

Presidential Address

CATHOLICITY, INCULTURATION, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

During this, our last assembly until next year in Atlanta, we gather to probe some ethical implications of our convention theme. What does our developing understanding of catholicity and inculturation imply for our social ethic, our understanding of justice and the common good?

The design for this morning's program is experimental. Originally President-elect Walter Principe had intended to have a panel of two speakers who would each discuss a common issue concerning inculturation, one from a third world perspective and the other from a North American vantage. The topic selected for this cross-cultural scrutiny, the test case of catholicity and inculturation, as it were, was to have been the concerns of women in the regions represented on the panel. One often hears, for example, that some societies are ready, even eager, to have women in positions of leadership, whereas others are not at a point where such change can be accommodated. Perhaps a panel could have helped us understand why the ordination of women is or is not a priority concern in one setting or another, or which cultural factors create momentum for change and which strengthen resistance to change in this or that part of the world. Or perhaps the panel might have focused on the ways that social and economic patterns, moral teaching and sacramental practice affect women's minds and bodies in diverse cultural situations. There is a great deal to be learned about these matters. How valuable it would have been, for example, had we been able to hear an analysis of the social justice questions involved in the AIDS epidemic from knowledgeable women theologians from, say, Nigeria and New York City, and then to probe with them the extent to which Catholicism is bringing Good News to the situations of suffering they know so well.

However, by the time the Society's Board of Directors met last October, the panel had not been arranged, and the board was also dealing with objections from members to what has seemed in recent years an overly packed agenda for the final morning of our assembly. And so from a caucus within the board came a proposal to experiment with a new design for today, and a request that I kill two birds with one speech by dealing with the panel topic in my presidential address. This, it was advanced, would allow time not only for listening to ideas but also for discussing them. The board favored this suggestion, and I acceded to their request, though not without a concern I want to lift up as I begin.

Clearly there is loss entailed in the fact that we are not hearing from one sort of theologian Walter Principe originally had in mind for the panel prior to the presidential address, namely a woman with substantial experience of catholicity and inculturation in a society other than the white Anglo U.S. culture that is my her-

itage. Study the literature from the women of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) as I might, and correspond with women living in the southern hemisphere, in Canadian Indian territory, and in enclaves of rural poverty in the southern United States as I have done, none of this makes me qualified to speak for my absent sisters. This limitation must be faced, and must be remedied in the future. It may also be compensated for to some extent today, if theologians in this room from different cultural contexts will offer in the discussion time your insights on the matters I shall address this morning.

Of course, even if we had gone ahead with the panel, there would have been the problem of tokenism, the danger that one or two might be expected to speak for the many. Surely Philippine theologian Virginia Fabella's recognition of the diversity entailed in the category "Asian" is relevant also to other groups. "Who among the estimated 2,800,000,000 Asians," she asks, "has the proper Asian perspective?"¹ Indeed, more than a dozen national cultures were represented in the volume of Asian women's theology, *With Passion and Compassion*, in which Fabella asks this question. Just as there is no "women's perspective" on inculturation and social justice, so too there is no "African women's perspective" nor any single "québécoise" or "Hispanic-American women's perspective." This is true, and yet we rightly feel that hearing from knowledgeable members of such groups would have deepened our understanding of inculturation in ways so rich that we must mourn the absence of these women. Tokenism may be a sin, but if the alternative is silence, we would do well to heed Luther and "sin bravely." So let these empty chairs on the speakers' platform symbolize the fact that we are still missing many voices from which we need to learn.

When I first contemplated this assignment I considered focusing the analysis of catholicity, inculturation, and social justice on a concrete topic such as women's ordination, employment, or health. But something else kept presenting itself, some questions beneath the presenting problems. All well and good to ponder the implications that cultural differences have for women's ministries. Important indeed to call attention to how the menace of AIDS is affecting women in North America, Africa, and Brazil, and also to question whether absolutes about the sinfulness of using condoms make sense at all to faithful wives of unfaithful or intravenous drug-abusing husbands.

But is there perhaps something more basic that needs first to be explored? Could it be that women's concerns are not just an apt "case" of the tension between catholicity and inculturation, but are rather the crux of the matter? Do not the central categories of "difference" and "otherness" apply when we discuss the two sexes as well as when we think about various cultures? And are not the categories of domination and subordination germane to both problematics as well? Perhaps the lens of *gender* will afford special insight into the question of inculturation, with important consequences for our understanding of social justice. As you know, next year marks the centennial of *Rerum Novarum*, the encyclical that launched a modern tradition of Catholic social teaching that is one of the most widely appreciated

¹Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, eds., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology. Reflections from the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* (New York: Orbis, 1988) 108.

features of our religious tradition, and justly so. Will we celebrate this anniversary by complacently repeating past teaching, or will we build on our heritage and develop a social ethic that is even more adequate to present and future needs? I hope for the latter, and I also hope we may seize this anniversary as the occasion to close the gap between some excellent papal and episcopal teaching on social justice and the consciences of the faithful, which are still so preoccupied with other matters. The gap is there for clergy and laity alike. It is revealed in William Buckley's enduring quip from the 1960s, "Mater si, magistra no!" Indeed, I wonder if things have changed very much since the 1940s, when one of J. F. Powers's memorable monsignors observed to his curate in an effort to disabuse him of some notions about social justice acquired in the seminary, "The Holy Father's in Europe, Father. [The banker] Mr. Memmers lives in this parish."²

It is for the sake of transcending the parochialisms that keep the church from being a clear sign of hope to the poor and oppressed that I shall subject our convention theme to scrutiny in the light of gender analysis. My address is organized around several questions it would be profitable for us to consider in the discussion period this morning, and subsequently as well. I offer my reflections on these questions in the hope that they will contribute to productive conversations among us in the discussion period that follows this presentation.

The first question is this: *What is your experience of the tensions and benefits associated with respect for and affirmation of difference?—in the CTSA, in Catholicism, in general?* To open our thinking on this subject, let us consider the culture of our own Society. By starting where we are, by reviewing our experiences of difference and change, we may be better poised to consider more global and complex instances of the tensions associated with asserting and affirming difference in the context of our Catholic tradition.

CULTURE AND DIFFERENCE: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE CTSA

In six years our Society will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. Surely the history to be written for that occasion will note many differences between the 1946 convention in New York and our meetings of the 1990s. Recall the foldout photograph of our founding fathers that was published in the 1970 edition of the *Proceedings*. It shows eight tables with eight men at each. All are in clerical dress, and by contemporary standards we might be inclined to fault the group's exclusivity. These founders, however, were not without their differences. Some were diocesan priests, while others belonged to religious orders and congregations, each with a distinctive spiritual and theological tradition. Moreover, each man brought a personal background that set him apart from the others at his table in ways that must have been significant at least to him. I call attention to the differences beneath the homogeneity of the picture because if we are to grasp the meaning of

²J. F. Powers, "The Forks," in *Prince of Darkness and Other Stories* (1947; London: The Hogarth Press, 1985) 105. Monsignor continues in a vein that anticipates by several decades certain criticisms of liberation theology: ". . . there's damn little cheer I can give a man like Memmers. Catholics, priests, and laity alike—yes, and princes of the Church, all talking atheistic communism!"

inculturation on a global scale it helps to touch base with our personal experiences of feeling different, of wanting to be part of something larger, and yet not wanting to have our identity swallowed up by that which we join. We feel this tension particularly when we are in the minority or are the only one of our kind, and we are especially uncomfortable when our individuality is interpreted through filters of prejudicial stereotypes, especially negative and demeaning ones. All of us know this experience to some degree. Racial and ethnic slurs come readily to mind; but there are also stereotypes about Catholics, about the divorced, about priests and nuns, about folks from Iowa, certainly about academics, and bishops, and Jesuits, as the existence of a certain adjective testifies. The experience of difference is more acute for some of us than for others, but there is one point of difference we all have to deal with, and this is the difference of gender.

Let us dwell briefly on the ways gender and difference have been part of the experience of the culture we know as the Catholic Theological Society of America. How did this group that started out as a white clerical club reach the point where its third female president is concerned about two aspects of our membership: increasing the participation of male and female theologians of color and maintaining the original membership base of priests who teach in seminaries, especially freestanding seminaries without university ties? Much has changed since 1946, and we have much to learn from the history to be written for our fiftieth anniversary.

Especially in view of this year's Committee on Nominations report, there seems to be no need at the moment to worry about women's status in this organization, although there *is* need to reflect on the significance of the changes that have transpired since the mid-1960s.³ I shall do this shortly, but first something else needs to be said. Especially as we conclude this convention, which has provided the most explicit and in-depth attention to cultural diversity of any in our history, it is urgent that we all agree not to let this attention wane simply because the theme will be different next year. The ranks of our francophone members and our members of color are still very thin, and the same few people are carrying the social justice agendas of African American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American, and Native American groups into so many academic and ecclesiastical conferences that a special obligation devolves on the English-speaking white majority in this Society to support their efforts and do all that we can to increase their numbers. One of the main ways that European-Americans can promote social justice, I believe, is to encourage promising young persons of color to aspire to leadership in all sorts of contexts, including the world of professional theology. This entails mentoring and practical assistance at the level of teaching, and requires that every member of the Society be proactive in seeking to involve theologians from different cultural backgrounds in all facets of our work. The difficulty that Anglos experience in even seeing, not to mention writing, the proper accent marks for French and His-

³In 1990, for the first time in the Society's history the Committee on Nominations proposed a slate with more female (4) than male (2) candidates. At the June 8 business meeting members elected Lisa Sowle Cahill to the vice-presidency and Matthew Lamb and Jamie Phelps to positions on the Board of Directors. Phelps is the first African American elected to office in the Society.

panic words, including the names of our members, is a metaphor for the fact that often our minds are as limited as our typewriters when it comes to affirming and respecting difference. In 1990 the CTSA stands with respect to cultural diversity about where we stood in 1970 with respect to gender. If we are to grow toward a "more vital" theology as an intellectual discipline, we must attend to the challenges and insights available from those doing theology from different cultural perspectives. The mistake to avoid at all costs is assuming the topic has been "covered" this year. We have only begun to affirm and respect and learn from difference.

When the history of the CTSA is written, I hope there will be particular attention to the way women and laymen came to be so involved in this professional society that although our numbers when combined still amount to fewer than one-third of the Society's total members, there is a widespread impression that our clerical members are in the minority. Since two CTSA members have expressed this misperception in print in 1989, I want to take this occasion to set the record straight by reporting that although we may not have exact statistics until our next survey is done in preparation for the 1992 edition of the *Directory*, anyone counting the women's names in the present membership lists will not get past 250, and probably not nearly that far, and the numbers of laymen are certainly fewer.⁴ What then accounts for the erroneous perception? This is something you may want to discuss. One thing does seem clear. When difference is affirmed, change results. Although we must be careful not to suggest a monocausal connection, it is safe to say that when the Society altered its constitution in 1964 to enable qualified women and laymen to join, it let itself in for substantial change. Those who recall preparing a birthday greeting that included assurance of fifty masses being offered for the intentions of our benefactor Francis Cardinal Spellman, or who had to arrange for multiple altars to be set up in convention hotels, are no doubt in the best position to gauge the extent and complexity of the changes seen since the 1960s.

Although the history of the changes entailed in women's joining the Society will turn up some painful episodes, such as Mary Daly's being denied admission to the convention reception and banquet in 1966, there is also evidence that justice-minded men in this Society did seek to respect and affirm the differences women brought to the organization, and in 1969 Agnes Cunningham became the first woman to address a CTSA convention, speaking on "The Ministry of Woman in the Church."⁵ Her presentation was widely noted in the press, and the follow-

⁴CTSA membership is currently estimated at about 1450. The mistaken perception that clergy are no longer in the majority was expressed in two otherwise insightful essays by CTSA members: Daniel Rush Finn's "Theological Scholarship: Freedom and Responsibility in the Seminary Setting," in the 1989 National Catholic Educational Association publication, *Theology of Priesthood and Seminary Formation: Issues of Assembly II*, p. 36; and Robert J. Wister, "The Teaching of Theology 1950-1990," *America* (3 February 1990): 88.

⁵Daly's account of the 1966 incident is found in the second edition of *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 141-42. Daly claims membership in the Society in this account, but the *Proceedings* for the years in question do not list her among newly admitted members. I hope eventually someone will provide a full historical account of the first decade of women's involvement in CTSA. I have published some background analysis of such developments in "Toward Renewing 'The Life and Culture of Fallen Man': 'Gaudium et spes' as Catalyst for Catholic Feminist Theology," in Judith A. Dwyer, ed., "Questions of Special Urgency": *The Church in the Modern World Two Decades after Vatican II* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1986) 55-78.

ing year Cunningham was elected Secretary of the CTSA. After six years in that office she became the first woman elected to presidential office in the Society, serving as Vice-President during 1976-77 and President during 1977-78.

Having offered this very brief background sketch, I hope that in the discussion period following this address you will draw on your own memories and consider in some depth how the changes involved in admitting women and laymen to the Society have affected our work during this last quarter-century. I also hope you will explore how we can best affirm and enhance cultural diversity in our ranks as the CTSA moves forward in history.

DIFFERENCE, GENDER, AND AN INTELLECTUALLY VITAL THEOLOGY

This latter hope leads to a second question for your consideration this morning: *How can we connect this year's emphasis on "Catholicity and Inculturation" with next year's theme, "Theology as an Intellectually Vital Inquiry"?* I raise this question because I believe it is worthwhile to give some thought while we are together to preparing for next year's meeting in Atlanta. There is, of course, a direct connection between the two conventions in view of the proposed plenary session on developing North American liberation theologies. In addition, I would suggest that the attention to the religiously alienated cultural and intellectual elites that is envisioned for next year bears in interesting ways on our present preoccupation with inculturation, and especially on the matter of affirmation of and respect for "difference." As I have already indicated, the lens of gender analysis can be very useful in helping us to think about the relational issues at stake in mediating other differences, and it also happens that some of the most intellectually exciting work now being published in the humanities, the social sciences, and even the natural sciences deals precisely with these questions of gender, sometimes with explicit attention as well to matters of cultural and racial justice.

To illustrate this point, I shall bring to your attention several recent texts from other disciplines that are not only intellectually rigorous but also highly relevant to theology, particularly to moral theology's concern for social justice. After briefly describing three such theoretical contributions—to political science, philosophy, and anthropology—I shall draw more extensively from a study in the history and philosophy of science as I discuss some specific ways in which the new scholarship of gender analysis can enhance our understanding of inculturation and social justice, at the same time proposing a few more questions for discussion. My hope is that this brief review of literature will entice those making forays into other disciplines as they plan for Atlanta to explore some of the new feminist writings in addition to the works of prominent male scholars, a number of whom themselves find the new feminist studies of great value.⁶

⁶I employ "feminist" here in a broad sense to indicate a position that involves (1) a solid conviction of the equality of women and men, and (2) a commitment to reform society so that the full equality of women is respected, which requires also reforming the thought systems that legitimate the present unjust social order. I would like to see increasing numbers of both sexes claim the ethical stance of feminism, for not to do so is to be complicit with its opposite, namely, sexism. There is, of course, great variety among feminists in terms of levels of commitment, degrees of explicitness of commitment, and opinions regarding specific problems and their solutions. For a brief ethical analysis of sexism, see Patricia Beattie Jung, "Give Her Justice," *America* 150 (14 April 1984): 276-78.

Political theorist Michael Walzer, for example, has high praise for Susan Moller Okin's 1989 book, *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, calling it a "brilliantly argued and highly persuasive critique of current theories [of distributive justice] followed by a radical but by no means utopian program for social change."⁷ Okin's work sets the contributions of such thinkers as Robert Bellah, John Rawls, and Alasdair MacIntyre in a new light, and her commitment to the flourishing of just families gives a new meaning to the term "radical feminist." Surely theologians can learn much from a work driven by such questions as the ones with which Okin concludes her book:

How much do we care about the injustices of gender? How much do we care that women who have spent the better part of their lives nurturing others can be discarded like used goods? How ashamed are we that one-quarter of our children, in one of the richest countries in the world, live in poverty? How much do we care that those who raise children, *because* of this choice, have restricted opportunities to develop the rest of their potential, and very little influence on society's values and direction? How much do we care that the family, our most intimate social grouping, is often a school of day-to-day injustice? How much do we *want* the just families that will produce the kind of citizens we need if we are ever to achieve a just society?⁸

To cite but one example from the burgeoning literature of gender studies in the humanities, I recommend a recent philosophical work, Elizabeth V. Spelman's *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*.⁹ Spelman had originally planned to write a volume critiquing the male philosophical tradition (to be called *Out of Their Minds: Philosophers on Women, Slaves, Emotions, and the Body*), but she decided instead to turn the critical searchlight onto white, middle-class feminist philosophy. Among her findings is the insight that "the notion of a generic 'woman' functions in feminist thought much the way the notion of generic 'man' has functioned in Western philosophy; it obscures the heterogeneity of women and cuts off examination of the significance of such heterogeneity for feminist theory and political activity."¹⁰ Spelman's attention to the differences of culture, race, and class is informative for discussions of inculturation, and also helpful for comprehending the alienation that many intellectuals from oppressed groups feel toward institutional religion.

The nontheological discipline most often mentioned in discussions of inculturation is, of course, anthropology, and my third example of a text showing how gender analysis is at the forefront of intellectual progress in various fields is an essay from this discipline, which appeared last year in *Signs: Journal of Women*

⁷Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989). Walzer's judgment, which appears on the back cover of this edition, concludes by calling this a "splendid book."

⁸*Ibid.*, 186.

⁹Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, ix.

in *Culture and Society*.¹¹ This jointly authored essay, "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective," argues that during the present quest for a more adequate ethnographic methodology, anthropologists need to draw on feminist theory to correct certain problems resulting from uncritical reliance on "postmodern" epistemology and literary theory. For example, they note with appreciation the insight of Nancy Hartsock concerning the timing of deconstruction's fascination with the alleged loss of authority and meaning in written texts:

[Hartsock] finds it curious that the postmodern claim that verbal constructs do not correspond in a direct way to reality has arisen precisely when women and non-Western peoples have begun to speak for themselves and, indeed, to speak about global systems of power differentials. In fact, Hartsock suggests that the postmodern view that truth and knowledge are contingent and multiple may be seen to act as a truth claim itself, a claim that undermines the ontological status of the subject at the very time when women and non-Western peoples have begun to claim themselves as subject.¹²

This cautionary article from *Signs* by no means rejects the intellectual gains associated with contemporary hermeneutics, but it does make a case for shedding any pretensions that scholarship can avoid politics and for embracing an ethic of justice in the doing and "writing up" of research. Ethnographers, these authors maintain, are inevitably caught up in power relations, and they would do well to adopt "a feminist political framework that is suspicious of relationships with 'others' that do not include a close and honest scrutiny of the motivations for research."¹³ Theology's use of anthropology is critical for any work we do concerning inculturation, and if we are to overcome the naivete often exhibited in this use we must be acquainted with the major controversies going on in this discipline, and particularly with the continuing discussion about the relation between "nature" and "culture," which has been greatly influenced in recent years by feminist scholarship.¹⁴

¹¹Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen, "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective," *Signs* 15 (1989): 7-33.

¹²*Ibid.*, 15. The passage from Hartsock is quoted from her essay, "Rethinking Modernism," *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987) 187-206.

¹³*Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁴A starting point for reconsidering the nature/culture distinction is Sherry B. Ortner's essay, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" published in Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture, and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974) 67-87. Ortner's essay has generated considerable debate. Essays by anthropologists questioning the Western tendency to regard "nature" and "culture" as gender-related opposites have been collected in Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern, eds., *Nature, Culture and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). The importance of theologians comprehending the issues involved in these debates seems clear when one encounters such undeveloped assertions as the following statement from the International Theological Commission's recent document on "Faith and Inculturation": "Anthropologists readily return to describe or define culture in terms of the distinction, sometimes even opposition, between nature and culture," *Origins* (4 May 1989): 801.

The above-mentioned texts are representative of some very exciting work now underway in disciplines with which theology ought to be in conversation. Whole areas of inquiry have been omitted from this illustrative survey—for example, history and psychology—and many more titles in the various disciplines of the humanities and social sciences might have been mentioned. These few titles, however, are excellent places to begin the interdisciplinary study that can help theology become a more vital intellectual inquiry in North America today.

SCIENCE, GENDER, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

A fourth recent title has been selected for fuller attention here because of the historical importance of developments in the natural sciences for theology and also because this book strikes me as very relevant to the topic of social justice. This work is Evelyn Fox Keller's 1985 volume, *Reflections on Gender and Science*.¹⁵ Keller, a mathematical biophysicist, has collected in this book some powerful essays in the history and philosophy of science, which together form what she describes as "a psychosociology of scientific knowledge."¹⁶ In commending this rich and complex work to your own study, I shall select from it several insights that have enriched my thought on the questions of catholicity, inculturation, and social justice.

For one thing, Keller's work makes clear how basic are metaphors of sex and gender to the self-understanding of scientists. This finding bears on theology not only because theology considers itself a science, a disciplined mode of inquiry that seeks true knowledge, but also because the self-understanding of natural scientists and theologians alike has been developed on the basis of male experience. The picture is no doubt complicated by reason of the fact that in modern times science has been regarded as "masculine" while religion has been associated with the culturally "feminine," which may lead religion to want to compensate for what may seem a disadvantage in the eyes of some. At any rate, I find a very interesting convergence of metaphors associated with the dawn of modern science and the colonization that entailed extensive overseas missionary work, which in turn has resulted in our current preoccupation with inculturation, a phenomenon that itself is often described in sexual terms.

Consider the following passage, which Keller quotes from a very influential document in the history of science, Francis Bacon's work of 1602-03, *The Masculine Birth of Time*:

To receive God's truth, the mind must be pure and clean, submissive and open. Only then can it give birth to a masculine and virile science. That is, if the mind is pure, receptive, and submissive in its relation to God, it can be transformed by God into a forceful, potent, and virile agent in its relation to nature. Cleansed of contamination, the mind can be impregnated by God and, in that act, virilized: made potent and capable of generating virile offspring in its union with Nature.¹⁷

¹⁵Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁶Ibid., 13.

¹⁷Ibid., 38.

Keller's comments on Bacon's words are instructive:

The transformation of mind from female to male is made explicit in the structure of this work. The first part is a prayer addressed to God, in the voice of a supplicant. The remainder, and body, of the work is cast in the voice of the mature scientist addressing a son, his virile offspring. It is here that we read, "I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave."¹⁸

Keller certainly seems justified in concluding that "gender ideology [is] a crucial mediator between the birth of modern science and the economic and political transformations surrounding that birth."¹⁹ In light of her analysis, I now invite you to recall from your own readings about colonization, enslavement, and missionary work, images that reflect a similar way of relating to otherness. I also invite you to scrutinize the theological literature on inculturation with this consideration in mind, and to note the full significance of the references to insertion, penetration, and impregnation that abound in various treatments of the evangelization of cultures. Is this historical association of evangelization with male sexuality part of the reason for resistance to women's ordination and preaching? You will find interesting traces of this imagery in works ranging from the International Theological Commission's 1989 document on "Faith and Inculturation" to Peter Schineller's very helpful *Handbook on Inculturation*, which is basically quite positive in recognizing women's equality and yet uncritically cites a traditional missionary slogan, "be, beget, begone," in ways that suggest a theological equivalent of Keller's work would be very beneficial for the inculturation discussion.²⁰

This point leads to a third question for this morning's discussion, which may most economically be expressed thus: *How central is the problem of the gospel's inculturation in patriarchy to your theological work?* I am supposing here that the claim Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and others have made about early Christianity too quickly accommodating its gospel vision of equality between the sexes to the patriarchal society surrounding it is at least a productive hypothesis for our reflections.²¹ Such concerns are not limited to women theologians, as, for example, Michael Scanlon's entry on "Christian anthropology" for the new Glazier dictionary of theology makes clear. Writes Scanlon:

No christian anthropology today can be silent on the issue of feminism. Theology

¹⁸Ibid., 39.

¹⁹Ibid., 43.

²⁰International Theological Commission, "Faith and Inculturation," *Origins* (4 May 1989): 800-807; Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation* (New York: Paulist, 1990) 24.

²¹See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). Patriarchy literally means father-rule; I use it in a more specialized, ethical sense to designate social patterns and structures of domination and subordination, especially (but not exclusively) those flowing from unjust attitudes toward females. Whereas patriarchy is institutional or structural, the sin of sexism, or failure to respect the full humanity of females, is attitudinal. For an historical discussion of this topic, see Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

and anthropology are always in correlation when the human is understood as the image of the divine. Thus there is a not very subtle connection between modern deism and modern androcentrism. The image of the absolute God of omnipotence in modern culture is the predominating male in control of nature.²²

Scanlon's words here, not to mention the convention he organized as President-elect of our Society in 1987 around the theme, "The Linguistic Turn and Contemporary Theology," remind me of a second very productive insight from Keller's book. In a passage discussing how ideology affects scientific theory and practice, Keller observes that "[c]onfidence in the transparency of language . . . encourages the belief that one's own language is absolute." She goes on to give an example from the history of science, which I quote at some length:

The very concept of 'laws of nature' is, in contemporary usage, both a product and an expression of the absence of reflectivity. It introduces into the study of nature a metaphor indelibly marked by its political origins. The philosophical distinction between descriptive and prescriptive laws is invoked to underline the neutrality of scientific description. But nonetheless, laws of nature, like laws of the state, are historically imposed from above and obeyed from below. . . . So deeply entrenched is the belief in the laws (or law) of nature as the primary object of scientific inquiry that it is difficult at first glance (especially in the physical sciences), to imagine any other. Yet reflection uncovers just such an alternative. The concept of order, wider than law and free from its coercive, hierarchical, and centralizing implications, has the potential to expand our conception of science. Order is a category comprising patterns of organization that can be spontaneous, self-generated, or externally imposed; it is a larger category than law precisely to the extent that law implies external constraint. Conversely, the kinds of order generated or generable by law comprise only a subset of a larger category of observable or apprehensible regularities, rhythms, and patterns.²³

Keller proceeds to show how the emphasis on law instead of order blinds scientists to some data and encourages a kind of dogmatism that people in general would be surprised to hear associated with scientific research. Hierarchical thinking, she asserts, lends itself to seeking hierarchical explanations for phenomena, for example in molecular theory: "[C]ontrol may be located in a sovereign governing body," she observes, "for example, in a 'pacemaker' or 'master molecule.' . . . The 'central dogma' of molecular biology is a case in point; it depicts DNA as the executive governor of cellular organization, with unidirectional transfer of information."²⁴ How some data are missed because of this dogmatism is a part of her argument I cannot get into here, but her suggestion that just as the concept of power is broader and more serviceable than that of domination, so also the concept of order may serve science better than that of law, which it encompasses, strikes me as potentially very productive for moral theology. If we were to think in terms of a "natural order" in the area of human sexuality, for example, this might help us move beyond some of the rigid understandings of "natural law" that are trouble-

²²Michael J. Scanlon, "Anthropology, Christian," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987) 40.

²³Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, 131-32.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 133.

some for Catholics generally as well as for theologians' discussions of inculturation.

This leads to my fourth question: *What is your assessment of the difficulties that need to be surmounted in order to close the gap between Catholic teaching on social justice and the consciences of the faithful?* Several things suggest themselves to me. Reconsidering the natural basis for ethics in terms of order rather than law is one possibility I would like to entertain. I am even more certain of the need to move sexual ethics from the realm of the personal to the arena of social justice. Works that develop this point very well from women's perspective include the volume *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, edited by Joanne Brown and Carole Bohn, and essays such as Ana Maria Bidegain's "Women and the Theology of Liberation."²⁵ They also include important studies of prostitution contributed by Asian feminist theologians, which clearly show the connections between economic realities, tourism, and militarism, and this phenomenon that many see only as a personal matter.²⁶

In addition, it seems clear that church structures need to be reformed in light of Catholic social justice principles, as thinkers from all parts of the globe have claimed. Dorothy Ramodibe of South Africa puts it thus:

Is it possible for women and men together to build the church in Africa when there is exploitation, oppression, and domination of women by men? Is working together possible when there is no equality between men and women?

To me, this sounds like the same apartheid drums that I hear at home, where people (particularly P.W. Botha) call upon whites and blacks to build together the 'nation' of South Africa while apartheid remains intact. . . . There can be no co-operation as long as men retain their dominant position in the church.²⁷

Similarly Virginia Fabella observes:

To be a credible sign of salvation and to witness to Jesus' universal love, the Church as institution has to rid itself of its non-liberating structures and non-loving practices, its exclusive, hierarchical mode of operation. . . . If the Church is serious in following Jesus, then it should encourage and support all efforts towards inclusive-

²⁵Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989); Ana Maria Bidegain, "Women and the Theology of Liberation," in Elsa Tamez, ed., *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1989) 15-36.

²⁶Elizabeth Dominguez provides a Philippine perspective on this issue in "Biblical Concept of Human Sexuality: Challenge to Tourism," in Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Lee Park, *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women* (Hong Kong: Asian Women's Resource Center for Culture and Theology, 1989) 83-91; Nantawan Boonprasat Lewis offers a Thai analysis in "The Connection of Uneven Development, Capitalism and Patriarchy: A Case of Prostitution in Asia," in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Anne Carr, eds., *Women, Work and Poverty* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987) 64-71.

²⁷Dorothy Ramodibe, "Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa," in Fabella and Oduyoye, *With Passion and Compassion*, 14. Ramodibe subsequently implies that a feminist critique is needed where African theology is concerned: "African theology, we should note, has almost fallen into the trap of idolizing African culture in an uncritical way" (15).

ness and full humanity. . . . Men and women have the same human nature and are endowed with the same potentials for 'fulness.' Men do not image God more than women do. Yet patriarchy has distorted these truths to promote a hierarchical and complementary model of humanity, which puts women in second place. Women's inferior status has become part of the working definition of being human in Asia, buttressed by the doctrines and practices of the major religions. This has had degrading and dehumanizing consequences for women in all areas of life. . . . One of the deplorable consequences is the very internalization of this "ideology" of women's inferiority by women themselves as part and parcel of our cultures.²⁸

Sexism tends not to be the priority issue for third world women, which is also the case with American women from oppressed groups, although sexism is nevertheless being dealt with in important new writings from a range of theologians including Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, Yolanda Tarango, M. Shawn Copeland, and Ivone Gebara, to mention a few examples.²⁹

One final suggestion regarding social justice is that it will prove beneficial to develop a fuller and richer image of the common good as a basis for ethical reflection. We would do well, in our discussions of social justice, to emphasize the biblical image of the banquet as a complement to the valuable work already done concerning human rights, which for all its merits does carry overtones of legal conflict, not to say classical liberalism. I would by no means suggest abandoning the language of rights, but I suspect we may find it helpful to ask questions also in terms of the quality of our interaction and, most basically, in terms of what people experience as good or not. Citizens of the United States, for example, should inquire what kind of a common good is possible in this society when the latest statistics confirm that for the third year in a row the gap in life expectancy between blacks and whites has grown wider. Furthermore, according to a recent report from the Park Ridge Center:

Most of the disparity is due to patterns of behavior—deaths caused by AIDS, drug abuse, alcoholism, car accidents—and not by diseases that are much harder to control. Dr. Christine Hale, an expert in mortality statistics at the University of Washington, said, "The trend is appalling. And there is one thing all these causes have in common: they are preventable. This is essentially self-destructive behavior, and it is a pattern you get when people are despairing."³⁰

²⁸Virginia Fabella, "Christology from an Asian Woman's Perspective," in Fabella and Park, *We Dare to Dream*, 11.

²⁹As Christine N. Qunta of Botswana explains in the Preface to the volume she edited, *Women of Southern Africa* (London: Allison & Busby, Ltd, 1987), "The enemies of African women, particularly in Southern Africa, are colonialism and imperialism, white racism, class oppression and sexual oppression. The first step towards true emancipation must be the defeat of colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism. The next step is to eradicate all the effects of exploitation based on race, nationality, class and sex. . . ." (15). See also Ada Maria Isasi Diaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); M. Shawn Copeland, "The Interaction of Racism, Sexism and Classism in Women's Exploitation," in Fiorenza and Carr, *Women, Work and Poverty*, 19-27; and Ivone Gebara, "Women Doing Theology in Latin America," in Tamez, *Through Her Eyes*, 37-48.

³⁰*Bulletin of the Park Ridge Center* 5 (January 1990): 5.

What kind of common good is possible in a world where so many children feel like this 12-year-old from Korea?

My mother's name is worry,
 In summer, my mother worries about water,
 In winter, she worries about coal briquets,
 And all the year long, she worries about rice.
 In daytime, my mother worries about living,

At night, she worries for children
 And all day long, she worries and worries.
 Then, my mother's name is worry,
 My father's name is drunken frenzy,
 And mine is tear and sigh.³¹

Such sentiments are all too common in this world, whose goods continue to be distributed so inequitably. Theological reflection needs to articulate a vision of the common good that respects the humanity of both sexes and all peoples in a way that will inspire a new era of evangelization and action for justice. Much critical and constructive work lies ahead. As we move forward to do this work, I leave you with an image and a question.

The image is from Keller's book on gender and science; it is an image of a good scientist, drawn from her chapter entitled "A World of Difference," which analyzes the contributions of plant biologist Barbara McClintock, whose discovery of genetic transposition led to the Nobel Prize. This woman pursued an unusual program of research, one at considerable odds with the current scientific orthodoxy. Instead of trying to explain away the aberrant plant behavior she noticed, she was willing to contemplate—for years—the *difference* between what was expected and what was encountered in the grains of corn she studied. Writes Keller:

Indeed, respect for individual difference lies at the very heart of McClintock's scientific passion. "The important thing is to develop the capacity to see one kernel [of maize] that is different, and make that understandable," she says. "If [something] doesn't fit, there's a reason, and you find out what it is."

Keller continues:

Making difference understandable does not mean making it disappear. In McClintock's world view, an understanding of nature can come to rest with difference. "Exceptions" are not there to "prove the rule"; they have meaning in and of themselves. In this respect, difference constitutes a principle for ordering the world radically unlike the principle of division of dichotomization (subject-object, mind-matter, feeling-reason, disorder-law). Whereas these oppositions are directed toward a cosmic unity typically excluding or devouring one of the pair, toward a unified, all-encompassing law, respect for difference remains content with multiplicity as an end in itself.³²

³¹Quoted in Chung Hyun Kyung, " 'Han-pu-ri': Doing Theology from Korean Women's Perspective," in Fabella and Park, *We Dare to Dream*, 142.

³²Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, 163.

The image of such a research scientist suggests a model for the theologian reflecting on inculturation—not, of course, a model to be imitated slavishly, but one to be emulated for the respect and empathy it manifests. McClintock, Keller observes,

provides the most fully developed account of a vision of science premised on order rather than law, on respect rather than domination. Central to McClintock's vision is her insistence that good research requires, above all, the willingness to "listen to what the material has to tell you."³³

This woman, who went at her research in a contemplative and open spirit rather than with a prior conviction that some law must control all activity of the material she studied, impresses me as an excellent model for the theologian as well as the evangelist.

I come now to my final question for your consideration in the discussion period. This question flows from the matters I have touched on this morning in that the complexity of the questions we face entails the need for research that transcends any single theologian's training and requires that we draw on various disciplinary approaches and cultural perspectives. And so I invite you to consider this last question, which is posed with our Committee on Research and Publications' stated interest in collaborative projects also in mind: *What ideas for collaborative research projects (especially those concerning catholicity, inculturation, and social justice) would you find appealing?* Only you can answer this question, and I conclude by inviting you to begin the discussion.

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³³Ibid., 138.