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Remembering Esperanza: a cultural-political theology for North American praxis

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this idea presents him with a moral dilemma when considering Jesus: if Christ is fully human, a Symbol of the essential Self, then he must also represent within himself both light and shadow. While this notion is a difficult one, its acceptance, as Monick notes, "can give an enormous sense of relief to bewildered and frightened persons... [Grünewald's] image of God shares with me a common nature; the evil I know as a reality in my own life is intrinsic to reality itself" (p. 25).

In his final chapter, Monick leaves behind the stark horror of the Crucifixion and considers briefly one of the images on the inside panel of the Isenheim altar. Grünewald's Resurrection reveals an entirely different Christ image—a resplendent figure, surrounded by an aureole of fire, who bursts forth from the darkness of the grave. One must see the crucifixion through the resurrection and vice versa: in both life and death, good and evil are intertwined.

Monick's book is less scholarly analysis than meditation upon an artistic image which had a profound emotional effect on the author. While the Jungian language may present difficulties for the uninitiated, and the speculations regarding Christ's sexuality—especially the suggestion of his bisexuality—may be disturbing to some, this book provides many useful insights. It would be of particular interest to those who must deal, either personally or in the context of a counselling relationship, with burdens of guilt associated with sexually-transmitted illnesses. The study is also worth reading if only to remind us of the power of visual imagery, not only in shaping our faith but also as a vehicle for spiritual understanding and psychological healing.

Monick is the author of two other pioneering works of "sexually conscious theology": *Phallos: Sacred Image of the Masculine* (1987) and *Castration and Male Rage: The Phallic Wound* (1991).

Diane E. Peters

Wilfrid Laurier University/Waterloo Lutheran Seminary

Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis

Mark Kline Taylor

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books

xii + 292 pp.

Mark Kline Taylor opens this volume by reflecting upon his earliest boyhood memories of a Zapotec villager named Esperanza in Mexico. He lived there with his family for one year, while his father was doing anthropological research. Esperanza is also the name of a barrio in Guatemala City which influenced Taylor by their "life in Christ" (p. x). He then moves into

a search for adequate theological methods and a Christology that attempt to address the concerns of contemporary “cultural pluralism and political oppression” (p. ix).

The author employs the word remembering in a fluid, multifarious manner. It refers to several levels of reality: physical-sexual, emotional, visual, family history, gathering and uniting people in hope to struggle against racism, classism and sexism, constructing a North American liberation theology.

For Taylor, the starting point of a Christian theology is *christopraxis*—i.e., “a reflective response to a practice of commitment to Christ” (p. 19). In the process of constructing a Christian theology, Taylor incorporates a postmodern trilemma—i.e., a sense of tradition, celebrations of plurality, and resistance to domination. He contends that one of the significant results of postmodernism is that theologians—like all other academics—must work without foundations.

After alluding to the problematic nature of defining hermeneutics, Taylor outlines “six salient concerns” (p. 49) in his cultural-political hermeneutics: the focus on texts, roles of language; awareness of pre-understanding; emancipatory interests; encountering plurality; the problematic of truth. Following Ricoeur—with a few North American postmodern trilemma modifications—he suggests that literary-critical, political, and anthropological theories act as servants to develop explanatory theories and analytical understanding.

Taylor then engages the reader in a discussion on theories of sexism, the family wage system, and cultural theories of matricidal ethos and mythos. He cites Catherine Keller’s *From a Broken Web*—which provides an analysis of the *Enuma Elish*—explaining how fear of women and mothers led to the female monster and male slaying of this monster as a “triumphant”(?) misogyny in ancient Babylon. In several ancient myths, there is a recurring pattern of matriphobia, misogyny and matricide. This recurring pattern is quite prevalent in the psychology of Freud, Jung, James Hillman and others. Gerda Lerner is convinced that this misogynist tradition in the Western world has led to a low value of the feminine in relation to God from the Hebrew Bible and a deformity of women in Aristotelian thought.

After tracing the connections between sexism, heterosexism, racism, and classism Taylor cautions the reader that differing oppressed persons/groups need to be in solidarity with each other, rather than be divided over which person’s/group’s causes are the most legitimate.

Racism, for many whites, has its origins in viewing the color black as negative, dirty, and evil. Psycho-sexual phobias alongside the abstract currency exchange of capitalist economic theory and practice “is prior to and generates the specific psychology of racism” (p. 145), according to Joel Kovell.

In chapter five, “Christ as Rough Beast”—no doubt a rather offensive title for many readers—Taylor quotes Melanchthon and Tillich to support his approach of linking Christology with soteriology. His Christology seeks

to address specific, concrete deliverances from oppressions. For example, deliverance from: corporate, sinful, cultural-political structures; ethnocentrism present in sexism, hetero-realism, classism and racism; male-centred Christologies. He maintains that since Christian tradition has reinforced systemic domination, theologians must view such tradition with distaste and mistrust. He links imagination with truth and history to develop a re-mythologization of Christian mythos as a socio-historical movement, rather than an exclusive focus on Jesus the person. Jesus is pictured as leaven to emphasize Christology as inter-personal/communal, rather than personal.

Then, there follows a "refiguring" Christus Mater Christology. This refiguring is by and for: the aged, children, the differently-able, racial-ethnic minorities, women, and other oppressed persons/groups. Taylor's refiguring Christ is undertaken over against his five earlier-mentioned distorted realities of: sexism, hetero-realism, classism, racism, and ethnocentrism. Christus Mater also involves a Christology that weaves together Christ with maternal powers viewed as sacred, over against North Atlantic, patriarchal, matricidal impulses.

This root metaphor of Christus Mater is employed by the author to make his case for a Christian reconciliatory emancipation process, involving four constructs: admiration and liminality; maternalization, sensuality and friendship; emancipatory blackness; materialization of human life and hope. Taylor's project alas, may be guilty of the very oppression which he attempts to avoid, namely, being overly idealistic and sentimental towards mother-love, as well as alienating professional career women without children.

What Taylor ends up with in his overview of Mother Christ, Sister Christ, Woman Christ, sounds to this reviewer like patronizing women on how *they* ought to view *themselves* and how *they* ought to construct *their own* Christologies! Taylor also fails to see that an over-emphasis on cultural-ethnic differences has proven to be extremely dangerous and tragic—as we have witnessed in Rwanda with the genocide of Tutsis and Hutus, as well as in the former Yugoslavia with the "ethnic cleansing". The over-emphasis on differences all-too-easily turns into connecting difference with superiority, which, in turn, becomes racism and ethnocentrism.

Taylor suggests that the eucharist became more spiritualized and abstract after its separation from the Agape meal. Citing other critics of this trend in the early church, he points out that one of the results was a neglect of the social and nutritional needs of the poor. Christ's real presence in the eucharist needs to be an integral part of the process of redistributing the earth's resources to those in need—thus resisting classism. Along with oppressive abstraction comes dismembering, whereas reconciliation causes concrete, redemptive action and a remembering of hope.

This volume is not easy reading. Taylor's prose has the propensity towards ivory-tower obscurity—which, ironically, he would likely critique in others! It should be most appealing to the seminarian or theologian who wishes to keep abreast of the ongoing contemporary hermeneutics debate and dialogue.

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The Cutting Edge: How Churches Speak On Social Issues

Mark Ellingsen

Geneva: WCC Publications and Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1993
370 pp.

Forget about this book's title. The subtitle is more accurately descriptive of its contents. The book contains an analysis of the official statements on social issues that have been issued by the Christian Churches of the world over a thirty year period, ca. 1963–93. Those who are looking for a single reference book which catalogues churches' social statements and compares and contrasts them will want to own a copy of Ellingsen's work.

As is the case with too many reference works, the author's style is rather dry and analytical. However, it is to Ellingsen's credit that he has accomplished this project.

Ellingsen states that he put these pages together out of concern for ecumenical memory. His hope was to create a comprehensive picture of what has been said and argued, in the past, by socially conscious Christians around the world.

In carrying out his analysis, the author focuses on nine major social issues on which many churches have spoken out over the past thirty years. These issues are: 1. Apartheid and racism, 2. Economic development and unemployment, 3. Ecology, 4. Nuclear armaments and peace and war, 5. Divorce, remarriage and polygamy, 6. Abortion, 7. Genetic engineering, 8. Social justice, 9. Socio-political ideologies.

Those readers who are concerned with the ethical implications of the Christian faith will find this book valuable because it documents how various church bodies have responded to the nine areas listed above. This book will also speak to those who are interested in the correlation between the social statements of churches and their theological perspectives and cultural environments.

As a result of his analysis, the author draws some challenging conclusions which the reader may accept at face value or may want to do further