NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Women and Catholic publishing

Heidi Schlumpf | Oct. 24, 2013 NCR Today

I?ve been enjoying *America* magazine [1]?s special issue on ?Women in the Life of the Church,? with articles by Kerry Weber [2] on women?s leadership, Diana Hayes [3] on women?s spiritualities, Carolyn Woo [4] on women in the developing world and Helen Alvaré [5] on work/life balance, among others.

For those wondering if this special issue is a mea culpa for the magazine?s editing mistake in the recent pope?s interview, you can be assured that this in-depth issue clearly had been planned long before that brouhaha [6].

However, the editors do make an apology of sorts in the editorial, ?Conscience of America [7],? for its underrepresentation?or even lack?of women its pages throughout the magazine?s history:

> "When this journal was founded in 1909, seminary faculties and theology departments?like all clerical positions in the church?were the exclusive dominion of men. The same was true of **America** ?s editorial board, comprised solely of Jesuits. This undoubtedly influenced our editorial position on a number of issues, including the 19th Amendment. After it was ratified in 1920, the Jesuit editors expressed ?deep concern? about the ?moral and social effects? of extending suffrage to women."

Although *America* has made strides in increasing lay participation in the magazine, low representation of women, regrettably, continues today. The editors write:

> "It is not surprising, and perhaps unavoidable, that as a Jesuit journal, most of our editors are men. But it is also the case that most of our non-Jesuit contributors are men and that achieving a greater balance in our pages is both a worthy and challenging endeavor."

The editorial goes on to note that such underrepresentation is partly a larger societal issue, citing a recent Media Matters study that showed women comprising only 38 percent of newsroom staff in the United States, with no growth in that number in the past 14 years.

America, at 23% (only three of its 13 editors are females [8]), still has a ways to go to reach even 38%.

It?s true that many Catholic publications, including diocesan newspapers, are equally male-dominated. National Catholic Reporter [9], by contrast, has more women than men on its editorial staff, with seven out of 13 women (I included publisher Tom Fox in addition to those listed as Editorial Staff). This is, admittedly, a more recent development for NCR, which also has been traditionally male-dominated.

I?m also proud to say that the other Catholic publication where I worked for many years, U.S. Catholic magazine [10], also had strong female representation, not only on its editorial staff but also in its page. U.S. Catholic?like

America?was founded by and continues to be run by a religious order, the Claretians. (Coincidentally, today is the feast day of St. Anthony Claret, [11] that order?s founder.)

Of course, merely counting heads is not the only way to measure commitment to women. U.S. Catholic, for example, also, for years, gave out an annual award for furthering the cause of women in the church.

But the absence or limited participation of women in any endeavor generally does not lead to good things for women. America is brave to do such a public examination of conscience, and I?m not here to run their noses in it. I do, however, strongly agree with the editors that it?s high time for Catholic publications to realize the importance of editorial representation that more closely matches women?s general representation in the church.

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