

## Book Reviews

**Introducing Feminist Theology.** Anne M. Clifford. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books. 2001. Pp. xi+287. \$.21.00

Christian theology reached a point of stagnancy towards the middle of the last millennium. Until Vatican II it was almost in the doldrums making itself irrelevant to the realities and aspirations of the technological humans. However inspired and invigorated by Vatican II it began to break new grounds and infiltrate every dimension of the human life.

Contextualization of theology set the pace for new areas providing theologians previously unknown capabilities in their profession thus making people's life purposeful by subjecting every dimension of their life into inquiry. Anne M. Clifford's (AMC) book entitled **Introducing Feminist Theology** is an answer to the aspirations of more than a moiety of the human society who were considered the 'silent lambs' of the society.

The manner in which AMC explains the origin and development of feminist theology is interesting. Before stepping into theology which is here feminist and Christian, she answers the why and what of feminism. While the answer to the first question is derived from the experience of the global realities of women, the answer to the second is picked up from the waves of feminism that projected the social vision of women. Tracing the origin of the word feminism to Hubertine Auclert, a French woman (1882) and its characteristics to the writings of Christine de Pizon of the 15<sup>th</sup> century,

AMC proceeds to explain the four types of feminism - liberal feminism, cultural feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism. This presentation is a boon to the Christian feminist theologians in doing theology because different kinds of feminism affect and intersect with theology.

Coming to the theological part of the book the author points out three forms of feminist theology namely, revolutionary feminist theology, reformist Christian feminist theology and reconstructionist feminist theology and moves over to the 'Feminist Perspectives on the Bible'. Here she focuses on the story element of the Bible - the formation of the Bible as the story of the divine-human relationship - which features more men than women thereby presenting women as less favoured with the experience of God in their lives than men. This predominance is due to the patriarchal nature of the ancient Middle-Eastern societies. AMC therefore calls for a feminist hermeneutical methodology as developed by Elizabeth Schusses Fiorenza, the first ever American Catholic biblical scholar in order to interpret the biblical stories which stigmatize women as inferior to men. AMC is at her best in this chapter where she introduces Eve's story (Gen 2-3) as reconstructed by Phyllis Trible, a protestant feminist biblical scholar. The author is at home not only with the women scholars of the first world but also those of the third world, for example Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz of Cuba, Irone Gebra of Brazil, Elza Tamez of Mexico, Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana, Judetta A. Gallares of the Philippine who take a

fresh look at the Bible as a source for eradicating the oppression of women. The chapter on 'Feminist Perspective on God' is an exploration into the interrelationship of God images and gender attitudes. Stressing the idea that exclusively male God-language undermines the human dignity of women and is a hurdle to their human flourishing, AMC focuses on the connection between God symbolism and the biblically rooted belief that humans, male and female, are made in the image of God.

In chapter four the author lays down the real issues that confront women in their claim to equal participation in the affairs of the Church. Though ordination of women to priesthood is presented as an important concern for Christian women, it is not the only concern related to the position of women in the Church since adding a few female priests will not bring about any significant change in the male-defined ministerial priorities in dioceses or result in drastic revisions of canon law. AMC offers different conceptions of the Church, such as fellowship of believers; the people of God; sacramental mystery; a prophetic voice; an institution; the presence of the reign of God, to widen the perspectives of the ministerial activities of women and thereby identifies different areas and varieties of ministries which would usher in an extensive collaboration of men and women in a spirit of mutuality that will in turn ensure true partnership of equals. AMC then proceeds to speak about feminist spirituality. Starting with a general sketch of Christian spirituality she gradually but firmly paints it with feminism thus making it meaningful to women. Symbolism is an essential element of spirituality. Images of God

(as mentioned in chapter 2), Mother Mary and other women saints are symbolic in nature. Symbols if not carefully used can lead us astray. The ease with which she is able to handle these symbols so as to reflect the authentic characteristics of the sacred and divine in them for women is remarkable. Drawing inspiration from Our Lady of Guadalupe of Mexico and Our Lady of Black Aparecida of Brazil, and from the women saints of the Bible and those of the first and third worlds, she provides a springboard for an exploration of an era of Christian spirituality that is generating a great deal of energy today. The book is capped with an interesting chapter on ecofeminism that explains the "Communion of Saints" (*Communio sanctorum*) as the "communion of, or in holy things" which highlights a creation-centred spirituality activated by a spiritual sensitivity to our own embodiment and to our relationship with other living things. Major contributions of ecofeminist theologians from the U.S.A. and the third world are the special features of this final chapter.

There are several elements that serve as reading-aids, which make the reading of the book more interesting and profitable. Glossary of terms, blocked boxes with photos and details of the women theologians referred to in this book, detailed footnote references and questions for reflections and discussions are some of the useful aids.

Though titled as an 'Introduction...' *Introduction to Feminist Theology* is a very useful textbook for beginners. a handy reference book for scholars and a ready source book for researchers.

**Dr. T. Victor**

**Ministry & Theology in Global Perspective.** Ed. Don A. Pittman, Ruben L. F. Habito and Terry C. Muck. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996. pp. xvii + 524.

As it is well known, India has been a multi-religious country for so many centuries and continue to be so even to this day, notwithstanding the growing influence of science, technology and secular ideologies. Millions of people belonging to diverse religious faiths are living together and sharing the life of one and the same community for several centuries. Not only in India, but also in other Asian countries - all the more in the so-called Christian countries of Europe and North America - religious pluralism has become a stark reality. Practically every major city of the world today has significant numbers of people of other faiths due to the migration of people to different countries since World War II. An important factor to be noted is that at present the people of diverse faiths are slowly moving from their isolated as well as repulsive outlook to what may be called a dialogical existence with harmony and mutual cooperation. Due to the emergence of modern means of communication and mutual cultural exchange and changing patterns of mobility, people belonging to different religious traditions are locked up in a new situation in which they have to live together as one community, brushing aside the spirit of rivalry and animosity which they have imbibed for centuries together.

At this juncture, the Church cannot remain idle and live in an ivory

tower, closing its eyes to the reality of religious pluralism. Responding positively to some of the challenges arising out of the multi-religious situation and reshaping and restructuring her theology, ministry and mission accordingly assume greater importance and significance. How to reinterpret and reshape the ministry and theology of the Church in the context of growing religious pluralism is exactly the concern of the Book, *Ministry & Theology in Global Perspective*. No doubt, it provides important and adequate resources for reflection on contemporary Christian ministry and theology in a global perspective. A significant feature of this book is that it is a collection of works by outstanding authors, both of the past and the present, starting from pre-twentieth century writers to contemporary theologians. In spite of the diversity of period and context in which the contributors lived and theologized, one and the same theme runs through from the beginning up to the end of the book, thanks to the meticulous attention paid by the editors in selecting the relevant articles based on that theme. Religious pluralism, being a serious concern of all the Christian Churches, the theological reflections of both Protestant and Catholic theologians and the official declarations of the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches are included in this work.

Of the various issues dealt with in this book, one that deserves our pointed attention concerns mission. In the past centuries the people of other religious traditions always looked at the Christian mission with

suspicion, since it was principally associated with colonial expressions such as domination, confrontation and imposition. The gamut of missionary thinking was shaped and expressed within the powerful colonial structure. Thus the mission was viewed as conquering people for Christ by proselytization and establishing the powerful structure of the Church. In the face of religious pluralism, the understanding of mission as extension of Christianity and extinction of other religions is on the wane and a new perception as establishing the Kingdom of God in collaboration with the people of other faiths has come to the forefront: "the Christian will be eager to cooperate with people of all faiths and ideologies in all projects which are in line with the Christian's understanding of God's purpose in history" (Lesslie

Newbiggin, p. 201). "The primary task of evangelization is the advancement of the mystery of God's plan for the world – the promotion of the Kingdom." (M. Amaladoss, p. 301).

It is needless to say that a critical study of some of the traditional and outmoded theological perspectives inherited in the course of the history, in the light of the global phenomenon of religious pluralism, would surely contribute to new perspectives and open up fresh avenues in the fields of mission and theology. It is undoubtedly a good and magnificent resource book which deserves to be used by the students of theology as it contains mines of thoughtful reflections in disciplines like pastoral theology, missiology, theology of religions and inter-religious dialogue.

Dr. S. Devaraj

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**Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings.** Ed. James B. Nickoloff. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996. Pp. viii + 336. \$ 20.00

Theology of Liberation, a contextual theology, was born in the Latin American countries in the 1960s. Gustavo Gutierrez is one of the pioneers of this practice of liberation. The unmistakable dynamism on which Gutierrez formulates the theology of liberation has a two-fold commitment, one is the commitment he has made to the God of life in whom he believes and the other is to his own people of Peru. Being a pastor, teacher and theologian he is able to demonstrate clearly that being committed to God means to be free from self-centred existence and free for loving service.

This present volume of Gustavo Gutierrez includes several articles written for journals and public addresses on Liberation Theology with a wide range of topics that have not been published so far in English. This work is edited with an introduction and thematically organized by James B. Nickoloff. The aim of the editor seems to be to make the reader get acquainted with the development in Gutierrez's thought. It certainly offers a key and fundamental concept which would enable the reader to perceive the breadth and depth of Gutierrez's radical challenge to his time and thereafter.

The book starts with the new method of Liberation Theology and proceeds to explain the hermeneutical principle and

preferential option for the poor. It then leads the reader to the gratuitousness and the freedom of God's love which is the theological axis, and explains to him/her soteriology from the perspective of liberation, freedom and communion. Continuing in the same tone this collection speaks on the vision of evangelization and ends with a call for discipleship which means nothing but walking according to the Spirit. And thus it covers extensively all the important dimensions of liberation theology.

While speaking about understanding the Scripture, Gutierrez says that "Scripture itself is the product of God's choice of the poor, and if the revelation of God is mediated by the poor, an authentic solidarity with the poor of today becomes an indispensable precondition for a firm grasp of the biblical message" (78). Why does he speak on the 'preferential option for the poor'? It is primarily because he is a Christian and Latin American. These religious and cultural dimensions have tremendously influenced and increased his human compassion. The practice of faith takes place in a concrete historical context. The historical context of today is the massive social, economic and political marginalization of the majority of the earth's people. There is an indispensable condition for a concrete reflection on faith. Hence there is a fundamental hermeneutical circle from humanity to God and from God to humanity, from history to faith and from faith to history (145).

In dealing with the notion of soteriology, Gutierrez does not simply equate salvation with liberation. He interprets salvation as a communion with God and one another in history and beyond it. The primary subject of salvation is community rather than individual.

Salvation has concrete social and political implications for that community. The entire process of liberation is directed toward communion and that liberation is a way to freedom. Freedom is not an end in itself, but it is a means to love and service (234).

Some complain about the liberationists that their main concern is bread alone and that they do not bother about the spirituality of the people. In fact all the writings of Gutierrez are theological, political and spiritual. As one finds an evolution in his thought, more developed treatises appear in the form of spirituality of liberation. For example the priority of an encounter with God, conversion to neighbour and awareness of gratuitousness experienced in prayer are the directions of walking according to the Spirit to reach the discipleship (286, 304).

A clear detailed history of Gutierrez's development of thought is given as an introduction to the book which could be useful for those who do researches either on Gutierrez exclusively or in Liberation Theology in general. And a brief commentary to each chapter and subtitles also are given to make the reader feel at home. The editor certainly deserves applause for this hard job.

Some of the texts in this volume have either reappeared or some thoughts are developed from the books like *A Theology of Liberation*, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* by the same author. This is, as the editor has made known, to suit the theme chronologically. But the reader who is familiar with liberation theology might find some inevitable repetitions of some notions and thoughts on liberation theology.

**Fr. Alphonse Thainese**