

FEMINISM AND THE LIBERATION OF THEOLOGY

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A PROBLEM OF METHODOLOGY

Today the Catholic Church gives the impression of being the last refuge of male chauvinism- The office of the Pope will probably be the last post to be open to women - if even this were to happen this side of paradise.

Catholic priesthood is not only a preserve of the males; it is still forbidden for Catholic priests to be married. Yet the development of the struggle of the women for their promotion, emancipation and liberation is posing a serious question to Catholic thinking. The U.N, Year of the Women, 1975, coincides with Pope Paul's Holy Year which has "Reconciliation" as its theme. Will the Catholic Church reconcile itself to the equal dignity of men and women during this holy year?

The attitude of the Catholic- Church towards women's rights depends both on *its* theoretical teachings and its practical policies - *Both* these are deeply influenced by the cultures that have prevailed in the so called Christian societies. Theology is the reflection on the revealed teachings of God. Theologians provide the main material for the teachings of the Church. The present phenomenal advance of women in the assertion of their rights, presents an important issue to theologians and Catholics in general. How can this issue be faced?

There are different approaches. Some are traditionalist and want the women confined to the homes - children, kitchen and Church as they say in German. They invoke the long line of traditional theological thought. Others are more liberal. They advocate respect for women, and the provision of a special place for them due to their being the stronger or weaker sex. They say all persons are equal, * but women are different and should be treated as such. This leads to a certain protectionism and paternalism. It does not fundamentally alter the position of male dominance. A third attitude is to affirm the equality of all persons and to try to remove all disparities in treatment as these are almost wholly due to the cultural conditioning of our societies. How do theologians react to all this"? What method is to be invoked in the evolution of a theology of Women?

THE CONSERVATIVE APPROACH

The usual method is to return to the Scriptures of the early Church and to find there reasons for or against the emancipation of the women. One such line of argument is that the Christian Scriptures speak of the supporting role of the woman from the very beginning of history and of this relationship as seen in the story of Genesis. Numerous citations can be found in the Scriptures in favour of an inferior position being given to women. The example of Jesus too is frequently mentioned in so far as he did not choose women to be among the

12 apostles who were to be the chief continuators of his mission and authority in the community he founded. The fact that Jesus was a man is also said to favour masculine superiority. This approach also makes frequent use of St. Paul's sayings concerning the role of women as being made to be more seen than heard in the Christian Community. The example of the early Church is also mentioned. The apostles and later Popes and bishops seemed to think that the highest ecclesiastical position a woman could be given was that of a deaconess. This school of thought would also 'argue from the history of the Church and from Canon Law in favour of the privileged position of the male in human society and in the Church. They would therefore maintain that women cannot be priests and much less bishops or Pope. All these are founded on the basic conception that the woman is an inferior being compared to the man.

A MORE LIBERAL LINE

Another line of thought gaining ground today is that Jesus was a liberator of women and that he did not support the discrimination against the women that was prevalent in the Jewish society of his time. Instances are mentioned of the relationship of Jesus with women such as the adulteress, the Samaritan woman at the well, Martha and Mary, Mary Magdalene and above all his own mother. It is also thought that in the early Church, women had a greater degree of equality than in the Jewish-Greco-Roman Society of the day. There is a certain amount of truth in this position too in so far as Jesus sometimes went against the traditions and customs of the time and adopted a more humane and liberal attitude towards women. However, it is one thing to say this and another to claim that an adequate theology of the role and rights of women in modern society can be developed on the basis of the New Testament, Scriptures or the examples of the early Church alone for the issues that are raised up today are quite different in their depth and ampleur. It may be asked how far the questions of 1975 concerning the liberation of women at a worldwide level can be inspired by these texts.

THEOLOGY TOO AS CULTURE BOUND

Still another attitude is to recognize the evolutionary character of revelation by God, that God's revelation to humanity in the Christian tradition does not necessarily reach its ultimate point in every aspect with the New Testament or the life of the apostles. For, we see a continuing evolution in the Church of its own understanding of the Christian message even, in matters concerning the moral law. We know that there has been a gradual evolution of thought within the Church with reference to such matters as slavery, polygamy, democracy, socialism, etc. The fact is that the Christian community itself learns from the world. The process of the evolution of the world has taught the Church many things which it did not find originally in Scriptures or even in the explicit teaching of Jesus Christ. We may say the same concerning the rights of women. We cannot expect to evolve an adequate theology of women's rights from the New Testament or the life of the early Church. Nor need we accept as adequate the writings of great theologians like St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas or even Teilhard de Chardin. All those persons wrote at a given historical time and

their attitude to women depended on the cultural context of the time. Christian theological tradition has tended to regard woman as an inferior being, a temptress, a fair defect of nature, and at best only a secondary associate of man. In this tradition the weight-age has been given to the celibate woman as the ideal of feminine goodness. Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been presented as the Blessed Virgin, a patient, docile mother. Even in present writings and speeches we see the presentation of women as the ideal of docility and religiosity; whereas man is regarded as the more, independent, powerful and active.

UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE TEXTS

In our approach towards the texts of scripture we have to distinguish:-

- a) The intention of God in revealing a particular teaching at a given time.
- b) The author's own expression.
- c) How these are understood in the cultural context of the time.

In this we note that historical evolution of the pedagogy of God with reference to his people. Thus the Law of Moses that an adulteress could be stoned or strangled to death was not being observed in the time of Christ, partly due to the influence of the Romans. It would be sacrilegious to have to think that God wanted such a law to be maintained for all time under all circumstances. If it had any meaning it was only as understood within the context of the day. Therefore we have to critically evaluate the context of the Scripture in the light of the growth in human awareness concerning what is right and just. This study, is known as hermeneutics or the research into the interpretation of texts.

The evolution of the human race in its self-understanding is also a process that takes place under the guidance of providence. It is a form of revelation to humankind by God. It takes place today mainly within secular society. Human beings become more aware of their rights of the conditions which are truly humanizing and fulfilling for them as persons. Today we are aware that slavery is de-humanizing and hence is of no avail to argue that Jesus Christ did not condemn slavery or that St. Paul encouraged masters to treat their slaves well. What the Bible says about slavery has to be - evaluated in terms of our present consciousness of what is right and wrong. In this sense, therefore, this almost universal consciousness of the evil of slavery is a criterion for judging the Bible Itself. It can help us understand the limits within which the original message was given. To defend slavery on the basis of St. Paul's Statement would be fair neither by God nor by St. Paul. For, they were not meant as statements for all time. There are many actions of the apostles which are not necessarily meant to be imitated. Thus Paul circumcised his disciple Timothy out of consideration for the Jews. There are many particular lists of advice in St. Paul and the New Testament which the Church has long since forgotten: e.g. that only circumcised persons should be ordained, that bishops should be the husband of one wife etc. Why then is it that only Paul's advice regarding women's speech and head dress are remembered and not those more significant recommendations? One conclusion of this is that humanity's consciousness

of right and wrong as it develops over the centuries is a guide for the critique of the understanding of the message or revelation.

This can also be applied to the problem of the rights of women. Since the modern world has advanced to a point in which the more enlightened persons recognize woman as a human person with equal rights as a man, then this is a criterion for judging the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church, rather than vice versa.

For this means that God present in persons has made humanity more aware of his own nature and dignity. The subordination of women to an inferior position is dehumanizing and unjust and this cannot be the will of God. It might have been recommended for a given time, as a concession to male domination or as an acceptance of the existing situation. Likewise for the tradition of the Church. The fact that there were no women who were apostles may not be used as an argument concerning the role of women in the Christian community today since the position of women is being completely changed in civil society. What was perhaps normal in the time of the Jews and the Romans cannot be regarded as universally valid, particularly today, when we have woman Prime Ministers, legislators, Everest climbers, astronauts, scientists etc. The modern world had made it possible for women to perform most of the functions which were earlier the preserve of man. There seems hardly anything so manly in the ecclesiastical offices that a woman cannot perform. A woman is capable of being Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy, India. There is no reason why she cannot look after a diocese. We have; therefore, to question the thinking of the Church about women and their rights beginning with what the secular society teaches us as a matter of experience and this I would suggest is also a theological method for the evolution of our thinking on women's rights.

It may be almost futile to try to find arguments for women's rights in the long tradition to Christian theology which has been dominated very much by males, especially by clerics and monks. Christian theological reflection has unfortunately helped to socialize male domination. It performed the same function towards feudalism, capitalism and colonialism. We do not have to be surprised by this for theology too is culture bound. It is perhaps much better to accept that the Christian tradition has not been too favourable to women's rights in spite of the example of love and affection shown by Jesus. This need not be an impediment to us today. There are so many things which the Christian tradition has not been aware of but had to learn from the evolution of the world.

Therefore the suggestion is that a methodology for the evolution of a theology on women's right would have to begin with thinking of the more enlightened persons in our contemporary society and the experience of the world. From these we can discern the rights of woman and her position as an equal to man, and in do way an inferior to man.

Women themselves can contribute much to Christian reflection by laying aside the historical burden of a male dominated theology, and evolving their own thinking from within their own consciousness of their rights as free, responsible human beings. To try to work

within the old theological framework is to accept limits which cannot be too helpful. It means being caught up within a system of male superiority. It leads to the type of thinking that is likely to be satisfied with the "promotion" of the women when the legitimate demand is for a liberation which the dignity of every woman as a person demands.

We may find arguments for such a radical approach in St. Paul who said - that in Jesus Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female (Fa. 3.28), and in the Second Vatican Council which also affirmed that any discrimination based on sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion is contrary to God's intent (Church in the Modern World Art.29). The contradiction is between such words and the practice of the Church where a woman priest, not to mention bishop or Pope is still unacceptable. It is not that the priesthood is important for woman's liberation. But the insult contained in the law that women cannot be priests, bishops and Pope is a counter witness in the modern world to the dignity of the human person.

The evolution of the particular aspects of theology in so far as there are differences of sex, psychology etc., would have to take place within the fundamental proposition of basic equality, which the modern world emphasizes. Hence it would be necessary to give up many of the traditional concepts of Christian theology concerning the women i.e. to demythologize the traditional Christian theology of the Christian woman; that she is the one who has to be only docile and pensive, is meant for victim hood, compassion, patience. Such a change in theology is likely to help the Christian religion itself to get itself out of a position in which women are supposed to be more "religious" and almost *as* a consequence religions are regarded as more feminine.

What is required is a radical new approach to the problems of the theology with reference to the sexes. The theologian has to learn from the modern world to recognize that every human being is a person and has a right to personal fulfillment, freedom and happiness. It would therefore follow that sex should not be a criteria of discrimination. If we argue from an example of Christ it is unfair by him because we cannot take each of his actions and guide lines for all time. In any case, if the Church fails to recognize women's right at this stage of history, it is the Church that will suffer the consequences. For the women will all the same go ahead towards their greater liberation.

This approach is applicable not only to the question of women's right but to many other issues in which there is a long tradition of unfair domination of one group by another.

Thus in the question of the salvation of those who are not of the Christian faith it is not of much use to engage oneself in endless theological research to try to prove that the Christian tradition is not against the salvation of those who are not Christian. For today humankind is aware that a just God will not condemn to eternal unhappiness thousands of millions of people who are not Christians for no fault of theirs. If the Christian theological tradition had no adequate answer for this problem what we have to do is begin with the assertion of the goodness of God and the rights of man and in the context of these two to

critically evaluate our theology or theological tradition. Similarly for questions such as human freedom and the rights of individual conscience.

Only a radical approach to the question of the equal rights of women can help the Church meet the challenge that is posed to it by the revolution of the modern world. This is one more direction in which revolutionary changes are taking place rapidly and universally. The process of rapidation itself will grow within the next few years. Unfortunately the Church leadership is prepared to educate and "promote" the woman but as yet is not willing to acknowledge an equal right. This is a crisis more for the Church than for enlightened women. For women will advance, and the more among them may leave aside the Church as incapable of understanding their deepest and best aspirations. The Church has already alienated the workers, youth and intellectuals. It may even lose many women who have been long the mainstay of her own position.

The acknowledgment of the rights of women has however not to be a more paternalistic concession, nor a patchwork palliative, The Church has to learn to respect human beings as made by God - male and female. The Church has to grow and once again learn from the world. This is a grace for it. In its turn it can help the liberation of millions of women.

While we need not expect from the Christian scriptures all the elements for developing a theological reflection concerning the rights of women, we can discern many helpful contributions from Scripture. These include the life and attitude of Jesus, his mother Mary, and: the life of the Early Church as portrayed in the Acts and the Epistles, as well as the basic scriptural teachings.

<p>The text of a talk given to the Christian Peace Conference, Women's Consultation Sri Lanka, 5th April 1983</p>

In this talk I shall deal mainly with some aspects of the conditioning of Christian theology by a male dominant society to legitimize its own power relations. In order to understand this better I shall begin with a reference to the tendency of all those in power to control information, knowledge and thinking to their advantage. Such a process of thought control or manipulation is greatly helped by developing schools of thought or ideologies. Today we can see how the super powers that have dominance due to their superior armaments have also very powerful means of dissemination of information to the whole world.

In the religious sphere theology is a systematized body of thinking concerning human life in the context of a God. Theologies too tend to be influenced and to some extent determined by the power relations in a society. Thus the dominant race, class, sex have an impact on the body of religious thinking that is communicated by a religious leadership to its

followers. With the advance in human consciousness there is a valuable purification of theology itself, so that it may be less a legitimization of the powerful and more a reflection on the deeper spiritual values of love and service inspired by a relationship to and message from the Transcendent God.

The Women's movement as it develops throughout the world is a great help in this process of human growth to a more true assessment of human life and relationships. It is contributing on the basis of the women's consciousness of their oppression and their search for genuine liberation, to remove some of the false values that have been developed during centuries of male domination. One area in which this contribution is taking place is in religion, specially Christian theology.

SOURCES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Christian theology is based on the claim that God has spoken in a unique manner to the Jewish people through their religious writers. This message of God - called revelation is contained in the Bible - the sacred scriptures of the Judaeo - Christian tradition. This revelation is given a supreme value as the Word of God, the Truth, the explanation of the meaning, purpose of human life and after life.

Other religions too have their sacred writings which have a great value for them. The Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic sacred writings are sources of knowledge and springs of motivation for their total human life. Secular ideologies too have their intellectual sources in the writings of their accepted leaders or founding "fathers". The writings of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels are a primary source book for Marxism Capitalist thought, even today refers to the works of Adam Smith for inspiration.

All these sources are given an unique value; a certain degree of certitude is attributed to them. They evince an intellectual assent from their adherents. They contain the basic postulates of a given theology, ideology or school of thought. They contain some of the fundamental assumptions, myths or stories on which their thinking is built.

Some myths are stories that give meaning to people's lives e.g. the Adam and Eve story.' It is a story that is communicated from generation to generation. Such myths are related to the power relation in a society. In Marxism also there is an element of myth - such as concerning the existence of a primitive communism and the rise of private property.

Myths are part of the unquestioned stories on which people build their view of life and their ideologies. Due to the prevalence of many myths we have to analyze our sources of knowledge. For liberation is in truth, in knowing as much of the truth as we can and in being true to oneself, to one's conscience and one's personality. To be truly liberated is to be free to be oneself and to honestly relate to others and not live merely by unquestioned myths or social conditioning. This has to be in close relationship to love, to understanding, sympathy, and compassion. Often we are pressurized to behave according to the conditioning to which we are subjected to.

With reference to theology also we must try to analyze, critically examine and evaluate its content of thought. Theology is not God. Theology is a point of view about God; just as feminism is not the woman; a school of feminism is a view about woman. Woman herself is a reality that cannot be fathomed and explained fully by any theory. All the more is the human mind incapable of comprehending God fully.

STRUCTURE OF THINKING IN JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

What is the body of thought that is handed down to us as tradition? Let us go through its general themes in brief outline. There is first the idea, of God. We accept God as a power, a person transcending the world. But what and who exactly God is, is unfathomable. None can define or identify God completely. It is very important to place the mystery where the mystery is, and not allow the mystery to be reduced to a theology. Our experience of the divine is much more than and quite different from a theological formulation concerning God. We say God is not fully knowable; we must respect that unknowability. Similarly no human person is fully knowable.

Christians hold that God is Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is in us yet and not fully within us, not controlled or possessed by us, God is transcendent, beyond us and the universe. Another key concept is that of Creation. The story of creation given in the Bible has led to the idea of Original Sin coming down to all humanity through our descent from Adam and Eve. Jesus had to come due to this human sin. This is one of the main elements of the assumptions of Christian theology. Many other themes of theology depend on it. Because of original sin all humanity needs salvation, and salvation is a gift of God, a Grace. Original sin is communicated from generation to generation. This is a primary heritage that human beings give to their offspring. Hence the need of salvation and of a saviour.

In this perspective the universal saviour has to be a person of divine nature, because only a divine redeemer can atone for the immensity of the sin of our first parents. This saviour is Jesus Christ.

The person Jesus is known historically. As humanity is alienated from God due to the sin of Adam and Eve there is no redemption without a sacrifice of a divine order. Therefore Jesus had to die; hence his crucifixion.

Since Jesus is God he rose from the dead - hence the Resurrection. Jesus had gathered together his disciples whom he formed through the experience of life. This is the beginning of the church. Jesus gave- the apostles a Mission of preaching his gospel to all humanity. Baptism is required because all human persons are born with original sin. With Baptism we get grace through Jesus. All the other sacraments follow from Baptism. Once we die there is heaven or hell.

This is the basic structure of Christian theology in brief There are entire theological tracts concerning each of these themes e.g. about God, Christology, Soteriology concerning salvation, missiology, catechesis regarding teaching. Worship and celebration are called liturgy. All these are linked to the story of Adam and Eve, and the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

RACE, CLASS, SEX AND RELIGION

Let us see how the question of race, class, sex and religion are used by those in power to interpret this primal story and this basic structure to their advantage. If we take Race we see how the Jewish people explained the story in their favour. They considered themselves the chosen people. Jesus was not racist e.g. the parable of the Good Samaritan. But the Adam and Eve and Jesus stories were appropriated by the European peoples. They tended to interpret them in terms of white superiority through Christian theology. It is they who have the true revelation and grace. One of the main elements in this story is the necessary role of the Church or salvific community. Within it knowledge and power are with the clergy. They therefore decide on the theology.

The general principle is that those who control power, tend to control knowledge and thinking. This can be seen in society in general. What is published is decided by those who control the media of communications Thus the Western Christian Churches thought of the Church as White, The Roman Catholics thought of it as Italian and Roman. To take a simple example, all the popes were Italian for a few hundred years till 1978. This was because the Cardinals who elected the Popes were mainly Italian. And why were the Cardinals Italian? Because the Popes created the Cardinals, Thus the system of Italian Popes choosing Italian Cardinals and vice versa continued for hundreds of years. This was the manner in which the earthly representative of Jesus Christ was chosen. Here there was an element of racism.. The Popes were Italian; and had to be White. To think of a Black Pope is still far fetched. Thus de facto power was used to retain power within a certain category of persons. If this can be so in an institution committed to spiritual goals what could it not be in ordinary civil society?

A similar situation can be seen with reference to religion itself. The White race has Christianity as its religion. So according to them God has spoken in a special revelation to the Jews and the White race. The Bible which is the story of the Jews is considered to be the revelation of God for the whole of Humanity. The interpretation of the Bible is controlled largely by the religious powers in Rome, Canterbury, New York, Geneva and Moscow. These indicate how a race or group that is dominant can determine the content of theology.

During many centuries the dominant Christian religion held that eternal Salvation is only through Baptism. Everybody is in Sin, as Adam and Eve are the first parents of the

whole human race everywhere. No body is saved except through the ministration of the Church in Baptism. All had to accept the Judaeo-Christian revelation and acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the Lord-God, This was said to be the only path to heaven Thus here was a religion and a race using their power and knowledge to put across a theology, that served it. The (White) Christians therefore claimed the right to destroy the temples of worship of other religions be they Hindu, Buddhist or Moslem. For the spread or defence of their religion they fought against Islam for over 1000 years. Christians called it the Crusades; for Moslems it was a holy war. God was at war against Cod through different religions and peoples. This was seen even in the World Wars I and II. Cod T.-as invoked by both sides.

We have therefore to distinguish between God as the divine mystery and our images of God. We tend to make our gods to our own image and to our likeness. We have therefore to bring a critical perspective on our images of God in our theology.

The class in power tends to place God on its side. Thus the poor are considered miserable; we will always have them. They must accept their lot. The class system affects the Church too. The source of power in the Church is the clergy. Therefore the clergy are from the middle or upper classes or are made to accept such life styles and values. The Popes, Patriarchs and Cardinals live at the level of the highest class. The clergy are so formed as to be elitist even intellectually. The type of work they could engage in was defined and limited. They would normally not be identified with the interests of the working class.

Virtue was interpreted according to class. If one upsets the class relations, one is bad. People who are disadvantaged must be patient, peaceful and forbearing. The rich will in return help the poor out of their superfluous wealth, and contribute to the Church funds to support the poor. Here too knowledge and power are used by the class in power to its advantage.

Like race and class, sex too conditions theology, Those who have control over power and access to knowledge use them to interpret the Biblical revelation and build up a story favourable to the dominant sex in this case the males. We can see this in relation to almost all the themes of theology. Let us take the idea of God. Theology deals with a concept of God; and not directly with God, as may take place in a mystical experience. We can accept the necessity of God for an explanation of the world, of the human person and of all known reality. But what and who this God is, is not known to us fully. The language of Christian theology is speaking of God as a male. Almost everywhere we hear of God spoken of as "HE". Even among Women theologians this expression comes to their lips due to long habituation. This is a matter of language. However, it is important to realize the significance of language; because we are conditioned by it. Change in language can help us think differently of God.

It is incorrect to think of God in such specific sex connotative terms. We have to think of, reflect on and pray to God as one beyond human physiology. As soon as we say

"HE" we imply a physiology for God. God the Father is represented as a grand old man with a flowing beard.

Sexism is based on a material physiological differentiation. Sexism attributes the value of a person ultimately to a physical difference limited to psychological factors. Sexism is not and cannot be based on spiritual values of the human person. For concerning spiritual values there is inequality and subordination of one person to another. Personality is undefineable. Each person is unique and of incomparable value. To attribute to God a masculine sex by calling God "HE" is ever: unconsciously to make God physical and material and hence limit God. In this sense sexism, has a fundamental relationship to Capitalism and Marxism. A physical material characteristic is given pre-eminent value in their world view.

In the teaching of Jesus God is a Spirit. He also -said "Our father" this need not prevent us from reflection further. Scripture refers also to the motherhood of God. In the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and in the major world religions, God is beyond the material physical aspects of a human personality. The divine is not limited to flesh.

We need to mediate deeply on the reality of God. Who is God? How does God speak to us; in truth, in love, in our conscience. None can control or possess God. Those who control power in society or Church -end to think that they have a monopoly of the grace of God, like someone controlling the main tap in a water supply system. This is the tendency of all power. The power of race is used to dominate other races in the religious sphere also. During the Portuguese period there were no native priests in Sri Lanka. All the priests were Portuguese. Similarly the priesthood was made a middle class phenomenon. The working class was excluded from the priesthood. Priest-workers were considered an abnormality even in recent times. So also the limiting of the clergy to males.

God is not a male. God is not limited to a human person or personality, God is transcendent, above and beyond all, while being immanent in all. God speaks to us from within and challenges us all to go towards a type of society in which the values of the divine are realised. Our human tendency is to take God seem to be what we want God to be. We often say by implication: God is that temple that Church that rule, that law. All such conditioning is a using of God to serve our purposes.

Let us now turn to sin, original sin. The theological thinking has been that every child born to human parents is turned away from God and cannot look at God face to face unless it is baptised therefore all un-baptised children were said to be confined to a Limbo where there was no happiness or unhappiness. This was the thinking for a long time. There is no justification in Christian revelation for the view that the whole of humanity is in sin in that way. There is a reference in St. Paul to humanity being in "sin". How different is this view from the words of Jesus: "Let little children come to me". "Unless you become like little children you cannot enter heaven". Jesus himself was not baptised till he was about 30 years of age.

These are the theologies of a particular group that interpreted the story to suit it. We have therefore to question them. Not only the Adam and Eve story as to who is more guilty etc., but also the whole theology of original sin. What is it? It is true human sinfulness is in all of us. Human weakness and proneness to evil are acknowledged by all religions. This is not taken away by baptism only.

But the concept of an original sin due to which we are cut off from God, and which makes God angry with every human child till it is baptized, is part of a theory that makes the clergy very important and generally necessary. It gives a special spiritual privilege to Christians who have an almost automatic access to baptism.

Jesus gave his disciples the Mission; 'Go ye and baptize all nations and teach what I have taught'. What Jesus taught is that: power must be a service; love one another, if you have two coats give one to another, in need. It is in that sense that Christians have to be baptized. We have ourselves to die with Jesus in service to others even unto death.

The sacramental system is also interpreted by those who have control over theology. The influence of sexism is more clear in the question of the Eucharist and Penance. Within this scheme the power to absolve sins is limited to the priest who has to be a male. Therefore women have no power of absolution. They cannot be the agents of reconciliation between God and a human person.

Women need men in order to be released from the burden of grievous sin Only men can save them from eternal hell if they are in mortal sin.

JESUS AND CHRIST

The personality of Jesus is central to Christianity, Jesus is a male Christ is not a male. The second person of the divine Trinity is not a male. This is the problem. God spoken of as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is a human way of expressing the inexpressible divine, God is not a father with a grey beard; the eternal Christ is not a son. God is a power, a being that is within and beyond all, that is not male or female, Greek or Jew Sinhala or Tamil, White or Black.

Jesus and Christ are distinct. Though not separated, often we attribute to the human Jesus what belongs to the Second Person of the Trinity It is very important that we use these terms very carefully viz: Jesus, God, Second Person of Trinity. Christ, Messiah, Jesus Christ. There are difficult questions here; such as what is the relationship of Jesus as son of Mary and the Son in the Holy Trinity?

The feminist movement can question the notion of "Son" itself when attributed to the Divine Trinity. God has only one son, no daughters. This is only an image, but it has a very powerful impact on people's mentality. It is the way of expression of a male dominated patri-

archal society. God is male. Jesus is the son of God; the question is in what way is he the son of God; How is he a child different from other children. This is part of the mystery.

Can we claim to understand how God can take human form? We must not claim to understand more than we can comprehend with our limited human minds. God is not definable, cannot be captured fully by the human mind. There is a very close relationship between Jesus and God. What is it? Can we identify and define it? That is a difficult problem.

In the early Church the term "Son of God" was understood as a man who was very close to God. The story of Jesus is well-documented, better perhaps than any other story from that period of human history. He lived and died as a man. What is the relation between this Jesus and the Christ?

In the Jewish tradition there could be many messiahs or Christs? Jesus is not the only Christ. But in so far as Christ is the Cosmic Christ "Word of God" the "Logos" referred to in the Prologue of St. John, Christ was not born at a particular time. The Cosmic Christ was and is of all time, before and beyond time. Christ as divine did not die. The divine Christ cannot die. Christ in whom as St. Paul says all things are re-integrated is the divine person and not a limited human person and hence not a male.

What is of the human Jesus can be attributed to the male sex of Jesus Christ. That which *is of* the divine Christ as such we cannot attribute to the male sex. The two are not always the same. We must distinguish the two even if we do not necessarily separate them. Jesus died and was buried; Christ in the sense of the Second Person of the Divine Trinity could not die and was not buried. Jesus the Christ in the sense of an expected Jewish Messiah died and was buried. We must have a clear idea of whom we are speaking when we refer to Jesus, Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and Christ as the eternal word.

The idea of Christ as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity is sometimes used to legitimize male domination. Without an adequate distinction in the concepts and in the reality, the terms relating to Jesus the historical male person, Jesus the expected human Messiah and Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, are all used rather indiscriminately to justify and preserve male superiority in the Churches.

This is not merely a theoretical issue. It is of great practical importance in the life of the Churches. Different arguments have been adduced against the ordination of women: such as that they cannot keep a secret and hence are unsuitable for hearing confessions that they could not travel in distant lands for danger from wild animals etc.

Such arguments are now not acceptable. Women hold some of the most responsible positions in the world. More serious theological arguments have to be given against female ordination if that position is to be accepted. In 1977, the Vatican Declaration on "Women and the Ministerial Priesthood" argued thus: "When Christ's role in the Eucharist is to be examined sacramentally there would not be this natural resemblance which must exist

between Christ and his minister if the role of Christ were not taken by a man. In such a case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ, for Christ himself was and remains a man, Christ is, of course, the first born of all humanity of women as well as of men. Nevertheless the incarnation of the Word took place according to the male sex. This is indeed a question of fact; and this fact while not implying an alleged natural inferiority of man over woman cannot be dissociated from the economy of salvation."

This is a theological statement from the Vatican but not necessarily from the Pope. It has some ambiguities. It is using the idea that Christ is a male. If you say the human Jesus is the Christ we can agree that Christ is a male; but if by Christ you mean the Second Person of the Trinity we have to differ. The Eternal Second Person of the Trinity is not a male; because God is God. This argument seems far fetched and is hardly convincing. It can be objected to as another example of males using theology to justify their use of power.

This is an argument in terms of "natural" resemblance to Christ whereas generally the approach to the Sacraments is concerning their "supernatural" significance. Now the argument is about the natural resemblance of the priest to Christ. It may further be questioned how far is the Christian Clergy originated from Christ as Second Person of the Trinity. The Christian clergy is from Jesus in a historical linkage But can we say that this clergy is more from the Second Person of the Trinity than the Hindu priest? How do we know that? This leads us to the question of Revelation is not limited to the Bible or to the Catholic or Protestant Churches. God is not limited to operate within the categories or perimeters of the Church or Churches.

Since the Second Person of the Trinity is not a male that role of Christ cannot be taken by a man anymore than by a woman. The declaration refers to the "image of Christ". We may ask which image of Christ? According to whose understanding; is it of Christ as Jesus of Nazareth, Christ as the Messiah, or Christ as the Eternal Second Person of the Trinity. Is the Christ who is to return at the end of time a male? Is the Christ of whom St. John says "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." a male? These are questions which need to be asked when such use is made of the masculinity of Jesus to argue against the ordination of women.

The Churches have too easily identified Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah and God. Jesus is only one of the Christs, Jesus is a man, and Mary his mother is a woman. Between the two, would Jesus have considered himself superior to his mother? If a woman could conceive Jesus, bring him up to manhood and offer him up as a victim at Calvary, can it be said that women are not fit to offer the same sacrifice sacramentally in the Eucharist?

The Vatican Declaration stresses: "Nevertheless the incarnation of the Word took place according to the male sex". It would seem, therefore, there has never been an incarnation of the Word according to the female sex. How- are we to be sure of this" How can we be so definite that God did not want to be incarnate in any other person or manner. Why should God be limited to take human flesh only in one person? What of all the other religions? In the Bible story the Word took flesh in the womb of Mary. The Incarnation took

place within and from a woman (and that without a male participation according to some traditions). Is the fruit more sacred than the tree?

Such affirmations concerning Jesus the Christ may be accepted unquestioningly; or they may be regarded hypothetical 111 so far as they depend on original assumptions, which are taken for granted. These assumptions and interpretations are often proposed to suit the dominant power of a race, a class, a sex or a religion. These tend to appropriate God and the divine to support its claims to power and superiority.

When however we begin to question the first postulates, the questioning takes us far. On the other hand unless we question we do not come close to God in truth and spirit. This is part of the challenge to the human generation from the encounter of the world religions which all claim to know the truth. Yet they have different perceptions of the ultimate truth and of reality. Thus Christianity sees God as speaking to us as transcendent and calling us through prophets and apostles.

The call to get to the heart of the issue beyond the unproved assumption is part of the challenge of feminists as well as of Third World Theology. Third World Theology questions the uniqueness that Christian revelation claims. What of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and the religions of the Far East? Marxist analysis and sociological analysis offer a critique of the Church in terms of its class affiliations. The Women's movement in the Churches questions the implicit or explicit male domination in Christian theology. This includes a question of the sources of revelation. Is it limited to the Bible which is written by men? How far do patriarchy and the Bible support each other? Was the divine inspiration being communicated to men related to the greater literacy of males in a patriarchal society?

We are now witnessing a deep questioning of the theology that has long been taken for granted. This can have a purifying and liberating impact. The questioning by Galileo brought up the issue whether authority can determine what the truth is. The Church authorities were proved wrong in this regard. In the 18th and 19th centuries with the rise of the democratic tradition, the Church took a position that, since authority is from God, democracy cannot be the foundation of legitimate political power. The Church did not appreciate the value of election of civil rulers by popular franchise. The Church had to learn this from the experience of the peoples after the latter part of the 19th century. Similarly the Church had much to learn in respect of human freedom and tolerance. When the Church exercised civil power, it had theologies that justified its intolerant use of power.

There was a period when the Church did not appreciate the human aspirations for greater economic equality. Socialism and Marxism brought a critique of the Christian religion which was then intimately linked to Western Capitalism. This is an issue which has not yet been resolved by the Church though about a third of the human race is under Marxist regimes. The class character of Christian institutions and even thinking needs still further purification, in order that churches may be more true to the teaching of Jesus.

White superiority within Christianity is another issue needing resolving. The Catholic Church central leadership is mainly White, so are the Protestant and the Orthodox Churches,

The majority of Catholics are in Latin America, Africa and Asia, but power in the Catholic Church is still in Europe and North America. Thus the problems of race still remain within the Churches, though the Churches have contributed much to overcome racism in many parts of the world.

There is a deeper question of the entire interpretation of religion and of the meaning of life. In Christianity Jesus speaks of God as Spirit speaking to us in truth and calling us to love and freedom. This is not to dilute the message of Jesus, but rather to get to its core. The challenge of Jesus is to get beyond race, sex, class, religion and to respond to the reality of the Spirit within us calling us to build a new world. In this Jesus is manifesting the divine in him and in all others.

Each of the liberation movements: of race, of class, of sex, or for truth and freedom, can help us to understand God better. They can help us to see beyond the limitations of a given time and try to live the more desirable human relationship within new personalities and structures that are genuinely open to others. Our personalities have ingrained within us many myths, conditionings and prejudices. Our misgivings and excuses are also partly due to such conditioning. We cannot be what we want to be due to our society. We tend to excuse ourselves saying: we are women, we are black, we are workers, we are young and thus we see ourselves as outside the main centres of power and decision making.

The poor, the weak and the oppressed suffer the conditioning of their minds. One of the roles of a theology that is subordinate to a power structure is to form the minds of the believers to accept such a power. The mass media too have this function. All authoritarian regimes tend to control religions and the means of communication to maintain their control over the minds of people. Within the Church too a small body that exercises power may seek to so limit it from generation to generation. Theology helps to maintain and legitimize this control. Although there is much dedication, generosity and love in the Churches, the power structure too is there and it may work at contrary purposes, unless there is a real conversion of power to service of all.

We are called to a personal liberation also, so that we can relate to God in truth and spirit beyond the forms of a given ritual and structure of power. Then in our life decisions we can be in deeper dialogue with God. We can then discern interiorly our mission in life. Then we can associate with others in trying to change the relationships and structures whether of religion or of society. We can try to realize that type of community which Jesus wanted; and build that 'type of human relations that are fulfilling for all. In this process we can help transform the Churches to be more Jesus-like.

The Scriptures themselves are to be subject to such a transforming influence. They are not the total revelation of God to humanity, they are only one such revelation. We cannot limit God and God's message to the whole of humanity to only a few Jewish men from a male dominated society. We cannot limit God to one generation, or impose silence on God after the death of the last apostle. That would be putting human limits on the divine.

God can speak to us also today. If women have not done much writing earlier they can do so now and in the future. Future generations may have other revelations of God which we do not even suspect now. The present revolutionary changes - of the age of electronics and satellite communications - may be an indication of the breaking down of barriers which we have ourselves built or which were hitherto insurmountable. They may be a source of strength to the people against the powers that seek to control them suddenly.

Reflections such as these can help articulate theologies which will be liberative not only for women but for all the oppressed. They can be liberative for the oppressors also to be their true selves. Each generation has to go through its process of search and contribution to the human community. We from the "Third World" countries can join hands in this liberating action of the "second sex" for more human and hence more divine relationships and societies.

Source : Logos Volume 22 No: 3 October 1983