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As a young sister teaching school, Joan Chittister one evening came across the small book, Women and the Church, by Sr. A.M. McGrath, a Dominican sister and a Ph.D. historian and chair at the time of the history department at Rosary College.

The book, published in 1976, is a piercing march through the church's historical attitudes about women, a mixture of deep history and polemic. Chittister read it in one sitting, and the book lined out a part of the path she took in advocating for women.

"It marked me," Joan says of the book during this episode. "It marked me inside myself. Actually, I never forget the woman. I still have the book. I consider it a moment of grace for me."

Her commitment to women and their place in the church and the wider world led her to such moments as the 1995 U.N. conference on women in Beijing.

She still feels the negative effects of being a woman in the Catholic Church but she also thinks on many levels and in society, things have changed for the better from the time she came across the McGrath volume.

"Risking the Questions" is a joint project of Benetvision and NCR. This podcast has been made possible in part by the generosity of Bill and Jeanne Buchanan.

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