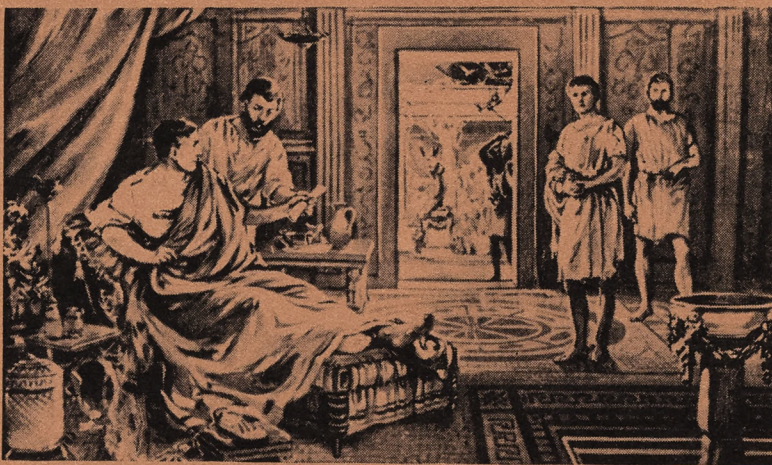


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Theological Education Today: In Caesar's Household



ROBERT McAFEE BROWN • BEATRIZ MELANO COUCH
T. RICHARD SNYDER • ROSEMARY RUETHER • M. DOUGLAS MEEKS



What About Celibacy?

It was a refreshing addition to the argument for acceptance of homosexuality by the church to see the Rev. Carter Heyward write in the June WITNESS that the basic principle of sexuality is commitment, loyalty, mutual responsibility between people who participate in the shaping of a just society. Too often I've read of rights for minorities without mention of concomitant responsibilities.

Carter Heyward is a careful writer, yet when she writes of denying sexuality as being unnatural, unhealthy and unholy I wonder if she is speaking of celibacy as being in this category? Celibacy, I believe, means one will not have sexual relations but does not mean a denial of sexuality. Are we being here divorced from the Christian tradition?

In the documents of Vatican II, it is observed that celibacy is not demanded by the nature of the priesthood. But it is pointed out, as does Anglican Sister Edna Mary in her book on the religious, that chastity is a means by which love is disciplined in order to direct one's love in more selfless service. And, Vatican II cautioned, we should "not be influenced by those erroneous claims which present complete continence as impossible or as harmful to human development."

Granted, we may be in a game of semantics by using words as *deny*, *celibacy*, and *chastity*. But in ordinary usage we in the pew are confused in how these words are sometimes used. I'd like the Rev. Heyward to bring this issue into more clarity. She doesn't mean a return to the standards of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Henry VIII?

Douglas H. Schewe
Madison, Wisc.

Heyward Magnificent

The article by Carter Heyward is magnificent. It's forthright without being polemical. I want others in my parish to have a chance to read this and would like to have permission to reproduce this article. It may even be after I check with our social action commission which has sponsored some forums on the issues of sexuality that we may want to send this out to our entire parish list. I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to share this article with others. Keep up the good work that you do through THE WITNESS!

The Rev. George H. Martin
Minneapolis, Minn.

Questions Theology

In "Theological Explorations of Homosexuality," Carter Heyward rightly notes that our relationship to other beings may be inhibited or denied by our "aversion to, avoidance of, refusal to touch or be touched by, persons . . . whether the touching be physical, emotional, spiritual," and that our failures in achieving relationship are rooted in our vulnerability and fear of knowing and being known. Her recognition of this and her sense of responsibility to foster a society where human relationships are nurtured and honored seem to be the strong basis for her defense of homosexuality.

The weak basis of her engaging argument is the unconventional theology she develops in its support. I suggest that traditional Christian theology provides a stronger and more compelling base for the theological exploration of homosexuality. Words enclosed in quotation marks are drawn from Heyward's article.

I AM WHO I AM cannot be named "I AM BECOMING WHO I AM BECOMING." I AM WHO I AM is creator of all that is becoming and is outside the created dimension of time.

"Being human means being self-consciously . . . able to love and be loved." When humankind gained, or when a person gains, this self-consciousness, then innocence is lost, and we are no longer like the lilies of the

field. This is humanity's distinction — our sin and our opportunity to will and to love.

The incarnation is God's way of affirming and enabling our capacity to grow in the "meaningful relationship of deep significance" that we yearn for. "In Christ, God and humanity are . . . perceived to be in unity." The transcendent "up there" creator and the "down here" humanity are related, indeed, are united. Jesus lived and illustrated this in his life of constant relationship with his father and with persons. He commended this relationship to us in the summary of the law, in which our relationship to God and our relationship to our neighbor are so stated that their structural duality is affirmed, while neither can be considered subordinate.

As individually and corporately we continue our self-realization in the Body of Christ and in the image of Christ, we are becoming more ready to find meaningful relationships in our love of God and of our neighbor. This context gives Heyward's concept of sexuality an integral place in Christian experience rather than perceiving it as an idealized yearning grasped only through rejection of God's transcendence and of our sin. Thank you for a thought provoking journal.

Joanne Droppers
Alfred, N.Y.

'Twixt Boredom, Despair

In response to Carter Heywood's (*sic*) two articles on her own "coming out" (June WITNESS and June 11 *Christianity and Crisis*) I am moved between boredom and despair. Boredom because this seems to me another installment in the continuing saga of Ms. Heywood's Search For Fulfillment which apparently we all need to know about. Lord knows we need a liberal newspaper in the Episcopal Church, but a journal, not a soapbox for a blow by blow account of Ms. Heywood's struggle to find the Ground of her Beingness or whatever — whether it's her "coming out" or her ordination to the priesthood. Honestly, *The Living* (Continued on page 19)

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Same Vine—Different Branches

Robert L. DeWitt

For many people the essence of religion is a mystical matter. It has to do with feeling the presence of God, or knowing oneself to be "twice-born," or enabled to speak in tongues, or believing the orthodox doctrines about the Trinity, the Incarnation, Eternal Life. For some of us the pilgrimage through this kind of religion has had its rewards. It has touched our deepest human concerns. It has spoken to the dark, perennial mysteries of our life — Why are we here? Where are we going? What is the purpose of our existence? But for others, and for many of us some of the time, it has seemed a specialized interest. Although a long and strong cultural tradition in our society ascribes respect to religion and to those who are religious, religion is not seen as something which pertains to all people. The majority of us respect the minority who go to mass daily, or read their Bible regularly, or give liberally of their time, talents and efforts to church affairs. We feel these are all "good works." But we see these devotions as a special interest some happen to have.

Much of the work of the parish priest has been a valiant effort to move that majority into the ranks of that minority, and with understandable reasons. The clergy are classically the ones seen as those professionally religious, and presumably so on behalf of the amateurs and of those not interested. The traditional deference to clergy is a kind of fee, paid in body language and words, for spiritual services somehow rendered by their being religious.

However, a new current in religion is making itself felt. Liberation theology is an example of it. Although not really a new development in Christian thought, it represents a departure from the thinking of many, if not most, Christians today. This new current flows directly from the pages of the Bible, Old and New Testaments alike, and presents us with a God who is centrally concerned not with "religion"

but with the affairs of human society, with the love and justice which occasionally do, but more often do not, mark those affairs. Liberation theology moves the focus of faith from believing in religious concepts and doctrines, and the seeking of religious experience, to believing in a God who has a total investment in the human family.

This God comes down from heaven. This God is not restricted to esoteric or ecstatic personal experiences, though sometimes speaks through them. This God is not locked in the Bible, though the Bible is pungent with the divine purpose. This God is not hidden in sacraments, though they are signs, seals and means of divine grace. No, this God is forever bursting out of these appointed instruments in order to be more fully with the people of God, all of them. True, this God is also found in private encounters with women and men; but always and only in order that they "go and tell my people . . ." Tell them what? That God is the God of all people, that God is a God of justice and love, that it is God's will that the institutions and practices of society be marked by justice and love.

Such a God is not the private property of the religious. All people are the people of this God, and this God is the God of all people. All people therefore have a deep stake in the commandments, the actions, the judgments, the grace of this God. Issues which to us may seem to be only the affairs of society, to God are the affairs of the family of God. What is currently referred to as "liberation theology," seeing the main thrust of the will of God as being centrally related to the liberation of those oppressed, is but a current attempt, and a powerful one, again to locate God's central presence and everlasting concern where the Christian tradition has always insisted it is — with all of God's people. ■



Theological Education & Caesar's Household

by T. Richard Snyder

Some of the Christians in Rome were slaves or freedpersons who worked in the Imperial Palace, performing services for the Emperor Nero. Often per-

T. Richard Snyder is Dean of Doctoral Studies at New York Theological Seminary and Director of the ISTEM program (Inter-Seminary Theology Education for Ministry).

sons of great gifts and sometimes of influence and wealth, they exercised power at the pleasure of, and for the sake of, the Emperor.

Being involved in theological education in the United States today is like being in Caesar's Household. The dominant product of our labors appears to be more in service to the controlling values, mores and purposes of our society than in service to the gospel. Like those Christians in Rome,

it is not that we are uninformed by the gospel, nor that we intend to serve mammon rather than God, but that we are caught in an untenable situation that often subtly and unwittingly turns what we do to the service of a master other than the One we proclaim to serve.

Members of the Theological Education Task Force of the Theology in the Americas have been exploring the nature of theological education in our

country today. As a result of the discussions, we have come to some tentative ideas about the effects of theological education. It is because of what we have concluded, however incomplete our conclusions may be, that we make the equation between theological education and Caesar's Household.

It is not without some fear that we draw the analogy. Some might construe our conclusions to be based upon a sense of self-righteousness, pointing the accusing finger at others. We do not mean this. We recognize our own integral complicity in the situation. As clergy and laity, as faculty and students, as church school teachers and pastors, we have all played our part in the creation and maintenance of the situation. Further, we do not mean to imply that there are no faithful witnesses, activities and structures within the church's theological education endeavor. But, as we participate in a variety of judicatories, congregations and seminaries, we have lamentably come to the conclusion that much of what is going on within these circles is in the service of a society which is unjust and out of step with the biblical norms.

We think this because of what we see being introduced by our structures of theological education. While we have spent most of our energy looking at the consequences of seminary, our conclusions also apply to church schools, lay training and teaching sermons. The products of theological education today which cause us such great concern are numerous. I have attempted to gather them under five themes.

I. A Focus Upon the Subjective and Autonomous Person

Perhaps the most obvious and dominant development within theological education today is the emphasis placed upon self-knowledge, self-definition and subjectivity. One of the chief indicators of such an emphasis is the mushrooming interest in pastoral psychological concerns. While there is a strong sense of accountability to indi-

viduals and individual healing, there is little sense of public accountability among Christians.

It is not that pastoral and psychological concern is wrong. Rather, it is that we have displaced any sense of corporate, structural, public accountability for the gospel with a personalized understanding of faith and salvation. When one talks with parish priests, it is common to find that the only area in which they are able to integrate what they have been taught with their current practices of ministry is in this domain of pastoral and psychological care. This leaves them searching for, but largely unable to find, any integration between the tradition and the corpus of our heritage and the pressing life issues of our cities and society, which are increasingly controlled by corporate and institutional structures and processes.

There is a too-frequent anti-institutional and even anti-church bias among increasing numbers of clergy and laity. This can be understood to grow out of legitimate disenchantment with existing structural forms of the church and society. But, it should not lead to escapism or to ignoring the problems, which is often the case. In order to have an adequate understanding of salvation that is offered us, it is necessary to understand the fullness of the principalities and powers which we need to confront. To pretend or to limit ourselves to dealing with one aspect of our sinfulness will leave us with a truncated salvation. By spending all our energy on individuals, we are playing right into Caesar's hand. For, Caesar tells us, by every conceivable means today, that life is individual while at the same time dominating our lives through organizational forms. So long as we accept the myth of individualism, we continue to allow our society to move in the directions now prescribed.

II. Dependence Rather Than Interdependence

One of the great ironies of our

society is that despite the emphasis upon "rugged individualism" and a focus upon the subjective dimensions of life, we have produced a majority who are dependent persons, persons who go along with the crowd; who are convinced that you can't fight City Hall; who are content to let someone else do it.

Three aspects of our educational milieu contribute to the creation of dependent persons. The first is hierarchy. Within most schools, whether seminary or church school, there is a hierarchy both among the teachers, and between the teachers and students. There is little sense that all are on a search; on a journey of discovery; on a pilgrimage of faith. Rather, we are taught and we model a religion which is divided into levels of importance; the most critical division being that of the clergy and laity. When one is indoctrinated and comes to accept the hierarchical model of arranging life, it is well nigh impossible to avoid the feelings of dependency upon those "above" you.

A second aspect of most theological education today is that its pedagogical method is transmissive rather than dialogical. We teach and learn most of the time in the style that Paulo Friere calls the "banking" method of education. The learner is viewed as a recipient into whom the truth is infused, in whatever manner best suited. This sets up a dynamic of expert and non-expert; the result is that we come to rely upon the expert for the answers. He/she is viewed as the font of wisdom and we abdicate our own responsibility.

A third factor is that we have succumbed to a "work's righteousness" within the educational sphere. Emphasis has been placed upon production, with a reward and punishment system that reinforces the production mentality. This permeates all levels, from children's gold stars in the church school, to the system of tenure based upon publication at the seminary faculty level. In so doing, we have allowed our own worth (intellectually) to be

Servants preparing food in the kitchen of a Roman house, as detailed on a funeral monument.



primarily defined by what others have said we are worth. There is little sense of intrinsic worth that comes from a reward/punishment system based upon production. Once again, dependency is fostered.

These factors, and others, lead us to be persons who rely upon others for our authority, our truth and our sense of worth. Rather than building a legitimate mutuality and interdependence, we develop into responsive followers, which leads us to take a predominantly functional approach to life and ministry. The functional approach understands our work as specific tasks to be mastered, based upon the mandates and evaluation of others. This is opposed to an essential approach in which our work is viewed as vocation; central to our very core as persons; called out of us by a community and accountable to a community; and of the very essence of our lives.

III. Disconnection from Life-Giving Sources

Most of our education is done in isolation from the issues of the world which surround us and in isolation from others except the experts and those similar to us. The result of this isolation is that we are out of touch with many sources of vitality which have brought forth the church and our faith in the first place.

We are disconnected from the church. While some education takes place in the church building, it is seldom that the lives of the people inform it in any substantial way. The bifurcation between the worship ser-

vice and the church school program is an example; they are generally not operated with each other in mind. The worship service is seldom seen as fundamentally part of the educational aspect of the church's life, and vice versa. One of the clues to this bifurcation is the sense that one graduates from church school into "church."

Within the seminaries, the split is often more pronounced. While some of our denominational schools have very clearly cast their lots with the church in its various forms, far too many view themselves as most fundamentally linked to academia, to the university. Hence, we have a predominantly classroom approach to preparation for ministry. Participation in the life of a local parish is encouraged, but it is not usually viewed as being a central part of formation or of the curriculum. The fact that the realities of specific congregational life are not dominant in the theological study of seminaries is indication of the peripheralness of the parish to the enterprise.

Another source of life with which theological education tends to be largely out of touch is the laity. Of course, at the local level, there are lay people teaching courses throughout the church. But, they are teaching "religiously." That is, they are doing what, assumedly, the minister or ordained person could do best if he/she just had more time or could be in several places at once. We often view the laity, and they themselves, as fill-ins. By the time one reaches seminary, the laity have

been successfully weeded out.

There is a special category of people whom the Bible claims is at the center of God's concern, that is, the poor and the oppressed. It is difficult to find these folk at the heart of our educational ventures. While they are often the object of our pity or charity, they are not viewed as sources of truth and wisdom, and we do not incorporate them into the structuring of our education.

Even at the theoretical level, few courses in class analysis are offered, nor is class analysis made a part of the study of most subjects. Our lack of incorporation of those closest to the heart of God is maintained by an unconsciousness about their very reality.

Another of the life-giving sources which can be identified as being all but absent from the core of most theological education is the development of

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spirituality. While there is no simple or final definition of what this means, at the least we are talking about the fact that so many of us who go through the entire educational route and move into professional ministry “burn out.” We have not developed resources of interior life. These cannot be separated from the analytical and political task of ministry. Neither can they be eliminated.

Finally, while there is talk about ecumenism, most people are generally isolated within a very small circle of faith experience. An occasional foray into the life of some other tradition might be arranged from time to time, but the sustained involvement and dialogue which has the power to reshape and transform is not there. At the best, we sometimes extend our purview to include the other main-line denominations, but those of other traditions and other faiths tend to remain essentially suspect rather than being viewed as sources of life and truth.

In summary, we have found that theological education, whether in church school or seminary, tends to separate us from some of the essential sources of truth and wisdom that could contribute to our growth.

IV. Without Faith

One person from another tradition observing clergy from several of the mainline churches said, “the only problem with them is that they don’t believe in God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit.” While that may not be the best way to describe the plight of those trained theologically today, it does point to the heart of something we

consider to be one of the fundamental products of our education: A lack of faith.

There are several aspects of faith lacking in far too many of our people today. First, they do not believe in the possibility of transformation — of themselves, of people, of society. There is little sense that the power of the resurrection, the power of the spirit, the power of conversion is a reality. The educational system has socialized them into dependency-prone persons who wait for life, assuming all is given, rather than discovered or changed. The routinization of life modeled by our education leads to the expectation of sameness, to a wandering in the wilderness with no hope of the promised land. While we may mouth the jargon about conversion, we live as if it were a fantasy.

Secondly, we do not believe in the remnant promise or reality. If it is not of the majority, we assume it is incorrect. We succumb to the mentality that bigger is better and assume that the wisdom and way of our culture is closer to The Way, The Truth and The Light than some remnant groups’ halting attempts at faithfulness.

Thirdly, we do not believe in the Bible and biblical norms. While we have developed finely-honed critical tools for studying the Bible, we do not allow it to shape and direct our lives in any significant way. It becomes one more tool in our bag of tricks, rather than a primary source for our lives.

Finally, as one of the students in our discussion put it, “theological educa-

tion has taken away from us the ability to dream.”

V. The Embodiment of Injustice

Most of us are tired of dealing in “isms” — racism, classism, sexism, ageism, etc. Often, those who have struggled with the issues and questions have been accused of placing too much emphasis upon them. The irony of this accusation is that the very structures of our education foster the issues and “isms.” Theological education represents and perpetuates many aspects of injustice which the gospel condemns. An even cursory analysis turns up the inescapable fact that the seminaries are a bastion at all levels for students, faculty, administration and boards of directors who are white, middle and upper class and, until recently, male. Not only do the methods of theological education produce the consequences mentioned above, but the very composition of those in control and those trained guarantees the above results.

The list of consequences could go on. There are some good consequences of our theological education, to be sure. We have only focused upon those results which seem to feed so integrally the mind-set and direction of our society and which pose questions for us as persons seeking to be faithful to the gospel. Others would draw the line differently.

Some would see exaggerations or skewed perspective in our critique. But, even if what is said here is only half true, this is serious enough to warrant a new look at our theological education structures and methods. ■

How to Speak of God In an Affluent Society

by M. Douglas Meeks

There is a story about a woman who came up to the philosopher William James after he had given a lecture on cosmology and assured him that the world rested on a giant turtle. He replied by asking her what the turtle stood on. She said, "Well, of course, another turtle." He looked quizzical. She anticipated his question and said, "I know what you're going to ask, Professor James, and it's turtles all the way down."

When we come to the question of how to speak of God in our society, we're asking about what goes all the way down — the question of our deepest assumptions.

To speak of God biblically in our time will mean what Gustavo Gutierrez called a death of present theological intelligence in our church and in our society, because I am certain that the God-concepts and God-talk that organize our churches are the very same God-concepts and talk that organize our capitalist society. The church is called, biblically speaking, not to be non-world, but to be that part of the world that is given over to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That is, the church is called to be the *transformed world*.

The problem of doing Christian theology in North America is that our churches have become the world but not the transformed world. Therefore, I think simply to form the Church of Jesus Christ in the context of what we normally refer to as the church would be already a transformation of at least part of the world, and for that reason, I'm more and more convinced that the church is a good place to work in the revolution of God in our times and a good place to work for the revolution of our society.

We have been asking ourselves why we are not becoming engaged in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed and the poor in our society. I think, in large part, the reason lies in the two main models of the church that we are working with in North American society.

The first model is that of the church as a voluntary asso-

ciation. Most lay people see the church as the place for leisure time, for what's left over in life. It's the place where everything is voluntary, nothing is obligated or promised or necessary. The church has no real claim upon one's time or resources. When push comes to shove, it's every man and every woman to his or her tent. And thus, the voluntary church becomes the least important institution in the lives of its members and an institution from which one can expect nothing new or transforming for the world.

The other model is the model of the corporation. This is the model that clergy types by and large prefer. The church is principally a structure, an organization that needs to be governed and administered.

Unfortunately, what we're doing in our seminaries today is preparing people to be professional rulers and governors in either one of these churches, so that under the first model we prepare people to be counselors. One becomes a professional minister by becoming adept in the psychotherapeutic theories and by assuming a medical model. We try to work with the internal life of privatized people while our world is becoming more and more disintegrated.

Under the second model, in seminary one learns skills and competence in organizational development and conflict management and becomes adept in ways that will help to administer an organizational structure. These models of the church are disastrous for the Church of Jesus Christ, and unless we can radically transform them, we cannot create a situation in which there can be a liberated and liberating church, which I think demands a covenant model.

Now I think there are two ways of speaking of God from the perspective of a capitalistic view of the church based on the first two models. They have old classical names but they're just as alive today in our society as they have ever been. The first is the attribute of God called *asceity*. That means God has no needs. God is self-sufficient. The second is what classical theologians called *impassibility*. God is incapable of suffering.

In the last analysis, we speak of ourselves and of human beings in terms of the way we conceptualize God. If we speak of God as the One who possesses Himself (and that's what *asceity* means), has no need of going outside of Himself, has total self-sufficiency, is proper to Himself and thus is property of Himself, then we get a peculiarly capi-

M. Douglas Meeks is Professor of Systematic Theology and Ethics at Eden Theological Seminary and author of *Origins of the Theology of Hope*. This article is excerpted from a talk given at a Theology in the Americas Conference, New York, NY. It is reprinted with permission.

talistic vision of the human being, of the self as private property. This prevents the possibility of entering into solidarity with other human beings, since what one is most afraid of is the loss of self — one's main property. That is the reason that in the middle class church in the modern world the traditions of existentialism with the language of "authenticity" have arisen. Such God language serves the privatism and individualism of the voluntary association. The God language of propriety and property, on the other hand, serves the notion of the church as a corporation. Speaking of God as the impassible private self in possession of itself creates the socio-economic structures which protect the affluence of those who are "divinely" private and self-possessed.

Our task, as we reflect on God in our situation, is to try to find out how to speak of God biblically in our own time. I want to give several very quick points about the way I think the Bible speaks of God.

The first point is that for the Bible, "God" is a *political term*. It is a conflict term. It is a power term. For the Bible has this one main question, namely, "Who has the power ultimately; who really is God?" But the Bible knows quite well that "God" in and of itself is only a technical term. It is a term that is empty and void. It is a formal description of divinity. But that concept is always filled with some history and with some identity, so the main question of the Bible is the "name" of God. To whom does the ascription of divinity belong? The name of God in the Bible is the One "who brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," or the "One who raised Jesus Christ from the dead." Those are names of God and that means the Bible speaks of God always historically, with respect to particular people, special times, and specific places.

The second point is that the Bible always speaks of God in terms of *righteousness*. I think this is our main problem in the middle class churches of North America with respect to speaking of God; namely, we are so reluctant to speak the word "righteousness." I think there can be no covenant community and no liberating church in our midst unless we can again speak of righteousness.

The most convincing theologian in the North American context for our churches was Andrew Carnegie who in 1889 wrote an article called "Wealth," in which he claimed that Christianity has to do only with the second phase of money. It has nothing to do with how one gets one's money. That is determined by the laws of nature, and it does not behoove the church to try to interfere with those laws of tooth and fang. The church takes over after one has money, and it gives some rules of charity about how to disburse it. As long as we talk of God only in uncritical love language, we're going to be guilty of what Marx called the "trip-trap of love." The first and the last word of the

Bible is "righteousness." That is what creation is all about. With the power of righteousness, God calls something out of nothing. The definition of God's righteousness in the biblical tradition is "God's power for life." With His righteousness He calls a people out of a nobody people. At the heart of the Sabbath is righteousness. The content of the resurrection is righteousness, justice. That is, of course, what justification by faith is all about — how to make us justice people; how to make us just.

And so first we have to start using the word "righteousness," even though with our middle class sensibility we don't want to call ourselves "self"-righteous. The problem is, what if we're not righteous; what if we do not have justice in our bowels; what if we do not have the power of God's righteousness to fight the enemies of sin and evil and death in our midst? The biblical assumption is simple but historically realistic: If God's righteousness is absent, death will reign. This language about God makes the Christian life utterly and completely militant.

The third thing is that the Bible speaks of God *economically*. The language of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is completely economic language. It is the question of how God distributes His powerful life so that His creatures and His creations may live. The New Testament speaks always in a language of abundance and of super-abundance when it talks about the Holy Spirit. The word "economics" means simply the law of the household. It has to do with whether everyone in the household will get what it takes to be human, to live.

The biblical view is that the whole of creation is the household and God is at work in history providing what His people need in order to live. I want to try to bring these things together and relate what I think liberation theology is all about on the methodological level. We who have been liberals are very wary of what the tradition used to call a dogma; what the tradition used to call a "canon within a canon," or a principle of interpretation, a hermeneutic. There will be no covenant society, there will be no covenant church among us, unless we agree on something like a canon within the canon. The canon within the canon doesn't mean that we refuse to read parts of the biblical tradition, but it means we have a way, and we're agreed upon it, to read all of the Bible. We have a way, and we're agreed upon it, to think and speak about God. And that way reads something like this: The righteousness of God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit comes to the poor, the oppressed, the sinners, and the dying. That is the authoritative way to read the whole of the Scriptures. This brings together, I think, the notions that God language is political language, God language is about history, God language is about economics, and above all God language is about righteousness. ■



Start with the assumption that large institutions (such as seminaries) are not going to be on the forefront of radical social change. Continue with the assumption that Christians are *supposed* to be on the forefront of radical social change. (Those who do not accept this assumption can stop reading now.) Conclude with the assumption that to bring about radical social change some kinds of institutional structures are not only useful but necessary.

Where does one go with all that, if one believes that theological education should be a vehicle for radical social change?

Autobiographical fragment: In the '60s, when I was based in a "secular" university, I found myself in the midst of an exciting, if occasionally terrifying, ferment. As more and more students discovered that they were living in a repressive society (subtly repressive to them, overtly repressive to minorities both at home and abroad), they tried to organize to bring about change. "Free universities," student-initiated curricular changes, alternate models for learning, and (with the heating up of Vietnam protest) direct pressure on university structures for significant change, were the ethos in which we lived and worked and sometimes trembled. It looked like the beginning of a new era.

Most of that is now nostalgia. A few

Robert McAfee Brown is Professor of Ecumenism and World Christianity at Union Theological Seminary and author of *Theology in a New Key*.

of the gains have made a difference; more have been co-opted in ways that do not threaten ongoing university structures, and the rest have been maligned. Things are back to normal, which is to say that the *status quo* has

SEMINSEM A Fantasy on Seminaries

by Robert McAfee Brown

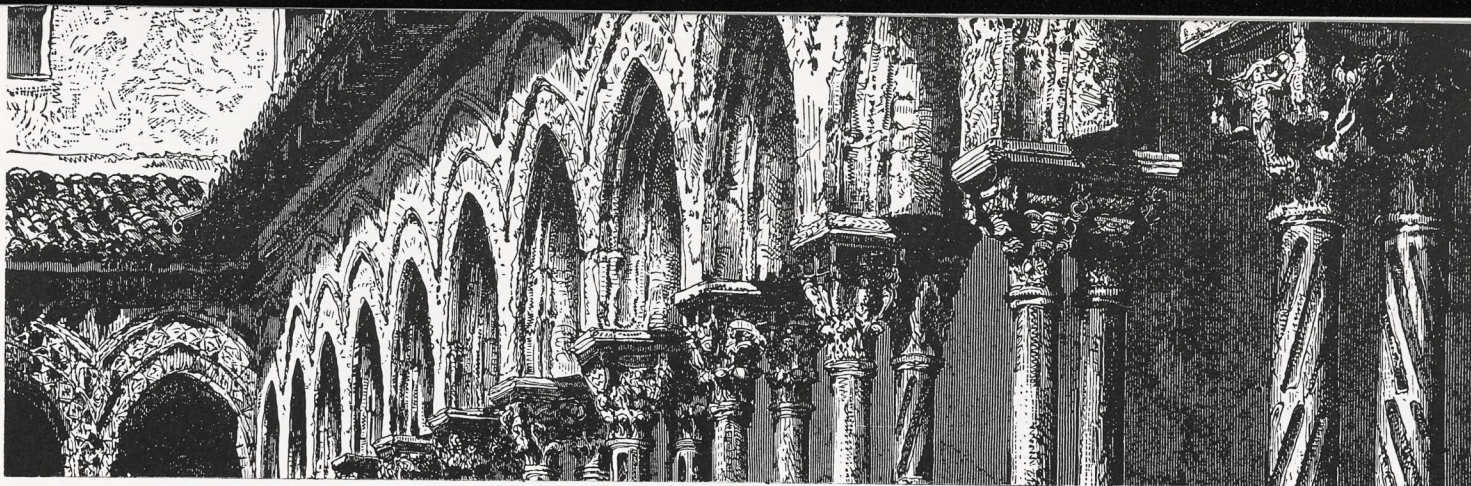
been reaffirmed by most administrators and students.

By the '70s it was clear to me that the universities were an unlikely breeding ground for a genuinely new society. Universities had too much at stake in preserving the old society. Younger radical professors failed to get tenure, admissions processes were tightened up and the "good old days" of the past began to seem more enticing to undergraduates than the new society of the future. Fraternities and sororities are even coming back into favor.

I have this funny quirk, which made no sense to my secular colleagues at Stanford (or to most of my "religious" colleagues, for that matter) that the church still has the potential for being on the frontline of identification and involvement with the poor and oppressed during the next couple of decades. I

do not mean the institutional church *per se*, which will have all the institutional problems of survival (and then some) that beset the universities, the multi-nationals and everybody else. But I think there is still a *remnant within the churches* around which a new agenda could be built, an agenda that would respond affirmatively to the cries of Third World Christians and would examine seriously what changes in life-style, theological methodology, "revisionist" understanding of church history, and so forth, might be involved in preparing to live within that remnant community.

It was my earlier hope that there might be some seminaries (even one seminary) where this could happen. While such a proposal might be impossible in denominational schools, beholden as they are to denominational structures that are likewise beholden to the "principalities and powers," I thought that perhaps certain inter-denominational seminaries might put such concerns at the top of their agenda. I am no longer sanguine about that either. If such places exist, I do not yet know their names, addresses or zip codes. For they, too, are beholden to sources of financial support that can scarcely permit such blatant misuse of funds, and they too are dug into individual institutional histories that make radical change highly unlikely. As long as significant numbers of a tenured faculty look upon the '60s as an "intrusion" into the true tasks of theological education and Christian scholarship, to be put behind as fully as possible so that everybody can get back to



the “real work” of seminary education, there is hardly any power conceivable (maybe not even that of the Holy Spirit), that is going to turn such institutions around.

What is one to do? There are a number of possible scenarios:

One could simply keep on trying; repeating in ever more lonely fashion that current trends are all wrong; losing four allies for every one gained; content to be the “lone voice,” the creative minority opinion; tolerated only because one is not powerful enough to engage in a significant threat to the structures.

One could also adopt a low profile, playing along with the crowd in order to survive, but in one’s own teaching and writing trying quietly but persistently to intrude new ideas into structures that want no part of them. The price of doing this is likely to be co-optation.

One could throw in the towel, but the price is likely to be one’s soul.

Or, one could start a new seminary. It would be made up of those who share a like-minded set of goals and objectives for the future. It would not be hard to assemble a faculty; many younger teachers (and even a few older ones) would positively lust for the opportunity to create such an institution. But it would be exceedingly hard to *pay* the faculty.

Other small obstacles in the way of starting from scratch are the need for a decent library (several million dollars); the need for buildings to house the library and the students and the classrooms and the faculty and the admin-

istration; the need for funds to offer large scholarships, since students coming to such a seminary would not come from the affluent strata of society; the need for funds for promotion, advertising, etc. and the need for considerable endowment to carry the seminary along once the original donors had discovered what was really happening and withdrew their support.

(Qualifying note to the above: A place like New York Theological Seminary has solved many of the problems by *getting rid* of its library, buildings, tenured faculty, etc. A bold and exciting venture, but one partly described by the concerns of the rest of this article.)

The above scenarios are less than adequate. Could there be another scenario? (Here is where the fantasy part comes in.)

Imagine a center of theological learning — any center of theological learning. It has buildings, library, faculty, endowment and students, along with a tradition of being open to a *few* new ideas, so long as they don’t seriously threaten buildings, faculty, endowment, students and the tradition of being open to a few new ideas. Before the boom is lowered there is at least a little time and breathing space. For awhile. What could be done in such a situation to educate the remnant for the future? A few proposals:

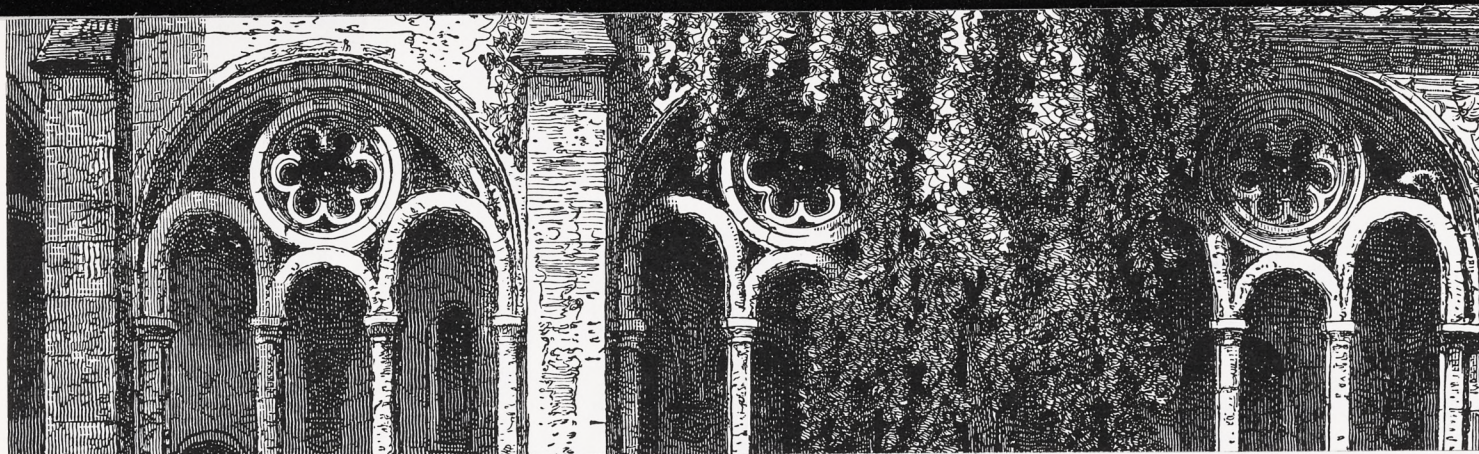
Accept being part of such a situation. There will be institutional demands and commitments to be met, and these have an appropriate claim upon a certain portion of one’s time and energy, if one is either a student or

a faculty member at such a place. But insist on being more than just a part of such a situation. Alongside the existing institutional vision must be set another, alternate vision. Being “in and yet not of” an existing structure is part of the legacy of Christian existence that needs new adaptation for today. How, in a creative rather than destructive use of the word, could one “exploit” an institutional structure for ends it did not envision for itself?

A possible model: Conceive of oneself as part of a “Seminsem” — a seminary-within-a-seminary. To be part of Seminsem would mean to be part of a self-conscious, intentional community *within* the overall seminary structure, *as well as* part of the seminary structure itself. Dual citizenship. How would it work?

Perhaps 75 per cent of the curriculum of Seminsem could be provided by the already existing seminary. Basic material about the Bible, church history, systematic theology and so on could be provided by the already-existing structures; exposure to such things is part of what seminary education is all about. An increasing restlessness about just *how* it is disseminated and appropriated is the reason for the next provision.

At least 25 per cent of the curriculum would need to be created by the members of Seminsem, both “faculty” and “students” (a distinction of limited value in a place like Seminsem). Some of this might involve asking what one *does* today with the biblical or historical material one has acquired in conventional fashion — a question



conventional seminary courses seem notoriously nervous about asking. Another curriculum task would be to pose the whole question of how education takes place, *i.e.* what is deficient about conventional models (thus making Seminsem necessary) and how can appropriate remedial work be done before the conventional models have destroyed one's ability to seek an education. There would need to be at least sample seminars in substantive subject matter that would be explored along non-traditional lines — not a case of having an “expert” impart information into students' minds, but a cooperative venture of exploring what the Christian faith means today.

The distinctive life of Seminsem would thus have to be organized around action/reflection models, for which the term *praxis* has come to be a convenient shorthand and symbol. Seminsem would need to have its own life clearly anchored in the community around it — not the “academic” community but the community of the workers, the unemployed, the artists, the politicians, maybe even some Church practitioners. It would be important to have theological questions posed *out of* such encounters, rather than having theological answers imposed *upon* such encounters. This would imply the presence of some non-seminarians in all learning situations so that there could be a challenge to abstract theorizing. This means that theological reflection would grow out of commitment to action on behalf of — or more properly, alongside of — victims in our present society. The imperative for change would need to

inform the distinctively Seminsem curriculum.

Seminsem would need some kind of geographical focal point. It might be a house “in town” in which some of the members lived; it might be a room within the regular seminary structures, set apart for Seminsem activities. But it would be a place where those with similar concerns and commitments could regularly gather to share insights, frustrations, breakthroughs and hopes.

There should be some kind of minimal corporate discipline. All three words are important. At the start it should be *minimal* — not making demands that would scare away potential interest, nor so highflown as to be unrealistic. The nature of the demands should grow gradually out of the group experience rather than being arbitrarily imposed upon it by those who got there first. The discipline should be *corporate* — a commitment by all to group sharing of work, study, results, liturgy, chores, whatever. And it should be a *discipline* — something clearly and consciously agreed upon and not merely left to individual whimsy. There should be some mark or style to indicate the nature of the life being shared. The point of this is that more than an “academic atmosphere” is needed. Too many seminaries are so self-conscious about their academic side that they minimize or ignore the importance of a communal life-style commensurate with the material under scrutiny. The life of Seminsem, on the contrary, must somehow embody what it is talking and studying about. Furthermore, any attempts at exclusive-

ness or preciousness should be avoided. All that Seminsem does should be open to all; any who wish to participate in its meetings, enroll in its courses and share in its disciplines, activities and involvements should be welcome. Otherwise, how will it grow?

In all of this, it is important to be open and upfront about what is going on. Seminsem should not be a sneaky or covert operation. Those in charge of the institution where it is present should be informed of its goals and activity; their cooperation should be elicited. Members of Seminsem should have a written statement of intention, should elicit space and other amenities from the seminary, seek for course credit for its operations and try to be an arm of the seminary itself. The idea is, of course, to subvert whatever present models are inadequate, but it should be possible for administrators initially scared by experimentation to adopt the Gamaliel Test: “If this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will be unable to overthrow them.” — a no-lose situation for any sensitive administrator.

Finally, let all be provisional. Mistakes will be made; these should be acknowledged and rectified. Critique from outside should be welcome; critique from inside should be mandatory. (Let this outline come under the mandate of critique from either source.) The goal is not to become an autonomous institution; the goal is to transform the existing institution, by the power of example and attraction, so that the need for Seminsem will disappear. ■

Liberation Theology: Suspicion, Hope, Commitment

by Beatriz Melano Couch

What kind of hermeneutics does the theology of liberation use? How do we deal with the whole issue of interpretation? I believe that this point is what greatly divides contemporary theologies, cutting across confessional boundaries.

Let me point out some issues that we have to keep in mind which are essential to any kind of theology. In the first place, Christianity is not a collection of ideas but the continual interpretation of facts, of fundamental events. These events are told and already interpreted in the Bible. Therefore, Christianity is a biblical religion. These events record the dealings between God and His people. Even though God may speak through individuals He is always pointing toward a more global action which has to do with humanity as a whole. From the very beginning, the Old Testament, as well as the New, is the interpretation of these basic events. Therefore, the hermeneutical task is not something which we have initiated, but rather it is already present in the Bible itself, describing reality as it has been seen and lived by the prophets, by the people of Israel, by Christ Himself, by the early church.

Secondly, let us keep in mind another basic point. It has been presupposed that we can approach the Bible in a state of what I would call an "original naivete," disengaging ourselves from culture, from our own ideals, from our own internalized images, from our own philosophical and ethical presuppositions, and then apply Scripture to the reality of the world. Theology has been thought of as an endeavor that one can do as if one were working in a laboratory with 100 per cent pure containers. This is false.

We have to be aware when we approach the Scriptures that we are already conditioned by some kind of philosophical, ethical, political and social background. The her-

meneutics of the theology of liberation starts with what we may call the hermeneutics of suspicion. Paul Ricoeur initiates a kind of hermeneutics of suspicion and Juan Luis Segundo also uses this expression, but this type of thinking is already present in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. Ricoeur points out the need to expose the false conscience which poses itself as the foundation of meaning. But he does not go beyond this point, as the theology of liberation does; that is to say, to the consideration of the political, social, and economic situation. We have to suspect our own ideas with which we approach the Bible and be aware that they are already the product of the kind of political and social background in which we are immersed.

As I see it, we should begin with two considerations. The first one is the suspicion about our own ideas as we approach the Scriptures; the second is suspicion about our methods. There are no innocent methods; every method presupposes a theory with its own limitations and within its own purposes.

The theology of liberation turns to the modern social sciences as necessary tools for describing in a more scientific and objective way the reality in which we are immersed, not only to unmask our own false conscience but to unmask the distortion and oppression under which the peoples of the Third World live today. It hopes to avoid the danger of reading into the text only our own conditioning, with the aim of freeing the text, letting the text speak with all its urgency, depth, and power. And then it hopes to let the text itself rephrase our own questions and rephrase our own conceptions about life and death, our own epistemology, our own knowledge of society, our ethics, politics, etc. A more accurate knowledge of society will also rephrase our own questions and conceptions. Summing up, the hermeneutics of the theology of liberation is done in a dialectic relationship between reality as it is described by the modern social sciences and then reflection on the Scripture and vice versa.

Let me point out something about the kind of reflection that we try to do on the Bible. It is a reflection which is

Beatriz Melano Couch is Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This article is from *Theology in the Americas*, reprinted here with the permission of Orbis Books.

being born of the way we experience reality. This reflection points out the contradictions of our own society, the contradictions within our own selves, between the church and the gospel, between the Bible and academic theology. I would insist that these reflections have to spring from suffering; by this I mean from the immersion in conflict and in struggle to survive as free human beings. Only if the reflection emerges from that kind of situation can we move on from just condemning what is wrong. Usually, to condemn is very easy — we just point out; we get out our hate and our anger. But when we are immersed in the situation — when a little boy comes to look for leftover food in the garbage at my doorstep; when a friend is assassinated in the streets, or when an ex-student is taken to jail — then it is not a matter of merely pointing out what is wrong. That very situation leads us to commitment, a commitment to change what is wrong and not just to condemn it; to change it not by our own authority but by entering into God's purpose and dealing with what the theology of liberation calls "efficacious love."

In summary, the hermeneutics of liberation theology is a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of hope born of engagement. I would call it then a hermeneutics of engagement or a hermeneutics of commitment, of political commitment.

I will now draw some theological implications from this. I am not going to elaborate upon these ideas; I will simply mention them. I think we have to get away from some mortal (fatal) alternatives into which it is easy to fall. These alternatives are:

1. Existential engagement vs. theoretical engagement (which we can call a state of neutrality!). To think that one can be neutral in today's world is to believe that one can fail to be present, that we can afford the luxury of being simply absent, taking no sides, no options. We are all present one way or another in this historical moment and we either contribute to the liberation of the oppressed of the world or we contribute to exploitation and injustice.

2. Love of God vs. love of neighbor. "For he who does not love the brother and sister who can be seen cannot love God whom one cannot see." (I John 4:20).

3. Violence vs. non-violence. Love is always violent: Love breaks; love erupts; love brings forth; love creates. If it only destroys it is not love, but if it is only an idea, a feeling or a resignation, it is not biblical love.

4. Theology of liberation of a people vs. theology of liberation of individual groups. In the first should be included the liberation of all groups. I cannot be free while my neighbor is under oppression. Is there such a thing as individual liberation?

5. Ideology vs. faith. Faith is expressed in praxis, not only in ideas but in action. Ideology is a coherent nexus of

values, ideas, beliefs, customs, attitudes. Both faith and ideology are expressed in ideas and in ways of life. Even though, for the Christian, faith is communion with Christ, it is very difficult to make a clear-cut distinction to determine where one begins and the other ends.

6. History vs. eschatology. We have to interpret eschatology in terms of the kingdom that is already here and now — the kingdom that is present and the kingdom that is to come. Therefore, we shall move away from the dichotomy between the future of the human race and the future of God. God's future is our present; our present should reflect God's future.

7. Theology of the elite vs. theology of a people on the march which is seeking to be faithful. Being immersed in the situation means being one with others, becoming one flesh with the "other," especially those who are the oppressed of the world. The future of theology is not going to be the task of *prima donnas*; it is not going to be the responsibility of a few, but our common reflection as a people as we search to interpret God's word and His purposes for our time. The New Testament shows us that the events of Christ were interpreted within a community. The New Testament writers were not isolated people; they belonged to a community of proclamation, worship and service. The theology of liberation is a theology on the march. It is an open theology in the sense that it is not a finished product; it is open in the sense that it is not a closed system of abstract dogmatic truths. If theology is disengaged from the particular situation, it is irrelevant. It cannot be separated from the common church experience, from the common sharing of the struggles and hopes of the people who search for a more human and just society. It assumes suffering; it assumes praxis; it assumes the challenge of faith today.

8. There is an additional dichotomy which I have not yet mentioned. We have to get away from the alternative between one truth and many interpretations. That is a mortal alternative too. The truth is not something we invent, of which we have an intuition; it is not something we create; it is not an ideal we produce. It is an incarnate reality that we discover, that judges our action and confirms it, and that throws light on the road ahead.

Just one final word. What does this mean to us women in the church? I think that, precisely because of the rediscovery of the evangelical truth in the situation and in the Scripture, we dare not fail as women to assume the challenge with which we are faced in the task of doing theology today. We must assume together with men the task of the theology of liberation. And probably some light will be thrown on a theology that was done by only one-half of the population of the world for two thousand years. ■

Liberation Mariology

by Rosemary Ruether



One of the new themes that surfaced during the recent Latin American Bishops' Conference in Puebla, Mexico (January-February, 1979), in both the speeches of Pope John Paul II and in the document of the conference itself, was Liberation Mariology. Mary is said to be the representative of the poor and the oppressed. This theme was enunciated in the later speeches of the Pope in Mexico, such as in his speeches at Guadalajara and Zapopan. It was picked up at several points in the final document, especially in the section on the preferential option for the poor (XVIII, 12). Quoting from the Pope's speech at Zapopan, the document declares:

From Mary, who in her Magnificat proclaims that salvation has to do with justice to the poor "there flows authentic commitment to the rest of humanity, our brothers and sisters, especially for the poorest and the most needy and to the transformation of society."

How are women, especially Christian feminists, to respond to this theme?

For most Christian women, especially Catholics, Mariology has not been experienced as exactly liberating in the past. The Mariology we have known from our upbringing has been primarily a tool of repression. Mary has embodied all that the clerical, celibate, male-dominated church wished to enforce upon women in the patriarchal ideal of "femininity." In traditional Christian culture, femininity has had two dominant themes: (1) — "purity" or sexual repression and (2) — passivity or total receptivity to

Rosemary Ruether, feminist theologian, is Georgia Harkness Professor of Applied Theology at Garrett Evangelical Seminary, Evanston, IL., and author of *New Woman/New Earth*.

the demands of a male divinity and "His" representatives, ruling class males. "Be it done to me according to Thy Word" was not presented to us as a radical, autonomous decision of a woman to risk her life on a divine messianic venture outside of established society. On the contrary, it summed up that docility to male demands that should be the appropriate response of women to fathers, husbands and priests.

Mary was both the ideal model for this "femininity" and at the same time a model that no actual woman could hope to emulate, thus casting all real women into the shade as tainted daughters of Eve.

For Christian women, who, through a process of painful growth, have at length freed themselves from this repressive ideal, Mary is not exactly someone they want to welcome back with open arms as their liberator. Any claims in that direction sound contrived and are rightly greeted with great suspicion. "With a friend like that, who needs enemies," we might well think! Such a theme is all the more suspicious when it is enunciated by a Polish Pope and a Latin American bishops' conference packed with conservatives. The Pope, in his pronouncements so far, has been consistently traditionalist in his views of women. His initial Mariological statements in Mexico (and Poland) sounded like the worst of reactionary piety. So one was hardly prepared for anything prophetic to come from that direction.

Nevertheless, I would argue that a Mariology read from the Magnificat may be an important topic linking feminist and liberation theologies. By endorsing this theme the Pope and the Latin American bishops allowed a piece of dynamite to be smuggled into their well-secured ecclesiastical houses, inside what only superficially looks like a piece of traditional statuary. It is for us who are concerned with feminist and liberation theologies to detonate this piece of dynamite and blow the cover off the statuary.

The key text for Liberation Mariology is taken from Luke 1:47-55, in which the pregnant Mary declares to her cousin Elizabeth:

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and
my spirit rejoices in God my
Savior.*

*for He has looked upon the
low estate of His handmaiden
and behold all generations
shall call me blessed,
for He who is mighty has done
great things for me and Holy
is His name.*

*and His mercy is unto generation
after generation on them that
fear Him,
He has shown the strength of His
arm*

*He has scattered the proud in the
imagination of their hearts,
He has put down the mighty
from their thrones and exalted
those of low degree;*

*He has filled the hungry with
good things, and the rich He
has sent empty away.*

*He has helped His servant Israel
in the remembrance of His
mercy.*

This Lukan text (which echoes the Old Testament text of I Samuel 2:1-10) is, I would argue, the only place in the New Testament where Mary herself is advanced as a personification of a Christian theological principle. Here, Mary personifies the church or the messianic Israel (while, in the historical sections of the synoptics, she represents the old Israel as unbelieving kinsfolk, and, I would argue, that this is also her role in the two key texts about Mary in the Gospel of John as well). Luke's nativity narrative is the only part of the New Testament that makes Mary herself both an active agent in Christian salvation and ascribes to her a crucial significance for Christian theology. If there is to be any genuinely New Testament Mariology, it must take Luke's nativity narrative as its source and the Magnificat as its critical norm.

As the embodiment of the church,

the messianic Israel, it is Mary's faith, acting as an autonomous, free agent, that is the pivot of that human response to God that makes possible the messianic advent. For Luke, this is not primarily a biological event (much less a biological freak event), but a faith event. Without faith, no miracles can happen. Without human response, God cannot act. This is the radical dependence of God on humanity that Christian theology has so often denied. Mary's faith makes possible God's entrance into history.

Luke's nativity story must be understood in the context of another of his texts which would appear to contradict much of that traditional Marian piety that glorifies the marvels of Mary's "womb." This is the saying in Luke 11:27-28 where the woman raises her voice in the crowd to cry: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the paps that gave thee suck." Jesus, replies, "Nay, rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." For Luke, the miracle of the nativity does not have to do with blessing womb and paps, but is the miracle of God's liberating action made possible precisely because Mary, in her acceptance, is the one who "hears the word of God and keeps it."

What kind of miracle comes about because Mary hears the word of God and accepts it? Are we simply to move now to the Christmas story with the sweet picture of Mary as young mother absorbed in her new born baby? The text of the Magnificat ignores or sweeps past all of this. The important point of Mary's faith is that through it God's liberating action can become effective in history, the liberating action which God has promised to Abraham and to his "seed." This liberating action is expressed in a revolutionary transformation of the social order. The social hierarchy of wealth and poverty, power and subjugation is turned upside down. Mary is highly exalted, not because she is so happy to be pregnant. She is exalted because through her God is working a revolution in history. Or,

to be more specific, she herself embodies that oppressed and subjugated people who have been liberated and exalted through God's liberating action. She is not merely an "advocate" or "agent" of God; she is herself the liberated Israel; the humiliated ones who have been lifted up; the hungry ones filled with good things. The language for this liberation in Luke is explicitly economic and political. The mighty are put down from their thrones; the rich are sent empty away.

This theme grates unpleasantly on most Christians' ears. Since many North American Christians, in any case, regard themselves as near, if not exactly *on*, the thrones of the mighty and as moderately "filled with good things" already, the idea of God's salvation as a judgmental choice is offensive. We prefer to regard God as loving rich and poor alike. A divine liberation that might send the rich empty away is one whose judgmental hand might fall upon *us*! Perhaps it is we who are to be put down from our thrones? Perhaps it is our riches that are to be swept from our hands?

Luke's social revolutionary message in the Magnificat accords with a bias found throughout his gospel. The same emphasis is found in his version of the beatitudes:

Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,

Blessed are you who hunger now for you shall be satisfied.

Lest the point not be clear, these are followed by their judgmental opposites:

But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you who are full now, for you shall hunger (6:20-25).

Contrast this blunt economic language of Luke with Matthew's spiritualization:

Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . (Mt. 5:3,6).



Stories of social iconoclasm play a marked role in Luke's gospel. Luke goes out of his way to point out examples of special divine favor and forgiveness upon those classes of people who are despised by the wealthy, powerful and traditionally religious. Jesus eats with sinners and gives special favor to publicans. The stories of the good Samaritan and the rich man and Lazarus also make the point that those reviled by the society find favor with God.

Among these stories of social iconoclasm in Luke, a large number have to do with the vindication of women, especially poor women, and despised women, prostitutes. The story of the widow's mite, the story of the forgiveness of the prostitute who has faith, the healing of the woman with the flow of blood, the defense of Mary's right to discipleship are among the Lukan stories that lift up the favor of women by the messianic prophet.

The poor and despised in the present social system are constantly presented in Luke's gospel as the *avante garde* of the Kingdom of God. It is they who are more open to the Word of God, more able to read the signs of the times than the rich, the powerful and the righteous. Jesus even thanks God that the meaning of the times has been hidden from the educated and revealed to the simple ones. (Lk. 10:21). All this is a part of a common synoptic tradition, of course. In Matthew 21:31, it is said that the tax collectors and the harlots will go into the Kingdom of God ahead of the scribes and Pharisees (read: clerics and theologians). But Luke particularly favors this element in the tradition.

It is Luke also who shapes Jesus' inaugural sermon to stress the continuity of His mission with the prophetic tradition. Quoting from Isaiah, Jesus announces that the Spirit of God:

has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, proclaim release

to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

In other words, the coming of the Kingdom of God, the acceptable year of the Lord, is manifest precisely in these liberating events: Good news to the poor; release to the captives, setting at liberty the oppressed. In the words of the Lord's prayer, the definition of God's Kingdom come is God's will done on earth.

Luke's sensitivity to women as members of the poor and despised vindicated by the messianic prophet adds an additional dimension to Mary's identity in the *Magnificat*. As the first believer whose faith makes possible the messianic advent, she is a particularly appropriate personification in the church, the messianic Israel. But, also, as a woman, she particularly represents those classes of the subjugated who will be lifted by and filled with good things in the messianic revolution.

The Puebla document basically understands this interpretation of the church when they place the Mariology of the *Magnificat* in the context of the "preferential option for the poor." It is important to understand this idea correctly. It is not that Mary, as an aristocratic "lady," opts for the poor in the manner of *noblesse oblige*, or that the church advocates the poor, in the manner of the patronage of the poor by the rich. Within the document there is confusion over this, and, at times, the bishops slip into the patronizing understanding of advocacy of the poor.

But, in the section on preferential option for the poor, the authentic understanding is clear. It is, first of all, God who opts for the poor, not us. And God's opting for the poor makes the poor the preferential locus for understanding who the church is. The church is the poor and oppressed whom God is vindicating. The non-poor join the church by joining God in that preferential option for the poor

and identifying themselves with the cause of the oppressed. This is very different than the monopolization of the identity of the church by a social establishment who then take it upon themselves to patronize the poor.

Many women, however, will still resist the notion of a female personalization of the church. This is because, for most of us, the dominant symbols still remain male. A male divinity is seen as vindicating a female personified Israel. A male messianic espouses the female church. When the God-Israel, or Christ-Church symbolism as male and female is read in this way, it tends to fall back into the traditional hierarchical pattern of patriarchal marriage. This, of course, is the way the symbolism is picked up and used in Ephesians 5 where the Christ-Church symbol becomes explicitly a model of male headship in marriage. As long as the female personalization of the church is linked with this symbolism of husband over wife, as head over body, it will not only be offensive to feminists, but, I believe, will miss the meaning of the church in the *Magnificat*.

A different option is available in the synoptics which is incompatible with the ecclesiology of Ephesians 5. This is the understanding of the messianic prophet, and those who hear and follow Him, as those who have rejected the model of power and domination. The Son of Man comes not to be served, but to serve, and give His life as ransom for many. Likewise, those who are to follow Him must not seek to lord it over others, must not be called Father, Master or Teacher, but must be ready to empty out power in service to others. The male symbol for God and the Messiah, therefore, is important only in the sense that maleness itself, as a traditional symbol and social expression of domination, is here undergoing its own *kenosis*. Those who have traditionally embodied power empty out power in order to empower others. Those who have been subjugated are empowered to throw off their servitude and enter into their inheritance as

people of God.

This means that, in the messianic revolution which empties out divine power into service to the poor, the primary identity of the people of God ceases to be taken, symbolically, from the ruling classes, *i.e.*, sons and princes. Instead, the primary identity of the people of God comes from the poor and despised, women and slaves. Women and slaves now have the symbolic priority for the church's identity. They go into the Kingdom of God *first*. The rich man will enter only by selling what he has and giving to the poor. And experience tells us that, when faced with this demand, most rich young men will shake their heads and go sadly away.

In order to liberate ourselves from the male headship model of the Christ-Church symbol, we must recognize the full meaning of this *kenosis* of God in Christ. As God is emptied out in service in Christ, so Christ is emptied out in service to the liberated people. This means that, in the liberating messianic event, the identity of the messianic prophet is now transferred to the messianic people. It is they (or, symbolically, "she") who represents the ongoing messianic presence in the world. This transfer of messianic identity to the people is particularly strong in the second half of the Gospel of John: As the vine, so the branches. This also means that just as the world (those in power) have hated me, so they will hate and persecute you.

The church is the ongoing Christ as the liberated poor who continue to serve and liberate others. And also, as those who suffer, as those who pay the price for this struggle for liberation. Mary, as the personified church, the liberated poor, cannot become model for continued subjugation, but rather of messianic empowerment. She is *alter Christus*. She is the messianic people who continues the liberating action of God in the world. The last becomes first and the first last. A poor woman of despised race is the head of the church. ■

(Continued from page 2)

Church is starting to look better all the time by comparison.

I despair because despite all the lip-service paid to equality, I learned from Ms. Heywood's articles that as a heterosexual (excuse the box), I contribute to patriarchy, laissez-faire, and male headship. Why she left out the charge of over-population is a mystery to me.

Lastly, I despair because I am bored by so much of what is called "feminist theology." Most of it is uninspiring and weighted down with such a trendy jargon of its own that the gap is only widened between hearing and comprehension (e.g. "radical mutuality"?). To find anything worthwhile in the genre of feminist theology I find I must look back to persons like Dorothy Sayers and Virginia Woolf. One layperson cries out for some imagination, clarity and real scholarship in feminist theology — or in the spirit of that awful woman-hater Paul: "How about some strong meat?"

**Judith Maltby
Champaign, Ill.**

Ms. Heyward Responds

Thank you for sending the letters of response to my article. Let me reply briefly to two who seem to be seeking substantive dialogue on the issue of sexuality: Douglas Schewe's question about celibacy seems to me an important question. As an option, meaning a voluntary decision rather than a coercive mandate, celibacy may be a creative means of expressing, and directing, one's sexuality. Certainly, many people have experienced it to be and believe that it is. But there are also people, including many Roman Catholic priests and nuns, who testify boldly that celibacy is, in *their* experience, an "unnatural, unhealthy, and unholy" way of being in relationship. In any case, I believe the element of choice is most fundamentally at issue.

Joanne Droppers raises important theological issues in her letter. The issue that she raises with me, namely the question of God's transcendence, is an issue with which I struggle constantly,

and only tentatively try to resolve in what I write. The fact is, however, and the Hebrew will bear this out, "I am becoming who I am becoming" is a legitimate, and rather common, interpretation of God's identity, "I am who I am I." Another common translation is "I will be who I will be." The theme I am attempting to explore in my article is *not* that humanity and God are synonymous, nor that humanity has no sin (or alienation from God), but responsibly, in acts of love — transcends all categories of what is "simply human" and what is divine, or of what is profane and what is sacred. And just as we experience *ourselves* in flux, changing, becoming — in relation to one another and in relation to that which we believe is God — so too might we experience God's own changing and becoming — with us, here on the earth. What is implicit in my article is my belief that God benefits from humanity's love for humanity.

Finally, I would only wish that Judith Maltby, who has read so many of my articles, and who is inspired by scholarly precision, might spell my name correctly.

**The Rev. Carter Heyward
New York, N.Y.**

Not a Religious Concern

Your June issue was a distinct disappointment. Your biased and rabid anti-nuclear editorial comment did not become you — nor did the article by Sam Day, Jr., a known dyed-in-the-wool environmentalist. There are two sides to this nuclear question and the problem of national energy is in no sense religious nor ethical. So I would much prefer that my church and its publications stay within its provinces. Next thing I will be told how to vote for our next president. Otherwise, your WITNESS was quite interesting.

**F. Weddell, Jr., M.D.
San Luis Obispo, Cal.**

Hitting Bed Rock

I'm hastening to send for a permanent subscription to THE WITNESS. You're

hitting bed rock here.

The William Stringfellow series you are running poses central issues for the church. And Sam Day's "H-Bomb's Three-Mile Island?" article in the June issue was timely. It brought to mind Norman Cousins' article in the July 7 issue of the *Saturday Review*, on the time bomb ticking as the result of our failure, politically and in every other way, to master nuclear power and the disposal of nuclear waste.

The selection of Father Paul Washington to receive the William Spofford award at the General Convention in Denver was an excellent one. There couldn't be a more fitting recognition of a very exceptional man. I treasure the memories of my adventures with him in the Church of the Advocate — one of the great experiences of my career in public life. He taught me so much.

The award to the Right Rev. Daniel Corrigan rang a bell. I recollect meeting with him on one or two occasions somewhere in the past at the Home Department of the Executive Council, in New York. Wit, warmth, energy, and intellect are among the impressions of him that persist.

You have my heartiest wish for success and my testimony of personal satisfaction with THE WITNESS.

**Joseph W. Barr, Jr.
Harrisburg, Pa.**

Helpful to Community

As a member of a new community (40 members; 7 years old) of religious women (hopefully some men, too, in the near future!) in the Roman Catholic Church, I am particularly grateful to be receiving your publication, THE WITNESS. I don't know who subscribed to the magazine for me, but one thing is certain — I want to continue receiving it! Many of us in our community, the Emmaus Community, are concerned about the issue of women in the church. Your magazine is very informative and helpful.

**Sister Rita M. Rene
Deal, N.J.**

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