

## SEMINAR ON THEOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

This year there were three formal presentations during the first session of the seminar and the issues they raised were discussed during the second session. The following summaries were prepared by the respective panelists.

Speaking on "Feminist Theology and Social Transformation," Marjorie Reiley Maguire said that the goal of feminist theology is social transformation. It is not interested in building an abstract, intellectual edifice. Neither are feminist theologians simply trying to break into the *system*. They want to turn the *system* upside down. The *system* is patriarchy which pervades both the public and the private realm of life. However, feminists are not attempting to practice "reverse sexism". Nor do they want to substitute matriarchy as a new system. They want to end the patterns of domination and hierarchy that are intrinsic to patriarchy, in order to bring about a society that operates as an egalitarian community. Since religion has served to legitimate patriarchy, feminist theologians strike patriarchy at its roots. Moreover, they believe that they are actually turning theology from its "malestream" (Beverly Harrison's phrase) to its mainstream. The unique contribution of feminist theology flows from its methodology, anthropology and ethics and from new possibilities that feminist insights could bring to ideas of God and Christology.

The methodology of feminist theology is to begin with experience, particularly the experience of women, rather than with abstract reflection on a "deposit of faith." It allows experience to ask questions of the tradition, believing that this is the best way to arrive at the initial faith experience of the individuals and the community upon which tradition is based. Answers coming from the tradition that have no relation to questions anyone has asked are not seen as revelatory. And any tradition which automatically excludes certain questions and experiences is seen as irrelevant.

Feminist anthropology is built on the insight that humanity is molecular rather than atomic in structure. Individualism is anathema to feminism. The basic unit of humanity is the social-individual. This means that dominator and dominated are both negatively affected as persons in a hierarchical relationship. The feminist conviction that we are social-individuals is continuous with an interpretation of Genesis 1:27 as revealing that the image of God is found only in community, and only in community which can accept diversity, the most basic of which is maleness and femaleness.

Ethics is the cutting edge of feminism. Feminists do not depart from the most cherished traditions and principles of ethics, but they do point

out the inconsistencies and contradictions of traditional ethical systems. Feminists know that "natural law" was based on Nature as males experienced it. Universal ethical principles were universal only for males and not even for all males. Human freedom, the treasure supposedly safeguarded by ethics, was denied to women in basic areas of self determination. Traditional justice promoted inequality because it failed to account for unequal needs. Traditional ethics was built on individualism and resulted in an ethic of rights. Feminist ethics is built on social-individualism and results in an ethic of care and responsibility.

The God of classical theology is far from the lived experience of women's lives. The idea of God has rested on a triadic structure: God is good; God is omnipotent; God exists. This structure has often led to the denial of God's existence by male theologians and philosophers who have noted the incompatibility between an omnipotent God's goodness and human suffering, especially the suffering that is God's "fault," e.g. earthquakes, famines, floods, genetic disorders, etc. Feminist theologians would be more likely to accept the idea that omnipotence is not an essential attribute of God. They are not threatened by impotence. They would sooner worship God who is not all-powerful than deny the existence or goodness of God, or affront human reason by trying to reconcile human suffering with God's wisdom. Feminist theologians would know that an acceptance of God's relative impotence could cause us to take more seriously our charge to build the earth and bring creation to its completion.

The Christological dogmas, interpretations, and metaphors of traditional theology have excluded woman and have thus failed to image the universal salvation they proclaim. "Malestream" theology's exclusion of women has led feminist theologians to ask, "Can Women Be Saved by a Male Saviour?" (Rosemary Ruether). This question has been addressed from a soteriological perspective and answered affirmatively, as long as the male is prophet and servant preaching a message of liberation for the dispossessed and powerless. However, as the Vatican ironically demonstrated by claiming that women could not "image" Christ, the question must also be addressed from an ontological perspective. The problem of the divinity of Jesus is the theological "bottom line" for Christian feminists and one which has not been sufficiently addressed. A possible feminist approach could be to affirm the divinity of Jesus but to deny the exclusive divinity of Jesus. Jesus, then, was God incarnate because every human person is God incarnate. Since Jesus was the paradigmatic revelation of God, women as well as men can reveal God as incarnate in them following Jesus. Jesus's equation of the two great commandments — to love God and to love neighbor — becomes understandable.

The Scriptural God traditionally operates in one person or a small group in a limited geographical area and a distinct culture. Thus, feminist theology, although stronger in the U.S. and the West than in the rest of

the Church, can properly be seen as a revelation of God for the world Church, pointing out the golden calf of sexism and calling us back to the worship of the true God. Feminism is not divisive for a world Church and is only as much of a stumbling block and a sign of contradiction to ecumenism and intercultural dialogue as the cross of Jesus.

"The Contribution of Peace Studies to Theology" was Joseph J. Fahey's topic. Fahey outlined the work done on peace studies at Manhattan College and said that the emerging academic field of Peace Studies is a multidisciplinary attempt to understand the causes of violence and injustice along with the concomitant quest for peace and reconciliation within individuals and between nations. Five content or problem areas have been indentified which presently constitute the parameters of Peace Studies research: (1) war and arms races; (2) social, political, and economic justice; (3) dispute settlement or conflict regulation; (4) the philosophy and strategy of nonviolent social change; and (5) the construction of a juridical world community.

The following are some positive contributions of Peace Studies to Theology. (1) Peace Studies is multidisciplinary in nature and interdisciplinary in method. Peace Studies relies not only on the humanistic disciplines of history and philosophy but also on the social science disciplines of economics, politics and government, sociology and anthropology and on the physical science of biology. Applied fields such as business and engineering are also useful to the Peace Studies enterprise. Peace Studies has profitted much from this broadly-based quest for truth; theology can also. (2) Peace Studies relies a great deal on emprical data. Rather than simply assert in an *a priori* fashion that either war or peace flow from the nature of humankind, Peace Studies will conduct rigorous objective scientific investigations of the question before hazarding an answer. Theology — especially moral theology — can profit greatly, and perhaps in some aspects change dramatically should its assertions based on faith be subject to the truth which can also be discovered through scientific analysis. (3) Peace Studies has identified the quest for justice and peace to be at heart of the academic community just as the quest for truth has been its historic *leitmotiv*. Theology and religion which minimize or do not centrally identify human dignity as central to their nature can profit much from the focus of Peace Studies.

There are also many positive contributions which theology and religious faith can make to Peace Studies. Among the many contributions are: (1) the reminder of theology that our physical problems (political, economic, etc.) are at heart spiritual problems; (2) the radical nature of the Reign of God should ever challenge Peace Studies to its own more radical analysis of human nature and society; (3) the theology of evil (or the demonic) should remind the Peace Studies professor that a mere rearrangement of social institutions will never eliminate the need for constant vigilance and reformation of even the reforming institution; and (4) a theology of redemption and hope can give Peace Studies the necessary confidence to continue to believe that its work will bear fruit.

Michael McGinniss, F.S.C., from Washington Theological Union in Silver Spring, Maryland, presented and critiqued a method for interdisciplinary theology first developed by William Everett and T.J. Bachmeyer in their *Disciplines In Transformation* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979). After indicating the strengths and limitations of this trilateral analysis, he translated the method into a preliminary method for practical theology understood as the study of those concrete experiences, understandings, judgments and actions by which men and women realize the Church as the people of God.

This method for practical theology would require at least these six steps: (1) identifying the lived approaches to Christianity, to personality and to society which are incarnated in persons, relationships, symbols, rituals and all other bearers of value-laden communication in the community; (2) identifying the practices, loyalties and theories which make up the approaches to Christianity, to self and society within the community; (3) drawing out the relationships of congruence — first, on the levels of theory, practice and loyalty in the praxis of Christianity, self and society; (4) next, drawing out the relationships of congruence or coherence among the approaches to Christianity, self and society — a first truly interdisciplinary step; (5) drawing out the relationships between what is professed and what is practiced, between what the community perceives as the *ought* and what *is* practiced; (6) finally, proposing alternative praxis for the community — praxis which would bring the community closer to incarnating its deepest loyalties to the gospel.

In the third section of his presentation, McGinniss focused upon the concept of "congruence," which is the principal critical category in trilateral theology as proposed by Everett and Bachmeyer and the central critical category in his own proposal for practical theology. Trilateral analysis, and the derived practical theology, would pursue the formal, rational value of congruence so as to realize in society and history its fundamental commitment to the gospel. Is congruence so understood an adequate criterion for practical theology in the contemporary context? McGinniss answered his own question in the negative for two reasons, both of which reflect the influences of Matthew Lamb's typology of theory-praxis correlations [*Solidarity With Victims* (New York: Crossroad, 1982)]. First, the context in which we live and theologize requires a stance of solidarity *with* the victims of theoretical rationality, rather than a theology which proposes *for* or *to* those suffering the effects of theory gone wild. Second, practical theology today needs to be focused upon what is really done in theology, thus upon the praxis which is the goal and source of all theory. While trilateral analysis and the derived practical theology are praxis-oriented, the basic theological loyalty of "fidelity to the gospel" needs to be elaborated so that the praxis to which that fidelity commits the community, theology and the entire Church is clearly understood and realized.

Finally, McGinniss invited the seminar participants to apply his comments and analysis of a method for practical theology to their own

interdisciplinary work, particularly to the values and loyalties implicit and explicit therein.

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