

FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Of course it would be easy for a man to poke fun at these essays in "feminist theology." It's nine-tenths of all comedy to do with the relations between the sexes, and isn't there something comic about these very earnest American theologians so replete with jargon? Isn't it funny that Professor Fiorenza refers to the author of the Fourth Gospel as "he," while Professor Ruether announces the "false naming of God/ess modelled on alienation"?

But men who simply laugh at feminism are very silly. These solemn theologians are no more comic than many of the word-spinners. Their patriarchal extravagances seem less mirth-making than many a man's—once we absorb our hearts as well as minds the fact that all through history, all round the globe, women have been exploited, ignored, neglected and dismissed to the great discredit, as well as to the great loss, of humanity. Christian men in particular ought to find in the record of their own rather than humour, in view of our origins.

Professor Fiorenza, of the University of Notre Dame, works through the New Testament pointing out the sexism. It needed to be done. Enough evidence survives to show that the women understood Jesus of Nazareth better than did the men and that much of the local leadership of the church in the first century was supplied by women. The early Church always escapes attempts to define it; it is truer to say that it was a community of equal disciples, women and men, many of whom were given outstanding abilities by the Spirit, than it is to say that it was a society for the upkeep of clergy and church buildings.

The Professor's study begins with the woman who anoints Jesus before his death. Of her it is said: "Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mark xiv: 9). But men transmitting the gospel have managed to forget her name! This example of chauvinism is all the more striking if, as Dr. Fiorenza believes, probably what happened was the anointing of Jesus as the messianic King.

"Human history," Gustavo Gutierrez has truly remarked, "has been written by a white hand, a male hand, from the dominating social class." Even the New Testament is not exempt from this generalisation—as we are reminded by the failure of St. Luke (who pays proper attention to women in his Gospel) to tell us anything substantial about the ministry of women in Acts.

Cry of the world

PETER SELBY is the missionary for the diocese of Newcastle; and this contribution of his to the New Library of Pastoral Care "the substance of lectures he gave in America last year. He proves to be a man of uncomfortable words.

His theme, put starkly, is that empathy and personal care are not enough. Counselling that concentrates on individuals as individuals, and aims to help them adjust to the society they live in, is too one-sided. People are affected by their environment as well as by their heredity; and, if social or political injustices contribute to their distress, then it is blinkered care that ignores them. Christian counsel that concentrates on spiritual and psychological health while ignoring its link with an unjust system is in danger of making the faith seem irrelevant to the challenges of life.

Mr. Selby's book develops this theme, and is based on a reflective look of his own experience. It is a book about making connections—connections between personal therapy and a public struggle for justice; between the Christian and the secular view of man; between the community and other communities; between falling down in failure and standing up in the

IN MEMORY OF HER. By Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. (SCM Press, £8.50)

SEXISM AND GOD-TALK By Rosemary Radford Ruether. (SCM Press, £7.95)

But enough survives to make a reading of the New Testament in a feminist light worthwhile both for research and for meditation. Dr. Fiorenza is able to present both St. Mark and St. John as evangelists who condemn apostles but praise courageously receptive women; and this reading of their gospels makes rather more sense than many an interpretation to come from a male hand.

Clearly Jesus did treat women with an equality and intimacy very rare

By DAVID L. EDWARDS

in a society whose normal attitude is betrayed in that description of a brave lady as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee." And he compared God with a woman in his parables. That shines out despite the sexism of many translators—for example, the King James version of Luke xviii: 34, which, by adding "men" to the Greek, apparently favours homosexuality at the expense of marriage ("there shall be two men in one bed").

What is less commonly acknowledged is that many women took the lead in the Church life known to St. Paul. A third of the Christian leaders greeted at the end of his letter to the Romans were women—including Phoebe, the deacon, and Priscilla, one of "my fellow-workers to whom all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks." Are we to suppose that, when with her husband Aquila she instructed the Jewish scholar Apollos (Acts xviii: 26), what she really did was to warm the two men's slippers? Or that Philip's four daughters who were prophets (Acts xxi: 9) were unique?

Admittedly St. Paul told the Corinthians that it was shameful for a woman to speak in a gathering for worship. But it is obvious from his letters that the normal organisation of the Church in his time was in house churches, often under a patroness through whom he sent greetings to the congregation. It is hard to believe that such ladies always kept their mouths shut.

Dr. Fiorenza goes so far as to affirm her confidence that one of the "apostles"—a wider circle than the twelve—was a woman: Junia, the wife of Andronicus (Rom. xvi: 7). She blames the masculine version of

that name in many ancient manuscripts (the version preferred in modern translations such as RSV or NEB) on the chauvinism which set in when the apostles' teachings about Jesus were corrupted by a male-dominated Roman society and an "androcentric" Greek philosophy. Be that as it may, she assembles evidence which is relevant to the debate about women priests—a development which she urges eloquently on hesitant Roman Catholics.

Professor Ruether, of the Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, is also eloquent about the importance of the feminine in biblical religion. She dwells on the female images of God in the Hebrew scriptures (for example Wisdom, who is "she") and on the significance of Mariology as preserving this element in the Christian tradition (so that Mary, the Mother of God and of the Church, becomes the glorious pattern of "the Church as humanity redeemed from sexism").

The emphasis certainly corresponds with a part of the Bible's message, taken as a whole, which was scandalously neglected in the theology done by men. But Dr. Ruether nowhere seriously considers the dangers in the cult of the Goddess or the Earth-Mother. She romanticises it; through her eyes it becomes a sensitive appreciation of the beauty and delicacy of the environment and the body. She cannot see, let alone answer, the reasons why the religion of Yahweh fought it. And in our time, if a Christian feminism is to stay within biblical religion, these dangers must be faced—just as there are dangers in the cult of Christ the Superman, and danger in an exclusively paternalist portrait of the Creator.

"This book amounts to a *Principles of Christian Theology* written from a feminist perspective." So Professor Ruether's publisher claims. But s/he exaggerates; perhaps the style of the book was too infectious. The book is in fact a collection of lectures, quite often repetitive and always rhetorical. It is a passionate pleading, loud and even strident, in order to make women hold their heads high and men keep their ears open.

Shorter Notices

Gnomes and Gardens, by Alan Melville (Heinemann, £6.95), is a genially inventive verbal romp on the theme of gardens—and the pests and pleasures therein. There are flights of (often clever) fancy on all things horticultural, indoors and outdoors, rain and shine—delivered in sketches, parodies, pastiche and odd odes arranged as chapters. All good, earthy fun—and an ideal present for the not wholly dedicated gardener with a sense of humour.

Landscapes of the Night, by Christopher Evans, edited and completed by Peter Evans (Gollancz, £7.95), is a study of sleep and dreams. Half the book is a simplified summary of significant theories to date. The rest expands the author's own computer theory about dreams—suggesting that sleep is analogous to a computer being put "off line," and that dreaming is a manifestation of information being processed. This is a useful survey and an intriguing new theory—presented in a jargonless and anecdotal way which makes easy reading for the interested beginner.

The Drummond children were wealthy contemporaries of Princess Victoria, and their childish drawings have survived to fascinate our later age. In *Making Victorians: The Drummond Children's World 1827-1832* (Gollancz, £6.95) are domestic scenes in the school-rooms and drawing-rooms of their various town and country residences, with family and servants all shown in full, elaborate fig. Here are reprimands and tears as well as romps and dancing; and Susan Lasdun adds a beguiling commentary to accompany the drawings.

Three books by BRO. MAX THURIAN of Taizé

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LIBERATING GOD. By Peter Selby. (SPCK, £3.95)

visionary light of what human life should be.

The author is well aware that it is usually more congenial to work on an individual basis than to haggle at the Town Hall—but he reiterates Bonhoeffer's belief that we have now come of age. Our present scientific and psychological knowledge demands that we accept responsibility for bettering society as well as our neighbour—and in this connection his chapter on the fear of adulthood is memorable.

His message is sometimes controversially stated but is not startlingly new. Many counsellors admit the limitations in their approach, but confess themselves unequipped for the public arena. The power of the book lies in the way it is expressed.

Peter Selby writes to fire the mind rather than provide a manual of direction, and this he does with a blend of argument and example that has a prophetic quality. He bids us hear "the cry of the world, as those whom we care for pastorally express it"—and his opinions reverberate with a disturbing insistence.

MARGARET DANIEL