

# Feminism Offers New World Order, Rosemary Radford Ruether Asserts

By Sister Kathleen Mihlken, RSM

"Equivalent" is a word Rosemary Radford Ruether prefers to "equal" when describing her feminist views; being equivalent, she says, means being of equal value, and seeking to overcome the domination of women in our social structure.

In her theory, "whole personhood" rather than filling particular roles is uppermost.

Speaking to a group of 100 women and men Sunday, April 29 at St. Mary's Church, she observed that feminist aspirations cannot be accommodated in our current social systems, but that the way needs to be opened to change the systems.

Patriarchal structures have profoundly affected culture throughout history, and symbolize more than just power over women, Ruether said.

"God, the great patriarch who rules the cosmos" has also profoundly shaped our religious culture and symbols, she said. She asserted that the patriarchal attitude is continued in our vision of Christ and the Church; and that it is one we have come to believe is divinely ordered, and that "to change is to rebel against God's will."

The social order, too, depends on maintaining this patriarchy, in Ruether's view. Even the self is so ordered that the "male powers" of reason are superior to the "female parts" of emotion and passion. In such a structure, she said, sexuality becomes a relationship of power.

In the patriarchal culture, "nature" is to be controlled from above; when nature is exploited, we say it is "raped," she said.

In our culture of violence and war, femaleness is the generic symbol of all that is to be dominated, and it must not contaminate the purity of maleness, she said. In the patriarchal model, one must "dominate without touching or getting involved yourself," she said.

In Ruether's view, the ultimate fear of mortality and the need for a secure base for the male ego favors transcendence, rather than female corruptibility.

Therefore, she said, the aspirations of feminism cannot be contained in this system. She asserted this ideology must be rejected, along with the social movements which "romanticize" the oppressed, idealizing them to keep them in a powerless state.

Even the idea of femininity is a patriarchal creation, she



Prior to a talk at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Dr. Ruether (second from left) chats with Marian Kelly of Western New York Women's Ordination Conference, John Engels of Corpus Christi Parish, and Sister Margaret Smith, RSCJ, also of Western New York WOC.

said, elements of which, when projected onto women, alienate them from whole personhood.

In her vision of feminism is a series of concentric circles which favor the expansion of roles, allowing both women and men to utilize their full potential.

These circles begin with the "self," and expand into "interpersonal," "economic," and "nature," with God as the ground and center, embodying the "self" and challenging it to endless new potential of body and spirit.

She described God as the "shalom of our being," the connecting point of peace and justice.

In the economic sphere, Ruether believes women are doubly exploited because they are the lowest paid and have the poorest job security, while still assuming responsibility for running households.

To make this more equitable, she sees the need for communities in which work and home are more integrated, where there are shorter work hours and child care units in workplaces.

She said such reforms must be addressed across class and race lines, and the liberation from patriarchy must rise from the perspective of poor women of color at the lowest place in society.

The environment, too, is dominated, she said. In her view, nonhuman nature is at the bottom of the system in aid through the exploitation of labor, which contributes to the wealth of the few. Nature is seen as "female," and, Ruether said, environmental dominance will not be solved until the dominance of humans in society is improved.

She said that humankind needs to use its intelligence as a servant of nature, to sustain rather than distort it, and to live in harmony with it. "Nature does not need us to rule over it," she said.

In a question and answer period following her talk, she expanded on her concept of whole personhood.

She does not feel we will ever have a "radical androgyny" or a "neutered species," even with role changes. "Mother Nature is capable of making natural differences," she joked. In addition, complementarity of the sexes is a false concept, she said; rather, it is whole personhood which should be the goal, rather than two halves completing each other.

Ruether does not advocate "female separatism," but rather a system which enables men and women to develop as whole persons. She said men, too, need a strong movement in this direction.

The author of "Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology," Ruether is Georgia Harkness Professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and a member of the graduate faculty at Northwestern University.

Her appearance in Rochester was sponsored by the Divinity Schools, St. Mary's Church, Corpus Christi Church, the Diocesan Sisters Council, the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of St. Joseph, and the diocesan Commission on Young Adult Ministry.

(Sister Kathleen is a Sister of Mercy and is assisting the development of the sesquicentennial celebration for St. Mary's Church.)

## AT YOUR PARISH



### Our Lady of Mercy

Our Lady of Mercy Parish will conduct a visitation program or census on May 20. It is the first such event for the parish in 11 years. Coordinating the effort are (left to right) Father John Quinn, pastor; Bernard Schneider, parish life chairperson; John Flavin, chairperson; Richard McElwain, parish council president; and Sister Mary Ann Brunett, SSJ.

### St. Cecilia

Elmira — St. Cecilia's annual Summer Bazaar will be held noon-9 p.m., Sunday, June 3 on the parish grounds. International foods and chicken barbeque will be featured.

### St. Lawrence

Greece — St. Lawrence parishioners are planning a celebration in honor of the retirement of Father John Murphy, pastor, the silver jubilee of Father Donald Haycock, CSC, weekend assistant, and the 25th anniversary of the parish, 6 p.m., May 24, at Arena's Party House. Those wishing to attend are asked to call 225-7320 during the day; 225-3744 in the evening.

### Good Shepherd

Henrietta — Father Richard O'Connell will celebrate a Mass for the charismatic renewal community, 12:35 p.m., Mothers Day, May 13 at the Church of the Good Shepherd.

A Life in the Spirit Seminar will begin 7:30-8:30 p.m., May 15 in the Good Shepherd Chapel annex.

### St. Theodore

The Rosary Altar Society of St. Theodore's Church is sponsoring a card party, 8 p.m., Friday, May 11 in the school gymnasium on Spencerport Road. Refreshments will be served. Reservations are made by calling Yvonne Nowicki, 426-0898; Mary

Blind, 436-1477; or the rectory, 458-7846.

### St. Augustine

A spaghetti dinner, sponsored by St. Augustine's Parents Organization, will be served 5-8 p.m., Friday, May 18 in the school hall. Salad, spaghetti and meatballs, breads, choice of dessert and beverages are on the menu. Tickets at \$4 for adults; \$3, senior citizens; \$2, children under 12; and \$18 for families, are available only in advance and are obtained through the school office, rectory office, or following Masses.

### Deadline

Deadline for news in the Courier-Journal is noon on Thursday, preceding Wednesday publication.

## Vietnamese Group Plans To Raise Two Memorials

The Vietnamese people in the Rochester area represented by the Young Vietnamese Foundation are planning to raise memorials in honor of both Vietnamese who died or are still missing in the Vietnam War and U.S. servicemen who served in that cause.

The first memorial will be funded by the Vietnamese and will honor their countryfolk missing or dead.

The second will be erected with funds raised by the Young Vietnamese Foundation from the general public and will honor Vietnam War era veterans.

From New York State, 4,093 were killed in action and 161 are listed as missing.

A foundation release stated:

"Despite American intervention throughout the Viet Nam War, the non-communist government of South Viet Nam collapsed under communist pressure. Due to this change of governmental structure, there has been a steady flow of Vietnamese refugees to the United States.

"In their resettlement to this country, they bring with them different social values and cultural traditions. There is a society that honors and reveres those who have fought for freedom.

"The Vietnamese people are concerned over the lack of recognition and honor for the sacrifice made by those Americans who served during the Viet Nam War."

The Vietnamese monument, the release stated, will incorporate the sun, sword, dragon and turtle, all symbols of high honor in Vietnamese culture. The monument will be sculpted in Taiwan and transported to Rochester for dedication ceremonies in spring, 1985.

The design for the second monument has been opened to the public. "A select group of informed individuals will be making the final choice at the appropriate time. It is planned that the second monument will be crafted by New York State artisans, to be erected by the summer of 1985," the foundation release said.

The Young Vietnamese Foundation describes itself as a Rochester-based non-profit organization. "The Vietnamese people are planning to sponsor fund-raising events to collect money necessary to make this gesture. Any excess of funds will be channeled through the Young Vietnamese Foundation Inc. for programs to benefit Viet Nam

War Era Veterans," the release said.

The foundation "was created to provide guidance and assistance to those Indo-Chinese seeking to adapt to the American culture, without totally negating their own. Among its services, the foundation provides programs in linguistics, education, job placement, community involvement and family location. Legal and credit assistance is also available to Viet Nam Era Veterans and to international students on visas," the release said.

Further information is available from the foundation, 16 W. Main St., Room 510, Rochester, N.Y. 14614; (716) 325-7880.



## A Committee of Concepts

The Committee of Concepts, a group of friends of Nazareth College, has recently sent out invitations for "A Gathering of Guys and Molls" -- a dinner-dance with a 1920s theme. The affair is scheduled from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m., Friday, May 18, in the Otto A. Shults Community Center of the college. Committee members are, seated from left, Mrs. William Denney and Mrs. Gerald Boyle; standing, from left, Mrs. Robert McCambridge, Mrs. Richard Lewis and Mrs. Robert Schantz.