

Like bread, their voices are rising

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

EDITORS' NOTE: This is the second installment of a two-part column that began Aug. 26.

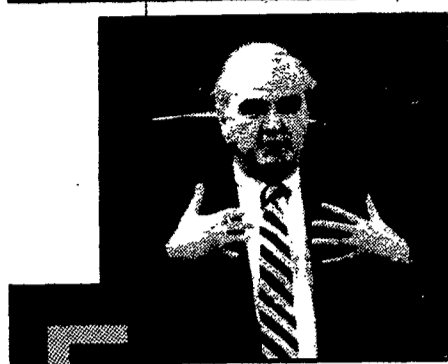
A new book by Holy Cross Sister Francis Bernard O'Connor, titled, *Like Bread, Their Voices Rise!* Global Women Challenge the Church (Ave Maria Press), and the accompanying videocassette, "Crumbs from the Table," dispel the institutionally self-serving assumption that Catholic feminism is an exclusively "North American problem."

On the basis of questionnaires and on-site interviews involving more than 1,260 women in four different countries (Brazil, Uganda, Bangladesh, and the United States), Sister O'Connor concludes: "The Spirit is indeed blowing through the ranks of Catholic women everywhere. They are joining their voices in a cry for full participation in the church."

Eighty-one percent of the women in Third World countries indicated that they would like more opportunity to take part in the church, beyond tending the flowers on the altar or fulfilling other subservient roles.

An average of 83 percent believe they should have equal decision-making power, and 77 percent affirm that they should have equal access to leadership positions alongside men.

Sixty-seven percent expressed a



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strong desire to give homilies, and an average of 52 percent favored the ordination of women as deacons or priests.

Most of the women surveyed are realistic about the pace of change for themselves. But they are determined that their daughters will live in a different church, open equally to the gifts of women and of men.

"It may be too late for me," one Ugandan woman observed, "but surely not for my daughter."

"If we begin," a Bangladeshi woman remarked, "we can slowly accomplish this for those who come after us."

But the obstacles are mighty. A Ugandan woman spoke of the priest who closed down programs for women because they were challeng-

ing him about church teachings and practices.

"No one in the church worries about women until we start educating ourselves," a Brazilian woman pointed out. She had just been relieved of her parish position.

A highly educated sister in Bangladesh described how her parish priest forced her to leave on the pretext that she was "too proud."

"A priest I was working with," a U.S. woman reported, "felt insecure because more people were coming to hear me than him."

Rather than struggle for their part in the celebration, they remain passive.

"It is obvious from the stories women told me," Sister O'Connor writes, "that their history of exclusion, oppression and diminishment in the institutional church is far removed from the consciousness of the church hierarchy."

The very fact that many among the hierarchy consider women's struggle for full participation in the church to be "a North American problem," and one that "sensible women" do not want, illustrates for the author "their distance from women's reality."

"Unlike the Canaanite woman," she continues, "Catholic women today are refusing to pick up the crumbs that fall from the clerical table. For too long they have been the recipients of fragments of power, particles of authority, portions of ministries, splinters, shreds and pieces of

membership and participation in a church that consistently takes all they give and gives them only crumbs in return."

Auxiliary Bishop Francis Murphy of Baltimore was every bit as direct in his Sept. 25, 1992 *Commonweal* article, "Let's Start Over." "Dominance pervades our church, a dominance that excludes the presence, insights, and experience of women from the 'table' where the formulation of the church's doctrine takes place and the exercise of its power is discerned."

This patriarchy, he says, "not only robs women of their full personhood, but also encourages men to be domineering, aggressive, and selfish."

The worst happens, however, when women dominate, suppress, and demean other women for their own selfish gains, often to win points with a grateful male establishment.

"How is it," Sister O'Connor asks, "that women in such disparate cultures, races and language groups, thousands of miles apart on four different continents could have identical questions about their church and envision similar solutions?"

"It behooves the institutional church to pay attention because it can no longer use the argument that this is a North American problem, nor can they claim it to be a women's problem. Rather this is the problem of the hierarchy of the universal church and it will not go away."

Like bread, their voices rise.

Mother finds prioritizing tasks essential

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Guest contributor

I just finished editing a book of daily meditations for mothers titled, *Daily Meditations (with Scripture) for Busy Moms* (ACTA Publications, 1993).

In one of her meditations, "Leaves," author Patricia Robertson writes: "Today, I sweep up the majority of leaves in my yard and let the rest blow into other people's yards as theirs blow into mine. I've learned a very valuable lesson since I've become a mother: Not everything is worth doing, and not everything worth doing is worth doing well."

"Instead, I do the best that I can with the tasks that lie before me each day. I prioritize rather than trying to do everything, and I find that — just like those leaves that blow into someone else's yard — sometimes the



FAITH AND WORK

undone tasks miraculously disappear."

The idea that some things worth doing are *not* worth doing well, how-

ever, seems to fly in the face of work's spirituality.

If work is an occasion for getting in touch with the good, the meaningful, the transcendent, the holy, the divine — in a word, with God — then shouldn't everything that is "worth doing" be "worth doing well?"

In editing Robertson's book, for example, I spent many extra hours proofreading her book over and over again. The weekend before the book was scheduled to go to the printer, I took it home and re-read it one last time — even though this "overtime" work took away from my time with my family and myself.

Most of the changes I made during that final read were minor ones that few, if any, readers would ever notice. Yet I did catch "mislead" where "misled" should have been, and "it didn't phase me" instead of "it didn't faze me."

The back cover of the book even had "who's" when "whose" was correct. (One of the problems with computer spell-checking programs is that they don't catch correctly spelled words that are used incorrectly.)

I'm sure that the author — and her readers — will take it for granted that the book has been edited "well." Their concern should not be the amount of time or money it took. That's the responsibility of any good publisher. Yet, the question of how much good work is "enough," remains. Doing this job "well" came at a certain price in terms of my other obligations.

If it is true that "not all things worth doing are worth doing well," it also is true that "some things worth doing must be done as well as is humanly possible."

Balancing those two truths is one of the tasks of work's spirituality.

"It is so much easier to attempt to become a Christian when you aren't one, than to strive to become one when you assume you already are."

Soren Kierkegaard

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