

cloning: but there is nothing in her discussion of how so-called 'reproductive cloning' threatens the nest of familial relationships which are recognized and supported by all human cultures, how it represents another great step from procreation to manufacture and how it would involve a despotism of cloners over cloned, a despotism utterly at odds with Christ's insistence that our relationships with others should be marked by the equality of genuine friendship. And whilst there may be truth in the claim that the relevant Catholic theologizing has focussed on the significance of genetic engineering for human beings and 'by-passed serious consideration of the issue associated with non-human species', it is unreasonably dismissive to claim of the former focus that it has a tendency to 'reduce the theological implications of genetic engineering to a pro-life dogmatic standpoint': the Catholic Bishops' report entitled *Genetic Intervention of Human Subjects of 1996* (which she cites as an illustration of the response of the Roman Catholic Church) includes a suggestive discussion of the distinction between those ways of influencing a child's development which respect the dignity and individuality of the child and those that do not.

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CHALLENGING WOMEN'S ORTHODOXIES IN THE CONTEXT OF FAITH, edited by Susan Frank Parsons, *Ashgate, Aldershot [Heythrop Studies in Contemporary Philosophy, Religion and Theology]*, 2000. Pp. 246, £ 17.99 pbk.

This is a varied collection of lively papers on the subject of women and religion (mainly Christianity), which will give pause for thought to feminists and their opponents alike.

Several of the articles conform quite closely to the expectations raised by the title, whilst others seem more removed from the book's ostensible theme. For example, Kerry Ramsay, an Anglican priest from South Africa, locks horns with the difficult question of women's relationship to the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice and suffering for others. Because self-denial has been strongly elevated as a specifically feminine virtue, often used to promote women's subservience to men, many feminists have rejected it, seeing the promotion of a sense of self-worth as being of greater value to women in their relationships with both humanity and divinity. Ramsay, however, draws on recent Christian feminist writing which understands the suffering of Christ to point to vulnerability and suffering as human rather than narrowly feminine characteristics, and she describes the strength of this approach by reference to her experiences of life under apartheid and the attendant struggle for freedom and justice.

In a rather different vein, although with an equally passionate commitment to the establishment of truth and justice, is Anne Primavesi's 'Theology and Earth Science'. Primavesi has been a flag-

bearer in the field of 'Green Theology', and as a reviewer engaged in this area of research myself, I find the chapter disappointing. However, it deserves consideration because it undoubtedly appeals to widespread assumptions about Christianity and science, and these need to be unravelled.

Primavesi's paper attacks Christianity for having been overly anthropocentric, an accusation that is well supported by much Christian history. But rather than drawing on Christianity's own strong resources for replying to this (as may be found, for example, in those medieval authors who assert that God's motive for the incarnation was that the whole universe should be united to him), Primavesi turns to the theory of evolution as her primary point of reference. This theory, Primavesi suggests, puts humanity in its proper place, as part and parcel of the natural world. Indeed, this chapter has a certain whiff of evolutionary fundamentalism about it; evolution is the new orthodoxy. Yet the doctrine of evolution brings its own difficulties, which Primavesi's approach cannot address. In the first place, it is evidently not the case that the theory of evolution is less anthropocentric in its consequences than traditional Christianity was, as the destructive development of science and technology since Darwin amply demonstrates. Moreover, from a Christian point of view, the fact that creatures and species suffer and die is not something that is morally neutral. It in fact falls within the category that was traditionally called 'ontological evil'. This means that we have a responsibility to regard the process of death and decay by reference to the intention of a God who desires not to destroy God's creation, as happens continually in evolution, but to redeem and glorify it through union with God's self. Primavesi unfortunately allows science to comment on bad theology, but does not allow good theology to comment on science.

The problem of why God allows suffering and destruction is raised with particular clarity by Melissa Raphael, in a chapter entitled 'Notes Towards a Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust'. Raphael considers written accounts of women captives in concentration camps, and the way in which the women used their terrible circumstances for the praise of God and the healing of their fellow inmates. She then draws on the teaching of one of the great Kabbalists of 16th-century Safed, Isaac Luria, to suggest that some of the victims of concentration camps were in effect engaging in the work of *tikkum* (the healing or completion of the world), 'by descending into the very abyss of impurity to rescue the [holy sparks that were scattered at creation, in order] to return them to God' (p.81). This is in striking contrast to an understanding of God's will which considers that God may wilfully use terror and destruction as a means of achieving his ends. Raphael sees this latter kind of theodicy as characteristically patriarchal, and as perpetuating the very understanding of Deity which justifies oppression in the first place.

Exactly what distinguishes 'patriarchal' from other modes of

thought, or 'masculine' from 'feminine', is addressed in the work of Luce Irigaray, the now popular French feminist philosopher, whose ideas are considered in two essays in this volume. Lucy Gardner examines the question of interiority and transcendence in Irigaray's work, while Rachel Muers uses the thought of Irigaray as part of a critique of the concept of women's silence in the writings of Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Irigaray is concerned to investigate what is truly distinctive about women's voices, which have been silenced by the imposition of men's voices. Women's *difference* has been blotted out by *the same*, which is male. None of the contributions to this collection considers explicitly that the analysis of women's subjugation in terms of denial of difference, or 'otherness', may itself be misguided. However, one of the two pieces written by men, Laurence Hemming's 'On the Nature of Nature: Is Sexual Difference Really Necessary?' does try to grapple with the question of how fundamental sexual difference is to humanity's creation and redemption. He does this by asking about the link between cosmology and physicality, between our embodiment and our being ordered to a greater whole (p.155). An important link that is made elsewhere in this volume, not only by Anne Primavesi but also by Georgina Morley, in a beautifully clear essay on the possible value of John Macquarrie's theology for feminist consideration. In Hemming's article, the cosmic connection is a corrective to contemporary psychologically based understandings of the human person, such as that presented by Judith Butler, and is taken directly from Meister Eckhart's consideration of the virtue of *detachment* in relation to the Virgin Mary. This is to do with knowing one's 'place' in the cosmos: 'the soul needs to discover its detachment as a way of uniting itself with the whole cosmos, which will make it contiguous to God' (p.173). Mary was possessed of this detachment, and thus was in both the place and the state in which God could be born. This virtue is for both sexes, although to be a physical mother, Mary had to be a woman. Hemming acknowledges that his thesis is still incomplete, and at the end of his contribution the precise importance of gender difference remains somewhat unclear.

The other papers in this collection consist of a Christian response by Angela West to Daphne Hampson's post-Christian feminism, an analysis by Jenny Dagers of British Christian women's theology in the 1970s and 80s, a useful account of the work of the African theologian, Mercy Oduyoye, by Carrie Pemberton, and a consideration by Anne Murphy of the construct of women's innocence in Catholic hagiography. The book is topped and tailed by an introductory essay on feminist theology by Susan Frank Parsons, the book's editor, and an epilogue by James Hanvey by way of response to the other contributions.

This is a book full of tasty nuggets.

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