THE NEWSJOURNAL OF CATHOLIC OPINION

CONSCIENCE

Rosemary Radford Ruether

A Commemorative Issue

Highlights from her prolific writings in *Conscience*

CONSCIENCE

THE NEWSJOURNAL OF CATHOLIC OPINION

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CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

THIS ISSUE OF *CONSCIENCE* IS A CELEBRATION OF ROSEMARY Radford Ruether and everything she's given to Catholics for Choice—spiritually, intellectually and personally.

Rosemary has helped set the bar for what a Catholic theologian can be. Her work is unique because of her remarkable ability to put herself in another's shoes, from early Christians to those of Mexican peasants (Lessons from Chiapas). It is what happens when, as Rosemary so aptly puts it, "you put yourself on the other side and you see things from the context of the oppressed."

Our work can sometimes be overwhelming in the face of a forbidding orthodoxy. Those of us who are Catholic and believe in the freedom of conscience needed a giant. And we have one in Rosemary. For women, for prochoice Catholics, for progressive theologians and social justice advocates, Rosemary reassured us that we, too, could not only be redeemed, we could also redeem.

We saw her as one of our own, armed with enough intellectual vigor and honesty to defeat existing power brokers at their own game while teaching them about her—our—territory.

The force of Rosemary's curiosity flows around every barrier in its path, often turning "You can't" into "Why not?" She finds "a substantial continuity" between contraception and women's personhood (Women, Sexuality, Ecology and the Church), something we strive to place at the center of our work. She also sees no reason for faith to be excluded from the street—why shouldn't theological discussions be advertised in pasta shops (Thoughts on Being Cancelled in Rome)?

Rosemary Radford Ruether knows what is at stake for anyone seeking to write their own "stories of women liberators." She recounted:

> "Eku, a Fante woman of Ghana … led her people to a new land where they could find a good life, and risked her own life by tasting water from a pool to see if it was poisonous before allowing her thirsty people to drink."

Like Eku, Rosemary found deep wells to sustain those of us thirsty for cutting-edge scholarship. At the forefront of her field, she drank fearlessly, heedless of the "poison" others may have thrown there, at times paying the price with lost opportunities, exclusion and demonization. Her true courage is that she never flinched for a moment from her necessity to articulate that truth. That liberation from fear means that this movement will long go on. Her writing will continue to slake the thirst of those in need of new stories with a diverse cast of heroines.

This special edition of *Conscience* is a tour through a selection of Rosemary's writings, including original articles, transcripts of speeches, book reviews and more. We hope you enjoy retracing her footsteps through some of the very best of progressive Catholic thought.

JON O'BRIEN
President, Catholics for Choice
June, 2011

ARTICLES

Rosemary Radford Ruether

FEARLESS LEADER AND CHANGEMAKER FOR PROGRESSIVE CATHOLIC FEMINISM

By Patti Miller

Few people have made their mark on modern Catholicism as decisively as feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether. From her early days in the Civil Rights movement to her groundbreaking critique of the Catholic hierarchy's patriarchy and re-envisioning of Christian theology to her pioneering work in ecofeminism, Ruether has made unique contributions to progressive Catholicism. Her influential book "Sexism and God Talk," among many other major works, helped usher in modern Christian feminism.

Conscience sat down to talk with Ruether recently in Atlanta, were she was attending the American Academy of Religion conference, about her career and work with Catholics for Choice as she prepares to depart the CFC Board of Directors, which she has served on since the early 1980s. A career spanning nearly 50 years and the conclusion of her role on the CFC board notwithstanding, Ruether remains engaged in the study of theology, enthusiastic about feminist scholarship and deeply committed to her vision of Catholicism. She was on four panels at the conference addressing topics as diverse as decolonial interpretations of Mary and Christian Zionism.

Ruether's life was imbued with the contradictions of Catholicism from the start. Her mother was Catholic and her father Episcopalian and she was raised, as she puts it, "Catholic in an ecumenical context." It was perhaps inevitable that she herself would become a scholar of the classics and church history and one of the hierarchy's most constructive critics. "My mother took seriously what she thought of as the high intellectual tradition of Catholicism but she was also critical of what she saw as superstitious, dogmatic Catholicism," notes Ruether.

After receiving her BA in philosophy and history from Scripps College and marrying political scientist Herman Ruether in 1957, she entered Claremont Graduate School, where she earned her MA in ancient history in 1960 and her PhD in classics and patristics—the study of the early church "fathers"—in 1965. Despite her academic interest in church history, reproductive rights were never far from her mind. In 1964, when the question of whether the Vatican would officially approve of contraception was on everyone's mind and she herself was a young mother balancing family and a career, she wrote a piece for the *Washington Post Magazine* entitled "Why a Catholic Mother Believes in Birth Control." It eventually cost Ruether her first teaching job at Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles. "I had been hanging around with the Immaculate Heart Sisters because the priest I was working with on Greek stuff was out there. And they asked me to teach. But some trustees rose up in wrath and said 'you can't hire her' because of the *Washington Post* article," Ruether recalls. "I remember the mother superior coming to me at the end of the first year and saying 'I feel really terrible, but we are not going to be able to hire you for another year.' "

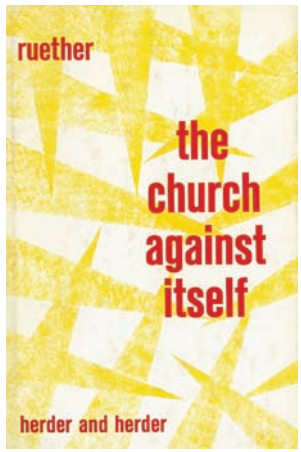
Ruether already had another job offer, teaching at the Howard University School of Religion, so it wasn't a major career setback. But it did teach her a valuable lesson. "It gave me the basic message: don't work for a Catholic institution," she says.

Teaching at the historically black Howard wouldn't seem like a natural fit for a white woman schooled in the classics. But like other young progressive activists in the early 1960s, Ruether had become involved in the Civil Rights movement. "The chaplains at Claremont Colleges were involved in civil rights, so I got involved though them," explains Ruether. "They developed a summer immersion program in Mississippi in 1965—the summer after the 'Freedom Summer' when those civil rights volunteers were killed. I was there that summer with the Delta ministry."

PATTI MILLER *is a former editor of and regular contributor to* Conscience.

The experience would shape her work in profound ways. "I got involved in feminism though the Civil Rights critique of male dominance," she notes. "What you experienced in Mississippi was looking at the United States from the southern black side. You see the white dominance and the racism. That has always been very important to me in terms of social justice: that you put yourself on the other side and you see things from the context of the oppressed. The feminism that I got involved in was rooted in social justice and in terms of seeing sex, race and class hierarchies, not the Betty Friedan kind of feminism."

In 1967 Ruether published one of her most famous works, "The Church against Itself," in which she criticized the inability of the hierarchy to "delve deeply enough to create a viable theology of radical change" on issues like birth control, marriage and sexuality because of its irrational commitment to outdated doctrines from the past. "In retrospect it becomes much more evident," says Ruether today, "that it wasn't that the church wasn't able to develop a theology of radical change but that the leadership was determined to prevent change."



Ruether taught at Howard for 10 years, taking time in the early 1970s to teach courses about women and religion at Harvard Divinity School and Yale Divinity School. "It was in these two years from 1972 to 1974 that I was really developing my material. I didn't think about Catholicism in an isolated way. I thought of it as the broad western philosophical tradition. The Enlightenment was very misogynistic, too." Her work would result in a series of groundbreaking feminist theological works, such as "New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation" (1975), and "Mary— the Feminine Face of the Church" (1977), culminating in "Sexism and God Talk" in 1983. "Sexism and God Talk" offered a radical critique of traditional Christian theology from a feminist perspective—a reimaging of the Bible and Christianity from a woman's point of view. "Sexism and God Talk" created what the *New York Times* called the first "full-fledged feminist theology" within a Christian context, influencing a generation of feminist theologians.

The book provided a feminist ethic to rectify the traditional male-centered bias of Christianity, which, Ruether said, led to subjugation and robbed women of their full humanity. It was this humanity, wrote Ruether, that she sought to restore with a new vision of Christian theology. She wrote that the "uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of women's experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past. The use of women's experience in feminist theology, therefore, explodes as a critical force, exposing classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on male experience rather than on universal human experience."

"I think the reason that feminist Catholic theology was important at that time was because the Catholic hierarchy was the biggest problem – it has the most explicit and enforced theology that really impeded abortion and reproductive rights," says Ruether. It was around this time that she joined the board of Catholics for a Free Choice (now Catholics for Choice). She had been involved with the organization for a brief time after its founding in 1973 but CFFC had few formal programs to draw on the board's expertise and Ruether became involved with other projects. When a much larger and better-financed organization reached out to her in the early 1980s, she eagerly rejoined and quickly became vital to CFFC's work of providing an alternative interpretation of Catholic theology and teaching. "We actually have theologians on the board who are contributing a critical alternative theology on key questions of sexuality and reproduction," says Ruether. "This has allowed CFC to give intellectual respectability to an alternative vision. Otherwise the assumption is that women who critique the Vatican's position are just deviant, immoral people."

"To me Catholicism is a community of a billion people who represent a range of things, so I don't identify with the pope."

In addition to helping develop the theological bedrock of much of CFC's work, Ruether has had a long and personal involvement in CFC's Latin American work with its partner organization Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Catholics for the Right to Decide—CDD), traveling to Latin America to network and speak, and, as in the United States, providing a theological underpinning for the CDDs' work. Her interest in Latin America actually predated her work with CFC. "My mother was born in Mexico and I felt I had been robbed of a certain heritage, particularly the Spanish language. Somewhere in my thirties I started going to Mexico to do Spanish and became involved in Catholic liberation theology circles, so picking up the

Latin American work with CFC and CDD was picking up a thread I had been working on."

Ruether cites the growth of vibrant CDD organizations in Latin America as being among CFC's most important contributions. "Today we have several generations of the Latin American program. The formed themselves and have done a very good job of that. These are very sophisticated programs. They really understand how to appropriate the theological and canon law discourse. In several places in Latin America, CDD is integrally related to the struggle for legal change regarding abortion law and reproductive rights."

Ruether's work evolved and broadened over the course of her career to include eco-feminist theology, which links the oppression of women and the domination of nature, themes which she explored in "Gaia and God: An Eco-feminist Theology of Earth Healing" (1994). "The goal of this quest is earth healing, a healed relationship between men and women, between classes and nations, and between humans and the earth," wrote Ruether in what became a classic on the subject.

Another area that Ruether is passionate about—both as a scholar and a participant—is the Women-Church movement, which envisions grassroots, feminist liturgical communities freed from patriarchal models. "The women's ordination movement began in the 1970s," notes Ruether, "but in the 1980s, through the influence of women like Mary Hunt, they began to reject the idea of women's ordination as simply trying to duplicate clericalism, which I was sympathetic to. So we said what we need is Women-Church, not women priests—feminist based communities."

As she wrote in her 1985 book "Women-Church," "Christian feminists cannot wait for the institutional churches to reform themselves enough to provide the vehicles of faith and worship that women need at this time." Catholic women, she wrote, "are beginning to recognize the need for autonomous bases for women's theologizing and worship."

"I have been part of the movement for a long time in terms of feminist liturgy," says Ruether, who participates in a local group near her home in Claremont, Calif., although she notes the need to model grassroots, family liturgies for those who don't just want to be a part of an all-woman group. And despite the many shortcomings of the institutional church, she remains upbeat about "her" Catholicism: "To me Catholicism is a community of a billion people who represent a range of things, so I don't identify with the pope. My Catholicism is the progressive, feminist liberation theology wing of Catholicism. That is the Catholicism that I belong to, that I am connected to around the globe."

Ruether has influenced generations of scholars from her teaching positions at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, where she taught from the mid-1970s until the early 2000s, and the Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University, where she teaches today, and numerous books and visiting professorships. Two generations of her doctoral students are assembling a collection of writings reflecting on her work from multiple feminist theological perspectives covering feminist theology, colonization and globalization, and eco-feminism, entitled "Voices of Feminist Liberation: Writings in Celebration of Rosemary Radford Ruether."

Ruether, who will remain active with CFC as editorial advisor to *Conscience* and with other projects, continues to expand her horizons. Today her work is centered on transnational feminism. "The direction I am going in is not only ecumenical Christian but increasingly interested in gathering perspectives across ethnicities and religions. Claremont has one of the few programs that offer a PhD in women and religion and we just celebrated our 20th anniversary. We have Mormons doing feminist studies and trying to do feminism in a way that challenges that tradition and we have more and more Muslims who are doing feminism."

Ruether has been challenging traditions herself for nearly 50 years. Yet for her it is a joyful journey. "I have had a happy life," she says, in no small measure due to her determination to find ways to express her work and worship outside the confines of institutional Catholicism. "I seek to support and widen the space for that Catholicism," she says, referring to her brand of global, progressive, feminist Catholicism, "and to create as many obstacles as possible for patriarchal Catholicism." ■

> **"The feminism that I got involved in was rooted in social justice and in terms of seeing sex, race and class hierarchies, not the Betty Friedan kind of feminism."**

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Ruether worked tirelessly throughout Latin America paving the way for contemporary feminists, such those advocating for abortion law reform in Mexico City, above, on April 22, 1999.

Reprinted from Vol. IX, No. 3, May/June 1988

The Catholic Bishops' Pastoral on Women: A Flawed Effort

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

THE U.S. ROMAN CATHOLIC bishops have issued the first draft of a pastoral letter in "Response to Women's Concerns." This pastoral was written as a result of consultation with a wide range of U.S. Catholic women's groups, ranging from the Women's Ordination Conference to the Daughters of Isabella. During the hearings, which the bishops conducted in efforts to listen to these groups, Catholic women repeatedly suggested that the bishops either should refrain from writing a pastoral letter, since they were not qualified to speak on the subject of women, or else write a pastoral on patriarchy, not on women. Just as previous pastorals had been on systemic evils, such as racism or militarism and not on blacks or soldiers, so a pastoral on sexism should actually name that systemic evil and not the victims of that evil, as though they were the "problem."

The bishops declined to follow these suggestions, but they attempted to modify their claims to authority by titling their pastoral modestly as a "response" to women's concerns and declaring that they in no way mean "to define women, to prescribe roles for them, or to tell them who they are and what they should do." The result is a flawed effort. The episcopal authors come across as desperately sincere, truly desiring to say and do the right things toward this "other half" of the human race about whom they realize they know very little. But their efforts are highly constricted. They do not feel empowered to question any church teachings on such matters as birth control, divorce, lifelong celibacy for the unmarried, or the rejection of the ordination of women. They even repeat their refusal to support the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

The bishops have little sense of what sexism is, as a part of a legal, social, political, economic and ideological system.

The bishops use a spirited language to denounce sexism as a sin and to declare their own intention to repent of it:

> We must and do pledge to reject clearly and consistently human structures and patterns of activity that in any way treat women as of lesser worth than men. When our actions do not conform to our ideals, all suffer. We, therefore, regret and confess our individual and collective failures to respond to women as they deserve. We call the people of God to join us in personal and corporate contrition for the sins of sexism that violate the basic tenets of our faith. (Pastoral, paragraph 41)

In spite of such statements, the bishops have little sense of what sexism is, as a part of a legal, social, political, economic and ideological system. They have not tried to study its history or how it has shaped the church itself, both institutionally and ideologically. Consequently, their denunciations of sexism still function as a way of deploring personal failures of charity which, for some unknown reason, have abounded in our churches and societies. They are also caught between denouncing a tradition and using a tradition as though it were immutable. They don't even seem to be aware of this as a problem.

Their basic theological starting point is Genesis 1:27 which they take for granted as meaning, and as having always meant, complete equality and partner-

This article is reprinted from Christianity and Crisis *with permission from the author,* ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER, *who is a professor of applied theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and a* CFFC *board member.*

ship between men and women. They ignore the fact that, for most of Christian history, this text was interpreted asymmetrically. According to Augustine, men alone possess the image of God, and women are the image of God only when taken "together with the man who is their head." More recent Catholic anthropology has moved from arguments for women's natural inferiority to arguments for their "difference" and complementary relations to men.

The bishops disregard these historical traditions for an anthropology of equivalence and partnership of equals. They seek to carry this through by affirming women's partnership with men in the family, in society and in the church. However, they are unable to carry this partnership model through in any of these areas. Their underlying presuppositions remain those of patriarchal clericalism.

Their affirmation of the partnership of women and men in the family is severely restricted because they feel they have no adequate teaching on women's reproductive rights, and even more, because their support for the values of motherhood is not matched by any corresponding affirmation of fatherhood. Women are said to have a "vocation" to motherhood, while men are never said to have any vocation to fatherhood. This means that parenting is, in fact, not a "partnership," but a female job. Fathers "help" mothers in what remains essentially "women's work."

In addressing women's work in the world, the bishops recognize women's rights to equal pay for work of comparable value (despite refusing to support the ERA), and pledge to help the single mother with services such as day care. But they acknowledge that women work only out of economic necessity, to help their families. Women are never said to have a vocation in society. Thus their basic ideal remains the full-time mother who does not work. The bishops have no sense that it is precisely this model of women as unskilled dependents which is

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FUTURE SHOCK

Reprinted from Vol. X, No. 5, September/October 1989

From June 2-4, 1989, CFFC sponsored a landmark conference—FUTURE SHOCK: New Challenges in Ethics and Reproductive Health. Involving nearly three hundred people, the conference provided participants a forum for discussing a wide range of reproductive health care issues, including contraception, sexual ethics, abortion, new reproductive technology, and public policy. Below is an excerpt from a session.

Prochoice Is Prolife: Winning the Propaganda War for Reproductive Rights

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

For seventeen years, since the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*, right-wing forces wishing to reverse the Court's decision and recriminalize abortion have sought to wrap themselves in the flag of absolute virtue and claimed to represent the "right to life." To defeat this crusade, it is imperative that the reproductive rights movement become much more persuasive in convincing middle-of-the-road Americans that antichoice is antilife. It needs to make clear that the ultimate goal of the antichoice movement is both to recriminalize abortion and to block access to sexual education and contraception, especially for poor women, teenagers, and poor nations, the very people whose lives are most devastated by unregulated reproduction....

The anticontraceptive effects of the recriminalization movement need to be highlighted because most middle Americans take access to contraception for granted. They don't recognize the anticontraceptive bias of much of the recriminalization movement and its effects, especially on young and poor women and on impoverished nations around the world. In these nations, struggling with staggering demographic growth, malnourished babies are born to mothers already overburdened with children they cannot care for. And they are dying every day by the thousands.

Antichoice is antilife! This is the motto we need to claim. Antichoice fundamentally opposes all the conditions—cultural, social, medical, and legal—that promote the possibility of a woman being able to conceive and bear children

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Women are said to have a "vocation" to motherhood, while men are never said to have any vocation to fatherhood.

the root of the feminization of poverty.

When the bishops turn to the topic of partnership in the church, all they can really offer is partnership of women with men in the ministry of the laity. They are ready to endorse this offer with a full array of new ministries, such as eucharistic ministers, lay administrators of parishes and chancellors of dioceses. They even suggest that women should preach. But the ordained priesthood remains permanently closed, by its very nature, as an icon of the male Christ.

Thus their theology of clergy and laity, like their view of family and society, remains dualistic. Oddly enough, this reverses the classical Christian tradition, where women were unequal in nature, but equal in grace. For the bishops, women and men are equals on the level of "nature"; i.e. the laity. But the sphere of grace, or the priesthood, remains restricted to males because of Christ's maleness. Women, like laymen, then, in some sense, do not really belong to the church, but are outside and "under" the church. This is reflected in the fact that the bishops still use the term "church" to refer, not to a community that encompasses laity and clergy, but to themselves as hierarchy. Basically, the bishops want women to be the subordinate "helpers" of the "church"—i.e. the clergy. ■

when she wants them and is best able to care for them. It is fundamentally against the cultural, social, medical, and legal conditions that help societies limit demographic growth and so have some chance of providing adequate food, housing, education, and health care for those children who are born. "Life" in humans or any other species is not promoted by unregulated birth but by planned and chosen births that are in harmony with the social means to sustain the lives of those who are born.

Prochoice Catholics must unmask the facile and delusory rhetoric and tactics of those Catholics who equate antichoice with antiwar and who claim that both types of activism are a "seamless" continuum in defense of life. We must take responsibility to impress on the consciousness of our church and of our society that the real effects of the antichoice campaign will be the recriminalization of abortion. Such recriminalization will not only fail to lessen the demand for abortion; it fact, it will exacerbate that demand under conditions that will kill adult women as well.

It is not accidental that Catholic countries, where both contraception and abortion are discouraged, have higher abortion rates than countries where both are legal but where contraception is encouraged. It is also well known that Catholics in the United States have a higher proportion of abortions than Protestants or Jews. Why? Quite simply, the combination of an anticontraceptive culture, combined with hostility toward female sexuality and self-determination, promotes the conditions of unchosen pregnancy and hence recourse to abortion as the unchosen but forced solution....

Dr. Nafis Sadik, a Pakistani physician working with the United Nations Fund for Population Activities ... recently gave a talk in London on the conditions for successful global family planning. In this talk she made clear that promoting women's right to be the primary decision makers about reproduction is the key to successful family planning and that all programs neglecting women's role have failed....

... Family planning, whether it is promoted or opposed by male "experts," typically has ignored or rejected women as the primary moral agents in reproduction. Women have been treated as reproductive vessels to be controlled by male priests, doctors, or social experts, not as moral agents in their own right.

This attitude toward women lies at the heart of the antichoice movement and links its adherents to those male family planners who design coercive methods of birth limitation. Both types of men deny the fundamental personhood of women as moral agents. Both types of expropriation of the womb fail because they refuse to respect women as decision makers.... Only when women are fully affirmed as the primary responsible persons in reproductive decisions will sustainable life on earth become an attainable goal. ■

Reprinted from Vol. XI, No. 4, July/August 1990

Women, Sexuality, Ecology, and the Church

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

The Catholic church has a serious problem with women and with sexuality. Denigration of sexuality and of women is deeply embedded in Christian, especially Catholic, spirituality and practice, and it has affected profoundly not simply the church as a religious organization, but also the cultures the church has shaped. I believe that the inability to see through to a reasonable ethical position on the legality of abortion (and its limits) in both Catholic church teaching and in American society has more to do with this tradition of hostility to women and women's moral agency in matters of sexuality and reproduction than with 'life' and the valuing or nonvaluing of fetal life. At the root of the issue is the devaluing of women's lives, women's persons.

WOMEN AS SINNERS

Already in the New Testament the struggle over the status of women is evident The Pauline text of Galatians 3:28 that appears to dissolve patriarchal hierarchy and give equal value to women and men "in Christ" is countered by the deutero-Pauline text of I Timothy 2: 11-15:

> Let a woman learn silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved by bearing children ...

Here, woman's subordinate status in creation and her primacy in sin are proclaimed; and they have been used as a way of rejecting the possibility of leadership for women in the church. Women are denied the attributes of speech, of self-articulation, of autonomous personhood.

Instead, women are defined as subordinate in the very nature of things, yet prone to insubordination. From this, sin came into the world. Woman's subordination and silencing reflects both women's created and her sinful nature. Childbearing becomes her way of atoning for this sin. The very concept of sin is thus defined in a victim-blaming way toward women. Patriarchal domination over women's person, rather than being recognized as a sin against women, is proclaimed as God's will and as woman's deserved punishment for the sin of attempted self determination. This victim-blaming definition of women is continued and developed by church teaching down to the present day. St. Augustine denied that woman possesses the image of God in herself. For Augustine, woman exists in relation to the image of God only under the male as her head; in herself she images the body. The male, however, is fully the image of God whether or not he stands in relation to the woman. This is another way of saying that men are autonomous human persons, while women lack such personhood.

Thomas Aquinas added a biological argument to this view of woman as lacking full personhood by adopting the (false) biology of Aristotle, in which women are defined as defective because of the process of gestation by which the female is produced. Lacking the fullness of humanity—mentally, morally, or physically—women are said to be incapable of exercising leadership in either the church or society. Aquinas deduced from this that it was ontologically necessary for Christ to have been incarnated in a male because only the male possesses the fullness of human personhood. It follows then that only a male can represent Christ in the priesthood. This argument that only men can be priests because only males "image Christ" continues to be echoed in Catholic teachings today.

CHURCH UPHOLDS SEXUALITY TABOO

One finds a parallel negativity toward sexuality and reproduction in Christian thought connected with the negation of women. In Levitical law woman was defined as ritually impure and excluded from any contact with men or the sacred places during menstruation and after childbirth. She was doubly impure if she bore a female child. These views were reaffirmed in Medieval Christianity, which excluded women from the church's sanctuary. The ceremony of the churching of women reflected the Levitical ceremony of purification after childbirth. Medieval Catholicism decreed that faithful couples should abstain from sexuality on Sunday, during Lent and other special days, and taught that deformed children were the result of sexual relations on forbidden days.

John Boswell, in his book *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children*

This article was first present as a speech ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER *gave April 7, 1990 as part of a conference at Seattle University. A* CFFC *board member, Ruether serves as Georgia Harkness Professor of Applied Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and is the author or editor of more than twenty books, including* Sexism and Godtalk *and* Faith and Fratricide.

in Western Europe From Late Antiquity to the Renaissance, has shown how this teaching increased incentives to abandon handicapped children since they were not only a burden to the family but were also seen as shameful, the living proof of the illicit sexuality of their parents. Although the idea that handicapping conditions in children are caused by parental libidinousness has disappeared today, what is striking in this tradition is the willingness of church leaders to construct a punitive view of sexuality as punished through the child, in total disregard for the welfare of the child itself.

Augustine taught that all sexual relations were degrading to the spiritual self, but that this was forgiven or allowed if the couple despised sexual pleasure and only engaged in sex for procreation. A secondary purpose of sexual relations was the relief of (male) concupiscence, i.e., prevention of men from straying to other sexual partners outside of marriage. But any attempt to inhibit the procreative purpose of the sexual act made sex, even in marriage, gravely sinful and equivalent to fornication, a teaching that still informs the Catholic rejection of contraception.

In the 1960s these anticontraceptive teachings began to be questioned by Catholic moralists. By this time the rhythm method had been allowed for Catholics, but many couples found this method both ineffective and trying on their sexual lives. It meant that most of the allowed period for sexual intercourse fell during the woman's menstrual period. Both this and its ineffectiveness surrounded marital sexuality with tense anxiety. By the mid-sixties the dissent from these teachings had grown so insistent that Pope Paul VI, during the Second Vatican Council, convened a commission on birth control that brought together not only canonists and theologians, but physicians, sociologists, and married couples.

This commission met between 1964 and 1967. The testimony of married couples about the rhythm method and its conflict with their understanding of married love impressed many of the priest-theologians deeply. Unfortunately commission member Carol Wojtyla, later Pope John Paul II, never attended the commission's meetings. The final report of the commission accepted any medically recommended method of contraception as legitimate within committed marriage. However, several dissenting members of the commission wrote their own minority report, objecting to this conclusion. Contrary to a widespread misunderstanding, this was never an official report, since the commission chose to issue only the one majority report.

Pope Paul VI, however, influenced by the dissenting members' arguments that the church could not change its historic position on contraception, chose to reject the [majority] report of the commission and to reiterate the traditional arguments against contraception in the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. There was widespread dissent from this teaching by moral theologians, priests, and laity. Some episcopal conferences tried to modify the statement by suggesting that Catholics could follow their "conscience" on this matter, while other bishops disciplined dissenting priests and theologians. The efforts during the 1980s to remove theologian Charles Curran from his teaching position in ethics at Catholic University stems from this period. The consequence is that Catholicism continues to teach a view of sexual ethics that has openly lost its credibility and is disregarded by most Catholics.

This heritage of negative teaching toward both sexuality and the status of women plagues the efforts of the American Catholic bishops to formulate a pastoral letter on women. The bishops have realized that there is growing alienation among Catholic women toward their treatment by the church. But the bishops are hampered by their inability to challenge either the teachings against contraception or abortion or against women's ordination. The bishops refused even to support the Equal Rights Amendment, since it was seen as opening the way to challenging these teachings.

The inadequacies of the pastoral on women are worsened in the new draft, issued at the beginning of April 1990. The language of partnership between men and women apparent in the first draft has been removed. Although the term "equality" is used, its meaning is tipped toward an anthropology of complementarity of different male and female "natures" favored by Pope John Paul II. The influence of the papal document on the "Nature and Vocation of Women" is evident through-out the new draft. In particular, arguments against contraception now appear and the arguments against the ordination of women are greatly extended.

The argument that women cannot be ordained because they cannot "image Christ" makes an absurdity of the bishops' statement in favor of the equality of women in the image of God. Despite efforts to support various lay ministries for women in the church and to express concern for the feminization of poverty, the message that continues to come across in the pastoral is that woman's primary vocation is motherhood, a calling unmatched by any parallel vocation of men to fatherhood; that careers for women are allowable for economic necessity but not as vocation; and that, finally, women are excluded from sacramental ministry by their very nature as women.

All of this makes very hollow the brave statement in the pastoral that "sexism is sin." Several Catholic women's groups, including women's religious orders, have called on the bishops to recognize their inability to write an adequate pastoral on women and the inappropriateness of a pastoral that appears to make women, rather than sexism, the focus of the problem.

DISSENT ON ABORTION DENIED

In the 1970s and '80s the furor over contraception appeared to disappear from Catholic public conversation, replaced by the issue of abortion. Many Catholics assume that the church has always taught that human life begins at conception. This is not the case.

There is substantial continuity between the issues of the status of women as persons, contraception, and abortion. The prevalent view until the late nineteenth

century was that human life or "ensoulment" took place sometime between the sixth and the twelfth weeks. This was based on what was known of embryology, which showed that the embryo only gradually developed human form. Following the Aristotelian view that the soul is the form of the body, the human soul could only be present when the body of the embryo had achieved a certain stage of development.

Recent studies have shown that the brain and lung development of the fetus only achieve the stage of development that allow viability outside the womb at the end of the sixth month. Even with modem technology, this threshold cannot be pushed back before the twenty-third or twenty-fourth week. Traditional Jewish law regarded the baby as a person only when it drew its first breath after birth, and Western law has followed this view. I believe that before viability one should regard the fetus as a potential human but not as having the same status as a person. This does not mean it is valueless or a "mere piece of tissue," as prochoice extremists have put it. But its value cannot be put on the same level as the viable and birthed baby.

Gestation is by its nature a developmental process. One cannot deal with process by absolutist thinking. Gestation is the gradual development of the organic systems that can support the human processes of breathing, feeling, and thinking. The soul or self is the interiority of this organic system, and it is Platonic to regard the soul or self as fully present before the organic system to support it exists or is sufficiently developed.

Unfortunately, contemporary Catholicism has forbidden such discussion by claiming that the view of the soul as fully present even in the fertilized ovum, prior to any organic development, is the only legitimate one. Any removal of the fertilized ovum from the process of gestation, even at the earliest stages, is said to be murder. Dissent or public discussion of this teaching has been rigidly repressed. In the new Code of Canon Law, assistance in abortion is made one of the sins for which there is automatic excommunication.

It is not too much to say that submission to this teaching against abortion has become a kind of litmus test for legitimacy as a member of the Catholic church. Charles Curran was finally removed from his teaching position at Catholic University on this as well as the contraception issue, in spite of the fact that his teachings on these subjects were moderate and highly qualified, based on strict attention to Catholic ethical tradition. And the signers of the *New York Times* ad of October 7, 1984, which simply called for recognition that there was more than one legitimate standpoint among Catholics on this issue, were subject to continual persecution.

All of the religious women who signed the ad were told by the Vatican that they had to recant or be forced to leave their orders. Only after a very long process of harassment was this demand gradually settled with more vaguely worded statements of recantation by most of the women religious signers. Lay Catholics who signed the ad have been regularly faced with efforts to cancel their speaking engagements.

The most disturbing aspect of this campaign against dissent and open discussion among Catholics is its use as political censorship by the Catholic bishops. Some Catholic bishops have been using the abortion issue to tell Catholic politicians what they can say and Catholic voters who they can vote for. Catholic politicians, such as Geraldine Ferraro or Governor Mario Cuomo, have not actually supported abortion themselves but have merely argued against the criminalization of abortion on the grounds that, in a pluralistic society, one cannot impose the teachings of one religious group on the whole society. This position also has been declared illegitimate by the bishops.

Since politicians with such a position also tend to be Democrats with more progressive views on other subjects, this campaign against abortion constitutes an effort to bias the Catholic vote to conservative and Republican candidates, who are also likely to vote for high military spending and against social welfare. Governor Cuomo has been forbidden by various bishops from even speaking in churches in some dioceses and told that he is likely to go to hell. In an era of dismal presidential options, a man who was seen in 1984 as a hopeful candidate for the Democratic nomination for the presidency has been virtually removed from running for national office by this one-issue crusade.

Although it might appear that the abortion issue is very different from issues of contraception and the status of women as persons, I would suggest that there is substantial continuity between them. There are a few exceptions, but most of the groups opposing legal abortion for any reason are also against the Equal Rights Amendment, believe that women's primary vocation is motherhood, and are fearful of family planning and sexual education. The so-called "consistent life ethic" proposed by bishops such as Cardinal Bernardin did not find favor with the vast majority of the anti-abortion movement, who supported high military spending and capital punishment and opposed gun control and welfare spending. Their proclaimed concern for life shows little carryover to life after birth. These political affinities indicate that the motivation of the anti-abortion movement is primarily about patriarchal control over women and youth and not about concern for life in the broader sense.

A small segment of Catholic and Evangelical antiwar activists have tried to promulgate an alternative by linking anti-abortion efforts with the struggle against war, poverty, and injustice. To be against killing, they argue, one must be against killing at all stages of life, including fetal life. They would argue that people on the Left, who oppose war and support a more just distribution of global wealth, are inconsistent when they accept a prochoice position on abortion. Although this appeal for a consistent life ethic sounds unassailable, I would argue that it is based on simplistic reasoning. At the very least it demands of those who hold it that they be consistent pacifists. The American Catholic bishops are not pacifists.

It is very instructive to compare the rigidity of the American Catholic bishops' teachings on abortion with the great flexibility of those same bishops' teachings on nuclear war. In the case of a pregnant woman faced with desperate health or economic conflicts, no exceptions can be made. But nuclear arms build-up, which could end not only a few lives but perhaps all life on earth, not only for one generation but for all future generations, is treated with many qualifications. Nuclear deterrence is accepted as a principle, despite its dangers of unleashing an accidental nuclear exchange and its draining of the global economy. The bishops seem to take for granted the right of men in power to make life and death decisions for vast masses of people.

One of the difficulties with sorting out the underlying issues in the abortion debate lies, I believe, in the misleading opposition of the terms "prolife" and "prochoice." Most of the anti-abortion camp has little concern for life after birth. But the term "choice" is also misleading, since it suggests that abortion is a kind of morally neutral choice. This rhetoric conceals the fact that no woman elects to have an abortion as her first choice. The decisions to have or not have an abortion are forced on women because they have lost their real freedom of choice, the choice to have a child when they can really raise it properly. If one is serious about reducing the number of abortions, the primary and only effective way to do this is by ameliorating the circumstances that put women in this situation of involuntary and unbearable pregnancy.

What are those circumstances? They are, first of all, ineffective birth control. This includes methods that are ineffective as well as inadequate sexual education to teach women and men how to use methods of birth control. It includes moral pressures against the use of birth control at all, as exemplified by Catholic anticontraceptive teaching. It includes the larger cultural context in which men regard the sexual conquest of women as a way of asserting their masculine prowess and in which women feel the need to acquiesce to such sexual demands, even when unprepared against possible pregnancy, because they don't feel empowered to cross the male will. And it also includes the likelihood of female poverty for single women with sole responsibility for children. Most women don't feel they can bear a child if there is no one else to help take responsibility for supporting her and her child.

Any society seriously interested in reducing the recourse to abortion will undertake a broad-based campaign to reduce all these circumstances prompting women to seek abortions. This means funding research for more effective birth control and also funding comprehensive sexual education designed to teach people how to use birth control. It means combating the kind of macho culture that makes male conquest of women and female acquiescence to such conquest the essence of masculinity and femininity. And it means addressing the poor economic prospects of women, which assures that most women alone with dependent children will be in poverty.

Global studies have shown that legal restrictions have little effect on the actual number of abortions. For example, Ireland has stringent laws against abortion and limits access to contraception. Yet thirty thousand Irish women travel to Britain each year for abortions. What does reduce the demand for abortion is the widespread use of contraception, together with strong child support policies. The effect of these policies is reflected in the continuous decline in abortions in Scandinavian countries since the 1970s, when restrictions on abortion were lifted.

By contrast, the United States has the highest abortion rate in the industrialized Western world, and Catholics within the United States have more abortions than Protestants. Most of the anti-abortion leaders are also against sexual education and contraception. The so-called prolife movement has held rallies to prevent high school health clinics from providing contraceptive counseling even in public high schools, a strategy endorsed by the Catholic bishops. Such policies perpetuate the circumstances that produce unchosen pregnancies and abortion as well as neglected children of teenaged mothers.

In practice the actual policy goal of the anti-abortion movement has nothing to do with curtailing the need for abortions. If it wins the day, what it will basically accomplish is the criminalization of abortion. The anti-abortion movement gives people the impression that if abortion were illegal, it would somehow magically disappear and this would "save lives." But there is no such connection between criminalization and "saving lives." The only result of criminalizing abortions is criminalized abortions. Abortion would continue, as it always has, but as illegal and unsafe, killing adult women as well as fetuses.

Those who promote the conditions making it likely that women will be involuntarily pregnant, and those who reject sexual education, contraception, and female moral agency in personal and sexual relation, oppose abortion in theory but promote abortion in practice. It is not too much to say that the Roman Catholic church, by promoting female subordination and dependency and opposing contraception, is one of the major factors in the high abortion rate globally, especially in Africa and Latin America (as well as in other areas where institutional Catholicism is highly influential).

Abortion is neither an unambiguous good or evil, nor is it morally neutral. It is always a tragic decision between two unchosen and undesirable options. Anyone who is serious about reducing abortions will start by asking about the conditions that promote this bad situation. This must begin by making abortion legal and safe. But we should not end with this. We must move on to promote research on safe and effective contraception, comprehensive instruction on the use of such contraception, adequate child support for women who want to bear a child but cannot support herself and her child and, finally, a culture that affirms the woman as moral agent in the decisions that affect her life. Any church and society refusing

to support these policies is, in effect, promoting abortion.

It is for this reason that Catholic women typically have more abortions than Protestant women in the United States; Catholic countries, including countries where abortion is illegal, have a high level of abortions. This was recognized more than ten years ago by many Italians. Italy had a stringent antiabortion law, inherited from the Fascist period, which made abortion illegal for both woman and doctor. At that time Italy also had the highest abortion rate in Europe, as well as a high rate of maternal deaths due to abortion, especially among poor women who could not afford expensive Swiss clinics.

In 1978 a new law was put in place in Italy allowing abortion on the woman's decision through the first three months. This law provided counseling to instruct women in the use of contraception and also offered economic aid if she wanted the child but felt she could not afford it Italian proponents of this law defined themselves as seeking to reduce the need for abortions by ameliorating the circumstances of forced and unbearable pregnancy and enhancing women's ability to make reproductive decisions.

In 1981 the present pope mounted a campaign to repeal this law. He was defeated by Italian voters two to one. Unlike American Catholics and many other Americans, Italians had not forgotten that criminalization of abortion has nothing to do with reducing abortion or promoting "life."

ABORTION AND ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The purported concern of the antiabortion movement for fetal life basically ends at birth. There is little real effort to help the woman thus induced to bear a child she didn't feel able to raise actually do so. There is an assumption that simply by promoting more and more birth, one promotes "life." But life is not promoted simply by an infinite number of isolated acts of giving birth. The authentic affirmation of life must be situated in social and ecological systems that promote the flourishing of life in community. Life is not promoted if there is no ability to sustain and nurture that life through a lifetime of adequate physical and social resources. Such resources need not only to exist but to be organized in such a way as to be made available to families. Two realities, the birthed life and the communal and ecological network to sustain that life, have to come together in an adequate fit if we are to say that creating more human life is a moral good.

In today's world the ecological and social fit between children being born and the network to sustain their lives is wildly out of connection. A minority of the world's population monopolizes the majority of the world's resources, while the majority lives in misery or starves outright. A third of the world's population goes to bed hungry, and ten million infants die every year before their first birthday due mainly to malnourishment and lack of sanitation and potable water. The military systems of the world exist primarily to keep this unjust monopoly of the world's resources in its present state.

Even if the world's resources were more justly distributed, genuine hope to feed the world's population in the future depends on a serious effort to level off the exponential population growth of the planet, which has been doubling at shorter and shorter intervals for the last century. To name only one reality, not only is the world's arable land not expanding, but it is rapidly shrinking through erosion and its confiscation for housing and roads. In this context the decisions to limit the number of births, both for one's own family and as a part of a global community, is as much a decision for life and for a more adequate distribution of the means of life as is the struggle to end the arms race.

We are finite and interdependent beings. To accept our finitude and interdependence is to realize that the affirmation of the value of human life must be both qualitative and quantitative. One does not affirm life by demanding the infinite expansion of numbers of people who are then to be condemned to a short and miserable existence. To refuse to see the connection between quantitative limits and qualitative affirmation of life is as myopically antilife as those who want to nuke the world in order to save it for democracy.

Family planning, whether opposed or promoted by men in power, has typically either rejected or ignored women as the primary agents in reproduction. Women have been treated, both by those who reject birth control and by those who seek to promote it, as reproductive vessels to be defined and controlled by male decision makers. Only recently have some women doctors involved in issues of world population come to recognize that the single most important factor in population control lies neither in law nor in technology, but in the affirmation of the woman herself as the birth giver and hence the primary moral agent in decisions about reproduction.

If we are really to enhance human life on all levels, we need to understand the real warp and woof of the seamless garment that interconnects all aspects of the creating and sustaining of human life in local and global community. This depends on an authentic and accurate, not simplistic or punitive, understanding of that nexus between women and their bodies and the ecological and social relations that sustain and enhance life, or which threaten it. To deny women reproductive self-determination in the name of "life" is to fail to see the system of violence that connects violation of women as human persons and the violence that denies most humans the adequate food, clean air and water, housing, and land to sustain life, finally threatening all life on earth with nuclear annihilation.

To be integrally "prolife" is to seek to change this system of violence in all of its dimensions. The place to start is with those social patterns that violate the humanity of the primary bearers and nurturers of life; namely, women as human persons. However much women need the advice and support of family, friends, doctors, lawyers, and priests, it is they who must be recognized as the primary agents in the decisions of pregnancy and birth. ■

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TO MARK THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF *HUMANAE VITAE, CONSCIENCE* INVITED Catholic theologians and others to reflect on the encyclical and its impact. Specifically, we asked, what is the most positive contribution made by *Humanae Vitae*, and what is the worst?

Watershed for Faithful Catholics

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

Barbara Morgan, Martha Graham—El Penitente—Erick Hawkins Solo as El Flagellante, 1940.

THE PROMULGATION OF *Humanae Vitae* was perhaps one of the greatest moral disasters of the Roman Catholic church. Its importance lay in forcing many to decide to repudiate the church's mistaken views of both sexual morality and teaching authority. In that sense the disaster for the church's credibility as moral authority was a gain for the liberty of conscience of millions of ordinary Catholics.

The anticontraceptive teaching has its roots not in pronatalism, but in a negative view of sexuality as sinful, even within marriage, and allowable only for procreation. This teaching has doubtless always been honored in the breach more than in the observance, but its contradictions became glaring in the twentieth century when shifts in women's roles, desired family size, and infant survival demanded more conscious family planning. Most Protestant groups came to accept contraception between 1920 and 1950, leaving Catholicism maintaining a teaching that had lost its credibility.

More and more Catholic couples, and moral thelogians, began to examine the rationale for the teaching and found it wanting. This crisis came to a head during the Second Vatican Council; there, books such as *Contraception and Holiness*—in which major theologians challenged the teaching and Archbishop Thomas Roberts wrote the introduction—were circulated to the council fathers. Pope Paul VI removed the topic from discussion at the council and reserved it for a special Birth Control Commission. Meeting between 1963 and 1967, the commission brought together not only bishops, but moral theologians, sociologists, and married couples; Pat and Patty Crowley, leaders in the Christian Family Movement, represented the experience of the masses of Catholic married couples, presumably those highly faithful to the church.

The Crowleys polled their membership and received devastating critiques of "natural" family planning and its impact on the wellbeing of couples, contrary to clerical assumptions that such "marital chastity" fosters discipline and deepens love. The Crowleys brought these testimonials to the commission in a detailed report. Many bishops and priest theologians were deeply moved, having never before heard frank discussion of marital sexuality or the harm of living with anxiety about unintended pregnancies and lovemaking artificially contrived according to the calendar.

The result was that the overwhelming majority of the commission voted to change the teaching and affirm that all methods of contraception are equally acceptable morally for faithful couples who intend to have some children.

The Crowleys were horrified when they learned that the pope had reaffirmed the traditional teaching in a new encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*. Why did Paul reject the conscientious work of his own commission? Basically, he was persuaded by several moral theologians that if he

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changed the teaching, the church would lose credibility as a teacher of unchangeable doctrines of faith and morals. One cardinal had posed this argument in the commission, demanding of the other members, "if we change the teaching, what about all those who have been sent to Hell because of the previous teachings?" Patty Crowley replied, "Your excellency, do you think that God has obeyed all your orders?"

Reaffirming the teaching against the emerging sensus fidelium (the consensus of the faithful, traditionally a source of church teaching) not only failed to sustain church credibility—it had exactly the opposite effect. Particularly for the Crowleys and the highly conscious couples who made up the Christian Family Movement, it was quickly apparent that the interests of Catholic families had been betrayed in the name of a false understanding of church authority. The rejection of the commission's consensus revealed the interconnection of authoritarianism with a pathological need to control the sexuality of women and lay people generally. The Crowleys refused to accept the teaching, and the Christian Family Movement split from its clerical advisors. This was a watershed experience for these "faithful" American lay Catholics.

Today the maintenance of the anticontraceptive teaching is both an intellectual embarrassment and a cruel imposition on millions of women and men whose access to contraception is impeded by church power. No moral theologian of standing seeks to justify the teaching anymore, so it stands on brute institutional power alone, lacking any moral credibility. In 1968 a critical moment was lost when Catholicism could have engaged in genuine development of doctrine through a real process of consultation.

The pope rejected this opportunity because of his inability to admit that church teaching could previously have erred. He thereby unmasked the extent to which the church's self-concept of privileged authority has become not only mistaken but idolatrous. ■

Thoughts on Being Cancelled in Rome

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

Last March I received a call from a teacher at a Pontifical Theological Faculty in Rome. He asked whether I would be interested in coming to Rome in early October to present a paper at a conference on "Mary in Faith and Culture." The organizers of the conference wanted me to speak on Mary in American culture.

Not being accustomed to receiving invitations to speak at Rome's pontifical institutes, I was a bit surprised, but I readily accepted when I was assured that all expenses would be paid. I like Rome (classical and contemporary, not ecclesiastical), I have friends there I could look up, and besides, I was quite curious about the context that would lead such a faculty to invite me in the first place. But I also expected that some "higher authorities" would force my inviters to cancel the invitation, regretfully, in due time.

Months went by and the invitation was still on. The printed brochures arrived in English and Italian, with my name and topic duly noted in the schedule. Friendly letters arrived telling me how much the faculty was looking forward to my presence and could I send my text by September 25 so that it could be translated. In August I wrote my paper, focusing on the division in contemporary American Catholicism between feminist reclamations of Mary and circles of followers of Marian apparitions, as symptomatic of a deep cultural schism in the church.

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I had just sent the text off to Rome and secured my ticket when I received a call from the priest who had invited me, who happened to be in Chicago. He asked whether he could come and talk to me. When he arrived and was seated in my office, he informed me with deep apologies that my invitation had been cancelled. They would, of course, pay my honorarium and all expenses. It seems that, only two days before, the Holy Office had realized that I was a speaker at the conference and had called the president and the rector of the faculty on the carpet at the Vatican. The president pleaded that this was an academic conference and needed different voices, but to no avail. The Vatican authority (unnamed, but presumably Cardinal Ratzinger) was adamant that I could not speak at the conference.

The priest went on to tell me that theological education in the pontifical faculties in Rome was in a terrible state. Teachers lived in terror of being spied upon, and none of the newer Catholic thought could be taught. "We are not even allowed to have people like Schillebeeckx on our bibliographies," he confided. Informants of the Holy Office were everywhere. He told all this to me in a low whisper, as if he half expected that the spies had bugged my office.

I thought to myself, these spies can't be that omnipresent if it took the Holy Office five months to catch up with this invitation. "I don't think the Vatican controls Italy or the airlines," I said. "Suppose I just come to Rome anyway?"

The priest laughed nervously and suggested that the Vatican might get me arrested at the airport. It was clear

There were even posters for the conference in pasta shops in Rome.

that, mortified though he was by the cancellation, he could not imagine defying such an order from the Vatican.

ANOTHER SCENARIO

After the priest had departed with a copy of my text in his hand, I began to play with another scenario. I imagined all the pontifical faculties in Rome getting together and deciding that they had to do something to break free and get back into dialogue with newer Catholic thinking throughout the world.

They decided to have a major conference on contemporary Catholic theology. There would be feminists from many parts of the world: Catherina Halkes from Holland, Mary Grey from England, Elizabeth Fiorenza, Elizabeth Johnson, and Rosemary Ruether from the United States, Ivone Gebara from Brazil, Virginia Fabella from the Philippines. They would also invite Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Kung, and Johannes Metz from Europe, and Charles Davis from England; Richard McBrien and Charles Curran would come from the United States, Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff from Latin America, Aloysius Pieris from Sri Lanka.

The initiations were sent out, all agreed to come, and conference brochures were widely distributed. There were even posters in pasta shops in Rome. But it was not until two weeks before the conference was to convene that the Vatican noticed. Cardinal Ratzinger called all the heads of the faculties to his office and read them the riot act, demanding that the conference be cancelled immediately. The presidents declined to do so, insisting that theological schools had to be in touch with contemporary Catholic thought and noting that to listen and discuss was not to agree. They invited the cardinal to be one of the speakers.

The cardinal threatened sanctions: firing all the heads of the faculties and/or revoking their pontifical status. The seminary presidents refused to bend, saying the schools would keep going by alternative means. The conference went on and drew the largest crowd of participants on record. Lively debate and discussion reigned in Rome for five days. After the conference, plans were made to renovate the curricula of the schools and include new Catholic thought and a praxis oriented method of teaching, sending seminarians to work in slums with base communities.

The confrontation with the cardinal (who did not attend the conference) continues. One faculty was evicted from its buildings. The teachers and students assembled in the courtyard, veiled the statue of their founder, and processed to the Waldensian seminary, which gave them temporary shelter until they could rent a building. One student scrawled on the base of the statue as they left, "Bye, bye, Ratty, the worm has turned!"

Theological education in Rome has begun to experience a renaissance. Students flock there from all over the world for exciting and relevant theological study. Feminist and liberation theologians are frequent visiting professors. How all this will end is unknown, but as one faculty member put it, "I never realized that theology could be so meaningful!" ■

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The Alliance That Fizzled

THE VATICAN AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS AT CAIRO

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

In the final weeks before the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, the tone of the Vatican attack on the conference grew increasingly shrill. As the September conference approached, the Vatican described the conference as promoting homosexual unions, promiscuity, abortion as a woman's right, and a coercive imposition of birth control upon poor countries by the affluent West.

Particularly startling were the reports in August that the Vatican had been reaching out diplomatically

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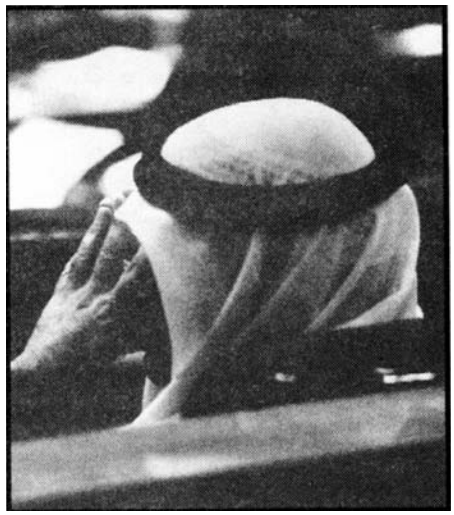
called for the conference's cancellation and suggested that delegates might be in danger of losing their lives.

Faced with these threats, the Egyptian government—looking to the conference to pull the nation's tourist trade out of a decline precipitated by antigovernment assaults on tourists—announced that it was taking every precaution to assure the safety of the delegates. Moderate Islamic leaders called on Muslims to participate in the conference and help to shape the document, and not to feed the Western image of Islam as violent. Egypt's population minister, Maher Mahran, declared that the views expressed by the document did not violate Islamic morality.

reword passages, but those standing with the Vatican opposition were a few Catholic states—not Islamic nations, with the initial exception of Morocco, whose support also disappeared. (In fact, large Catholic countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and even Poland were notably absent from the list of the Vatican's allies: Malta, Honduras, Argentina, and at times Guatemala and Nicaragua.)

What happened to the Islamic-Catholic alliance, or did it ever really exist? I am not privy to behind-the-scenes relations that might have existed between the Vatican and Islamic government leaders, but my experience at Cairo made plain certain realties that may help to explain the absence of this alliance once the conference got under way.



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ICPD, official session.

Future alliances between the Vatican and fundamentalist Muslims may form around conservative views of "family values."

The reported Vatican outreach to radical Islamic states outraged the US delegation, already stinging from the Vatican's highly personal attacks on Vice President Al Gore, who led the US delegation, and on President Bill Clinton himself. When the US delegation held a briefing for representatives of nongovernmental organizations, Tim Wirth, Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, said he had confronted Vatican delegates to the conference about their parleys with radical Islamic states. The United States had appealed to Vatican representatives to condemn threats of violence against the conference, but the Vatican's men had failed to respond, he said.

Yet despite this furor in anticipation of the conference, once the gathering was underway, there were no Islamic demonstrations against it, and no evidence of an alliance of the Vatican with any Islamic states. The Vatican's efforts to eliminate from the document all references to abortion and artificial contraception kept delegates up long hours to

First of all, just as the Vatican's stance does not command the allegiance of a majority of Catholics, Islamic voices on family planning and even abortion are by no means unified. The conference allowed a large number of Egyptian organizations to surface in support of the conference, and delegations from many Muslim countries brought secular and Islamic voices in support of both family planning and gender equity; Doctor Nafis Sadik, executive director of the United Nations Population Fund and secretary general of the Cairo conference, is herself a Pakistani Muslim.

Progressive Muslims pointed out that Islam is not against family planning. The Quran itself allows the primary form of contraception that was known at the time of its writing—coitus interruptus—and Islamic teachers have long insisted that, within marriage, the Quran poses no objection either to small families or to any particular form of contraception.

The Islamic view of abortion, too, differs from contemporary Vatican teaching. Islam maintains a view—derived from Aristotle and once shared by Catholicism—that the fetus is "ensouled," becoming a human person, not at conception but later in the gestation process; this occurs at 120 days, according to Islamic tradition. Thus abortion in the early months, while not condoned, is not regarded as murder.

Other than a few states with small populations, such as Saudi Arabia, most Muslim countries today have recognized that economic development and family planning go together. Not only more secular Muslim countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia, but even the Islamic Republic of Iran have major family planning programs. Iran works through village mosques to promote the two-child family.

Conservative Muslims resonated with the Vatican's attack on the conference primarily on issues of gender equity for women and also on what they read as endorsements of homosexuality and of sexual promiscuity among unmarried

youth. But it became clear that the Vatican's portrayal of the Program of Action was greatly exaggerated. In fact, there was no reference to homosexual relations at all in the document. What there is, is a recognition that there are various forms of the family system, as well as sexual relations between unmarried people, and that these realities need to be addressed by health and population planners.

The document's strong endorsement of gender equity grated on the nerves of some Islamic fundamentalists; an example is the statement that women should be given equal inheritance, which goes against traditional readings of Islamic law. But with so many strong women from the Islamic world, as well as elsewhere, in positions of leadership at the conference, neither the Vatican nor Muslims wanted to admit that continued subjugation of women was the covert basis of their common agenda.

The upshot was that Islamic states endorsed the Program of Action after some rewording on sensitive topics such as abortion, adolescent sexuality, and plural forms of the family. The Vatican, meanwhile, became isolated and finally allowed that it would surrender on the issue of family planning, once the document had been revised to state that abortion is not to be promoted as a method of family planning.

Thus the anticipated Vatican-Muslim alliance proved chimerical at the conference itself. This is not to say that the possibility of such an alliance around conservative views of "family values" is to be dismissed for the future. Conservative Catholics and Muslims in Orange County, California, came together in their shared alarm over the conference, and a number of Catholic and Islamic policy-oriented organizations staged a joint press conference in Washington, DC.

One must recognize, though, that Islam is as divided as Catholicism over the relationships among sexuality, family planning, and women's equality. Muslims and Catholics are as likely to work together on the progressive as on the conservative side of these issues. ■

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Women and Culture

THE CASE FOR UNIVERSAL RIGHTS

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

THE ARGUMENT THAT FEMINISM is an expression of Western cultural imperialism and is inappropriate for women of the non-Western world has emerged in recent years as a major rhetorical rebuttal to the globalization of the movement for women's rights. I first encountered this argument in 1990 when I was traveling and lecturing in South Africa. I was speaking to a group of African women church workers in the Bantu "homeland" of Transkei. One African man was present, an Anglican priest dressed in impeccably tailored black clericals and speaking in British-accented English, neither the dress, the religion, nor the language being, one would think, traditionally "African."

When I finished my remarks about Christian feminism, its Biblical roots, and contemporary developments worldwide, this priest rose to his full height and said, "Such ideas may be fine in the West, but they are completely contrary to our African culture." After enlarging upon this theme for some time, he concluded with the sweeping statement, "and you can't challenge culture!" Fortunately, I had been primed with a good response by a friend of mine, an African woman sociologist. "Well," I replied, "you might say that racism is a part of traditional white culture. Would you say that you can't challenge white racism because it is a part of white culture?" The African women tittered, and the priest sat down, glaring.

While I might have made a verbal coup, however, I doubt that the priest's mind was changed. The argument that feminism should be rejected as un-African clearly served a social function in maintaining male power in his society and was not amenable to purely intellectual questioning. Since that time I have grown increasingly aware of how common is this argument that non-Western traditional "cultures" are in some way immutable and sacrosanct and should not be changed to accord with notions of human rights that

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are advocated primarily in modern Western societies.

Significantly, this argument is used primarily against women's rights as human rights. I have heard it most often from the mouths of Third World men, echoed by Third World women and First World men. It is used to claim that feminism and feminists are pushing purely Western ideas that continue patterns of Western cultural colonialism. Remarkably, this argument has been exploited recently by that exemplar of European religious and cultural colonialism, the Vatican. This was especially apparent in Vatican crusades against feminism before and during the United Nations conference on population and development in Cairo in 1994, and again in 1995 around the Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing. The Vatican employed this argument repeatedly to oppose international approval of contraception and safe abortion, recognition of diverse notions of family, and acknowledgment of homosexuality, among other things.

This argument, as used by the Vatican as well as by antifeminists of Africa, Asia, or the Middle East, generally carries the suggestion that feminism not only is a Western cultural imperialist ideology, but also reflects a Western moral decadence. This presumed decadence is blamed for sexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and the "destruction of the family," which "evils" these "bad" Western feminists now seek to impose upon innocent, vulnerable, non-Western women, whose traditional families and morality are presumed to be still "intact."

Not only is such an argument outrageously paternalistic toward non-Western women, but it also has little to do with social reality in Third World countries. It ignores the long and widespread existence in non-Western societies (as in the West) of everything from female-headed households in poverty to rape and incest, as well as variations among attitudes toward homosexuality—all of which preexisted Western influence. Pointing out this history, however, no more curbs the rhetoric against "Western feminist cultural imperialism" than my rejoinder changed the mind of the Anglican priest in Transkei. Power relations, not truth about social history, usually motivate the use of such arguments.

THE CULTURE REFRAIN

An ominous expression of the argument against women's rights in the name of non-Western cultures is its use by representatives of some Third World countries, particularly Islamic nations, in the United Nations. They have appealed to this idea not only to reject the principle established in UN documents that women's rights are an integral part of universal human rights, but also to question the very concept of universal human rights, suggesting that it amounts to Western cultural imperialism. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, this question of whether there are universally binding human rights that take precedence over "local cultures," particularly when sanctioned by religion, was a major area of controversy in the drafting of the Platform for Action produced by the conference.

Several delegations sought to insert into the platform a footnote—in language lifted from the Cairo document on population and development—that would have subordinated women's health-related rights to a nation's religious and cultural customs. During a long night's debate on the eve of closing ceremonies in Beijing, the chairperson of the drafting committee ruled with the majority of the delegates to eliminate this footnote. Instead, the relation between local culture and human rights was elaborated in the document's introductory "global framework" in this way: "While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms." Any split between human rights and women's rights, moreover, was precluded by the basic principle, embodied in the document and stated in the accompanying Beijing Declaration, that "women's rights are human rights."

But in another area—the right of lesbian women to affirm their sexual orientation—objections based on "culture" overwhelmed human rights. Language against discrimination based on sexual orientation was dropped in the final night's negotiations and debate, in a concession to countries that said it would contradict their religious and cultural values.

Another hotly contested conflict between women's rights and religious custom concerned female inheritance. Many Islamic states pointed to the Koranic statement that daughters should inherit half the amount that sons receive. As Islamic law, they said, this could not be challenged by other norms, such as women's human right to equality of access to inheritance. The final language (which Iran, but few other Islamic nations, accepted as consistent with its economic system) called for the enactment of laws "as appropriate" to ensure the "equal right to inherit, regardless of the sex of the child."

Notwithstanding the numerous compromises that delegates crafted for the sake of consensus, a number of countries recorded reservations on the final Platform for Action. Many noted that the document is legally nonbinding and stated that elements in conflict with particular religious principles would not be honored.

Argumentation in defense of traditional "culture" against women's rights has by no means been restricted to United Nations events. One of the most emotionally fraught examples has occurred over many years in relation to the campaign to end female genital mutilation. The practice, which originated in male efforts to control women sexually, has become an integral part of certain cultures, primarily in Africa. It is typically enforced by women themselves upon their daughters because of the prevalence of the view that uncircumcised girls and women are likely to be promiscuous or unclean and therefore unmarriageable.

Yet many women who have themselves experienced genital mutilation are now

leading campaigns against the custom. While they are very aware of the cultural complexity of female genital mutilation, they recognize its traumatic psychological and physical effects in their own lives. They are determined to end the practice, knowing that this means a fundamental reconstruction of both cultural attitudes and power relations between men and women.

Although these women speak out of their own experience and the cultural context where genital mutilation is practiced, some leaders have been made the butt of the argument of the preeminence of culture over women's rights. The claim that criticism of female genital mutilation constitutes Western cultural imperialism has been transferred to some of these women by the assertion that they are "Westernized" and thus do not speak for their own cultures.

Power relations, not truth about social history,
usually motivate the use of such argument.

TRANSCENDING PATRIARCHY

Feminist ethicists would do well to pay careful attention to the conflict between cultural or religious particularity and human rights as a universal claim. This has recently become a contested issue in feminist theory. Some postmodernist feminists challenge any concept of ethical universality as simply a holdover of a Western imperialist ideology of modernity which falsely universalized its own particular cultural norms. Ironically, the Western feminist, postmodernist critique of modernity in the name of cultural diversity could increase many women's vulnerability to right-wing male exploitation of cultural particularity on behalf of premodern patriarchal norms.

Perhaps feminists need to revisit the intellectual roots of the concepts of universal human rights articulated in classical philosophies of natural law and further developed during the Enlightenment. Progressive Catholics are likely to be turned off by the very term "natural law" because their primary acquaintance with it has been in the context of conservative Catholic use of "natural law" to argue against contraception. But this is a blatant misuse of natural law ideas. The larger meaning of this tradition is worth revisiting, both to refute its misuse in this case, and also to lay a basis for women's rights as human rights in the current conflicts about the universality of moral justice principles and the particularities of culture.

This tradition assumes that the cosmos is a unified ontological whole whose nature implies ethical norms of right relationship. Humans are an integral and paradigmatic expression of this ontological whole, and its norms of right relation govern what makes for human wellbeing. The Greek philosophical tradition developed this concept of natural law precisely to argue for universal norms that transcend and can be used in judging particularity of cultures. United Nations parlance on human rights has its roots in this tradition.

In this natural law tradition, each culture can be seen as a partial version of this common whole, one which must constantly seek to test and enlarge its particular customs by its discernment of the universals of human nature. Dialogue between particular cultures should seek a mutual transformation that moves each toward a fuller discernment of norms of right relations and the common good that unites humanity. Contemporary ecological thought also speaks of a "universe story" in which common norms can be discerned from nature. This is in sharp contrast to a postmodernist positivism that sees all as particularity without common principles.

Perhaps this understanding of a common base for humanness from which we can discern human rights is itself not so much provable as it is a leap of faith. Yet this leap of faith is necessary to build a global society that can live together on one planet without disintegrating into warring ethnicities and religions that reject the very possibility of human community. The women at the Beijing conference, who came from diverse cultures, were for the most part seeking both to affirm the integrity of this diversity and also to bring these particular cultures and religious heritages into union with women's human rights by appealing to their better traditions.

The implied norm by which these better traditions were defined was women's human rights to equal justice. In other words, some concept of universal norms of human rights for women as well as men was assumed as the basis for affirming, critiquing, and transforming particular cultures. Societies all over the world have patriarchal pasts that have inferiorized women. The affirmation of women's rights that transcend the patriarchal elements in local cultures is possible only through some concept of human rights as being universally normative in a way that both transcends and corrects local cultures.

Perhaps it is time for Western feminists to spend less time attacking concepts of human rights grounded in human nature and more time making them more credible across cultures. At the very least, they should realize that a zeal for cultural diversity without some underlying principles of human commonality plays into the hands of reactionary patriarchs. This, at the very time when women the world over are trying to move their cultures toward greater justice for women on the basis of norms of the universality of human rights. ■

Lessons from Chiapas

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

Late last year, Catholics for a Free Choice gathered twenty board members, staff, and Latin American coworkers for a retreat in Chiapas, Mexico, to visit and learn from progressive movements there. For several days, we met with leaders and members of groups working for social justice in Chiapas, the southernmost state in Mexico and the base of the Zapatista uprising.

Typifying the vision of these remarkable groups was Pueblo Creyente, a network of base communities. At a hotel in San Cristóbal de las Casas, we were introduced to this "community of believers" by four of its grassroots leaders, three men and a woman. They explained that the base communities of Pueblo Creyente build bridges among groups addressing various social issues-economic development, land reform, health, education, and women's rights from the perspective of reflection on the scriptures.

We were stunned by the organizational skills and quiet courage of these four leaders, who come from the poorest peasant and Indian communities and have little formal education. One man had walked for four hours to come to the meeting, braving checkpoints where the Mexican army has beaten, shot, or raped those they suspect of activism. Pueblo Creyente members see themselves as building a new society against great odds posed by the Mexican government and the local landlords, drawing strength from the firm conviction that God is on their side, calling them to create a society of justice and equality for all people.

Women's rights are part of their vision. The three men, as well as the woman, agreed that women are treated unjustly. In the peasant communities, women not only work long hours in both domestic chores and labor to support the family, but they are often subjected to physical violence and assumed to be their husbands' chattel. For the leaders we met, equality of women was not simply "a woman's issue," but an issue of justice for all of society. One confessed that some other men objected to his critique of male machismo, and he said the Mexican government had dismissed this aspect of the Zapatista agenda as "irrelevant." Still, Pueblo Creyente persists in explaining its importance. A democratic society must start with democratic relations between men and women in the family as the base of society, he said.

Pueblo Creyente members do not have an easy time promoting a union of Christian faith and social justice. Conservative Catholics and Protestant evangelicals oppose them, saying faith is purely a matter of the "soul," having nothing to do with "politics." Fortunately, the Catholic church in this diocese—under the prophetic leadership of Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia—supports the vision of Pueblo Creyente, as CFFC's group saw in a visit with the social vicariate. The vicar, a young priest, said the bishop gives the church's blessing to these self-sustaining movements, with the goal of promoting them, not controlling them. Bishop Ruiz also has denounced injustice by the government and landlords.

The bishop's work of annunciation and prophetic denunciation has fostered deep hostility from the wealthy and politically powerful and their allies in the church. The Vatican has bowed to pressure from these segments, sending to the diocese a more conservative coadjutor bishop. The leaders of Pueblo Creyente scornfully quoted the coadjutor as saying the church must be as concerned with the "spiritual oppression" of the rich as with the physical oppression of the poor.

In addition to Pueblo Creyente and the social vicariate of the diocese, CFFC's group met with leaders of DESMI, which works for the economic and social development of indigenous peoples; the Women's Movement of San Cristóbal, which addresses domestic violence and reproductive health; and Alianza Cívica, which monitors elections and promotes democratic electoral processes. We also went on daylong field trips to small towns and rural areas where we visited cooperatives of artisans and groups working on land reform and other issues. While brief, these field visits were intense and moving, a window into a world of great poverty and injustice matched by great creativity and courage.

The meetings were arranged by Jorge Santiago, founder of DESMI, who has worked in Chiapas for twenty-three years. He had been imprisoned recently by the Mexican government, which claimed he was one of the top Zapatista leaders and the go-between for the Zapatistas and Ruiz. Widespread protests won his release. A member of the advisory board of CFFC's Mexican counterpart, Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, Santiago worked with his wife, Ana Santiago, who is a development specialist active in DESMI, to organize the entire retreat.

The retreat's purpose was not to promote the agendas of CFFC/CDD but to listen to the social justice perspectives of women and men in the region. Again and again, we saw the holistic vision of these movements. In their view, democratic

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society must be built from the ground up; it cannot be created by a revolution or grand scheme at the top. There must be equality of men and women, of Indian and mestizo. Land reform is essential, to give those who till the soil an equal share of the earth's riches. Local communities need to direct their own grassroots economic development.

Chiapas is an area of vast natural resources, including abundant rain and sunshine to grow coffee, corn, soybeans, and cocoa. There are petroleum resources and power plants, as well as forests of fine woods. The poverty of its people reflects a five-hundred-year history of enslavement of the indigenous population by conquerors attracted to the region's natural wealth.

In January 1995, on the first anniversary of the Zapatista uprising, Chiapas remained a paradoxical beacon of hope, not only for Mexicans, but also for people around the world. This beacon deserves our vigilant support lest it be snuffed out by powerful local and global enemies. ■

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Created Second, Sinned First

WOMEN, REDEMPTION, AND THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTIAN FEMINIST THEOLOGY

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

In traditional Christianity, redemption is the reconciliation of the fallen soul with God, won by Christ on the cross, applied to the soul in baptismal regeneration, and then developed through the struggle to live virtuously sustained by grace. In the classical Christian paradigm, women, in order to be redeemed, must subordinate themselves to men, because women, to paraphrase I Timothy 2:11-15, were created second and sinned first. Feminist theology, however, defines women and men as created equal and denounces male domination of women as sin. Redemption then becomes transformed gender relations that overcome male domination, rather than a call to women to submit to this domination as their means of salvation. The definition of redemption in relation to gender is determined by the prior theological assumptions about the nature of "original" or normative humanness as male and female, and how sin and fallenness are seen as changing original gender relations. A shift in the assumptions about either or both of the first two sets of assumptions will also change how the effect of redemption on gender relations is defined. Thus, tracing the changing paradigms of gender and redemption in Christian theology involves showing the shifts in how gender is defined in all three states, creation, fall and redemption, in relation to each other.

In the sixteenth century, humanist Agrippa von Nettlesheim laid the groundwork for a feminist reading of Christianity. He argued in his 1509 treatise *Female Preeminence* that women's and men's souls were created equally in the image of God, but that women were superior to men because they reflect the wisdom nature of God and are more attuned to life and virtue. Agrippa argued further that male domination of women is neither God's original design for creation, nor punishment for female priority in sin, but rather reflects men's propensity to injustice and tyranny. Christ restored women to equality and gave them equal leadership in the church, but men refused to accept this and have distorted the message of Christ to justify the continued subordination of women in the church and society. Agrippa argued that women's full equality was their due according to their nature.

Seventeenth~century Quakers, while not stating these as emphatically, agreed with Agrippa's basic ideas on gender equality. They believed that women and men were created equal; but, through sin, men gained power over women. Male domination, or patriarchy, is thus a manifestation of sin. Christ restored equality between men and women, mandating that both should be prophetic evangelists of the gospel. Those who would silence women in the church are the "seed of Satan," and continue in the fallen state, not having received the inner light of the redemptive Spirit. The Quakers translated their ideology of original and restored gender equality into participation of women in missionary work, preaching, and ministry in Quaker meetings. But they did not inaugurate a struggle for women's equality in public society because their sectarian

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view of the non-Quaker realm as an expression of the fallen world disposed them to withdraw from, rather than participate in, public life.

In nineteenth-century America, however, several abolitionist feminists challenged this sectarian stance by uniting the Quaker theology of creation restored in the Spirit with American democratic thought. Sarah and Angelina Grimke, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton inaugurated the struggle for women's civil rights in America on Biblical and theological grounds.

Redemption for these nineteenth-century American feminists meant not only restoring equality between women and men, but also transforming the social and legal systems that deny women their rights. Redemption is realized, not primarily in an otherworldly escape from the body and the finite world, but by creating and encouraging personal and social relations of justice and peace between all. humans here and now. This is the true message of Christ and the Gospels. The churches have betrayed Christ by preaching a theology of female silence and subordination.

Twentieth-century feminist theology developed within the tradition of this-worldly progressive hope, redefining injustice in the context of gender hierarchy, which is seen as central to a total system and ideology of patriarchy. Feminism sees patriarchy as a multi-layered system of domination, centered in men's control of women, but including class, race, and generational hierarchies, clericalism, war, and the domination of nature. Catholic feminist and New Testament scholar Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza has coined the phrase "kyriarchy" (the rule of the lord) for this system of top down power firmly rooted in the religious hierarchy. Redemption requires overcoming all forms of patriarchy.

Feminist theologians, such as Brazilian Ivone Gebara, stress that overcoming patriarchy means dismantling an entire cosmovision based on a split universe in which God is located in a spiritual realm outside of creation and ruling over it. Redemption is seen as sending God down from this higher spiritual realm to a lower, material world lacking spiritual life. Gebara argues that Spirit and matter, God and body need to be reintegrated, locating the divine power of renewal of life-giving and loving relations in mutual relationality between all beings, not dominating control from outside.

Gebara also begins to dismantle the dualism that feminists accept from Biblical thought, namely an original paradise of the beginning when all was in perfect harmony and a Kingdom of God at the end of history when all will again be in perfect harmony, contrasted with present evil. Gebara questions the literalism of a utopian future when all evil will be conquered, Rather, she wishes to distinguish, between the finitude of life and death, of joy and tragedy, contrasted with the construction of a system of domination based on the false attempt to secure the powerful from vulnerability, which turns most humans and the earth into victims. Here redemptive hope lies in dismantling this distorted social construction to reclaim fragile joys and life-giving relations shared equally between all beings in the midst of life's limits.

Redemption requires overcoming patriarchy.

CLAIMING THE JESUS STORY

The shift from other-worldly to this-worldly redemptive hope also entails a revised anthropology and Christology, or way of interpreting Jesus's life and teachings. Feminist theologians reject the classical notion that the human soul is radically fallen, alienated from God, and, unable to reconcile itself with God, in need of an outside mediator. Instead, the human self is defined through its primary identity as image of God. This original goodness and communion with its divine ground of, being continues to be the true nature of women and men.

Jesus's role becomes quite different in feminist theology. His is a root story for the redemptive process in which we must all be engaged, but he does not and cannot do it for us. No one person can become the collective human whose actions accomplish a salvation which is then passively applied to everyone else. Jesus's story can be a model for what we need to do for ourselves and with one another.

Yet Christian feminists are remarkably persistent in their attachment to the Jesus story. Across many cultures around the world, feminists, womanists, and mujeristas continue to affirm their relation to Jesus, even as they reject the Christological superstructure that has been erected by classical Christianity in his name. These feminist theologians remain Christian, however radical in their repudiation of doctrines about Christ as redeemer, in their continued affiliation with the Jesus story as the foundation for their feminist theology. Why is this? Does this attachment simply indicate some residual need for male authority? Some fear of breaking the final tie with Christianity? These fears and dependencies may exist, but they do not explain the resiliency of the Jesus figure for feminist theology.

Modern Jesus scholarship has radically stripped the Jesus story of its dogmatic accretions, revealing a Jesus whose life continues to strike a responsive chord for feminist liberation theology—namely, a man (not lord, but brother) who dissented from the religious and social systems of domination that marginalized the poor and the despised, most notably women. He incurred the wrath of religious and political authorities for these subversive teachings and practices, and they sought to silence him by publicly torturing him to death.

But, just as the cross failed to silence his story, for Jesus rose to live on in a

religious movement that kept his memory alive, so all the appropropriations of him into constructions of ecclesial domination through the centuries also have failed to silence the subversive power of his name. The Jesus story, continually reenvisioned, still rises beyond the deaths of patriarchal Christianities, and still lives as a touchstone for feminists who continue to seek and celebrate their liberation in "memory of him."

The Jesus story continues to be a model for Christian feminists because it exemplifies the redemptive paradigm of feminist liberation: dissent against oppressive religious and political structures, taking the side of the oppressed, particularly women, living egalitarian relations across gender, race and class, and pointing toward a new time when these hierarchies will be overcome, and anticipating redeemed relations in a community of celebration here and now.

Sceptics might wonder whether, as Christians in search of a Jesus to ground our faith, we are not, once again, looking down a well and seeing our own faces reflected in the bottom. However one construes the complex relation between "objective history" and subjective constructions reflective of our own desires, this reading of the Jesus story as reflecting and grounding our own story resonates with Christian feminists.

If we claim the Jesus story because it echoes our own story, why not just discard it and tell our own story? I would resist doing this for several reasons. Most basically, claiming the Jesus story expresses a desire to continue to belong to the church, not as a hierarchical structure, but as a community of faith, to have historical roots, to lay claim to a people, while at the same time calling that people to repent of its patriarchy and to understand its calling to redemption as liberation from patriarchy. Feminist Christianity is the true gospel of Jesus.

CHRISTLIKE WOMEN

Yet the fact that Jesus was male is a major problem for claiming the Jesus story as the root story for feminist theology. The patriarchal church has used his maleness to insist that women cannot represent Christ. One solution is to deconstruct the assumption of patriarchal theology that maleness is normative for being fully human and the image of God. Jesus' maleness is declared to be one "accident" of his historical reality among others, like being Jewish, a first century Galilean. What distinguishes Jesus as a model is not his maleness, but his humanness as one who loves others and opts for the most vulnerable and oppressed, especially women. One imitates Christ by living in a like manner, not by displaying male genitalia.

While this deconstruction goes a long way to solving the problem, it does not overcome the basic social symbolic structure in which Jesus, a male, opts for women as objects of concern. Women can receive Jesus's liberative praxis, but women cannot liberate themselves and other women (and men). Thus, Christian feminist theology is pushed to go beyond telling the Jesus story as one of a "good man who really cared about us," and dares to parallel the Jesus story with the stories of women liberators. We also want to be able to experience the liberating women in our own cultures and ethnicities. Thus some Christian feminists begin to lift up female Christ figures of their own cultures.

William Clift, Footsteps, Mont Saint Michel, France, 1982.

The Jesus story still lives as touchstone for feminist theologians who continue to seek and celebrate their liberation in "memory of him."

In one example, African Christian theologians Mercy Oduyoye and Elizabeth Amoah tell the story of Eku, a Fante woman of Ghana, who led her people to a new land where they could find a good life, and risked her own life by tasting water from a pool to see if it was

poisonous before allowing her thirsty people to drink. For Oduyoye, the story of Eku parallels the story of Jesus as liberator for Ghanan people.

Many Christian feminists also question the focus on suffering and the cross as central to redemption. Others parallel Jesus and women as sufferers, a way of making women Christlike. But some want to ask what kind of suffering is redemptive? Is the passive suffering of victims redemptive, or does the mandate for women to suffer in this way in order to be Christlike simply justify and prolong evil?

Some theologians, like Delores Williams, have answered this question by decisively rejecting that victimized suffering is redemptive. What is redemptive is extricating ourselves from unjust suffering and changing the conditions that cause it. It is not Jesus's suffering and death that are redemptive, but rather his life of protest against injustice and solidarity in defense of life. This is the Jesus we need to imitate. Suffering is a factor in the liberation process, not as a means of redemption, but as the risk one takes when struggling to overcome unjust systems whose beneficiaries resist change. But the means of redemption is conversion, that is opening up to one another, changing systems of distorted relations, creating loving and life-giving communities of people here and now, not getting oneself tortured to death.

Feminist Christianity is the true gospel of Jesus.

TOWARD A NEW UNDERSTANDING

This dismantling of the patterns of patriarchal Christianity, reconstructing a radically different understanding of the key touchstones of Christian theology (God, humanity, male and female, sin and fall, Christ and redemption) raises the question of how feminist theology relates to scripture and tradition. Many Christian feminists remain stuck in the Protestant paradigm in which tradition is dismantled or bypassed by returning to what is seen as the original dispensation of revelation in Jesus of normative perfection. These theologians leap from an appropriation of this original "truth" to a reconstruction of theology for our own time and context, ignoring the intervening history.

This Protestant paradigm falsifies the earliest Christian movement as much more like our own vision than it really was, ignoring our actual heritage in a Christian history of ongoing reinterpretation. Although I believe there were touchstones in the early Jesus movement that can ground our vision, it also could only express its insights into new gender relations in a cosmology radically different from our own. We would not want to "go back" to those earliest paradigms of gender equality as the alternative to the patriarchal paradigms that arose to repress them.

We need to own as ongoing revelation the process of continuous reinterpretation that lies behind our restatements of redemptive gender equality in new, more socially embodied terms. This does not mean development of doctrine in a traditional Catholic sense, which allowed for only small explications of ideas already implicit, not radical paradigm shift in understanding these symbols. Rather we need a dynamic dialectical synthesis of the Catholic understanding of ongoing inspired development and the Protestant model of return to origins that dismantles distorted developments, seeing this, not as a literal "return" to some first-century world view, but as an insightful encounter with root stories that releases space for radically new envisionings.

As more African-American, Hispanic-American, Asian, African, and Latin American feminist theologians find their voices, they place their hopes for redemption from gender injustice in new cultural contexts. European or European-American feminists are asked to let go of their unconscious assumption that they can represent women as a whole. The differences among women who articulate their feminist theology in many particular histories and cultures need to be fully acknowledged. A genuine globalization of women's theologies in solidarity with each other can happen only when we dismantle the false universalization of one group of women.

Feminist theologians from multireligious backgrounds have also contributed to the reinterpretation of redemption and gender injustice. What happens to Christian feminist theology when Christian symbols are one resource among others, along with Shamanism and Buddhism, as with Korean Christian feminist Chung Hyun Kyung, or along with indigenous Latin American and African religions, as with Elsa Tamez and Mercy Oduyoye? Multireligious solidarity and syncretism are not only allowable, they are required, especially for women who can hardly say who they are apart from embracing all these aspects of themselves as persons and communities.

This synthesis of many religious traditions calls more monocultural Christian feminists, not to co-opt religious symbols not their own, but to be in solidarity with the justice and creativity of sisters engaged in multireligious interpretations of feminist theology. It also calls European and European-American Christian feminists to discover more about our own repressed plurality of identities.

Feminist liberation theology is a human project, not an exclusively Christian project. Revisioned Christian symbols can be one cultural resource among others in a struggle for liberation that can become global only if authentically rooted in many local contexts. This is, I think, the full promise of feminist liberation theology. We are only beginning to live it, to imagine its full implications. ■

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Sex and the Body In the Catholic Tradition

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

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Roman Catholic Christianity is sometimes presented as suffering from a solely negative view of sexuality, rooted in hostility to women. This view is sometimes contrasted with robust and positive views of sexuality in the "pagan" and the Jewish worlds, although the negative Catholic views are sometimes also blamed on Platonism, supposedly in contrast to the positive Jewish views. These negative views are seen as having been overcome either by Protestantism, which embraced sexuality as good and/or modern "enlightened" views, allowing modern Europeans to embrace sex as innocent and happy pleasure.

The reality of this historical trajectory is, predictably, much more complex. Neither Judaism nor the Greek and Roman cultures viewed sex as unambiguously good. The impeachment of American President Bill Clinton for stand-up sex with White House intern Monica Lewinsky in the corridor of the Oval Office testifies to the extreme ambiguity with which recreational sexual pleasure is still regarded, at least in American public culture.

Western European and North American cultures operate out of a deep split personality toward sexuality. I call this split the "puritan-prurient syndrome." On the level of super-ego, sex is disdained, feared, and treated as an obscene subject. On the "id" level, covert sexuality takes place in all sorts of places outside of marriage, often in exploitative and violent ways that are implicitly, if not explicitly, misogynist. Women are seen both as the creatures to be put on a pedestal as "beyond" sexual feelings, and as sexual objects to be used and discarded. If women themselves become agents of their own sexual activity, making their own decisions about when and how to enjoy sex and how to limit its reproduc-

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tive effects on their bodies, they are seen as disgraceful sinners who must be punished and forced to submit to male definitions of their sexual roles.

Western Europe and North America are by no means unique in this ambiguity toward sex. Sex is seen as a volatile force in most cultures, to be variously used, repressed, and channeled, and this combination of use and repression is entangled with ambiguous views of women as desired virgin, honored mother, and despised whore. It is not ambiguity, but the particular configurations of the ambiguity that differ somewhat from culture to culture. Western European and North American cultures have been shaped by their roots in Catholic and Protestant Christianities, both in their overt Puritanism and their covert revolts against religious constraints. In this essay, I propose to review something of the teachings on sexuality in the Latin Catholic tradition that have shaped this situation.

These teachings emerged from early Christian asceticism, but they are not a straight-line development. Early Christian asceticism had elements of a countercultural, subversive movement against the dominant patterns of family and society. In the new Christian "family," class and ethnic lines were leveled, and women emancipated to preach alongside men. In Christ, the "orders" of a fallen creation were overcome: there was no more division of male and female, Jew and Greek, slave and free.

Very early, however, within the first two generations of the Christian movement whose traditions are part of the New Testament, a reaction against the radical implications of this idea of the church as a new egalitarian family arose that sought to reinstate patriarchal Paulinists of the New Testament. Equality of women with men, slaves with masters, ethnic groups with each other are spiritualized in a way that reaffirms patriarchal social hierarchy. Those liberated by Christ will now voluntarily obey their fathers, husbands, and masters as the Lord, and will thereby earn their reward in Heaven.

In the second and early third centuries, radical movements such as Marcionism, Montanism, and Valentinianism, which equated Christianity with rejection of sex and marriage in a way that emancipated women from social subjugation and allowed them prophetic leadership in the church, continued to flourish. But the church fathers who shaped the church that became dominant set their face against such views. Gradually there emerged victorious a complex synthesis of patriarchy and celibacy.

In this synthesis, celibacy for men was identified with male clerical hierarchy over the laity. Male church authority sought (not always successfully) to strip female celibacy of its subversive potential as liberating women for new roles of public power and to confine nuns to strict monastic enclosure, enforced by obedience to male clerical superiors. Marriage was affirmed for the laity, although as a spiritually inferior choice to celibacy. Within that state of life, women's subordination was doubly affirmed, to their husbands and to clerical authorities, while their sexual and reproductive roles were linked to sin and death.

Sexual renunciation was still linked with higher holiness for Christians of the late Patristic and Medieval eras, but its subversive potential as leveling class and gender hierarchy was curbed and incorporated into a new status hierarchy that included the dominance of a celibate clergy over a married laity. Yet sexual renunciation itself continued to carry a radical vision in late Patristic asceticism, a promise of overcoming not only sin, but of dissolving the limits of finitude governed by the rule of the cosmos that held the body hostage to death.

As Peter Brown has shown in his masterful work on sexual renunciation in early Christianity, Christians came to focus much more insistently on the body and the repression of its needs for food, sleep, and sexual urges than pagan ascetics, because it had a more radical vision of its potential for tranformation. Males of the pagan classical world looked on the body as an inferior, not unlike the inferiority of slaves and women. The philosopher, as respectable paterfamilias, should discipline these inferiors to serve the patriarchal household, kinship group, and civic society. But they should also give them their due.

There was a place for the delights of marriage and the table, although excesses should be curbed. Well-tempered sexual intercourse to produce well-formed, legitimate children was a responsibility of every householder, and the prime purposes of women's existence. But in due time, the philosophically-inclined should reduce these pleasures to the minimum, even letting sexual intercourse go altogether, in preparation for that separation of soul from body in which the intellect would soar free to the stars unencumbered by mortal clay.

Christians entertained a more unthinkable notion, the resurrected body. Far from doffing the body at death to live an immortal life of the soul alone, the Christian expected the body to be transformed, losing its urges to sex, food, and sleep that signaled its fall into mortality. This immortalized body, the companion of the soul, would be exalted with it into a new redeemed world of the "new creation." The urges of the body must be more severely suppressed to anticipate this transformation in which the body's finitude would be discarded in a redemptive transmutation.

For ancient Christianity, the incarnation of the Logos of God in the body meant something different from a modern Christian use of that doctrine to claim an embrace of mortal physicality. For patristic thought, the incarnation of God into the human body meant that the immortal, unchangeable substance of God has descended into mortal flesh in order to transmute it into an immortalized form, free from death and decay. God became human to make us divine was the ancient understanding of incarnation, not to celebrate but to overcome the frailties of the flesh that tied it to corruptibility and death.

Many of the forms of Christianity of the second century sought to live out that vision as one that was already transforming daily life by a deep renunciation

of all the ways the finite body reproduced itself through temporal processes. By such practices as sexual continence, fasting, and vigils, Christians anticipated the definitive transformation of the bodily in the redeemed cosmos whose imminent arrival they expected, and their repressed bodies became a sign that they had already shifted their allegiance from the present world to the world to come.

Renunciation of sex was seen as a key expression of world renunciation, not necessarily because sex was the most urgent need of the body. Indeed, emaciated people lose sexual urges. For many monks, hunger, the cravings of the belly, were more insistent bodily demands and less easy to control. But sex tied the person to marriage and family, to the pride and avarice of the kinship group that desired to reproduce the large houses, the great landholdings with its crowds of slaves and clients, the demand for power and status in the civil and imperial world. Through sex and marriage, "the world" as a social system of power and possessions was reproduced. To renounce marriage was to renounce that "world" in all its social, economic, and political implications.

Some of this radical vision of liberation through asceticism lingers in Eastern church fathers, such as Gregory Nyssa, writing in the last quarter of the fourth century. For Nyssa, sex, physical procreation, the temporal corruptibility of the body, were no part of the original intention of God for creation. Humans were created with spiritual bodies and would have reproduced by some "angelic" means if they had not fallen. Maleness and femaleness were there only potentially, in view of the fallen state to come.

With the fall from God, the body took on "coats of skin," the attributes of corruptible finitude. Physical sex for procreation then became necessary in order to compensate for the loss of the original immortality of the spiritual body. Gregory sees the reascent of the embodied self from the fallen state as a long process of reawakened communion with God, reflected in the inner spiritual nature of the mind or soul. It is the attachment to temporal needs—pride, avarice, bondage to sexual pleasure—that are to be given up through the disciplines of ascetic renunciation and contemplative thought.

Thereby the self also frees itself from the anxieties associated with these needs: the fears that wealth, once accumulated, will be taken away; the attachment to a spouse and the pride of progeny dashed by early death. Virginity, for Nyssa, is this inner spiritual process of freeing the self from greed and fear associated with attachment to transient material things. Marriage and sex are one expression of these attachments, but not the most insistent of them. Nyssa, himself married in his youth, can envision a chaste wedlock gradually given up for higher philosophical pleasures.

Nyssa's focus is the deeper process of self-transmutation of body/soul by which the Christian anticipates a final transformation in which the material body is changed into the spiritual body of the Resurrection. Then the body will lose its temporal accretions or "coats of skin" that tie it to eating, evacuation, procreation, sleeping, and decay and become the immortalized body that can share in the endless ascent of the soul to fuller and fuller communion with God, going on "from glory to glory."

By the late fourth century the monastic movement had gained ascendancy in Eastern and Western Christianity, and there was the beginning of the effort to insist that the clergy remain celibate, although this would have indifferent success in Latin Christianity until it was forcibly enforced by the twelfth-century reforms. Then the problem was dealt with by defining clerical marriage as concubinage and the offspring as bastards who could not enter the clergy or inherit church property.

In the fourth century, Latin world hostility grew to the ascendancy of the monastic class, and their denigration of marriage. Two Christian writers, Helvidius and Jovinian, sought to mediate this conflict by defining marriage and celibacy as equally holy. Mary was seen by these writers as epitomizing the holiness of both states of life, having lived before marriage and bore her first son in the virginal state, while assuming sexual relations and bearing further children to Joseph thereafter. The enthusiasts for celibacy were declared to be bordering on Manichaeianism, the belief that matter and the body are evil and reproduction is to be shunned.

In the early Christian "family," class and ethnic lines were leveled, and women emancipated to preach alongside men.

These efforts to give equal status to marriage and celibacy were vehemently attacked by St. Jerome, who declared that Mary had never departed from the virgin state, the brothers of Jesus of the New Testament being cousins, not children of Mary. In his exaltation of the superiority of virginity and sexual continence over the debasement of sex, Jerome's rhetoric threatened to erase any difference between sex within marriage and prostitution.

Augustine sought to repair the negative impression created by Jerome's intemperate defense of the superiority of virginity and continent widowhood to marriage. In his treatise "On the Good of Marriage," he sought a more measured approach. He defended marriage as embued with three "goods": progeny, fidelity, and sacrament. These purposes of marriage give the good benefits of producing children and channeling the

sexual urge into faithful wedlock, thus guarding against the worse evil of fornication. In addition, marriage symbolizes the union of Christ and the church, and thus expresses the sacramental bond of Christian community.

Augustine would gradually back away from his earlier Origenist view of original creation, rejecting the common Eastern Christian view that there would have been no sexual differentiation and reproduction in Paradise. In Augustine's later exegesis of Genesis I, he would come to accept the view that sexual reproduction would have taken place in the original creation. Gender differentiation, marriage, sexual coupling for reproduction were all part of God's original plan, not things added only after or with a view to the Fall.

Yet, Augustine would also limit these affirmations in ways that made marital sex distinctly third-rate, bordering on sinfulness. In Augustine's view, although there would have been physical sex and reproduction in God's original plan, this sex would have been devoid of the hot pleasure of male sexual ejaculation. Concupiscence, Augustine believed, had come about only through the division in the self which expressed division from God. Thus, in our present fallen state, sex, even in marriage, carried with it sin. Through it the original sin of Adam was passed on to the next generation.

Thus Augustine's view of sex, even in chaste marriage, was distinctly ambiguous. Although the end, children, was good and continued to be blessed by God, reproduction could not take place without sinful "lust." The sexual act was itself the means of generating sinful offspring, who could only become children of God through baptism. This sinful act of sex allowed for the good end of reproduction (hence forgiven) and yet still sinful in its objective nature and consequences.

Paradisal sex also differed from present fallen sex in other ways. Women would not have been "deflowered" by it, but would have retained their "virginal integrity," like Mary, in both the sexual act and parturition, suffering no labor pains, a view that suggests something less than fully embodied sexual "penetration" and childbirth. This view would be expanded to claim that women would not have menstruated; women's monthly bleeding was an expression of their "cursed" fallen state.

Moreover, Augustine, like Jerome, is convinced that marital sex and procreation are no longer commanded by God, although still allowed in the Christian era. In creating humanity, God blessed reproduction in order to produce a certain number of humans from which the elect would be drawn. The Patriarchs of the Old Testament were even allowed multiple wives in order to hasten this process by which the generations of humanity were born to the time of Christ. But with the birth of Christ, the new era of the virginal has dawned in human history, anticipating the culmination of this present world and the dawn of the New Creation, when marriage will no longer be necessary. It is virgins who represent this redeemed era. To be fully dedicated to Christ is to put aside reproductive sex. Thus Augustine suggests that marriage is in some sense sub-Christian. Although still retaining its "goods" from its creational mandate, it is essentially flawed by the Fall and will have no place in the age to come, which Christian life should mirror and anticipate.

These views of Augustine would be passed on to the medieval Latin church as orthodoxy. Sex outside of marriage was totally sinful, but sex even within marriage was degrading and to be hedged around with severe restrictions. No contraception was allowed, since sex was allowable only for its main "good," procreation. But women should submit to the sexual demands of their husbands, even if pregnant or if their husbands were violent or suffered from leprosy, in order to avoid the far worse possibility that their husbands might seek sexual gratification elsewhere. The definition of sex in marriage as "remedy of concupiscence" defined wives as a kind of sink for their husbands' sexual urges, regardless of the personal or physical effects on their wives.

Repression of sex, even within marriage, was seen as contributing to holiness, if both partners agreed to it. Moreover, the medieval church advocated periodic abstinence from sex on holy days and special seasons of the year. It reinforced these recommendations by implanting the suspicion that children born defective were the result of sex during forbidden seasons or engaged in with too much ardor (a theory that may have accelerated the tendency to abandon deformed children). Thus, the celibate clergy injected into its teaching on marital sexuality its antisexual hostility and attempted to imbue the "work" of the marital bed with feelings of shame, guilt, and degradation. These attitudes lingered in official Catholic teachings and in the psychology of many married Catholics until the mid-twentieth century.

The medieval church developed no spirituality for the married laity, but only offered to them the option of sexual continence if they would be truly holy. Unlike the Greco-Roman culture which allowed the married to see the procreative fire in their bodies as an expression of the same divine energy that sustained the cosmos, Christians were taught to see only shame in their sexual coupling, separating them from God.

The degrading of married sexuality in the light of antisexual purity also shaped a mystical spirituality for men and women built on sexual sublimation. The man taught to abhor attraction for real women could meditate on vivid visions of being joined in marriage with a beautiful young Virgin Mary. Christian women, warned against all sexual feelings that lurk in their own bodies and those of men, could yet be admired as saints when they had visions of being espoused by Christ as celestial lover, and of birthing and suckling the baby Jesus. The powerful urges for a sexuality united to affective love for spouse and children, rigorously repressed on the physical level, reappear as vivid spiritual visions, but in a way that despised rather than rehabilitated their negative counterparts.

The sixteenth-century reformers revolted against this system of male celibate clericalism triumphant over sex and marriage. But the Protestant Reformation would only revise rather than deeply transform the Augustinian presuppositions about nature, sin, sex, and gender on which it was based. In his writings on marriage, Luther insisted that marriage is the vocation to which all humans are called by God. The Catholic exaltation of celibacy is a violation of God's commandment to marry and its blessing in the order of creation.

Not only are all humans called to marriage as their creational vocation and duty, but all humans have sinned. Following Augustine, Luther saw sin as corrupting sex into lust, but he also rejected the ascetic belief that the urges of lust could be transcended through transforming grace and spiritual discipline. Celibacy denies the divinely-given remedy for lust through marriage and so leads celibates to a worse sinfulness of unmarried promiscuity, not to a higher holiness. For Luther, all are called to marry, both to obey God's command in creation and to avoid the greater evil of fornication.

Both Protestant and Catholic leaders agreed on the Augustianian teaching that women were created subordinate to men and have incurred the greater sin through their priority in disobedience that caused the Fall. For Protestant women are all to marry and to be subjugated to their husbands. For Catholics, most should marry and some may choose the higher vocation of celibacy, but both choices carry the demand to submit to male authority, whether that of husbands for wives or clergy for nuns. Both are to lead silent, subordinate lives and play no public leadership roles in church or society.

Yet the Reformation was fought in highly sexualized language. The Protestants accused Catholic celibates, priests, and nuns of practicing secret fornication under the robes of higher holiness. Catholics, in turn, impugned the virtues of Protestant clerical marriage, implying that Luther and his confreres violated their vows of celibacy to marry because of an incapacity to contain their lustful urges. Catholic teachings on the counter-Reformation reaffirmed traditional teaching that priests are to be celibate and that celibacy expresses a higher holiness than marriage. Marriage, while allowable, should be limited to procreation or at least may never intentionally prevent procreation. Married people should disdain sexual pleasure and sublimate their sexual urges through prayer as much as possible, ideally choosing to have no sex at all, either throughout their marriage or after producing children.

These teachings, which rejected contraception and the possibility of the goodness of sexual pleasure for its own sake, continued to characterize Catholic teachings into the 1950s, reinforced by modern Catholic campaigns against birth control. The Second Vatican Council in the 1960s gave voice to the various movements seeking to revise Catholic teachings and practice in a number of areas, including the question of the sinfulness of contraception within marriage. The effort to revise these teachings on the purposes of sex inevitably involved questioning the traditional Augustinian view that sexual pleasure is inherently disordered and sinful and allowable only within marriage for the purpose of procreation or at least without impeding procreation.

Protestantism, with its renewed Augustinian theology, accepted the teaching that contraception was sinful until the mid-twentieth century. The birth control movement that arose in the 1920s was linked to feminism and socialism and thus was seen as a radical challenge to traditional society. However, by the 1930s, the birth control movement had been tamed and transferred to conservative concerns about over-population and the proliferating numbers of poor, ethnic minority groups, at a time when the white middle class of Western Europe and the United States had adopted a two- to three-child family.

English and American Protestants accommodated to the demand for family planning in the 1930s to the 1950s, and Roman Catholicism softened its stance to allow the newly discovered "rhythm method" of periodic abstinence. By the 1950s, this had become the "Catholic" method of birth control, jokingly called "Vatican roulette." Many Catholic couples who faithfully sought to follow church teachings struggled to maintain their marital sexuality under a regime that demanded that they confine sexual activity to the part of the month when women menstruate and often feel less sexually inclined, a method which still resulted in unplanned pregnancies.

By the time the Second Vatican Council was opened in 1962 by the new liberal Pope John XXIII, revolt was stirring among a newly articulate Catholic laity ready to testify that the rhythm method did not work and caused inordinate anxiety in marital relations. Moral theologians, such as Charles Curran, were aware of this discontent and recognized the logical incoherence of allowing an elaborate method of avoidance of procreation through manipulation of the woman's monthly cycle, while disallowing contraception as a terrible sin. Clearly the rhythm method sought to separate sex from procreation, but ineffectively. Did its moral acceptability lie in the combination of periodic continence plus ineffectiveness?

Women's subordination was affirmed, while their sexual and reproductive roles were linked to sin and death.

During the Vatican Council, articles by theologically trained laity and moral theologians criticizing the traditional teachings circulated among the council fathers. One such collection was the book endorsed by Bishop Thomas D. Roberts, SJ, *Contraception and Holiness*. Pope Paul VI recognized the danger of a dispute on the council floor over this volatile issue, and avoided it by forming a Papal Commission on Birth Control to meet separately from the council. The council was to include liberal and conservative bishops and moral theologians, but also experts on demography and even married couples! Three married couples drawn from the Catholic Family Movement were included; thus for the first time the church was actually seeking to listen to the experience of married men and women on the issue.

The American leaders of the Catholic Family Movement, Pat and Patty Crowley, collected testimony from couples of their movement about the effectiveness and stress of the rhythm method. During the meetings of the commission, some moral theologians and clergy listened to this testimony with surprise and concern. Clearly until that time such theologians had pontificated about marital sexuality, but had never really listened to those who practiced it.

The result was a volte face in church teaching. The majority of the commission voted overwhelmingly for a change in which all medically approved methods of contraception could be used within marriage and within an overall commitment to faithful marital relations and childbearing.

Nevertheless, a few bishops and moral theologians who clung to the traditional view were outraged and believed that any change on this teaching would threaten the laity's faith in the church's capacity to teach inerrantly. One bishop was quoted by Patty Crowley as exclaiming at the end of the commission, "What about all those who have been sent to Hell because of disobedience to the church's teachings?" to which Crowley replied, "Your Excellency, do you think that God obeyed all your orders?"

While Crowley might take such divergence between God and church authorities lightly, for some Catholic authorities this was a serious question. Those who objected to the commission report convinced Pope Paul VI to reject the conclusion of his own commission and reaffirm the traditional anticontraceptive teaching. The pope did so by issuing the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. The result was a major revolt in the ranks of moral theologians, priests, bishops and most of the laity. The open questioning of the validity of the encyclical by priests and theologians, such as Charles Curran, was quickly suppressed by church discipline. But most laity voted with their bodies by simply refusing to comply with Catholic teachings on this issue and no longer regarding it as a sin to be confessed or as a reason to leave the church.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, most educated Catholics in the Western world have gone their own way on contraception, even while the present pope, John Paul II, has continually reasserted the unchangeability of the traditional teaching, thus effectively preventing debate on it. The chief victims of the teachings are poorer Catholics, particularly in Africa and Latin America, where the influence of the Catholic church prevents access to contraception. The group Catholics for Contraception is seeking to reopen the debate on the Catholic church's anticontraceptive teachings.

At international meetings of the United Nations gathered to shape world policies on population and development, such as that held in Cairo in 1994, the Vatican has stood with conservative Muslims and a handful of Catholic countries, such as Malta, in continuing to oppose contraception, not only for heterosexual couples, but even for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases such AIDS. For the Vatican, Augustine's views still reign: sex is only for procreation within marriage and its morality sinful outside of that context, even for married heterosexual couples. Sex is never allowable for the unmarried, and homosexual sex is always disordered and sinful, even if it takes place between a faithful, committed couple.

Catholic teachings have thus come to be seen as a major obstacle to liberalized laws on contraception, legal abortion, divorce, and remarriage, and the acceptance of homosexuality as a normal human variant of sexual orientation. Since the Vatican brooks no debate on these issues, most Catholics who have changed their minds on these issues simply absent themselves from public argument to go their own way in good conscience, selectively practicing those aspects of Catholicism which they find meaningful, such as the liturgy and the teachings on social justice.

In the 1970s, the American organization of Catholic theologians, the Catholic Theological Society, attempted a major work of revisionist sexual ethics, published under the title *Human Sexuality*. In this work, they moved away from the view that sex was moral only within the legal boundaries of marriage between heterosexuals and for the purpose of procreation. They accepted the Papal Birth Control Commission's view that all medically approved methods of contraception were acceptable, but they went farther. They revised the criteria by which sex is to be judged as moral or immoral.

In the view of these writers, sex is moral to the degree that it is integrated into friendship and takes place in the context and is an expression of the qualities of love, commitment, fidelity, and mutual concern for one another. Sex is immoral to the degree that is departs from this context of friendship and lacks qualities of love, commitment, fidelity, and mutuality. The difference between moral sex that expresses such moral qualities and immoral sex which does not is a spectrum rather than a fixed legal boundary. Sex is the more immoral to the degree that is violent, uncommitted, exploitative, and lacks mutuality. Sex grows into being more moral to the degree that the couple grows into greater

love and friendship, commitment, and mutuality.

Thus moral or immoral sex is a question of the moral growth of the couple in their over-all relationship to each other. Such a revisionist view of what makes sex moral or immoral would revolutionize traditional teachings. It would mean that a married heterosexual relationship in which sex is violent, abusive, and exploitative, where the man dominates the woman and exerts his demands selfishly without regard to her feelings and needs, is deeply immoral. By contrast an unmarried relationship which has qualities of love and mutuality, although somewhat defective in commitment, is nevertheless more moral than an abusive relationship in marriage.

This study by the Catholic Theological Society was not accepted as official teaching by the American Catholic bishops, who refused to grant it their imprimatur. Yet it stands as an important expression of what I believe should be the direction of a revised sexual ethic for Christians (and all people) today. As I noted in the opening of this essay, the negative teachings of the church on sexuality as degrading has not resulted in a Western society that is abstemious, but also has not produced a healthy view of sex. Rather, what has developed is the "puritan-prurient" syndrome: sex is disdained as beneath respectability and exploited pornographically, both of which privilege men over women.

What is needed for the church, and for moral culture and socialization, is a new ars erotica. Such an erotic art would seek to help people develop their capacity for sexual pleasure and enjoyment, while integrating it into deep friendship, so that sex becomes increasingly an expression of love, commitment, and caring that seeks to be truly mutual. This process of developing the capacity for erotic delight in sexual activity, while integrating it into friendship and care, should be understood as a process of moral growth over many years. It is not a matter of fixed legal boundaries that separate the married from the unmarried, the heterosexual from the homosexual, those who wish to procreate (which may be homosexuals) from those who do not. The development of such an ars erotica should not be an esoteric or pornographic literature. It should become part of culture that is discussed with the young. Youth, males and females, should be taught during puberty (perhaps in new coming-of-age ceremonies, as well as in general socialization) how to develop their capacity for erotic delight, practice contraception so they can responsibly choose when to have a child, and regard their sexual partner as one to be loved and cherished. They should be helped to see this as a process of moral development, not a once-for-all leap from virginity to marriage that can take place overnight at the point where church and state pronounce them "man and wife."

The impact of Christian Puritanism, Catholic and Protestant, has prevented the emergence of a genuine ars erotica in Western culture, and has often resulted in the repression of positive erotic cultures in other societies through the impact of missionaries. Although cultures such as that in India have traditional cultures celebrating the erotic, this was regarded as shameful and shocking by Westerners. Moreover in patriarchal societies such erotic cultures were deformed by lack of mutuality of men and women.

Renunciation of sex was seen as a key expression of world renunciation.

The authors of the study also revised the traditional views of homosexuality. Rather than the view that God "makes" all people heterosexual and allows sex only within procreative marriage, the authors lean to the view that homosexual orientation is normal and hence God-given for some regular percentage of humanity. Such persons are not to be denied sexual fulfillment, nor is the lack of procreative potential an impediment to the goodness of such sexuality, since most human sexual acts are not procreative, both by nature (periodic and postmenopausal infertility) or by choice.

Homosexual sexuality, like heterosexual sexuality, should strive to develop the qualities of expressing friendship, mutuality, and fidelity. Like heterosexual sex and judged by the same standards, homosexual sex should be judged moral or immoral to the extent that it is loving, mutual, and faithful or not. Here faithfulness is taken out of its legal definition of marriages recognized by the state, and becomes a moral quality of committed concern and determination to care for the other and not to betray the other in deceitful and double-dealing ways.

Homosexual relations also have languished under the veil of shame and exploitation by dominant males. An ars erotica that includes gay males and lesbians is the product of the modern gay and lesbian liberation movements. Here too male voices have often dominated. The female tendency to integrate sex into deepening friendship has often been overshadowed by the male preference for casual relations. Gay people have only begun to ask what deeper friendship and fidelity mean for gay relations in a way that is not simply the mimic of heterosexual monogamy with its defective legalism and exclusivism.

Thus, Western cultures are a long way from imagining, much less seeking, to inculcate through sensitive socialization, a happy celebration of sexual pleasure, connected to deepening friendship, an ars erotic that brings together the three loves of eros, philia, and agape: sexual delight, friendship, and mutual service. The time is long overdue for such a cultural development. Let us begin. ■

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The Mantra of "Anti-Catholicism": What is Bigotry?

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

EDITOR'S NOTE: DURING THE LAST YEAR THE CHARGE OF ANTI-CATHOLICISM has increasingly been a tool of political one-upmanship in the U S political arena. The accusations being lobbed from both Democrats and Republicans have come in response to issues ranging from the House chaplain controversy to the uproar in the District of Columbia and on the Hill on insurance coverage for contraceptives. Besides the expected election-year political maneuvering, however, what is the bigger picture behind these allegations? Catholic theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether situates this trend in a broader cultural context.

IT HAS BECOME COMMON AMONG right-wing Catholics, such as the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, to pillory various cultural phenomena in the United States —ranging from movies such as *Priest* and *Dogma* to Catholics for a Free Choice—as "anti-Catholic."

Significantly, this label is being used most frequently against liberal Catholics who hold views other than those of the Catholic League and other Catholic right organizations about what it means to be Catholic. My own recent experience is a case in point. This spring I was invited to give the Swan lecture (an annual lectureship) at Nebraska Wesleyan University, a Methodist institution. My topic focused on my new book, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family* (Beacon Press, 2000). It had nothing specifically to do with Catholicism, nor was I invited as a Catholic. The chancery of the diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska, mounted a major campaign against my speaking, declaring that I was "anti- Catholic" and "practiced witchcraft." The college itself was attacked as "anti-Catholic" for having invited me. The chancery threatened the college with dire consequences if they did not disinvite me: advising students in area Catholic high schools not to attend Nebraska Wesleyan and banning Nebraska Wesleyan students from practice-teaching in Catholic high schools.

The school did not back down on the invitation, but they were unable to respond clearly to the charge of "anti-Catholicism." During my visit there, I was repeatedly quizzed as to what I had done "wrong." The fact that this was a false charge related to an internal Catholic conflict, not a question of "anti-Catholicism," could not be publicly clarified. The school was intimidated by the attack.

What is going on here? Is there a rise in anti-Catholic bigotry in the U.S. from which groups such as the Catholic League need to defend the "rights" of Catholics?

There is a history of anti-Catholic bigotry in American Protestantism of some generations ago. In the 19th century, Protestant mobs burned Catholic convents. Right-wing Protestants, such as the leaders of Bob Jones University, still hold to the idea that the pope is the anti-Christ and that the Catholic church is "satanic." But these views are seen by almost all U.S. Protestants as odd fossils of old religious wars that are not to be taken seriously.

In short, the charge of "anti-Catholicism" is being used as a scare tactic by the Catholic right in the service of repression of progressive Catholic views.

American Catholics, since the Kennedy administration, have become fully integrated into American society. They are generally treated respectfully by the dominant culture and media as a mainstream component part of American religious diversity despite the occasional exploitation of stereotypes of nuns. There is no evidence of a rejuvenation of the old type of anti-Catholic bigotry in the United States, stemming from Protestant-Catholic conflicts of the Reformation. Official Protestant-Catholic

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relations are ecumenical. Indeed, the Catholic Church and the German Lutheran Church have officially declared that they have come to an agreement on the chief doctrinal issue of the Reformation: justification by faith.

Rather, what is going on today is a new schism and conflict, stemming from the Second Vatican Council and new Catholic liberal thought, one that divides Catholics from each other. The mantra of "anti-Catholicism" from the Catholic right is primarily a reflection of this internal Catholic conflict. This term is being used by the Catholic right to claim that they and they alone are "authentic" Catholics, and Catholics that hold progressive views are not Catholics, are hostile to "authentic" Catholicism, and hence are "anti-Catholic." Furthermore, non-Catholics in the larger society who listen respectfully to the views of progressive Catholics are therefore also "anti-Catholic." In short, the charge of "anti-Catholicism" is being used as a scare tactic by the Catholic right in the ser vice of repression of progressive Catholic views.

It might be useful in this context to sort out the fundamental difference between critical thought and bigotry. Bigotry, whether racial or religious, is a stereotyping of an entire other religious or racial group as essentially evil and demonic by nature. It is not factual and by nature cannot be factually proven. It sets up the other group as the antithesis of all that is good and Godly, characteristics supposedly monopolized by the bigot's own group. Catholics have practiced this kind of bigotry against Protestants, claiming that they are "heretics." Both Catholics and Protestants have a long and evil history of using this kind of demonic language against Jews as a religious and ethnic group.

Critical thought is the fundamental opposite of such bigotry. Critical thought is based on nuanced judgments founded on historical reality. There is a world of difference between saying the pope is the anti Christ and making historically fac-

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Resisting the Silence

REFLECTIONS ON JOAN CHITTISTER'S DECISION TO SPEAK

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

EDITOR'S NOTE: IN 1995, POPE JOHN PAUL II ISSUED THE ENCYCLICAL Ordinatio Sacerdotalis, *which prohibited even the discussion of women's ordination. On June 30, 2001, Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister spoke at the first international conference of women's ordination groups, in direct defiance of a Vatican order. In consultation with her community, Chittister's superior, Sister Christine Vladimiroff, also disobeyed the Vatican by refusing to impose on Chittister an official injunction barring her from presenting at or attending the conference. All but one of the 128 active nuns in the community signed a letter from Vladimiroff explaining her decision not to prohibit Chittister from attending the conference, and 35 nuns also requested that any punishment given to Chittister also be meted out to them.*

In reading this summer's reports about Sister Joan Chittister's decision to speak at the Women's Ordination Worldwide conference in Dublin after having been forbidden to do so by the Vatican, I was struck by the long, agonizing struggle that she went through to make this decision. It was almost as if she and the prioress of her order, Sister Christine Vladimiroff, who declined to give Chittister the Vatican's silencing order, had to vindicate the seriousness of their decision. They told us of the long process of discernment they went through, how they discussed and prayed over the decision together. They surely wanted to present a different model of how decisions are made in community, in contrast to the top-down orders of the Vatican. Perhaps they also were resisting the assumptions of male church leaders that women's decisions are made frivolously, impulsively, by showing the depths of their process of prayerful consultation, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the collective wisdom of the group. All this is understandable. Much is at stake personally and as members of their community; their identities, their livelihoods, their standing in the church.

One fears, however, that the Vatican leaders care not a whit for the prayerfulness of their decision. It must have been evident immediately that the Vatican order was so outrageous that it called for some form of resistance. The only question was how to do so most effectively. In my view, the Vatican has no right to "agonize" us for one minute. By what prerogative does this leadership class assume they can tell women and men that they may not discuss the issue of women's ordination? Is our capacity for ordination not something which women can discuss? Are the underlying assumptions that

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women's humanity lacks the capacity to image God, to represent Christ, to be priest of the church, not something that women can debate? Are these assumptions that maleness is apt for such representation of God and femaleness is not beyond inquiry and questioning?

Perhaps the real issue behind the Vatican's command is the very untenability of the arguments that exclude women from ordination. These arguments assume an obsolete anthropology of women's lack of full humanity, their status as an incomplete human, as a "misbegotten man," in Thomas Aquinas' language derived from Aristotle's mistaken theory of biological reproduction. One has only to discuss these theories to reveal their absurdity, their lack of credibility. Perhaps it is just this lack of credibility, the inability to make a convincing argument, that lies behind the silencing. For to discuss the rationale of the exclusion of women from ordination is itself to reveal its dubiousness to people who are accustomed to seeing women achieve the highest levels of education and leadership today.

Therefore the Vatican ducks critical examination by forbidding public debate. But in doing so it also shifts the issue. Instead of discussion of ordination itself, of the nature of priesthood and of women, and their compatibility, the issue becomes authority and obedience. The finality of authority judges what is thinkable, rather than reasonable thought judging what is authoritative. The Vatican claims to represent God, Christ, as ultimate truth and power in one. Its commands supercede thought. But thereby the Vatican actually puts itself in deeper jeopardy. To question its orders is now to question its very claims to represent God and the church.

The Vatican backs up its orders with formidable threats. It claims it may expel us from our religious communities of many decades, cut us off from communion with God, deny us the sacraments. Really? Does it really believe that it can cut us off from our friends and from friendship with God? The arrogance of such presumptions is breathtaking. The very exaggeration of the threats throws the claims of ultimate power into doubt. Such claims excite disgust, contempt. One is even a bit embarrassed by the rant that seeks to conceal, but only displays, the nakedness of the king.

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Surely we can do better than this as church, as those who seek to be the People of God. The key sign of being church is commitment to conversion to that sort of relationship by which we treat each other with respect as fellow human beings, made in the image of God and called to community with each other in God's grace. The Vatican discredits its claim to represent Christ when it behaves in a way that suggests that it has little understanding of what it means to enter that process. ■

THE MANTRA OF "ANTI-CATHOLICISM": WHAT IS BIGOTRY?

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tual statements about the papacy as an institution as having been corrupt at various times, having abused power and wealth and having been less than truthful about its own history. Garry Wills' new book, *Papal Sin*, is this kind of carefully documented critique of the papacy. Garry Wills is a Catholic. He makes his critique for the purpose of arousing critical thought among Catholics about these papal defects in the hope of promoting church reform. It is an insider's critique made by an esteemed Catholic scholar whose purpose is the improvement of the Catholic community's fidelity to its authentic values of truth and justice.

The name for such historically accurate critique of a community made from within for the purpose of calling it to reform is "prophetic" thought. This kind of insider's critique is the core of the Biblical tradition. The Hebrew prophets and Jesus called down stern critique of the leaders of their own community in order to recall them to their more authentic traditions. Civil discourse in any culture depends on being able to distinguish bigotry aimed at stereotypical demonization of the "other" from historically accurate criticism made for the sake of reform and renewal of authentic values. The Catholic right's misuse of the language of religious bigotry to repress progressive Catholics threatens both to cut the life line of renewal within Catholicism itself and to collapse the fundamental distinction between bigotry and critical thought that is at the heart of educated, civil society. In the Catholic right's book, Jesus and Jeremiah would be "anti-Catholic" if the kind of criticism that they made of the religious leaders of their time had been directed against Catholic leaders. It is time for American cultural leaders to stop being intimidated by such language and start exercising critical public evaluation of the accuracy and context of the use of the term "anti-Catholic." ■

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The War on Women

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

Several years ago, Martin Marty and others edited a prestigious series of important studies, published by Chicago University Press, on the rise of fundamentalisms across world religions. These books saw striking resemblances between the wave of fundamentalisms that were appearing in the Catholic and Protestant Rights in the West, in various Muslim fundamentalisms, in right-wing Judaism—particularly in Israel—and rightist forms of Hinduism, Confucianism and other Asian religions. All these movements seemed to have in common a rejection of modernity and efforts to reestablish the public role of religion, if not religious states, to counter what was seen as evil secularity, with its lack of established public values.

What the Marty books overlooked was perhaps the most striking similarity of all between these fundamentalist movements: namely their efforts to reestablish rigid patriarchal control over women and their hostility to women's equality, autonomous agency and right to control their own sexuality and fertility. This hostility to feminism or women's autonomous agency, particularly in sexuality and reproduction, links all these right-wing groups together. One can cite the extraordinary diatribe of Pat Robinson, who in a 1990 fundraising letter for a campaign to oppose a state ERA bill, opined that "feminism makes women leave their husbands, kill their children, destroy capitalism, practice witchcraft and become lesbians." Even the current Bush administration responded less-than-favorably when Jerry Falwell, backed up by Pat Robertson, suggested that the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon represented God's punishment of America for allowing the existence of such evils in this country as feminism, gays, abortion providers and the ACLU.

The Vatican is hardly less obsessed with women's equality and reproductive rights as the epitome of evil modern secularity and the cause of civilization's demise. At the 1994 UN conference on Population and Development at Cairo, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing and the five-year follow up meetings to these two conferences, the Vatican distinguished itself by tireless efforts to oppose any language that would declare that women's rights are human rights and that women's autonomous decision-making about their own sexuality and reproduction were integral elements of such rights.

The Muslim fundamentalism that has swept not only Afghanistan with the Taliban, but has major influence in Islamic states from Algeria and Egypt to Iran and Pakistan, has made war on women the major center of their campaign against modernity and what they regard as irreligion. In Afghanistan under the Taliban, women were banned from even primary school education, paid work and virtually any public presence. Even the windows of their houses had to be blacked out lest they be viewed going about their housework by men looking in from outside.

Why this war on women in the name of true religion? Women seem to have become the scapegoats for male fears of loss of control in society. In a world where anonymous global forces control and decide the economies of nations, control over women seems to become the place where men can imagine that they are reclaiming order against chaos, their dignity, honor and security in a world where there is little available on the macro level. With life out of control for many men, rigid control of the women in their homes becomes the place where they can imagine that they are still in charge.

But such a war on women is totally counterproductive from the point of view of any real emergence from poverty and underdevelopment for those impoverished societies most prone to such fundamentalist takeovers. Studies have long shown that women's development is absolutely key to betterment of society as a whole. The education of women is statistically closely linked with smaller families, better health and education of children, and emergence from poverty. An Egyptian study found that if women with no education had finished primary school, poverty would have been reduced by one-third. UN agencies have duplicated this study in several other countries.

Economic stability, political moderation and democratic order are closely linked with the higher education and public participation of women. The attack on women has every likelihood of increasing the gap between poverty and wealth, between the underdeveloped and the developed worlds, that fuels the anger of the fundamentalist backlash but is mis-

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guidedly channeled into attacks on women, not to mention attacks on public buildings such as the World Trade Center.

For me, one of the areas of particular concern is the potential for alliances between right-wing religious movements, one might say "ecumenical deals" of convenience between Christians—Protestant and Catholic—Jews, Muslims and others, all of whom make fallacious connections between criticisms of modern injustices and anxieties over loss of values with an effort to turn back the clock on women's emergence as equal human beings in society.

One can cite various efforts to make such alliances. In the United States, some right-wing Focus on the Family-type Protestants have long hoped for an alliance with conservative Catholics. Such an alliance has been impeded by the very different authority structure of the two religious groups and the not-too-distant memory among Catholics of the anti-Catholicism of fundamentalist Protestantism. Before September 11, George Bush clearly saw the placating of conservative Catholic demands against birth control, abortion, fetal tissue use and other such sex- and gender-related issues as the way to cement support for his next presidential election bid, having won the last time with a razor-thin majority in key states and by dubious tactics. The Bush administration courted and was photographed surrounded by smiling Catholic prelates.

Another such ecumenical deal was sought by the Vatican with conservative Muslims at the Cairo Population and Development conference in 1994. Hoping to create a common Catholic-Muslim front against birth control, abortion, women's equality and recognition of diverse forms of the family, the Vatican adopted rhetoric that pilloried Western feminists as assaulting the cultural traditions of the third world. In this effort, the Vatican posed as a defendant of cultural pluralism against Western cultural hegemony, an unlikely role given its own history as the epitome of Catholic or universalist religio-cultural hegemony.

This alliance partly fizzled because Muslims had reason to doubt the Vatican's sudden support of cultural pluralism, and also due to the somewhat different agendas of Muslims in population and development issues. Although some Muslims share a desire to subordinate women to an authoritarian male-dominated family and curb what they see as western sexual promiscuity among women and youth, they are not against birth control either in principle or in terms of contraceptive methods. Although generally against abortion, they adhere to a medieval Aristotelian view that the fetus is not ensouled until the 120th day of gestation and thus early abortion is not murder. Oddly enough, this is a position that was shared by medieval Catholics and was changed only in modern times in favor of the strangely disincarnate view of the fertilized egg as a full human being.

But such right-wing Christian and Muslims alliances against women's development and reproductive rights are still possible. Despite the horrendous treatment of women by the Taliban, George Bush recently suggested that the "Alliance against Terrorism" should not make women's rights a central issue since this would "offend Muslims."

Right-wing "ecumenical deals" between Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims often employ rhetoric that draws on a post-modern critique of liberalism, modernity and universalism in order to serve a reactionary, pre-modern agenda. One finds an appeal to cultural relativism or pluralism to assault efforts to establish a standard of universal human rights, particularly when these explicitly include women. Post-colonial resistance to Western colonialism, which historically denigrated the traditional cultures of colonized regions such as the Middle East, Africa and Asia, is evoked to suggest that any principles of universal human rights are cultural colonialism and Western hegemonic dominance. Feminism is billed as a purely Western, and of course culturally decadent, movement that is foreign to the cultural traditions of Africa, Asia or the Middle East.

Western liberals, who themselves invented and support such post-modern critique of Western cultural hegemony, are often at a loss to respond when such principles are used against them to support pre-modern social patterns that subordinate women. As I have mentioned, the Vatican made an appeal to exactly this kind of anti-Western rhetoric in its bid for a Catholic-Muslim alliance at Cairo. Such right-wing ecumenical deals typically feature males of both religious cultures shaking hands with each other, excluding women of either group from speaking for themselves. Western feminists are demonized, while women of the non-western culture are pictured as vulnerable innocents liable to corruption from said evil western feminists.

I had an experience of such an appeal to the myth of sacrosanct traditional culture to reject feminism ten years ago when I was teaching and lecturing on feminist theology in South Africa. At one of the Bantustan universities, an African Anglican priest in elegant cleric dress and speaking the Queen's English rose to declare that feminism could not be accepted in Africa "because it is against our culture." "And culture cannot be challenged," he declared in ringing tones. Earlier one of the African women had warned me against such an argument and given me a good response. I repeated her words, saying to the African priest, "Well, white racism is a part of white culture. Does that mean it can't be challenged or changed?"

This demonization of feminism as Western totally ignores the fact that for more than two decades women of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East have been creating their own contextualized forms of feminism and speaking about their rights and demands in their own voices. This globalization of feminisms was evident at the Beijing world conference on women, where representatives of women's movements from every nation gathered and networked with each other. This kind of networking across women's movements in every

country and culture could well represent the alternative to the kinds of ecumenical deals of men against women that are being hatched by the Vatican and right-wing Protestants and Catholics.

Religion Counts is an initiative that aims at a progressive ecumenical alliance between Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists that supports women's equality and reproductive rights. It met in Rome in January 1999 and issued the "Rome Statement on the International Conference on Population and Development," which sought to explore common principles on women, sexuality and reproductive rights across the world's major religions.

The United Nations and international media too often pay attention only to right-wing or fundamentalist religion. The media typically assumes that feminist Christians or feminists in other religions are marginal and don't really represent their own religious traditions. It is right-wing men in leadership positions who are treated as the authentic spokespersons for the religious tradition. Thus religion is unwittingly portrayed only in its conservative or fundamentalist expressions against secularism, thus reinforcing the right-wing religious polarity of religious values versus secular lack of values. Religion Counts seeks to mobilize and ally the progressive voices across the religious traditions and to make these progressive voices players in public culture and decision-making. This has remained a very small initiative, but I think represents an important alternative that needs to be cultivated.

Secularity is being portrayed as a failed modern experiment that has resulted only in valueless anomie. I think this is far too simple. There was and is in secular liberalism valuable principles that need to be vindicated, but that is the subject for another time. For the moment a key way to combat the claim that religiousness is authentically represented only by patriarchal, misogynist religious traditions is to vindicate the progressive, egalitarian principles within religious traditions themselves. This is essentially what Christian and Jewish feminisms have been doing for the last thirty years. Christian and Jewish feminists have mined their own traditions to show their potential for an egalitarian reading.

Muslim feminists today are also developing a similar strategy of pro-women, pro-egalitarian rereading of the core religious values. For Muslim feminists, such as Riffat Hassan, a Pakistani leader of Muslim feminism, the Koran is essentially an egalitarian scripture. Hassan and other Muslim feminists do close readings of the Koran to show that mistreatment of women, their segregation, imposition of the veil, and denial of education, political and business involvement is nowhere found in the Koran. Rather these traditions come from the incorporation of Arab or other local customs. In some cases the arguments for women's inferiority were actually imported from Christianity.

Women seem to have become the scapegoats for male fears of loss of control in society.

Hassan, for example, has done her major work on the texts for the creation of humanity, male and female, in the Koran. She has shown that the Koran lacks the tradition of Eve's creation from Adam's rib and her sin as the cause of the Fall. These concepts do not exist in the Koran, which contains only the story of Genesis I of the creation of the human, male and female, equally and at the same time. The stories of Adams rib and the apple were imported into later Islamic commentaries from neighboring Christianity and, as in Christianity, used to argue for women's inferiority and punishment. In a tradition that sees the Koran as the norm for what is truly Islamic, such arguments carry weight.

These more progressive and feminist voices of Islam need to be supported. These are the movements that not only can allow Western anti-Muslim bigotry to see a different, more progressive face of Islam, but also, even more important, can allow Muslim cultures themselves to embrace democratic, equal-rights agendas as compatible with Islam, rather than as humiliating Western cultural impositions. Interestingly enough, the current anti-terrorist campaign, with all its gross errors, and I count our bombing war against Afghanistan as a major error, has done one thing right. It has realized that if it is to build a Western-Muslim alliance, it cannot simply demonize Islam. It needs to publicize the positive, progressive voices of Islam. Thus most Americans have probably read and heard more about the diversity of the Muslim world in the last 75 days than all their previous lives.

The very existence of Muslim feminist movements and their strategies for a progressive, egalitarian reading of Islam have been well-kept secrets from most Western Christians. There has now been some discussion of such movements as Women Living Under Muslim Laws and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, but there needs to be much more. Progressive Muslim women's movements need to be given space to speak and develop. In the process it is important that the distortion that has happened in Western feminism, partly due to feminists themselves, but mostly through hostile interpretation by Western media, needs to be corrected.

It needs to be made clear again and again that equal rights for women is the best way for the whole society to emerge from poverty and authoritarianism. Feminism is not about women against men and children. Feminism is about men and women becoming real partners in a way that can develop their fuller humanity for both of them and will allow children the best chance to flourish. It is male domination that impoverishes us all. ■

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An Enlightened Church?

LETTERS TO YOUNG CATHOLICS

AS HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF YOUNG CATHOLICS GATHERED IN TORONTO, CANADA, TO celebrate World Youth Day, *Conscience* asked Catholic women from around the world to share their advice, encouragement, and insights on what it means to be a Catholic woman today.

REFLECTIONS ON BEING A CATHOLIC

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

Lecturer, author, and Catholic feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether has produced more than 30 books and is a board member of Catholics for a Free Choice.

At a recent interfaith dialogue conference a Christian scholar, who happens to reside in Boston, launched himself at me during a coffee break, declaring, "I don't see how any moral human being can be a Catholic!" Somewhat startled I replied, "I suppose you could say the same about being an American. How could any moral person be an American?" The issue for me is similar in both cases. How do we take responsibility for the communities in which we have been born and choose to live? Particularly when they reveal deep flaws that make them prone to do major evils in the world, as I believe is the case for both Catholicism and the United States as historical societies.

This reply seemed to make no sense to this man, and he continued his diatribe, making it necessary for me to explain what I thought was obvious, namely, that large numbers of Catholics do not agree with what church leaders say on particular topics and they form critical communities of opinion that oppose particular official teachings. One must realize that the fact that a particular cardinal or the pope makes some declaration does not mean that all Catholics identify with this teaching.

This individual then explained that his vehemence was conditioned by living in Boston and seeing the bad example of Cardinal Law's behavior in that city. This astonished me even more since it is precisely in Boston where Catholics have been most publicly outspoken in their criticism of this particular prelate. They are picketing the cardinal and demanding that he resign on a regular basis. Why would the evil deeds of Cardinal Law bring this gentleman to demand that all critical Catholics should leave the Catholic church? Does he want to leave the Catholic church to the Cardinal Laws and their supporters?

My own experience of being a Catholic has been perhaps distinctive in the American context. My mother taught me as a child to assume that Catholicism had both deep and profound truths and much nonsense and that I should seek the first and put aside the second. She carefully steered us in our education and church experience to see the better side of the church and avoid exposure to the nonsense. In my adult life I have done the same. I attend university parishes with intelligent leadership. I avoid being under retrograde clerical power. As a layperson teaching in a non-Catholic theological seminary, the hierarchy has little power over me and I don't hear from them personally. So I am not "oppressed" by them on a day-to-day level. On the other hand, I have had many excellent relations with progressive Catholic leaders, lay, nuns and priests and even some bishops.

But I am not fooled that my fairly comfortable Catholic niche is typical. I know the evil ways of much of this institution perfectly well. That is why I avoid getting under its power. But I am also committed to contributing something to the well-being of this particular historical community and supporting like-minded people that are concerned to do the same. This does not mean that I am "optimistic" that this church can be reformed as a whole. Quite simply I wish to lend myself to an effort to see that a diversity of positions continue within this community, that progressive Catholicism remains a vibrant option in the Catholic media, educational institutions and even parishes, that oppressive and retrograde views do not triumph and silence all other voices.

This does not mean that I spend all my life energy working on behalf of keeping progressive options open for Catholics. I live in an ecumenical world, both inter-Christian and inter-religious. In a certain sense, wherever I am, I am concerned to keep better options open for those who are struggling with their particular communities. But all these efforts connect with my particular concern to keep progressive options open for my own people. It is a worthy project. I expect others from other communities to support me in this project, just as I support them in theirs. ■

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Polarization Among Christians: Is Dialogue Possible?

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

Christians have been divided into hostile factions since the first generation of the church. Contrary to the myth that there was once a perfect consensus on Christian teachings, from which "heretics" later deviated and created schisms, there has always been diversity in the interpretations of the Christian faith. In the past this resulted in divisions into separate churches or sects, in which the less powerful group was driven out of existence by persecution or else divided churches continued as separate groups, preserving their distinct historical perspectives, theologies and polities.

In recent decades there has emerged a new form of division among Christians. Rather than separating into different churches, much of the division among Christians has taken the form of polarization between factions within the same historic churches. Instead of each church being relatively coherent in their views of theology and polity, defined against other churches with different views, an ecumenical similarity has developed between the progressive wings of many of the historically divided churches, but these progressive wings are deeply divided from the conservative and fundamentalists of their own historical churches. Progressive Catholics find they have more in common with progressive Protestants and vice versa than with the right wing of their own churches. The right wing of the different churches are less likely to be in ecumenical consensus with each other, but sometimes make tactical alliances against progressive Christians of their own churches on social issues, such as homosexuality, abortion and women's ordination.

Dialogue between separated factions within the same historic churches has proved very difficult. Some who have tried to engage in dialogue have concluded that these separate factions hold such different presuppositions that dialogue is impossible. One such effort to dialogue between progressive feminist Catholicism and right wing Catholicism was undertaken by Dr. Mary Jo Weaver, professor of religious studies at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. Several years ago she engaged in a multi-year process of discussion with leaders of the Catholic right, published in the book that she and Scott Appleby edited, *Being Right: Conservative American Catholics* (Indiana University Press, 1995). Weaver subsequently edited a parallel book on liberal American Catholics, called *What's Left?* (Indiana University Press, 1999).

Weaver went into the process of discussion and the editing of the book on the Catholic right with hopeful expectation that some consensus or at least an improved understanding between conservative Catholics and progressives such as herself would ensue. She came out of the dialogue convinced that this was impossible. Her presuppositions and those of the Catholic right were incompatible. Weaver reported on this process and her conclusions in a lecture given April 15, 1996 at Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California, called "What's Wrong with Being Right?"

Weaver is not the only person to come to the conclusion that dialogue is impossible between polarized factions within their historical church. Dr. Linda Thomas, African American Womanist theologian and a United Methodist minister, was part of a process of dialogue between right wing and progressive Methodists a few years ago. In her report on those meetings to our faculty at Garrett Evangelical Seminary, a Methodist related seminary in Evanston, Illinois, she expressed the conclusion of the liberals that dialogue with the conservatives was impossible, even though they had gone into the dialogue expecting to come out with better understandings of each other. Rather, the more the two sides dialogued, the more they realized that their differences were irreconcilable. For example, those who assume that the Bible is verbally inspired and those who see the Bible as a historical collection of writings that point to inspired insights, but don't contain it in a final and unchangeable form, simply do not have the same starting points for discussion.

For many years I have been a part of inter-religious dialogues, between Christians and Jews, Christians and Muslims and Christians and Buddhists. There have evolved certain ground rules

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of what makes dialogue possible. Each side must give up the assumption that they are out to convert the other side to their faith, that they alone have the true faith and the others are heretics, idolaters or demon-worshippers. Each starts with an attitude of mutual respect for each other's faith. They assume that there is some truth in both religious perspectives and both are partial and historically constructed, although pointing to deep truths. Each can learn from each other, both to more deeply appreciate the other's faith, and also to better understand their own faith. These presuppositions make dialogue possible.

I would suggest that the same presuppositions that make dialogue possible between religions are also necessary for dialogue between Christians, even Christians in the same denominations. Dialogue is impossible if some Catholics start with the assumption that those of the other side are stupid, perverse or evil, and that your group alone has the fullness of the truth, and that the goal is to make the other side either submit to your fullness of truth or get out of the church. These presuppositions, unfortunately, are exactly the presuppositions of right wing Catholics and Protestants vis à vis the liberals of their churches. It is these presuppositions that make dialogue impossible.

What is to be done? I believe it is essential that neither side gain the power to drive out or silence the other side. Each must continue to coexist within their churches, even if it means constructing distinct media of communication, educational institutions, and networks to maintain one's own existence. We must continue to clarify not simply the surface points of difference, but the difference of presuppositions. These will not lead easily to a new consensus, but rather a clarification of the depths of the differences. But both sides must continue to exist and to try to communicate. Perhaps eventually a new synthesis will arise. Perhaps it won't. But neither group should be allowed to destroy the other. ■

Sexual Illiteracy

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

In 1989 I spent a sabbatical in South Africa lecturing at various universities throughout the country. This included a pleasant week with the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of the Transkei, an area then defined as a separate "Bantustan," or homeland, in South Africa. In a memorable conversation, one of the professors, Ephraim Mosothoane, described to me how local Africans had traditionally managed young people's sexual development and how Christian missionaries had then sabotaged a perfectly functioning system.

According to Mosothoane, in the traditional societies of the region the grandmothers supervised a group of huts where the young people were allowed to come and engage in free sexual experimentation. The older women taught them how to satisfy each other sexually and how to avoid pregnancy. After this period of sexual experimentation, young people married and were expected to be faithful to one partner. But the key was that they went into marriage experienced in how to give one another pleasure and equipped to elect or avoid pregnancy.

When the missionaries came, they were horrified at this practice, seeing it as sexual license, and demanded that it be stopped. The missionaries sought to teach the local Africans their own values of sexual abstinence before marriage. The result was a disaster with premarital pregnancies happening for the first time. Young people didn't stop sexual experimentation before marriage, but they now did so clandestinely, without learning how to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

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BUSH'S PURITANISM

The recent announcement about the US government's funding for AIDS prevention in Africa is a similar example of Western puritanical missionary zeal that seems likely to add to the social disasters of African life. At the request of President George W. Bush, the US Congress passed a $15 billion initiative to combat AIDS worldwide, but aimed primarily at Africa. Several congressmen succeeded in earmarking a third of the funds for prevention for "abstinence-unless-married" programs. Representative Mike Pence (Republican, Indiana) revealed the missionary impulse underlying this demand when he opined that it was not enough to send billions of dollars to Africa without sending "values that work."

The slogan "Abstain, Be faithful, use Condoms" (ABC) has been coined to describe this approach to AIDS prevention. The slogan was adapted from a program developed in Uganda, but with an emphasis on "abstinence alone" for the unmarried that was not part of the Ugandan program. This effort to impose Western sexual morality on Africans in the AIDS crisis not only does not represent values that will work in Africa, but also is based on "values" that have never "worked" in the United States or indeed

any place in the Western world.

In Christian cultures, abstinence before marriage has always been based on an unadmitted double standard that is both sexist and classist. "Good" girls are supposed to be abstinent before marriage, while boys "sow their wild oats" with "bad (lower class) girls" who are not socially acceptable marriage partners. To keep the "good girls" chaste before marriage they were traditionally segregated and denied free access to public society.

The marriage night then became a nightmare for many young women. Without sexual experience they were, in effect, raped by young husbands whose previous sexual experience came from exploitative relationships with servant women and prostitutes. The young bride went into marriage without knowledge of how to experience pleasure or prevent pregnancy. The result was continual pregnancies, without access to birth control or abortion, under conditions that often kept women from ever experiencing sexuality as pleasurable. Sexuality for women was synonymous with subjugation—a loss of control over their own bodies.

SEXUAL ETHICS

Modern societies have sought to change this situation, allowing women education, legal autonomy, paid employment and personal freedom. But the sexual morality of traditional puritanical patriarchal Christianity has never been adequately rethought. Instead the "sexual revolution" was simply construed as making all young girls available to young men who wanted to "sow their wild oats" without taking responsibility for the results. Girls should now have the same premarital sexual license as boys, but without changing the male sexually exploitative mentality. Young girls were supposed to learn quickly how to have sexual pleasure or prevent pregnancies, but without any help or accountability from adults or their male partners.

The result was often a strange doublethink on the part of supposedly emancipated young women. In the early 1970s, while visiting Cornell University for some lectures, a woman professor revealed how the faculty was startled by the number of college women getting pregnant out of wedlock. These were not young women without education or means to secure contraception. But mentally they seemed to be trapped between two contrary ethics, virtue defined as abstinence before marriage and sexual freedom defined on male terms. The result was a strange doublethink in which the young women imagined that their acquiescence to a boyfriend's sexual demands was "innocent" as long as the sexual intercourse occurred "spontaneously" and they had not prepared for it by using contraception themselves or demanding that the boy use a condom. The result was pre-ordained; many Cornell women either had to seek abortions or drop out of college due to pregnancy.

The Christian Right, Catholic and Protestant, is trying to roll back the sexual revolution by returning to a patriarchal puritanism based on a classist separation of females into "good" girls and "bad" girls, exploiting the bad girls while denying the good girls personal freedom. Clearly the feminist revolution that gained women personal freedom and access to public life has been hampered by the failure to define a sexual ethic of responsible mutuality between males and females.

Feminism is falsely blamed for a sexual promiscuity that often results in pregnancies outside marriage. Society has not faced up to the fact that what is causing this situation is an unreformed male ethic of sexual exploitation that was always the underside of official patriarchal puritanism. This is what I have called the "puritan-prurient" syndrome; that is, a male ethic of sexual repression of one group of women that one marries, and sexual exploitation of another group of women that one does not marry. What is needed is a definition of an egalitarian feminist sexual ethic of mutual accountability. This is what Dr. Sheila Briggs has called an alternative ABC: Accountability, Be responsible, use Condoms.

In the last chapter of my book, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family* (2000), I sought to define such a feminist sexual ethic. This ethic is based on the assumption that good sexuality is achieved through a process of learning and experience. One doesn't jump in feet first at some moment when sexuality is allowed, having previously been totally banned (i.e. the wedding night). Like the traditional African system, we need to imagine a framework for such a process of learning.

In my book I suggest a process of learning how to integrate *eros* and *philia* (sexual pleasure and friendship) and then to integrate *eros*, *philia* and *agape* (sexual pleasure, friendship and loving care for others). We should think of at least a two-stage process of such sexual integration. In the first stage of young people's lives they should learn how to give sexual pleasure to one another without getting pregnant. This entails adults helping them to learn about their own sexuality in a way that would endorse both sexual pleasure and contraception. It assumes that young people can engage in sexual experimentation before they are ready for reproduction, perhaps "going steady" with a partner, in a way that connects sexual pleasure and contraception with friendship; i.e. accountable, responsible relationships.

That decision to form a permanent relationship, that might or might not include child raising, would come later, and would follow learning how to enjoy sex, prevent unwanted pregnancy and form responsible relationships. Is this so shocking, so hard to imagine? I think this is what many young people are already doing. But they are doing it under a cloud of disapproval and hypocritical doublethink on the part of their parents, teachers and pastors. It makes it very difficult for them to progress along the path to personal sexual maturity in a secure and self-confident way. Americans can hardly attempt to impose their sexual values on others when their own sexual values do not work for themselves and their children. ■

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TALKING ABOUT ABORTION

The Choice to Speak Out

Rosemary Radford Ruether

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THE CHOICE TO SPEAK PUBLICLY ABOUT one's abortion is usually a difficult one. Prochoice supporters need to acknowledge that the decision to have an abortion is usually an ambivalent one. It is a choice between a potential life and the ability of the potential mother to support and nurture that life once actualized. It is usually not a choice between a woman and a baby, since there is no "baby" in the first trimester when most abortions take place. But there is a potential baby, one that has begun to gestate, one that is not yet developed enough to survive in its present stage of development and one that the woman, who would be its mother if it was allowed to develop to term, decides she cannot in fact mother. This weighing of conflicting goods is generally an ambivalent one, not one of straightforward good versus evil on either side of the equation.

I know the stories of two people who decided to have an abortion. One of them is a relative, now in her late forties, who became pregnant as a teenager when she was in a relationship with a young man who was highly unsuitable as a partner and parent, and from whom she was struggling to separate herself. A child at that stage of her life would have been a personal disaster, linking her with this young man more permanently and truncating her future potential. Neither were in any way prepared for parenthood. If such a child had been born, the difficulties it would have caused and would have experienced were considerable.

By having an abortion, the teenage girl was able to eventually free herself from the unsuitable male, continue with her education through college and graduate school and develop a creative career. Now, she occasionally regrets not having a child and thinks about adopting one, but not too seriously. She knows that, as a single woman who has enough difficulty managing her work, health and friendships, a child is not a real option. Her occasional brushes with parenting as an aunt make clear to her how much time and energy is involved in mothering. She does not regret the abortion, since it is clear to her that she had no other option at that point in her life.

A second case is that of a friend who was married, but whose marriage was breaking up. When she became pregnant, she was eagerly anticipating mothering a child. But her husband was entirely opposed to having a child, saying it would destroy their marriage. She decided very reluctantly to have an abortion to save her marriage, but the marriage soon broke up anyway. Looking back, she feels great pain at the loss of her child and the knowledge that she will never have another one. This regret does not turn her into a person who is "antiabortion." Rather, what pains her is her willingness to sacrifice her own desires for a relationship with a man, a pattern that she sees repeated in abusive relationships with men throughout her life. Each year, on the anniversary of her abortion, she takes some time out to mourn.

These two cases indicate the ambivalence of the abortion decision. The decision is not a straightforward one of "baby" against potential mother, as antichoice people would have it, or woman against an undesired future baby that would have negative conse-

quences for her, as prochoice people would have it. Rather, it is a decision about the quality of life of the future child, interconnected with the quality of life of its potential mother.

To decide to have an abortion is to decide that the quality of life of both as a joint compact of 20 years of future child-raising is not sustainable. Not only would such a relationship be destructive and unsustainable for the woman, but it would also be a bad situation for the potential child who could not be nurtured well in such a context. Sometimes that decision is regretted, as in the second case when the abortion was coerced by a desire for an ongoing relationship with a man. In retrospect, the woman wishes she had chosen the child rather than the man. But this is hindsight, not something she could have been sure about at the time.

Mostly ignored by both pro- and antichoice people is the role of men in the decision to have an abortion. In both of these cases a relationship with a man who was unable or unwilling to parent was key to the decision. If antichoice people want to reduce abortions, they might start with the problem of men who do not take precautions against impregnating women when they are unwilling to take responsibility for a child. Most women who have had abortions know that the circumstances in which the pregnancy took place made the decision the best one—both for the woman and also for the child who could not have been well raised in unsustainable parenting circumstances.

Women who have had an abortion don't have an obligation to speak out. But they may opt to do so, not by stating the fact on a T-shirt, but by revealing the complexity of the decision in their personal lives. They can expect to be vilified by the hard-line antichoice camp no matter what. But such stories told in all their complexity can help to generate better understanding among those who are open to such understanding. ■

Distortion, Misrepresentation and Caricature

THE VATICAN'S LETTER TO WOMEN IS CONFUSED ABOUT SCRIPTURE AND FEMINISM

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

The "letter to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World," released by the Vatican Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on May 31, 2004, has already drawn extensive criticism worldwide. I hope to add a few additional comments, primarily from the perspective of a historian of Christian thought.

First, I state the obvious criticisms. The letter is addressed to the bishops of the Catholic church, not to the whole church as clergy and laity. Hence women as such are not addressed by the letter, but rather simply defined in order to inform bishops of what they should teach on women. The underlying assumption here is one of a pre-Vatican II ecclesiology. The church is the magisterium, i.e. the pope and the bishops. The laity are subjects of the church, not themselves church or, as the Vatican II view had it, part of the People of God.

Secondly, the letter is misnamed. It is not about the collaboration of men and women in the church and the world. Its purpose is to condemn "certain currents of thought which are often at variance with the authentic advancement of women." Presumably these "currents of thought" are seen as "feminism," although neither the word feminism nor the supposed authors of these "currents of thought" are ever named or their works referred to.

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Thirdly, although the letter calls for "dialogue with all men and women of good will, in a sincere search for the truth and in a common commitment to the development of ever more authentic relationships," in fact the approach taken by the letter excludes any real dialogue with anyone, particularly with women. Rather the letter presumes that the "correct understanding" of the nature of women and how men and women should collaborate in the church and society is already completely known by the magisterium (i.e., Cardinal Ratzinger interpreting the views of Pope John Paul II). Thus it is only a question of defining this correct view, promulgating it to the bishops and, through the teaching authority of the pope and bishops, getting everyone else in both the church and the world to acquiesce to it or else stand condemned.

DUBIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

The letter stands on a very narrow base of "scholarship." The footnotes cite almost entirely the writings of Pope John Paul II and other approved Vatican documents. Scripture is referred to, but no scriptural exegetes. There are one or two cursory references to several church fathers. No recent theologians, much less female theologians, are cited. The assumption is that the correct anthropology of men and women and their true nature and collaboration are already fully known *a priori*. Moreover, this "correct" view has been unchanging for all eternity, revealed in the Old and New Testament and known in the church tradition. There is no need to consult or dialogue with anyone about this, but only to promulgate the correct view and

banish all contrary proposals.

What this means is that the author of the letter allows no historical consciousness of the cultural context of his own views on anthropology and its deviation, not only from various proposals of modern feminism, but also from the views found in Hebrew Scripture, the New Testament and the church fathers. In fact the anthropology presumed in this letter is not that of either scripture or patristic and medieval theology, but rather it is the anthropology of 19th century romanticism. This anthropology was based on the complementarity of two totally distinct human natures, masculine and feminine, that define the essential being of males and females. This anthropology governs the theology of the document from beginning to end.

It is hard to know whose views Ratzinger's letter seeks to condemn, but they do not correspond to any major currents of feminism.

INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

Beginning with Genesis 1 and 2, the author claims that the image of God in which humans were created is one of distinct and complementary natures, masculine and feminine which only together, in a relational unity, are the image of God in humanity. Whether one agrees with this anthropology or not, what must be said at the outset is that it is the anthropology of 19th century Germany, not that of the bible or the church fathers. The church fathers, both East and West, (i.e. Gregory Nyssa and Augustine) are united in assuming that the image of God in humanity is not found in maleness and femaleness, but in that unitary expression of human nature which is not male or female; namely the Spirit, the soul or reason. Male and female belonged to the body, not to that part of humanity made in the image of God since God is neither male nor female.

The Eastern fathers tended to see maleness and femaleness as appearing only with the Fall, while Augustine came to insist that it was there from before the Fall. But for Augustine also the image of God is essentially non-gendered, shared by both men and women. This view contained some confusion, since reason was seen as more natural to men than to women. Nevertheless women were presumed by Western and Eastern theology until modern times to possess the image of God, but exactly in that part of themselves which is not gendered, i.e. not feminine. Femininity is not included in the image of God in any classical Christian theology.

One might well question this classical anthropology, but what one cannot do is to try to interpret classical Christian anthropologies without understanding them, imposing on these texts an early modern anthropology that is fundamentally different. This is what the letter does. The result is a basic confusion about the scriptural and patristic views of male and female.

The theology of creation and redemption that the letter presupposed is the following: Humans are created male and female with essentially different and complementary natures. They are intended by God to exist in a loving mutuality defined through this complementarity. But this initial loving relationality was distorted into domination and subjugation with the Fall. This distorted and wounded the original good relationality. Redemption is about overcoming this distortion and restoring loving complementarity, to be completed only in heaven, when it is delinked from sexuality.

But the male side of this complementarity is never defined. Only the feminine or female side is defined as an attitude of receptivity, faithfulness and being for others. The feminine is here highly idealized. It is not to be confused with mere passivity or subjugation, which is its distortion through sin. Women are presumed to be specialists in this loving "being for others" by their very nature, while males apparently have to learn how to do it through women's example. One might wonder then if only men, but not women, have fallen into sin. Women apparently can be victimized by domination and their being for others distorted as vulnerability and passivity, but they have not lost their "essential nature" as being for others.

This being for others, however, is what all humans, men and women, need to cultivate as the right relation to God. Moreover, God is seen as essentially male *vis à vis* this receptive or "feminine" relation of humanity toward God. The Son of God had to be incarnated as a male in order to reflect this male nature of God. Although it is not spelled out in the letter, the assumption here is that this masculinity of God and God's incarnate Son, Christ, is the reason why women cannot be ordained. Thus the anthropology of complementarity moves in two contradictory directions. First, "femininity" as the capacity for loving "being for others" is something that women do "naturally," but men need to learn and cultivate, a move that presumably would cancel the difference of male and female, if males were to succeed in this redemptive process.

But, in the opposite direction, the relation of God and humanity is continually compared with the relation of male and female. God acts and humanity receives. Maleness is different from femaleness precisely in sharing this Godlike activity *vis à vis* feminine receptivity. This is clearly not a mutual and complementary relationship, but a hierarchical one, indeed a relationship of power as agency over receptivity. Appar-

(continued on p. 51)

Benedict XVI's First Encyclical: "God is Love"

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

CATHOLICS HAVE GROWN WEARY WITH PAPAL ENCYCLICALS in recent decades. Typically they have become tedious exercises in admonitions and warnings. The hidden or overt text is to shake the finger against the modern world, against materialism, women's independence, birth control, abortion and forms of the family that represent an alternative to heterosexual marriage. Although the first encyclical by Benedict XVI does not show any softening of the views that underlay such warnings, he has chosen to almost entirely avoid the tone of admonition and rebuke. Instead he has sought to provide the vision of the faith that inspires him and which he hopes will inspire other Catholic Christians throughout the world. This is a welcome choice. The encyclical should be judged by how well he has succeeded in providing a credible vision for people seeking to be Christians in the world of the 21st century.

The encyclical is divided into two sections. The first is his theological and philosophical reflection on the nature of God as love. For Benedict, the idea of God as love is the astonishing insight of the Christian message, although not lacking in intimations in the Jewish and Greek worlds. But the special message of Christianity is that God so deeply loves us as to be willing to sacrifice godself for our redemption, for our fullness of well-being. God's love trumps God's justice, manifest in forgiving love. Benedict also strives to overcome the dualisms of soul and body, eros and agape, erotic love and self-giving love, to find a synthesis of the two in a love that is both self-giving and ecstatically mutual. God's outpouring of love for us also must overflow in love for one another. For Benedict this is most completely expressed in the love relation between man and woman in monogamous marriage. But it is also expressed in many forms of loving care for the other.

The second half of the encyclical turns to the work of love, or caritas, that is the specific social expression of the church in society. Here Benedict engages in some Marxism-bashing in order to define the church's charitable work in a way that does not neglect the work of justice or simply maintain the status quo. Since the Marxist challenge is now seen as fading away, space is cleared for the church's social teachings to re-establish themselves as maintaining the proper balance between love and justice, church and state.

For Benedict the work of the state is properly the establishment of a just society. In a statement that would be worth repeating in many political arenas today, he declares, "Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics." It is not the job of the church to take over the work of justice from the state. Moreover the church should not use its charitable work to proselytize. The state must be a sphere of religious freedom and "guarantee religious freedom and harmony between followers of different religions." We are a long way from classical Catholic Christendom here. The church's vision of redeemed humanity in God's love has a role to play in lifting up a holistic vision of justice and inspiring the laity to be the agents in society to work for justice.

But justice, no matter how fully realized, doesn't do away with the need for loving service to others. There are problems of human finitude and vulnerability that can never be resolved by justice alone. Here is the place for the specific work of the church, not by itself, but in collaboration with other people of faith. The church needs to work to provide that service to others in their concrete material needs, which also manifests a loving care that communicates the message that everyone is a person of worth whom God loves. Thus Benedict seeks to carefully delineate and yet interrelate the spheres of church and state, and the work of love and justice proper to each.

This is a vision that many liberation theologians could probably embrace. Or at least it could be taken seriously by those who wish to lift up a vision of justice and yet not try to create a new Christendom that merges church and state. Hope for a coming Reign of God as an earthly horizon, as well as a heavenly one, is not part of Benedict's vision, but the work of the church in challenging the state to do its work of justice is well articulated. The second part of the encyclical concludes with the words, "Love is possible, and we are able to practice it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world—this is the invitation I would like to extend with the present Encyclical." In a world grown increasingly despondent with the shattering of so many hopes, it is an invitation worth considering. ■

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A Consistent Life Ethic?

SUPPORTING LIFE AFTER BIRTH

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

In July of 2006, President Bush signed an order forbidding stem cell research that involves the destruction of embryos. In this same month he continually opposed a ceasefire in Lebanon in a war that was clearly disproportionate and resulted in a high level of deaths of non-combatants. Cartoonists had a field day with the contradiction between such exacting reverence for life at the level of fertilized eggs, while disregarding the value of the lives of born human beings. One cartoon had Bush saying, "Israel has a right to defend itself," and, in the next breath, "as long as there are no embryos involved." Another cartoon showed Bush receiving the casket of a fallen American soldier with the attending military person saying, "Don't worry, Mr. President, it is not an embryo."

The question I want to pose in this talk today is whether the Catholic campaign in favor of the protection of fetal life from the first moment of conception, while failing to raise its voice against vast killing of non-combatants in war, poverty and environmental degradation, does not help produce this very contradiction. Despite its claim to a "consistent life ethic," Catholic teachings in fact use very different kinds of moral reasoning when dealing with questions of war than when dealing with abortion. This contradiction was pointed out 18 years ago by Catholic ethicist Christine Gudorf in her article, "To make a seamless garment, use a single piece of cloth," (Patricia Beattie and Thomas Shannon, eds. *Abortion and Catholicism: The American Debate.* NY: Crossroads, 1988, 279-296).

In this talk I want to deal first with the problems of the absolutist moral reasoning applied by Catholic ethics to unborn life, and then turn to the inconsistencies of its lack of moral rigor when it comes to threats to the life of the born, particularly due to war, poverty and environmental destruction. My own view is that abortion should be "legal, safe and rare," to quote President Clinton's phrase. I do not believe that there is a "human person" present from the first moment of conception, nor do I believe that the Catholic tradition actually teaches or follows this belief in its pastoral practice, as is evident from its refusal to baptize even late-term miscarriages.

Catholicism, following an Aristotelian view of human nature as an integral union of body and soul, traditionally taught that the human soul is present only when the body of the fetus has developed to a certain level of human physical development, traditionally placed at about five months. Today we might see this as the point where brain development reaches the level of sustaining viable human life outside the womb. Certainly to claim that a fertilized egg within days of conception is a human person is a totally Platonic view of the human person. Upholding this claim asserts that there is a human soul fully present in a tiny speck of germ plasma. Despite its rhetoric, the Catholic tradition has never actually taught this, as Catholic philosophers, Dan Dombrowski and Robert Deltete, show in their book, *A Brief Liberal Catholic Defense of Abortion* (University of Illinois Press, 2000).

Although I don't believe a fertilized egg, or even a three-month fetus, is a human person on the same level as a born person, it is not "nothing." Rather it is a potential life that is in process of actualization. Except in those relatively rare situations where an abortion decision is made in the case of a fetus whose conception was desired and chosen, but proved to be severely deformed, or whose continued development would threaten the life of the mother, most decisions for abortion are taken in the context of unchosen pregnancies. Despite the argument that when women choose to have sex, they choose the possibility of pregnancy and thus should be responsible for the results, we know that women's social and cultural context in our society and throughout the world means that much of the time women do not really chose the conditions under which they have

This is the text of a speech given by Ruether at the Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles in October 2006.

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sex, even in marriage. Even short of actual rape, women are often being somewhat coerced into having sex, while not being in control of its results.

Even when women want to use contraception, including so-called natural family planning, men often do not cooperate. For a variety of reasons, women many times find themselves involuntarily pregnant. Although many women are able to adjust to this unwelcome news, especially if they have a stable marriage, but sometimes even outside of marriage, many others feel deeply threatened by a situation in which psychologically, socially, economically or all three, they are not in a position to bear and raise a child. (And I don't think that women have any responsibility to bear an unwanted child to term only so the child can be adopted by someone else). This situation is not going to be changed but only worsened by coercive legal measures, such as remaking abortion illegal and hence criminal under the law. Such legal measures will only assure that abortion becomes clandestine, unsafe and hence likely to result in the deaths or injuries of the women, as well putting her in danger of legal sanctions.

This has become the case in El Salvador, where an Opus Dei archbishop and a campaign by right-wing Catholics has resulted in a national law criminalizing all abortions. The result has been a large number of clandestine abortions mostly by poor women (since the wealthy can get abortions from private doctors or in other countries), where many die or are injured as a result of the unsafe procedures. When they go to hospitals or otherwise seek medical care they are taken into custody and may be imprisoned. The penalty for the abortion provider is 6-12 years, 2-5 years for someone who helps the women and 2-8 years for the woman herself in the first trimester and 30-50 years thereafter. One desperately poor mother who aborted an 18-week fetus has been imprisoned for 30 years, even though she has three small children dependent on her as their sole parent. This is clearly an example of absolutizing the value of the life of the unborn and disregarding the value of the lives of the born.

Catholic ethics must recognize that the decision for or against abortion is one of conflicting values of life. It is not simply a matter of the "murder of innocent life" in which there are no values of life on the other side that are equally and sometime more imperative. In the case of the woman in El Salvador, in desperate circumstances of poverty she chose the value of survival, for herself and her three children for whom she was the sole providing parent, rather than bearing yet another child she could not afford to support. Women are caught in conflictive situations where their ability to function economically, psychologically and otherwise has to be weighed against the value of a potential child.

If ethicists are serious about reducing abortions, and I believe the instances of abortions should be reduced as much as possible, this will not be done by coercing women to bear children they feel they cannot bear, but instead by helping women as much as possible not to become involuntarily pregnant in the first place. This is the root of the issue which "pro-life" advocates avoid. To really help women avoid un-chosen pregnancies is a very complex problem, certainly having to do with making effective and safe contraception readily accessible. But avoiding un-chosen pregnancies also means addressing all the cultural issues that put women in the position of less than fully chosen sex, lack of adequate sex education about how to avoid pregnancy, and, above all, lack of full moral agency to enforce their preferences about sex and birth control.

Catholicism both forbids abortion under any circumstances and is a major cause of producing the situations that cause it. As a religious ethic which both denies the moral permissibility of effective birth control ("natural family planning" is not effective birth control for most people) and also disparages women's moral agency as autonomous persons, Catholicism clearly is a major force in the world that promotes the conflictive situations of involuntary pregnancy that cause some women to opt for an abortion.

Catholicism gives the impression that only unborn life is really protected and that people's lives become fair game as soon as they are born.

While absolutizing the right to life of the unborn, even of fertilized eggs in the first days after conception, Catholicism has little moral rigor when it comes to the vast carnage that is untimely causing human beings between birth and old age to fall victim to death, due to war, poverty and environmental devastation. While theoretically Catholicism forbids the direct taking of innocent life at any stage of life, the most rigorist sanctions are applied to taking unborn life, while there are no sanctions applied to killing non-combatants in war, selling toxic waste to farmers as fertilizer that cause people to sicken and die, favoring military spending over social welfare spending that is impoverishing the majority of the world's population and any number of other actions which have the consequences of unjust and untimely death. This gross inconsistency lends the impression that only unborn life is really "innocent"—that people lose their innocence and become fair game as soon as they are born—perhaps an odd expres-

sion of the doctrine of original sin.

As Chris Gudorf pointed out in her article, Catholic ethics uses an absolutist version of deontological natural law ethics when speaking of abortion, while when speaking of war it shifts to a consequentialist ethic that carefully balances conflicting values. Absolutist deontological natural law allows no debate and applies coercive sanctions, excommunication, and the demand for criminalization. However, the consequentialist ethic draws on a multiplicity of perspectives, allows for various opinions and relies on persuasion, not legal sanctions, ultimately leaving matters in the hands of individual conscience. Where is the bishop who would say that soldiers who directly massacre non-combatant civilians are excommunicated? Where are bishops who would suggest that those who manufacture nuclear weapons are excommunicated and should repent by leaving such forms of employment? There were two Mexican bishops some years ago who declared that torturers were excommunicated, but they were maverick leftists whose views were unsupported by the rest of the bishops and by the Vatican. In short, Catholicism speaks softly and carries no stick when it comes to untimely and unjust death after birth.

Let me summarize a few issues on war, poverty and environmental devastation to make clear what a truly horrendous threat of death and destruction humanity is facing at this time, and the leading role of the U.S. in these crises. First, on chronic war. Since the U.S. creation of the atom bomb and its use against two Japanese cities in 1945, the world has been held hostage to fear of the possible use of "weapons of mass destruction." The U.S. has continually taken the lead in producing new stages of these weapons of greater and greater destructiveness, as well as expressing its willingness on several occasions to actually use them on a first-strike basis.

Today this threat has arisen in relation to Iran. The "bunker busters" or so-called "tactical" nuclear weapons that the U.S. is contemplating throwing on Iranian uranium-refining facilities (which Iran claims have to do with peaceful and not military use) would not just explode underground, having little effect above ground. Rather it is estimated by Physicians for Social Responsibility that an attack by these weapons on two buried Iranian research facilities would generate a blast in which 2.6 million people would die in 48 hours and a million more would suffer immediate injuries. Radioactive dust would be carried east to expose 10 million more to deadly fallout. Where are voices from the bishops or the Vatican warning against the danger of using such weapons?

In addition to continued development of nuclear weapons which itself fuels a continual nuclear arms race around the world, the U.S. has built the most enormous military system in world history. It also has continually armed the nations it considers its allies, sometimes arming both sides of regional conflicts, as seen in the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980s. As a result, vast stockpiles of arms and chronic war presently characterize the world. The U.S. is ringing the world with military bases. Since the invasion of Iraq there are 109 military bases in that country alone, including four very large and apparently permanent bases the size of small cities. Any serious quest for world disarmament cannot simply focus on disarming America's rivals, a strategy that only fuels the desire of other countries to have such weapons to prevent an American invasion. Real disarmament must be disarmament of all sides, not just Korea and Iran, but the U.S. and its allies.

U.S. military spending, as well as military spending around the world, consumes half or more of our and other nations' national budgets, starving every social program. Reducing spending for war is essential if humans are to address the issues of poverty, health, education, renewal of basic infrastructure and repair of environmental devastation.

Moving on to poverty: the human species has never before in its history experienced such vast disparities of wealth and poverty. Some 20 percent of humanity control 85 percent of the world's resources, much of it concentrated in the top 1 percent. This means the other 80 percent of the world shares the remaining 15 percent of the wealth, with the poorest billion people living in dire misery, with more than 30,000 human beings dying every day from starvation. Discussion of disparities of income only begin to touch on the extremes of the gaps between the affluent top 20 percent, which include many of us here today, and the very poor 20 percent. What we are talking about is an abundance of means of transportation, fleets of cars, access to frequent air travel, large homes, advanced technology, good medical care, high walls and guards protecting this elite, versus an extreme lack of access to decent housing, little or no medical care, education, inadequate food and potable water, a daily vulnerability to violence and disease for a third of humanity. Where are the voices in our churches that are addressing the glaring injustice of the disparities of wealth and poverty and demanding that the well-off in our church pews see this as an urgent moral issue that demands a response in terms of their personal lifestyles?

Environmental devastation is the context for economic destitution and war worldwide. This needs to be seen as an interaction of many factors. Addressing these issues in a holistic manner must include the exponential growth of population that has expanded from 1 billion to over 6 billion in the last 75 years and could well double in another 30 years, causing increasing death from malnutrition, disease, including pandemics such as AIDS, unclean water, war and social violence.

Another key factor of environmental degradation is the use of fossil fuels, especially petroleum, as the world's chief energy source. The world is facing the depletion of petroleum in the next 10-20 years, and this growing scarcity is key to the oil wars in the Middle East and elsewhere. Burning fossil fuels is the leading

cause of air pollution and acid rain that destroys soil fertility and forests. Fossil fuel burning is also causing global warming that creates increasingly violent weather patterns, such as stronger hurricanes and melting ice caps that threaten to inundate islands and coastal areas where many cities are located.

Soil erosion and pollution of soil and water from industrial and domestic wastes are major causes of decreased fertility of the soil, toxic waste supply and diseases conveyed to humans and animals through such pollution. At the same time the pouring of fertilizers, human and animal excrement, plastics and other wastes into oceans is altering the capacity of the world's oceans to sustain life. Larger mammals and edible fish are dying, while the oceans are reverting to primitive forms of life that can survive without oxygen, but which are highly toxic to humans and animals. Such toxicity is not just carried by marine life, but also is blowing in the winds, causing severe respiratory problems for those who live near oceans.

Given all these atrocities, a growing human population is facing a major reduction of its ability to produce healthy food on both land and in the oceans, rivers and lakes. Humanity stands on the edge of huge global disasters in the next few decades. These interlocking crises of war, poverty and ecological devastation need to be addressed both locally and as a world system of human life on the planet. Where are the voices of church leaders at this crucial moment in human history?

The Christian churches seem to be fixated on a kind of navel-gazing, seeking to return women to passive acquiescence to male domination, denying gays the option of sanctifying their relationships and caring for each other and absolutizing the lives of embryos, while ignoring the thousand-pound gorilla in the middle of the room that threatens to squeeze us all against the wall.

This does not mean there are no values to be defended in relation to the unborn, but these must be appropriately balanced in relation to the enormous threats to the lives of the born. I suggest that this means that Catholic ethics needs to be somewhat more consequentialist about the decisions of women to reproduce or not reproduce children and more principled when it comes to defending life after birth and sanctioning those whose policies are causing untimely death.

In relation to reproduction, Catholics should not only recognize the need for effective birth control, but also support women's moral agency in sexual and reproductive choices to reduce as much as possible the likelihood of women finding themselves involuntarily pregnant in situations where they feel they cannot bear and raise a child without grave threats to their own well-being and future development. When such unchosen pregnancies do occur, Christians might hold out the ideal of encouraging women to be generous in caring for an unexpected child in stressful circumstances, but this must be a matter of persuasion, not coercion. Sacrificial generosity can only be voluntary, it cannot be forced.

Moreover if Christians are to call such women to generosity they must be willing to help provide some of the support services that would lessen the conflicts that are at the root of "their" problems with bearing an un-chosen child. How about a Christian community adopting a relation to such a woman—helping find her a better job, obtain medical care, support education and day care for her children? In other words, how might those who hold out such values actually help relieve the distresses that are causing a woman to make a decision that she might prefer not to make if in less stressful circumstances? But, finally, one must be willing to trust women to make the decision which is best for them, precisely what the Catholic church's hierarchy has been least willing to do.

When it comes to life after birth, threatened by war, poverty and environmental devastation, Christians need to be more principled and more willing to urge sacrificial action. While recognizing the ambiguities of threats to life on both sides of conflictual situations, the Catholic church must be willing, at the very least, to condemn atrocities, where there is a direct massacre of civilians or where there is disproportionate violence that is killing large numbers of non-combatant men, women and children. They must be willing to call for sanctions when such atrocities occur. Those who massacre or torture should be put on trial, imprisoned, put out of the army.

But the Catholic church must also analyze more forthrightly the total patterns of militarism, the unjust monopolization of power and wealth, which is causing so many humans and the earth itself to sicken and die. It must be willing to call for Christians to take sacrificial measures against such destruction, refusing to pay taxes for war, refusing to accept the call to fight in war or to make weapons of mass destruction, even if such decisions might bring imprisonment, social marginalization or loss of employment.

Again, such sacrificial action must be voluntary. It cannot be coerced. Again, no one should take these risks alone. They should be part of support communities that help alleviate the costs of such risks. But there is no reason why church leaders could not present the possibility of such actions in a persuasive and attractive form as an appropriate calling of Christian faith, rather than seeking only a minimalist ethic which does not challenge an unjust status quo of the dominant global system.

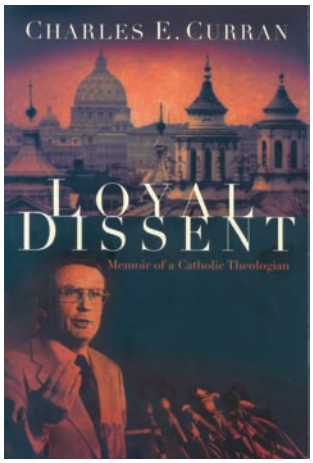
Putting the ethic of life before birth and life after birth more in sync with one another would help overcome the credibility gap from which Catholic teachings on ethics presently suffer. Only by putting these two ethics more in sync with each other can we genuinely speak of a "consistent life ethic" that is not simply a code word for an absolutist rejection of abortion in any circumstances, while ignoring the myriad threats to the life of the born. A "consistent life ethic" is a nice slogan. But we are very far from a realistic and truthful understanding of what that would mean in Catholic ethical teachings and practice. ■

For the Good of the Church

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

Loyal Dissent: Memoir of a Catholic Theologian
Charles E. Curran
(Georgetown University Press, 2006, 280 pp) 1589010876, $26.95

Charles Curran is perhaps the leading moral theologian in the Catholic tradition in the world today. He has published 33 monographs, two co-written books and 18 edited collections since 1961. His writings cover both sexual and social ethics. His work has not just discussed a range of particular issues, but also critically probed the underlying methodology and world view of the traditional Catholic views on these subjects. He has formulated the new methodology and perspective needed for reform.



Curran is, in his own self-understanding as well as in the minds of his colleagues, a moderate. He seeks well-founded revision of the Catholic tradition, while remaining solidly within its core values. In spite of this moderation and loyalty, in 1986, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—formerly the Inquisition—declared that he was officially not a Catholic theologian, and that he was "neither suitable or eligible" to teach Catholic theology. This judgment drove Curran from his tenured position at Catholic University, where he had taught for more than 20 years. Shunned by Catholic colleges and universities, he spent four years seeking a job. After short-term positions at Cornell, Southern California and Auburn, he was hired as the Scurlock professor of human values at Southern Methodist in Dallas and its Perkins School of Theology.

This memoir of his intellectual development as a moral theologian in the Catholic tradition—and his relentless persecution by magisterial Catholicism, culminating in his official repudiation—is both enormously insightful and depressing. Here is a careful and responsible thinker, revered by the vast majority of his Catholic and Protestant colleagues, whom hierarchical Catholicism cannot tolerate. Why? In Curran's own account, he started out as a quite conservative thinker, but was drawn to a path of critical modernization of Catholic thought through the work of established Catholic theologians such as Bernard Häring during his studies in Rome. He early on began to take on the controversial issues of sexual ethics, such as contraception, homosexuality and divorce. He exposed the untenable argumentation that lay behind traditional views based on outmoded biology, essentialism lacking in historical consciousness, a questionable view of natural law rooted in a concept of the design of the physical body that ignored the human person and a failure to consult the experience of people in daily life. These views were associated with a false capacity of the magisterium to attain absolute certitude, shielded from doubt or the possibility of revision.

Although Curran makes clear that a credible Catholic moral theology or ethics must take on exactly these principles using contemporary knowledge of biology, historical consciousness, respect for human experience and an ethic of relationality, his struggle with the magisterium finally comes down to a contest between critical reason and an authoritarianism that rejects criticism. Curran does not simply challenge authority in the name of the rights of conscience. For him, both conscience and authority are subject to the norm of moral truth. Both must seek moral truth and bow to the best knowledge of truth that can be discerned by a combination of scientific knowledge and best moral values from our traditions of human experience. This best knowledge will never lead to absolute certainty; infallible knowledge is not available to fallible humans in the arena of morality. But we can attain a high presumption of moral truth if we carefully draw on these critical sources of knowledge. Authority cannot trump this best knowledge, but must be informed by it in order to be credible.

Curran evades the infallibility question by carefully distinguishing between infallible truth (doctrines such as the trinity, drawn from revelation) and fallible truths based on human reason and experience. For him, moral teachings fall into the latter category, and thus are intrinsically fallible and subject to continual revision. His conflict with the Vatican finally comes down to its rejection of the notion that its teaching on morality belongs to fallible rather than infallible knowledge. The right to dis-

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sent from moral teachings in areas such as abortion, birth control, divorce and homosexuality is thus rejected in principle by the Vatican.

Curran undoubtedly came under the unforgiving ire of the Vatican for more than his questioning of its teaching on these sexual issues. What must have been most intolerable to them was that he refused to back down, to accept some face-saving statement that he had withdrawn his views. Instead, he organized protests against Vatican efforts at repression. In 1968, Catholic University faculty and students went out on strike in support of Curran, and the university backed down and promoted him, rather than firing him. Curran has organized protests of many repressive moves, gathering thousands of signatures on petitions against Vatican decisions. When he was threatened with condemnation in 1986, tens of thousands signed petitions of protest. When the condemnation went ahead anyway, denying his right to continue teaching, Curran sued Catholic University for breach of contract.

For Curran, becoming respectful of truth will make Catholicism a better Christian community.

Curran refuses to knuckle under. He maintains his positions and insists that they be dealt with rationally. He does this for the good of the church and for the good of Catholic education. For Curran, becoming respectful of truth will make Catholicism a better Christian community. Academic freedom will make Catholic colleges places of authentic education. ■

(continued from p. 44)

ently, although males can cultivate femininity, i.e. receptivity, women cannot cultivate Godlike activity; hence they lack fundamentally that image of God which reflects divine agency.

Thus the letter contains three anthropologies: 1) a complementarity of opposites in egalitarian mutuality; 2) a unitary human nature, defined as all women and men becoming "feminine," i.e. cultivating "being for others," and 3) a hierarchy, based on the analogy that male is to female as God is to human. The three are simply pasted together, with the contradictions between them unrecognized.

This misunderstood mixture of anthropologies from Western Christian traditions of different periods and contexts are set against a caricature of those "currents of thought" which the letter opposes. These are defined as "two tendencies." One tendency condemns the abusive hierarchy of men over women that makes men the adversaries of women, and the second seeks to abolish any difference of sex, while privileging difference of gender. Since those who hold these views are undefined, it is hard to know who the letter has in mind in condemning these views. But what needs to be said is that they do not correspond to any major currents of feminism.

On the first "tendency," feminism seeks indeed to overcome abusive domination, a view that, oddly enough, the letter shares and claims as basic to its view of salvation. But feminism seeks to overcome abusive domination, not to turn males into adversaries. Rather, abusive domination has already created this adversarial relationship. Rather, feminism seeks to overcome the cultural, structural and psychological patterns of abusive domination precisely in order to overcome this adversarial relationship and create genuine egalitarian mutuality, the very goal that the letter claims to be its own.

Secondly, the Vatican letter completely misreads the feminist distinction of sex and gender. It is not that feminism seeks to abolish biological sexual differences, while privileging differences of gender, but rather the opposite. Gender differences, as cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, are what are seen as cultural constructions that can and should be overcome, while most feminists acknowledge biological sexual differences. Here is the real crux of the difference between the anthropology of the letter and that of most modern feminism.

The Vatican letter wants to construe biological sexual differences as the base for a total ontological and spiritual difference between males and females as masculine and feminine, and insists that good relations between men and women are possible only by essentializing this difference from eternity to eternity. It acknowledges that this difference has been distorted by sin into domination and victimization, but it assumes that it can be restored as a relationship that keeps men and women both totally different and yet similar in an egalitarian and mutual way.

Feminism sees the dualism of masculine and feminine as mutually distinct genders to be itself built on a distortion of domination and subjugation and seeks to overcome the distortion to create a mutuality based on a shared holistic humanity in which men can be receptive and women active. By presenting a caricature of feminist anthropology, the letter both fails to see the similarities between its own theological anthropology and that of feminism and also its own contradictory inability to maintain a consistent complementarity, without falling into a feminized unitary anthropology on the one side and a masculinized/divinized hierarchical one on the other.

Real dialogue of the Catholic magisterium with feminism might open up this contradiction and lead to better understanding, if the letter writer were open to such dialogue. But such dialogue has been blocked from the very beginning by the assumption of *a priori* truth, on the one side, and caricatured error, on the other. Thus any response to this letter is by definition a "dialogue" of the deaf. ■

Intellectual Freedom and the Catholic University

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

In July of this year my invitation to teach at the Catholic University of San Diego was abruptly canceled during a phone call from the provost. I had been invited to teach as a visiting professor under the John R. Portman Chair in Roman Catholic Theology in January of 2008 and had completed negotiating the terms of the contract with the head of the Theology and Religious Studies Department and the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. On April 30, I signed a letter indicating my willingness to accept. Although the provost did not admit it at the time of her call in mid-July, it soon became evident that the primary "problem" with my occupying this chair of theology, even for a short time (I had accepted to teach part-time for one semester), was pressure on the school from a right-wing Catholic group. Its chief objection was my membership of the board of Catholics for Choice.

Catholics for Choice takes a nuanced view of abortion. As noted in the last issue of *Conscience*, "We affirm that the moral capacity and the human right to make choices about whether and when to become pregnant or to end a pregnancy are supported by church teachings. We believe that people should be empowered and given support to exercise their rights and responsibilities. We believe that women have a right to choose." The best way to reduce the need for abortion, a goal we support, is to promote effective sexuality education and contraception. In other words, to reduce the need for abortion, we need to reduce the likelihood of unplanned pregnancies. For this reason, among our major emphases at CFC is a campaign called Prevention *Not* Prohibition. We also have a campaign called "Condoms4Life" where we argue that the use of condoms should be accepted, and they should be made readily available to prevent the transmission of HIV, a view that is generally rejected by the Catholic hierarchy, although several bishops have openly supported their use.

I was not planning to talk about abortion in my class as USD. My agreement was to teach a course on Ecology and Theology. That fact made no difference to those who wanted to exclude me from teaching there. The fact that I was a member of a dissident Catholic group was sufficient for them to declare that I should not be allowed to hold this chair, even though I am the author of 45 well received books on theology and social issues and have been a professor of theology for more than 40 years at several universities, including some Catholic ones. As a retired professor with a standing invitation to teach at the Claremont School of Theology and the Graduate University in Claremont, Calif., I am not in need of this job. However, for me and for many others, this decision signals something very disturbing about the state of intellectual freedom at Catholic universities.

More than 2,000 people worldwide, in addition to 50 members of the faculty of USD, have signed a petition asking for this decision to be reconsidered, but the administration has declined to do so.

My concern is that Catholic colleges and universities are in danger of becoming intellectual ghettos where controversial issues, particularly in relation to Catholic teachings and practices, cannot be discussed. But if they cannot be discussed at Catholic universities, where else can they be discussed? What better place is there for them to be discussed? I believe that if an issue like abortion could be examined in an open and respectful forum, many Catholics could find common ground with the views taken by Catholics for Choice. We all agree that it would be good to reduce the need for abortion. The question at issue is how to accomplish this goal. Is it accomplished by forbidding contraception even within marriage? Or is it best accomplished by effective use of contraception within responsible sexuality?

Catholic universities in the last 40 years increasingly have excluded critical Catholic thinkers who are seen as diverging from Catholic teaching, even though they themselves see their views as appropriate developments of Catholic teaching. Leading Catholic moral theologian Charles Curran was excluded from teaching at the Catholic University of America in 1986 for opening up questions on the morality of contraception. Eminent Catholic theologian Hans Küng was excluded from the chair of Catholic theology at Tübingen University in Germany for questioning papal infallibility. Jesuit theologian Roger Haight was excluded from teaching at Weston Seminary for his book on Jesus that opens up his human historical context. The list could go on. Küng continues to teach at Tübingen, but now in a chair of ecumenical theology. Curran and Haight teach at Protestant schools. Around the world, the most creative Catholic theologians and ethicists find themselves teaching outside Catholic universities. Is this good for the Catholic community? I think not. A church confident in its quest for truth should be open to respectful discussion of differing views. Only in this way can we arrive at fuller understanding. ■

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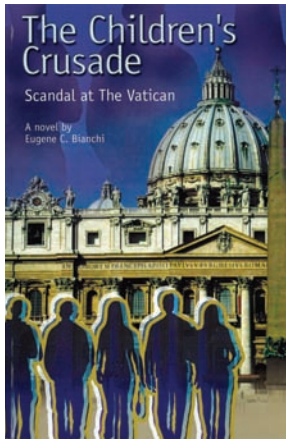
Fictionalizing the Unspeakable

By Rosemary Radford Ruether

The Children's Crusade: Scandal at the Vatican
Eugene C. Bianchi
(Caritas Communications, 2008, 440pp)
978-0-9799390-2-0, $14.95

The sex-abuse scandal has been the source of a major crisis of the Roman Catholic church worldwide for more than a decade. This scandal is the subject of a fast-paced novel, *The Children's Crusade* by Eugene Bianchi, ex-Jesuit and emeritus professor of religion at Atlanta's Emory University. Bianchi's novel pits the reform wing of Catholicism, exemplified by Voice of the Faithful, a movement that arose out of the sex abuse scandal in Boston, with the extreme Catholic right.



The central figure is Mark Doyle, liberal bishop of San Francisco, who was introduced in Bianchi's earlier novel, *The Bishop of San Francisco: Romance, Intrigue and Religion*. Doyle espouses all Catholicism's progressive causes: married priests, women's priests, contraception and the use of condoms to prevent AIDS, and a general democratization of the church. He is pitted against the shadowy Ordo Novus who has already assassinated two priests in Doyle's diocese, a gay Jesuit pastor and a liberation theologian and is gunning for Doyle himself. His friend and former priest, Hector Novales, is accidentally killed when he is hit by a bullet aimed at Doyle.

San Francisco alternates in the novel with Rome where a professor of medieval history, Dan Harrington, is paired with an activist Franciscan nun, "Frankie" Latrobe, in the kidnapping of Cardinal Bolger (modeled after Bernard Law of Boston). Bolger epitomizes the refusal of the American hierarchy to adequately protect children against sexual abuse and the cover-up of this issue by the Vatican. Resigning his position due to protests in the US, Bolger is enjoying a comfortably sinecure in Rome when he is kidnapped and sequestered in an underground room in a church in Rome. There he is forced to listen to the testimonies of victims of priest sexual abuse, with the aim of forcing him to realize his mistakes and to write a statement calling for more decisive action by the church.

The story heats up as San Franciscan police and Colette, Hector's wife, follow the trail of the murderer and uncover a trail leading to the Colombian embassy and Ordo Novus. Meanwhile a New Testament professor in Rome uncovers evidence that the new pope, Clement XV (modeled after Benedict XVI) was himself a child abuser during years he spent teaching in Frankfurt. Doyle, summoned to Rome for a "hearing" with the pope, goes first to Frankfurt, to meet Frankie and Dan to investigate the story of the pope's former history. They uncover a sister and brother of a leading family abused in their teens and now ready to tell their story.

The story then moves to a rapid denouement as the pope meets with the abused pair seeking their "forgiveness" in a public cover-up of his behavior. When they refuse to acquiesce, he succumbs to pressure from his Opus Dei advisor, Juan Miranda, and seeks to assassinate them, along with Doyle and his friends. When this attack is partially averted and exposed, the scandal of the pope as sexual abuser is accentuated by that of would-be murderer. The pope realizes his situation is indefensible and resigns, dramatically coming out of the Vatican to appear at a public demonstration by representatives of abused Catholics from around the world.

Bianchi's novel pits the reform wing of Catholicism with the extreme Catholic right.

Bianchi has been around Catholicism and Rome long enough to give his story realistic detail. The clashing worldviews of those who would resort to violence to protect the "order" of society and the church, and those determined to purge the church of this evil and its underlying roots in a celibate clerical culture, are vividly experienced. This is a fun read, as well as an instructive one, and its conclusion is a reformer's vision. ■

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER *is a feminist theologian and prolific author, most recently of* Catholic ≠ the Vatican *(The New Press, 2008). She is currently the Carpenter Emerita Professor of Feminist Theology at Pacific School of Religion and a board member of Catholics for Choice.*

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