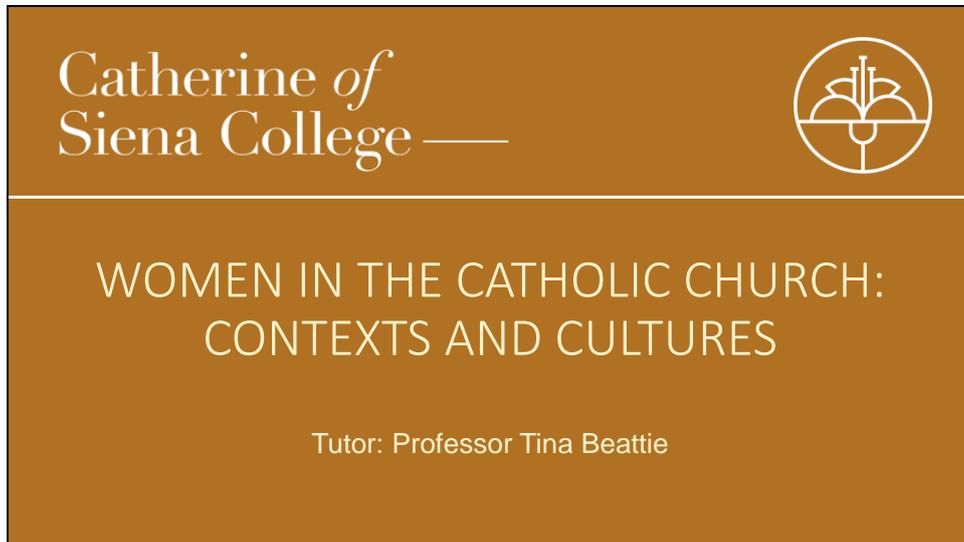


WOMEN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH – WEEK THREE

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESENTATION

Slide 1



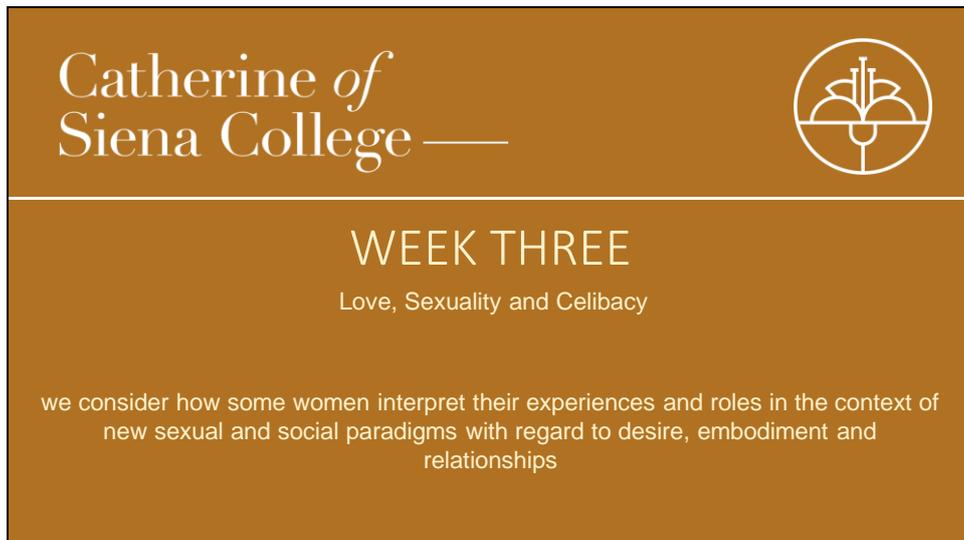
Catherine of
Siena College — 

WOMEN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH:
CONTEXTS AND CULTURES

Tutor: Professor Tina Beattie

Welcome back to Week 3 of “Women in the Catholic Church: Contexts and Cultures”, taught by Tina Beattie.

Slide 2



Catherine of
Siena College — 

WEEK THREE
Love, Sexuality and Celibacy

we consider how some women interpret their experiences and roles in the context of new sexual and social paradigms with regard to desire, embodiment and relationships

This week we look at themes of love, sexuality and celibacy. We consider how some women interpret their experiences and roles in the context of new sexual and social paradigms with regard to embodiment and relationships.

There are a number of essays and reflections in the book that are relevant to this week's theme. For this lecture, we focus on Carolina del Río Mena's essay, "Conversion and a New Consciousness: The Challenge of Women's Equality for Sexuality, Society, and Church". This offers a wide-ranging theological and sociological reflection on the ways in which women and men are being challenged by changing sexual and social paradigms.

We also ask what insights Tina Beattie's interview with Jeannine Gramick and Ruth Hunt, "Staying in and Reaching Out" offers into the lives of LGBTQI Catholics in modern society, and we consider Madeleine Fredell's essay, "From Knowledge and Power to Wisdom and Authority: Religious Women in the Life of the Church", which invites reflection on changing perspectives in the lives and vocations of women religious.

Again, we approach all these essays as stories of identity and the quest for meaning, in a world in which traditional Catholic beliefs and practices are being refigured by rapidly changing and challenging social contexts which impact upon our most intimate relationships and ideas of selfhood.

Slide 3

PART ONE
CONVERSION AND A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS
Carolina del Río Mena



"The woman who sets out on the path of becoming conscious of gender, of her personal worth, of the need for symmetrical relationships with men and the reciprocity that might nourish these relationships, embarks on a one-way trip in which, according to the Spanish theologian and psychologist Mercedes Navarro, her personal, subjective consciousness – her self-concept – is greatly altered. As a result, her moral conscience (her internal norms of obligation and value) leads her to experience a deep sense of unease and disillusionment as she approaches a difficult crossroads."

Carolina del Río Mena explores the challenges that changes in modern society pose to traditional ideas of marriage, sexuality and masculinity and femininity. Consider this quotation in the light of Ricoeur's theory of "narrative identity":

The woman who sets out on the path of becoming conscious of gender, of her personal worth, of the need for symmetrical relationships with men and the reciprocity that might nourish these relationships, embarks on a one-way trip in which, according to the Spanish theologian and psychologist Mercedes Navarro, her personal, subjective consciousness – her self-concept – is greatly altered. As a result, her moral conscience (her internal norms of obligation and value) leads her to experience a deep sense of unease and disillusionment as she approaches a difficult crossroads.

Think about this quotation, and maybe ask:

- What does this tell us about the ways in which a woman’s sense of identity might be challenged and transformed as she opens herself to the questions that changing social and sexual values pose to her sense of identity, belonging and responsibility?
- If she’s a Roman Catholic woman, in what ways might her Catholic faith be challenged and called into question as she explores these new insights and ideas?

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CONVERSION AND A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS
Carolina del Río Mena

- Changing hearts and minds:
- Contrast, confirmation and conversion (Elizabeth Johnson)
- A shift in relationships of sexual love from subordination to reciprocity and co-responsibility
- A recognition that female pleasure and sexuality cannot be understood only in terms of motherhood
- A critique of romantic love in favour of a more equal and mature understanding of reciprocity in relationships
- An affirmation of the significance of the body:

“The body is the epiphany of a person: it is language, communication, a personal expressive speech that has social significance as exchange and encounter, as gift. The body is a living word, open, explicit, inescapable. It is the word that reveals the deep, real, true ‘I am’ of each of us.”

Carolina del Río Mena refers to Elizabeth Johnson’s threefold characterisation of this process as “contrast, confirmation and conversion”. This is a different way of describing the changes that Ricoeur associates with the formation of “narrative identity”. It suggests that our sense of self emerges through a temporal process of struggling, learning and growing as we experience different stages and challenges of life that call into question established cultural and religious narratives and identities.

These changes in consciousness create changes in relationships of sexual love and marriage between men and women, calling for new models of reciprocity and equality in place of the traditional models of female submission and male headship which have informed theological and cultural approaches to marriage.

The body plays a key role in these refigurations of female identity and relationality, as women learn a more affirmative and positive attitude towards the body’s significance in terms of identity, loving and relating.

So in summarising Carolina’s argument, she speaks of the changing of hearts and minds that results from these new paradigms that women are embracing. This leads to a process of contrast, confirmation and conversion, as women allow themselves to be changed by these insights into their capacity for growing and flourishing as women. This produces a shift in relationships of sexual love, from models of subordination and submissiveness to reciprocity and co-responsibility.

This entails a recognition that female pleasure and sexuality cannot be understood only in terms of motherhood. It invites a critique of romantic love in favour of a more equal and

mature understanding of what reciprocity means in relationships. And it entails an affirmation of the significance of the body. Carolina writes beautifully on this. She writes:

The body is the epiphany of a person: it is language, communication, a personal expressive speech that has social significance as exchange and encounter, as gift. The body is a living word, open, explicit, inescapable. It is the word that reveals the deep, real, true 'I am' of each of us."

You might like to pause and reflect on times in your life when you've experienced such a process of change:

- What insights would you want to bring to this analysis of development and change on the basis of your experience?
- What questions or criticisms might you pose?

You might like to make a note of these in your journal and to raise in the discussion group.

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CONVERSION AND A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS
Carolina del Río Mena

Refiguring masculinities:
The change in women's consciousness precipitates a crisis in male identities and concepts of masculinity.

- "Men are the laggards in the transitions now occurring – and in a certain sense have been so ever since the late eighteenth century. In Western culture at least, today is the first period in which men are finding themselves to be men, that is, as possessing a problematic 'masculinity'. In previous times, men have assumed that their activities constituted 'history', whereas women existed almost out of time, doing the same as they had always done."

An important insight that Carolina brings to her reflections is the recognition that the transformations in women's lives also produce a sense of crisis with regard to male identities and concepts of masculinity. She quotes sociologist Anthony Giddens, who argues that in the last century or so men have had to question identities and roles that were taken for granted. Giddens writes:

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Feminist theorists and theologians argue that masculine identity has been constructed in relation to the female as other. A man knows who he is by knowing who he is not – he is a man, because he is not a woman. Woman thus occupies the placeholder of the negative and

disavowed aspects of human identity that find no place in the construction of the modern male subject:

- In contrast to his autonomy, she is dependent.
- In contrast to his rationality, she is emotional.
- In contrast to his individuality, she is relational.
- In contrast to his authority, she is subordinate.

When women begin to question and change these roles and hierarchies, the whole social order shifts and masculine identities are also called into question.

Paradoxically, both feminists and religious conservatives see feminism as a threat to the social order. For feminists, this constitutes a liberating revolution which dismantles the patriarchal status quo and offers women new opportunities for the affirmation of their dignity, equality and full participation in church and society. For conservatives, it undermines the stability and moral order of a social order premised upon marriage, the family and stable institutions of law and society, usually governed by men. These debates become more intense as western politics shifts from liberalism to conservatism in countries such as the United States, and in the light of what some would see as a backlash against women's rights – for example, in attempts to criminalise abortion. Meanwhile, campaigns such as the #metoo movement have highlighted the extent to which women and girls still experience sexual harassment and abuse, so that sexual politics today have become increasingly volatile and confrontational.

- How does Carolina's article help you to think through some of these complex social dilemmas?
- You might like to reflect on Giddens' claim that "men have assumed that their activities constituted 'history', whereas women existed almost out of time, doing the same as they had always done." How does this relate to Pope John Paul II's admission, which we looked at in week 1, that women have to a large extent been excluded from the historical record?
- Carolina writes from a Latin American context, referring to changes in Chilean culture. To what extent do these arguments and insights resonate with your cultural and religious context?

If you'd like to do more on Carolina's thoughts and ideas, you might like to watch an interview I recorded with her when we were in Rome in October 2018 for our book launch and symposium. You can find this on the Moodle site for this week.

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END OF PART ONE

This might be a good time to pause and reflect on Carolina's arguments and ideas:

- To what extent do you agree with her interpretation of the changes affecting women and girls in the modern world?
- Where might you offer a different interpretation, or want to question some of her claims?
- Carolina writes from the perspective of Chilean society, and she draws on sociological as well as theological insights. How far does her account resonate with or differ from your own cultural and religious context with regard to changes in sexual identities and relationships?



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When you are ready, please come back and resume the lecture.

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PART TWO
STAYING IN AND REACHING OUT:
WOMEN, LOVE AND IDENTITY IN LGBTQI CONTEXTS
Jeannine Gramick and Ruth Hunt

"To me it's about the Gospel. Most people look at sexuality when we talk about church teachings on LGBT issues, and I say what about church teachings on LGBT people with regard to the social teachings of the Church, which rest upon the dignity of the human person? Every person is a child of God. So I gain my strength from the Gospel, from my prayer life, from the voice of God coming to me through people, and I hold on to and want to proclaim the social teachings of the Church." (Jeannine Gramick)

"[T]he Catholic Church provides ... an anchor where God can express Himself through you and with you and in your deeds and in your words. ... If we could talk honestly about what good relationships look like, and for example the fact that gay couples are providing amazing homes for some of the most vulnerable children, and there is nothing more Christian than that. That is so Christ in action. This rigid idea about what family looks like and what love looks like and what tradition has taught is deeply damaging." (Ruth Hunt)

In the second part of this week's session, we look at women, love and identity in an LGBTQI context. We're focusing particularly on an interview I recorded and transcribed with Jeannine Gramick and Ruth Hunt. Jeannine runs New Ways Ministry and was one of the pioneers of Catholic outreach to the LGBTQI community, back in the days when the words "lesbian and gay" sufficed to describe this work. Ruth Hunt is CEO of Stonewall, Britain's largest secular LGBTQI campaigning organisation. Ruth is a practising Catholic.

They spoke about their Catholic faith in the context of their vocations to ministry among LGBTQI communities. This is an area of Christian ministry that generates widespread controversy and disagreement among Catholics in different cultures and communities – see, for example, Anna Kasafi Perkins' description of her work in tackling homophobia in Jamaica, or Nontando Hadebe's account of the devastating impact of homophobia on women in southern Africa. You can read both these women's essays in the book, and you can see videos of their interviews on Moodle.

I asked Gramick and Hunt to explain what their work means to them in the context of their work with LGBTQI communities. Jeannine said:

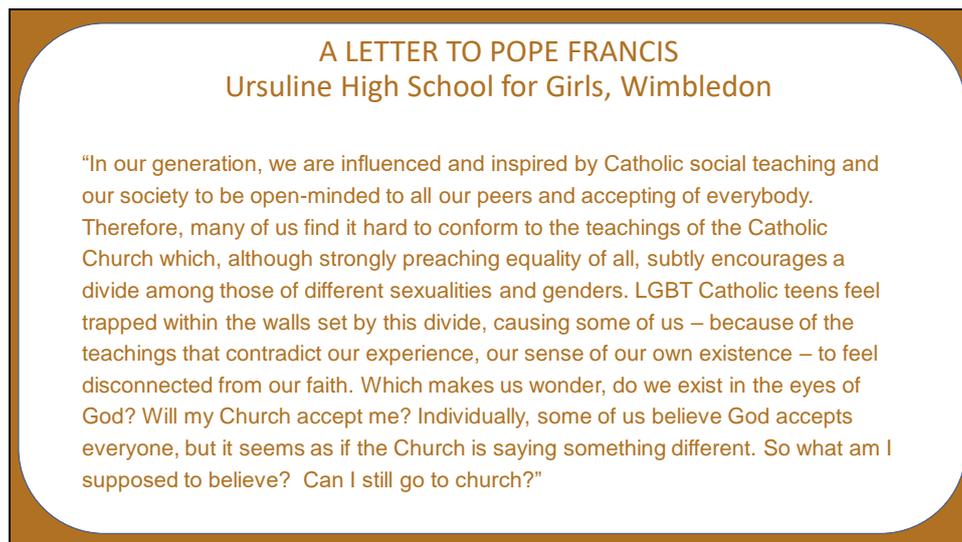
To me it's about the Gospel. Most people look at sexuality when we talk about church teachings on LGBT issues, and I say what about church teachings on LGBT people with regard to the social teachings of the Church, which rest upon the dignity of the human person? Every person is a child of God. So I gain my strength from the Gospel, from my prayer life, from the voice of God coming to me through people, and I hold on to and want to proclaim the social teachings of the Church.

Ruth Hunt said:

[T]he Catholic Church provides ... an anchor where God can express Himself through you and with you and in your deeds and in your words. ...
If we could talk honestly about what good relationships look like, and for example the fact that gay couples are providing amazing homes for some of the most vulnerable children, and there is nothing more Christian than that. That is so Christ in action. This rigid idea about what family looks like and what love looks like and what tradition has taught is deeply damaging.

The emergence and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex identities is perhaps one of the most radical changes in attitudes towards sexuality, identity and human relationships in western culture in recent decades. While secular liberal societies have embraced gay rights, and the people of Ireland – a traditionally Catholic country – voted in a referendum in favour of the legalisation of same-sex marriage, Catholic teaching still prohibits sexual activity between same-sex partners. Many cultures in the Global South and in countries where religion is still a significant social factor remain intolerant towards same-sex relationships.

What kind of challenges do you think these issues pose in the context of Catholic faith, identity and practice? What insights or questions would you pose around this issue?

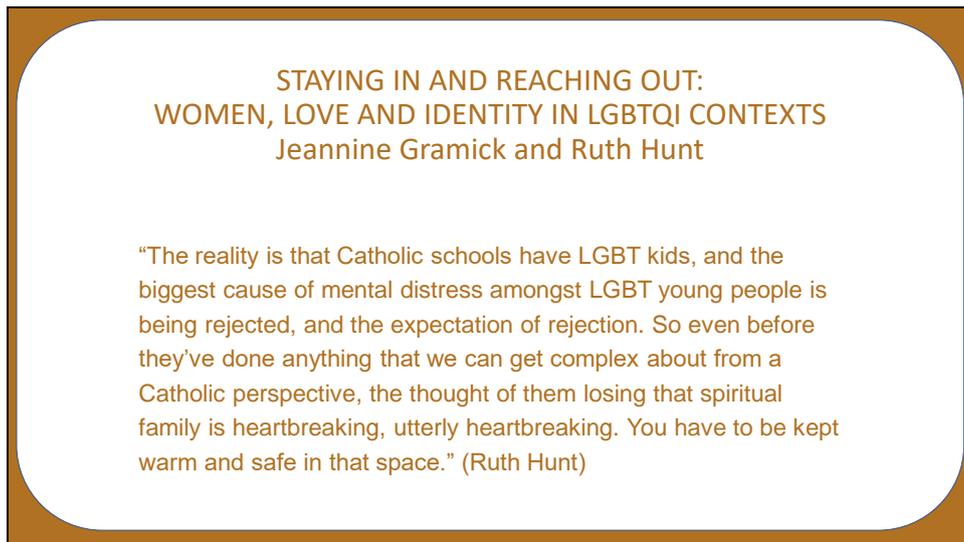


Let’s consider a letter to Pope Francis that a group of Catholic school girls aged between 14 and 17 wrote in response to the Pope’s post-synodal exhortation on families, *Amoris Laetitia*. The letter by girls from Ursuline High School is published in *Visions and Vocations*::

In our generation, we are influenced and inspired by Catholic social teaching and our society to be open-minded to all our peers and accepting of everybody. Therefore, many of us find it hard to conform to the teachings of the Catholic Church which, although strongly preaching equality of all, subtly encourages a divide among those of different sexualities and genders. LGBT Catholic teens feel trapped within the walls set by this divide, causing some of us – because of the teachings that contradict our experience, our sense of our own existence – to feel disconnected from our faith. Which makes us wonder, do we exist in the eyes of God? Will my Church accept me? Individually, some of us believe God accepts everyone, but it seems as if the Church is saying something different. So what am I supposed to believe? Can I still go to church?

You’ll find links to a video of girls from that school reading extracts from the letter on the Moodle site this week.

- What kind of response do you think the Church offers to these young women?
- What does their letter tell you about the ways in which young people form a sense of self and belonging or of rejection and alienation on the basis of their community’s values and teachings?



Think in terms of “narrative identity” and the insights offered by Jeannine Gramick, Ruth Hunt and others writing on these issues. Speaking of her work in Catholic schools, Ruth Hunt observes that:

The reality is that Catholic schools have LGBT kids, and the biggest cause of mental distress amongst LGBT young people is being rejected, and the expectation of rejection. So even before they’ve done anything that we can get complex about from a Catholic perspective, the thought of them losing that spiritual family is heartbreaking, utterly heartbreaking. You have to be kept warm and safe in that space.

Ruth’s words invite reflection on how we understand the significance of a faith environment for young people’s lives at formative stages of their personal development.

- What kind of environment might schools and religious communities need to create to enable young women to develop a sense of self that expresses their personal dignity and worth?
- What aspects of your cultural and/or religious environment do you think contribute towards the flourishing of women and girls?
- What aspects might hinder their development and impede their capacity to flourish?

If you’re interested in listening to the longer version of that interview I did with Jeannine and Ruth, you can find it on this week’s Moodle site.

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END OF PART TWO

Feel free to pause again here and take time to reflect on the issues we've been exploring. Think about people you know or situations you've encountered that are relevant to these questions of identity, desire and relationships. How might this session help you to understand those and respond to the questions they raise?

When you're ready, please return to the final part of this lecture.



Maybe you'd like to take a little time out now to reflect on what we've discussed so far. Feel free to post to the discussion forum, or you might prefer to make personal notes in your journal.

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**FROM KNOWLEDGE AND POWER TO WISDOM AND
AUTHORITY: RELIGIOUS VOCATION IN THE LIFE OF THE
CHURCH**
Madeleine Fredell

"[F]aith is about relationship to life itself, to our brothers and sisters and to a living and expanding God. We cannot base our adult faith on catechetical statements, dogmas and doctrine. Life will change the contents of our faith in ways that may at times be at odds with the official doctrine of the Church. This is something we have to handle without being distressed and without thinking that we have "lost" our vocation. God is always calling us forward. It is painful to change and leave outdated beliefs behind, but we are never abandoned by the living God.."

In part 3, we look at Madeleine Fredell's contribution to the book – "From Knowledge and Power to Wisdom and Authority: Religious Vocation in the Life of the Church".

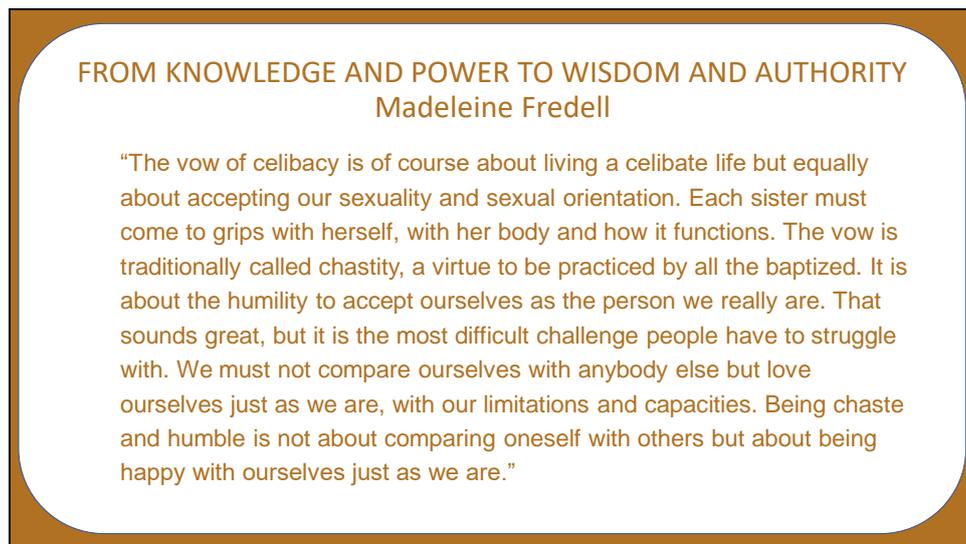
Let's reflect again on identity in terms of narrative – a sense of self that unfolds as we engage in creative struggles and challenges arising out of the dissonance that sometimes occurs between traditions and cultures and our own experiences and desires.

Madeleine writes:

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- How do Madeleine’s words help us to understand what’s involved in narrative identity, in terms of who we are in engagement with and sometimes conflict with our traditions and cultures?
- What might it mean to leave behind some of our most cherished beliefs, in order to follow the living God who calls us forward into new possibilities and spaces of becoming?

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I also want us to think in this session about the significance of celibacy when we’re talking about various forms of sexual identity and relationships.

Madeleine reflects on how women religious today understand their vows of obedience, celibacy and poverty. She writes:

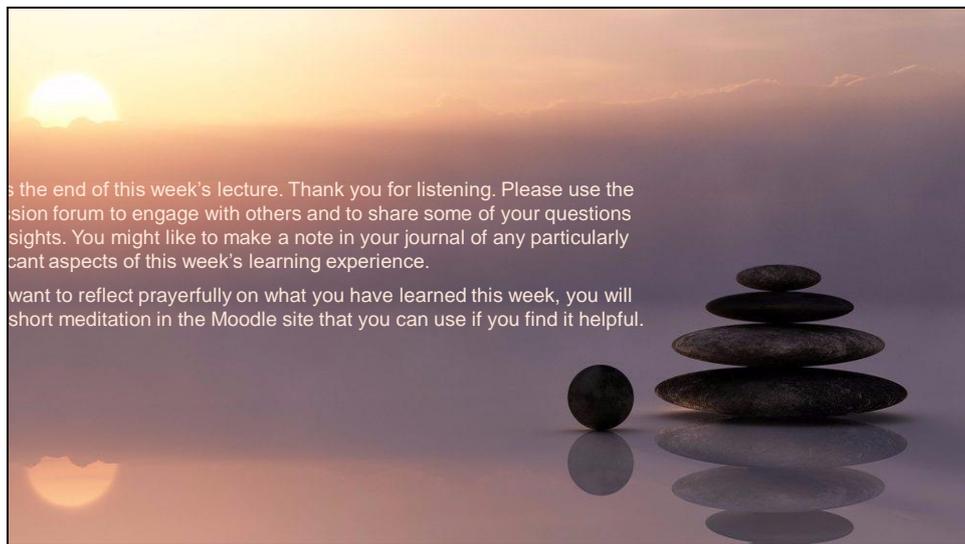
The vow of celibacy is of course about living a celibate life but equally about accepting our sexuality and sexual orientation. Each sister must come to grips with herself, with her body and how it functions. The vow is traditionally called chastity, a virtue to be practiced by all the baptized. It is about the humility to accept ourselves as the person we really are. That sounds great, but it is the most difficult challenge people have to struggle with. We must not compare ourselves with anybody else but love ourselves just as we are, with our limitations and capacities. Being chaste and humble is not about comparing oneself with others but about being happy with ourselves just as we are.

When we read stories of celibacy from modern women and men, we discover that for many, a commitment to celibacy can be a creative expression of freedom, refocusing their erotic energies from sexual activity into other forms of self-expression and relationality. For others,

it can be a way of avoiding deeply rooted fears and inhibitions to do with sexuality and embodiment – in which case it becomes a distortion and diminishes our capacity for flourishing.

You might like to reflect on these issues and on how you understand the role of celibacy in the context of a holistic and life-giving attitude towards human sexuality and bodily flourishing.

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That is the end of this week's lecture. Thank you for listening. Please use the discussion forum to engage with others and to share some of your questions and insights. You might like to make a note in your journal of any particularly significant aspects of this week's learning experience.

Each week, I include a short scriptural meditation which you will find in the Moodle site for that week. This is entirely optional, but if you want to reflect on your learning experiences and insights through a scriptural lens, this provides an opportunity for you to do so.