

The New Feminism

A chilling account of the effects of feminism
on religious orders, and how one group of
“women of grace” found the courage to resist!

Sister D.

Could any group of women be more affected by the “old feminism” than the women in Religious Orders after the 1970’s?

I write from experience that radical feminism had a devastating effect on good, faith-filled religious who, for years, had taught the Catholic faith and the following of Jesus to many thousands of students at all levels of education. Sadly, to one degree or another, the destruction of our Catholic Sisters continues to this day. Hopefully, the present study of Religious Life in the US will help all religious to regain their lost heritage.

The Sisters in the rank and file of my particular teaching community were so busy in the late 70’s, and 80’s in classrooms, group homes, and administrative duties that we were aware, only minimally, of all that was happening to our way of life. We could not believe at the time that our very Catholic faith and life as Catholic religious women was under attack.

Leaders and would-be leaders of our Community, with extra time to attend radical feminist seminars, were being changed from consecrated women of the Catholic Church to angry women

who doubted their Catholic faith and no longer taught Catholicism or the ideals of following Jesus.

Instead we noticed that over time our leaders in Community were asking us to explore and live the new programs for women’s issues. It became an unwritten rule to ignore encyclicals or documents written by men who, according to our leaders, only preserved the network of hierarchical power.

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In recent years community newsletters never mention the Name of Jesus and God is referred to as “The Divine”, thus eliminating all male references. We noticed the names of goddesses and “Gaia” while at the

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same time, names of Our Lady and the Saints and liturgical feasts are strangely absent in all Community communications. From the phase during which we followed Starhawk, the Witch, and her teachings of Paganism, Native Spirituality, walking a labyrinth and celebrating rituals honoring the four sacred directions, our Community has recently moved into environmental and earth spirituality.

We could not help but notice that we never received the Catholic spiritual leadership that invited all of the Community to be united in Jesus and in the Church that He instituted. Whenever we questioned what was happening to us, as vowed Catholic women, we were told to move with the times or that we were just out of it and too conservative.

A former Bishop said that our Community was dying and the sooner the better. He advised that it would probably be better to walk away from our Religious Vows, leave Religious Life for peace, at last.

In the midst of this sad situation I came upon an advertisement for Johnnette Benkovic's program called Women of Grace® that promised the great gift of "authentic femininity and how to live it out in our world today, hearts will be healed and

souls will be saved" (P.5 Facilitator's Guide). It seemed to be the answer to our prayers and my small community insisted that I write to ask for the program.

We invited the Sisters from our area to join us in implementing the study. From a group of 15 Sisters, 8 of us decided to meet once a month for nine months to complete Johnnette's Women of Grace study.

Our materials of texts, study guide workbook, song CD, Video Lecture Series and Facilitator's Guide arrived promptly and we set out on a journey toward hope and authentic feminism.



Each meeting is described in detail and the bulk of the planning work for the gatherings is done for us. Our meetings always included prayer, hymns, study, discussion, a video lecture by Johnnette, discussion, announcements for the next meeting with a joyful celebration of a meal and snacks to follow.

We learned about the special call and gift of women, prayer, obedience, the Eucharist and carrying out our mission as daughters of God. Each lesson was based on Scripture, documents of the Church, lives of the Saints and the Catechism of the Church. We were inspired by the Women of Grace® Program to gather four extra times to have a holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament in preparation for our General Meetings with the large Community, inviting more to join us. We gained up to four more Sisters.

It seems to me that we went from being fearful and frightened sisters in the Upper Room to courageous, knowledgeable, and inspired disciples of Pentecost, on fire to live the Word of God and to spread Him everywhere, even to our very own Sisters who most opposed the Word so fiercely in the past few years.

Our eight brave women of grace went to our Chapter of Elections and spoke out to all without the slightest hesitation and to those in power, of an entirely opposite view. There was no backing down, no retreat, and no fear. A transformation had occurred and the process continues in the eight women, while they slowly strengthen others.

Another event that showed the bravery of our eight women of grace was the big feast of the Assumption for our large community. In the last several years, this feast has been ignored as inconsequential. This year the women of grace volunteered to plan and carry out the Sisters' 50th and 75th anniversaries of vows on Aug. 15. We returned the celebration in honor of Our Lady to the liturgical feast it had been for us. We provided the music and sang with enthusiasm, renewed our Vows as they were always intended to be, vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.

We even gave exhortation to the large community to remember our Blessed Mother as the one who points always to Jesus, our Spouse. It was a joyous day for everyone and we must thank Johnnette for bringing about the transformation of Sisters who do not fear to be true women of grace not only to all we meet each day, but to our Sisters and Superiors who may have forgotten how to be the authentic women living our Catholic Faith and leading others to do the same.

We beg your readers to continue to pray for us and for all Sisters, especially those hidden, silent and even persecuted in religious orders taken over by radical feminism and eco-spirituality. All are worth saving, worth encouraging and lifting up once again to help other women save the world from falling. They too, with women throughout our countries need the hope and evangelization of Johnnette Benkovic's Women of Grace®. Deo Gratias!