, despite great personal cost, is justified with prophetic ethos. According to Darsey (1997), "The role of the prophet is not a role one seeks; it is a role with which one is burdened" (p. 28). Darsey noted that the prophetic call may be mistaken for an act of "psychopathological gratification," when in fact "the magnitude of the prophetic sacrifice in the achievement of righteousness" is what truly distinguishes prophetic ethos (p. 29).

The theme of initial reluctance yielding to the persistence of the divine call appears in many of the RCWP narratives. Often, the women report serendipitous occurrences that appeared to them as signs from God, urging them to endure on the path to ordination. In a personal interview with me, RCWP Alice Iaquina shared her path to ordination and the obstacles she encountered along the way. On a journey to Rome and Assisi in Italy, she felt like she "was being hounded" by the message, "Teach for me,

teach for me” (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013). Unsure about how best to fulfill this call, Iaquina continued to pray for divine insight. She explained a mystical experience that brought her more clarity:

[T]he day after Easter, I got struck with an illness . . . in my neck, the pain, just excruciating . . . And somebody came on Pentecost Sunday and brought me Eucharist and helped me get out of bed. I was scheduled for surgery. It was so bad, the pain . . . I sat out on my little deck and they said they’d be back in a couple hours . . . And I went into deep contemplative prayer. It was a very calm, mystical sense of prayer. [Long pause] And I said, “What is it that you want?”

And I got it again. This time, it was clear as a bell. (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013)

Iaquina went on to explain that when she emerged from her meditative state, she felt changed, and by the next morning, her pain had disappeared. She noted that her experience was “Pauline-like . . . getting knocked off your horse” (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013), drawing a similarity between her call to ordination and Saint Paul’s sudden conversion experience on the road to Damascus. Darsey (1997) has identified re-birth metaphors in Old Testament accounts of prophetic summons. The re-birth trope highlights “an experience, which served to impose a new teleology on [the prophet’s] lives” (p. 29). Iaquina’s narrative contained multiple anecdotes that she interpreted as divine nudges, compelling her to persist toward ordination. For example, she shared a story about trying to locate her Church records in order to submit her application to study at the seminary. An employee at the Church office informed her that her records had been

boxed up and would not be available in time for her application deadline. Iaquinta persisted, despite the office employee's resistance, and urged the employee to make a note of her name just in case the documents could be accessed before the deadline. Iaquinta explained what happened next during a phone conversation with the Church employee:

. . . I said, "My name is Alice" and then I started to spell and I got I-A-Q out, and she said, "Well oh, would that be Iaquinta?" And I said, I'll never forget this, "How could you possibly know that?" And she said, "Well because I just pulled your records on Friday and they're sitting right here at my desk." And every, like, neuron in my body was like "Oh, my God." Okay, I will never question anything again. How could that possibly be a coincidence, you know? (A. Iaquinta, Interview, March 15, 2013)

Narratives such as these occur frequently in RCWP justifications for the authenticity of female vocations to the priesthood. These stories argue that the pursuit of ordination is not simply a movement to secure equal rights for women, but that each quest for ordination represents the answer to a divine call. Consistent with the prophetic voice, RCWPs often report a helplessness against their divine summons. RCWP Judith A. B. Lee articulated the power of her summons to the priesthood through explicit identification with the Old Testament prophet Moses:

[T]he question is more "Who" than "what" called me to serve the poor, for the work is sometimes so hard that I would run from it if not for Godde's call. The

voice within calls clearly . . . A fire grows in my heart and belly . . . Like Moses, it includes a call from Godde's heart to my own. (Lee, 2008, p. 77)

As Darsey (1997) has explained, prophetic arguments follow logically from transcendent premises. For RCWPs, the premise of a prophetic summons by the Spirit legitimates disobedience of Church authority since the divine word transcends human law. RCWPs frame their disobedience of Church law as an obedience to God's call. Conversely, they condemn the Vatican's attachment to a patriarchal order as disobedience of the divine mandate of equality for all God's creatures. RCWP bishop Patricia Fresen (2008) distinguishes between obedience to authority and obedience to the Spirit, identifying the former as a child-like approach to spirituality and the latter as the mature spirituality of an adult. Obedience to the Spirit, which Fresen also characterizes as prophetic obedience, commands attention to personal conscience and "to the signs of the times," rather than a blind adherence to institutional rules (p. 32). Consistently, RCWPs highlight *conscience* as the medium through which they recognize God's calling and as the source of their conviction to pursue ordination. Their stories collectively assert that the call to priesthood is received through "interior awakening" (Doko, 2008, p. 144) and the recognition that one's life events are unfolding in the direction of priesthood, even in the midst of turmoil and resistance.

RCWPs make sense of their rejection by the institutional Church by accepting it as a prophetic burden that is necessary to fulfill God's plan. The prophetic voice of the RCWPs resonates through narratives of hardship and rejection. RCWP Eileen DiFranco observed that the path to ordination is fraught with "slings and arrows" and that the

women who walk that path often lose friends, particularly within their Catholic communities, finding themselves “cast out of prayer groups and other long-standing associations with their parishes” (“Excerpts From An Interview,” n.d., para. 9). RCWP Irene Senn, who was in the midst of preparing for ordination when I interviewed her, admitted that the possibility of losing her job with a Catholic parish after she became ordained would be an extremely painful consequence, but one that she saw as a sacrifice that God demanded of her. She explained:

I know that there are going to be consequences for what I am doing, and I am choosing to accept whatever those are. And I’m choosing to, if I have to leave St. Michael’s, to accept that, even though I don’t want to, [ . . . ] but I will, if it has to be that. (I. Senn, Interview, March 19, 2013)

RCWPs face their expulsion from the Church with “[f]aith in God rather than fear of the unknown” (“Excerpts From An Interview,” n.d., para. 9), displaying the certainty of divine promise that characterizes prophetic speech. They hold firm to the hope that they “will one day be affirmed as faithful daughters of the church who created new models of discipleship in the 21st century” (Meehan, Doko, & Rue, n.d., p. 6).

Through the prophetic voice, RCWP members combine rhetorics of impiety and piety, simultaneously enacting a radical break with Church tradition while continuing to affirm their loyalty to Catholicism. Darsey (1997) has argued that “[t]he prophet is simultaneously insider and outsider” (p. 202). Although the prophet proclaims a radical message that challenges the audience, “the prophet engages those premises that are central to the culture” (p. 202). Darsey noted that “prophetic discourse seeks to reshape,

to re-create the audience in accordance with a strict set of ideals as commanded by God . . . and assented to in principle but unrealized by the audience” (p. 202). Therefore, even though prophetic rhetoric relies mainly on the rhetorical principle of division, positioning the prophet against the audience, ultimately the prophet and the audience share transcendent values. As such, prophetic rhetoric is a special case of radical rhetoric. By assuming a prophetic role, rhetors can simultaneously emphasize the rhetorical distance between themselves and the audience, as well as the jointly-held “premises to which they have assented as a culture” (p. 202). RCWPs challenge Church hierarchy and Catholic laity who uphold the current exclusion of women from the priesthood, but their challenge does not reject the Church. Rather, RCWPs justify their denouncement of male-only piesthood with evidence of the importance of women in early Christian communities and with examples of Jesus’s message of radical inclusivity. Thus, the RCWPs’ arguments point to sources that are jointly honored by them and the audiences they are confronting.

RCWPs are both trenchant in their critiques of the institutional Church and ardent in their loyalty to Catholicism. Pogorelc and D’Antonio (2008) observed that a unique subset of Catholics are both its most loyal adherents and its fiercest critics, and consider themselves “as partners who share in the church’s beliefs, practices, and mission” (para. 4). They noted that highly loyal members tend to “make every effort to engage organizational leaders if they think they have a chance to influence a decision and gain a favorable outcome” (Pogorelc & D’Antonio, 2008, para. 7). The RCWP movement demonstrates that loyal Catholics who desire reform within the Church do not always



employ rhetorical strategies of engagement with the Church hierarchy. The RCWP movement has deliberately adopted a stance of impiety, the consequence of which has been a severing of dialogue between the members and the institutional Church. RCWP Alice Iaquina justified the movement's radical approach by likening it to a plow. She clarified:

A plow has a very sharp edge to cut through the toughness of the soil. And that's what I see our movement as. It's the tip of the blade moving through the very tough soil of the established institutional Church (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013).

However, the RCWP movement clarifies that while its defiance of Church law is necessary, it welcomes the Catholic hierarchy to "an open, respectful dialogue" about Church reform (Meehan, n.d., para. 17). RCWP members maintain that it is the Church hierarchy who has rejected the possibility of dialogue with them. RCWP Irene Senn distinguishes between members of the institutional Church who have been implicit allies in her ordination journey and those who steadfastly enact a rhetoric of "disengagement" (I. Senn, Interview, March 19, 2013). A few weeks before Senn was ordained a deacon, she received a letter of warning from the Archbishop of Milwaukee informing her of the penalty of automatic excommunication that awaited her unless she changed her mind. Senn described the Archbishop's approach as unpastoral. She argued:

To me, I see that as a lack of engagement. He did his canonical duty but he did not do a pastoral thing . . . if I would have been in his place, I would have at least

asked that person if they would be willing to have a conversation with me. That would have been engagement. (I. Senn, Interview, March 19, 2013).

The RCWPs' desire to remain connected to the Catholic Church is evident in their decision to enter into the priesthood through the tradition of Apostolic Succession. For Catholic women who aspire to the priesthood, maintaining consubstantiality with the Church through Apostolic Succession is both a tactical and a spiritual concern. They acknowledge that a parallel priesthood, outside the tradition of Apostolic Succession, would be even more easily dismissed. But, they also view their participation in a tradition that reaches back to Jesus's entrusting of his ministry to his apostles as a way to remain connected to the early core of the Church. RCWP bishop Patricia Fresen has argued that the RCWP movement would "be seen as just another sect" if it dispensed with traditional ordinations (Fresen, 2008, p. 30). Therefore, the RCWP movement has chosen Apostolic Succession as the path to ordination "[f]or the sake of credibility and also as a matter of justice" (Fresen, 2008, p. 29). For the RCWPs, to abandon Apostolic Succession would mean to lose a significant link to the Catholic Church and to allow the Church's practice of sexism to continue unchecked.

RCWPs value continued ties with the Church and claim that their radical stance is a temporary measure until the institutional Church embraces a reformed priesthood. RCWPs hope that their prophetic act sounds a clarion call and catalyzes deep reflection within the Church. They are often asked why they insist on remaining within the Church when they could serve as priests in other Christian denominations that have embraced female clergy. RCWPs argue that their ordinations are not self-serving but are offered as

prophetic sacrifices to reform the Church they love. RCWP Gabriela Velardi Ward explained:

I, like others in the movement, love the Roman Catholic Church. I loved the sacramental nature of the rituals, the history and tradition of mysticism, and the history of social justice activism . . . . Through the years, I have had the opportunity to be ordained to the priesthood in a number of alternative ways. But they never felt right. When I found RCWP, I felt that this is where my call to the priesthood . . . would be fulfilled (Velardi Ward, 2008, p. 74).

RCWP Irene Senn offered a similar perspective to resolve the contradiction between the RCWPs' defiance of Church law and their professions of loyalty to the Church. She clarified:

[P]eople have asked me, "Why don't you just go off and . . . join a different religion that accepts women?" But, I grew up this, and it's part of . . . it's in my bones, it's in my DNA . . . my family, who knows how far back, have been Catholic and . . . somehow it's being part of something much bigger, followers of Jesus in a certain way, which doesn't mean that I agree with every bit of the dogma, you know, or the doctrine, but people on the journey together, and not just one place, but the catholicity, you know, meaning the universal Church. (I. Senn, Interview, March 19, 2013)

RCWP members cite various reasons for their fidelity to Catholicism, ranging from an attachment to the religion since childhood, to the universality of the religion, to its emphasis on the sacraments. They claim that their disobedience of Church law does not

gainsay their loyalty and, in fact, is proof of their love for Catholicism because they are willing to bear the pain of excommunication in order to fulfill the Church's true potential. RCWP Olivia Doko (2008) argued that ordination and its painful consequences were "an outward sign" of her "deep and loving connection . . . with the heart of Christ Jesus and of the Catholic Church," and that her "prophetic action . . . is a pouring out of [herself] with love for the good of the Church" (p. 148). Similarly, RCWP Elise Hainz McGrath (2008) explained that her defiance of Church law was "not about [her] *at all* [emphasis in original]. It was about the Church" and about the women who will follow (p. 109).

RCWPs explain their prophetic stance by dissociating the Catholic Church into the institutional Church and the communal Church. They maintain that their impiety to the institutional Church is a necessary strategy for the sake of the communal Church. The RCWP website describes the female ordination movement as a grassroots advocacy. RCWP bishop Patricia Fresen observed, "If I left, nothing would change. The hierarchy would take no more notice of us. We can only make change if we stay, so we are not going away" (Kelley, 2012, para. 16). Pursuing female ordination, despite the consequence of excommunication, becomes sensible as a temporary strategy for RCWPs until they are able to demonstrate successfully to the hierarchy, through the voice of the faithful represented in the grassroots movement, that part of God's will for the Church is a more inclusive priesthood.

The historic Vatican II Council is another thread of connection with the Catholic Church that the RCWPs emphasize. RCWP bishop Patricia Fresen (2012) has sharply criticized the virtual absence of women at the Council and the silencing of the few

women who were belatedly invited to observe the Council proceedings. Fresen framed the women who did attend the Council as “the mothers of Vatican II” (p.1). She argued that, despite restrictions, the women attendees made key contributions to the conciliar documents. For example, Fresen claimed that it was the women at the sub-commission for the 1965 Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium Et Spes*, who influenced the Constitution drafters to recognize that “every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent” (as cited in Fresen, 2012, p. 1). Further, Fresen insisted that “[a]lthough they were so few, the women were a formidable presence at the Council” and that their gift to other women was “a much greater awareness of the deep-seated patriarchy that had taken root in the church over many generations” (p. 2).

Despite many post-conciliar changes, the lack of the Vatican’s flexibility on some issues, especially feminist concerns like contraception and women’s ordination, left many who had been energized about the Second Vatican Council deeply disappointed. For RCWPs, persisting within the Catholic Church allows them to fulfill the promise of Vatican II and ensure that the *sensus fidelium* or the voice of the faithful becomes a guiding force for the Church in the ways that many Catholics had hoped for after the Council. The members of the RCWP count their defiance of Canon Law as a sign that “the voice of the Catholic people - the *sensus fidelium* has spoken” (“About RCWP,” 2012, para. 1). The RCWP movement envisions not only an inclusive priesthood, but an inclusive Church as well. The movement emphasizes that it addresses the needs of

Catholics who are marginalized or disillusioned by the institutional Church. RCWP Irene Senn observed that the RCWP is “creating some kind of an option for a place to be, for people who don’t feel like they belong anymore” (I. Senn, Interview, March 19, 2013). Fresen (2008) claimed that faithful who are drawn to Catholic women priests tend to be those who are “on the fringes of the institutional church, people who are hungry for a community in which they can feel at home” (p. 34). She expressed hope that the communities that grow through RCWP ministry are moving the church to a model that “is closer to the community Jesus had in mind” (p. 35). In this way, RCWPs are able to justify their radical rhetoric by balancing their impiety to the institutional Church with a firm commitment to the communal Church. In the next section, I will outline the RCWPs’ arguments for a communal Church and a new kind of priesthood. Their claims rely predominantly on feminist readings of scripture and Church history, and are articulated in the deliberative voice.

### **Restor(y)ing the Female Face of the Church**

RCWP bishop Ida Raming (2008) has noted, “More than half of the members of the Roman Catholic Church are women; yet the public appearance of this church is that of a man’s church” (p. 21). The RCWP movement draws attention to the lack of significant female representation in the Church’s decision-making apparatus and argues that female members of the church are forced to cooperate with laws imposed on them by the male hierarchy. Raming also observed that all lay Catholics, regardless of gender, “are obliged to obey the ‘sacred Pastors’” (p. 22), and are thus subordinated to Church

hierarchy. The dual critique of patriarchy and hierarchy echoes frequently in RCWP rhetoric and substantiates the movement's agenda for broader inclusivity and empowerment within the Church.

The RCWP movement draws from a feminist spiritual consciousness that is informed by theological as well as secular feminist perspectives. The arguments for including women in the priesthood rest on the premise that women and men are formed equally in the image of God, a divine truth that is traced to the biblical book of Genesis. Following this fundamental equality, RCWPs maintain that “women are equal symbols of the holy” and accordingly “both [male and female] may represent Christ as priests” (Meehan, Doko, & Rue, n.d., p. 1). RCWP Alice Iaquina also echoed this rationale for female priesthood when she observed, “Jesus Christ images both male *and* female. Because all human beings in their wholeness represent the genetic structure of both male and female, so how could that possibly be then, that a female could not image a male?” (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013).

RCWPs claim that patriarchal traditions have distorted the divine plan, as well as Jesus's legacy, by suppressing the influence of feminine spirituality in the Church. The RCWP movement insists that Jesus himself never ordained a priest, that he only selected individuals, both men and women, to be his witnesses, and that the tradition of priesthood, which emerged in the post-resurrection early Christian communities, did include women as well as men as priests and deacons. In this section, I will demonstrate how the RCWP movement argues for reintegrating the feminine into the Church by using historical and theological evidence for greater spiritual equality between the sexes.

RCWPs are clear that they do not simply hope for an acceptance of women as priests, but that they stand for a different model of priesthood which emphasizes servant-leadership over hierarchy. I will also describe the RCWP movement's efforts to model this new ministry of priesthood, in keeping with their deliberative vision for the Church.

The RCWP website provides a short document that lists several scriptural and archeological examples of evidence suggesting that female priests and deacons officiated in early Christian churches, both in the East and the West, and that female ordination "remained at least an open question" for about 1, 200 years after the origin of the Church (Meehan, Doko, & Rue, n.d., p. 5). The examples include St. Paul's reference to Junia as a female apostle, as well as his praise for the deacon Phoebe who led the church at Cenchreae. The archaeological evidence cited includes a fresco in the Catacomb of St. Priscilla, in Rome, which depicts a group of women celebrating a Eucharistic banquet, a floor mosaic dedicated to a woman priest in the Anaba Cathedral associated with St. Augustine of Hippo, and an Egyptian female mummy, identified as a Christian priest who lived between 250 to 350 A.D. The RCWP historical overview mentions that, even though the tradition of female priests did not survive, later female saints expressed their vocations to the priesthood, including St. Brigit of Kildare, who is said to have been ordained a bishop, and St. Therese of Lisieux, who confessed a deep desire to become a priest, although her vocation was never fulfilled.

Besides argument by tradition, the RCWP movement also grounds its advocacy for female priesthood in theological arguments. Pamela Dickey Young (1990) noted that feminist theology has been inspired by secular feminist theory, which arises out of



political and social advocacy dedicated to redressing systemic discriminations against women. Feminist theology participates in feminist theory by exposing patriarchal constructions of femininity in religious contexts and reconstituting the value of feminine spirituality. Feminist theologians amend androcentric doctrines to incorporate women's experiences. RCWPs reject the doctrine of an exclusively male God and re-imagine God in gender-neutral, feminine, or both masculine and feminine symbols. Some RCWPs personify the Holy Spirit with a female pronoun, or use a term such as "Godde" (Lee, 2008, p. 77) to feminize the divine. Feminist theology also retrieves female characters who play peripheral roles in scriptural stories and foregrounds them, so that the same stories can be appreciated from the perspective of strong and vital female agents. For instance, the demure acquiescence of the Virgin Mary is reconfigured as the courageous choice of an "independent woman who chooses to cooperate with God" (Dickey Young, 1990, p. 14). Similarly, the RCWP movement finds inspiration in retelling the resurrection scene so that Mary of Magdala is spotlighted as the first witness to the risen Savior and the one chosen by Christ to tell the Good News to the rest of the apostles. She is described in RCWP literature as "the apostle to the apostles" (Meehan, Doko, & Rue, n.d., p. 2). Since the Vatican insists that its ban on women priests follows Jesus's decision to select only men as his apostles, evidence of female apostles, especially one that was granted the privilege of announcing Jesus's resurrection, serves as a compelling rebuttal for the RCWP movement.

Catholics who become disillusioned with the practices of the institutional Church but want to retain their Catholic faith seek resolution by reinterpreting Catholic theology

and Church doctrine while trying to remain faithful to the Gospel message (Dillon, 1999). Their identity work requires the separation of essential articles of their Catholic faith from Church laws and traditions that they regard as superfluous. Such rhetorical strategies are also evident in the identity work of the RCWPs. Distancing themselves from the patriarchal and hierarchical practices of the Church, RCWPs locate the core of their Catholic faith in the New Testament, particularly in Jesus's opposition to hierarchy, and his embrace of people regardless of their social status. A pivotal argument for feminist theology rests on the proposition that Jesus's mission epitomized the feminist agenda. Feminist theologians maintain that "[t]hrough Jesus' actions, we learn what is demanded of us" and that his actions demonstrate that "permanent hierarchy is not a necessity of existence" (Dickey Young, 1990, p. 44). As salient as Jesus's example is for the feminist argument, his maleness is regarded as incidental. Noted theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether observed that, if the mythical figure of Christ is dissociated with "its traditional masculine imagery . . . the Jesus of the synoptic Gospels can be recognized as a figure remarkably compatible with feminism" (Dickey Young, 1990, p. 38). The RCWP movement emphasizes "a Christ-centered Church for the 21st century" ("History of Roman Catholic Womenpriests Movement," 2012, para. 1) and focuses not on Jesus's maleness, but on his equal treatment of men and women and the potential of all baptized persons, female or male, to act "*in persona Christi*" (Fresen, 2012, p. 7).

To restore the Church, the RCWP movement urges a radical equality, which it claims was enacted by Jesus himself. In feminist theology, Jesus is construed as "a political figure who defends the lowly and judges the mighty" and "models a leadership

based on service to others” (Dickey Young, 1990, p. 38). For many RCWP members, the desire to become more deeply involved in Church life often collided painfully with perceptions and experiences of discrimination against women within the Church. The resulting dissonance provoked in them a strong desire to overcome injustice. RCWP Eileen McCafferty DiFranco expressed her frustration at perceiving, from an early age, a preferential treatment for males in the Church. She wrote:

Tradition and authority made no sense to me . . . [w]hy the insistence on male altar servers, many who by seventh grade were drinking on the railroad tracks . . . Was there something about boys that made them better than girls? . . . No man I knew looked or acted like Jesus. (McCafferty DiFranco, 2008, p. 57)

RCWP rhetoric focuses on Jesus’s Gospel message of “equality and justice for all including women . . . the poor, exploited, and marginalized” (“ARCWP About Us,” 2013, para. 4). RCWP bishop Patricia Fresen’s 2012 address at the Call To Action conference, entitled “Less Pope, More Jesus,” argued that the Catholic Church has lost her way by elevating ecclesial authority over Jesus’s mandate of “inclusivity and compassion” (p. 3) and abandoning his work of unmasking “all structures of patriarchal power” (p. 4). Therefore, overcoming social injustice assumes prime importance for the RCWP movement.

### **A New (Old) Priesthood**

In addition to condemning the patriarchal bias in the Church, RCWPs emphasize community over hierarchy, thus speaking in the deliberative voice. RCWPs draw sharp

distinctions between the hierarchical and patriarchal clerical tradition of the institutional Church and their own model of priesthood. RCWP bishop Patricia Fresen (2102) asserted, “We constantly need to distinguish, these days, between the institutional hierarchical church, on the one hand, and the church of the people (i.e. the baptized), on the other, because the two are moving in opposite directions” (p. 3). Fresen claims that the source of the Church’s problems lies in its hierarchal structure and suggests that the Church, as a body of faithful, has already begun to heal itself. The RCWP movement identifies itself as a part of the Church community that is trying to heal, rather than as an agent of healing apart from the Church. RCWP Alice Iaquina noted that the biggest challenge facing the Catholic Church is that “the centralization of power and authority [are] in contradiction to the collegiality and universality of the Church” (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013). She clarified that the members of RCWP movement “define the Church as the people of God, not a central core of individuals who happen to be in the Vatican City in Rome” (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013).

A hallmark of the deliberative voice is its acknowledgment of the role that listening plays in the process of truth discernment. The religious deliberative voice emphasizes the emergence of Truth through careful attention to multiple voices, as opposed to exclusively from a single authority. This deliberative vision is highlighted in RCWP Alice Iaquina’s observation that the Church hierarchy needs to listen more carefully to the Church community. She argued:

[They don’t do a very good job of listening. They do a lot of talking. They do a lot of telling. They don’t listen. You know, *Humanae Vitae* is a good example of that.

There were huge studies done, there were panels, there were commissions with married Catholics and psychologists, all kinds of people . . . . And that, all of that, got erased. I know that the listening commissions here in this diocese . . . Rembert Wiekland held *lot* of listening sessions with women and he was in charge of putting together a report on the status of women in the Catholic Church. And it was an *excellent* report. But, by the time Rome accepted it, they had completely revised it and cut everything. (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013)

RCWPs argue that the exclusionary and elitist traditions of the Roman Catholic clergy arise from the theology of “ontological change” (Fresen, 2012, p. 5), according to which a priest upon ordination is able to act *in persona Christi*, in a manner that is not possible for an unordained baptized Catholic. Fresen argues that this principle perpetuates a myth of clerical superiority and facilitates clerical abuse of authority. The RCWP priesthood, by contrast, adopts a “servant-leadership model” that attempts to collapse the chasm between clergy and community (Fresen, 2012, p. 6). RCWPs deliberately abandon the “clericalist model” for a non-hierarchical priesthood that follows Jesus’s “model of ministry [which] included footwashing, teaching, healing and seeing that people were fed” (Fresen, 2012, p. 6). RCWP Irene Senn explained:

I don’t think Jesus had in mind layer upon layer of bureaucracy or of hierarchical patriarchy. I think that’s what he came to undo, even within the Jewish religion. And so, what we need to do is flatten the Church . . . bring down the distance between people at different supposed layers of authority. (I. Senn, Interview, March 19, 2013)

The desire to level power differentials is consistent with the deliberative framework. Clerical authority is displaced in RCWP communities by a model of distributed authority, which encourages the community of lay members to perform many of the functions that are exclusively enacted by clergy in the institutional Catholic Church. The RCWP movement emphasizes small intimate house churches, in alignment with its feminist communal ethics, and its commitment to restore early church practices. RCWPs typically celebrate the Eucharist in congregants' homes, or small gathering places which are sometimes borrowed from other Christian denominations. Meehan (2008) has noted that this practice re-creates the small communal celebrations that were common among the early itinerant Christians, who often met in homes to escape persecution. RCWPs argue that house churches meet the needs of a local community in ways that are not possible for established Catholic parishes and that smaller congregations can better nurture and experience the full potential of a religious family.

During the Eucharistic celebration in house churches, the congregants usually join the priest in consecrating the bread and wine. This is a modification of the traditional Catholic service, in which the priest serves as the agent of consecration for the congregation. While the homilies are predominantly delivered by the priest in the institutional Church, during RCWP masses, homilies can include communal sharing of insights by congregants as well as the priest. The privileging of the congregants' capacity for spiritual insight, instead of assigning teaching responsibility exclusively to the priest, is a manifestation of the RCWPs' deliberative assumption that Truth emerges through dialogue. The participation of the lay community in functions that are otherwise reserved

exclusively for clergy reflects the RCWPs' belief that "the Eucharist belongs to the community and a genuine Eucharist happens when a community gathers to share the sacred bread and wine," rather than primarily through the actions of the officiating priest (Meehan, 2008, p. 46).

Fresen (2008) advanced the bold prediction that Church communities in the future are less likely to be organized around ordained priests and more likely to adopt a framework of different but equal ministries, such that all baptized persons can act *in persona Christi* according to their vocations, fostering "a discipleship of equals" (p. 31). RCWPs emphasize equality between the roles of priest and congregants. They encourage a distribution of roles according to each individual's gifts and argue that religious ministries cannot be assigned according to factors such as gender. They also reject the criterion of mandatory celibacy and embrace married and homosexual persons into the priesthood as well. RCWP Irene Senn observed, "Paul's letters talk about the gifts of the Holy Spirit and they're in all of us . . . I don't think the Spirit keeps track of anybody's gender" (I. Senn, Interview, March 19, 2013). She offered this as justification for the RCWPs' agenda of replacing the hierarchical structure of the institutional Church with a framework that acknowledges and fosters the spiritual gifts of all the faithful, without exclusions.

For the RCWP movement, priesthood is primarily a service to the community. The movement encourages an alternative financial relationship between its priests and their church communities. It argues that the financial dependence of traditional Roman Catholic priests, on either their bishops or their religious orders, encourages abuses of

power within the hierarchical Church structure. The RCWPs choose to be “worker-priests” (Fresen, 2008, p. 32). They support themselves financially with work outside their priestly ministries, so that priesthood remains a service rendered rather than a means of livelihood. The RCWP movement also takes deliberate measures to minimize hierarchical order within its clerical body, even as it recognizes that the growth of the movement necessitates the development of structures that risk ossifying into a hierarchy. For the purposes of administration and collaboration, worship communities are organized into Regions, rather than the typical institutional unit of a Catholic diocese. Although RCWP bishops represent their respective Regions, their duties are primarily pastoral, in contrast to the episcopal tradition in the Roman Catholic Church, which grants bishops administrative authority over a diocese. In the RCWP format, administration for each Region is coordinated by a leadership team, including a Regional Administrator and a Regional Coordinator, and the bishop (“RCWP Constitution,” 2012). Individuals on the leadership team are selected to their positions by the members of the respective Regions.

The RCWP organizational framework makes an effort to disperse power and broaden accountability. The movement has chosen the circle as a symbol of its organizational structure, in contrast to a pyramidal hierarchy. Regional circles are nested with a national circle. National circles, in turn, are represented within an international circle. Further, to ensure that the RCWP movement remains responsive to dynamic needs, the RCWP Constitution is open for review every two to three years by an *ad hoc* Structures Committee. RCWP Alice Iaquinta also noted that RCWPs sometimes help each other in decision-making through a deliberative model. She explained:



We've two Listservs. One is a business, for just, you know, official stuff. Then we have a Chat that . . . if we find things that are interesting, we put them out there, if we have a question, if we're struggling with an issue in our community, then we have these dialogues and people chime in from all over . . . . And part of what we try to do is *discern* decisions, so every voice, and everybody's happy.

That gets harder and harder to do. (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013)

Iaquina acknowledged that, while the RCWP movement was committed to resisting the hierarchical structure of the institutional Church, in practice, maintaining deliberative structures and processes was a continuing struggle. She observed:

[W]hen we we were going to incorporate as a 501C3, that requires you have your Board of Directors, become a business model, you have a President. All of a sudden, you're into hierarchy. That refuted everything we'd done up till then, which was circles of leadership, and that the Bishops were as equal to the Administrators at the Regions, as the Program Coordinators and the Vision Keepers. And so maintaining that integrity of that vision, the demands that the external world puts on, in terms of what it requires for the business model, that's tough. (A. Iaquina, Interview, March 15, 2013)

Despite the difficulties in practice, the RCWP movement insists that the deliberative vision is the essence of the Church that Christ intended.

### **Conclusion: The prophetic-deliberative bind**

In this chapter, I have argued that the Roman Catholic Women Priests combine rhetorics of piety and impiety. Although they enact a radical break with the institutional Catholic Church by seeking ordination, they continue to profess loyalty to Catholicism. They resolve this apparent contradiction by adopting the prophetic voice. Prophetic rhetoric issues a radical challenge to its audience. Prophets and their audiences are connected by the transcendent values they share. Thus prophets occupy a unique rhetorical position, in which they are simultaneously insiders and outsiders to their audience. Prophetic rhetoric can deliver harsh criticism, but the prophetic ethos is protected by the claim that the prophet is simply the emissary of the divine. Prophetic rhetoric is ultimately a rhetoric of hope and mercy because prophets address the audience in order to exhort them to repentance and renewal. RCWPs draw on the prophetic motif to legitimate their disobedience of Church Law. They accept their excommunications as a prophetic burden and maintain hope that their radical stance will be vindicated in the future, when their movement catalyzes a transformation of the Church and returns the Church to its Gospel roots.

The focus of the RCWPs' vision for reform is an emphasis on the communal Church, reflecting the deliberative voice. RCWPs see themselves as a movement of "grassroots communities" ("About RCWP," 2012, para. 1) who are fulfilling the promise of Vatican II by creating a Church that is more responsive to the *sensus fidelium* or the voice of the faithful. RCWPs emphasize that the role of the clergy is to listen more attentively to the needs of Church communities. The RCWP movement's vision for a

renewed Church is epitomized in its re-modeling of the priestly tradition. RCWPs deliberately dismantle the hierarchical dimensions of Catholic priesthood in order to achieve the ideal of servant-priesthood. Their communal focus is emphasized in Eucharistic celebrations that take place in small house churches, and in the RCWP organizational structure which emphasizes lateral connections over hierarchy.

Both the RCWP and, as will be illustrated in Chapter 5, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) defend feminist Catholicism using the prophetic and deliberative voices. However, I argue that the prophetic and the deliberative voices together create a discordance. There is an inherent rhetorical contradiction in the juxtaposition of these voices. The prophetic voice, as theorized by Darsey (1997), demands a resolute certainty in the prophet's claim to be God's direct messenger. This criterion conflicts with the deliberative vision that Catholic feminists hold for the Church. When speaking in the deliberative voice, Catholic feminists, present themselves merely as conduits for the voice of the larger Catholic community, rather than as exclusive messengers of the divine. The deliberative voice hesitates to grant Truth privileges to any one party. Catholic feminists desire a Church hierarchy that listens to the voice of the Catholic faithful. So, modeling a deliberative stance requires them to offer a similar open-mindedness. In a deliberative model, a priori assumptions are bracketed in favor of Truth that emerges when multiple voices engage dialogically. This open-mindedness is antithetical to the the prophets' unwavering conviction that they are the chosen messengers of divine Truth.

Although the tension between the prophetic and deliberative voices constrains Catholic feminists from harnessing the full rhetorical potential of either voice, they choose to speak alternatively in the two voices because each allows them a different rhetorical leverage. The prophetic voice allows Catholic feminists to understand their persecution as a burden that must be borne until the Church is renewed. However, Catholic feminists do not abandon the Church with the apocalyptic warnings of the prophet who cries, “Change your ways or else!”. Because Catholic feminists see themselves as part of the Church that is trying to heal, they cannot, like the prophet, be truly distant from their audience. RCWPs believe that a healed Church is one that acknowledges the deliberative nature of sacred Truth. In the deliberative model, all voices are welcome to engage. Therefore, healing requires engagement with, rather than rejection of, the Church hierarchy.

At the same time, members of the RCWP movement regard a more dialogic approach to gaining acceptance for female priesthood as futile, given the current Church environment and structure. Thus, they have decided that prophetic defiance is necessary to proclaim the Truth of radical equality. RCWPs have not given up hope for dialogue with the Vatican, but their rhetoric makes it clear that they have already identified the radical changes that are needed in the Church. They have chosen to enact change in the Church rather than await the opportunity to enter into a deliberative process with Church authorities. The balance between the prophetic and deliberative voices is, by no means, a static rhetorical position achieved through fixed rhetorical formulas. Rather, Catholic

feminists oscillate between these voices and, as I will show through comparison in the next Chapter, different groups of Catholic feminists favor one voice over the other.

The RCWPs privilege the prophetic voice. Their defiance of Canon Law enacts a prophetic rejection of the status quo and their ex-communications deny them the opportunity to engage directly with Church hierarchy. Nevertheless, the RCWPs' strident prophetic voice is tempered by their persistent efforts to model a more deliberative Church within their movement. Even as they claim certainty about divine sanction for an inclusive priesthood, they shun the certainty of the didactic role that is traditionally accorded to Catholic priests. Instead, they pursue a model of priesthood that deliberately erases markers of privilege and separation from the lay community, and emphasizes commonality between the priest and lay congregants, as well as a servant-orientation. In the next chapter, I analyze the rhetoric of the LCWR and illustrate how they also alternate between the prophetic and the deliberative voices. However, the LCWR presents a different type of Catholic feminist rhetoric, because it emphasizes the deliberative rather than the prophetic voice. Since the LCWR remains under Vatican jurisdiction, the members of the LCWR cannot exercise the radical inflexibility of the prophetic stance. The deliberative voice, on the other hand, allows them to maintain loyalty to the Magisterium, because it does not claim moral superiority.

## **Chapter 5: The LCWR Defends Feminism**

In April 2012, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) released the Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). The Assessment delivered a somber warning to the organization that represents the majority of U.S. Catholic nuns. In the document, the CDF noted, "The current doctrinal and pastoral situation of the LCWR is grave and a matter of serious concern . . ." ("Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, p. 3). Specifically, the CDF claimed that the LCWR was guilty of diminishing "the fundamental Christological center" of religious life, of advocating positions "not in agreement with the Church's teaching," and of promoting "radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith" (pp. 2-3). The Assessment asserted that:

As an entity approved by the Holy See for the coordination and support of religious Communities in the United States, LCWR also has a positive responsibility for the promotion of the faith and for providing its member Communities and the wider Catholic public with clear and persuasive positions in support of the Church's vision of religious life. ("Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, p. 5)

In the Assessment, the Vatican argued that the LCWR's feminist positions were radical because they defied the teachings of the Magisterium. For the Vatican, being Catholic requires fidelity to the Magisterium. Accordingly, the Vatican charged the LCWR with promoting inauthentic Catholicism because it allowed the expression of certain theologies that stretched or challenged official Church teachings. The Doctrinal Assessment upheld the Magisterium as the exclusive teaching authority of the Church and emphasized that

religious life is lived most fully through an “allegiance of mind and heart to the Magisterium of the Bishops” (“Doctrinal Assessment,” 2012, p. 1). Further, the Assessment designated an “Archbishop Delegate, assisted by two Bishops, for review, guidance and approval, where necessary, of the work of the LCWR” in order to ensure “conformity to the teachings and discipline of the Church” (p. 7).

In this chapter, I analyze the LCWR’s responses to the Doctrinal Assessment, by piecing together a rhetorical text that is comprised of information from the LCWR website, its public statements, public addresses by its leadership, media reports, media interviews, and two personal interviews that I conducted with the 2012-2013 President of the LCWR, and the LCWR’s Executive Director. Given that the LCWR, an all-female organization, found itself in a confrontation with the all-male Catholic hierarchy, and that the Doctrinal Assessment specifically named radical feminism as one of the Vatican’s concerns, the controversy between the Vatican and the LCWR has been read predominantly as a clash between a patriarchal bias in the Catholic Church and a struggle to assert Catholic feminism. In a 2013 CBS interview, then president of the LCWR, Sr. Florence Deacon, was asked to interpret the Vatican’s claim about the radical feminist leanings of her organization. Sr. Deacon replied that she was willing to accept the label, if by feminism the Vatican meant “the radical idea that women are people” (“Rebel Nun Talks,” 2013). By repositioning the term *radical* from a description of the LCWR to the common sense assumption that women are equal humans with men, Sr. Florence argued that the CDF’s discomfort with the LCWR stems from the Vatican’s refusal to recognize that its patriarchal traditions have distorted the Catholic faith by diminishing the value of female personhood. In a personal interview that I conducted with Sr. Deacon, she

expressed hope that the promise of the Second Vatican Council would be fulfilled by including more women at higher levels of the Church's decision-making apparatus, particularly in the roles of "advisors and consultants," because she believed that "a lot of the decisions being made would be . . . better decisions if both men's and women's minds were put at it, and men's and women's experiences were taken into account" (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). Sr. Deacon's observations frame the clash between the LCWR and the Vatican in feminist terms, as a lack of responsiveness on the part of the Church establishment to female experiences and female spiritual potential within the Church.

Former LCWR president, Sr. Pat Farrell, when asked about her reaction to the Vatican's accusation that the LCWR is pursuing "radical feminist themes," described the term *radical* as "polarizing" and suggested that the Vatican's use of the term implied an underlying fear of the potential for women's roles in the Church ("An American Nun Responds," 2012, para. 58). She decoupled the terms radical and feminism, arguing that a critique of Church traditions that diminish "the value and place of women" does not represent a radical rejection of the Church. Rather, a feminist challenge is both a necessary and "sincere investigation into . . . a masculine bias" that pervades Church structures and interpretations ("An American Nun Responds," 2012, para. 57-58).

In a public statement, the LCWR expressed that it "was stunned by the conclusion of the doctrinal assessment" and "taken by surprise by the gravity of the mandate" ("LCWR Statement from Presidency," 2012, para. 1). The LCWR's engagement with the hierarchy in the wake of the Doctrinal Assessment has been



restrained and cautious. Soon after the Assessment was issued, the LCWR announced that it “plans to move slowly . . . engage in dialogue where possible and be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit” (“LCWR Board To Discuss CDF Assessment,” 2012, para. 1). LCWR members encouraged their leadership to engage with the Church hierarchy “from a stance of deep prayer that values mutual respect, careful listening, and open dialogue” (“Leadership Conference of Women Religious Decides Next Steps,” 2012, para. 6). Nevertheless, the LCWR also made it clear that its “officers will proceed with these discussions as long as possible, but will reconsider if [it] is forced to compromise the integrity of its mission” (“Leadership Conference of Women Religious Decides,” 2012, para. 6).

In an NPR interview, former LCWR president Sr. Pat Farrell surveyed four possible options for the organization’s response to the Vatican’s Doctrinal Assessment mandate: unquestioned compliance, non-compliance to determine how the Vatican will respond, canonically disbanding the LCWR as an organization so that it is no longer under the jurisdiction of the Vatican, or, what Sr. Farrell advocated as her preference, “to see if we can somehow, in a spirit of nonviolent strategizing, look for some maybe third way that refuses to just define the mandate and the issues in such black and white terms” (“An American Nun Responds,” 2012, para. 13). She clarified that the LCWR’s intent was not to abandon the Church but “to respond with integrity” to the Assessment (“An American Nun Responds,” 2012, para. 13).

The LCWR’s public responses to the Doctrinal Assessment indicate its unwillingness to yield to the CDF’s pressure without a process of dialogue. While the

LCWR affirms its desire to remain in communion with the Church, it refuses to accept, without discussion, the Vatican's accusation that it pursues radical theologies that conflict with authentic Catholicism. As Sr. Farrell indicated, the challenge for Catholic feminism is to dissolve some of the "black and white terms" ("An American Nun Responds," 2012, para. 13) in which the Vatican defines fidelity to Catholicism and to argue that Catholicism is not antithetical to, but rather affirming of, dialogue to resolve questions about lived faith experiences. In a personal interview, Executive Director of the LCWR Sr. Janet Mock wondered whether "the institutional Church has begun to grasp what it means to be Church in a postmodern world" (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). Sr. Mock expressed concern that the "institutional Church is very much wedded to . . . a premodern world view, where things are quite clear and very right or very wrong," a perspective which overlooks the "complexities" of both Catholic life and postmodern life (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). The impasse between the Vatican and the LCWR can be read, from the LCWR's perspective, as a struggle to affirm the compatibility between feminism and Catholicism, and to argue that social change does not necessarily represent a departure from the divine plan, but may in fact be a part of its unfolding.

Both of my LCWR interviewees, former President Sr. Florence Deacon, and Executive Director Sr. Janet Mock, identified themselves as strong feminists and committed Catholic sisters. Their synthesis of feminism and Catholicism echoes throughout the LCWR's public rhetoric as well. While the Vatican names radical feminism as one of its concerns about the LCWR, the sisters of the LCWR assert that their feminism does not represent a radical break from Catholicism but is, instead, an

effort to live out the Gospel message more fully and emulate Christ's example of radical inclusivity. Sr. Deacon observed, "I do consider Jesus a feminist" (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2103). She explained that in "later periods of history, the culture won over Jesus's attitudes towards women and . . . theologians considered women misbegotten males" (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2103). Sr. Mock also justified the LCWR's feminist concerns by emphasizing that they are congruent with Jesus's mission. She asserted that:

[W]e would attest to a Christological center to our life. Our belief system is rooted in a trinitarian God. And our understanding of God becoming human and that continuing . . . the idea that we are together becoming the Christ, the more we make choices in favor of care for the earth, the more we make choices [inaudible] in terms of peace-building and the eradication of abject poverty in the world. That liberates the Christ in our midst. So, it's *very* Christological. (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013)

Sr. Mock clarified that the LCWR's feminism is not restricted to women's issues in the Church and is concerned with broader issues of justice. She claimed, "[T]he feminist agenda is . . . not just about women, it's about . . . equality and . . . enhancing the dignity of everybody" (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013).

For the Vatican, Catholic identity is determined by primarily by obedience to the Magisterium. For the sisters of the LCWR, on the other hand, a Catholic identity is rooted essentially in the Gospel message. Sr. Deacon observed that, due to a recent conservative direction taken by the Catholic hierarchy, discussions of Catholic identity have become

less about “Let’s follow the Gospel more closely” and more about “Let’s tighten the tent” (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25 2013). The clash between the Vatican’s and the LCWR’s articulations of authentic Catholicism center on whether Catholicism is demonstrated predominantly by obedience to the Magisterium or by a practice-oriented obedience to the Gospel, in which the Gospel message is to be found and lived in the imperfections of everyday life. The LCWR believes that, as an organization of women religious who minister to lay Catholic communities, its role is to bring to the attention of the Catholic hierarchy, the voices of those at the margins of society, “[t]o raise up for the Church unmet needs [and] questions,” so that the Church hierarchy can discern “what really is of God and what really isn’t of God” (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). The LCWR argues for its role vis-à-vis the Church hierarchy by articulating its claims through the deliberative and prophetic voices. In the sections that follow, I will analyze examples from LCWR rhetoric that illustrate how these two voices facilitate the LCWR’s rebuttal to the CDF’s indictment of its radical feminism.

### **Embracing Uncertainty: The LCWR’s Deliberative Voice**

The LCWR’s justifications for the compatibility between feminism and Catholicism reflect the deliberative voice because the LCWR regards divine will as continuously evolving. The LCWR also acknowledges that divine Truth can emerge in the ordinariness of everyday life and is not exclusively mediated through the Church’s hierarchical authority. This view of divine revelation contrasts sharply with the orthodox conviction that God’s Truths have already been revealed and that they are interpreted

exclusively by the Magisterium. As I have noted in Chapter 2, the Second Vatican Council produced a fervor for “dialogical discernment and decision making” practices in the Catholic Church. Swept up in the spirit of Church reform, various orders of women religious enthusiastically explored the dialogical process (Hinze, 2006). This was also true of the LCWR. The Vatican’s 2012 Doctrinal Assessment criticized, in particular, the *Systems Thinking Handbook*, an educational resource developed by the LCWR for its members. The Vatican asserted that the decision-making model recommended in the handbook did not rely on a sound “doctrinal foundation” and instead suggested “strategies for dialogue . . . when sisters disagree about basic matters of Catholic faith or moral practice” (“Doctrinal Assessment,” 2012, p. 6). The CDF expressed concern that “it is not clear whether this dialogue is directed toward the reception of Church teaching” (“Doctrinal Assessment,” 2012, p. 6).

The deliberative voice is clear in the LCWR’s response to the Church hierarchy’s accusations. Although the Vatican argued that LCWR members risk “plac[ing] themselves outside the Church’s teaching” (“Doctrinal Assessment,” 2012, p. 3), the LCWR claims faithfulness to Catholicism because it privileges a communal Church to complement the Vatican’s institutional emphasis. The LCWR argues that the institutional Church needs to be more attentive to its non-clerical members and that the *sensus fidelium* or voice of the faithful has a role to play in informing the Magisterium’s formulation of Church teaching. The LCWR’s deliberative voice also reminds the Church hierarchy that God’s will for creation continues to emerge through scientific and social

development and therefore the Magisterium needs to address these changes through theological reflection.

At the LCWR's 2012 annual assembly, outgoing President Sr. Pat Farrell delivered a speech entitled *Navigating the Shifts*, which offered a roadmap to guide LCWR members through the crisis of the Doctrinal Assessment. Several times throughout her speech Sr. Farrell asserted a belief in communal discernment. She framed the "impasse" between the Vatican and the LCWR as a positive opportunity, assuring her LCWR sisters that "God [will] carve out a deeper knowing in us" (Farrell, 2012, p. 2). Sr. Farrell's notion of discernment suggests an openness to revelation through "collective wisdom" (p. 2). She lamented the lack of tolerance for dissent in the Church, wondering whether "a Church that has committed to honor the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful" is truly open to hearing the feedback of its community (p. 3). She used the metaphor of a physical body that has lost its ability to feel pain to emphasize the dangers that await a Church that does not heed the voices of its faithful. Sr. Farrell's commitment to communal deliberation is most clearly articulated when she shared the following quotation from St. Augustine:

Let us, on both sides, lay aside all arrogance. Let us not, on either side, claim that we have already discovered the truth. Let us seek it together as something which is known to neither of us. For then only may we seek it, lovingly and tranquilly, if there be no bold presumption that it is already discovered and possessed. (Farrell, 2012, pp. 3-4)

Sr. Farrell used the quotation above to illustrate the ethic needed for “civil discourse” with the Vatican (Farrell, 2012, p. 3). She is unwilling to assign the privilege of Truth discovery exclusively to Church authorities. However, neither does she claim this privilege exclusively for the LCWR. Rather, she locates her hope in a process of joint discernment. To justify this hope, Sr. Farrell needed to question the doctrinal premise that God’s Truths are legitimately defined only by the Magisterium. Using the deliberative voice, she argued that the capacity for discerning divine will extends beyond the office of the Magisterium. She observed that an internal “compass” has shown God’s way to women religious over the years, and she suggested that God’s call may be experienced “within our own spiritual DNA” (p. 3). She emphasized that “communal discernment and decision making” reflect the spirit of Vatican II, which inspired changes within congregations of women religious, encouraging them to “move from a hierarchically structured lifestyle . . . to a more horizontal model” within their own congregations (p. 5).

Within a deliberative framework, rhetors are committed to encouraging broader participation and valuing alternative perspectives. The LCWR’s deliberative voice cautions against a faith practice that privileges fidelity to the Center at the cost of acknowledging the guidance of the Spirit at the margins. Sr. Farrell spoke in the deliberative voice when she expressed “solidarity with the marginalized” (Farrell, 2012, p. 4), arguing that they experience a “privileged place of encounter with God” (p. 4). Contrary to the view that those who struggle on the margins are in need of hearing God’s Truth, Sr. Farrell observed that the marginalized can, themselves, be the beacons of divine Truth. She argued that “[p]eople on the margins who are less able to and less

invested in keeping up appearances, often have an uncanny ability to name things as they are” and that women religious who work among communities of marginalized people need to recognize the truths revealed to them in the communities they serve, so that they can “balance . . . life on the periphery with fidelity to the center” (p. 4). Thus, the LCWR’s deliberative voice argues that Truth discernment is not only a communal process but that it is also a gift available to all human beings, and in a special way to those who are considered least important in society, because God’s “preference is always for the outcast” (p. 4).

LCWR Executive Director Sr. Mock explained that divine will may be discerned through a dialectic between Church teaching and the lived faith experiences of the community. She observed, “It’s not that we’re against promoting what they [the Church hierarchy] teach. But, when we question what they teach, we have to have a framework where we can raise those questions” (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). She clarified that the vocation of religious life draws Catholic sisters to serve “at the edges of society” (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013), where they encounter the needs of Catholic faithful who are often not acknowledged by the institutional Church. She believes that it is the role of women religious to bring these needs to the attention of the Church establishment and to raise questions about Church teaching when it invalidates the lived experiences of many faithful. Clarifying the mutuality between the roles of the LCWR and the Vatican, she stated:

[I]t’s our job to raise those kinds of questions. It’s their job to take that question and do some serious theological reflection . . . and together, you know, be



influenced . . . we're influenced by what they come up with after serious thought and they have to be influenced by what we're hearing at the margins of society, what isn't working for the ordinary people. (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013)

The deliberative voice welcomes the experience of all participants in the deliberative process and therefore encourages a radical inclusivity. Former President Sr. Florence Deacon emphasized this ethic in her hope for a Church that is “willing to listen to diversity of ideas . . . of experiences . . . to people’s hopes and dreams and to understand how sometimes it’s quite a challenge to live the Gospel in the midst of . . . family life [and] job stress” (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). Further, she encourages the Church to “understand the whole diversity of human experience and how the incarnation . . . sanctif[ies] the whole human experience” (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). She justifies her call for inclusivity with Christ’s example. Sr. Deacon supported her claim that the institutional Church needs to become more inclusive of women, by highlighting signs in the Gospels of Jesus’s affirmation of women in his teaching and ministry. She argued:

[A] real reading of the Gospels would indicate that Jesus Christ had strong relationships with women, that he had women disciples, women among his closest friends, that when he began to teach, . . . he used the experiences of women in his teaching, he used the experience of home makers, bread makers, spinners of cloth, when he told his parables . . . . So, in my mind, there’s a whole lot of opportunity if people take Jesus Christ as their example for integrating women and their

experiences much more wholesomely into the mission of the Church. (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013).

Catholic feminists draw their argument for a more inclusive Church from the same scriptural resources that inform the Magisterium's formulation of Church teaching. However, they foreground aspects of Scripture that are typically backgrounded in the hegemonic readings.

The deliberative voice also emphasizes a processual dimension to Truth. Whereas the voice of the Church hierarchy proclaims and protects already revealed Truths, the LCWR emphasizes revelation as ongoing rather than complete. In her speech *Navigating the Shifts*, Sr. Farrell referred to a “cosmic breaking down and breaking through,” explaining that “many institutions, traditions, and structures seem to be withering” because “[t]he human family is not served by individualism, patriarchy, a scarcity mentality, or competition” (Farrell, 2012, p. 2). Sr. Farrell was careful to clarify that her belief in the continuity of revelation does not dismiss past Truth commitments. She explained that “evolutionary advance . . . in no way negates or undervalues what went before,” and that creation continues to be birthed by God's spirit (Farrell, 2012, p. 2).

The religious deliberative voice shows an openness to considering a divine plan at work in social changes. Former LCWR President Sr. Deacon maintained:

[T]here have been a lot of scientific advances in human anthropology and psychology and human sexuality, we're understanding more and more about how God created us and I would hope for the openness, that the hierarchy could

integrate those new scientific understandings with Church teaching.” (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013)

A belief in ongoing revelation allows the LCWR to embrace the ambiguities of a postmodern world. Sr. Mock contended that the Vatican’s “rigid interpretation of doctrine” does not adequately address the complexities that confront the Catholic faithful in a pluralistic society. She clarified that an acknowledgment of pluralism does not amount to an acceptance of “relativism” (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). She noted of her own experience of Catholic faith:

[I]t’s very wrapped up in a formation from my very early years . . . the rituals and symbols of the Catholic faith that gave me a framework, out of which to look at the world, and at my deepest center that still holds. (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013)

She explained that this “deep rootedness” is what allows her “to explore all kinds of other worldviews” (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). Sr. Mock argued that “the challenge for . . . any of the world religions is to provide enough structure that holds the integrity of the human being in place while he or she . . . just explores the world” (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). Her observations illuminate how Catholic feminists balance their commitment to the Catholic faith with an orientation that engages pluralism and ambiguity.

The spirit of deliberation also permeates the LCWR’s organizational decision-making process. The leadership team of the LCWR is comprised of the current president, the past president, and the president-elect. Each position is held for the duration of a year.

Sr. Mock noted that decision-making by the LCWR leadership is a collaborative process between the three leaders and the Executive Director. She elaborated:

[W]e make all our decisions together and that's been a wonderful process because we don't always come at things from the same angle and what we've been able to do is hold all the diversity of thought among us, because . . . each of us has a piece of the truth and we hold it until we go to a deeper level and let ourselves be influenced by one another and then, *always*, we come to a much better decision about the way to go. (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013)

The spirit of collaboration spills over into the larger body of the LCWR as well. After the release of Doctrinal Assessment, all LCWR members had a chance to weigh in at the 2012 Annual Assembly. Trained facilitators led the women through contemplation and reflection. At the end of the four-day assembly, the LCWR Communications Director, Sr. Annmarie Sanders, developed a one-page statement that captured what she had been hearing throughout the reflection process. Thus, the response of the LCWR to the Vatican's Assessment took into account the input of the whole body of LCWR members. Not only was the dialogic process enacted within the LCWR, but it was the focal point of the LCWR's response to the Vatican as well. The women religious of the LCWR asked their leadership team "to proceed in dialogue . . . with the bishops . . . but not violate [their] own integrity as a organization" (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013).

The dialogic process envisioned by the LCWR is not a matter of simple, strategic negotiation with the Vatican, but rather a willingness to trust that when parties in the dialogue balance conviction with openness, God's Spirit works through the process to

reveal Truth. Executive Director Sr. Janet Mock described the LCWR's vision of dialogue in the following way:

[O]ur definition of dialogue is rooted in real conversation and, the Latin root for conversation is *conversion*. So we talk, you and I talk, and I hear what you say which illuminates my own thinking and I have the capacity to be changed by you . . . as I really listen to you. And vice versa. (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013)

This definition of dialogue affirms the possibility of transformation for all participants. It reflects Gastil's (2008) definition of the deliberative process, namely the potential for enlightened understanding such that all participants emerge from the deliberative process clearer not only about their own views but those of the other participants as well.

### **Radical like Jesus: The LCWR's Prophetic Voice**

Like the women of the RCWP movement, the members of the LCWR also support their identity as Catholic feminists by claiming a prophetic role vis-à-vis the Church hierarchy. However, the prophetic voice of the LCWR is much less strident than that of the RCWP. As I have explained in Chapter 4, the juxtaposition of the prophetic and deliberative voices creates a rhetorical configuration that is charged with an inherent tension. The resoluteness of the prophetic stance must be softened when committing to deliberation, while the receptiveness and flexibility needed for deliberation must be toughened to confront the patriarchal power structure with the prophetic voice. The RCWPs and the LCWR oscillate between the two rhetorical voices. Further, in each case,

one of the rhetorical voices takes precedence over the other. The relative emphasis on the prophetic or the deliberative voice depends on the level of engagement that the women can hope to have with the Church hierarchy. The Church's ex-communications of women priests rejects any possibility of engagement between the RCWPs and Church officials. Although the RCWPs maintain hope that they will eventually be recognized by the Church, they have chosen a strategy that currently alienates them from the institution. Their willingness to incur punishment from the very audience they hope to persuade illustrates the rhetorical position of the prophet who, driven by the force of a divine message, persists despite rejection.

In contrast, the prophetic voice of the LCWR speaks more mildly. The LCWR continues to be under Vatican jurisdiction. Even though the Doctrinal Assessment issued a serious warning to the LCWR, the CDF ultimately emphasized the Vatican's desire for continued engagement with the LCWR and its hope that the LCWR will be reformed by following the CDF's Mandate. The LCWR, in turn, has clarified its willingness to engage with the Church hierarchy. Therefore, the LCWR's rhetorical orientation toward the Vatican is dominated by the deliberative voice, which resists claiming a position of moral superiority, and instead both offers and seeks a commitment to listening and deliberation. This does not mean that the rhetoric of the LCWR eschews prophetic tones entirely. I argue that the prophetic voice, however muted, is necessary for the LCWR to maintain assertiveness in discussions with the Vatican and to ensure that the objectives and practices of the LCWR are not dismissed without fair discussion.

The prophetic tradition in Christianity offers clear precedent for voices that are misunderstood and condemned because their messages challenge the status quo. In one sense, the prophet is set apart from the audience as a divine emissary; in another, prophet and audience are connected by a common rhetorical heritage, which includes the sacred principles that serve as grounds for prophetic claims. Darsey (1997) argued that prophetic rhetoric performs an “epideictic function” because it “both depends on and recreates community” (p. 111). The prophetic voice reminds the audience of its existing covenant with God and confronts the audience with its failure to keep that covenant. Assuming a prophetic role, the LCWR holds the institutional Church accountable to the demands of the Gospel and exhorts the Church establishment to recognize that its emphasis on hierarchy has distorted Jesus’s message of radical equality. With the prophetic voice, the LCWR also urges the Catholic hierarchy to fulfill the promises made at the Second Vatican Council to recognize more fully the *sensus fidelium* or voice of the faithful as a medium through which God’s Spirit can guide the Church.

In her 2012 speech, former LCWR President Sr. Pat Farrell clarified that an authentic prophetic voice is recognizable because it speaks with “the freshness and freedom of the Gospel: open, and favoring the disenfranchised” (Farrell, 2012, p. 3). She argued that the prophetic voice often challenges structural inequalities to find “human pain and unmet need” and it “urges action and change” (p. 3). Sr. Farrell understands prophecy to be “both God’s gift as well as the product of rigorous asceticism,” requiring an individual to cultivate a “rootedness in God” and a clear reading of reality, such that the prophet can “be a voice of conscience” (p. 3). By assuming a prophetic stance, the

LCWR defends itself against the accusation that it is straying away from Church teaching, and affirms its allegiance to Catholicism, even as it highlights current weaknesses in the Church.

Darsey (1997) has noted that “[t]he most accessible evidence of the prophet’s radicalism is [an] opposition to the regnant power structure” (p. 20). He observed that prophets in the Old Testament “measured the performance of kings against the incontrovertible moral standards” of Yahweh’s covenant and condemned their “substitution of power for righteousness” (p. 20). Prophetic rhetoric is simultaneously conservative and radical. Since the prophet is merely a messenger for the divine, prophetic rhetoric “is conservative in that it has no power of invention; it can only reveal that which was already there” (p. 20). On the other hand, prophetic rhetoric is “profoundly radical . . . in its engagement of society at its root” (p. 20). This rhetorical flexibility inherent in the prophetic voice allows the LCWR to explain its confrontation with the Church hierarchy as a consequence of its duty to follow the Gospel. While refuting the charges of the Doctrinal Assessment, the LCWR draws attention to the Church hierarchy’s failures to adhere to the Gospel message and fulfill the promises of the Second Vatican Council. LCWR President Sr. Florence Deacon noted that the institutional Church does not always “balance [Church] teaching with mercy in the best way” (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). Further, she observed that the promises of Vatican II to incorporate women more fully into the Church have “not been realized” (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). Sr. Deacon modeled the prophetic voice, holding its audience accountable to sacred principles, when she argued:



I would want a hierarchy that sees itself truly as servant-leader, that is committed to the Church as the people of God, understands that the Spirit moves among all of us, and takes seriously its responsibility of teacher, but understands that mercy and a pastoral approach is of the utmost importance . . . . They have to be humble servants committed to the Gospel. (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2103)

Although prophetic rhetoric is judgmental, it is also a rhetoric driven by optimism for change (Darsey, 1997). The relationship between prophet and audience is not entirely antagonistic. Even as prophets remind audiences of their failures, they illuminate the path of the divine plan and offer hope of reconciliation with God. Similarly, the LCWR leadership expresses optimism that the organization's time of trial will serve as a stimulus for reflection and change within the Church. Sr. Deacon envisaged that the crisis with the Vatican will "start an international conversation around some of the issues that are implied in the Doctrinal Assessment" and facilitate an engagement between "different ways of understanding Church [and] different ways of understanding the Gospel" (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013).

Sr. Mock described the Doctrinal Assessment as a "catalyst" for "the voice of the laity in the Church" (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). In the wake of the Vatican's censure, the LCWR was "flooded with emails and letters" from Catholic faithful who not only expressed their support but shared their own faith struggles (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). Emphasizing the relevance of the Doctrinal Assessment for the Church as a whole, Sr. Farrell noted that the LCWR has received a "groundswell of support" from members of male religious orders as well as from Catholic laity. She provided evidence

by offering an excerpt from one of the letters sent to her by an LCWR supporter, who was eager that “this crisis be treated as the 21st century catalyst for open debate and a rush of fresh air through every stained glass window in the land” (Farrell, 2012, p. 1).

The prophetic voice helps the LCWR re-frame the Doctrinal Assessment in a way that offers hope rather than despair. The Vatican’s criticism evoked strong reactions in the LCWR’s members. Although the LCWR had been aware of the Vatican’s concern for a while, it did not anticipate the severity of the Vatican’s ultimate indictment in the Doctrinal Assessment, or the level of oversight required by subsequent Mandate. Sr. Deacon described the Vatican’s denunciation as “extremely painful” because she felt that the Church hierarchy had misunderstood the LCWR’s mission (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). Sr. Mock confirmed that the Assessment’s verdict was “stunning . . . and shocking” for the LCWR (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). Describing the initial reactions among LCWR members, she said:

[W]e had a board meeting and the first thing we did was we hired a psychologist to meet with us for about two hours . . . she led us through a process to really express our reaction. And that was a wonderful thing because people really did verbalize their anger. But because they were able to verbalize their anger, they got in touch with a deeper emotion which was sadness. Such deep sadness that we would be accused of just being frivolous with Church theology . . . (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013)

These observations evoke the prophetic lament. Prophets often mourn the vilification and torment they are forced to bear. Nevertheless, they accept their tribulations as a necessary burden that must be endured until the audience is moved to heed their prophetic message.

Members of the LCWR see the divine hand at work in their crisis, believing, with prophetic assurance, that the turmoil they are experiencing will bear fruit by inspiring renewal in the Church. In her speech *Navigating the Shifts*, Sr. Farrell described the LCWR crisis as part of a tumultuous time of change. She observed “all of creation is groaning in one great act of giving birth” while “[t]he Spirit of God still hovers over the chaos” (Farrell, 2012, p. 2). The tenacity of the prophetic voice and its hope for eventual vindication also emerged in her interpretation of Jesus’s parable about the mustard seed. At the end of her speech, she reflected on the weed-like nature of the mustard plant, emphasizing its tendency to grow “prolifically” and “take over whole fields of cultivated crops” (p. 7). She interpreted the metaphor of the mustard seed as a symbol of hope that those “who pledge [their] lives to a radical following of Jesus can expect to be seen as pesty [sic] weeds . . . but that if the weeds of God’s Reign are stomped out in one place they will crop up in another” (p. 7). Through the mustard seed metaphor, she reminded her audience that, although Doctrinal Assessment criticized the efforts of the LCWR, “there is no political or ecclesiastical herbicide that can wipe out the movement of God’s Spirit” (p. 7). She encouraged her LCWR sisters to consider that they may, through the impasse of the Doctrinal Assessment, be living out the mysterious will of God for the Church. The steadfastness advocated by Sr. Farrell reflects an “uncompromising . . . stance toward a reluctant audience,” that is typical of the prophetic tradition (Darsey,

1997, p. 16). The LCWR speaks in the prophetic voice to remain resolute in the context of the Doctrinal Assessment and to argue that its role is not only to affirm and promote Church teaching, but to urge the hierarchy to pay greater attention to the voices that emerge from the margins of the Church community.

Perhaps anticipating the prophetic voice as a line of defense, the Vatican's Doctrinal Assessment warned that prophecy can be misunderstood. The Assessment asserted that "true prophecy is a grace which accompanies the exercise of the responsibilities of the Christian life . . . regulated and verified by the Church's faith and teaching office" ("Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, p. 5). Further, the Assessment denounced prophetic claims made on the grounds of "theological intuition," that challenge Church teachings ("Doctrinal Assessment," 2012, p. 5). For the Vatican, the true prophetic voice is recognized by its fidelity to the teachings of the Magisterium. For the women religious of the LCWR, on the other hand, the prophetic voice is one that confronts hierarchical and patriarchal traditions in the Church. Sr. Deacon clarified the prophetic calling of women religious when she asserted:

[S]isters are not part of the hierarchy, we're not a teaching arm of the Church and . . . we have a role to be prophetic and at times that means saying what people don't want to hear. And, we need to be true to that part too, but always in love, always in light of the Gospel, always in light of the good of the entire Church. (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013)

From the LCWR's perspective, challenging the status quo is framed not as an act of wanton disobedience but as an act of faithfulness to the Gospel. Sr. Deacon argued that to

speaking prophetically is “to learn to look through the eyes of the Spirit and the Gospels, to look at what of the culture is true and valid and good and what of the culture needs to change” (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013).

By assuming a prophetic role, the LCWR insists that challenging Church tradition does not amount to rejecting Catholicism. Instead, the LCWR balances the Vatican’s emphasis on the Magisterium with a call for greater attention to the communal Church, and a greater responsiveness to the *sensus fidelium* or the voice of the Catholic faithful. This focus on the *sensus fidelium*, however, is the very reason why the LCWR is unable to fully realize the prophetic voice. The deliberative voice, which is consistent with a feminist rhetorical stance, eschews moral superiority. Consequently, even as the LCWR asserts itself prophetically, its prophetic voice is mitigated by its commitment to collaborative discernment.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) alternates between the deliberative and prophetic voices in defending itself against the criticisms of the Doctrinal Assessment. Because the prophetic and deliberative voices make contradictory assumptions, the LCWR does not fully enact the rhetorical potential of either voice. Nevertheless, it chooses to speak both deliberatively and prophetically to advocate its identity and mission. As Catholic feminists, the women of the LCWR are committed to a more deliberative vision of the Church. In particular, because of their ministerial work in communities, the women identify themselves as

spokespersons for the voiceless and believe their role is to remind the institutional Church to be responsive to the faith needs of those who are currently ignored or marginalized by Church teaching. Since their calling compels them to highlight weaknesses in the Church's outreach to its communities, they claim a prophetic role vis-à-vis the Church hierarchy. As prophets expose and condemn injustices and remind their audiences of sacred principles, the women of the LCWR argue that their challenge to the institutional Church is a call to revive the message of radical equality at the heart of the Gospel. At the same time, the LCWR remains an organization under the Vatican's supervision and its members acknowledge the authority of the Magisterium. This commitment requires a careful rhetorical negotiation between asserting their mission and submitting to the Vatican's authority. Since the LCWR's goal is to encourage the Church establishment toward greater responsiveness to the voice of the faithful, they themselves must model an orientation of humility and open-mindedness in their negotiations with the Church hierarchy. Although the juxtaposition of the prophetic and deliberative voices is discordant, the dual commitments of Catholic feminists, to dismantling patriarchal bias and nurturing a more deliberative vision for the Church, compel them to oscillate between both voices. In the case of the LCWR, its continued engagement with the Vatican demands that the deliberative voice resonate more strongly than the prophetic voice.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

It has been my overall aim in this dissertation to illuminate two cases of rhetorical engagement between the Catholic hierarchy and Catholic feminists in the contemporary Church. I have conceptualized this engagement as a chorus of three voices: the voice of the Church hierarchy, the voice of the Roman Catholic Women Priests (RCWP), and the voice of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). In juxtaposing my analyses of the three voices, I have demonstrated how the Vatican protects Catholic doctrine and tradition by excluding and censoring feminist voices, identifying them as heretical or radical. I have also explained how two groups of Catholic women who champion feminist causes advocate for and defend their positions vis-à-vis the Catholic hierarchy. In this chapter, I review key arguments I have made in the dissertation and explain how they contribute to scholarship on rhetorical theory and criticism.

First, I review the rhetorical challenges facing Catholic feminists who must reconcile their loyalty to a traditionally patriarchal religion with their feminist convictions, which requires them to juxtapose rhetorics of piety and impiety. Catholic feminists attempt to strike this balance by alternating between the prophetic voice and the deliberative voice. This theoretical framework has the potential to illuminate the rhetorical dynamics of other struggles, in which a minority group confronts the establishment with the ultimate purpose of reforming the whole community. Second, my analyses of the RCWP and the LCWR also challenge the claim that fundamentalist and progressive positions are mutually exclusive (Crowley, 2006). I argue instead that religious progressive rhetoric can retain fundamentalist commitments, even as it

questions the certainty of interpretation that is the hallmark of fundamentalism. Finally, I end with an epilogue, that briefly analyzes the change in the Church's institutional voice since the new Pope Francis replaced his predecessor Pope Benedict in 2013. Although the new pope has noticeably softened the Vatican's tone and made unprecedented strides in validating the communal Church, there has been no indication that the Church will alter its position on the RCWP and the LCWR.

### **Prophetic and deliberative responses to the doctrinal voice**

The institutional Church, wary of postmodern threats to the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, protects Catholic teaching from feminist challenges by framing them as heretical or radical. The criteria by which feminist positions are deemed as such remains firmly within the Vatican's control. Feminist positions are evaluated in terms of whether they deviate from the teachings of the Magisterium. In condemning or censuring feminist voices, the Church establishment speaks in the doctrinal voice. Identified as a rhetorical genre by Roderick Hart (1971), doctrinal rhetoric relies exclusively on doctrine for evidentiary support. This secures doctrinal positions from arguments that originate outside doctrine. Therefore, Catholic feminists confront a rhetorical constraint in the Church's doctrinal voice. As loyal Catholics, they are required to defer to the doctrinal voice. Yet, their feminist convictions challenge some Catholic traditions that are ascribed to doctrine. They profess piety to the Catholic faith, even as they resist patriarchal assertions of power embedded in Church practices. The responses of Catholic feminists,



to censure by the Church authorities, emerges through the prophetic and deliberative voices.

I developed the theoretical concept of the prophetic voice based on Darsey's (1997) genre of prophetic rhetoric. I conceptualized *rhetorical voice* as a dynamic instantiation of a rhetorical genre, an activation of generic possibilities in particular cases. The theory of prophetic rhetoric is useful for understanding the rhetoric of feminists who are determined to stay loyal to the Catholic Church, despite censure and rejection by the Church authorities. The prophetic trope is especially powerful for Catholic feminists, since the biblical prophetic tradition is highly salient in a Christian rhetorical context. Catholic feminists frame their challenge to the Church's patriarchal traditions as a prophetic reminder that the institutional Church needs to return its communal and inclusive roots.

The prophetic voice of Catholic feminists is directed both outward as a response to the Church hierarchy, as well as inward to rally hope within their own ranks. The prophetic voice speaks a rhetoric of hope that inspires Catholic feminists to persist through the hardship of rejection. For the LCWR and the RCWP, the prophetic claim legitimates their resolve in the face of censure by the Vatican. In the prophetic tradition, the prophet's message is never welcomed since it challenges the status quo. However, the prophet is ultimately vindicated through the manifestation of divine will. Catholic feminists frame the rejection they endure as a sacrifice that is necessary for following in the prophetic footsteps of Jesus. They remain hopeful that their sacrifices will eventually bear fruit in the form of a renewed Church.

Catholic feminists also respond to the Church hierarchy in the deliberative voice, arguing for greater responsiveness on the part of the hierarchy to the voices of the Catholic faithful. The religious deliberative voice emerges as a rhetorical foil to the doctrinal voice, by articulating a set of alternative rhetorical moves that trouble the certainty of doctrinal claims. However, the *religious* deliberative voice does not eschew certainty entirely. Like doctrinal rhetoric, it upholds some fundamental premises as indisputable. Nevertheless, while doctrinal rhetoric confers considerable interpretive authority on the doctrinal rhetor, religious deliberative rhetoric contests that privilege and argues for the possibility of ongoing and shared revelation. I developed the concept of the religious deliberative voice from the tradition of civic deliberation (e.g. Burkhalter, Gastil and Kelshaw, 2002; Gastil, 2008).

Civic deliberation advocates an egalitarian process for problem discussion that engages participants in dialogue and listening, so that they come to understand each other's perspectives and thereby arrive at the best consensus. Hauser & Benoit-Barne (2002) maintain that civic deliberation follows the Habermasian "model of critical rationalism" (p. 261). This framework does not embrace faith-based argument because the deliberative process requires the willingness of participants to be influenced by each other and to welcome insights produced through collective discussion, which may alter their pre-existing beliefs. Because arguments grounded in religion insist on a priori truths, they are bracketed from the critical-rational process which demands deference to reasoned discussion of alternative perspectives. Dillon (1999), however, challenged the assumption that a critical-rational approach should eliminate commitments to tradition or

doctrine. She argued that progressive Catholics find compatibility, in practice, between faith and reason, which allows them “to critique and transform aspects of Catholicism while simultaneously preserving its doctrinal and communal tradition” (p. 166). Dillon described the enactment of this contradiction as “doctrinal reflexivity” (p. 185), and conceptualized it as a balance between arguments based on faith, reason, and a critique of power. Although Dillon drew extensively from interview responses and open-ended survey questions to understand how progressive Catholics “chart new symbolic territory” (p. 255), she worked from a sociological rather than a rhetorical perspective. She identified four resources used by progressive Catholics: emphasis on community, doctrinal reflexivity, embrace of pluralism, and a theology grounded in reason. I offer the religious deliberative voice as a construct that subsumes these resources, and highlights the central principle that guides progressive Catholic rhetoric, namely a simultaneous embrace of received faith traditions and a commitment to an active and collective discernment process, that is both grounded in Gospel principles and open to the unfolding evidence of God’s plan.

The religious deliberative voice that I have identified in the rhetoric of the RCWP and the LCWR demonstrates that reason-based and faith-based argument can be productively combined. Both cases that I examined richly illustrate how Catholic feminists can be passionately committed to Scripture and Catholic teaching, while also advocating for an ongoing collective discernment to ensure that the Church is mindful of the ways in which God’s creation continues to evolve. Former LCWR President Sr. Florence Deacon observed that, through their ministries, women religious are exposed to

the hardships of lay Catholics who struggle to meet the ideals of the Catholic faith promulgated by the Vatican. The encounters of women religious with lay Catholics inspire them to reflect on the ways in which Church teaching can draw from the experiences of the Catholic laity. She explained:

So, we're . . . asking more questions about Church teaching and how it should be applied and . . . so we might be asking the questions of futurists, . . . of psychologists, . . . of theologians and [the Vatican] is saying, "What in the world would the Leadership Conference of Women Religious want to be hearing somebody like that talk?" Well, it's expanding our minds and it's preparing us to understand the world in which we're living and it's to help us understand the future that we're stepping into . . . . And so, we're seen sometimes as far out, radical, when we're just broadening our consciousness to look at . . . new ways of trying to understand reality and integrate the Gospel. (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013)

Catholic feminists reconcile an acceptance of contingency with a belief in the transcendence of divinely revealed Truths. Sr. Deacon offers insight into how this apparent contradiction is resolved. In my interview with her, she explained her willingness to search for the Word of God in places overlooked or ignored by the Magisterium, asserting, "[S]ome of the things that I'm looking at might not be of God and they'll fall by the wayside, but what is of God will continue" (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). Therefore, belief in God's transcendence allows feminists, like Sr. Deacon, to adopt an evolving rather than a rigid view of faith and religion. Sr. Deacon

also questioned the Church establishment's reluctance to allow open discussion of certain controversial issues. She asked, "I . . . wonder why certain topics are . . . not appropriate to talk about. You kind of wonder, why can't ideas stand or fall on their own merits?" (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). Her observations simultaneously express a firm faith in timeless transcendent Truth while challenging the assumption that this Truth is mediated exclusively by the Magisterium. Thus, the religious deliberative voice asserts an a priori belief in divine transcendence but resists the claim that divine Truth has already been fully revealed, or that it can only be legitimated by an elite authority.

Since the Magisterium equates fidelity to Catholicism with fidelity to its teaching, ideas that challenge official Church teaching are branded as radical and subversive. The LCWR, however, claims that authentic Catholicism cannot preclude asking questions that may challenge Church tradition. Sr. Deacon explained the compatibility between loyalty to the Church and willingness to question its hierarchy by observing that "the Church is the people of God walking together . . . we are the Church . . . Vatican II stressed the fact that the Spirit speaks among all of us . . . so we're part of the Truth" (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). For Catholic feminists, faith in the deliberative process derives from the belief that God's Spirit "hovers over the chaos" and that divine will emerges dynamically over time and through the struggles of the Catholic faithful (Farrell, 2012, p. 2). This ultimate belief offers Catholic feminists the security to participate in and encourage a deliberative approach. LCWR Executive director Sr. Janet Mock described this conviction as "a place of deep rootedness" from which one "can explore other ideas" (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013). She envisioned Catholicism as "a great ocean

that . . . you dive into” and, in the process of this exploration, one’s “images of God keep changing” (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013).

Catholic feminists do not eschew belief in fundamental Truths. However, encompassed within these Truths is the belief that “it is part of God’s plan that we will come to fuller understanding and then we’ll integrate that fuller understanding into how we determine God really wants us to live” (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013). For Catholic feminists, individual experience and reasoning, as well as collective discernment, are ways in which God can be discovered and revealed. Sr. Deacon noted that through “scientific advances . . . we’re understanding more and more about how God created us” (F. Deacon, Interview, March 25, 2013), which requires that Church teaching engage with, rather than dismiss, social and scientific progress. For religious progressives, the process of exploration is believed to be divinely sanctioned and therefore not contradictory to a belief in the Truth of God. In fact, the certainty of God’s guidance inspires religious progressive to embrace uncertainties as part of God’s plan, and to believe in individual or communal discernment as processes through which God is revealed in the mysteries of daily life.

The contrast between the deliberative and doctrinal voices, that I have offered in my dissertation, will allow rhetorical studies scholars to explain how similar religious commitments might yield different religious claims. For example, despite a common grounding in biblical Scripture, the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) uphold starkly discrepant positions regarding homosexuality. The difference between the two stances can be traced to a doctrinal approach by the

former and a deliberative approach by the latter. While the Catholic Church regards scriptural evidence of the condemnation of homosexuality with the certainty of God's revealed Truth, the ELCA maintains that God's revelation is ongoing and therefore scriptural denouncements of homosexuality reflect contemporaneous values rather than God's enduring will. The ELCA re-interprets biblical passages condemning homosexuality, in the light of biblical accounts of Jesus's radical love and inclusiveness, as well as his caution against casting judgment. The religious deliberative voice offers a useful conceptual tool to make such comparisons between orthodox and heterodox religious voices, and to explain progressive movements within religious traditions.

Although the two groups of Catholic feminists that I studied both combine the prophetic and deliberative voices, they each demonstrate unique rhetorical configurations that privilege one over the other. The prophetic and deliberative voices are inherently contradictory. The certainty and resoluteness of the prophetic voice are mitigated by the open-mindedness and compromise that characterize the deliberative voice. Nevertheless, the identity of the Catholic feminist requires an oscillation between the two voices. As long as they claim fidelity to the religion, Catholic feminists cannot challenge patriarchy on non-doctrinal grounds. To be valid within the Catholic rhetorical framework, their critiques must draw on the very same foundations that are recognized and upheld by the Church hierarchy. The prophetic voice speaks from the margins of society but its message is not unfamiliar to its audience. The prophetic voice serves as a reminder to the audience that the audience has deviated from the sacred principles it claims to uphold. Speaking in the prophetic voice, the women of the RCWP and the LCWR confront the Church

hierarchy albeit in different ways and to different degrees, with the message that the institutional Church needs to become more responsive to the needs of its marginalized members. At the same time, since they are committed to a more deliberative vision of the Church, Catholic feminists cannot claim exclusive access to divine Truth, nor can they completely refuse to engage with the Church hierarchy. Instead, they must also model the humility and open-mindedness characteristic of the deliberative voice. While RCWPs speak in a stronger prophetic voice because they have already been rejected by the Vatican, the women of the LCWR emphasize the deliberative over the prophetic voice, since they continue to engage with the Vatican.

### **Looking forward: Lessons about Good and Bad Rhetoric**

The analyses that I have developed in this dissertation make a broader argument about the interaction between fundamentalist and progressive rhetorics. Although the two are often pitted against each other, the rhetoric of Catholic feminists demonstrates the potential for a synthesis. Crowley (2006) has identified an antagonistic relationship between fundamentalist and progressive rhetorical ethics. Her framework defined good rhetoric as that which does not foreclose “argumentative possibilities” but instead unlocks all the perspectives that are arguable “in a given moment and situation” (p. 56). Crowley ascribed this type of rhetoric to a postmodern ethic that “privileges movement, flexibility, contingency, and difference” (p. 56). In contrast, she identified bad rhetoric as that which is “static and univocal” (p. 56). It supports “the status quo” and “transcend[s] temporal and local contexts” (p. 56). Crowley admits that her dualistic model denies ethical virtue



to fundamentalist rhetoric and privileges instead “democracy instead of authoritarianism” and “inclusion rather than exclusion” (p. 56). Although Crowley focused her analysis specifically on the rhetoric of the Christian Right, her descriptions of fundamentalist rhetoric apply to the rhetoric of Catholic Church establishment as well. This becomes clear through her use of William Connolly’s definition of fundamentalism, namely:

[A] general imperative to assert an absolute, singular ground of authority; to ground your own identity and allegiances in this unquestionable source; to define political issues in a vocabulary of God, orality, or nature that invokes such a certain, authoritative source. (as cited in Crowley, 2006, p. 12)

The institutional Church is self-consciously fundamentalist. It recognizes that its doctrine, tradition, and very epistemology are threatened by a post-modern era. Newman (1990) has indicted post-modern thinking for breeding pluralism in the Catholic Church, and traced feminist movements for church reform to the corrupting influence of post-modern secular thought. The Catholic Church calls for steadfastness against such influences and sees its own fundamentalism as necessary to counteract these threats.

Crowley (2006) maintained that a liberal emphasis on reason is ineffectual against “the level of authority that legitimates . . . fundamentalist Christian thought” (p. 91). She advocated a *rhetorical* approach that recognizes the power of “other sorts of proof . . . such as faith or tradition,” and challenged liberalism’s assertion that “disagreements can be resolved solely by appeals to empirically based reason” (p. 44). Crowley advocates engaging with fundamentalist arguments on value grounds instead of attacking them on rational grounds. By articulating a rhetoric of values rather than reason, Crowley believes

that liberals can substitute their own fundamentalist adherence to reason with a more tolerant stance that recognizes the values that underlie all systems of belief, including their own. Nevertheless, Crowley, herself, remains firmly committed to liberalism as “superior to other currently available political discourses” (p. 17). Although she tries to guide liberal thinking toward a deeper understanding of the fundamentalist worldview, with the hope of breaking down the rhetorical impasses between the fundamentalism and liberalism, ultimately she remains biased in favor of liberalism as she believes “liberal values of freedom and equality are responsible, historically, for the inclusion of groups” that were once marginalized (p. 17). Despite a brilliant effort at unpacking fundamentalist articulations of belief, Crowley falls short of inspiring the kind of respect for fundamentalists as she desires from them. She does lay down some building blocks for a bridge between fundamentalism and liberalism, but ultimately her dichotomy between good and bad rhetoric points to the chasm between them rather than a way across.

I argue that the Catholic feminists I have studied in this dissertation challenge Crowley’s (2006) dichotomy between good and bad rhetoric and model a working synthesis between fundamentalist assumptions and a postmodern ethic. Crowley does not dismiss the possibility that rhetors with religious beliefs can practice a postmodern ethic. She clarifies that they are as likely as secular skeptics to distinguish between a fundamentalist orientation and the nature of their own religious beliefs. I assume that Crowley would place Catholic feminists in this group of believers. She explained that “subalterns . . . who are subjected to rather than subjects of a hegemonic discourse” (p. 192) are more likely to encounter “disconnects . . . in the apparently seamless articulation

of hegemony” (p. 193), than are those who are served by the hegemony. The experiences of contradiction by subalterns provoke “different conjectures and authorize different ways of connecting belief” (p. 193). Nevertheless, as Crowley develops her playbook of rhetorical tactics for progressives to engage fundamentalist rhetoric, she remains firmly embedded in an agonistic relationship between the two stances. Despite a few allusions to Christian believers who hold liberal political beliefs, Crowley does not explain how this paradox is rhetorically resolved. My analyses of the rhetoric of Catholic feminists illuminate the rhetorical work that goes into synthesizing an adherence to transcendent and atemporal premises with a “postmodern” recognition of contingency and pluralism. Catholic feminists not only represent the subaltern consciousness that Crowley identifies, which opens them up to celebrate an ethic of difference, but, contrary to Crowley’s view of an oppositional relationship between fundamentalism and progressivism, Catholic feminists do not relinquish fundamentalist beliefs in order to pursue tolerance. Rather, their certainty about transcendent Truths is the very source of their openness to the contingency of lived, temporal experience.

I argue that the LCWR and the RCWP illustrate the rhetorical possibility of aligning a rootedness in faith with a disposition of openness and inclusiveness. Their embrace of what Crowley terms a “postmodern” ethic is articulated within a Christian theology. Crowley (2006) defined an “articulation” as “the form of connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions” (p. 60). Members of the LCWR and the RCWP embed scientific and social developments within the unfolding of God’s creation and, therefore, allow for the possibility of new revelation, which in “no

way negates or undervalues what went before” (Farrell, 2012, p. 2). Catholic feminists may challenge Church tradition, but their questions regarding the certainty of particular Church teachings does not mean that they oppose certainty all together. Their loyalty to Catholicism implies their submission to transcendent divine Truths, even if they recognize the contingency of their own Catholic identities. As LCWR Executive Director, Sr. Janet Mock explained:

[W]hile I hold the Catholic tradition as my own, I honor other faith traditions because God is so much bigger than any one faith tradition . . . I know because I’m a finite human being, I need a certain structure in a faith tradition that . . . mediates God for me in the world. But I also know other people all over the world find that same experience through other structures . . . It’s also what thrills me about interfaith dialogue because we learn; we learn the experience of God from one another. (J. Mock, Interview, April 9, 2013)

Sr. Mock’s observation reveals a belief in God and in God’s authority, which anchors her as she explores non-Christian beliefs. For her, belief in God sanctions tolerance because the divine is conceived as a mystery that reveals itself in varied ways and across time. Thus, Catholic feminists challenge the assumption that non-contingent beliefs necessarily stifle tolerance. Their example encourages a re-thinking of the tension between arguments grounded in faith and those grounded in reason, in order to identify linkages between the two. I invite rhetorical critics to seek and explain other instances of rhetoric that cross this epistemological boundary between faith and reason.

### **Epilogue: A renewal in the Church**

When I began my research for the dissertation, Benedict XVI was the pope of the Catholic Church. Under his authority, in 2012, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith announced the Doctrinal Assessment of the LCWR. The decrees of ex-communication on those who pursue female ordination were issued during the offices of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Both recent popes were unambiguous regarding the Vatican's concern about radical feminism. They continued a long tradition of protecting Church doctrine with the use of doctrinal rhetoric. In February of 2013, mid-way through my research, the world was stunned to receive the news that Pope Benedict had elected to resign. Over two thousand years of Catholic history, only four other popes have abdicated the papacy. The last to do so before Pope Benedict was Gregory XII, who resigned in 1415 in order to avert the Great Western Schism. Benedict's decision came about in less chaotic times and is attributed essentially to his declining health (Gladstone, 2013).

As much as Catholics and the world at large were shocked by the Pope's resignation, there was palpable excitement to discover who would become the new face of authority for the Catholic Church. From the moment the new Pope Francis stepped out on the balcony of the Vatican to reveal himself as Benedict's successor, it became clear that he marked a departure from papal traditions. In the first of what would become many instances of his unique papacy, Francis asked the throngs packed into Saint Peter's Square to pray for him, before he issued them the traditional papal blessing. This simple gesture of humbling himself before the Catholic laity was a sign that Francis was

determined to usher in a new era in the Catholic Church, one that balanced doctrinal emphasis with a validation of the Church as community (Carter, Messia, & Greene, 2013).

In the months since he took office, Pope Francis has surprised and delighted many for the ways in which he appears to be transforming the focus of the institutional Catholic Church. He has demonstrated an unprecedented ability to inspire approval from diverse audiences, both religious and non-religious. Recognizing the impact he has had globally within the first year of his papacy, Time Magazine named him their 2013 Person of the Year. Pope Francis is widely acknowledged for revitalizing a Church that has been badly damaged by the clergy sex abuse scandals. His readiness to address the Church's shortcomings, including the rumors of corruption within the institution, his explicit rebuke of unchecked capitalism, and his efforts to widen the Church's focus, from the polarizing issues of homosexuality and abortion to the more unifying goals of alleviating poverty and ensuring social justice, have infused new vigor into the Church (Chu, 2013).

However, despite the successes of his first year, the new pope has both conservative and progressive Catholics concerned. The pope's shift in emphases seems to have perturbed conservatives who believe that the new papacy will weaken long-standing Catholic traditions, whereas progressives, who are enthusiastic about the overall change in the Vatican's focus, are still concerned that Francis remains as conservative as his predecessors in other ways, including the Church's view on women's roles (Chu, 2013). Within the first month of his papacy, Francis crushed hopes of a new direction in the Vatican's stance toward the LCWR, by re-endorsing the conclusions of the Doctrinal

Assessment and re-approving the Mandate for reform of the LCWR (Martin, 2013). Pope Francis's decision to validate the Assessment is seen by some as a prudent choice, since overturning the decision of his predecessor, right after assuming office, would have generated "unwanted friction in the church" (Karlamañla, 2013).

Some argue that Pope Francis's efforts toward growing a more inclusive Church suggest that he may, in practice, be more sympathetic to the challenges that face men and women religious in their ministries. An unofficial transcript that was leaked to the press, of a meeting between the new pope and leaders of the Latin American and Caribbean Conference of Religious Men and Women (CLAR), is being read as a sign of Francis's empathy for priests and nuns who may feel discouraged and hampered by oversight from the Vatican. An excerpt from the transcript quoted the Pope as saying:

Perhaps even a letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine (of the Faith) will arrive for you, telling you that you said such or such thing . . . . But do not worry. Explain whatever you have to explain, but move forward . . . . Open the doors, do something there where life calls for it. I would rather have a Church that makes mistakes for doing something than one that gets sick for being closed up. . . . (as cited in "Pope to Latin American Religious," 2013, para. 8)

The Presidency of CLAR later released a statement that apologized for the leak, confirmed that there was no official transcript of the Pope's message at the meeting, and clarified that "the singular expressions contained in the text cannot be attributed to the Holy Father with certainty, but only their general sense" (as cited in "Pope to Latin American Religious," 2013, para. 32). Nevertheless, the statement has provoked reactions among conservative and progressive Catholics. The former express concern at the Pope's

alleged dismissal of the Vatican's authority (Dreher, 2013), while the latter express hope that the Vatican will become less tethered to clerical authority and more responsive to the voices of non-hierarchical Church members (Karlamañgla, 2013).

On the topic of women's ordination, Pope Francis declared unequivocally that he accepts the Church's tradition of male-only priesthood. In a conversation with reporters, he clarified, "With regards to the ordination of women, the church has spoken and says no. Pope John Paul II said so with a formula that was definitive. That door is closed" (as cited in McClory, 2013). Those who hold out hope that the priesthood will one day be accessible to women, even if it does not happen during Francis's papacy, choose to read between his words. McClory (2013) speculated that the Pope's observation articulated a statement of fact. It re-iterated a pronouncement by a former pope, but did not indicate Francis's personal position on the issue. Nevertheless, a few days after McClory's article was published, reports surfaced that the first ex-communication endorsed by the new pope had targeted Fr. Greg Reynolds, an Australian priest, whose stance on female ordination contradicted Church teaching ("Pope Francis Excommunicates," 2013).

Pope Francis has undoubtedly re-energized the ailing Catholic Church in a very short period of time. Much of the change he is spearheading is focused on transforming the institutional Church into a more responsive organization. Francis's initiatives appear to be guiding the Church toward the deliberative vision cherished by Catholic progressives. Recently, the Vatican published an online survey to listen to the voices of Catholics around the world on social issues such as divorce, cohabitation, and gay marriage. The Vatican clarified that the purpose of the survey was not to model Church



teaching according to public opinion, but to gather inputs for a global Synod on family issues, to be held in the fall of 2014. Many Catholics expressed excitement and approval at being consulted by the Church. Vatican historian, Alberto Melloni, observed that the questionnaire was noteworthy because its objective was to understand the realities of Catholic family life, and because it avoided a judgmental tone in its request for responses (Yardley, 2013). The Catholic Church is known to be a slow-moving institution weighed down heavily by its respect for tradition. Yet, we seem to have entered a time when crucibles of change are bubbling up in the Church. Now that the institutional head of the Church, himself, has drawn attention to the need for change, progressive Catholics are justifiably enthusiastic about a revitalized Catholicism. Nevertheless, as the new pope has indicated, the Church remains conservative and anchored in its doctrinal tradition when it comes to feminist concerns. The years ahead will be significant in determining whether and how the patriarchal traditions of the Catholic Church may change, and if those changes will be accompanied by rhetorical shifts in the doctrinal voice.

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## **Appendix**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LCWR/RCWP INTERVIEWEES**

(Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format)

**Topic: The informant's hopes and plans for reform in the Catholic Church**

Q: What are some directions of change that you believe are necessary for the Catholic Church?

Q: How do you see your role in those changes?

**Topic: The informant's reasons for retaining a Catholic identity**

Q: What does being Catholic mean to you?

Q: Is there anything about being Catholic that you find challenging?

Probe: If yes, what would you say is challenging?

Probe: What makes you want to remain Catholic despite those challenges?

**Topic: The informant's beliefs and attitudes toward Church hierarchy**

Q: What do you believe is the role of the hierarchy in the Catholic Church today?

**Topic: The informant's experiences of Vatican censure**

Q: From your perspective, what has been the LCWR's experience of the Vatican's investigation? (for LCWR interviewees)

Q: What are your thoughts on the Vatican's investigation of the LCWR? (for RCWP interviewees)

Q: What are your thoughts on the Vatican's position with respect to women's ordination? (for both sets of interviewees)

**Topic: The informant's experiences of engaging with Church hierarchy**

Q: What is the LCWR's approach in responding to (working with) the Church hierarchy? (For LCWR interviewees)

Q: Could you describe for me any personal examples of engagement with the Church hierarchy? (for both sets of interviewees)

**Topic: The informant's experiences of sharing identity tensions, and collaborating for reform action, with members of their respective organizations**

Q: How have LCWR members shared with each other their reactions to and experiences of the Vatican investigation? (for LCWR interviewees)

Probe: Are there plans for further collaboration and support among LCWR members, in order to work through the Vatican's mandate?

Q: How do Roman Catholic women priests support each other in their ordination journeys? (for RCWP interviewees)

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

### **Mridula Mascarenhas**

#### **EDUCATION**

##### **Ph.D., Communication, 2014**

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI

Doctoral Dissertation: A rhetorical analysis of Catholic feminism: Understanding prophetic and deliberative responses to the institutional Catholic Church.

##### **Rhetorical Leadership Certificate, 2011**

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI

##### **M.A., Communication, 2004**

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI

##### **M.A., Industrial Psychology, 2000**

Mumbai University, Mumbai, India

##### **B.A. (Honors), 1997**

##### **Psychology**

St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, India

#### **AWARDS**

- National Communication Association Doctoral Honors Seminar at the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Communication (2012).
- Top Debut Paper at the 2010 National Communication Association Conference.
- Chancellor's Award during Ph.D. program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (2009-2010).
- Chancellor's Award during M.A. program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (2003-2004 and 2002-2003).
- Outstanding GPA Award for the M.A. program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (2004).
- Academic Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi (2004).
- First rank at the M.A. exam in the Department of Applied Psychology, Mumbai University (2000).
- Gold Medal for the highest aggregate score in Psychology at the B.A. exam, Mumbai University (1997).

## PUBLICATIONS

Mascarenhas, M. (2014). Uniform to pulp: Performance of transformation, critique, and community-building for veteran soldiers. *Western Journal of Communication*, 78(1), 78-96.

Mascarenhas, M. (2014). Wearing different listening hats: A classroom activity for demonstrating the effect of listening attitudes. In J. E. Aitken (Ed.), *Cases on communication technology for second language acquisition and cultural learning* (pp. 18-21). Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference.

Mascarenhas, M., Meyers, R.A., & Bonito, J.A. (2010). Matters of life and death: Decision-making in a jury. In L.W. Black (Ed.), *Group communication: Cases for analysis, appreciation, and application* (pp. 127-134). Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Mascarenhas, M. (2014, April). *The form and function of an almost apology: An analysis of Bob Dylan's letter to the ECLC*. Paper presented at the 2014 Central States Communication Association Convention, Minneapolis, MN.

Mascarenhas, M. (2013, November). *Body as text: Rhetorical malleability of the plastinated corpse*. Paper presented at the 2013 National Communication Association Convention, Washington, DC.

Mascarenhas, M. (2012, November). *Legitimation strategies in the case for intelligent design theory*. Paper presented at the 2012 National Communication Association Convention, Orlando, FL.

Mascarenhas, M. (2012, November). *Wearing different listening hats: A classroom activity for demonstrating the effect of listening attitudes*. (Top Nine Submission). Presented at the Great Ideas For Teaching Speech (G.I.F.T.S.) session at the 2012 National Communication Association Convention, Orlando, FL.

Mascarenhas, M. (2012, July). *The ELCA as deliberative community: A study of the distinctive features of deliberation in a religious context*. Paper presented at the 2012 National Communication Association Doctoral Honors Seminar, Los Angeles, CA.

Mascarenhas, M. (2012, May). *Science will lead us forward: Marginalization of the public sphere in the Frankenfish debate*. Paper presented at the 2012 Research Network, Rhetoric Society of America Convention, Philadelphia, PA.

Mascarenhas, M. (2011, November). *He could have fought back: An analysis of national discourse on two bullycides*. Paper presented at 2011 National Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, LA.

Mascarenhas, M. (2011, October). *Expanding the scope of critical thinking in encounters between antagonists*. Paper presented at the 2011 Critical Thinking Conference, University of Wisconsin Stevens-Point, Stevens-Point, WI.

Kim, J., Lau, A., Mascarenhas, M. (2011, April). *Expressing frustration regarding customer service: The relationships among customers' conflict management styles, complaint behavior, and media selection*. Paper presented at the 2011 Central States Communication Association Convention, Milwaukee, WI.

Mascarenhas, M. (2010, November). *From uniform to pulp: The Combat Paper Project as performance of veteran resistance against war*. Paper presented at the 2010 National Communication Association Convention, San Francisco, CA. (Awarded **Top Debut Paper** in the Performance Studies Division)

## **EMPLOYMENT**

### **Hanover College, Hanover, IN**

**August 2013 - present**

Instructor, Department of Communication

*Courses taught:*

- Presidential Rhetoric & Political Communication
- Cross-Cultural Communication
- Interviewing
- Public Speaking
- Introduction to Communication

### **University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI**

**August 2009-May 2013**

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Communication

*Courses taught:*

- Business & Professional Communication (traditional & online formats)
- Interviewing
- Group Communication

### **Saint Cloud State University, Saint Cloud, MN**

**August 2006-May 2009**

Instructor, Department of Communication Studies

*Courses taught:*

- Public Speaking
- Introduction to Communication (including Honors sections)
- Group Communication

**Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY****August 2004-May 2006**

Instructor, Department of Communication

*Courses taught:*

- Business & Professional Communication
- Interpersonal Communication
- Group Communication

**Tata Motors, Mumbai, India****April 2001-June 2002**

Assistant to Vice President, Corporate Communications

- Monitored communication needs within the company.
- Assisted with conceptualization and implementation of communication systems and practices within the company.
- Assisted with company newsletters and press releases.
- Developed a bi-monthly customer newsletter.

**SERVICE****Hanover College**

Academic Advising (Spring 2014).

**University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI**

- Member of the UWM Graduate School Advisory Council (Spring 2012).
- Served as graduate student representative on the UWM Communication Department Undergraduate Affairs Committee (Fall 2011, Spring 2010).
- Served as graduate student representative on the UWM Communication Department Graduate Affairs Committee (Spring 2011).
- Volunteered as a Communication Department representative for the Undergraduate Open House (Spring 2011, Fall 2011).
- Served as judge for the UWM Communication Department's Public Speaking Showcase (Spring 2011, Fall 2011).
- Served as volunteer for the Milwaukee Graduate Assistants Association Press and Publications Committee (Spring 2011).
- Attended training workshops to serve as debate judge for the Milwaukee Urban Debate League (Fall 2009, Spring 2010).

**Saint Cloud State University, MN**

- Faculty co-advisor to a student service project (Annual Bone Marrow Donor Registration Drive )(Spring 2007, 2008, and 2009).
- Volunteer coach for the Speech and Debate team, also served as judge for various Forensics tournaments throughout the state of MN (2008-2009).
- Member of Communication department's Scholarship Committee (2008-2009).
- Member of Communication department's Student and Community Relations Committee (2007-2008).
- Member of Communication department's Faculty Collegiality Committee (2007-2008).

- Member of Communication department's Library and Equipment Committee (2006-2007).

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- Attended NCA 2013 PreConference: Mapping the Shifting Grounds of Post 9/11 War Rhetoric.
- Attended NCA 2013 Short Course: Public Speaking 3.0.
- Contributor to Figure/Ground Communication website which publishes interviews with leading Communication scholars across the field (2013, 2012).
- Trained as a facilitator for the "Public Conversations Method," through the Frank Zeidler Center for Public Discussion, in Milwaukee, WI (August 2012).
- Served as a reviewer for NCA 2012 papers in the Communication as Social Construction Division.
- Attended Digital Methods Workshop led by Dr. Richard Rogers, Web epistemologist from the University of Amsterdam, sponsored by the UWM Center for 21st Century Studies (November, 2011).
- Served as reviewer for ICA 2011 papers in the Instructional and Developmental Communication Division.
- Attended NCA 2010 PreConference: Building Ethnographic Bridges.
- Attended NCA 2010 Short Course: How to Stage a Civil Dialogue.