

## Article from the Archives

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# The Beauty of Right Relationships: Feminism & Women's Theology

By Patricia Judge

At two recent feminist conferences a prominent agenda item was women in the church and their ordination.

The 'Women, Power and Politics Conference' in Adelaide, resolved, according to a Press report, 'to convey dismay to the Catholic Bishops Conference over the denial to women of full participation in the Catholic ministry'.

In a Sydney Morning Herald report of the Conference, Saturday October 22, this motion was not mentioned. The most important issues, according to the article, were raising the consciousness of the Australian community to the issue of women and power and the internal disagreements over whether sanctions should be used to enforce the 33% quota in parliamentary representation.

'Shaping and Re-shaping' was the theme for the 137 women gathered in August at Taupo, New Zealand, for the 4th National Feminist Conference. 'We wanted to articulate a theology that made sense of our present reality as Pakeha women in New Zealand,' said one of the convenors of the Conference. She continued, 'We tried to find touchstones for re-shaping a future that would move us beyond a patriarchal church'.

Another delegate, an Anglican minister from Christchurch, questioned the crucifixion. 'How can I sit with women whose children have died and offer a theology which images a God who would send his son to die?' she asked.

The suffering servant model was seen as unhelpful in building a non-violent society. 'No woman is required to build the world by destroying herself,' became the theme song of the Conference.

The Conference concluded - the church will not be the same. The re-shaping process is well under way.

Rosemary Behan, wife of the rector of St. John's Latimer Square, Christchurch, a growing evangelical church says, 'I hope this serves to warn some of the way things can quickly go.'

In September, about 200 Catholic women gathered in a march in Christchurch to challenge sexism in the church. They called for equal inclusion in church structures, women deacons, women preachers, a regular women's liturgy, the mandatory use of gender inclusive language in liturgy and the Scriptures and the reconstruction of relationships in the church. Reporting on the march, the Press said that the women sang of their solidarity, gave thanks in the liturgy for women who

had brought enlightenment to the Church and that the group hoped to form links with others working towards similar aims overseas.

In England, 'things are in a hopeless muddle,' according to one observer. Apparently something like 400 priests have left the Anglican Church and a number of whole congregations have turned to Roman Catholicism.

Within the 'Forward in Faith' movement there is disagreement over the 'Flying Bishops' who have oversight of the churches which don't ordain women. A growing demand for these churches to be able to consecrate their own bishops is viewed by many as the setting up of a new sect.

In Sydney, we are grateful for the many opportunities we have to speak to women, many of whom are confused by the rhetoric of feminism and its appeal to notions of equality, justice, power, new structures and solidarity. Biblical concepts of service to others, denial of self-interests and serious examination of the Scriptures are not high on the list of feminist priorities and are often the casualties in the alluring but misleading attraction of this new theology.