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Dismantling Sexism

by Mary Ann McGivern

NCR Today

Last November the St. Louis Catholic Worker published its quarterly journal, *The Round Table*. This time the issue theme was "Dismantling Sexism." Just looking at the cover I felt uncomfortable. I work on criminal justice issues and military spending. But yes, I do know that sexism girds both the military and criminal law.

So I opened the issue, read the "Why this Issue?" and half of the opening article, "Dismantling Sexism: Discovering Sisterhood," marveled at the clarity and importance of what was being said, shut the journal, and didn't get back to it until this past week.

It's a great issue — and it's more comforting than demanding. We are not crazy, we men and women who deny that we are climbing over daily obstacles to justice because we don't even see that they are obstacles. The articles include: "Gender: the Woes of Boys and Girls," "Black Girls and Beauty," "Sexism and the Catholic Worker — Say It Ain't So," and "Sexism in the Catholic Church."

Over and over I found lines I wanted to quote to others, lines I wanted to commit to memory. And as I read I found myself exploring with more clarity why I had put the issue down and not gone back to it.

The spur to read it was Cardinal Gerhard Müller's speech to the LCWR leaders in Rome. I felt myself resisting a public shaming. I know we sisters don't deserve that kind of treatment and here I am, a public member of the Catholic Church, a woman who has committed myself to the institutional church.

It's not a question of "Why do I stay?" I know why I stay and that's a different essay, about community, voluntary poverty, shared vision and faith. The question is: How, in the place where I stand, do I resist being treated badly by men in power?

Alas, *The Round Table* issue doesn't give me a road map of resistance. But this set of brief, deeply reflective essays offer their own experience of community and shared vision. One of the men in the community, James Meinert, wrote "Being an Ally." He described his failures to speak to other men about how they were dismissive of women's ideas and, at the same time, expecting praise from women for their own contributions. James' admission of his failure touches me, reminding me of my own failures and of the simple truth that we have to keep on trying.

The articles are short. The whole issue is 28 pages. It's worth the read.

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