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Papabile Women

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Seven women were arrested outside the Synod in 2022 for calling for women's ordination.

WOC - Women's Ordination Conference

Amid calls for a more inclusive Church, women religious and reform advocates find themselves detained outside the Vatican, raising fresh questions about the Church's openness to the voices of its female faithful.

About mid-afternoon on Wednesday, 7th May, the first day of the Conclave, two pilgrims talking to the gathered international Press just outside St Peter's Square became aware that they had been surrounded.

About nine plain and uniformed State Police officers indicated to Rhiannon Parry Thompson and her husband Geoffrey Brome Thompson, that they were to go with them. They were eventually escorted to an on-site police hub. In all, they were questioned for about one and a half hours, largely about their identity, accommodation and flights home, rather less extensively about their purposes and intentions. There was a very high level of uncertainty and officiousness.

Midway through this ordeal, the Thompsons realised that three women had been added to their number. The women, two of whom were nuns, Superiors General from Brussels, and one of their associates, in Rome for their international Congress of 900 women, were made to give up their ID cards and passports, and subjected to similar interrogation. Why were they here, what were they doing? They were staying in the same hotel as the Thompsons, the guards insisted. No, they weren't, they replied, showing proof of their accommodation. They had never seen each other before.

But they were in Rome to talk about women's ordination, the guards insisted. That was what their Congress was about. You are women! they said, implying guilt by association.

Sadly, the Thompsons have become accustomed to this. They are members of Root & Branch Community for Reform, and Catholic Women's Ordination. Parry Thompson was arrested in 2022, outside the first session of the Synod, as one of what has become known as the Vatican Seven. Possibly the guards were under orders to look out for the Seven, but were unable to identify her. Later, the Thompsons learned that they were not the only reformers to have been detained yesterday afternoon; four further women were detained.

What sort of a Church threatens its faithful with arrest and detention when they exercise their conscientious right to speak?

Sadly, all of this takes place against the backdrop of a Church which had, for the first time ever, begun in 2021 to ask its faithful what the Church needs. 'The Synod offers us the opportunity to become a Church of listening,' Pope Francis had said. 'We have the opportunity to become a Church of closeness. This is the style of God; being close with compassion and tenderness.'

We want to see women treated equally, the faithful had replied, globally. Root & Branch's own analysis of England and Wales' 22 Dioceses Synodal responses shows that 91% of us asked for the ordination of women.

Is this what the faithful are supposed to say?

Again, sadly, no. Not according to the Final Document of the XVIth Synod of Bishops when the talking was over. Some lip service is paid to 'the pain of feeling excluded', but apart from a few more warm and deliberately opaque words, 'the question of women's access to diaconal ministry remains open. This discernment needs to continue.' And thus the question is batted back again straight into the long grass. Hierarchs one, faithful nil. So we are left with the problem of how to discuss and examine the necessity for growth and change in a Church which is peculiarly and specifically constructed not to listen to its people?

Root & Branch has taken this opportunity to draw up our list of Papabile Women in a transformed Church. As a new leader for the Roman Catholic Church has been chosen by 133 men, many of them close to 80 years old, we reflect deeply on what sort of leadership a Christian community truly needs. An autocratic male monarchy atop a self-preserving 3,000 strong male civil service, or Curia, is no longer the answer.



PAPABILE WOMEN

in a transformed Catholic Church

"A Church which ignores its women is like a bird with a broken wing."
Dr Mary McAleese.

 <p>Joan Chittister - USA One of the most influential religious leaders of our time. Known and loved by millions for her warmth, wisdom and wit on her Benetvision and Monasteries of the Heart series, and for her feisty spiritual common sense.</p>	 <p>Mary McAleese - EU Ireland Twice President of Ireland, and recent winner of prestigious Alfons Auer Prize for her work on children's rights and the Catholic Church. Formidable political and personal skills challenging lack of Human Rights in Canon Law.</p>
 <p>Elissa Roper - Australia Parent, theologian and academic, expert on synodality in the Catholic Church. Works extensively with Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua NG. Passionate about building a mature, responsible and loving Church.</p>	 <p>Nontando Hadebe - S Africa "No institution, including the Church, can ignore or violate human rights." Currently coordinates gender justice projects at Side by Side and Bread for the World. On board of Future Church, much loved for warmth and humanity.</p>
 <p>Virginia Saldanha - India Founder member and secretary of the Indian Women's Theologians Forum, and a former Executive Secretary of the Indian bishops' Commission for Women. Theologian, activist, journalist and long-term advocate and supporter of survivors of clerical sexual abuse.</p>	 <p>Miriam Duignan - UK Communications Director for the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research. Fluent international speaker; "Exposing lies about women's ministry and challenging sexist teaching is not lobbying, it is our duty".</p>
 <p>A myriad women leaders In Baptism we "have put on Christ... you are all equal in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3: 27-28). Women's intellectual, pastoral, moral, theological, therapeutic and teamworking leadership skills are vital today for a radically transformed leadership of our Church. Who would you put forward?</p>	

www.rootandbranchsynod.org/papabile-women

Can any one person supply the leadership that the 21st century Roman Catholic Church requires? Surely, we need a variety of skills and gifts used collaboratively for the good of all. We look for emotional intelligence as well as academic, a strong sense of responsibility and accountability to those that they serve, and a determination to challenge power abuse and to transform structure and culture.

There are multitudes of women in the Catholic Church who are Spirit-led and have the gifts that are needed. Who are barred from any of the institutional Church and its teachings by its misogynistic laws. One quarter of the world's social institutions, its hospitals, schools, clinics, refuges and homes are run by the Catholic Church. And the majority of these are run by women. Yet, for all their wide experience and managerial skills, not to mention dedicated faith and service, they are not eligible to change so much as one full-stop of the Church's governance. Because they are not men.

Curiously enough, as the world's news cameras hunker down in unprecedented numbers around the Conclave, yet again it's the secular press showing us the way.

Tom Doyle, longtime campaigner for victims of clerical abuse, has been pointing out for years that it is the secular press and authorities who have lifted the lid on the institutional Church's scandalous clerical sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable people, and dragged it kicking and screaming into the light. Left to the Church authorities and the Catholic press we, the faithful, would still be completely in the dark.

Now the crying question, Where are your women? comes from the secular press, not the muzzled Catholic outlets. "In particular, in the 21st century, can it really be the case that Christ did not intend half the world's population to play a full role in spreading His word?" says Robert Harris, author of Conclave, in an interview this week. "Can it really be the case that the Roman Catholics will not allow the ordination of women?" Anyone listening to the Conclave coverage will be hearing this and similar questions from the secular press throughout.

The Church is like a bird, says Dr Mary McAleese, with two wings, male and female. Paradoxically, it refuses to use its female wing. Repressed and silenced, this wing seems broken, and consequently the bird flutters helplessly round in circles on the ground, going nowhere. We must trust, however, that Spirit Sophia is in charge. And let us give the last word to another eminently Papabile woman, Joan Chittister. "If the people of God will lead", she says, "eventually the leaders will follow." The sacrifices of those like the Thompsons, who cannot now return to St Peter's for fear of further arrest, will bear fruit. The day will come, please God, when the bird soars – on both its wings.

To see a full list of Root & Branch's Papabile Women, click here:

<https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org/papabile-women>

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Excellent blog Mary, thank you for this.

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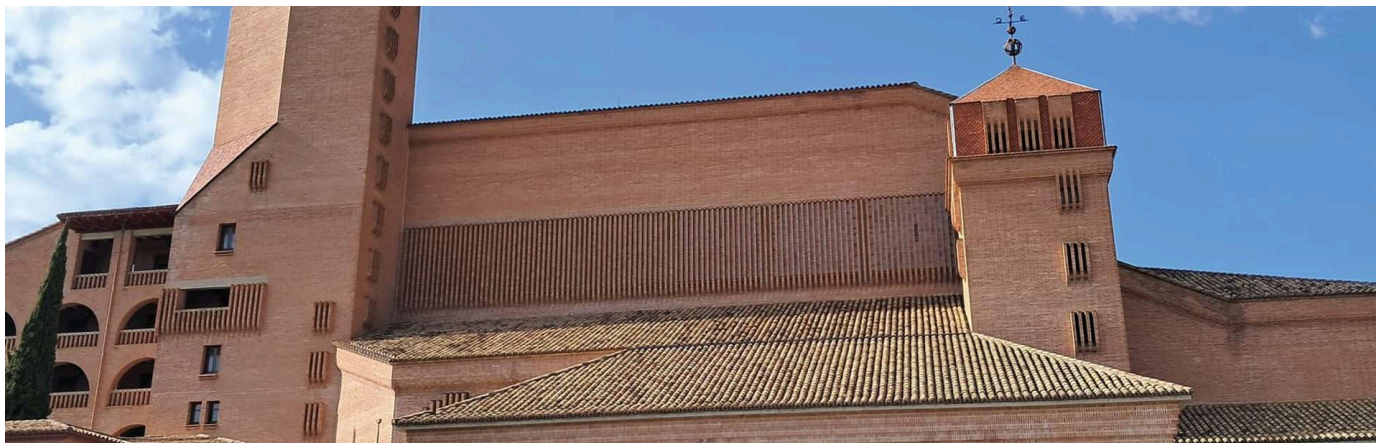
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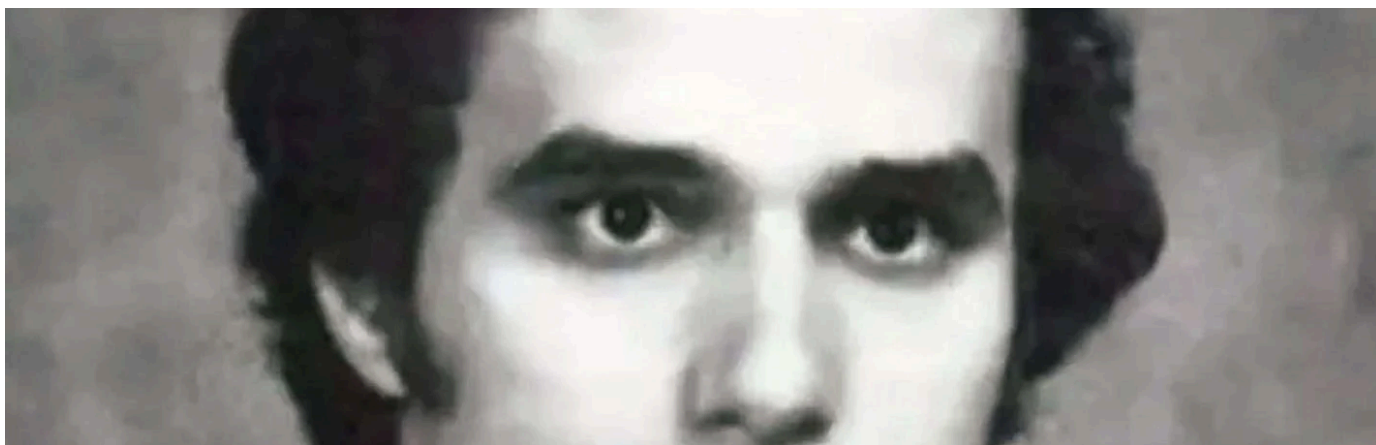
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