

Nun — 'I have to admit love-hate relation with church'

By SYLVIA HART
Press Register Reporter

"I guess at the moment I have to admit I have a love-hate relationship with the church," said a Catholic nun, addressing Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue participants.

SISTER ANN Patick Ware, financial consultant for the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches, based in New York City, talked to her audience in Mobile about the church from a woman's perspective, noting, however, "I speak only for myself."

At one point in her address at Ashland Place United Methodist Church, the sister said, "I feel done in in a lot of ways" by the church.

AT ANOTHER point, after one of her remarks had evoked laughter within her audience, the speaker said, "I sound as though I'm joking. I'm really not. I'm deeply pained."

Sister Ware described the hierarchy of the Catholic Church as a patriarchy. "Patriarchy means in clear words males over females. Matriarchy wouldn't be any better — putting women over men. The whole point is that we shouldn't be over one another."

SAID THE speaker, "The pope (John Paul II) is always telling us how woman's nature is. How does the pope know how woman's nature is? He's forever telling us that our nature is fulfilled by motherhood, and he's always telling this to groups of nuns.

"The pope never says how man's nature is fulfilled. Men have all kinds of ways of fulfilling their nature, and they don't even talk about it."

SISTER WARE talked about some parts of Scripture, both Hebrew and Christian, that "demean women." Those persons who plan the liturgy, or worship, continue to select these Scriptures.

A passage in Zechariah describes woman as "the symbol of evil." The book of Revelation includes a description: "those who have not defiled themselves with women." These and other Scripture selections "that are not quite so blatant" are read in worship, said the speaker.

SHE SAID, "There are shocking passages in Scriptures, and I don't know what we're going to do about that. We can't rewrite Scriptures. That we know, but at least we could not read them in the liturgical setting and make women less than full persons and then at the end call upon us to say, 'This is the word of God,' and we all say, 'Thanks be to God.' It's an impossible situation."

The sister's interpretation of Catholic teaching was that "women are not in the image and likeness of God, but women are in the image of men, who are in the image of God. All our language reflects that."

SHE TALKED ABOUT a selection from Maccabees, "a book that Roman Catholics use and Protestants don't use," in which a woman is described as having "manly courage, the best thing that the writer at the end can say."

Sister Ware said, "Women may not image Christ. We are not a suitable symbol. The Vatican declaration in 1976 on the priesthood told us that ... but you see for Catholics, bread and wine may be a suitable symbol of Christ."

"Inanimate bread and inanimate wine are a suitable symbol of Christ. When the priest elevates that before us after the consecration, we affirm that to be Christ. But a woman? No..."

SISTER WARE said she knows many women who "feel that they can no longer take part in Mass. This is very shocking...."

"These women feel the Eucharist as it's presently celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church continues to bolster the male priesthood only by denying the very truth of the essential truth of our salvation, namely that Christ came to save all, by making not the humanity of Jesus but the maleness of Jesus the redemptive fact. That distorts the Christian message.

"Many people feel that if the Mass were as overtly racist as it is sexist, we wouldn't have any trouble at all about staying away, but it's because women don't know how to deal with their own oppression that we are afraid really to — well, to take bold stands.

"WE'RE ALSO AFRAID because we don't know where to go. If you pull out, where do you go that's better? There's no place like that."

The sister quoted some words of Pope John Paul II which she said offer hope: "Love is the power that gives rise to dialogue, in which we listen to each other and we learn from each other.

"Love gives rise above all to the dialogue of prayer, in which we listen to God's word which is alive in the holy Bible and alive in the church.

"LET LOVE THEN build the bridges across our differences, and that at times are contrasting positions.

"Let love for each other and love for the truth be the answer to polarization when factions are formed because of differing views in matters that relate to faith or to priorities for action."

WHILE CRITICIZING the Catholic Church for its stance on the role of women, including not approving women for the priesthood, Sister Ware gave the church good marks on two other matters.

She said she supports the Catholic Church positions in "the area of peace and the area of economic justice."

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States, according to the speaker, is "following the lead of popes, certainly in recent times, ... by beginning to take a bold stand on the subject of nuclear threat."

SHE SAID, "...somehow the madness of the arms buildup and the threat of total devastation have emboldened these men" to speak against the arms race.

On the second matter, that of economic justice, Sister Ware said Pope John Paul II "has just issued an encyclical that's getting very good marks ... and has been called by many a brilliant document."

SAID THE speaker, "The document, while it is a dialogue with Marxism, is at the same time highly original. It affirms the solidarity of workers in their struggle for social justice."

The document, according to the sister, is "solidly in the Catholic tradition, namely that we must have primacy of labor over capital."



Ann Patrick Ware