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# Co-Creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry

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## Co-Creating: A Feminist Vision of Ministry

Lynn N. Rhodes

Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987

132 pp.

What do women clergy who are committed to justice for women do with their feminist vision for ministry? Do present forms of ministry furnish them opportunity to express and to practice their feminist vision for ministry? Or do they thwart such expression and practice?

These questions are central to the research and text of Lynn Rhodes in *Co-Creating*. As Assistant Professor of Ministry and Field Education at Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, she has a personal, professional and contextual interest in these questions.

This book is about feminist ministry and feminist theology. In examining the views of white women clergy ("Two groups who are not included in this book are particularly significant in the development of feminist theory: ordained women of color and laywomen from all ethnic groups.") and the reflections of four specific women theologians, namely Letty M. Russell, Beverly Wildung Harrison, Rosemary Radford Ruether and of herself, Lynn Rhodes presents informative, stimulating and challenging insights on the vital questions of authority, salvation, mission and vocation.

By what authority? Rhodes claims that for feminists "authority for ministry must be situated in honest and reflective discourse of women about their own experiences-in-relationship." "What is unique to feminist theology, is that it is reflection upon *women's* experience." "As women tell the stories of their *own* faith experiences and reflect upon them, they discover that the tradition of Christian faith is not just something that comes to them from elsewhere. Rather, they are themselves transforming and changing the tradition of faith under new conditions."

What is a feminist vision for ministry? In exploring the theme of salvation with her dialogue partners, Rhodes claims: "Feminist visions of the promise of new creation include a world where nobodies are somebodies, where women and men experience mutuality, and where justice is the norm of life. God's intention for us is love and mercy in a relationship of solidarity." To experience such, of course, means to embrace difference and diversity within the community of faith: "The message of salvation is the promise of a new creation that is embodied in communities of people who dare to create new possibilities for living out love of self, neighbor, and God. They tell the story of salvation, not to make others like them but to offer their own experience of new life."

What is the mission of the church? It is that of "justice" and of "solidarity"—seeking ways to be active partners in the work of justice and learning to act in solidarity with others "by engaging in experiences that expand their consciousness, but which do not perpetuate patronizing and

colonizing patterns." "The feminists envisage the Christian concept of service not as servitude but as the process of empowerment in community."

What is ministry? "Ministry does not refer to the work of clergy but to the activity of all Christians as they live out their sense of vocation. Ministry is what enables people to live their commitments and express their understanding of the source of their identity and meaning."

Rhodes is listening carefully—and has let us enter the process—to what an experienced and committed group of feminists have learned through their journeys as ordained clergy and parish pastors. For me, the basic strength and contribution to ministry and theology of this book is that it is a forthright and deeply reflective discourse by women about their own experiences-in-relationship as pertains to the four designated themes: authority, salvation, mission and vocation.

This text deserves to be on the reading lists of seminary courses in pastoral theology, especially those dealing with contextual ministry. Given its affirming and challenging style, it is also a book that needs to be read, digested and discussed by clergy and theologians serving in the field of ministry.

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## **Do Justice! The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops**

Edited by E. F. Sheridan, S.J.

Sherbrooke, Quebec: Éditions Paulines, 1987

459 pp. \$15.00

Fr. Sheridan's recently published volume, *Do Justice*, is a welcome edition for those interested in social justice. In this one volume Sheridan has brought together the social statements of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Together, they provide a perspective of the recent social vision of Canada's Roman Catholic Bishops.

With the release of the Bishops' statement, "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis" in December 1982, many people were surprised that the Canadian Roman Catholic hierarchy should be commenting on such complex subjects. What role does religion have in the world of economics and politics? In fact, there were many who strongly recommended that the Bishops stick to more "religious matters". In *Do Justice*, Fr. Sheridan effectively documents that such a concern for the world of economics and politics and the ensuing effect it has upon people is not something "new" for the Bishops, nor the Roman Catholic community, nor the broader Christian community for that matter.