

Manual sheds light on concerns of women in the church

The Wisdom of Women: Models for Faith and Action, written by the Bishops' Committee on Women in Society and in the Church; United States Catholic Conference (Washington, D.C., 1991); 110 pages; \$6.95.

By Sister Margaret Brennan, SSJ
Guest contributor

The proposed pastoral letter on women's concerns in the church may have become a footnote in the history of the American Church, but whether one mourns its fate or cheers it, women, the concerns, and the church remain.

I always welcome anything that will shed light on the realities and deal practically with the questions of the place, the ministries and the future of women in our church. Here's a little volume that gets near the heart of the matter.

Prepared by the Bishops' Committee on Women in Society and in the Church, this book draws its material from the 1990 National Wisdom of Women Symposium. This conference attracted more than 200 women of many ages, cultures and backgrounds, women who had only one common denominator: each was chosen from her diocese because of her commitment to women's issues and her love for the Catholic Church.

The book's stated purpose is practical: it was published to provide models for other such conferences and resources for reflection and discussion of women's concerns. The models are useful, but it is the content — the par-

ticipants' voices — that make this book an important resource. Their words are powerful expressions of the complexity, diversity and pain of these issues.

The three talks that begin the book are themselves worth its purchase price. Each deals with the concept of conversion. Diane Hayes, professor of theology at Georgetown University, speaks as a woman of color about the pain of exclusion and the loss to the community when some women are ignored because of cultural, racial, or economic differences. Conversion happens, she says, when we listen to and learn from one another, whatever our heritage, and form "a tapestry of many voices, of many colors, of many perspectives."

Sidney Callahan, professor of psychology at Mercy College, views conversion from a cultural perspective. She encourages the study of the past with new eyes by examining the feminine role in the development of Western culture, the importance of the feminist movement in the church and the functions of women as life-givers and peacemakers. She offers some interesting cautions on extremism within any reform movement, including feminism.

Our own Bishop Matthew H. Clark chaired the committee that sponsored the symposium. His talk centers around his personal conversion and the place that women's concerns had in that process.

"I believe," he writes, "that (my) conversion has included more than my perception of a commitment to the

dignity and place of women in the Church. But that issue is at the core of my own growth, and the women of our diocese have been the prime catalysts in the growth." The bishop articulates his own hopes and visions for the church's future with a refreshing candor.

Other sections deal with a wide range of subjects: collaboration in ministry; feminism and the pro-life movement; women's spirituality; aging; the development of diocesan women's commissions; and women in canon law. Reflections and discussion questions follow each topic, making the book a helpful pastoral resource.

One section I found both unsettling and oddly comforting is a brief "state of the letter" talk by Bishop Joseph L. Imesch, chairman of the writing committee for the proposed pastoral letter. This conference was held before the final draft was written, when hope was high for the letter's acceptance, and

Bishop Imesch describes its progress with enthusiasm and realism.

He speaks of the letter as being alive (if, even then, "on life support systems") and cites the good things that had occurred because of the process his committee had begun. Bishops (as a group) were listening to women (as a group) for the first time. He seems to have every confidence that the letter would be approved. However, sadly ironic Bishop Imesch's speech seems now, the process has indeed begun for the women whose gathering prompted this book, and for the rest of us, too.

This book helped confirm in me what I had suspected: the toothpaste is out of the tube. In *secula seculorum*. Amen.

Alleluia.

Sister Brennan serves as co-director of St. Martin's Place, a food program at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Church in Rochester.

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'A Far Off Place' offers a feast for the eyes and quality entertainment with a message

By Gerri Pare
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Disney's *A Far Off Place* is a feast for the eyes and the kind of mild-mannered juvenile adventure movie seldom seen anymore.



Witherspoon

Based on Laurens van der Post's books *A Story Like the Wind* and *A Far Off Place*, the movie is set in the southwest of Africa and concerns the plight of a teen-age girl, Nonnie (Reese Witherspoon), and adolescent Harry (Ethan Randall), who must cross 1,000 miles of the Kalahari Desert on foot to escape ivory poachers who have killed their parents. Their only companion is Xhabbo (Sarel Bok), an African bushman whose rapport with nature proves essential to their survival.

Director Mikael Salomon's years as a cinematographer are reflected here as the movie shimmers with heat and

light. The Zimbabwe and Namibia settings are in fact almost a fourth character, so strikingly are they incorporated into the narrative.

Xhabbo is the real charmer, however, able to coax water up from below the desert sands and to convince a herd of elephants to follow them and cover their tracks.

At times the movie's pace falters, but the wonders and wildlife of the Namib Desert — standing in for the Kalahari — more than compensate.

Nicely delivered is the message of respecting nature in a fragile environment. A glorious music score also enhances the memorable imagery.

Small children may not fully understand the poaching issue or have enough patience, and adolescents may find the teen leads a bit too sweet, but *A Far Off Place* places not far off the mark in quality entertainment.

Due to brief violence and continuing menace, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

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