

CONTINUED...

Women

Continued from page 1

Her sponsors include St. Bernard's Institute and the Women's Commission.

Sister Johnson pointed out, however, that until the Second Vatican Council theology in the Catholic Church was a male-only field in terms of who could study or teach it.

"What has happened over the many years, centuries, this being a male subject, is men used only their spirituality, their faith, their insights to interpret what Christianity meant. So that left out half the human race," she said in a telephone interview from her home in Bronxville, N.Y.

In her 1992 book *She Who Is* Sister Johnson contended that, "Male images allow men to participate fully ... while women can do so only by abstracting themselves from their concrete, bodily identity as women."

This sets up a "largely unconscious dy-

namic," she wrote, that alienates women from their own goodness and power while reinforcing their dependency upon men.

But as women contribute their own perspective, they eventually emerge with a deeper faith, one they can embrace and be faithful to, "not just the usual handed-down one," she said. And yet with this perspective, she argued, the "Gospel essence doesn't change."

"I am one of those committed to thinking our Christian faith is of tremendous value, and we need to do this for the sake of future Christians, the sake of children, that they can inherit a church, a vision of Christianity, that takes women's humanity seriously," Sister Johnson said. "I think that's good for men's humanity as well."

"But I'm not out there in the parishes teaching religious education to second-graders, so to my mind it's a multi-part effort," Sister Johnson said. "Anybody who's in the church and cares about this can do something wherever they are."

She and other women are wary that whatever a "new feminism" may mean, it not create a kind of reverse sexism. Mary Ann Glendon, who headed the Vatican delegation to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing last year, told the participants at the Women and the Culture of Life Conference that "dogmatic extremes" have stirred the controversy. One extreme, for instance, would argue that feminism means there is no difference between men and women, another that feminism treats men and women as virtually different species.

"I would hate to see the movement of women who are trying to help the church hear the prophetic voice of the spirit fall into the trap of replicating the same dysfunctional pattern they are trying to correct," agreed Sheila Cody of St. Januarius Church in Naples. She is co-organizing a Regional Synod Symposium on Women for 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 26, at St. Francis de Sales Church in Geneva. It will

feature Bishop Matthew H. Clark; Sister Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ, on spirituality; and a session on violence and poverty.

Cody was surprised to read this summer that the pope had spoken of women needing to form a "new feminism."

"My first reaction was, 'Gosh, why haven't more of us heard that?'" she said.

"I think that for the new feminism the focus is on living out the Gospels," Cody continued. "I was heartened by the pope urging women to live out their baptismal call. He was sort of giving us a challenge to be more responsible for that, but I'm afraid a lot of women don't know the challenge has been given."

In his message the pope also described motherhood as a "special communion with the mystery of life," that "gives rise to an attitude toward human beings ... which profoundly marks the woman's personality."

"Women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity which comes from being a person ... This is the fundamental contribution which the church and humanity expect from women," he stated.

Glendon told her audience last May, "We cannot know exactly what future historians will see when the look back at our 'turn of the century' feminism, or even whether what they see will be called feminism."

It is sobering, she added, "to think that all of us may bear some share of the responsibility for the shape of that new feminism."

Comparing women's journey to that of Moses to the Promised Land, she said that the past 30 years have taught women "to beware of freedom look-alikes."

"It is beginning to look as though the journey has ... no escape from the winding, rocky road so many have travelled since Moses and the Hebrew children escaped from bondage," she said.

"But from women's point of view, that is not so bad," Glendon said. "After all, for centuries we weren't even on the road!"

Diocesan women publish selected sermons

In an era in which some dioceses in the United States are just beginning to allow women to serve as lectors, two Rochester women have published what is believed to be the first collection of sermons by Roman Catholic women.

Extraordinary Preaching: Twenty Homilies by Roman Catholic Women was published in September by Resource Publications Inc. of San Jose, Calif. All 20 samples are from the Diocese of Rochester.

Roslyn A. Karaban, Ph.D., associate professor at St. Bernard's Institute, and Deni Mack, D.Min., pastoral associate at St. Anne's/St. Gregory's churches of Palmyra and Marion, edited the book.

In his foreword, Father Walter J. Burghardt, SJ, a nationally known preacher, noted the title is not an oxymoron.

"Catholic women are preaching in increasing numbers, in more and more

places, under fresh circumstances but still relatively rarely during the eucharistic liturgy," he wrote. He noted that the Rochester women's homilies "are ceaselessly provocative, sure to exasperate the hidebound and occasionally the intelligently sophisticated but always encouraging."

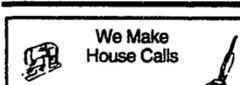
An endorsement of the book by Bishop Matthew H. Clark on the back cover reads, "With great enthusiasm I recommend *Extraordinary Preaching*. I have the privilege of serving as bishop of the local church to which these women bring such wonderful gifts. They have given strength and hope to my life, and I know they have done the same for thousands of others in our local church. They love and live the Word, have a deep reverence for the human story, and possess an uncommon ability to draw them together in a way that puts their hearers in touch with God and their own hearts."

Contributors include Karaban; Mack; Gloria Ulterino, designated coordinator of the diocesan Office of Women in the Church and Society; Mary Britton, diocesan catechetical consultant; Donna Ecker, director of Bethany House; Sister Mary Sullivan, RSM, professor at Rochester Institute of Technology; and Joan Sobala, SSJ, senior pastoral associate at St. Mary's Church, Rochester.

The term homily, technically, refers to the message during the Mass, after the Gospel, canonically restricted to priests and deacons. However canon law allows non-ordained people to preach under some circumstances.

Karaban noted that although the editors "went back and forth" over such issues as using the term "homilies," the term was chosen to point up the fact they were Catholic messages.

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