

Critical Theology

engaging
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Winter 2024 issue edited by Rosemary P. Carbine

Introduction

By Rosemary P. Carbine
Whittier College, Whittier, California

Building on an inspiring session with diverse intersectional and multifaith feminists and womanists at the American Academy of Religion in November 2022, this issue of *Critical Theology* celebrates the theo-activist and mentoring praxis of global Catholic feminist liberation theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether (d.2022). Each essay engages with salient innovative contributions of Ruether’s extensive works in women’s liberation theologies at important intersections of religion and race, gender, class, sexuality, society, ecology, politics, interfaith relations, and much more.

Feminist public theologian Rosemary P. Carbine participates “in a prophetic politics of storytelling” about Ruether’s revolutionary life and critical as well as reconstructive works “that eschatologically edged us toward alternative, more just worlds.” Global feminist ethicist Pamela K. Brubaker recounts Ruether’s leading roles in Christian socialist and Marxist dialogues as well as impactful influence on her own career. Recent inductee into the National Women’s Hall of Fame and renowned Jewish feminist theologian Judith Plaskow reflects on Ruether’s incisive analysis of “theological pathology,” especially manifested in Christian (and feminist!) anti-Judaism as part of the “centrality and perniciousness of dualisms in Christian thinking.”

Ruether’s own voice is amplified in this issue about perhaps lesser-known topics that also garnered her attention, namely ecumenism and messianism. In these essays published in the earlier iteration of this journal, *The Ecumenist*, she aimed to rethink Christian ecumenism in light of a kind of “diaspora Christianity”

which catalyzes a new community based on prophetic criticism and social change. She also sought to revolutionize US democracy by tackling its “infallibility complex” that religiously sanctified systemic oppressions of white supremacy, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous genocide, and American imperialism, colonialism, and exceptionalism. She also

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constructively engaged with Black liberation theology and its “iconoclastic shattering of the American self-image” to “return to the roots” and resolve stark contradictions between American political ideals and oppressive realities “by setting these ideals ever ahead of us as the measure of the future for which we are striving and the measure of the failure of our present reality.”

Aligning with Ruether’s theological starting point to critically recover the emancipatory and liberatory side of religion, book reviews in this issue highlight the identity-shaping and political power of religion to enact our intersubjective agency and solidarity and better address global injustices such as the refugee crisis, reckoning with racism, gender-based violence, genocide, and other forms of violence that rupture our communities.

Letter to Subscribers

Greetings to all subscribers to *Critical Theology*,

We, the publisher and the editors of *Critical Theology*, want to share some exciting news. *Critical Theology* is shifting to an exclusively online and open access format.

Beginning with the Winter 2024 issue, *Critical Theology* will be available to the public online at this address: en.novalis.ca/products/critical-theology

Because *Critical Theology* will be open access, there will be no subscription fee and no paywalls to navigate. Novalis Publishing will work with the editorial team to raise the necessary funds to ensure that *Critical Theology* will remain accessible to readers at no cost.

We are, furthermore, delighted to announce that we have received initial funding from the Department of Theological Studies at Concordia University (Montreal) and from St. Jerome’s University in the University of Waterloo to support this transition. We also have been promised annual financial support through the Genevieve Shaul Connick Chair in Religion at Whittier College, California. We hope that you will continue to read *Critical Theology* and consider supporting the periodical financially through an annual fundraising campaign.

We want to assure you that the mission of *Critical Theology* will be sustained. We will continue to publish

articles that seek to outline a theology that speaks to the great and often terrible events of our times, including war, the Holocaust, colonialism, the ecological crisis, racial injustice, gender discrimination, and the globalization of the free market system. From its inception during the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), *Critical Theology* has always sought to inspire people to resist evil, to organize themselves in solidarity with the poor, and to dedicate themselves to living their lives in the service of the common good.

We are truly excited by the possibilities that a digital journal offers: more timely articles, articles and issues of varying lengths, and the ability to reach a larger audience.

Finally, we hope that you will continue to enjoy *Critical Theology* and that you will continue to support the periodical. Of course, we would be most appreciative if you could share the news with your friends, colleagues, and those in your various networks that *Critical Theology* is now open access and available exclusively online.

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Recalling Ruether and/as Forging Future Theologies of Women's Liberation

By Rosemary P. Carbine
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Religion is a human construction. To say this is simply to say that all human culture is a human construction ... what culture is about is creating hope and meaning. It is about affirming that new life can rise from the constant threat of death, that we can create something that continues to affirm love, delight, beauty, and comfort, even as death carries off the finite beings that presently exist ... Humans through their affirmations of meaning and hope, produce endless new realities ... Humans are hope and meaning creators.¹

Situated at this nexus of religion, hope, and meaning-making, this commemorative issue in general and essay in particular engage in a prophetic politics of storytelling, in narrative and memory as a religio-political hope-filled act, in order to future feminist theology based on “the liberating potential of women’s spiritual journeys,”² embodied in the revolutionary life and the vivifying teacher-scholar-activist praxis of global Catholic feminist liberation theologian and decolonial educator Rosemary Radford Ruether (1936–2022), or Rosie, as some called her (I learned from Mary Hunt that Ruether and I shared that nickname). In more than 60 books and hundreds of articles,³ Ruether elaborated and increasingly intensified theo-political critiques of intersectional ideologies, theo-logics, and practices of domination, including eco-degradation, in order to radically re-envision and reconstruct social, ecclesial, and academic spaces to promote the dignity and liberation of women and marginalized folx toward cultivating a global world of justice and peace. May her visionary work to disrupt pervasive hegemonic and repressive power structures and to advocate in solidarity for racial, gender, ecofeminist, and religious justice in the academy, church, and society continue among us. May she rise in power, in good company with many feminist and womanist colleagues, collaborators, and ancestors among the cloud of witnesses who sustain the justice-seeking Spirit in and for more just and transformative change in the world.

Ruether offered a theological worldview and praxis that articulated and still stirs theologies of women’s liberation and eco-justice. She engaged in and inspired innovative feminist theological work in academic, religious, and social spaces that defied, resisted, and

reconstructed patriarchal religions and that eschatologically edged us toward alternative, more just worlds.

Ruether’s nearly 50 years of feminist efforts and energies in theological education aimed to address human and earthly needs for liberation in multiply transformative ways. My feminist educational moment with Ruether occurred in two overflowing undergraduate classes at Georgetown University in the early 1990s. These classes introduced me to comparative feminist, Black and womanist, and *mujerista* theologies. At the urging of my undergraduate professors, including Chet Gillis and Diana Hayes, I entered University of Chicago Divinity School immediately after college and pursued a curriculum focused primarily on comparative liberationist and feminist theologies. With my advisors, the late Anne Carr and then Kathryn Tanner, I self-designed one of my doctoral exams in systematic theology that situated Ruether’s life, writings, and activism in the context of multicultural women’s liberation theologies.

Ruether charted counter meta-narratives and spaces of women’s liberation by longing for and living into more enlivening spaces of community, of belonging, in which to critically and constructively envoice and amplify ideas and ideals for more just social, ecclesial, and scholarly spaces, all distorted by white Christian supremacist racist heteropatriarchal power dynamics that restrict and deny too many folx basic bodyrights and body politic rights. Ruether’s career provided a productive path for me to walk and follow in the field of feminist and womanist studies in religion, for the most part beyond Catholic institutions of higher education. More than 20 years ago, at a conference on religion and feminist movements at Harvard Divinity School, Ruether reflected on her career within the context of feminist studies in religion, particularly American women’s history, comparative feminist theologies, and transnational ecofeminist movements. After completing her doctoral degree in classics and patristics (about the Cappadocian father Gregory Nazianzus) at Claremont Graduate University, Ruether, as a white progressive Catholic, listened and learned from, accompanied in solidarity, and allied/collaborated with civil rights activists in Mississippi in 1965, one year after Freedom Summer. That summer’s “turning point”⁴ influenced Ruether’s learning about

white Christian nationalist and racist public terror and politics, weaponized against Black colleges and churches. Radically impacted by this civil rights and peace movement activism, she taught for a decade at Howard University School of Religion in Washington, DC, and then taught for the majority of her career at Garrett Evangelical Seminary and Northwestern University. In her “retirement,” Ruether continued this energizing and conscientizing educational trajectory at Pacific School of Religion in the Graduate Theological Union and finally at Claremont School of Theology and Graduate University, where I interacted with her.

Before she had a debilitating stroke, Ruether graced my institution, Whittier College, a Quaker heritage MSI/HSI small liberal arts college in southern California, with two visits and shared with students her inspiring theological gifts and presence. I coordinated and hosted Ruether for a lecture in March 2009 titled “Interfaith Dialogue, Transnational Feminism, and the Environment,” which was co-sponsored by Religious Studies, Gender Studies, and Hartley House, a faculty-in-residence program. I also crafted and read the citation as well as hooded Rosemary when she received an honorary degree at Whittier’s commencement in May 2012. Ruether briefly addressed the graduating class and their families and friends with her usual erudite economy of words, highlighting the students’ integral and transformative roles in shaping more just futures.

Through these important and transformative interactions with Ruether, which creatively grounded my career in soCal, I learned that both Ruether and I were informed and influenced by the parallels between Quaker and Catholic social justice traditions, activism, and pedagogies. Also, both Ruether and I navigated and negotiated dual academic couples; interestingly, we both married scholars of Asian religions. Moreover, both Ruether and I taught by interpreting comparative and interdisciplinary religious methods and traditions to challenge oppressive social structures and eco-degradation as well as to critically reclaim prophetic sources of social renewal, justice, and eco-solidarity in multiple religious traditions.

In July 2012, I attended a Catholic feminist movement building conference co-sponsored by Call to Action and the Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER). To my delight, Ruether recollected this conference in her autobiography.

Twenty Catholic feminists representing different Catholic peace and justice movements and ministries, and teachers in theology and ethics in colleges, met ... to respond to the recent attacks by the bishops to women’s work in the church. They discussed how they might create a more

organized network of Catholic feminists in the US Church ... In this meeting, Catholic feminists across the nation began to formalize their relation to each other as a community, and to imagine how they might create a movement for greater gender justice in the American Church. This is the kind of Catholic community with which I feel in communion.⁵

At this conference, Catholic feminists participated in a community of conversation, collaboration, and coalition about various topics related to feminist ministry and ecclesial justice, theological education, and social and political action. In a feminist, co-creative, and collective style, this conference refrained from reproducing and reinscribing the institutional violence of negative competition (i.e., deny and diminish the work of others for self-promotion) and instead invited, imagined, and enacted new flourishing relationships to realize/actualize new and more just, livable, and sustainable futures – with candour, with humour, and with a generous collegial way of being and living in and into new networks and coalitions. From this conference, I formed deep ties with several feminist theologians and ethicists that continued to creatively shape my self-understanding as a comparative feminist theologian, teacher, and activist via education.

Ruether served on many editorial boards, notably this international journal, *Critical Theology*, previously titled *The Ecumenist*, due to her interfaith brand of Catholicism shaped by her family’s interrelational ties to Episcopal and Quaker churches, Russian Orthodoxy, and Judaism and to her interfaith collaborations in Buddhist–Christian dialogues, in Jewish–Muslim–Christian dialogues about Israel–Palestine, and in ecofeminist struggles to sustain livable worlds. In 2018, *The Ecumenist* rebranded itself as *Critical Theology* and revitalized its editorial board, on which I serve with three Canadian theologians; the journal features theological reflection with global liberative intent and praxis. My edited issues have spotlighted Asian and North American Asian liberation and feminist theologies; different theological voices reckoning with systemic racism in Black womanist, white anti-racist feminist, and LGBTQIA+ theological perspectives in US Catholicism; and US Latin@/x/e, Asian/Asian American, and Black Catholic women’s prophetic theological visions about labour—all aiming to address and redress the intersectional injustices of racial/ethnic, gendered, and economic inequalities as well as to urge proactive solidarity praxis to build another, more just world.

Ruether embodied and exemplified the conscience, religious freedom, participatory and mutual pastoral and community care, and prophetic ministry for social justice of a lifelong progressive and feminist Catholic,

who created and revived “good church” grounded in a Vatican II ecclesiology that centralizes the people of God and that opposes clericalist ecclesial power dynamics and structures.⁶ Consequently, she contended with ecclesial and educational politics on Catholic campuses: for example, when the University of San Diego (USD) rescinded its invitation of an endowed chair to her in 2008 because, among other aspects of her scholar-activism, Ruether served on the board of Catholics for Choice until 2010 and on the editorial board of its magazine, *Conscience*,⁷ and also supported Mary Magdalene Apostle Catholic Community in San Diego, led by ordained Roman Catholic Women Priests. Her time and teaching at USD would have focused on ecotheology,⁸ but her case catalyzed a broader conversation among Catholic feminist theologians about the increasing fragility and jeopardy of academic and religious freedom for feminist and womanist theologies and studies in religion, still ongoing today. As I argued in an essay about academic freedom in higher education which spotlighted the life and scholarly work of US Catholic women in higher education,⁹ Ruether’s life and scholar-activist legacy epitomizes a grace-based constructive theology of academic and religious freedom: a feminist Catholic

prophetically transgresses and transcends barriers as well as witnesses to freedom, both in and out of institutional religious and political structures—a freedom from religio-political reductionist views of theology, political action, etc., and also a freedom for creative and constructive theological thought, practice, and life that is accountable to women’s experiences, to rich intellectual and cultural religious traditions, and to a just and justice-oriented church, society, and world.

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- 1 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning: An Autobiography* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), xi–xii.
 - 2 Ibid., 19.
 - 3 Ibid., 159–95.
 - 4 Ibid., 11.
 - 5 Ibid., 64.
 - 6 Ibid., 49–50, 53–56, 63.
 - 7 See “Rosemary Radford Ruether: A Commemorative Issue,” *Conscience: The News Journal of Catholic Opinion* (June 2011).
 - 8 Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 58.
 - 9 Rosemary P. Carbine, “Welcomed to Wisdom’s Feast: Memories of Monika as Professor and Mentor,” in *Monika K. Hellwig: The People’s Theologian*, ed. Dolores R. Leckey and Kathleen Dolphin (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 2010, 39–53.

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My Tribute to Rosemary Radford Ruether

By Pamela K. Brubaker

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Theologian

Although I was never formally a student of Rosemary Radford Ruether, she greatly impacted my theological thinking. I grew up in the Church of the Brethren (COB), a historic peace church. Our roots went back several generations. We learned from a young age what God requires from us is “to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). I served as a member of the district youth cabinet and participated in gatherings for peace and justice. I took some courses in theology when I attended a COB college in the '60s, but there weren't any women theologians that I knew, yet.

In the early 1970s, I heard Ruether speak at an event. I was very inspired by her feminist theology. I read her book *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975) when I worked on a Master of Arts in religious education at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. This book was groundbreaking! She discussed several topics: religion and sexism; racism and sexism; socialism and sexism; and women, ecology, and social revolution. These core issues she would continue to develop in future books. I wrote a paper on affluence for my Christian social ethics class that included Ruether's discussion of the exploitation of women in advertising:

She is both the image and manager of a home which is to be converted into a voracious mouth, stimulated by the sensual image of the female, to devour the products of consumer society. A continual stream of garbage flows forth in increasing quantity from this home, destroying the earth. Yet the home and women are not the originator but the victims of this system.¹

Sadly, this is still the case.

To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism was published in 1981. The chapter on “Can a Male Savior Save Women” especially interested me. I read Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father* and struggled with my own views. Ruether discussed three types of Christology: the imperial Christ, the androgynous Christ, and the prophetic iconoclastic Christ. The third one resonated with me, my beliefs, and my religious roots:

Jesus as liberator calls for a renunciation and dissolution of the web of status relationships by which societies have defined privilege and unprivilege. He speaks especially to outcast women ... because they are at the bottom of this network of oppression ... he has renounced this system of domination and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment.²

Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing was published in 1992. This book also was groundbreaking! Ruether had written about ecology in 1975, but this book focuses more systematically on the topic. In the introduction, Ruether asks:

Are Gaia, the living and sacred earth, and God, the monotheistic deity of the biblical traditions, on speaking terms with each other? Ecology and feminism, brought together in the unified perspective of ecofeminism, provide the perspective from which I seek to evaluate the heritage of Western Christian Culture. The goal of this quest is earth healing, a healed relationship between men and women, classes, and nations, and between humans and the earth. Such healing is possible only through recognition and transformation of the way in which Western culture, enshrined in part of Christianity, has justified such domination.³

Signifying the Greek Earth goddess, Gaia was also adopted by planetary biologists who regarded the entire planet as a living system, behaving as a unified organism. The last chapter of *Gaia and God* focuses on spirituality and politics. Ruether identified two interrelated tasks: “Envisioning a Good Society” and “Building Communities of Celebration and Resistance.” The first calls for a “metanoia or change of heart and consciousness ... real ‘security,’ not in dominating power and the impossible quest for total invulnerability, but rather in the acceptance of vulnerability, limits, and interdependence, limits and interdependency with others, with humans and with the earth.”⁴ The second asks that we see that

being rooted in love for our real communities of life and for our common mother, Gaia, can teach us patient passion, a passion that is not burnt out in a season, but can be renewed season after

season after season. Our revolution is not just for us, but for our children, for the generations of living beings to come. What we can do is to plant a seed, nurture a seed-bearing plant here and there, and hope for a harvest that goes beyond the limits of our powers and the span of our lives.⁵

Christianity and Social Systems: Historical Constructions and Ethical Challenges was published in 2009. Ruether writes in the acknowledgments that it was based on years of her “foundational social ethics course.” In the introduction, she states that the book’s purpose “is to provide an introductory analysis of the history, social structures, and basic social systems that have shaped Western Christian and post-Christian societies, with a focus on the U.S. context.”⁶ This book speaks to so many of the ethical issues with which we still grapple. Each of the 17 chapters addresses a crucial historical construction and ethical challenge. The last passage of this book presages contemporary interfaith and decolonial theologies:

Christians can no longer assume that redemption in Christ is the privileged trajectory to save the world. In this sense, the mission of the church must be decentered in world history. But at the same time, Christians can and should affirm that redemption in Christ should be one language among others for a vision of a planet that all peoples can inhabit in justice and peace. Christian hopes join the hopes of every religion and human tradition that seek more loving and just ways of living together on a renewed earth.⁷

Activist

I first met Rosemary in 1980. I received my Master of Arts from United Theological Seminary in Dayton. At that time, I worked at the seminary as the Women’s Center coordinator. I also attended a class on Christianity and Marxism at Wright State University in Ohio. Dr. Nicoles Piediscalz chaired the Religion department; in 1980, he hosted an event that included Ruether and Leonard Swindler, both involved in Christian–Marxist dialogue, and Giglia Tedesco, woman and Communist, senator and Catholic in Italy. I learned a lot from these three speakers and hoped to learn more. At the end of the meeting, there was an invitation to go to Italy. I was grateful that I could go.

Ruether held active leadership positions in “Christian Socialist Dialogues” and “Christian and Marxist Encounters.” She served as a co-leader of “Marxism, Christianity and Grass Roots Communities in Italy Today,” held on February 26 to March 10, 1981, in Rome. Ruether reported on these dialogues in *The Ecumenist*, but as this work was not included in the memorials or obituaries of Ruether that I read in newspapers, I expound on it here as transformative for my

own theological reflection and activism. She begins the article by declaring that “Today, among other things, Italy is a place of important and practical dialogue between Christians and Marxists.”⁸ She notes that the students and professors involved in these dialogues were mostly Americans from seminaries and departments of religion, including me. Over a period of 12 days, we experienced “an intensive immersion in the uniquely Italian cultural dialectic of Christianity and Marxism.”⁹ The lecturers in the seminar included Catholic and Protestant leaders of the left, pastors, and theologians; spokespersons for Communist, Socialist, Independent Left, and Christian democratic parties; and traditional Catholics.

Ruether highlights three speakers. Gianni Gennaria, a Catholic priest, moral theologian, and TV host for programs on Christianity of the left, clarified that

his choice of the politics of the Communist Party was contextual about the situation in Italy and about [a] particular kind of Communist party there ... It is possible to have a Marxism that accepts itself as a program and leaves open the question of the ultimate horizon of meaning and value ... The Christian must protest whenever a political party tries to become a church, or a church tries to become a party.

Further, “the Christian needs to find the proper relation by which to connect eschatological hope with human economic, political, and cultural hopes. This is possible only if the party does not try to define eschatology or the Church to try to define the political program.”¹⁰

Lucio Lombardo Radice, a well-known thinker and writer, played an important role in initiating European Christian–Marxist dialogues in the late 1960s.

Radice himself is an atheist, but he regards this not as a dogma essential to Marxism but rather as a personal point of view based on his inability to affirm the existence of a personal god or personal immortality ... He sees both Christians and Marxists as sharing a common faith in an open future and transcendent possibilities of human existence. The Marxist accepts the evilness of the present historical situation. If God is uncertain, evil is certain. Therefore, to believe in the possibility of a transformed future human existence is not a scientific determination, but an act of faith. Today, more than ever ... Marxists must acknowledge that the historic project of socialism has not brought about the utopian community ... But we must take up the challenge to create new models and renew our faith that socialism means freedom.¹¹

Sergio Aquilante, president of the Italian Methodist Church (now united with the Waldensian Church),

told how his family and community drew near the Communist Party during the 1920s as an expression of their resistance to fascism. The Communist Internationale was even sung in their Methodist Church. The son of a Methodist pastor of his village went to fight the fascists in the Spanish Civil War. In 1943, a group of resistance fighters to fascism formed out of their Church and community. The leading communists and socialists of his area were Methodists ... Faith must be seen as a dynamism that keeps us moving and the future open, that prevents us from giving up when all seems lost. This faith must be lived in the real events of life. It must be translated into the critical political and social option of the present situation ... The Christian must protest this atheism of religiosity that separates faith from real life. It must also protest all idolatry of the political party that makes a particular political analysis infallible ... Both these ... are necessary to establish true dynamic relationship between religious hope and political hope.¹²

Many of these three speakers' points in 1980 still resonate today.¹³

For example, Ruether states:

One concrete expression of the Christian and Marxist relationship in Italy today (1980) is the growing number of grassroots Christian communities. Unlike some other areas, such as Latin America where basic communities have been recognized by the hierarchy as an instrument of evangelization, in Italy grass-roots communities have arisen through direct confrontation with the hierarchy. The impulse for the development of these communities came from the renewal of the Church fostered by the Second Vatican Council. Many renewal movements sprang up in Catholic parishes. They were centered upon contemporary reflection on the Bible, liturgical renewal, and renewal of catechetics.¹⁴

However,

in 1968, after an initial year of confusion following the Council, the Curia and the Italian hierarchy began systematically to crack down on all these renewal movements inspired by the Council. In fact ... they had never been in favor of the Council documents ... At this point the Curia, together with the Italian hierarchy, began to repress these movements of renewal and to remove their leadership.¹⁵

During our trip and dialogues, our group visited a few grassroots communities and heard about collaboration between Christians and Marxists on concern for social needs. Ruether elaborates at length on one such community: namely, the working-class parish of Isolotto, in a working-class suburb of Florence, impacted

in the 1950's during the period of economic boom when many rural and southern Italians were coming to the area for new industrial jobs. Mass housing was being built for these workers but without any social infrastructure. In 1954 Enzo Mazzi was appointed the priest of the new parish. He began to renew the liturgy and to address himself in the concrete needs of the people. Gradually he began to cooperate with communists who were the primary representatives of the working class people.¹⁶

Ruether continues:

On one occasion one thousand workers out of twenty-six hundred were laid off from a local plant. In the Christian Democratic-controlled city of Florence, the communists could find no hall in the area to hold their protest meetings. Father Mazzi allowed them to use the church. It ... also became the center of the whole struggle over adequate school buildings for children housed in unsanitary temporary buildings. By the 1960s, Mazzi built a vital parish which was the real center of the concrete struggles for the social needs of the community. In 1968 a new bishop ... was sent to Florence ... When the order was sent out that Father Mazzi had been removed from his position as pastor ... there was a mass protest, and ten thousand people turned out to protest his removal. Some eight thousand were arrested by the ... government and put on trial for various civil crimes ... for a period of time the dissidents ... actually occupied the church and refused to turn it over to the bishop ... They evacuated the church building and moved instead to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist in the town square in front of the church. This ... has continued every week from 1968 until the present time (1980) in the public square ... the parish of Isolotto became an important catalyst for the grass roots community movement in Italy.¹⁷

Continuing to focus on socio-religious renewal and reforms in Italy, Ruether also wrote about Italian reproductive healthcare laws in the early 1980s:

In Mid-May Italians will go to the polls for a referendum on the present Italian abortion law. If the challenge fails, it will be another evidence of the growing inability of the growing Roman Catholic

hierarchy to dictate Italian politics from their religious perspective. It will also mean that the existing abortion law, which passed in 1978, will have a chance to be more fully implemented.¹⁸

Ruether also notes its potential “significance outside Italy.” The Italian law provides an important alternative to the confrontation between “pro-life” and “pro-choice” perspectives that rages in the US.

Although hard-line “pro-lifers” would not accept the Italian law, many conscientious Christians who find that present construction of “pro-choice” principles too lacking in respect for the values of maternity and fetal life might discover in the Italian approach some helpful ways of redefining the context of the discussion.

Prior to the enactments of the present law the situation on abortion in Italy was very bad. Not only were Italian women hedged in by the dual rejection of contraception and abortion by the Roman Catholic Church, but under the fascist government the church’s stand was translated directly into law, so that every abortion was a crime for both physician and woman. In practice, no one went to jail for abortion. Rather, abortion was driven into the back alleys. Affluent women could obtain safe abortions by making a quick trip to Switzerland. Poor women had to rely on the hooks and knitting needles of the illegal abortionist ... The present abortion law was passed in 1978. It was intended to legalize abortion and to eliminate as much as possible the illegal abortion trade. This law was shaped by feminist senators.¹⁹

In Ruether’s view, this law “represents a significant effort to balance the principles of women’s right to self-determination with an affirmation of the social value of maternity.”²⁰

On my travels with Ruether, we celebrated International Women’s Day on March 8, 1981, in Italy during the “Marxism, Christianity, and Grass Roots Communities in Italy Today” event. Over a hundred women and men met in the community center of Fiesole for this celebration. Speakers from Italy, Uruguay, the Philippines, and the US called for women to continue their struggle and to participate in other liberation struggles. All shared the hope of the liberation of all peoples and the vision of a changed world, a world of justice and peace. This is still my hope!

Mentor

Rosemary became an influential mentor for me during that trip to Italy. At first, I was anxious about talking with her, but she was down to earth. I learned so much

from her about the topics addressed in the dialogues and deepened my understanding of Marxism, social justice, and activism. She kept in touch with me and helped me consider getting a doctoral degree in theology. Ultimately, I entered the PhD program in Christian social ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. When the American Academy of Religion took place in New York, she stayed at my apartment, and we took the subway together to the meeting place. I learned from her how to navigate the meetings. Later, she read my dissertation and, when I completed it in 1989, she helped me get it published. I saw her at about all the subsequent American Academy of Religion (AAR) meetings, and when we both lived in California, we met at AAR meetings there, too. I am grateful to have known her!

Pamela K. Brubaker is Professor of Religion Emerita at California Lutheran University. Her books include *Women Don’t Count: The Challenge of Women’s Poverty to Christian Ethics* (American Academy of Religion Academy Series, Oxford University Press, 1994), *Globalization at What Price? Economic Change and Daily Life* (Pilgrim Press, 2001, 2007), *Justice not Greed*, co-edited with Rogate Mshana (World Council of Churches Publications, 2010), and *Justice in a Global Economy: Strategies for Home, Community, and World*, co-edited with Rebecca Todd Peters and Laura Stivers (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006). She has also published numerous book chapters and articles on feminist ethics, economic ethics, and just peacemaking. Brubaker participated in several World Council of Churches consultations on women, economics, and alternatives to globalization between 2002 and 2013. She is an advocate and activist who lives in Austin, Texas.

1 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 198–99.

2 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 56.

3 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

4 *Ibid.*, 268.

5 *Ibid.*, 273–74.

6 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and Social Systems: Historical Constructions and Ethical Challenges* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

7 *Ibid.*, 253.

8 Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Christian Left in Italy,” *The Ecumenist* 19:3 (March–April 1981), 33–38.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*, 34–35.

11 *Ibid.*, 35.

12 *Ibid.*

13 See Ruether, *Christianity and Social Systems*, ch. 8.

14 Ruether, “The Christian Left in Italy,” 35, 36.

15 *Ibid.*, 36.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Italy’s Third Way on Abortion,” *Christianity and Crisis* 41:8 (May 11, 1981).

19 *Ibid.*, 130.

20 *Ibid.*, 141.

Antisemitism and the Pathology of Christian Theology

By Judith Plaskow

Professor Emerita, Manhattan College, New York

Many years ago, I heard Rosemary describe her area of specialization as “the pathology of theology.” The phrase has stuck with me, both because it is such a wonderful description of much of Rosemary’s theological contribution and because it resonates with how I understand my own work. I first met Rosemary in the spring of 1970, when my fellow graduate student Carol Christ brought her to Yale to speak so we could experience the miracle of a real, live woman doing theology. On that occasion, Rosemary shared a version of what became her classic article “Motherearth and the Megamachine,” in which she describes the dualisms that shaped the Christian tradition from its beginnings and that fuel the sexism that still profoundly shapes our culture. I met her for the second time at the “Women Exploring Theology” conference at Grailville in the summer of 1972. At that point, she was in the final stages of editing her groundbreaking anthology *Religion and Sexism*, which carefully documented the pathology of Jewish and Christian images of women in canonical texts from the Hebrew Bible to Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. Rosemary’s own chapter in that volume, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church,” further developed her account of the centrality and perniciousness of dualisms in Christian thinking. While the book was in press, she gave a version of the chapter at the American Academy of Religion meeting and called it “Saint Augustine’s Penis,” but she seems to have decided to tone the title down for the published version. In any event, Rosemary’s extraordinary productivity, erudition, wit, and iconoclasm were already amply in evidence 50 years ago.

I also heard from Rosemary—at another conference in the 1980s, I believe—a joke that has stuck with me ever since then and that I have repeated many times: What is the difference between an antisemite and a prophet? it asks. An antisemite says, “Jews are terrible,” and a prophet says, “Jews are terrible, oy.” Rosemary’s sensitivity to both the complexity of prophetic rhetoric and the persistence of antisemitism is clear from her book that is rarely cited or discussed but that appeared in the same year as *Religion and Sexism*. That book, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Antisemitism*,¹ documents an important dimension of the pathology of Christian thought from its New

Testament beginnings to the time of that writing. The book, which was dedicated to her Jewish uncle, David Sandow, is vintage Rosemary in that it races through 20 centuries of Christian thought and discusses many different thinkers and cultural contexts. One can certainly disagree with her interpretation of particulars, but, like so much of her work, it offers an essential framework for thinking about issues most people would rather avoid. The book deeply shaped my own understanding of Christian sources when I first read it and, later, my understanding of the roots of Christian feminist anti-Judaism. I think it is well worth revisiting at this moment of rising antisemitism in the US and around the world.

Rosemary’s central argument is that Christian antisemitism is not just a holdover from earlier pagan hostility toward Jews but introduces a new and crucial factor into ancient antisemitism that is deeply embedded in the very foundations of Christian faith.² In essence, antisemitism is the negative side—the “left hand,” as it were (Rosemary often talks about left hands in her work!)—of a Christological hermeneutic. Christology and anti-Judaism are two sides of the same exegetical tradition. Christian theology, she says, initially took the form of a midrash on Jewish Scripture that claimed that the true meaning of the Tanakh is the prophecy of Jesus as the Christ. But this reading required exegetes to show why Jews were wrong in their understanding of their own texts. The Church needed to construct the Pharisees and then the rabbis as dangerous enemies not because they were misguided and obsolete but because they offered a viable alternative midrash on Jewish Scripture that, if accepted, profoundly challenged Christian belief.³

The Christian midrash on Jewish perfidy and blindness that began in the New Testament, Rosemary shows, was greatly elaborated in the *adversos Judaeos* traditions of the Church Fathers. The Fathers construct Jewish history as a trail of crimes—from a general proclivity for vice and idolatry evidenced by the building of the golden calf, to rebelliousness and unfaithfulness, to persecution and slaying of the prophets, culminating in the killing of Christ.⁴ One of the important points Rosemary makes in fleshing out these developments is that the depiction of the Jews in parts of the New

Testament and in the Fathers fits into the larger pattern of dualistic thinking that she had already described in her feminist work. Judaism is identified with all that is old and carnal, while Christianity represents what is spiritually and eschatologically new. The theme of Jewish sensuality and outwardness—Jews are a people of the letter rather than the spirit—becomes part of the general ontological dualism of Christian theology. Like women, gay people, and myriad others, Jews were constructed as representatives of the flesh.

For the first centuries of the Christian era, these attitudes remained in the realm of religious polemic: the hostility of a persecuted religion toward its parental faith. Once Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, however, antisemitism began to be incorporated into legal statutes, and the situation of the Jews changed. Judaism was the only non-Christian faith that remained legal in the empire, but Jews were gradually excluded from more and more areas of the economy, and their civil status steadily declined. They were shut out of manufacturing and agricultural enterprises, could not hold public office or any civil or military rank, and were barred from engaging in many forms of social and sexual relations with Christians. They couldn't build new synagogues or repair old ones. In the high Middle Ages, the Crusades led to a dramatic worsening of the Jewish position, both in terms of economic ruin and vulnerability to violence as well as increasingly ugly and hateful theological images of the Jew. In the modern period, the Jewish gains made in the process of Emancipation were erased when the Nazis came to power. While Nazi racial theory was new, Rosemary says, it built on centuries of ready-made stereotypes of the mythical Jew, eternal enemy of the Christian faith.⁵

Rosemary exposed and documented many areas of theological pathology, but her thinking never ended there. *Religion and Sexism* was quickly followed by *Women of Spirit*, which looked at female leadership in Jewish and Christian history. *Sexism and God-Talk* and *Gaia and God* explored the profound sexism of the Christian tradition but also laid out paths toward a richer, more liberated faith. Similarly, *Faith and Fratricide* concludes with a powerful chapter on how facing and addressing the anti-Jewish dualisms deeply embedded in Christian self-understanding plays a key role in revitalizing the Christian vision itself.

The Church's Christological hermeneutic, for example, created a schism between *promise* and *judgment*, splitting the promise of redemption preached by the prophets from their profound criticisms of Israelite

apostasy. Rosemary points out that this dualism fundamentally misunderstands the self-critical nature of prophetic religion. For the prophets, judgment and promise apply to the same, one, Hebrew people (hence the joke); to read them correctly as scriptural texts, the Church would need to appropriate judgment along with promise and apply *both* to itself. The schism between letter and spirit similarly imagines Judaism as clinging to "outwardness," legalism and the flesh, while Christianity represents a new, grace-filled, messianic humanity. This split has prevented the Church from recognizing that it has birthed as many institutions and laws as any religion in history. So long as it identifies Judaism with all things carnal and worldly, Rosemary argues, it will not be able to acknowledge the necessity for robust institutional structures and yet not pretend that they are the perfect, incarnate body of Christ. Moreover, the Christian construction of Judaism as a *particular* religion in contrast to Christianity's *universality* must give way to acknowledgement that Christianity also rests "on a particular salvific experience appropriated by a particular group in a particular context." Recognizing themselves as heirs to and children of a particular culture in a world in which different peoples have their own understandings of the ultimate is a vital task that Christians have yet to undertake.⁶

There is far more to say about this rich and important entry in Rosemary's extensive bibliography. But I think it illustrates well both the critical and reconstructive dimensions of her thought that have been so profoundly important to so many people. She has left feminist theologians with a big agenda that is now on us to pursue.

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1 Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

2 *Ibid.*, 28f.

3 *Ibid.*, 64f.

4 *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

5 *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

6 *Ibid.*, 228–45.

Post-Ecumenical Christianity*

By Rosemary Ruether

Are we beginning to enter a post-ecumenical period, a period in which the stance of dialogue is beginning to be surpassed and Christians who take it for granted have begun to anticipate its completion? This is the question we hope to explore. Let us quickly dissociate the term “post-ecumenism” from any pretensions it may appear to imply. There is an academic one-upmanship abroad in the land which can scarcely wait for the X-era to be announced before it leaps forward to proclaim the “death of X” and the advent of the post-X era. The term post-ecumenism here does not assume the invalidation of the ecumenical movement or even the irrelevancy of traditional Churches. Indeed, as we shall see, it may even give these a new relevancy. It wishes modestly to explore the way in which the conclusion of ecumenical dialogue, church unity and communion can be and is being anticipated today, and to find a perspective for this in a renewed ecclesiology of the whole Christian tradition.

A New Church Consciousness

Post-ecumenism means, first of all, the development of a new church consciousness, a sense of standing in the whole Christian historical experience in all its diversity, and, while not losing the setting of one's immediate tradition, appropriating it by taking it up into a fuller identity. It is a church consciousness that moves empathetically amid this experience; knows the subtle unity and yet distinctiveness of the Reformed and Lutheran positions; sees this against the Left-wing Spiritualists and Anabaptists; appropriates the stance of this tradition against magisterial Protestantism as well as its polarity within itself; dips back into that amazingly diverse and yet coherent world of the Latin Middle Ages; and, stepping back still further, absorbs the tragic diastasis, yet essential cohesion, between the Christianity of the Greek Empire and the Christianity of the Roman West which had lost the imperial authority and was in quest of its rightful Christian ecumenical leader. These two streams of Christianity, flowing out of a common patristic source, so close and yet so constituted to be the mirror opposite to the other, gradually appeared strange, alien and finally incomprehensible to each other. Perhaps, by a final stretch of imagination, we may even participate in that recoil of Semitic and Coptic Christianity from the aegis of Byzantinism, its nurture of its own liturgies, traditions and theologies by which it both affirmed its own

nationalities and was submerged under rising Islam. In this broadening vista of Christian historical experience, the biblical witness does not simply constitute the first chapter, but is necessarily both the starting and ending point of this whole experience, and this by being constantly at its center.

The existence of such a new church consciousness depends on an imagination that could not have existed before the rise of present historical consciousness. The historical consciousness is the grace that can free us from that parochialism which identifies the unity of the Church with a particular cultural and institutional appropriation. By its grace we need no longer translate otherness into rejection, but by recapitulating in historical consciousness the branching paths, and by penetrating them with a sensitized theological awareness, we can find a new “we” amid all of these fragmented and schismatic “others”. Historical consciousness is basic to this new church consciousness. Without it an ecumenism arises which is unprincipled, which has no sense of the traditions that establish present Churches and which cannot raise its vision above the inter-group potluck supper: in short, an ecumenism of mere sociability. On the other hand, historical church consciousness as such can become an aestheticism that loses itself in discussing the length of the lace on the surplice of the deacon of the Mozarabic rite. This is an aestheticism of historical church tradition into which Anglicanism (in so many ways in the forefront of development) has sometimes fallen.

Superficial eclecticism can only be overcome when the plurality of Christian traditions is really taken up into a new theological consciousness. Such a consciousness should appropriate the many cultural forms of Christian theologizing, and, without annihilating their particularity or even their contextual sufficiency, begin to sense the continuity of substance amid the diversity of forms. Here is a task that has only begun, whose principles we are only beginning dimly to intuit and for which new criteria of orthodoxy, entirely different from those which have prevailed in the past, must be developed if ecumenical theological consciousness is not to be a mere collection of alternatives. Here ecumenical dialogue will be relevant for a long time to come and will call for teamwork of members of all traditions. Yet those who have moved around in the many traditions already find growing in their mind some kind of new

* This article was originally published in *The Ecumenist* (predecessor to *Critical Theology*) 5:1 (November–December, 1966), 3–7.

theological consciousness which surpasses mere plurality, hard as it may be to explicate its objective form in any conceptual structure which would not itself be simply another partial and timebound mode of appropriation.

New Kinds of Community

This, then, is the theoretical basis for a post-ecumenical Christianity, a new church consciousness that is both an inclusive historical consciousness and an integrating theological consciousness. Can we go on to explore the even more difficult problem of its practice in common worship and life together? We have today a growing number of people who take for granted this fuller church consciousness as the matrix of their own Christian identity and who find themselves in concrete communities where it no longer makes sense to preserve traditional boundaries. Here stress must be laid on the happening of a real, concrete Christian community beyond traditional structures. The kind of situation here in view is much more than an exchange of pulpits and inter-church sociability, which presupposes distinct communities structured on traditional lines. The happening of a new kind of community rests on the flux and mobility of modern life. In this situation Christians find themselves holding on to a commitment without natural relationship to any parochial structure. In this flux, new communities begin to collect around the actual centers of common life, and, at a certain level of depth, wish to grasp this common life as the Church, as the community of worship. The university is a natural setting for this development. Itself the product of Western Christian civilization, the university exists ambivalently toward Christian faith, alienated, yet deeply bound up with it. Here the Christian finds himself released from his confessional structure, but in a setting where he can explore his larger cultural identity. The university carries traditions both affirming and negating Christian faith, and, above all, it wishes to preserve non-commitment as its official stance. Therefore, the Christian commitment within its framework is freed from confessional lines and yet defines itself out beyond it. Here, then, is the natural setting for the rise of a free-floating Christian community, surpassing traditional lines of separation, yet gathered together out of the official university community as a "peculiar people". Finding each other in this setting, committed Christians converse and finally wish to express their communication on the fullest level as communion. Thus, in the university setting of which I have been a part, diaspora Christianity has begun to apprehend its concrete community life in worship. On several occasions, culminating in a happy celebration of Pentecost, the active Christians who circulate around the campus religious center, ranging from Roman Catholics to Congregationalists, did celebrate

together, using various forms: the liturgy of Taizé and South India, and Anglican sung Masses.

The same process of diaspora and ingathering can be perceived in other settings. The civil rights movement has been another catalyst. In this movement many Christians in contemporary America have discovered themselves in a Christian community beyond confessional lines. This common life has a double side, being both a shared life (and even shared death) and also a judgment over against "the world". Here the Gospel is indeed a sword, sharply setting off those who have ears to hear from those who harden their hearts. The irony of it is that the local Churches are generally in possession of the hardhearted who bar the doors of the meeting places to the agapic community and even count it a service to God if they kill them. Consequently, the "true Church" perforce gathers for prayer in fields and streets and breaks eucharistic bread around kitchen tables without regard for the boundaries of these parochial structures.

Both of these examples suppose a surpassing of confessional lines, a mobile, diaspora Christianity that finds itself here and there as a new gathered community, not gathered by traditional structures, but gathered and structured by the Word itself. To some extent this same shift of the principle of assembly can be seen in traditional parochial structures as well, particularly among Protestants. Here rigid denominational identity becomes superseded by a more general Christian commitment. Then when a particular Christian community begins to come alive, preach and receive the Word together with new power, to explore a deeper life together, those open to such a Word gather around this center across denominational lines. On the other hand, members of this congregation, existing in a merely inherited relation to it and unable to grow with it, may be driven out by this same Word and seek their former level of religious security elsewhere. Again we see the Gospel as a sword, as a crisis, gathering the children of light, weeding out those who cannot hear. Inherited institutional structures become secondary to the gathering of a community at a particular center, the Word itself now acting as the essential principle in the gathering and structuring of the local Church.

A Gathered Community

All these examples of a new gathered community beyond confessionalism are charismatic. They are communities gathered around the experience of the presence of God. But what happens when we cannot discern the spirits? This side must be fully accounted for if our opening to a post-ecumenical Christianity is not to descend to a sub-theological level of mere feeling. When feeling becomes the only principle of assembly, such an assembly becomes the very oppo-

site of the Church, the community of faith. Community rests ultimately on faith, and hence it is able to transcend experienced graces of fellowship and persevere when they are absent. A community spontaneously gathers around the faith-experience of the presence of God. When minds are open to the Spirit and the whole dynamic of reconciliation is flowing, the Word indeed gathers and structures the church community ... and this is the authentic way for the Church to be gathered. But that secondary reality, the institution, is necessary to the Church's historical existence. It can transmit the tradition, the matter of faith, the form of assembly, even when the inner dynamic seems to turn off and the man who yearns for bread seems to be able only to give and receive a stone. The institution in all its ambiguity and finitude is, nevertheless, the support around the community of faith. A post-ecumenical Christianity that would be gathered only with its own discernment of spirits has not fully succeeded in establishing the desired community of faith. It must ask itself this question: What kind of a community can subsist around the experience of the absence of God? If the Church is not simply to dissolve around this experience, it must be sensitive to the dark night of the soul as well. To affirm the priority of faith over both kinds of experience of God allows the community to survive its sinfulness, to respond gratefully when the Spirit's direction is clear and manifest, but to persevere in ecclesial existence even when God is experienced only in his absence. It is here that the Catholic concept of obligation takes on a new meaning not as a good work, as it has been understood, but as *fides sola*, a gift of perseverance to keep gathering, hearing and communing even when no experiential feedback seems to take place.

Patience and Hope

Where does all this take us in our quest for a post-ecumenical Christianity? Are we disappointed that it seems to point back to those very structures which seemed at first to be surpassed? These structures doubtless could be improved, made more adequate, merged with each other in more effective units, but none of this has any absolute bearing on the question of church unity. Ultimately the unity of the Church is found in the Word, and institutional structures, whether larger or smaller, older or younger, more or less intelligent, are still related to this center only in a relative and secondary way. Nonetheless, for this center of unity, they remain its essential and indispensable carrying vehicle. Thus we arrive at a relativizing of traditions and a final apprehension of the Church as a community that

lives by faith and not by sight. This conclusion of the ecumenical quest seems to explain the fact that those (in the author's experience) who have broken through to the most mature ecumenical consciousness end by expressing this in the tradition from which they have come. In the words of one theologically acute friend (who began as a Presbyterian, was several years an Anglican, several years a Quaker and concluded as a Presbyterian), "Since non-salvation is to be found everywhere, I found I could handle non-salvation best where I began."

This remaining where you are, where you have been thrown by your particular historical circumstances, should not be mistaken for a momentary failure of nerve before we steel ourselves for the leap forward to a new technicolor, vistavision "Us". I would suggest that this acceptance of where you are may well be the fulfillment of mature ecumenism. Outwardly it may appear to find everything much as it was before we began, but actually a complete conversion has taken place. We now take up the task of being where we are on an entirely new basis, like the philosopher who, having emerged from the cave and contemplated the unity of all reality, is fulfilled only when he returns to the cave to serve those who remain enchained there. He becomes thereby, to the outward eye, indistinguishable from the others. One returns to the task of working amid the timebound and finite framework of the historical church institutions, but only because one no longer takes them for the ultimate truth; rather, one can finally deal with them only because one assumes the full context, both of the expanding unity in multiplicity of the whole Christian historical experience (the whole human experience?) and the focal unity of our being in Christ. It is now on this basis that one can validly appropriate one's existence in a local Church of a particular historical structure as an authentic figure of one's being in the body of Christ. Let no one mistake this for despair or pessimism. What it means is simply not to confuse dreams and theories with real work, and to say of the real community in which we find ourselves that this is the Church, this is the people that must become the sign of God's presence.

Dr. Rosemary Ruether, a frequent contributor to theological publications in America, has proposed the provocative idea of a post-ecumenical age in a personal letter to the editor. Though her thoughts on the matter are still tentative and groping, she has been willing to put them in the form of an article.

A New Political Consciousness*

By Rosemary Ruether

For over ten years the United States has been in the midst of a rapidly moving internal revolution that affects every aspect of its life, and it seems that this may well be a moment when it is crucial to step back from the situation for a time in order to take stock of ourselves. It is a time for looking back over our heritage as well—politically, culturally and religiously—and for seeking a larger perspective. We are losing the ground from under our feet, and this means nothing less than the loss of our past, not simply in itself, but as the basis from which to create new futures. The new generation so readily speaks as though no human being had existed before them, and as though liberty and sexuality were their personal inventions. Only nihilism and not creative revolution come out of the abolition of all that has come before us. Only those who have a deep sense of the human tradition can make “the Revolution.”

When we read the great documents of the Western revolutionary tradition, we are reminded, with a startling sense of freshness, of the visions and hopes on which modern revolutionary States were founded. These hopes of revolutionary States also parallel the hopes of the Church. The two move in the same vector of messianic expectation. Quite simply, this means the hope for salvation, in a total social and historical sense. It is the hope for the overcoming of evil, injustice, oppression and exploitation, and the hope for the coming of the redeemed community in a redeemed earth. So the Christian can indeed embrace the hopes of the modern revolutionary tradition as the secular culture-bearer of that same biblical hope from which came Israel and the Church.

“Woe to you who decree iniquitous decrees; who turn the needy from justice and rob the poor of their rights. ... Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, the notable men of the land who are the first in the nation. You who put far from yourselves the evil day, but bring near the seat of violence and ... are not grieved by the ruin of the people....” The prophets who wrote such words shared the wrath and the righteous indignation of the revolutionary, but, on the other hand, they also shared his hope for a new society, beyond this judgment: “It will come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the highest of the mountains ... and all the nations will flow to it ... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and

their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they study war any more....”

Uncritical Messianism

But there is a problem with the revolutionary tradition, and this is also to imply that there is a problem with the messianic tradition of the Bible as well. Messianic or revolutionary rhetoric is tempted to equate these ideals with whatever new society is created out of them, whether that be the Christian Church or revolutionary States. Thus these hopes become a self-sanctifying mythology which justifies everything that is happening and wards off the possibility of new criticism. It is not accidental that some people have drawn parallels between the psychology of communist States and that of the Catholic Church, for both, in similar ways, have used messianic symbols as forms of self-absolutization.

The United States of America has been a nation which has harbored the most exalted of messianic and revolutionary images, but it has also shown a great tendency to make these images into a sanctimonious justification of its policies. We are so familiar with that rhetoric, for Americans all grew up with it in school. America from its very foundation was perceived as the “Promised Land,” with all the biblical overtones carried by that symbol. It was a land of refuge and limitless new horizons for those who fled from the “Old World” of persecution and oppression. Here was the “New World,” the land flowing with milk and honey, where the New Zion might be planted in the wilderness. It was in a nimbus of such thoughts that the Puritan fathers hastened to these shores. The American Revolution added a further dimension to these images. Now America saw itself as the foremost land of liberty, the first nation to be founded on the new liberal theories that were banishing the old feudal European society. Its political practice became a model for revolutions in this same European society, and later on for other national revolutions. It is not accidental that the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, written by Ho Chi-Minh in 1945, begins by quoting the American Declaration of Independence and then the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. We were “the last best

* This article was originally published in *The Ecumenist* (predecessor to *Critical Theology*) 8:4 (May–June, 1970), 61–64.

hope of mankind,” “the shot that was heard around the world” as the herald of the new age of political liberty.

All of these self-images represented the very real hope for which this nation was reaching, and the standards by which it sought to guide its path. But it was also all too easily converted into a set of blinders by which white America could fail to notice the glaring contradictions between its ideals and its social reality, such as the genocide of the native Indian population, and the clash between declarations of universal human rights written by men who were slave holders.

This mythology continues to pervade our self-image and has a decisive effect on our foreign policy. American foreign policy is dominated by nothing less than a Manichaeian view of nations and social systems. The clash between East and West, “communism” and “democracy and free enterprise,” is the cosmic dash between the principles of light and darkness, good and evil. America dictates for herself a messianic role as the great white knight who charges about the world, liberating the oppressed and rebuking would-be oppressors and invaders. This messianic view of its world role is the most fundamental cloak for much that suggests American world imperialism, and it provides a justification for a policy of limitless intervention that not only spreads disasters in countries like Vietnam, but is sucking dry our own national resources as well. Both our policy makers and a vast sector of our population are imbued with a kind of infallibility complex toward themselves which makes it impossible for them to conceive of the possibility that our policy and the presuppositions on which it is based might be in serious error. We can only ask tactical questions. Are we going to win soon? What was the body count this week? But to question the fundamental right of America to decide the fate of other nations is, for many Americans, inconceivable.

The Counter-Mythology

But today we are witnessing the birth of a new revolutionary counter-mythology in America. This counter-mythology has its source primarily in the black community which, from the beginning, experienced the underside of this American messianic mythology. The black experience from the beginning knew America not as the “land of promise” but more like “hell on earth”; not as the land of freedom but as the land of enslavement; the white colonialists who brought this “stolen people to a stolen land” were not the heroic “Founding Fathers” but the “blue-eyed devil.” Today this black consciousness, which has been seething beneath the surface of American history for these many centuries, explodes on to center stage, bearing with it a whole heritage of this counter-experience as an iconoclastic shattering of the American self-image.

Moreover this counter-mythology, emanating from the black experience in America, has been appropriated by a significant sector of the white population, especially the youth, resulting in a new revolutionary consciousness. This revolutionary consciousness is expressed in a reversed mythology of the American identity: America not as the liberator, but as the enslaver; America not as the benign friend of all the world, but as the imperialist, racist beast.

In the literature and slogans created by black revolutionary writers and echoed by white radicals, we are no longer America, the international white knight, but Amerika, the international “pig.” From the Promised Land and the New Zion, we have become the harlot on the seven hills and the apocalyptic beast with the ten horns and the seven heads and the ten diadems on its horns, each inscribed with a blasphemous name. Is this some incomprehensible and unprecedented reversal? Perhaps Christians would do well to remember and so gain a perspective on this development: that the Christian Church underwent a parallel reversal of its self-image in the late medieval and Reformation period, when, from being the “body of Christ”, and its leader “the Vicar of Christ on earth”, and its nature that of the millennium and the final thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, it became the anti-Christ and the apocalyptic beast, in the eyes of its rebellious children who rose against it. No one can rebel against messianic society in this way except its own children who have grown up believing in its faith.

Revolution as Salvation

Which myth shall we believe in: America the white knight, or Amerika the beast? Is it really a question of deciding for one or the other, or is there some further ground on which we can stand and from which we can evaluate them both? Surely the new American Revolution proclaimed by the radicals must mean the decisive breaking of the self-sanctifying mythology which covers overmurderous war abroad and merciless neglect of social injustice at home, but this crisis must go beyond the cry of “kill the pigs”. The revolutionary must stand out against the failures of the society, but he must do it in such a way that his negation is also an affirmation of the basic values upon which the society itself was originally founded. It is precisely this second half of the dialectic that gets covered up and then forgotten in the rage of revolutionary rhetoric. As Albert Camus, in his book *The Rebel*, so brilliantly proved, the rebel is essentially rejecting a false order, or systematized disorder, and calling for authentic community. Thus he negates the ground upon which his own rebellion stands if he merely calls for the murder of the oppressor. The rebel is a true rebel only by uncovering the true values of a common human life which have been buried underneath a dis-

torted system. It is in this sense that we must speak of the fundamental conservatism of revolution. Every revolution must have, as one side of its impulse, a demand to restore the fundamental basis of things. In this sense radicalism is both a demand for something radically new and also a demand for a return to the roots. The revolutionary brings a judgment upon the society, but he brings a judgment in terms of the root values upon which the society stands and to which it is itself ultimately committed. This is the only basis on which the revolution can have any transforming value and power.

What could be more “conservative” than a revolution in a university, for example? Would this not mean to ask all over again for our times what it means to be an intellectual community? What is community? What is intellectual life? What is its relationship to society and the State? What is more conservative than that American Revolution proclaimed by the Black Panthers? Are they not calling for the fulfillment of those brave words emblazoned on every schoolhouse from the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution? And indeed they refrain from calling it a “new” American Revolution which has not yet happened. What does liberty mean? What does equality mean? What does justice mean? What does it mean to give to *every man* the possibility of pursuing his highest potential? Dick Gregory constantly carries around the American Declaration of Independence, claiming that he needs nothing more than this as his revolutionary text.

Revolution is not nihilism. Revolution is repentance. It brings judgment upon society, not merely to negate that society, but to bring it to the recognition that it has fallen down from its own authentic self. In order to be true to itself it must seek again its foundational values. Revolution claims this land, this society, this people as that people which must make this the land of promise which it has ever claimed to be. It does this, not by sanctifying the *status quo* by way of these ideals, but by setting these ideals ever ahead of us as the measure of the future for which we are striving and the measure of the failure of our present reality. Our stance must be neither a defensive absolutizing of the *status quo*, nor the demonizing of the *status quo*. Our stance must be transformationally dialectical, seeking to negate the society only by way of affirming its truer self.

We move off the ground of what has been the case, not merely in separatism and rejection, but to open up new ground and a new vision that can be the beachhead from which we can draw over society into a new reality.

It is not enough to be bomb-throwers; we must become architects of a new society. It is not enough to be prophetic denouncers; we must become creative reconstructors. We must rise from the level of wrath to that of a kind of angry love, even for the worst of our enemies. When the cry is raised, “Kill the pig,” we not only confine the possibilities of the adversary to the level of the beast, but we ourselves inevitably become beasts as well. To dehumanize the enemy is ultimately to assure your own dehumanization as well and to destroy the foundation of the revolution. To love one’s enemy—i.e., to be jealous for his humanity as much as for your own, even as you demand his conversion from the bestiality into which he has fallen—is not utopian sentiment, but the only basis on which the revolutionary can be sure to retain his own humanity in the midst of the revolutionary process. Only through this principle can the revolution become a real transformation.

When we lose our grip on this principle, we lose all hope for a really better world, and move toward a revolution which is merely the reversal of the present, in which oppressor becomes oppressed and oppressed becomes oppressor. The only revolution which can create a really better world is one which knows profoundly that the liberation of the oppressed must also be the liberation of the oppressor as well, and the creation of a new possibility for everyone. This was the vision which Martin Luther King held out to us, and which neither white America nor black America was ready for at that time. But today the time is fast approaching, and perhaps is already here, when that vision of a revolution as creating the basis for reconciliation and a new possibility for white and black America alike will cease to appear as utopian sentiment and pious idealism, and will be revealed as the only practical alternative for mutual annihilation.

Dr. Rosemary Ruether *preached this sermon, originally entitled “National Mythology and Counter-Mythology in the Making of Revolutionary Consciousness,” on April 12, 1970, at Harkness Chapel, Connecticut College. Dr. Ruether has just published a new book, related to the subject of this sermon, under the title The Radical Kingdom (Harper & Row).*

Book Review

Out of Witnessing Deprivation Emerges a Desire for Solidarity

By Don Schweitzer

St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon

Judith Butler and Frédéric Worms. *The Livable and the Unlivable*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2023. vii + 81 pp.

On April 11, 2018, philosophers Judith Butler, Distinguished Professor in the Graduate School, Department of Comparative Literature, University of California, Berkeley, and Frédéric Worms, Director at the École Normale Supérieure, Paris, met at the École for an intense conversation about the distinction between a livable and an unlivable life and the ethical obligations that arise from the interdependency of human lives. The plight of nearly two thousand refugees living in encampments in northern Paris provided the urgent context for their reflections. In 2022, they reconvened their conversation. This slim volume recounts their reflections.

Worms begins by trying to define criteria for distinguishing between a livable and an unlivable life. He proposes that the livable is a condition of life in which a person has an identity and is the subject of their life. The unlivable lacks this condition, which includes psychological, social, and political factors. Part of a livable life is criticizing what threatens the livability of one's own or others' lives. Butler adds that there can be language for the unlivable. This discourse about the unlivable enables the experience to be shared with those who have not undergone it, which in turn can generate empathy, compassion, and support networks for and with those trapped in unlivable circumstances. She also notes that intersubjectivity is a condition of subjectivity. Intersubjectivity implies interdependence among people for food, shelter, etc. Interdependence implies mutual obligations between people to provide and ensure for each other the conditions of livability. These obligations are implicitly universal in extent. They entail an equality among people that can provide a basis for struggle against the unequal distribution of the necessities of life.

In the Afterword, Worms notes that the unlivable circumstances of many refugees are politically created and constructed. Butler replies that for people living in relative security like herself, something in the unlivable conditions of others makes people turn away from them. Worms concurs. The unlivable can provoke

compassion yet can also move people to distance and protect themselves from it. Nevertheless, such distancing only exacerbates the unlivable.

Their discussion expands into the need for global minimal requirements for livability and institutions that can ensure them. Butler adds that such global requirements must be met in ways that reflect local conditions and cultures. She calls for thinking "glocally," for critical reflection on global minimal requirements in light of any given place, and vice versa. Worms concludes by noting that while he doesn't possess his life, he is responsible for how he lives it. Butler suggests he is pushing toward a more relational understanding of life, where the needs of others are seen as obligating us and where we recognize how our relations to others co-constitute us.

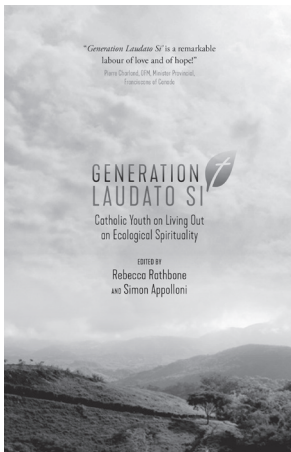
Butler and Worms aptly point out that global requirements which are flexible in their local implementation are needed to respond to the refugee crisis. However, self-sacrifice and limitation will be required on the part of the prosperous. Thirty years ago, Gregory Baum argued that the right-wing reaction sweeping Western nations was partly empowered by people's fear of what such solidarity would cost.¹ What will motivate the refugee response that Worms and Butler outline? Their dialogue suggests that a recognition of our interdependency will generate a sense of obligation that will suffice. Baum argued that the general populations of countries will not support such outreach unless motivated by a culturally mediated ethical sense of solidarity. He identified world religions as a potential resource. Jürgen Habermas has also pointed in this direction.

Butler and Worms have authored an important book that responds to the refugee crisis in a thoughtful way. It outlines a direction in which international society must turn. Yet, Butler and Worms limit themselves to a philosophical discussion. In some ways, their conversation carries forward the work of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who argued that in every human

face there is a divine appeal to care for this person. Levinas typically began his arguments philosophically but often concluded with a theological claim. The moral sources of world religions could help advance those claims as well as responses to this ongoing crisis.

1 Gregory Baum, "The Catholic Left in Québec," in *Culture and Social Change*, ed. Colin Leys and Marguerite Mendell (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992), 152.

Generation Laudato Si' Catholic Youth on Living Out an Ecological Spirituality



Edited by Rebecca Rathbone and Simon Appolloni

Written entirely by youth (aged 17 to 35) from 20 countries, this book comprises the thoughts, wisdom, dreams and aspirations of a generation that wants to change how we run the economy, foster community, lead and govern, facilitate education, use and apply technology, and live among the rest of creation. But it is more than just a book; through multimedia including a website, Instagram, Twitter and videos, it is a call to a global conversation to foster ecological conversion.

The news that Francis's remarkable encyclical is working its way down through the vast institutions of the Catholic Church is very welcome – and even better that it is lodging in the minds and hearts of young people. —*Bill McKibben, Schumann Distinguished Scholar, Middlebury College, Vermont*

... an irresistible compendium of pragmatic hope, a vibrant collage of how inspired young persons around the world are defending, and befriending, our planetary home. —*Stephen Bede Scharper, Associate Professor of Environment, University of Toronto*

Generation Laudato Si' ... has bolstered my conviction that this is not the end: there is still much to be done, and ours is the generation that can do it – we can "shift the paradigm." —*Yusra Shafi, KAIROS Youth Delegate to COP27*

Rebecca Rathbone is Officer Promoting Youth Leadership, Caritas Internationalis, and a former Animator for Development and Peace. **Simon Appolloni** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto, School of the Environment, and author of *Convergent Knowing: Christianity and Science in Conversation with a Suffering Creation* (McGill-Queen's University Press).

176 pages PB, ISBN: 978-2-89830-016-5 \$19.95



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Book Review

The Many Forms of Power Present in the Practice of Religion

By Don Schweitzer

St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon

Robert Wuthnow. *Religion's Power: What Makes It Work*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. 241 pp.

Robert Wuthnow, Professor Emeritus of sociology at Princeton University, is a prolific and important contributor to American sociology who has published a number of studies dealing with religion in America and its relationship to American society and culture. This wide-ranging but well-focused book combines sociology's interest in social power with the study of practice in philosophy and sociology to examine religion. While Wuthnow's focus is usually on contemporary religion in the United States, this book discusses case studies drawn from the past and present and from around the globe. Wuthnow is concerned with religion as a social phenomenon. He seeks to understand its power in terms applicable to other practices and institutions. The result is an insightful study of how power is present in and exercised through religious practices, in relation both to a religion's participants and to surrounding society.

Wuthnow focuses on five ways or "mechanisms" through which power works in religion: rituals, discourses, institutions, identity-definitions, and political influences. He typically notes how forms of social power shape and constrain how religions are practised and, conversely, how the practices of religion exert influence on individuals and surrounding society. The chapter on ritual argues about ritual power in various ways. Rituals enact, celebrate, and reinforce beliefs. They do grief work and consecrate people, objects, and relationships. Simultaneously, the power of social realities like patriarchy can shape how a ritual is performed and be reinforced through it.

Similarly, the chapter on religion's discursive power focuses on how asymmetrical power relations are present through the language used in religious practices and in who gets to speak. Wuthnow attends to the issue of sincerity in discourse, to the ways in which religious discourse is evaluated, and to how religious discourses operate as a form of resistance and protest against oppression. Religious discourse can have a distinctive motivating power through its claim to speak in the name of absolute values. Even in secularized so-

cieties, religious discourses have an important effect on people's lives and influence social norms.

Wuthnow next looks at how religious institutions seek to control and exert their presence in space and time. He examines how religions cultivate both practical and specialized forms of knowledge among their members and develop hierarchies within their membership according to who acquires this knowledge and gets to use it. This cultivation of communal knowledge helps religious communities influence their members and surrounding society.

Identity power illustrates how religions influence the way social groups define themselves and relate to each other. In this chapter, Wuthnow notes that the power of religion to shape identities is one of the ways in which systemic racism is present and at work in the United States. He calls for critical attention to how this identity-defining power is being used, for good and ill. Relatedly, in the chapter on religion's political power, Wuthnow defines the skills that religions can inculcate in their members and the resources religions can mobilize to deal with social issues and to engage in politics. Wuthnow notes that this kind of power is applied by religious groups to politicians and also by politicians to the electorate. It is exercised through value-coding events, issues, and persons by means of signalling and storytelling. It is also exercised directly through political engagement and protest. While national and regional church bodies hold certain forms of power, most of a religion's power is located in its congregations or local bodies.

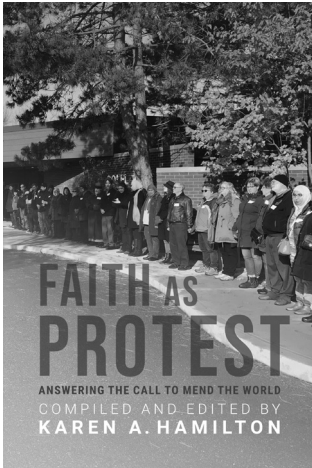
Wuthnow concludes by analyzing how religious practices are both enabled and constrained in and by their social context. However, religious communities often exercise some choice in their practices and in how they engage and perform them. With this choice comes the responsibility to choose wisely, so that their members and communities flourish as best they can and benefit the surrounding society.

People often experience themselves as both oppressed and empowered by the power of religion. Also, religious communities can be oblivious and neglect the power in their midst. Wuthnow's careful and insightful analysis can carry an emancipatory function

by illuminating the many ways in which forms of power flow through religious practices and are generated by them. Clergy, scholars of religion, and educated lay people involved in religious communities will benefit from reading this important and helpful book.

Faith as Protest

Answering the Call to Mend the World



Compiled and edited by Karen A. Hamilton

Is faith still relevant in today's world? Amid polarization, war, a refugee crisis, a pandemic and environmental devastation, it's easy to feel that faith no longer has a role to play. This book is evidence that nothing could be further from the truth. As you listen to voices from a range of religious traditions, you will see that faith – and the actions that arise from it – can mend the world.

“To have hope is to have faith. In these dark and divisive times, too many of us have become immobilized by cynicism or impotence. Karen Hamilton talks to more than a dozen thoughtfully engaged visionary voices who eloquently demonstrate that in dialogue and action there is always hope.” — *Hana Gartner, Member of the Order of Canada, award-winning CBC journalist and former host of The Fifth Estate*

“The stories in this book, compiled by The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton, are from interviews with people of different faiths who have acted courageously for justice. They are powerful and inspiring and proclaim the hope our faith gives us. People in our parishes, and many others, are struggling to know how God is calling us to respond to the injustices in our day. I wholeheartedly recommend this book.” — *Most Rev. Ronald Fabbro, CSB, Bishop of London, Ontario*

The Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton, the former General Secretary of The Canadian Council of Churches and Co-Chair of the 2018 Parliament of The World's Religions, is an award-winning author. She is the recipient of national and international awards for interfaith dialogue and practices.

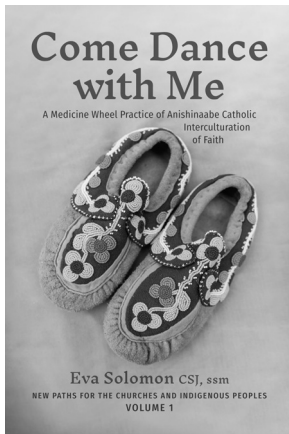
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Come Dance with Me

A Medicine Wheel Practice of Anishinaabe Catholic Interculturation of Faith



This book, the first volume in the series *New Paths for the Churches and Indigenous Peoples*, explores interculturation of Anishinaabe Roman Catholic faith through a mutually respectful and culturally appropriate dialogue process.

It is an invitation: an invitation to dance across the circular plain of the medicine wheel, a framework for Anishinaabe Catholic interculturation of faith. This rhythm of the dance is a means of healing, integrity, transformation, and reconciliation. The invitation, “Come dance with me,” reflects the invitation of the Cosmic Christ to all creation.

Sponsored by the Centre on the Churches, Truth, and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (CCTR) of the Faculty of Theology at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Canada, the purpose of the series *New Paths for the Churches and Indigenous Peoples* is to publish academic

theological research that contributes to the work of reconciliation and healing with Indigenous Peoples in Canada and beyond. The volumes in this series will promote theological research and investigation in service of truth, reconciliation, and healing.

“In *Come Dance with Me*, Sr. Eva offers her readers an important prophetic message based on her spiritual journey. Her life reflects a deep understanding of her Anishinaabe roots and the gifts they render to the Catholic worldview.”—Deacon Harry Lafond, Plains Cree

Eva Solomon CSJ, ssm, DMin, lives in Winnipeg. In her traditional way, she is a Sacred Pipe Carrier and has worked for several decades with the Canadian bishops on Indigenous ministry and on the development of a truly Indigenous Catholic church.

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