

Voices of Change: Women Led Resistance in Catholic Communities

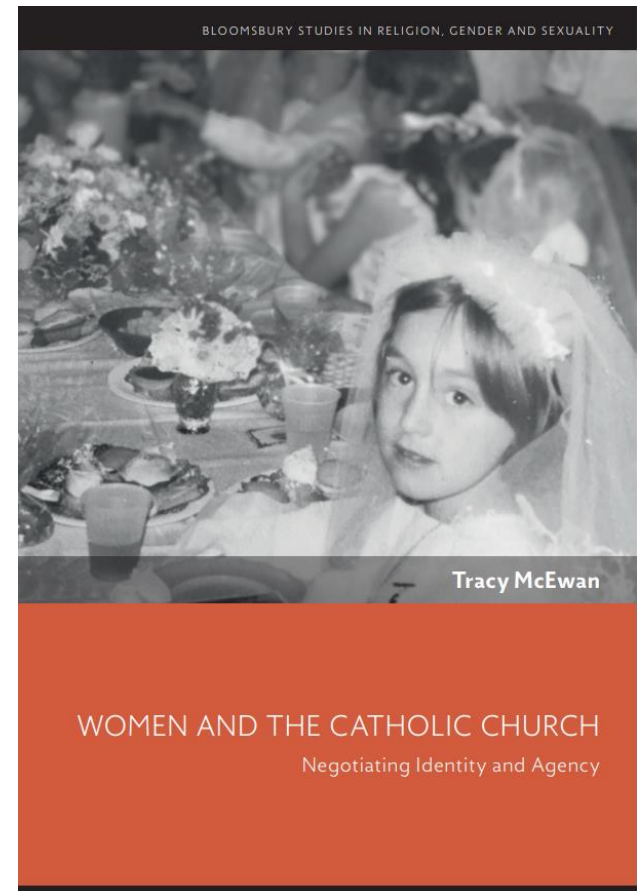
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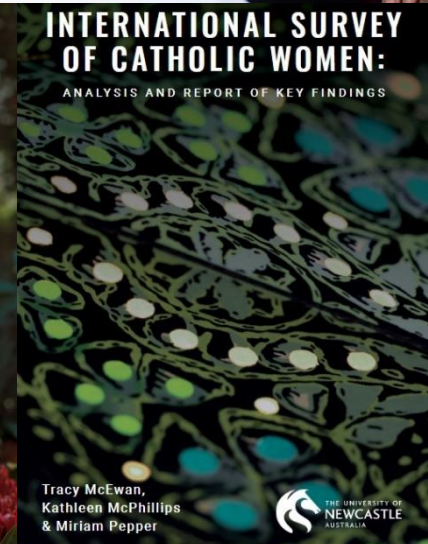
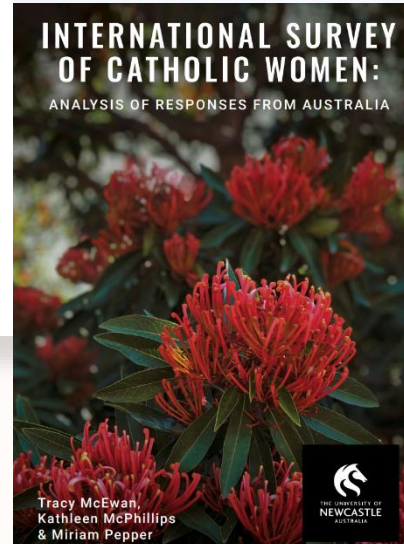


Sara Ahmed's (2023) core killjoy truth:
"If you expose a problem, you pose a
problem: if you pose a problem, you
become a problem" (p.18)



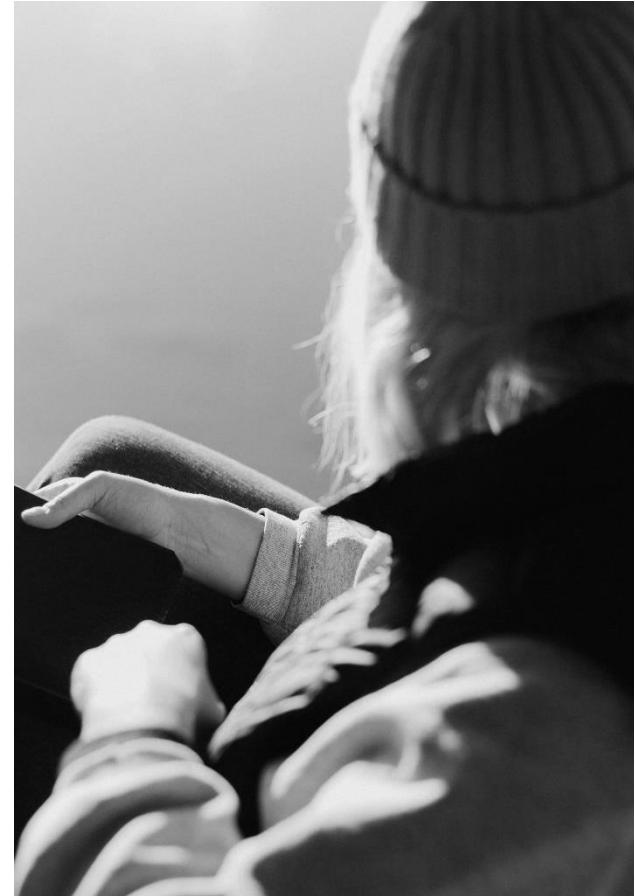
International Survey of Catholic Women (ISCW)

- Largest international survey of Catholic women ever undertaken.
- Distributed widely in 8 languages.
- 17,200 responses from 104 countries.
- Identified a high rate of gender-based violence (GBV) in women's everyday experiences within Catholic communities.



Gendered violence

- Acts of violence perpetrated against or affecting individuals due to their sex, gender, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity
- A wide range of harmful behaviours, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, occurring across public, private, home, workplace, and institutional settings
- In faith-based settings encompasses spiritual abuse and religious coercive control
- Can be directly linked to specific ideas of gender and conceptions of women's social and theological roles



Spiritual Abuse

- Misuses of power and forms of emotional and psychological abuse, distinguished by systematic patterns of coercive and controlling behaviors within a religious context.
- Spiritual abuse is present “when people are pressured, coerced or forced to accept interpretations of their own lives, to carry out actions or make decisions which they themselves would not freely decide to do” (Doris Wagner 2019: 79; *my translation*).



Everyday Spiritual Abuse

Everyday spiritual abuses happen via various technologies of harm which are imposed on and internalized by women, individually and collectively so to the police and enforce hegemonic norms and expectations so to:

- implement a pedagogy of correction and/or diminishment conceived necessary for salvation in Christ
- maintain the dominance of male clerical power
- create power asymmetries that support the subordination of women.



Misogyny enlists actions and speech acts that demean, shame, devalue, and discriminate to put women in their place and compel or coerce them towards certain behaviors (Manne 2018).

“

I want to see a powerful recognition at the highest level of the church that women are to be respected not just when they fit at one end or the other of the virgin/mother scale, not just as second-rate human beings, but as individuals created in the image of God (over 70 years New Zealand).

How is it that a rapist of a girl, for example is less of a sinner than that girl that wants, and even more, needs the pregnancy to get interrupted? “Women's sins” are those that are against patriarchy not God (41 to 55 years, Guatemala).



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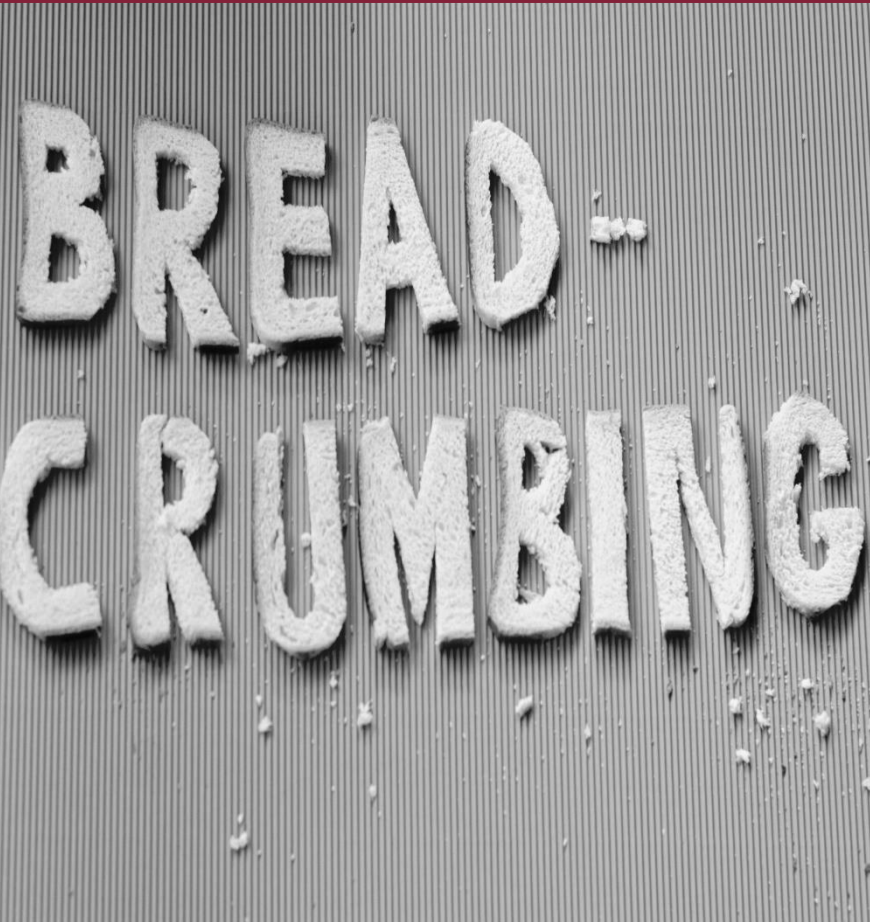
I am a Catholic Christian who is tired and disappointed with the explicit and implicit male orientation of the Church. While there are only males celebrating the Eucharist, power will remain male, sacramentally and canonically (56 to 70 years, Australia).



My life sometimes feels wasted because I felt a calling to be a priest and could not become one as a woman ... Living outside of priesthood feels as if I cannot be myself in this life (56 to 70 years, Netherlands).

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In an institutional setting, breadcrumbing tends to take the form of vague promises, false assurances, or token gestures aimed at placating individuals or groups who hold legitimate concerns or grievances.

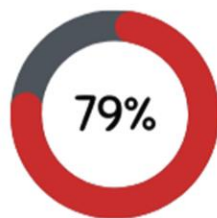


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Disappointed on some issues, but I know that at the centre of it all is Jesus and his gospel ... Hoping for change and also seeking and fighting for a way to achieve it (26 to 40 years, Mexico)

Frustration and disillusion are constant companions, but so is a deep belief in the power of Spirit to bring about change (over 70 years, Philippines).

”



LEADERSHIP

of respondents agreed with the statement
"Women should be fully included at all levels of church leadership"



PREACHING

of respondents agreed with the statement
"Women preachers should be able to give the homily during Mass"



ORDINATION

of respondents agreed with the statement
"Women should be eligible for ordination to the priesthood"

“

What a bizarre, archaic notion that men are somehow more spiritual or closer to God. Deeply frustrating (26 to 40 years, Singapore).

I feel ashamed of my Church when I see only men in procession and celebrating the Eucharist as they exclude women (41 to 55 years, Belgium).

It seems that the Holy Spirit is working to prepare people for the small change in canon law that would make this possible (26 to 40 years, Australia).

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Conclusion

- Even if Church spaces are reviewed and deconstructed, the fundamental grounding on which they are established can continue to be present and active.
- What is needed are radical democratic church spaces that are not just as places to 'be church', but also places for articulating, developing and debating feminist theories and theologies.



What are you doing collectively and individually to develop church spaces with the potential to be places of flourishing for women and others towards a more just and equitable future?

Acknowledgements

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