



Teresa Forcades at WOW 2015 - TRANSCRIPT

Margaret Johnson – introduction

Good afternoon. I'm very honoured to announce our final keynote speaker. Sister Teresa Forcades i Vila is, too put it bluntly, a force of nature, a Benedictine nun, a feminist theologian and a prominent activist for social justice. Sister Teresa has a non-stop schedule speaking, teaching and galvanising a political movement in her native Catalonia.

She has gained a huge international following through her criticisms of pharmaceutical companies and her political campaign for the region of Catalonia to gain independence from Spain.

Sister Teresa is a medical doctor, has a Master's degree in theology from Harvard and a PhD in public health. Although she's been nicknamed Europe's most radical nun, Sister Teresa didn't always intend to enter religious life. She was born to an atheist family in Catalonia and in the summer of 1995, chose to stay at the Benedictine monastery simply as a quiet place to study for her medical board exams.

She was deeply moved by the community of sisters she encountered as well as by her first reading of the bible which she describes as "a commotion". Just two years later she was taking her vows to become a Benedictine nun.

Sister Teresa's rich faith life gives her the immense courage to speak truth to power, especially to the power structures in our Church. She's been reprimanded by the Vatican for supporting reproductive rights and in a recent statement on the situation for women in the Catholic Church, Sister Teresa described it as, "an institution in which patriarchy is rampant. All the decision making is linked to something called ordination, and ordination is linked to something called gender."

We are extremely fortunate to have such a talented, powerful woman as our keynote speaker. Please give a warm WOW 2015 welcome to Sister Teresa Forcades

Teresa Forcades [Talk begins 3.05]

Feminist Ordination - A Trinitarian Approach.

Does the distinction between ordained and non-ordained ministry make any sense?

Ministry? Of course 'ministry' as a theological and practical category makes sense within the Christian community; it's I would say the core of it. Diakonia, service, ministry; we are not a religious group that wants to just enjoy in meditation even if some of us are in a contemplative monastery or come from the monastic tradition but from the beginning in my tradition, which is the Benedictine, it is central the incarnation of God, finding God in space and time. This means fully engaging with God's creation; co-creation would be the strongest theological notion - co-creation: creation understood not as something that God has done and finished but as something that God has prompted, has given impulse for, and now it's our duty and our joy to take on and move forward, in a direction that is not preordained and settled by God, but open because that's how I think that the notion and the reality of God stays at the centre of Christianity: not as a controller or a power from above, but as a real

inspiration for a path in freedom and love that has a lot of unknowns, even for God, even if the language here gets us in difficulty.

So within this Christian context: **does it make sense to distinguish *ordained* from *non-ordained* ministry?**

More fundamentally: does it make sense to distinguish between *sacramental* and *non-sacramental* actions? Sacramental – this word refers to a sign or symbol, and in theology is understood as making visible in time and space what is invisible, that is, the reality of God (that extends beyond time and space). So whatever makes the reality of God visible in time and space is a sacrament of God. Well, if that's so, isn't **life** itself a sacrament?

If we as human beings have been created 'in the image of God', isn't everything we do in life a sacrament? **Does it make sense to distinguish sacramental and non-sacramental?** (questions related to this are: how many sacraments are there and who can perform them).

And then a third question, in a succinct way: is the Eucharist somehow holier than Baptism? There is a sacrament called *baptism* that women can perform in an emergency when there is no priest available, but there is another one called *Eucharist* that can never be performed by a woman, under no condition.

Does this distinction make sense? **Is there something intrinsically different, and not only different but of a higher quality, holier or more sacred in the Eucharist as opposed to Baptism?**

These three questions set the context of my presentation.

My starting point is that the Christian community as such is a sacrament of the communion of God; a sacrament of the Trinity. That's why I have entitled my talk "Feminist Ordination - a Trinitarian Approach".

I find grounding and inspiration in chapter 17 of the gospel of John. It is my preferred chapter because of its theological implications that have yet to be fully explored in the Christian communities. This chapter is sometimes called *the priestly prayer of Jesus*. It's the prayer that Jesus addressed to the Father before his Passion, before being arrested, tortured and the executed under the political and religious powers of his time. It's one of the shortest chapters in the New Testament. And in such a short chapter, Jesus states four times something that was – and remains to this day –, astounding: "Father that they be one, like we are one" And again: "Like you and I are one, let them also be one" And a third time and a fourth time; four times in such a short chapter.

The implications of this statement have been underdeveloped in the history of Christianity because the unity between the Father and the Son, the unity between an invisible God beyond time and space and a visible human being that claims to be fully God on earth (in time and space) is what the later development in theology has called the Trinity and this Trinity and what it means has remained something completely separated from Christian life and liturgy, something that maybe some specialised theologians want to engage with, but nothing that is relevant to our daily lives; and yet, at such a key moment in the life of Jesus, we encounter this prayer calling us as human beings to fully experience the *same* communion and the *same* unity that God experiences in God's mysterious triune self.

Therein lies the full sacramental character of the Christian community and this of course raises a lot of questions. The Greek word perichoresis (translated into Latin as circumincession), a technical word in the tradition of Trinitarian theology, can help us delve in some of them.

Perichoresis is composed from two Greek words: *peri*, the prefix that means *around* + *choresis* from *choreo*, a root that can be translated by *making space*. It is the same root present in the word *choreography*, for example, an English word for *dance*; a dance can be called a *choreography* because a dance is a *graphos* (a writing) in space. So you write in space with a choreographed dance: you are telling a story but you do it not with words, you do it in space.

According to its etymology then, perichoretic love, the inner core of the mystery of the Trinity, would be a love able to “make space around the other”. This is the relationship that Jesus in his prayer (John 17) is encouraging us to have with each other in our Christian communities; in the measure that we do that, we will be sacramental, we’ll be true to our sacramental character as a community. Our sacramental character is made concrete in a type of relationship that understands love not only according to the erotic metaphor; erotic love entails the desire to go inside the other person or have the other person come inside of me or both, and that can be very powerful and very deep, but the problem with the erotic understanding of love is that it is compatible with violence. Erotic love might be experienced in the context of a free relationship and then it would be perichoretic, but it can also be experienced violently: I might fully and deeply desire to go inside of the other person or that the other person comes inside of me or we get fused in some way, but I can desire and sometimes realize that at the physical level against the free will of the other person.

Perichoretic love: is my relationship to the other person making space for her/him? Perichoretic (Trinitarian) love is centred in making space so that the other person can be whatever she/he wants to be, regardless of whether my encouraging her/his personal freedom brings that person closer to me – what I most deeply want – or not.

God is perichoretic and loves us perichoretically. Despite God’s desire, repeatedly expressed in the Old and the New Testament, of having a full communion with us, and independently of how strong that desire on God’s part is, God never forces or invades us against our will. Some passages in the Old testament might seem to contradict this, but the tenet of God’s dealings with humanity and of God’s revelation, is that **God acknowledges and accepts a limit and that limit is the human will** that says, “Yes”, or says, “No”, or says, “Come back later”, or “I’ll think about it”. Jesus repeatedly experienced the drama of trying to convey to whomever cared to hear him, how much the desire of God is so strong and so ready for a communion with us in mutual respect, for a communion that is not hierarchical; and we say, “Ok, I’ll think about it a bit later, come back, maybe tomorrow”.

Such is the proposal that God in history consistently makes to us: the perichoretic relationship is the depth of what it means to be a Christian community; to realise in time and space the life of God.

More concretely, what does it mean ‘to be a sacrament of the life of God’? There are three dimensions of life essential to us as human beings that God does not share. Two of them are the classical two Kantian categories: as human beings we can only understand ourselves in space and time, space and time are what defines the human experience. And the third category? I speak about three basic categories instead of two, because I think that the human experience is defined truly by space and time, but also by sexuality. Space, time and sex (three things we share with animals but not with God) are what make possible human consciousness.

Here I have a problem: I consider that the human being defined by space, time and sex has been created ‘in the image of God’ and at the same time I claim with my theological tradition that God – except in the incarnation –, is truly beyond space, beyond time and beyond sexuality.

So how can we understand that? What are we to do with this gap between who God is and who we are? Is it not a contradiction to be created in God’s image while being defined by three categories that are absent in God? I believe that there is a way to experience space, time and sex that turn the discrepancy between the basic dimensions of our life and those of God’s from an apparent hindrance into **the condition of possibility for us** to experience what God is trying to tell us and what God is.

Granted that in God there is no space, but in God – in the Christian Trinitarian God – there is something of which we would have no clue if we were not living in space, and this is **reciprocity**.

This is not a given; there are many notions of God that have nothing to do with *reciprocity* and sadly even in the Christian tradition, we have had and still have notions of God that have nothing to do with *reciprocity*: **we often say that God basically is a Giver**, somebody who has everything He needs and we need and He just gives it and then He is so generous and so loving as to be able to welcome us and love us from a position of supreme power and fullness that does not entail or understand the term reciprocity.

The notion of Trinity is different; it means that we believe that **God cannot be conceived without reciprocity**: in God there is not only **giving**, but also **receiving**. I believe this is one fundamental notion of our religious tradition that we have not explored enough. In the Trinity, God gives and God receives. If there can be no contradiction between what God is in God-self and what God is *for us and with us*, God then must also be in the relationship to us not only **One able to give**, but also as **One able to receive**, and this means also that if the Church (the Christian community) is to be a sacrament of God in the world, the Church cannot present itself in the world as having only something to give to the world. I do believe that we Christians have a lot to offer and I believe that it is our responsibility to be faithful to that.

Excursus 1: They have introduced me saying, “Teresa came from an atheist family”. I was however baptized as a child and also I had the first communion so you might say “Ok, very strange atheist family!” But that’s because when I was little Spain was still under national Catholicism, the fascist government of Franco: in such a regime it was socially problematic not to baptise the children and not to have them do their first communion. My parents are not martyrs of atheism and so they just went through whatever socially accepted moves there were but they warned me as a child, “the Catholic Church is an outdated institution; it’s like the monarchy. The church and the monarchy are still there but they don’t make any sense in the modern world so they will just go away slowly and you don’t need to bother with them”. That’s basically what I was told. My parents were not belligerent, they were not anti-church, they didn’t give me a sense of negativity, but they just said *irrelevant*, something that’s in the past and that’s it. That was my upbringing, but then when I was fifteen years old I had the opportunity to read the Gospels for the first time and for me that was a transformative experience. I got the chance to read them because somebody *offered* me to read them. And that person had received the witness from somebody else, and that somebody else from another ... etc. so definitely there is a constitutive **giving aspect** in God and in the Church and we have to be aware of it, affirm it and take responsibility for it.

However, and here comes my point, **giving** is not enough. Setting ourselves in the world only as **givers** does not allow the world to experience the Trinitarian God, does not allow us to be representatives or, theologically stated, **sacraments** of the Christian God because it’s a God that is also **a Receiver**. How can God have a receiving aspect? Well, that’s precisely what has puzzled the theologians and the theological reflection of Christianity from the beginning. As you know it took almost five hundred years to come to the notion of the Trinity that says that the giving end and the receiving end – the Father and the Son – are equally divine, equally full in divinity. The Giver (Father) is not more than the Receiver (Son). And it is taking more than one thousand and five hundred years to make sense of what this means and to bring what this means into real concrete structures in our communities.

So what does it mean to present ourselves as a Church in the world saying ‘Yes, I have something to give and I’m ready to offer it, but ***I have also something to receive, and in my receiving I am being as fully a testimony and as fully a sacrament of God as in my giving***’.

How can we make that concrete in our communities? What kind of world and what kind of dynamic in the community, what kind of ministries, what kind of ordained ministers – if any –, what kind of relationship with these ministers should we set up so that these are not only words and become a reality among us?

Back to space, time and sexuality: despite not being present as such in God, I consider that there is a way of experiencing each of them that helps us make sense of them in the direction of what a fulfilled Creation is supposed to be, and there are two basic ways of experiencing them that actually hinder that. Space can allow us to experience otherness and difference as reciprocity, but we can also experience otherness and difference as a threat (we deny space for 'the other') or as an unsurmountable limit (we absolutize space as distance and strangeness).

Denying space means ignoring the consistent otherness of the other; it means pretending that differences are only at the superficial level, that they are only an appearance, but if you are able to transcend difference and appearance in order to have a deeper vision, what you will find is **unity**. Many philosophies have espoused this view, according to which the core of reality is uniform, it doesn't have a place for consistent difference/otherness.

Well, that's not what the Trinity means. The notion of God as Trinity implies that unity and diversity are equally optimal, equally divine and equally ultimate. It's not true that you have a diversity and then deeper down there is a unity. No. There is a unity together with a diversity, and there is a diversity together with a unity.

And not to leave it so abstract, an example would be what my mother abbess said when I entered the monastery. I had come from the United States - I did my last medical training and my first theological training in the United States - and then entered the monastery in 1997. The abbess asked me, "Well Teresa, what do you think will be the goal of the time that you'll be a postulant?" – during the first year at the monastery, we're called postulants, we are not yet novices -. I answered, "Given that I come from a very different context, I will have to learn to adapt myself as much as I can to the ways of the monastery." At that, the abbess looked disappointed. I was confused, "What went wrong?" I thought mine had been a very obvious answer. Then she said, "Of course I understand what you mean and I appreciate that you have this willingness to fit in etc., but you know what?" And then she told me her dream of what a Christian community should be like, "I believe that God has made each of us unique and each of us original in a very profound way. So I understand, as abbess of this community, that if the community functions well, it's not that we start being very different and after a few years of living together we progressively change in order to be more and more alike, but on the contrary, if we are a true living Christian community we start very differently, and after a year, after ten years of living together, we are even more different than we were when we started."

That's what she said. I answered "Ok. I'm going to meditate about it" ... and twenty years later I am still meditating about it! Because that's how she understood in practical terms what I was saying in abstract, that the category of **space** is not an opportunity to achieve unity understood as uniformity. Unity is essential to the Christian experience, but it's a peculiar type of unity. It's a unity that fosters diversity, not one that passively *tolerates* diversity, it's not a unity that says "*It's impossible to have everybody thinking the same way so let's tolerate diversity*", but one that says "*Wait a minute. We have a problem in this community because we all think alike. Let's get somebody else in so that we don't stagnate*".

This most basic theological, metaphysical and practical valuing of diversity and this not setting it against unity is a huge challenge that demands many changes in the way we envision ministry, not only how we speak about it but how we enact it in reality. What does it mean for us as a community to have *Trinitarian* ministries?

Denying space amounts to colonialism, imperialism, tyranny; it is denying the differentiated identity of the other: if you cannot convert, kill. In a schematic way, it is the sin of Modernity. The sin of Postmodernity would then be **taking space as if it were absolute, as if it could not be crossed**: then you say the differentiated identity of the other is so real that there is no reaching out. The isolation of the self and the fragmentation of the world are huge topics in contemporary philosophy: the understanding that our differences are so fundamental that there is only an illusion of communion, an illusion of reaching out to others; but in reality we all remain forever fundamentally isolated from others. This is a philosophical position that makes absolute a real aspect of our lives: space. **Experiencing space as reciprocity** is an alternative to **denying space** like modernity, colonialism or imperialism do, and an alternative to **making space absolute** as the contemporary notions of the fragmentation of the world and the isolation of the self do. In God there is no space, but there is reciprocity. The spatial reality is sacramental in that it *allows us* to experience reciprocity. It *allows us* the experience, but never forces it upon us. Experiencing God (true reciprocity is an example of such experience) can only be a free experience.

What about **time**? I just argued that God doesn't have space, but has reciprocity. Ok. Let's assume this is so. What then about time? God does not have time but it has ... what? What is the category in God that corresponds to *time*? What 'something' exists in God that our existing in time allows us to experience? [a member of audience calls out "eternity"].

Well, you could say "eternity" but in a way "eternity" is denying time, isn't it? Maybe you can say it's a time of a different quality, but what I was thinking of is **truth**. In God there is truth. God says, "I'm true. I'm not a false God. I'm not an idol". Other gods in the Old Testament are called *false*. Why? Because they say to you, "I'll be there" and then don't come. That's a notion of truth. We are familiar with another notion of truth called 'propositional truth': one plus one make two; that's true. Ok, it is true, but it is not a consistent **truth**: one plus one make two in a decimal system but in a binary system one plus one make one, or zero, I don't know, whatever it is. Binary systems only have zero and one, so one plus one in a binary system make not two, that's for sure.

We can say it's true that one plus one make two but this is a different kind of truth and God has nothing to do with this kind of truth (propositional truth). God is true in the sense that God is **faithful**. **Fidelity is something that our being in time gives us an opportunity to experience**. There are also – as we have seen with space – two fundamentally frustrating ways of dealing with time. The first one is fundamentalism or dogmatism which deny time in a parallel way as imperialism or colonialism deny space.

If you say, "I'm a true or a faithful person." What does it mean? I said so and so ten years ago and you find me ten years later and I continue saying exactly the same thing, is this really what a consistent person is like? I don't think so: taking **time** seriously implies something that the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) named **creative fidelity**. Fidelity yes, but not immobility (unity yes, but not uniformity). I cannot say 'I met you once here so ten years later I'm still waiting for you here', because in those ten years you've moved, so in order to be faithful to you I have to move as well, otherwise I'm going to miss you and I will think it's your fault. So is temporal reality, dynamic and moving: if I want to be with you, to love you, I have to be true and faithful, but that doesn't mean immobile because life moves. And this is what God does all the time: in the gospels and also in the Old Testament, God keeps making proposals to us and we the people say, "No, thank you" and God moves and comes back in some different way: "Ok, here I am" and we say "Later" and God keeps coming again and again, but without repeating Himself. Each one of us can know in her own biography, how that has happened and how love is always like this; it's always creative, moving, dynamic, never stagnant.

So this would be the first type of frustrating experiences of **time**: fundamentalism or dogmatism (they are – like colonialism – linked to Modernity); the second type of frustrating experience of **time** is relativism, understood as the belief that there is no truth (this is – like the isolation of the self – linked to Postmodernity). I don't believe in relativism. Abuse is not relative. Abuse is wrong no matter when

and where and no matter how you feel personally about it. Abuse is wrong. Violence sometimes can be good like that of Jesus in the temple, but violence from the stronger against the weaker (abuse) is always wrong. Sexism is always wrong and racism is always wrong. I think this is true. And I think that this kind of truth needs to be said again and again in words appropriate to the reality that keeps changing. I believe in contextualization, but I don't believe in relativism.

The third element, besides **space** and **time**, which defines our human experience is **sex**. It is usually not discussed as a philosophical category together with the other two, but it is essential to our human condition. In God there is not only reciprocity and truth, there is something else and about this something else I believe we would have no clue if we didn't have sexuality in our lives. This something else is fire, desire, ecstasy.

One can have a calm and contained notion of reciprocity and a sense of truth also contained or serene but there is something else in God than calmness, contention and serenity. In God there is fire (Lk 12:49); there is desire; there is a sort of ecstatic craziness. There is craziness in all the saints: saint Francis, saint Gertrude, saint Teresa of Avila, all the saints if they are truly so, are a bit out of themselves. They have an extra bursting of life, a bubbling of life in them, something that escapes rationality; we can also call this the Holy Spirit: the wind that gives life and moves everything and you don't know from where it blows, there is a breaking of limits that cannot be contained in a concept. You can call it life: God is life. But **fire** I think is the best word and I relate that with sexuality because I believe that in our human experience, sexual attraction is what usually comes unexpectedly into one's life and most deeply unsettle it. Sexual attraction makes one want to come out of the self in a way that words cannot express very well. One wants to be oneself most fully than ever, but at the same time the intuition is clear that in order to be fully oneself, you have to somehow move beyond yourself and open up in a very fundamental way and this is what I bring together as something that correlates with God, and it brings us to this very deep inner aspect of God as life, fire, full bursting reality.

The two types of frustrating experiences of sexuality coincide with the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and can also be aligned to the historical moments we call modernity and postmodernity; modernity has promoted the stereotypical masculine as a model (the self defined by its individual autonomy; 'esse in' according to saint Augustine; fostering the des-identification of the self with one's sexuality and body in order to achieve self-realization); postmodernity promotes the stereotypical feminine (the self defined by its network of constitutive relationships; 'esse ad' according to saint Augustine; fostering the identification of the self with one's sexuality and body in order to achieve self-realization). The notion that who we are fundamentally as human beings needs to take into account our links and connections gathers momentum today, and not only because of the internet; the notion of 'self' as 'autonomous' (being 'in itself') is today often regarded with scepticism in literature and philosophy: *What are you "in yourself"? You're empty in yourself. It's only what you are in relationship to others that gives you an identity. Your body and your feelings are more real than your intellect and your thoughts.*

As I understand it, fulfilling experiences of sexuality have nothing to do with what is usually called anthropology of complementarity. Complementarity is something that might sound appealing in order to overcome the hierarchy between feminine and masculine. Maybe some of you who are here think favourably about complementarity between the sexes. The alternative both to hierarchy and to complementarity is to open the personal space to a unique original experience for each human being. A unique original experience that cannot be categorised. That's why I use sometimes the expression "queer theology".

'Queer theory' is the name given today to the intellectual effort to move radically beyond all categories, to think the human experience as an opportunity to bring up a new space for each human person. This is a challenge because the fear of freedom is part of what we experience personally and it's also socially a challenge because we are not ready in the Church or in the society to make space for

people to be what they really are or want to become without asking them whether they belong to this or that group.

Being a sacrament of the Trinity, then, would imply engaging the three basic dimensions of human life in 'a Trinitarian way', that is, approaching **space** (difference, otherness) as an invitation to *reciprocity*, approaching **time** as an opportunity for *truth/fidelity* and approaching **sex** as an opportunity to experience *fire/passion for what is original* and unique in the beloved person.

All this gives a sense of how I understand sacramentality. Another fundamental characteristic of it is the lack of hierarchy between the Father and the Son, between the Giver and the Receiver. It is astounding and has been very difficult for theology to speak about the Trinity without establishing a hierarchy, without considering that somehow the Father is the most important, then comes the Son, then comes the Holy Spirit. Some Christian Churches (the Roman Catholic among them) have an ordained ministry called the sacrament of the Holy Orders that distinguishes the office of **bishop** (referred to the Trinitarian person of the Father), the office of **priest** (referred to Jesus, the Trinitarian person of the Son), and the office of **deacon** (referred to the Holy Spirit), and conceive this ordained ministry as a hierarchy, with the bishop having the fullness of that sacrament of Orders and then the priest and then the deacon having less of it. The sacrament of orders is still viewed hierarchically and even as an 'ecclesiastical career': you move from deacon to priest and if you're lucky and successful enough then you achieve to be a bishop.

The current practices of ordained ministry in the Roman Catholic Church reinforce and actually fully uphold the hierarchical understanding. I think it's a structural sin together with sexism and linked to it. Sexism is rampant in the Catholic Church; clericalism too. We need to change both and to change them as soon as possible.

But not because we are 21st century people that don't accept hierarchies anymore. That's why I did this rather lengthy introduction on the Trinity because my goal today is to give a theological grounding as deep as I can to the critique of clericalism. If we want to be faithful to our sacramental mission as Church, as a Christian community, we need not only giving, we need also receiving. And what we have to give has to do with a fundamentally non-hierarchical understanding of difference. You might say, "What a strange God!" but so is our God, so is the Christian Trinitarian God: a God that includes difference and orders it non-hierarchically. How do you express that? With difficulty!, to be sure, but that's part and parcel of dealing with a sacrament: you cannot just bring God into categories. You cannot neatly pack God and say "Here it is: I'm delivering it to you." You have to become a bit uncomfortable while talking about God because God is not an object of our understanding, is a subject on Her own. And a subject is always breaks all categories.

It is by now clear that I consider the hierarchical understanding of God and therefore of sacramentality fundamentally wrong, but is then 'ordination' in itself also fundamentally wrong? Does it make sense to have ordained and non-ordained ministry in the Church?

I believe that it does make sense to have 'ordination' but it has to be a non-hierarchical ordination and that's why I gave to my presentation today the title "feminist ordination." Ordination has to do with *order*. I'm part of a Benedictine community and for almost twenty years we have been forty nuns in the community. Now we are down to thirty, but our organising needs still to be taken very seriously, otherwise our life would be chaotic: "Given that we have a non-hierarchical God, let us then have Christian communities where people come in and do whatever they feel and that's the best". Well, no. I don't think so. There is a practical aspect that needs to be acknowledged: everybody cannot read every day, therefore we need a ministry (a service, an appointment) of reading; everybody cannot lead the community, therefore we need a ministry of leadership (the abbess) ... etc.

At a practical level I think it's obvious that you need to have some kind of appointed minister – a person in charge of a given service that bears responsibility for it. Now, does all ministry in the Church

need be *sacramental*? Does the 'sacrament' happen only when the ministry is officially appointed and there is a public laying of hands done by the bishop or the priest acting on the bishop's behalf? Well, why should we think like this if we believe that, as a Christian community, as baptised, and even as human beings, we all have the capacity to make visible in time and space God's reciprocity, truthfulness and fire? Whenever God's ways are made visible in the world, there is a sacrament and this sacrament can be within a community expressed and made visible through appointed ministries (ordained ministries), but also through ministries (services, realities) that have not gone through these appointed paths.

One small example of that from my own community: we pray vespers every day and there is always a moment of explicit petitionary prayer; when that moment comes, the appointed sister in charge of the prayers goes to the lectern and reads the prayers that she has prepared. On Sundays and other festivities, the sister in charge, before uttering the closing remark, leaves the lectern and returns to her place and then everybody who wants can do a prayer aloud.

This is a very simple example of coexistence between ordained or appointed ministry and spontaneous ministry. I consider that it makes no theological sense to contend that when the sister who is explicitly appointed by the community says the prayer, there is something more sacred in it than when the spontaneous sisters say the prayer. Appointing or ordaining helps organizing the community and, by doing so, it achieves a theological point and not only a practical one: the ordained ministry symbolizes and enacts the presence of God within each of us and amongst us; it reminds us that we are called to live in a Trinitarian way with each other.

Gary Mason, who has spoken at this Conference before me, is one of the authors who has helped us see how in the history of Christianity, the term ordination has not always meant the same. In the Middle Ages the abbesses were **ordained**. Were they priests? In fact, they were more like bishops: they had the mitre and the staff, exerted ecclesiastical authority and acted 'in persona Christi' in the monastery. The ceremony of blessing of an abbess included the laying on of hands which is a beautiful sign of commissioning and has to do with the sacramental understanding I'm developing today, a Trinitarian approach to ordination.

In the Trinity there is a sending, there is a commissioning. St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas insist that when the Son is sent to the Incarnation, the Father and the Holy Spirit send Him but the Son sends Himself also. I think this is a very important remark because, as I understand it, in the Christian community there has to be always a creative tension between the self in itself (*esse in*) and the self in its constitutive relationship to others (*esse ad*); there is no dichotomy with regard to the Christian mission or appointment between *being sent by the community* and *going on one's own*; the Christian community (understood as a Trinitarian sacramental community) does never nullify me, never makes me an object that's being acted upon (ex. being passively sent). However, our liturgy does not always reflect this, and the reality of how our Church works does not always reflects it either. For example, yesterday we had the blessing of our new abbess in Montserrat (Spain) and that's why I couldn't come before to this Conference. It was a beautiful ceremony, but at the key moment of her commissioning, the abbess was positioned in a way that didn't look right to me: she was passive, she was only 'being done' and the ones 'doing' where only men. There is much we need to change in our rituals so that the one 'being sent' or 'being commissioned' can be a sacrament of the Trinitarian Son: actively receiving and fully participating in the action.

Do we then need ordained ministry or not? My answer is Yes. I think there is no problem in having ordained ministries if it remains clear that these ordained ministries do not set apart, do not make the minister holier or more sacred; *a Christian ordained ministry does not bring the person being ordained any closer to God.* The old priestly understanding acknowledges 'priests' as mediators between the domain of the invisible God and the domain of visible things. For a Christian, Jesus is the only Mediator: Jesus Christ who is fully God and fully human and is to be found in the community. The letter to the Hebrews is very clear. So I don't think a feminist ordination or a Trinitarian ordination

can accept at all any sense of mediation between God and the human other than the community from which the ordained minister receives the strength and the validation. God does not directly confer 'sacred power' to a person: it gives it to the interaction between the community and the particular person. The person outside the community has no sacramental power, she has of course a full human dignity that belongs to her regardless of whether those around her acknowledge it or not, but she has no 'sacramental power' on her own, because the 'sacramental power' demands a real perichoretic (Trinitarian) exchange, a real reciprocity: *for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them* (Matt. 18:20).

Ordination is not only a matter of practicality: "we need effective organizing and that's why we appoint people." No. Acknowledging the diversity in charismas, in the gifts that each one has, acknowledging the need of differentiating has an intrinsic (substantial) sacramental value. So when I ponder whether it makes any sense to distinguish sacramental and non-sacramental ordination, my answer is that the distinction makes sense, but it makes sense because we can live our human reality in a perichoretic (Trinitarian) way or not; it is not automatic; we can let our 'being created in the image of God' become active in our life ... or not. I have always a self and I have always an interconnection with others even if I don't acknowledge it, even if I don't want it; only acknowledging it (with the life, not with words) brings about the 'sacrament'.

Human experience in itself is not sacramental: freedom and love are. As we have seen, there are frustrating ways of living my time, my space and my sexuality that are actually a hindrance to perceiving the divine presence. For instance, when I commit abuse. Abuse is a human experience but is not a sacramental reality; it is an anti-sacramental reality. And I think that needs to be said and needs to be said with full force. So there are aspects of life, ways of living life, ways of being community and also ways of being alone that are **definitely not** sacramental. As human beings we have always the potential to be sacramental, independently of whether we have been ordained or not, appointed or not, acknowledged or not by the religious institution; the religious institution is not what gives us or takes from us our capacity to be a sacrament of God; it is the fact of experiencing our human life in such a way that opens up the expression and the development of our full divine reality; a divine reality that at the beginning of Christianity was called with a name that today we use very little and sometimes consider even heretical: divinisation, in Greek theosis. **The goal of human life is to become divine**. This is the predominant understanding in the first centuries of patristic theology – theosis, divinisation is the only purpose of human life according to patristic theology.

Excursus 2: We could start calling this period of Christian theology also matristic because we are learning lately that women were very active in it; one example is Macrina the younger, it seems that the *rule of Basil from Cesarea* should be called *rule of Macrina*, because Basil's eldest sister Macrina was twenty years the abbess of the monastery where Basil spent only two years; one needs to experience for a long period what the daily life is like at a monastery to be able to make up a rule like the one that is called the *rule of Basil*.

So matristic-patristic theology has at its core the notion of theosis (divinisation) and this notion is the one that makes sense when we think about ordination. How do we foster 'divinisation' and how do we express our sacramentality? I do think that there is a need to distinguish between sacrament and non-sacrament, but the 'sacred' does not correspond to a space 'controlled by a religious institution'; in the gospel of Matthew Jesus dies rendering the curtain of the temple from top to bottom, the curtain that separated the sacred from the non-sacred, because this separation had to do with hierarchy: the 'sacred' was a space that was only for a few people, only the high priest could go there, and only at appointed times. This separation of sacred/non-sacred has nothing to do with what I'm talking about. I think feminist ordination gets rid of this separation but keeps and should keep a distinction between what is sacramental and what is not. Sacramental has to do with perichoretic presence, with active love and freedom; there are other options to experience space, time and sex and we should keep a clear vision to criticise them frankly as 'non-sacramental'. I refuse any theological understanding that doesn't allow me to make such differences.

Finally, a few words about the last question I said I would address: women and other non-ordained Catholics can baptize if needed, but they can never consecrate the Eucharist; is then the Eucharist as a sacrament substantially different from Baptism; is the Eucharist somehow *holier* than baptism? We have in the Catholic Church seven sacraments for men and six for women; the number seven is not something that we need to defend as if it were God-given. If a man gets ordained as a priest, this is a sacrament; if a man or a woman gets married, this is a sacrament; but if a woman becomes a nun, this is not a sacrament. Why not? [applause] I've thought about it, as you can imagine. I don't find any theological reason for this; becoming a nun is an engagement for your whole life; it's something you do publicly; it's something you do in the Church. Why shouldn't that be a sacrament?

It's fundamental that we acknowledge in feminist theology and with an idea of feminist ordination that we have to take responsibility for our notion of 'ordination'. What do we call sacraments, what do we not? In no case can we hide ourselves under excuses: "We've always done it like this" because when we study ordination we realise that there have been major changes, but even if there had been none, we still need to take responsibility for our present praxis and understanding of the faith, as the Church is used to do in other areas. I'll give an example. For the liturgical vigil of Easter night (the longest service and the most important in the Christian liturgy), the Catholic Church has, among other readings, the prophetic text Ezekiel 36:16 - 28. However, what's proposed to be read that night is not Ezekiel 36: 16 - 28 in its entirety, but Ezekiel 36: 16-17a, 18-28. So of course I had the question, "What does 17b say? (laughs) Why has 17b been left out from this reading? Verse 17a reads: *Mortal, when the house of Israel lived on their own soil, they defiled it with their ways and their deeds; And then 17b adds: their conduct in my sight was like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual period.*

The Catholic Church, misogynist and sexist as it is, is nevertheless in the 21st century, and it realized that it would be too much to say on the holier night, on that night when everybody should be really getting the point of what God is all about, that God considers menstruation a source of uncleanness, indeed - in the context of the reading - a source of shame and guilt, defiling and abhorrent as a sin.

Why then do we still read 1Cor 14:34, "let your women keep silent in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience as the Law says" and excuse ourselves saying: "We don't like it, but it is the Bible!" Ok, then go ahead and proclaim also as 'the word of God' Ezequiel 36:17b, it is also in the Bible! If we are entitled as a Church to leave out Ez 36:17b, why don't we leave out also 1Cor 14:34? [applause] It is not a matter only of versicles, though; how we are dealing with the whole of the Church's sacramental reality is equally in our hands; it is our full responsibility.

I'm coming to a close now - I have tried to draft a theological foundation of the sacramental life of the Church that I think would lead us to an upheaval of the hierarchical understanding of ordained ministries, keeping nevertheless a very clear notion of mission and of what we are called to be as a Christian community: the goal of feminist ordination is to make visible in the world today the fundamental perichoretic understanding of what the life of God is, and to keep building and celebrating free loving communities without hierarchies and without abuse.

Thank you very much. [Finish 1.06]

Miriam Duignan responds

Teresa Forcades, thank you. It is such an honour to have you speak for us and thank you for the work that you do for everyone.

Everybody has a stole and I would like you to have a stole. So here it is. [Places purple stole round Sr. Teresa's neck]