

home of the

Home Delivery | Subscriber Services

Reconnect with free weekends.
 Redeem at 860 Starwood Hotels. No limits. No blackouts.
[Register Now](#)




SEARCH

SFGate Web Search by **YAHOO!** | [Advanced Search](#)

[Sign In](#) | [Register](#)

[Movies](#) [Music & Nightlife](#) [Performance](#) [Art](#) [Events](#) [Books](#) [TV & Radio](#) [Horoscope](#) [Comics](#) [Things To Do](#)

Nonfiction review: Sentilles on female clergy

Julie Foster
 Friday, April 18, 2008

PRINT E-MAIL SHARE COMMENTS (0) FONT | SIZE:

A Church of Her Own

What Happens When a Woman Takes the Pulpit

By Sarah Sentilles

Harcourt; 338 pages; \$25

IMAGES



[View Larger Image](#)

During her interview for a position as a minister, Marion was taken to a biker bar for a "smut 'n eggs" brunch: eggs served along with porn on big-screen

televisions. Monica, a young pastor with a penchant for short skirts, was repeatedly given lap cloths (big handkerchiefs with a lot of lace on the edges) by female parishioners at her Nashville church, to protect her modesty during services. And after a group of women from Germany, Austria and the United States, dubbed the Danube Seven, were ordained as priests in 2002, they were excommunicated immediately.

"A Church of Her Own: What Happens When a Woman Takes the Pulpit" offers readers a trip into a world that will be unfamiliar to many readers, that of female ministers. These are stories of women of various ages, races and sexual orientations who sought a role in the church and were rebuffed. They were publicly humiliated, forced to leave a vocation they were called to from an early age and generally paid well below that of their male counterparts.

Universal journey

Sarah Sentilles, who now resides in Camarillo, in Ventura County, left her home in Los Angeles to earn her master of divinity degree from Harvard University. She suffered what she calls a "conversion in reverse" and didn't survive the ordination process. But as she began asking other women from her divinity school about their experiences, she discovered she wasn't alone in having difficulties.

"Either they struggled through the ordination process in mainline Protestant denominations like I did, or, once ordained and working in churches, they were silenced, humiliated, and abused."

While chronicling the stories of these women during the various stages of their religious life, she also recalls her own journey, from being a woman who didn't think faith could be lost, because it wasn't "an object, like a shoe, or a camera left on a airplane," to a woman who began to see God not as a magician - who when persuaded by prayer or pleading, healed some and killed others, or took away from some and gave to others - but more like a monster.

For readers without a solid religious foundation, Sentilles is an able guide. Without overburdening the reader she explains her love of theology and why "biblical texts affect all women in Western society." She sorts out why being a pastor is different from being a


MOST COMMENTED	MOST READ	MOST E-MAILED
1. Obama angers gays with marriage law defense		
2. Palestinians angered by Netanyahu peace terms		
3. Pride Parade, celebration has a political bent		
4. High noon on the Hill for health care reform		
5. Mom recalls death of baby she left in car		
6. Deadline day for state leaders to close deficit		
7. Iran protester slain after huge pro-reform rally		

Top Autos

From **Carlsen Subaru**

SUBARU 2009 Outback \$23,190
SUBARU 2008 Outback \$26,213
SUBARU 2008 Outback \$18,999
SUBARU 2009 Outback \$26,213
SUBARU 2009 Outback \$21,999
SUBARU 2005 Impreza \$12,499
SUBARU 2005 Impreza WRX STI \$20,999
SUBARU 2009 Impreza \$18,190
SUBARU 2009 Impreza \$19,554

[See more from this dealer](#)

Carlsen Subaru  Think. Feel. Drive.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

PIRATE FESTIVAL



CLICK HERE TO TAKE CHARGE O' THE FUN!

JUNE 20th & 21st 2009

Vallejo Waterfront
By The Ferry!

IT'S FREE!

lawyer or a plumber. She deciphers what's involved in the ordination process and how the mentoring system causes women to suffer. Sentilles leads the reader through a hidden world that's given rise to a lethal combination of sex, religion and power and spawned unhealthy ideas about how "healthy adults engage in sexual activity." She takes the reader into a still-active environment of rigid rules governing language, clothing and differing sexual orientations. And she's thoughtfully included a bibliography and endnotes for the curious reader.

One of the most enlightening sections is Sentilles' explanation of the differences between sexism in Protestant and Catholic churches. She admits that she began the book with a "definite anti-Catholic-women bias" fueled by her self-righteous belief that the Protestant tradition was less sexist.

She began to understand her mistake during her interview with Nicole Sotelo, who delivers a speech at a Women's Ordination Conference. Sentilles began seeing Protestant sexism as toxic and debilitating, producing feelings of shame rather than outrage. Catholic women "understand their experiences of misogyny, sexism, and oppression as institutional and systemic, not simply individual." Catholic women also claim a tradition of radical social justice and place the women's rights struggle within that context.

Sentilles writes that one of the greatest gifts she received was from the transgender priests she interviewed, "men and women who followed their call by literally opening up everything about themselves to its transformative power."

Dramatic stories

While these stories were more dramatic than many Sentilles encountered, they brought into focus all the issues female ministers had been confronted with: "being forced to conceal who they were, feeling that they could not be their true embodied selves, knowing that their politics or way of dressing or talking or loving would not be welcome in the church."

And though Sentilles says the Christian church is still sexist, racist, homophobic, classist and oppressive, she also uncovered a conundrum that bolstered her spirit: The women she interviewed gave her hope.

"And, at the same time, the church is filled with human beings ministering to one another, nourishing one another, challenging one another."

If the stories Sentilles tells are hard for many readers to fathom, her book also affords the satisfaction of knowing that women are working to create a revitalized church where those who wish to can find community and a God who welcomes all.

Julie Foster is a member of the National Book Critics Circle and also writes for Publishers Weekly.

This article appeared on page E - 18 of the San Francisco Chronicle

[About Top Autos](#)
[View All Top Autos](#)

REAL ESTATE



'90210' actress selling 90265 house

Actress Shannen Doherty ("Beverly Hills 90210") has put her Malibu 90265 home on the market at \$4 million.

Mortgage rates up, refinancing activity slows
Some push to expand home-buying tax credit
Square footage varies depending on formula

[Search Real Estate »](#)

CARS



1999 Jaguar XK8 meets the need for a smoother sports car

Cal Tabucci, 66, taught junior high school in Los Gatos for 28 years and sold real estate for the next 10 years.

NASCAR says it's open to foreign automakers

Tom and Ray settle an argument

Photo: Car gallery. Submit your photos.

[Search Cars »](#)

JOBS



Job hunters flock to Avon, Mary Kay, Tupperware

Armies of new Avon ladies, Mary Kay reps and Tupperware sellers are advancing on living rooms across...

Bad credit and job offers don't mix

Movers and Shakers

Green-sector jobs booming

[Search Jobs »](#)

ADVERTISERS

Caribbean \$745+Beaches Resorts Save up to 60%

Equifax can help you monitor your credit score

PRINT E-MAIL SHARE

(0) View Comments »

Be the first to share your thoughts on this story.

Add Your Comment

You must be signed in to add a comment. Sign In | Register

Empty text box for user comment.

Submit



Raiders reportedly sign Greg Ellis



Susan Boyle will rejoin tour



Your guide to Gay Pride 2009



Woman's push for change at mosque



Acupuncturist uses needles, kindness

Ads by Yahoo!

Landsat Satellite Imagery

Get Your Burn Severity Products. Buy 1 Image and Get 1 Free. (www.landsatimageplace.com)

free satellite tv for pc download

Get 3000 Stations on Your PC for a small one-time fee! Learn more. (www.SatelliteTVtoPC.com)

Amherst Alarm Inc

We install security, fire alarm, systems, home theater and more. (www.amherstalarm.com)



Subscribe to The Chronicle

Home News Sports Business Entertainment Food Living Travel Columns Classifieds Jobs Real Estate Cars Site Index [return to top]

Advertising Services: Place a Classified Advertise in Print Advertise Online Public Notices

Reader Services: Home Delivery Subscribers E-Edition Mobile RSS Feeds Newsletters Feedback Buy Photos FAQ Corrections Get Us

Company Info: Contact Us Hearst Corp. Privacy Policy Terms and Conditions Work for Us Chronicle in Education Events & Promotions Submissions

© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc.

