

as my circumstances allow to whatever is being born or seeking to be born in the world and particularly in the Church. I'm very alert to the extraordinary and perpetual renewals of the Gospel that characterise our time and everywhere construct parcels of the Church from the ground upwards. Parcels . . .

I am no philosopher, I lack that capacity for philosophic reflection which enables the possessor to deepen concepts and to systematise thoughts. This is one reason why I've scarcely responded to the programme which Rahner has formulated as follows: a Christian theology for today's pagan; 'to rethink and preach the traditional Gospel message about God, Jesus Christ and his grace in such a way that it can be understood and received by the pagan world today' (*Theology Digest*, Winter, 1967, p 272). Each person his own charism. Mine is not the highest, but it's the one God has given me. Glory to him!

(Translated by Marcus Lefébure O P)

The Church in Peru

Peadar Kirby

Maria is 21 years old. She lives in a poor barrio in the suburbs of Lima and studies economics in one of Lima's universities. She also works as a catechist in her local parish. "I think that in the past two years there have been great advances," she told me, "the people now are very much more conscious than before". She sees her work as a catechist as a preparation for what she calls "political militancy". As an example of this she told me of a march which the catechists had been involved in a month before when 2,000 people went to the Ministry of Housing banging empty cups demanding a decent water supply for their area. "Us young people accept marxism, communism, without any problem", she added.

Senora Isabel lives in a nearby parish and at 79 has seen some more of life than Maria. When she first arrived in the area 19 years ago she used to make a meagre income by selling holy pictures of St Martin de Porres. Through the 'hermendad' or sodality of which she was a member she began to go along to meetings organised by a local priest. From there she progressed to be a member of the Movement of Christian Workers and for the past number of years has gone along to the annual summer schools in theology organised by the Catholic University. As her understanding of her faith

changed so too did she begin to get involved in the struggles of the people. She told me of the eight year-long campaign to get a health centre for the area and she has stories of being tear-gassed when police attacked the marches in which she participated. More recently she has become an active member of a local Left-wing group affiliated to one of Peru's Communist parties and it was with them that she recently walked on foot to the grave of Jose Carlos Mariategui, Peru's leading Marxist thinker and founder of its first Communist Party. It took her four to five hours to walk there and the same to come back, she told me. For her new-found commitment late in life she thanks the priests who first helped her open her eyes to the reality of her situation.

Maria and Senor Isabel are typical of the consciousness and commitment of numerous Christian communities organised all over Peru today. Flourishing now in cities and towns, among the campesinos of the Andes and the Indians of the jungle beyond, they are the result of the commitment of sectors of the Peruvian Church to the perspectives of the 1968 Medellin conference of Latin American bishops and the liberation theology which motivated it. They may be groups of catechists or 'mothers' clubs', organised in the Young Christian Workers or the Movement of Christian Workers, groups developed from the traditional 'hermandades' or fully developed basic communities, but all share the same theological and political perspective.

This dual identity has been strengthened during the harsh years of repression under the military government of General Francisco Morales Bermudez from 1975 to 1980 when the communities supported strikes and protests and in many cases had their members directly involved through their trade unions and political parties. Now has come a new phase with the first election of a civilian government since 1963, the more open struggle of the Left for electoral gains and the opportunity for the communities to reflect more on their Christian identity within the struggle, to do retreats, to study theology.

This network of communities are what the Latin Americans call the 'base' or the grass-roots of the new popular church or the Church of the Poor. While the growth of this current within the church has been phenomenal over the past twelve years it has only taken place through the support and vision of clergy and religious, theologians and pastoral workers, and many other professional people. In response to the needs of the grass-roots these skilled workers have organised numerous service and support groups. It is the richness and diversity of these groups which is one of the more visible witnesses to the new ecclesiology implied in this whole process.

One of the first groups to organise in the immediate post-Medellin situation was a movement of priests called Onis. Founded in 1968 they had from the beginning a clear wish to remain within the church and not allow themselves to be forced out on a limb as happened with similar groups in other countries. Fr Luis Fernando Crespo, a theologian in the Catholic University, told me that their aim was “to help the conversion of the Church to the Gospel”. Since many of the leading figures in the movement, notably Fr Gustavo Gutierrez, were diocesan priests the movement has always had a strong ecclesial sense, has always kept an openness to dialogue with the bishops and has put a strong emphasis on the task of building the grass-roots church. Also its numerous public statements have always been on issues of national political importance and they have never publicly taken positions on internal church matters. In the late sixties and early seventies then Onis provided a support group for priests committed to the perspectives of liberation theology, a place to share pastoral experience and a public voice on important political developments.

While its membership has never been more than around 150, Onis has been able to get up to 1,000 priests and religious to sign a statement ‘Give us this Day our Daily Bread’ in 1979 and has played a significant role in applying the perspectives of liberation theology in the concrete situation. As Fr Crespo put it: “It has helped the whole church to meet the presence of the poor. Even the bishops who are against us would admit it”.

In the work of strengthening the growth of a grass-roots church the next important development was the foundation of the Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones (Centre of Studies and Publications) in 1970. Born out of the intellectual world of liberation theology at the time, the university movement, it saw its task as studying the relationship between faith and social problems and publishing works relating to this area. One of their early and most famous publications was Gustavo Gutierrez’s *Theology of Liberation* in 1971.

However as Christian communities began to develop in poor areas largely through the work of priests involved in Onis so too did CEP find its role changing. In the words of its director, Fr Pedro de Guchteneere it began to “reflect back to the base their own experiences”. The most important vehicle for this has been the magazine *Paginas* which appears eight times a year and publishes articles about the struggles in other Latin American countries and a lot of documentation from all over Latin America all related to a liberation perspective.

This work has met difficulties from conservative sectors of the church. As CEP began to publish more and more simple booklets

for the direct use of communities so too did certain bishops become worried. A group of clergy and bishops petitioned the episcopal conference to condemn the Centro and certain of its publications were examined and criticised. Fr de Guchteneere showed me booklets in a series called 'Liberating Evangelisation' which Cardinal Landazuri asked them to re-edit after some conservative theologians had found fault with them. One of the points of disagreement was a list of the occupations of some of the prophets, Jesus himself and saints in which 'carpenter' was listed as the profession of Jesus. Though later pages of the same booklet made it clear the divinity of Jesus wasn't being denied the second edition came out with Jesus listed as 'carpenter, Son of God'.

The series of five booklets had to be withdrawn finally as Fr de Guchteneere explained: "We don't want to be against the bishops — we want to serve the church but not under orders from the bishops".

Despite this incident the work of CEP continues to develop. A recent innovation was a simple fortnightly eight page pamphlet for the use directly of the members of communities many of whom are not able to read and write very well. It was a good development with which to be able to mark their tenth anniversary.

An allied development to that of CEP was the founding in 1974 of the Centro Bartolome de las Casas which the current coordinator, Mrs Jenny Romero, described to me as the study section of CEP. However the centre, under its director, Fr Gustavo Gutierrez, has taken on a more direct role of doing workshops with leaders of the communities and at times going directly to the communities giving talks and orientation.

The early work of the centre involved more specialised studies into topics which could help the growth of the popular church at that time. Therefore the first study involved a philosophical examination of Christianity and Marxism "to clarify for Christian militants the possibility of working with Marxists and also to raise the question of faith for Marxists", as Jenny Romero put it. This was later published by CEP. The next two studies involved examining the traditional religious practices of the people in the northern city of Chimbote as well as in Lima "to see if in these there were liberating elements".

On the basis of these two studies which CEP also published, the centre can now provide advice to pastoral teams as to how they can use the traditional religious 'fiestas' of the people as an occasion of evangelisation. In the period just before the presidential and congressional elections last year the centre also fulfilled an important role in giving talks to communities all over the country helping them to evaluate the changes that were taking place,

looking at the different parties, evaluating the posture of the church and generally “giving confirmation to the communities in their ecclesial sense so that they could keep working as they had been doing under the military”. This was an important period to help the communities evaluate the advances they had made in the previous years so that they wouldn’t fall into a more passive and uncritical stance under an overtly less repressive government.

This is what Jenny Romero calls “pastoral orientation”. In a less directive way over the past few years the centre has been running workshops for leaders of the communities “to help them develop a habit of thinking about their reality and of theorising”. At the moment there are three workshops: one on Church and Society, one on basic Christian communities and ecclesiology and the final one on the militant reading of the Bible. (This latter isn’t to be confused with the materialist reading of the Bible which people in a liberation theology perspective find far too theoretical. For them the important thing is to facilitate the poor to read the Bible from their own standpoint).

While up to now the centre has responded to needs which have arisen from the communities it has now begun to initiate a project on the position of women. Here they are trying to get women in the communities to reflect on what issues are important for them as women. This is partly a response to the divisive intervention of more middle class women’s groups who pose the problem in terms of a woman’s control of her own body which isn’t at all the problem as marginalised and oppressed women experience it. Also, as Jenny Romero pointed out, it tends to divide the women from the popular struggle and organise them instead around exclusively women’s issues.

At the moment this project is at an early stage but Jenny Romero hopes it may have developed enough to introduce it into what is the most important theological event every year for the popular church, the two-week summer courses organised by the Catholic University in Lima.

Over the eleven years these have been organised, Fr Crespo, one of the organisers, sees a distinct change in the background of the 1,800 who come every year. “You can see it in the colour of their faces,” he says referring to the fact that the Peruvian poor have more Indian blood and so more distinct features. As the grass-roots communities have developed, so too has their participation in these courses so that they now make up the great majority.

“When we say that the poor do theology, it is not rhetoric”, he says. Though the course is the main platform for the lecturing of Gustavo Gutierrez, every day the participants reflect together in groups for two hours and on the last day give a presentation of

the results of these reflections. The course has three levels: the initial one where the question is posed as to what does it mean to do theology and where the participants discover that they do theology; the second level which takes a different theme every year – this year it was ‘God and Christ’; and the third level which is more for leaders of communities and takes the form of workshops on themes such as basic communities, spirituality, the church and human dignity, faith and politics.

This yearly experience “helps the maturity of the communities and an awareness of their identity”, says Fr Crespo. It also develops the ecclesial sense particularly of the many people from the provinces who come who might not often have the opportunity of meeting with members of other communities because of the difficulties of communication up the Andes. But it is also of great importance for the professional theologians as the reflection of the communities is a very important source for their theology.

The group which fulfills the role of animating the reflection of the communities is FAS, *Fé y Accion Solidaria* (Faith and Action in Solidarity). For Mr Manuel Piqueras, a political scientist by training but who now spends much of his time travelling around the country staying with communities and facilitating them in developing their awareness, the role of FAS is “to develop all the liberating potential of the people’s faith”. CEP and the Centro Bartolome de las Casas, on the other hand, he sees as providing a “reflection on the presence of the religious factor in the process of popular liberation”.

It is, he emphasises “a place of meeting more than a movement” and its main meeting once a year groups representatives of the communities all over the country together with others committed to the popular church, including some sympathetic bishops. But FAS is basically decentralised and sees its role as developing the laity as the protagonists in the church. He speaks of “the irruption of the laity in the church since the mid-seventies, particularly of the poor”. They have a two-sided role in their communities, he says: “One side is the insertion in the struggle, the other side is affirming their identity as Christian”. “It’s very strange to find people both very militant and very pious,” he adds, and reflecting on his travels around the country, he says: “It is extraordinary the theological richness of the poor”.

To help this process of helping “the poor direct their church and their people”, Manuel Piqueras has been involved in setting up a popular education centre in one of the poor areas of Lima. CIPEP, as it is called, does surveys of the conditions of the people and publishes them in simple form which is readily comprehensible to the communities. It provides booklets for developing the aware-

ness of community leaders about the political and economic situation of the country. It prepares three radio programmes a week of the people's struggles which are broadcast over a local radio station in a poor sector of Lima and finally it provides an advice service for newly elected Left-wing councillors. Already Manuel is beginning to see a certain breakthrough in the realisation of his vision: at last year's municipal elections the leader of a Christian community was elected mayor of his local borough for the United Left.

A vital aspect of all this grass-roots work is the ecclesial sense which underlies it. These groups don't just see themselves as movements *within* the church but they regard themselves *as* church and so their voice isn't simply another way of understanding and living the Gospel alongside other forms of understanding and life-style. Instead they see their perspective as containing elements vital to any understanding of the Gospel. As a group of middle-aged women organised as a branch of the Movement of Christian Workers in a poor area told me: "We see a church that isn't with the poor. We must evangelise these as much as non-Christians so that they can come to the people instead of just talking and talking. It is important that theory and practice go together."

It is this perspective which dominates the work of the official commission on social action of the bishops' conference, the Episcopal Commission of Social Action (CEAS). Its director, Mr Ernesto Alayza, told me that "the message of the church isn't just a sociological message but is the faith of the people" and that therefore a central aspect of the work of CEAS is to "recuperate the experience of the people" and transmit it to the bishops. "There is much life in the people that isn't transmitted to the church", he said, "but it is the poor who give an evangelical content to what is the church".

In carrying out this task CEAS tries to show "a great fidelity" to the people not only in communicating to the bishops the social and economic conditions in which the people live but more importantly communicating the people's own christian reflection on these situations so that the reflection "comes fully and faithfully from the people to the bishops". An example of the way CEAS carries out this task is the survey the Commission carried out in late 1979. In this they asked communities in the poor areas of Lima two broad sets of questions: what activities had they undertaken in their communities, trade unions or other groups about their problems and what was their reflection on these activities.

From this survey CEAS got answers from 77 communities and from these they tried to present "the great lines of reflection rather than just a synthesis" to the bishops. As well as a survey

such as this CEAS keeps constantly in touch with the different deaneries in the poor areas, meeting with their advisory groups and being kept in touch with the constant reflection in these groups.

It is out of this process that the most public part of CEAS's work derives. These are the public statements that they make in the name of the episcopal conference, sometimes as in the early seventies, broad general statements summing up the church's position on the type of society it wanted in Peru, analysing certain aspects of injustice in the present structures and proposing broad general lines of change needed. The most famous statement of this sort was the document issued before the Synod of 1971, *Justice in the World*. At other times the statements are more specific calling attention to specific abuses and seeking to have these rectified.

A more concrete form of the Commission's work is through its three departments: campesinos, human rights and prisons. The first of these supports pastoral agents working with campesinos and sponsors studies for campesino organisations. On human rights the Commission gives legal and financial help to those whose rights have been violated in specific cases and its prison department organises meetings for prison chaplains, gives advice and aid in specific cases and tries to stimulate a unified pastoral approach to work in prisons.

The more public work of the Commission is conditioned by the political situation of the country. After its foundation in 1969 it found itself in a situation under the reforming military government of General Juan Velasco where its voice was welcomed by the government who appeared to be initiating radical social changes. During this period it made three major statements on social justice. With the failure of the reformist project in 1975 CEAS kept a more quiet profile despite the harsh repression of the period. It was only with the advent of a civilian government in 1980 that it began to speak out again issuing a general statement of principles in January 1981 which Mr Alayza described as "an implicit criticism of the government's policies". This however had little impact as the press virtually ignored it. CEAS came to the fore again in July when they issued a short statement detailing the torture to which one prisoner had been subjected (he happened to be a nephew of an auxiliary bishop of Lima), saying that this was similar to many other situations which the Commission had some knowledge of and "warning of a certain widespread use of intimidation, physical and psychological, to obtain incriminating statements from detained people, actions which are against the law".

This statement, much to the surprise of some of the bishops,

was replied to in angry terms by leading government spokesmen. President Belaunde himself called it "a simple rumour" and forced Cardinal Landazuri of Lima to publicly affirm that he had seen proof of the tortures. The President's brother, Francisco, president of the lower house of Congress, said that it surprised him that Bishop Bambaren (president of CEAS) was now defending atheists when in the past he didn't defend Catholic citizens "prosecuted for their ideals". This reference was taken to allude to the bishop's support for the reforming measures of General Velasco particularly his confiscation of certain privately owned companies from their owners. Mr Oscar Trelles, the president of the Senate said that "Monsignor Bambaren ought first to visit the museum of the Inquisition and then he can speak of torture". (The museum referred to recreates in vivid detail the tortures which victims of the Inquisition suffered. The torturers are all clothed in white Dominican habits).

Though both sides were afterwards adamant that relations between church and state remained "perfectly good" to use the Cardinal's phrase, the incident could mark a new stage for the church's official relations with the state. According to one of Peru's leading liberation theologians, Fr Jorge Alvarez Calderon, it was for the church "the beginning of a new position in its relationship to political power". Unlike neighbouring churches, the Peruvian church had "an easy political context in which to implement reform" in the period after Medellin. This was due to the reforming government of the time which lasted up to 1975. In that period therefore, said Fr Calderon, "they could make a step forward without evaluating their relations towards power". Under the increasing pressure of the popular church who expect the bishops to take a stand on their behalf, the bishops "feel the necessity of taking a stand but fear it", he said.

As an incident it also demonstrated the ecclesial consciousness of the popular church. Messages of support flowed into the Cardinal from communities all over the country some of which diplomatically called on him to now take a stand on the increasing impoverishment of the poor as substantial price rises make it ever more difficult for them to make ends meet. As such it also strengthened the unity of the church, whether intended or not, helping the communities to see the Cardinal himself under attack from the Right for a stand he had taken and helping the Cardinal to realise that the communities were willing to support him when he most needed it.

It is an opportunity the communities all too rarely get. The growing strength and co-ordination of a group of conservative bishops has led to an increasing polarisation of the episcopal con-

ference itself in the late seventies. This has led to individual bishops speaking out more on their own and to the emergence of the five bishops of the southern Andes region as the only group of bishops speaking strongly and consistently since 1977 voicing the protests of the poor.

The co-ordination of the activities of Right-wing bishops has been strengthened by the strong line against the popular church which has come to dominate the work of CELAM, the Conference of Latin American Bishops, since it was taken over in 1979 by a group under the inspiration of Archbishop Lopez Trujillo of Medellin. In this attack on the theology of liberation and its new ecclesiological expression, Archbishop Lopez Trujillo appears to have the active support of Cardinal Baggio who is responsible for Latin American affairs at the Vatican. Another factor is the increasing number of bishops who are members of, or are close to, *Opus Dei*.

Under the combined influence of these sectors certain themes have begun to emerge within the episcopal conference particularly centred around the idea that the grass-roots church is forming what the conservatives call "a parallel magisterium" to that of the bishops. Significantly, it was an idea to emerge in some of the early talks the Pope gave during his visit to Mexico in January 1979. Within the Peruvian church, Fr Calderon says, "there were moments of tension but they were never thought of in terms of a parallel project opposing the bishops". Allied to this new fear being implanted in the minds of moderate bishops is the increasingly active role of the Nuncio both in choosing more conservative men as bishops but also "in his tendency for organising our church", as Fr Calderon puts it. "These churches had large open spaces where authority didn't get in", he says, "but that isn't true any longer".

These increasing tensions have their wider political context also. For Manuel Piqueras they are linked to the new phase Latin America entered in the seventies: the take-over of local economies by transnational companies, restricted democracies or outright dictatorships and the rise of the new Right. For the church in this situation, the problem becomes whether to take up the cause of the powerful or the cause of the poor. Conservative interests are seeking to promote a Christianity of reconciliation in answer to this polarisation. "But how can you have a Christianity of conciliation in a situation of repression?" asks Manuel Piqueras.

It is the strength of the popular church which has enabled this to become a real tension within the bishops' conference. It is very evident that the sector of bishops who support the alignment of the church with the cause of the poor are those who themselves are linked to the communities. Bishop German Schmitz, one of

the auxiliary bishops of Lima explained to me what this had meant for him: "For me personally, living with the poor made me discover these perspectives, both personal and structural, of poverty, marginalisation and oppression. We begin to see what really the malice of sin is, that it isn't just personal but is like a cancer in all our structures. As our posture as Christians is to act against sin we have both to seek personal conversion but also the transformation of structures".

"This contact with the poor and marginalised has also helped the bishops to enrich their vision of faith with respect to what charity means. One cannot deny that charity is a preoccupation with the needy person but it also is to search for justice for the oppressed."

This search for justice by the oppressed themselves organised in their Christian communities has led them to critically align themselves with the project of the Peruvian Left. Under the pressure of having to fight elections last year the different parties of the Left formed a fragile unity which broke up just before the presidential and congressional elections, but was re-formed for the municipal elections and has since managed to hold itself together though with many tensions. In this situation of growth, Christians who tend to have a less dogmatic political formation, have tended to be strong supporters of unity. So far the main contribution of Christians has been in the organisation of the people behind the growing mass movement. Already some Christians have become elected leaders for Left-wing parties at local and municipal level but as yet the main energy is directed into strengthening the consciousness and organisation at grass-roots level.

The leadership of the Left, however, recognises this important contribution. At a major meeting of protest at the government's policies, held in one of Lima's main plazas, many of the leaders of the different parties who spoke decried the attacks of the Right on the Cardinal and the Church over the issue of torture. It is a strange occasion to find the leaders of militant Marxist parties praising and defending the church before a huge crowd of their supporters. The fact that they did it and got a warm cheer from the crowd for doing it is the most telling witness to the recognition of the importance of the popular church in the struggle for socialism in Peru.

Sectors of the church can take on this service to the poor of Peru only because they have developed a strong theological and ecclesial identity. As the communities of the poor and oppressed themselves seek to respond in an ever more committed way to their immediate situation, so too do the pastoral workers, the theologians, the clergy and religious respond to the needs of the communities. There are no blueprints laid out and the goal, if a

formulation of it were attempted, would appear wildly utopian. But what there is in an intense way is courage, solidarity, a thirst for justice, an ability to celebrate, love and respect and plenty of struggle and suffering. And in that struggle the Gospel has come alive for countless thousands, oppressed people have found a dignity denied them for centuries and have learned to be able to hope again. To be a Christian has become a sign of contradiction to this present age and a cause of persecution once again.

Genesis and Patriarchy: Part II

Women and the End of Time

Angela West

In a previous article, (*New Blackfriars* Jan 1981) I argued that the eschatological interpretation of biblical theology is, ultimately, the only possible site for the creation of a feminist discourse. To put it in more assimilable terms: the contradiction of being a woman and a feminist is only finally resolvable in the context of Christian eschatology. This is rather a large claim, so I shall try to substantiate it.

The Findings of Feminist Anthropologists

Most theology hitherto has been based on an essentially androcentric perspective as a result of the fact that it is founded on an essentially androcentric anthropology. In recent years, attempts have been made by some anthropologists to bring an alternative perspective to bear on the material of their discipline: thus, Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, the editors of a recently published collection of essays by a number of female anthropologists¹ state in their introduction that the aim of the book is to 'demonstrate the importance of women's lives for our understanding of the human record'. I think it is important to consider what implications their conclusions, and those of other feminist scholars, have for non-androcentric theology, for a feminist hermeneutics.

At first sight, their conclusions wouldn't seem to be very comforting to feminists. 'The current anthropological view draws on the observation that most and probably all contemporary societies, whatever their kinship organisation or mode of subsistence, are characterised by some degree of male dominance'.² And further on they say '... although the degree and expression of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is presently a universal fact of life'. This means in practice that in all societies, male, as