

Godhead, but equally, and more so, that if the Son did actually take-on flesh, then he could not be truly divine. 'The passible Son was inferior in essence to the impassible Father in that he was (a) generated, and (b) subject to suffering' (p. 130). They may have wanted to ensure that the Son actually suffered and died and so lived an authentic human life, but in so pursuing this course the Arians were adamant that the Son must therefore not be truly God. It was merely the logic of the Docetists in reverse. Gavriyuk rightly points out that it was the pro-Nicenes who felt the problem more intensely because it was they who preserved the mystery – the transcendent God who is immutably perfect and impassibly loving is the same God who entered time and history as a man, and as a man lived a changeable and passible life.

The culmination of this Christian understanding of God is found within the Nestorian controversy. Nestorius was more ardently concerned with preserving God's impassibility than, contrary to much contemporary opinion, with maintaining Christ's authentic humanity. This is why all passible attributes must be predicated of the man Jesus and not of the divine Son. Thus Gavriyuk concludes that Nestorian theology was very similar to Arian theology. 'For both parties, despite their profound Christological differences, the divine impassibility precluded God's direct involvement in everything related to the created order, especially the experiences that indicated human weakness' (p. 144). Moreover, while he upheld the impassible perfection of the Son's divine nature, Cyril recognised that Nicaea demanded that the Son who was *homoousion* with the Father was the same Son who truly became man and so was born, suffered, died and was buried. These are not the thoughts of a Greek philosopher, but a profession of biblical faith, one which knew that God was indeed completely other than all he created, and yet could act in time and history in all his complete otherness – the Incarnation being the ultimate expression of this divine ability. Moreover, Cyril realised that it was the passible suffering of the Son as man that was redemptive and not, unlike the contemporary passibilists, some divine passible suffering. 'The presupposition that the divine nature could itself suffer renders the assumption of humanity superfluous. If God could suffer as humans do without assuming humanity, the incarnation would be unnecessary' (p. 159).

While there are some minor points that I would argue with, Gavriyuk has written an excellent book, one that is both scholarly and clear. He 'has attempted to debunk the Fall Theory once and for all' (p. 179), and I believe that he has succeeded. The problem is that those who are 'debunked' rarely realise that such has been done to them. Yet it is indeed heartening to find a book that has done so much to redeem the intellectual integrity and, more so, to enhance the authentic faith of the Fathers of the Church.

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**FEMINISM AND THEOLOGY** edited by Janet Martin Soskice and Diana Lipton, *Oxford Readings in Theology*, OUP, Oxford, 2003, Pp. 396, £20 pbk.

**WOMEN IN CHRIST: TOWARD A NEW FEMINISM** edited by Michele M. Schumacher, *William B. Eerdmans*, Grand Rapids, 2004, Pp. 358, \$38 pbk.

Upon completing these two books, I have read six books on feminist theology, all but one at the behest of book review editors. Both compilations name a 1960 article by Judith Plaskow as the originator of the editorial prejudice that women experience a special interest in 'women's experience.' It's a circular assumption which many young women entering the profession of theology have met in their Heads of Department, who require them to teach courses on a topic in which they hitherto had no knowledge or interest. "No man," they say, "would be made to teach a course on 'men's theology'"; a longer perspective enables one to add, "no man would be

told by his bishop, ‘we particularly want a man on our Commission.’” PHEME Perkins’s chapter in the Soskice/Lipton compilation, on Philippians, voices the assumption by noting that Paul was ‘ambiguous’ about the involvement of women in his communities: “the dominant images of athletic contest & military service do not reflect their experience. Neither does the exchange of authorized, male representatives . . . much of the imagery in Philippians speaks only of male experience” (p. 198). From this we can gather the insight, if such it be, that not only can no woman make a leap of imagination into such experiences, but nor can the vast majority of men who have never fought in a war or wrestled in the arena; Newman was deluding himself when he remarked that a biography of Wellington made him “burn to have been a soldier”, and the audiences of action movies, war films, and the Olympic games must all be sporty Territorial Army types.

Most people trace such non-receptive experientialism back to Schleiermacher, but Prudence Allen is closer to the mark in making William James the progenitor of this kind of feminism (see Allen’s scholarly essay, “Can Feminism Be a Humanism,” in Schumacher’s *The New Feminism*). Because of James’s influence on educational theory, teachers are familiar both with the maxim that students must be taught from what they know, and with the obstruction such pedagogy causes to opening students’ minds to anything they don’t know. People who teach theological aesthetics have figured out that it will only serve a niche market of arty students unless one can show that beauty has an impact across the spectrum of theology: one wishes it had been similarly evident to Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz that it’s no good telling us that the “theology I have been involved in articulating is born out of my experience and that of other Hispanic women” (Soskice/Lipton, p. 91) unless one explains why *Mujerista* theology has broader theological implications. The Church historian Jane Dempsey Douglass presents evidence for Luther’s misogyny from his Genesis Commentaries (“And although Eve was . . . similar to Adam with respect to the image of God, . . . still, she was a woman. For just as the sun is more extraordinary than the moon, so even though the woman is a most beautiful work of God, still she does not equal the glory and worthiness of the man”, Lipton/Soskice, p. 78). We can all catch the negative *moral* implications of this. For a suggestion as to why it matters *theologically*, we have to turn to Michele Schumacher: “When nature . . . is overpowered by grace – as in . . . Lutheran thought whereby it, in the absence of grace, is capable of nothing but evil – the pendulum swings toward . . . the denial of . . . divine influence upon human nature . . . Abandoned to human governance . . . nature . . . returns to its own ‘fallen’ state. Its ‘natural’ orientation to the good . . . is called into question, especially when it is perceived by feminists as controlled by a patriarchal society . . . Nature becomes that which ‘man’ wishes it to be: a manipulative tool whereby he achieves his sovereign rule over women and ‘lesser’ men. Such a dishonorable intention might . . . be attributed to Luther when he argues: ‘The fact that pregnancies wear women out and in the end lead to death is not serious. Let the pregnancies kill them; they are here for that.’” (Schumacher, p. 30). Schumacher’s nature-grace theory indicates a connection between Luther’s attitude to women and his theology as a whole, and thus refers it to points of concern wider than a moralising humanism which currently feels bound to nod to women’s experience, in passing.

The contributors to *Women In Christ: Toward A New Feminism* do recognise that no-one would have thought, for instance, of arguing that a Catholic understanding of grace and nature works out better for women in particular, if a very different kind of feminism had not first raised the issue of the particularity of women: that, as Janet Soskice puts it, the “pungency of Mary Daly’s writings was required to waken theologians from generations of slumber” (Soskice/Lipton, p. 7). But, it is the *New Feminism* which is now taking the discussion forward, as in Schumacher’s essay on the place of receptive experience in theology, or in Francis Martin and Anne-Marie Pelletier’s great pieces on the Bride-Bridegroom relation between Christ and his

Church as authentic liberation from the master-slave ethos. Their arguments require a rephrasing of both the biological naturalist's identification of sex and gender, and the postmodern sex-gender distinction: as Beatriz Vollmer Coles has it (I think), gender transcendence means creatively making a spiritual and moral use of one's given sex ("New Feminism: A Sex Gender Reunion"). There must be 'men' and 'women' as 'real universals' for this defence of male-female complementarity to bear out.

Since it was John Paul II who revived the term *new feminism* in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the Schumacher team take their cue from this theological *datum* and from the realist phenomenology the Pope espoused as a young philosopher. So Edith Stein's reflections on the nature of 'woman' are heavily rehearsed in *Women in Christ: Toward a New Feminism*. Though the essays are delightfully intricate, I was left wondering whether phenomenological 'essentialism' translates into an Anglo-Saxon context. But then, going on to the second book, I read Janet Martin's Soskice's piece, in which, reminding us of the Patristic and mediaeval devotions to Jesus as bleeding mother, she contends that it "is by no means clear that Christ is always and everywhere in the symbolic order a 'male' figure. There is abundant sense in seeing Christ as our mother, and his blood as the source of new life" (Soskice/Lipton, p. 337). There's a 'British Museum religion' feel to this apparent common sense: it may be a personal predilection, but I do not want Jesus to be my mummy. Perhaps, analogously, fewer people want their father to be their metaphorical mother than the older feminists hope; they want him to be *up for it* some of the time; but the miraculously lactating Bernard of Clairvaux would be a better paradigm of mediaeval gender-bender if he hadn't provoked a pogrom in the wake of the First Crusade, and caused Abelard such unnecessary misfortune. Merely on the basis of experiential centrality, the 'New Feminists' are today the more theologically engaging, with their analogy of "God and Israel who, through the grace of love, encounter each other face-to-face, as man and woman in their original state of awe (Gen. 2)" (Pelletier, in Schumacher, p. 236).

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**YVES CONGAR'S VISION OF THE CHURCH IN A WORLD OF UNBELIEF** by Gabriel Flynn, *Ashgate, Aldershot/Burlington, 2004, Pp. 280, £49.95 hbk.*

Cardinal Yves Congar OP is first and foremost associated with Catholic ecumenism. His passionate vision of the Church as the true unifier of humankind triumphed when the Church accepted ecumenism at Vatican II. Apart from his deep faith, love of the Church and 'active patience', as he called it (Congar spent much of the 1950s under censure), a major factor in his success was the breadth and solidity of his scholarship. Congar's more 'suspect' ideas, particularly his notion that doctrine was not coterminous with any one mode of expression, were shown to be founded solidly on Scripture and Patristics. In other words, what was supposedly new was actually traditional, and much older than the supposedly 'traditional' formulae which went back only to the Scholastics or Trent. This method of *ressourcement*, or going back to the sources, is employed by Gabriel Flynn in studying Congar himself, and results in a surprising discovery: Congar was not driven primarily by a passion for ecumenism, but by the recognition that even in the 1930s Europe was a society of unbelief. Indeed, secularisation, he argued, had begun in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, with the rise of lay power, which developed into individualist spiritualities and rationalist humanism. At the same time division between Christians and religious war caused scandal, and the Church's defensive response to criticism and negative attitude to social change contributed to the sundering of religion from the reality of people's lives. Some of these factors are still relevant to our own time, which is the impetus for Flynn's analysis of Congar's theology.