

# SPECTRUM

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Metanoia

## Christianity, feminism, and sexual pessimism

by John Valk

With great interest I read Rita Hurley's "Wimmin's Room" column of Jan. 15. Not only did the title ("Sinead O'Connor and the Pope") intrigue me, so did the article itself. A number of thoughts crossed my mind as I read it.

My first thought was that Ms. Hurley was not only quite correct but also very articulate in what she said. Yes, the institutional church has been a cause of much undue frustration and anger for feminists. Her article, and those numerous books, articles and letters of countless others, will hopefully help eliminate the sexism that remains in the church.

My second thought became a pondering question. Is Christianity and feminism necessarily on a collision course, as Ms. Hurley suggests? Perhaps.

I would like to think, however, that the Christian community can well benefit from the feminist critique. The institutional church, and its theologians, needs constantly to re-examine its reading of Scripture, its practices, doctrines, dogmas and pronouncements. The perceptive insights and well articulated views of many feminists have served the church well, and blown fresh air into it. Not only has it exposed patterns of sexism and misogyny, but more positively it has added much creativity and imagination to the Christian tradition. May it continue to do so. If those in positions of leadership in the church are not receptive to the Spirit's nudgings, God not infrequently turns to others who are.

At the same time, however, perhaps feminism also needs the critique of the Christian community. Whenever any movement uses the suffix *ism* the discerning person ought to be leery. This suffix implies something absolute or ultimate, and suggests a dominating ideology. A dominating ideology strives to redefine, not correct, human reality in its own image. Is this the intent of radical feminism?

To make any ideology dominant, whether that be capitalism, communism, materialism, hedonism, chauvinism—even feminism—potentially risks putting it, rather than God, central in human life. Feminist influence and insight, like prosperity, communal concern, material well-being, physical intimacy and maleness, is necessary for a balanced, healthy and spiritually vibrant life. But to make one orientation, one way of thinking or being absolute, will only distort human life. We have already discovered that with capitalism, communism, materialism, hedonism and chauvinism.

Thirdly, Christianity and sexual pessimism are hardly synonymous. No doubt church traditions have frequently given the impression of being rather puritanical regarding sexual expression. That may be

partly a reaction to cultures which have blatantly been morally bankrupt. Yet, one need only read the Song of Solomon to get a good sense that scripture celebrates sexual intimacy. Human sexuality is a good gift of God. In the proper context it is to be shared and enjoyed, without hesitation (see proverb 5: 15).

No church will, however, advocate sexual promiscuity. Nor, would I hope, will feminism. One does not have to look very far to see the disease, destruction, betrayal, dishonesty and emotional devastation which results from pre-marital and extra-marital affairs. But prohibition is not the same as sexual pessimism.

Furthermore, "the ideal of celibacy [as] the highest form of virtue with women as its primary opponent", as Ms. Hurley states, may indeed have been advocated by some, but it is certainly not part of the Protestant experience. The Protestant sector of the Christian Church long ago sensed that *marriage* is an ideal to be highly praised and valued. At the same time, the church has not failed to honour the single life.

Fourthly, I see poor St. Augustine getting dumped on again. Augustine was a well respected theologian for many centuries. His conversion was nothing short of a miracle, considering his past life, and his post-conversion insights were many and well articulated. To suggest that his influence on church teaching "probably sprang from personal sexual anxiety", guilt and self-loathing, is not only conjecture, but also fails to understand the meaning of forgiveness and the grace of God. Augustine was indeed overcome by guilt, anxiety, self-hatred and restlessness, "until he found his rest in God". That is what re-oriented his life.

The claim that Eve, and subsequently women, bear responsibility for the condemnation of the human race, results from a rather narrow and dated reading. Current and more careful interpretations will indicate that those passages in Genesis point more to a stupid Adam than a temptress Eve. Furthermore, Scripture clearly reveals that God frequently, and strategically, uses women to bring healing and redemption because *men* fail so miserably.

What does all this mean? Perhaps that the discussion is ready to begin. When it comes to Christianity, the church, and religion in general, not much in the way of enlightening discussion takes place. The university ought to put in place, in addition to its Women's Study Program, a Religious Studies Program. In this way opportunities may arise where students can engage in more in-depth study of Judeo-Christian Scripture (as well as those of other religions), alongside that of the church, its history and significant personalities. This may pre-

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vent distortions and half-truths from perpetuating and biblical illiteracy from proliferating.

Finally, I kept reflecting on what frequently emerges from the "Wimmin's Room". If the feminist critique of the Christian Church

and its tradition is to be of lasting merit, strategy is crucial. Many realize that. To provide leadership, insight and a corrective to an institution's shortcomings necessitates proceeding in a loving, humble, understanding and positive man-

ner, even amid hostility and opposition. The church in its long tradition has given little ear, and for good reason, to those who, standing outside the faith or on the periphery, hurl aspersions.

### The Wimmin's Room

## The search for a tampon

**ANGRY!** *Why are there no pads or tampons in the wimmin's washrooms?*

by Liz A. Lautard

It's 1:15 and you're sitting in class. Trying to take notes, you're suddenly aware of a slight cramping sensation. Your period has started and you're without protection. You anxiously wait out the remaining five minutes of class. Tension mounts each time you look at your watch. You notice your professor's annoyed glance in your general direction. Finally, it's 1:20. Class is over!

Hurrying out of class, you head to the nearest washroom. Once inside you're relieved. But, not for long. The tampon dispenser on the wall is open and empty! This should not come as a shock; you visit this washroom every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The tampon dispenser is always open and empty. However, this is not usually a problem. But, since it's that time of the month, it is a problem.

You make your way down the halls of Tilley. You're aware of another cramp. Now you're annoyed. You're wearing a new pair of jeans. Across the parking lot you rush. Through the doors of the SUB and up the stairs you go. Inside the washroom you're confronted with another open and empty tampon dispenser. This one's closed. You take out a quarter. You bite your lip. Are you going to risk a whole quarter on the chance there will be tampons or do you play it safe and get a coffee? You go for it. You put your quarter in... nothing!

Now you're angry! You push open the bathroom door and head to the SUB Shoppe to purchase some pads (or tampons). Once inside the store, you discover they only carry one brand - and it's not your brand. This wouldn't be so bad, except that they are pantyliners. Unfortunately, you know it's a maxi day. Disgust fills you when you

notice the price. This measly box of twenty pantyliners is going to cost you \$3.69 + taxes! All you needed is one. Just one tampon to get you through your last class! Even a minipad would have been a blessing. You see they sell individual condoms as you wait in line for the cashier. You throw your money on the counter. Sometimes, it just doesn't pay to be a wimmin.

Does this sound familiar? I'm sure all the wimmin on this campus have experienced it at one time or another. It is this experience that I'm using to discuss menstrual pads and tampons. Or, should I say, the lack of pads and tampons on this campus. To the wimmin on this campus, who comprise roughly half the student population, pads are basic necessities (like their soap). To go without them is inconvenient and frustrating. They are perhaps

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