

women in the church

SALT interviewed Sister Marie Andre, one of the chaplains of the Catholic Student Society (Cathsoc), about the role of women in the Church. She is the first officially appointed woman chaplain for tertiary education students and is co-equal with male chaplains. In this way she is breaking new ground.

As Sr. Marie Andre sees it, "Changes have happened very rapidly in the Catholic Church - you see, as the environment changes, attitudes change too. The idea of the option for the poor has made the Church question its values and at the same time women have questioned their roles in the Church as a whole?"

Although she is unable, due to tradition, to administer Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Sister Marie Andre is very much aware of the advantages of her situation. "As a woman I have not been caught up in the hierarchy - I can make my own role."

Traditionally, in the Church, women have not been seen as equal to men in the ministerial role. This is based on the fact that Jesus did not ordain women. As a result they are not ordained in the Catholic Church today. However Jesus did have women followers and attitudes to women in the early Christian society were changed by Him. But Christian faith in general comes from a patriarchal society.

Sr. Marie Andre sees herself as fulfilling her role as best she can, hopefully showing that women are as capable as men in certain roles. She believes that, as a woman, she can bring a different dimension to the Church. A woman's perspective is enriching for the Church. She is against an aggressive stance for equal rights, as it would lead to reactionary behaviour. "We need equality, not re-oppression." She says that women and men should work together for the future, positively.

SUBSERVIENCE

Traditionally the role of women has been one of subservience and obedience. Nowhere else has this been more apparent than in the Christian church where we have been taught that the Christian virtues which women should recognise, are those of obedience and meekness, service and caring. While we have always been taught about the strength of Joseph in accepting God's instructions, nothing has ever been said about the strength and courage of the Virgin Mary in facing the rebuke and ostracism of a society in which her baby would have been regarded as illegitimate.

The Christian Church has conditioned us into believing and accepting that women are inferior. For many of our churches, women make the tea, while



men preach from the pulpit; women hold functions to collect money while men decide how it should be spent; they clean and dust while men sit on pastoral and other decision-making councils and structures.

In an interview, Aneene Dawber, (a member of the Grail and of the Catholic Church) rejected this role of women as being one of oppression and degradation. Aneene recognises that before women can play a proper role they have to be liberated from their conditions.

According to Aneene, 'feminist theology' reinterprets God from a woman's point of view and looks at Jesus' attitude towards women. Feminist theology recognises the need to remove sexism from the Bible, for

SO BY THE TIME THEY GET MARRIED, MOST WOMEN HAVE LEARNED TO BE SEXUALLY ATTRACTIVE, PASSIVE, MOTHERLY AND DOMESTIC, AND ARE READY TO TAKE THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY.



NOW THE BIG PROBLEM IS THAT THIS POSITION, OR ROLE, THAT SOCIETY HAS MADE FOR WOMEN, IS NOT A COMFORTABLE ONE - AND IT OFTEN MAKES WOMEN VERY UNHAPPY

FOR INSTANCE, MANY WOMEN DO ALL THE HOUSEWORK, COOKING, CHILD CARE ETC, OR HAVE DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THEIR HOMES FOR LITTLE, OR NO PAY



SO IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT THIS IS NOT A WOMAN'S NATURAL FUNCTION, BUT THAT IT IS MADE BY SOCIETY, AND THAT WOMEN ARE TAUGHT TO BECOME LIKE THIS THROUGH A LONG



AND IF PEOPLE MANAGED TO RESIST THIS PROCESS...



THEY WOULD NOT BE "UNNATURAL"



BUT WOULD BE A VERY MUCH HAPPIER PEOPLE

PROCESS FROM BIRTH TO ADULTHOOD

YOU SEE OUR SOCIETY HAS A SPECIAL PLACE, OR ROLE, FOR EVERYONE

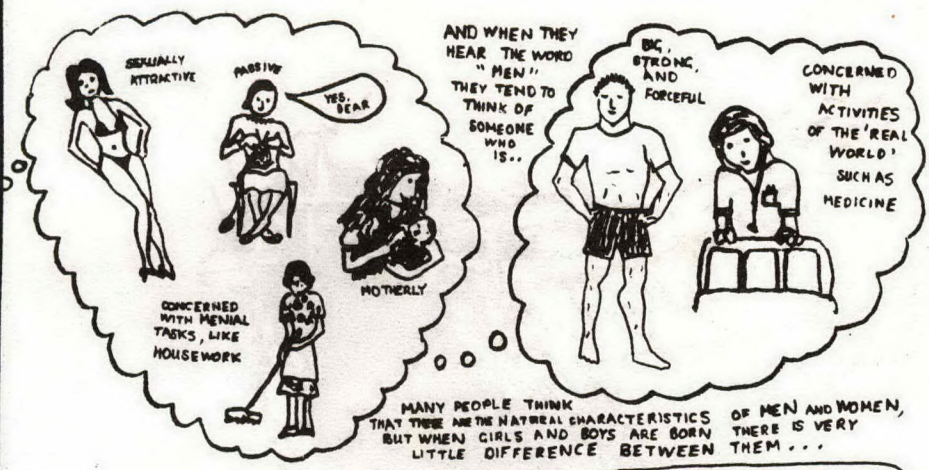


IF PEOPLE REFUSE TO ACCEPT THEIR ROLE...



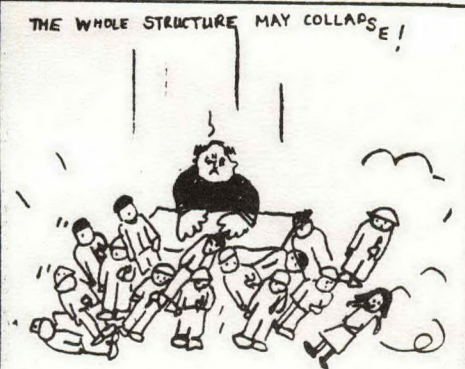
OBEDIENCE?

sandino's daughters



example the use of the male pronoun has contributed towards our conception of God as male. As Aneene puts it, "If one always talks about God as 'He' one will always think about God as 'He'. The Church needs to be representative of South African society. At present this is not happening as leadership in the Church is still dominated by men, while women have been forced into accepting the most menial roles.

Very often we forget or ignore the role women have played in the Bible. If we took the time to look at Jesus' attitude towards women, we would find that it was different. He gave the Samaritan woman courage to raise her voice and proclaim Him as the Messiah (John 4: 7-30); He promised another woman that



wherever the Gospel was preached, her act of pouring ointment over Him would be proclaimed (Mark: 14: 3-9), and that women, upon discovering that Jesus had risen were the first to tell the good news to the disciples (Matt 28: 1-10). These women, whose lives were transformed by Jesus, were the ones who helped shape the message of Christianity (Crisis News No. 17).

The time has come for us to put into practice the fact that all people are created in the image of God, that "....there are no distinctions between male and female" (Gal: 3: 28) and that we are all one in Jesus Christ. Young Christian Students.

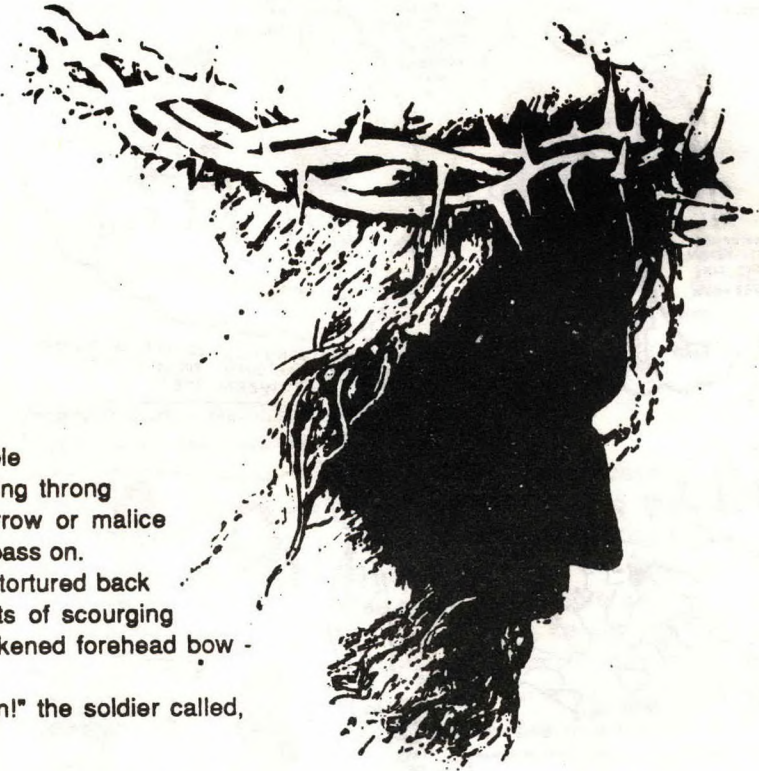
The book Sandino's Daughters by Margaret Randall looks at the struggle of women during the Nicaraguan revolution of the 1970's - a struggle which continues and who's demands are no less pressing today.

In particular this book looks at ways in which women have changed through their experiences, and how their concerns about what is important and necessary have developed as a consequence of the pressing questions or demands which face them - this depending on where they come from socially in terms of their social and clan background.

Each person tells her story, explaining how she came to realise her responsibility towards others in a deeper and more meaningful way. In other words how she came to realise herself as being part of an unjust society and how she was moved to work and hope for not only the well-being of herself and her family, but also for the well-being of her sisters, their families, and society as a whole - through organizing democratically.

Each person speaks about her involvement in the struggle for a free and just society from the standpoint of her own background and experience, -be it as a worker, or a religious sister, or a peasant or student. They candidly spoke about the difficulties encountered in trying to organize democratically. Usually the main and basic challenge facing them was learning how best to manage the tension (given their circumstances) between the prevailing atmosphere of brutal state repression and harrassment, as well as economic deprivation in some cases on the one hand, and having to satisfy family needs on the other hand.

In summary then we found the book to be very relevant for us, particularly at this time, because women are struggling and suffering in much the same way in our country. Also it addresses a fundamental issue - that the emancipation of women and our liberation must go hand in hand if our struggle is to succeed.



Simon of Cyrene

Simon saw him stumble
in the bumping sweating throng
that strained with sorrow or malice
to see a broken man pass on.
He saw the bent and tortured back
crossed raw with welts of scourging
He saw the blood-darkened forehead bow -

"You take it! Come on!" the soldier called,
siezing him.

Why pull me out? How am I involved?
A traveller from distant Cyrene
caught up in this death spectacle -
Why shame me in public with a cross?
I have heard them shout "Blasphemer!"
It is criminals they crucify, is it not?

But he raised the beam on his own shoulders
and followed the bloodied criminal
who performed miracles, they said
and claimed to be a king.

That was not the last cross
nor the final suffering.
It showed that crosses must be born
that pain is not a spectacle
to be condemned or shunned or moralized
from safe distances when we are called.

Simon the spectator,
where are you today?
Will you take sides
when broken men stumble
or will you step back
and turn your head away?

Peter Rule.

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