

Acknowledgements

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Foreword to the English edition, 2002:

After the translation from Dutch into French by Godelieve Compère, Louis and Denis Cappuyns and Claire Delva and a Spanish one by members of the Forum de Estudios sobre la Mujer (F.E.M. in Madrid) a request was received for an English translation.

This translation offered me the possibility to add some further text in order to enrich and clarify the contents.

I thank especially René van Eyden who provided several valuable suggestions and further material for this translation.

Carol White helped me tremendously with the translation and Irene Meijer together with Nicholas Neill carried out a final "polishing" procedure on our work. I owe them all my gratitude.

THE DINNER PARTY

INTRODUCTION

I have been interested in history since my childhood. My father, who had a great knowledge of, and love for history, passed that on to me at an early age. So when I got the opportunity to continue my study of Theology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, I knew for sure that Church History would be my chosen subject. The recently deceased Professor Jan van Laarhoven, of this University, stimulated my love and interest by his enthusiasm, his erudition and his unforgettable classes. He taught me a great deal.

Some experimental work in writing about the historical background of certain particular people, such as Marianella Garcia¹ and Sor Juana de la Cruz² led me to decide to write my thesis on another individual – Rie Vendrik – and her participation in the Pontifical Study Commission on the Function of Women in Society and Church.

During a stay in California, where I had earlier received my introduction to theology at the Pacific School of Religion (one of the schools of theology of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley) and where I received a Master of Divinity degree, I discovered a book by Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party. A Symbol of our Heritage*³. It describes a work of art that symbolically honours famous as well as forgotten women in history. This work of art consists of three long tables joined together in a triangle with an open space in the middle. Each table represents a period in history and seats thirteen women. The tables are laid with 39 specially shaped and painted plates, each of which represents a famous woman from mythology or history. The design of the plates – their color and shape – expresses the characteristic of the life and work of each woman. On the floor-tiles between the tables are written 999 names of important women who have thus been drawn out from the shadows of history into the light.

With this symbolic work of art, that was shown in several museums in the United States and Europe⁴, Judy Chicago wanted to celebrate what women in the course of history have achieved and generated. At the same time, she wanted to show how many accomplishments of women have been eliminated from traditional history. This work of art as a whole expresses the message: ‘Our heritage is our power.’

Besides these 1038 ‘foremothers’ there are far more women who are worth being mentioned in history. In this Thesis I want to explore whether the name of Rie Vendrik should be added to that ‘heritage floor’.

¹ Moed en Bemoediging (Courage and Encouragement), Post Scriptum, *Faust Special*, jrg. 13, 28 juni 1991, Nijmegen, 56-57.

² De slechtste aller Vrouwen, Juana, een fascinerende vrouw (Juana, a Facinating Women) in: *Kleine Geschiedenissen, essays ter ere van professor Davids*, Nijmegen, 1995, 71-74.

³ Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party. A Symbol of our Heritage*, New York 1979..

⁴ See also: Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origin*. New York 1983, xiv, xx.; Carol Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing*. Boston 1980, 123-124

My research questions

Who was Rie Vendrik and what were the experiences of Rie and four other women in the Pontifical Commission on the Function of Women in Society and Church? Following the track of these five, I try to analyse the process in the commission meetings. I give special attention to their clashes with the official church views which were enunciated by the majority of the 'Roman' members of the commission.

Methods and construction

Chapter one describes the life and work of Rie Vendrik. Chapter Two focuses on the general feminist situation in the sixties and seventies in society as well as in the Roman Catholic Church. The formation of the Study Commission is analysed in the third chapter. Chapter Four and Five examine the meetings of the Roman Commission and the experience of the five women therein. Chapter Six gives a recapitulation and analysis of the whole period.

I have chosen a chronological treatment of the two preliminary and the six plenary commission meetings and the actions of the five women during the interim periods. Several themes were put forward in the meetings. In this study I treat those subjects that were central for Rie Vendrik and her companions: the biblical-theological and anthropological presentations and texts about women and the 'ministères non-ordonnés' for women in the church. I have almost completely ignored all other themes. In this research I proceed as follows: First, I describe what happened during and in between the meetings. Next I comment and analyse the facts and background, and I don't attempt to conceal my emotional involvement in all that happened there.

The primary source for this study was the archive of Rie Vendrik in the Catholic Documentation Centre of the University of Nijmegen and the archives and discussions with Claire Delva and René van Eyden.