

**FOURTH ANNUAL GUTU FACULTY LECTURE**

**TOWARD A FEMINIST ETHIC:  
A SCHIZOPHRENIC WITNESS**

**KAREN LEBACOZ**

Associate Professor of Christian Ethics  
Pacific School of Religion

**WED., NOVEMBER 28**

**8:00 PM**

**PSR CHAPEL**

Scenic & LeConte Aves., Berkeley

**RECEPTION FOLLOWS**

November 9, 1979

Dean Michael Cook  
JSTB

Dear Mike:

For the posters for Karen's lecture, I think a relatively modest amount of information, appropriately displayed, should be adequate:

Fourth Annual GTU Faculty Lecture

"Toward a Feminist Ethic: A Schizophrenic Witness"

By Karen Lebacqz, Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, PSR

Wednesday, November 28, 8:00 P.M., PSR Chapel

If it can be done on 8 1/2 X 11 paper, we can run off a bunch of copies here and spread them all around the campuses. Thanks for assisting with this.

Cordially,

Claude Welch  
Dean and President

CW:en



July 3, 1979

Professor Karen Lebacqz  
Pacific School of Religion

Dear Karen:

This is simply to state officially, and with great pleasure, that the Consortium Council has voted to ask you to be the 1979 GTU Faculty Lecturer.

No specific topic for the lecture has been proposed, it has rather been the custom for each lecturer to identify a topic which would both represent his or her central research interests and be of general interest to the GTU community -- if, of course, such a combination is possible. There is an honorarium of \$250.

As we agreed, the date will be set for Wednesday evening, November 28, place to be determined. At your convenience, I would be glad to have a title that can be used in public announcement.

Cordially yours,

Claude Welch  
Dean and President

CW:en



December 11, 1979

Professor Karen Lebacqz  
Pacific School of Religion

Dear Karen:

I am happy to enclose our check for \$250 as honorarium for your 1979 GTU Faculty Lecture.

The evening was, I thought, a grand occasion, and I want to express thanks from all your colleagues in the GTU for your willingness to accept the invitation to give the lecture and for your care, sensitivity and clarity in drafting a provocative statement.

Cordially yours,

Claude Welch  
Dean and President

CW:en  
Enclosure: As stated.

Draft - Not for Quotation

TOWARD A FEMINIST ETHIC: A SCHIZOPHRENIC WITNESS

by Karen Lebacqz, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Christian Ethics  
at the Pacific School of Religion  
in Berkeley, California

By professional training, I am a theological ethicist; by conviction, a feminist. Therein lies the dilemma. Feminists do not "do" ethics as that discipline has traditionally been defined: their questions are different, their approaches are different, their literature bears scant resemblance to traditional philosophical or theological analysis.<sup>1</sup> Feminists do not "situate" themselves vis-a-vis traditional approaches to ethics, such as rule-utilitarianism or act-deontology. Indeed, they reject such a task.<sup>2</sup> On the other side of the coin, traditional academic ethicists seem singularly unaware of feminist thought.<sup>3</sup> The feminist who would be simultaneously a professional ethicist--or the professional ethicist who becomes a feminist--thus lives in two disparate and potentially incompatible worlds.

Of such experience is schizophrenia born.<sup>4</sup> When a person's own (feminist) perceptions and interpretations of reality are systematically negated and denied by the dominant (patriarchal) world in which she must live, schizophrenia threatens. A "feminist ethic" is therefore an exercise in schizophrenia.

I offer here a schizophrenic witness--an outline of the contours of feminist ethics that attempts to bridge the gap between two worlds. This very enterprise is itself antithetical to some aspects of feminism--for example, this is a "single author" essay while feminists often work in community. A preliminary problem is defining the literature and thought forms of feminism to be explored.

Since feminism involves the dis-covery<sup>5</sup> of dimensions of life that are ultimately religious and mythic, "its categories...are not those of philosophy but those of the poet, the mystic, the myth-maker."<sup>6</sup> Feminist

"ethics" is expressed in music, poetry, dance, drama, fiction, and science fiction. Only a few texts written by feminists carry the explicit label "ethics"; many feminist analyses of ethical issues draw heavily on skills of sociological, psychological, or linguistic analysis rather than on philosophical analysis.<sup>7</sup> The contours of a "feminist ethic" must be intuited using all of these sources. To simplify the task, I shall concentrate on feminist literature of the last ten years, with particular attention to feminists who come out of<sup>8</sup> the theological tradition.

What follows is a preliminary attempt to define feminist ethics using an eclectic and intuitive approach to these materials. The outline is given in traditional academic form rather than in poetry or song because my feminist sisters are bi-lingual and will understand this form. Space precludes a full examination of many aspects of feminist approaches to ethical issues. I offer some thoughts on methodology and on focus as a beginning movement toward a feminist ethic.

#### METHOD: EXPERIENCE AS THE CRUCIBLE FOR ETHICS<sup>9</sup>

In Beyond God the Father, Mary Daly made the cryptic comment that feminist ethics had "yet to be developed because women have yet to be free enough to think out our own experience..."<sup>10</sup> Feminist ethics begins and ends in the "thinking out" of our own experience.

A cursory glance at the table of contents of any collection of feminist essays on social issues reveals a clustering of concern around certain issues--abortion, rape, sex-role stereotyping, preferential hiring, and the like.<sup>11</sup> In short, those issues that are deepest and closest in women's experience form the ground and starting point for ethical analysis.

Experience forms not only the ground for feminist ethics, but also its primary method. Just as I began this essay by sharing my experience, so feminist analysis of ethical issues begins with the sharing of experience, the telling of stories. As stories are told, patterns of meaning emerge and theology begins.<sup>12</sup> Compassion--the sharing of suffering with others and the sharing of others' suffering--is integral to feminist modes of ethical analysis.

Finally, any ethical analysis or policy proposal is tested against women's experiences. One asks, "what does this policy mean for women?" Or, "Does it ring true to my own experience?"<sup>13</sup> Thus, women's experiences form not only the starting point and method for ethics, but also its test. The validity of any ethical system or proposal depends on its "fit" with women's experience. Experience is the crucible for ethics.

#### 1. Authority and Possibility

The implications of this methodological presupposition are profound. First, authority is now rooted in women themselves and in their experiences. Traditional authorities--Scripture and church doctrine, for example--are ignored or repudiated when they deny the validity of women's experience.

Because women's experience has not been taken as authoritative before, to do so is to posit a future radically discontinuous with the past. Feminist ethics contains a radical openness to the future. Feminists trust not in what is, for that is shown to be oppressive and deceptive, but in what might be--in the creativity and possibility implied in their own experience and sense of self. As Sheila Collins put it, "Since feminist women have least to lose from a break with the old system, we are more open to a radically



discontinuous future."<sup>14</sup> Feminist ethics will focus on eschatology (the future), advent (the breaking of the future into the present), and apocalyptic (the discontinuity of the future with the present). Feminist authority is, in Peggy Way's words, "the authority of possibility."<sup>15</sup>

The implications for ethics of a rejection of traditional authority and a dependence on a radically open future are profound. For example, the burden of proof lies not with those who would change the system, but with those who would retain it. Creation stories in Scripture no longer serve as the model for male-female or other sexual relationships. The Church's teaching on women in ministry is replaced by God's promises and women's advent experiences.

## 2. Pain, Anger and Creativity

Much of women's experience has been painful. Women have been discriminated against and devalued on personal, social, and cultural levels. To begin with women's experience, then, is to begin in the pain brought about by oppression.<sup>16</sup>

As pain is shared and patterns of meaning emerge, a transformation occurs: pain becomes anger. Women cease saying "I'm depressed" and begin saying "I'm oppressed"--a reinterpretation of their reality with profound significance. Knowledge of oppression breeds anger; anger energizes and catalyzes activity. Women assert themselves and begin to live out a different reality.<sup>17</sup>

Theologically speaking, this transformation may be seen as a move from death to resurrection. Two aspects of the transformation have particular importance for the task of ethics. First, resurrection is brought

about through anger and self-assertion. This understanding negates the traditional notion that salvation depends on someone outside the self and requires passivity. Anger as an emotion is not highly valued in this culture or in Christian tradition; it is furthermore an emotion whose expression is not permitted to women.<sup>18</sup> Women are to be self-sacrificing, not self-assertive, loving, not angry.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the transformation for many requires a move away from Christian tradition.<sup>20</sup> For those who remain within or in dialogue with the tradition, traditional theological categories must be either rejected or redefined--for example, "original sin" is redefined to mean lack of pride for women.<sup>21</sup>

Second, the resurrection here described cannot be equated with a simple adjustment to what is; it involves a radical rejection of what is. Our culture tends to be "therapeutically" oriented--geared toward happy adjustments with one's living situation. Traditional values such as "happiness" and "adjustment" are here replaced by the values of anger and creativity. Negativity can be seen as a positive experience. This reversal of traditional values also has profound implications for the doing of ethics.

### 3. Feeling and Thinking

Coupled with a new valuation of certain feelings is a general affirmation of the importance of feelings as a clue to the "rightness" or "wrongness" of things. Feelings are valued as a path to accurate knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Where traditional ethical reflection values objectivity, rationality, linear and logical thought, feminist ethics utilizes and values subjectivity, intuition, organic and circular thought, and mystical knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Where the

former strives to be "cool and unemotional", feminists are "warm and emotive" and do not see these qualities as obstructing the search for truth or knowledge.

Not only are feelings affirmed as legitimate paths to knowledge, but thinking itself is opened up to new forms of creativity. Daly calls it "ludic cerebration", "the free play of intuition in our own space, giving rise to thinking that is vigorous, informed, multidimensional, independent, creative, tough."<sup>24</sup> Thinking is not negated but transformed by the acceptance of intuition, feeling, subjectivity.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps most important for the task of ethics (particularly in specialties such as bioethics), this change in modes of thought means a rejection of the notion that something is "true" if it is scientifically verifiable and "false" if it is not. Scientific modes of knowing are accepted as only one approach to knowledge and truth.

#### 4. Commitment

In feminist thought, truth or falsity derive from the standpoint or commitment out of which thinking is done. Ethics is not intended to be "objective" and "impartial" but is distinctly partisan.<sup>26</sup> What makes something "true" is its rootedness in women's experience--whether it rings true to women. A commitment is the starting point.<sup>27</sup> To do feminist ethics, one must be woman-committed or woman-identified.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the point of feminist ethics may be to speak only to and for women: "our primary concern is not male ethics and/or ethicists, but our own Journeying."<sup>29</sup>

Further, feminists claim that ethics not only ought to be done from a particular perspective, but that in fact it always is partisan. Ethicists



always work from a particular perspective, adopt certain criteria for evidence, depend on a mode of reasoning, accept some interpretations and reject others. A part of the task of feminist ethics is exposing the partisan nature of all ethics and calling ethicists into account for pretending to universal truth when in fact they reflect only a particular (white, male) perspective. Honesty about the thought process itself is an important virtue in feminist ethics.

### 5. Concreteness

Because feminist ethics begins with experience, it also tends to remain concrete. There is very little abstract theorizing in feminist ethics. For example, in the introduction to Feminism and Philosophy, the editors claim that among issues of particular interest to feminists is "feminism as an ethical theory". Yet none of the essays in the volume addresses this theoretical question.<sup>30</sup> Rather, the essays expose and re-interpret particular problems, issues, and experiences. Mary Daly's Gyn/Ecology comes closest to offering a systematic metaethics yet is better seen as a call and a witness than as an abstract theory.

Eschewing the abstract in favor of the concrete means that the task of ethics is not to look for universal principles but to find the proper interpretation and message for the situation at hand. Jan Raymond argues for "integrity" rather than "integration" as the proper ethical principle in the case of transsexualism; this does not preclude the use of "integration" as an important principle for other issues (e.g. race relations). To the extent principles are discussed at all in feminist ethics, which is minimal, they are discussed within the context and in the light of particular problems

that are being addressed. No attempt is made to find "universal" principles applicable to all situations at all times in the same way.<sup>31</sup>

One of the implications of this concrete approach is that the message of an ethicist would be different depending on who is addressed.<sup>32</sup> Feminists addressing the oppressor (men) would bring a different message than feminists addressing the oppressed (women)--for example, linking sin with pride in the one case but not in the other. Since most feminists are writing primarily to and for women, little explicit attention has been paid to this issue as yet.

## 6. Praxis

Liberation theologians use the term "praxis" to refer to the dialectic between experience and thought, involvement and reflection, that characterizes liberation theology. Since much feminist theology is liberation theology, the term has gained currency in feminist ethics as well. "Praxis" means that the mode of ethical analysis must involve a dialectic between engagement (commitment) and the "ludic cerebration" of which Daly speaks. Only those who know the experience may legitimately speak of it (hence the rejection of male analyses of rape, abortion, and the like), and the speaking arises from and reflects back on experience. We move from "orthodoxy" to "orthopraxis."

The requirement of praxis means that the solitary scholarly life is always suspect as a ground or starting point for ethical reflection. Traditional ethics are rejected not simply because they are male or patriarchal, but also because they are academic (and by implication, non-involved). Indeed, "praxis" suggests that ethics and theology are best done by lay people, not

by theologians or academicians. Paralleling the rejection of scientific methodology as the pathway to truth is a rejection of the experts as those who can best illumine and explain truth. This suggests that enormous changes are required in the institutions that develop and train ethicists.<sup>33</sup>

## 7. - Community

A few names of feminist theologians and ethicists are by now well known--Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether, Peggy Way, Beverly Harrison, Letty Russell, and a few others. Yet no single feminist theologian has become "the spokesperson" for feminist ethics. This is partly because of the suspicion of "experts" mentioned above. But more importantly, it is because feminist theology and ethics is done in community. Theological meaning and ethical truth emerge from shared experience. Feminists reject the notion of the single scholar creating ethical systems. Ethics arises from the community.

Indeed, the sense of community may be one of the most important contributions of feminists to ethics. A new understanding of the self is emerging. Anais Nin declares: "As I discover myself, I feel I am merely one of many, a symbol."<sup>34</sup> Feminists see themselves not as isolated individuals but as part of an ongoing community of women. Each stands for and represents all; each is dependent upon and indebted to all. Thus it is possible for Peggy Way to claim that there are experiences "in which I did not participate but which are nevertheless my experiences too."<sup>35</sup> The sense of identity with others empowers women: women take on the tasks their foremothers left and carry them forward so that their daughters and granddaughters may reap the benefits of their work.



Doing ethics from a base of communal identity avoids the "individual versus society" debate of the deontologists and utilitarians. For example, preferential hiring is difficult to justify from the perspective of individual rights, and the arguments that might justify it in terms of good for the community would also undermine preferential treatment in some circumstances.<sup>37</sup> But when a person's identity is viewed as intrinsically related to a group, then wrongs to that group can be rectified at least in part by preferential treatment of the individual. Hence, beginning from a sense of communal identity may resolve some ethical dilemmas previously unresolved. Affirming communal identity also means that ethics must be historical, responding to and taking account of the history of groups.

### Summary

Beginning with the conviction that women's experience is the ground, method, and test of ethical reflection, feminist ethics evolves a methodology that is radically open to the future, rejects traditional authorities, acknowledges feelings (especially pain and anger) as legitimate sources of ethical insight, thinks wholistically and intuitively, admits--indeed, celebrates--a partisan nature, is concrete, depends on a dialectic between practice and thought, and develops in community as women share their experiences.

### FOCUS: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

It should be no surprise to find that an ethical approach that has experience as its ground, method, and test will focus on the social construction of reality. Re-naming and re-claiming one's experience requires redefining reality--breaking down old stereotypes and positing new under-

standings of who women are. Feminist ethics is primarily an exercise in the social construction of reality. Its critical task is the exposing of myths, paradigms for interpretation, and world-views that have subjugated and oppressed women. Its constructive task is the "spinning" and "weaving" of new tapestries of meaning, new social orders, new interpersonal relations.<sup>38</sup>

### 1. Herstory

Three loci of reconstruction have been particularly important for feminists. The first of these is "history", the interpretation of events and phenomena that provide the background for understanding who we are today. Feminists analyze "history" to expose the myths, stereotypes, social structures, laws, and traditions that have been used to "keep women in their place"--to maintain patriarchy.<sup>39</sup> The critical task here involves pulling apart the multiform ways in which our history and its recording have been oppressive to women. The constructive task is the writing of "herstory"--"the development of a positive history of the oppressed group."<sup>40</sup>

Since most of the record of women's achievements has been annihilated, and since women have been subjugated throughout Western history, the constructive task incorporates alongside the usual historical analyses a more imaginative, "ludic" thought process of proposing alternative myths and possibilities. Seeing the Fall as an historical event, or reexamining the history of worship of the mother-goddess--these are a part of the new social construction of reality. In short, feminist analysis uses the tools of historical analysis to document abuses of women and to locate heroines in history, but then moves beyond this task to examining the very methodology of historical analysis, criticizing and challenging historical method and creating an alternative interpretation--"herstory".

## 2. Empires

The second focus of the social construction of reality is social structures and institutions. "No institution is viewed as inevitable or necessary. All are examined and challenged."<sup>41</sup> The critical task here is exposing the underlying demonic nature of institutional structures--for example, seeing the state as a "male protection racket" that actually fosters rape.<sup>42</sup> The constructive task is proposing new institutions or institutional forms, such as non-hierarchical modes of authority.<sup>43</sup>

Two aspects of the analysis of social institutions and structures are particularly important for the work of ethics. First, acts are not isolated from their contexts. In an early discussion of abortion, Mary Daly criticized the Catholic tradition, saying "Feminist ethics...will refuse to give attention merely to the isolated physical act involved in abortion, and will insist upon seeing this within its social context."<sup>44</sup> There is very little concern in feminist ethics for whether the isolated act is right or wrong; attention goes instead to the nature and meaning of social structures and their impact on women's lives.

Second, even institutions are not dealt with in isolation, but are understood as interlocking. Raymond uses the term "empire" to refer to the interlocking network of medical, legal, psychiatric, and other social structures that combine to make "transsexualism" a reality.<sup>45</sup> Individual technologies or procedures are not dealt with in isolation from the entire social, structural, and mythological bases that permit and encourage their existence. It is "empires" that are the focus of feminist thought.

This stress on the nature and function of social systems, and on the



redefining of reality, should make it amply clear that feminism is not simply a struggle to equalize the position of women with that of men. Dictionary definitions of feminism as "the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes" imply that the thrust of feminism is "equal rights"--or equal positions in the social, economic, and political spheres.<sup>46</sup> Such a definition may have accorded with earlier feminist movements<sup>47</sup>, but does not match current feminism. Feminist ethics is not confined to arguments about the equality of women with men, or to proposals for full entry of women into current systems. Though such arguments form a part of current analysis, by far the greater part is devoted to criticisms of current systems and visions of alternative systems. Feminists are not simply asking for a piece of the pie; we are asking for a different flavor of pie.<sup>48</sup>

### 3. Language

Because language plays a large part in shaping social ethics has also been directed at an examination and reconstruction of language. Here again, the critical task involves exposing ways in which our language subjugates women--for example, by exposing the presumed neutrality in the use of masculine gender words to refer to all people.<sup>49</sup>

And again, the constructive task is substituting new and valid language. Sometimes this means replacing language that belittles women or defines them in reference to men by language that is woman-oriented--e.g. "Ms." replaces "Mrs." and "Miss". More recently, feminists such as Mary Daly have taken terms that are generally considered derogatory towards women and created for those very terms positive meanings--e.g. "hag", "spinster", "crone" all become woman-affirming terms in Gyn/Ecology. The constructive task, therefore,

can take the form either of replacing the old language or of replacing the meaning of the language; in either case, feminists create woman-centered language and meaning.

#### 4. Metaethics

In short, the central task of ethics is exposing the deceptive and oppressive nature of dominant definitions of reality and of the structures that support them, and creating new reality and new structures. The focus of feminist ethics is not "what should I do?" but "who am I?" and "what is the nature of my reality?" In traditional language, this represents a shift away from a concern for normative questions related to action and toward issues of character and ends. Yet feminist ethics goes beyond these traditional questions, too, for they can be asked within the framework of an accepted definition of reality, and it is precisely this definition that is at stake in feminist analysis.

Feminists agree that the definition of reality presented by the patriarchal world is false and that new definitions must be found or created. We do not all agree on the nature of these new definitions, or on the precise social systems, forms of interpersonal relation, or mythological structures that should replace old definitions and forms.<sup>50</sup> While some positive values are widely shared in feminism--for example, the value of cooperation instead of competition--what is most deeply shared is a "hermeneutic of suspicion", a refusal to trust that what is presented by dominant society is in fact what it appears.

Externally, this hermeneutic means that every system and structure is suspect. Not marriage, nor the family, nor socialism, nor Christianity

(nor even feminism itself) is to be altogether trusted to define reality. Internally, it means that feminists live simultaneously in two worlds, constantly translating what appears to be into what it really is. Hence, to be a feminist is to live a schizophrenic existence. As Bartky notes, feminists are constantly "wary" and always aware of the potential for the most seemingly innocent situation to be in fact a test.<sup>51</sup> Since nothing is what it appears to be, the constant process of testing, being tested, and translating the meaning of ones environment is exhausting.

The net effect of external and internal "suspicion" can be an ethical impasse. Since the reality presented to us is deceptive, but since women have not been free to define themselves and hence to arrive at a truer definition of reality, it is not at all clear what one is to do in most situations. The development of a normative ethics awaits the metaphysical, the aesthetic, and the metaethical. For now, feminist ethics consists in bringing these into being by the process of reflecting on the changing experience of women.

#### FEMINIST ETHICS: ETHICS AS WITNESS

This ethics based in experience that examines and reconstructs social reality I call an ethics of witness. To "witness" is: (1) to testify to something, (2) to have personal or direct cognizance of something, (3) to take note of things, and/or (4) to constitute the scene or time of something.<sup>52</sup> Feminist ethics is a form of witness in all these senses. Feminists testify to a new reality. They have personal and direct cognizance of oppression. They take note of the sexist nature of dominant interpretations and structures.

And, most important, they constitute the scene and time where God's activity of liberation and transcendence is taking place.<sup>53</sup> Feminist ethics may never evolve a set of rules for behavior. What it will always provide is concrete witness to the oppressive and deceptive nature of social systems and structures, to the needs and capacities of women, to the possibilities of a future that is not dependent on nor reminiscent of the forms of the past. As feminists "spin" and weave" new tapestries of meaning, a new ethic emerges--an ethic of witness.

At the present time, this witness must be "schizophrenic"--a witness that bridges the gap between two worlds, true to women's spirit and yet bound by traditional forms and structures. Some day, it will be a pure witness--born solely of women's advent experience and given flight through "ludic cerebration."

## TOWARD A FEMINIST ETHIC--NOTES

1. Academic treatises by feminists are scarce, for as one feminist put it, "Liberation and the incredible experience of the freeing of the spirit seem somehow at odds with the constraining nature of the printed word." Sarah Bentley Doely, in the introduction to Women's Liberation and the Church (NY: Association Press, 1970).
2. Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 12.
3. For example, James McClendon and Stanley Hauerwas both argue for the centrality of vision and story to doing ethics. Neither makes reference to the works of Mary Daly, Sheila Collins, Clare Fischer et.al., and other feminists who have argued cogently for the centrality of these elements. (See Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue (Notre Dame: Fides, Inc., 1974) and McClendon, Biography as Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974). The Journal of Religious Ethics has yet to devote an issue to feminist ethics and contains little dialogue between feminists and others.
4. See R.D. Laing and A. Esterson, Sanity, Madness and the Family (NY: Penguin Books, 1964).
5. I use the term here in Mary Daly's sense (see Gyn/Ecology).
6. Sheila D. Collins, A Different Heaven and Earth (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974), p. 42.
7. In the introduction to The Transsexual Empire (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), Jan Raymond identifies herself as a "feminist ethicist"; she includes a chapter specifically on ethics. Sheila Collins also identifies her chapter on "The Personal as Political" as an approach to ethics (Heaven and Earth). Mary Daly includes a chapter on ethics in Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), and subtitles Gyn/Ecology a "metaethics" of radical feminism. These are among the few works that carry the specific term "ethics" in their self-designation. An overview of the works in such volumes as Jo Freeman (ed.), Women: A Feminist Perspective (Palo Alto, Calif: Mayfield Pub., 1979) or Anne Koedt et.al. (eds.) Radical Feminism (NY: Quadrangle, 1973) reveals the use of literary analysis, sociology, psychology, legal analysis and other traditional modes of analysis but no explicit use of philosophical or theological ethical analysis.
8. The phrase "come out of" is intended to be taken two ways: first, as an indication that theological tradition and theological questions inform the starting point for the author, but second, as an indication that many of these feminists have moved out of and away from that tradition.
9. This title is adapted with gratitude from A Different Heaven and Earth.



10. Daly, Beyond God the Father, p. 109.
11. See for example Jo Freeman, op.cit., and Anne Koedt, op.cit.
12. See especially Sheila Collins, "Theology in the Politics of Appalachian Women" in Carol B. Christ and Judith Plaskow, Womanspirit Rising (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).
13. For example, at a conference on Ethical Issues in Reproductive Technology: Analysis by Women (EIRTAW) in June, 1979 (proceedings forthcoming), women analyzing ethical issues such as in vitro fertilization tested such new technologies against their own experiences and against the possible meaning of development of new technologies for women's lives. To assert the primacy of experience as the ground, method, and test of ethics is not without problems, of course. Whose experience counts? What interpretive framework is brought to that experience? Such questions will continue to challenge feminist ethicists.
14. Collins, Heaven and Earth, p. 145.
15. Peggy Ann Way, "An Authority of Possibility for Women in the Church", in Sarah Bentley Doely, Women's Liberation and the Church (NY: Association Press, 1970) Others who stress the authority of the future include Letty Russell in The Future of Partnership (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979).
16. Many of the essays in Clare Fischer et.al., Women in a Strange Land: Search for a New Image (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) express this pain and develop theology and ethics out of it.
17. Recently, both Peggy Way and Mary Daly have warned against getting trapped by anger and pain. Way suggests that the continual sharing of pain is not always freeing and can hold women back from claiming their true power (see "Reflections...the Birthing of Futures" in the Center for Women and Religion Newsletter v. 4, no. 2, pp. 11-15, Winter 1978). Daly speaks of the rage women feel as they come to understand the ways in which they have been oppressed, and then remarks, "If she does not constantly convert the energy of this rage to creativity it pre-occupies her, pre-possesses her." (Gyn/Ecology, p. 348).
18. Nancy Henley and Jo Freeman, "The Sexual Politics of Interpersonal Behavior", in Freeman, op.cit., pp. 474-486.
19. Margaret Adams, "The Compassion Trap" in Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (eds.), Woman in Sexist Society (NY: New American Library, 1971).
20. See, for example, essays in Womanspirit Rising; also note the transformation in Mary Daly's work from Beyond God the Father to Gyn/Ecology.
21. See, for example, Daly, Beyond God the Father, chapter 4.

22. For a theoretical treatment of the role of feelings in ethics, see June O'Connor, "On Doing Religious Ethics", Journal of Religious Ethics v. 7 (no. 1): 81-97, Spring 1979.
23. Collins, Heaven and Earth, p. 51.
24. Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p. 23.
25. Daly says, "'Feminist' anti-intellectualism is a mere reaction against moronizing masculinist education and scholarship, and it is a trap. We need creative crystallizing in the sense of producing works--such as books." Gyn/Ecology, p. 22.
26. Collins, Heaven and Earth, p. 43.
27. Carol Robb argues that this is true in general of liberation theologies: "a commitment is the starting point, the theology is the second act, and a new commitment is the third act." See "Ethical Procedures of Gutierrez and Alves" in Max L. Stackhouse (ed.), The American Society of Christian Ethics 1979: Selected Papers (Newton Centre, Mass: American Society of Christian Ethics, 1979), p. 82.
28. Some argue that one must be lesbian in order to be a feminist. See Jill Johnston, Lesbian Nation (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973). Mary Daly distinguishes between those who are lesbian in their sexual orientation alone and those who are lesbian in the sense of being totally woman-identified and woman-committed. Gyn/Ecology, p. 26.
29. Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p. 12.
30. Mary Vetterling-Braggin et.al., Feminism and Philosophy (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1977), p. xi.
31. A word must be said here about "situation ethics" lest the feminist approach be confused with it. Among other difficulties, "situation ethics" as defined by its leading proponent in this country, Joseph Fletcher, had two serious inadequacies: First, a failure to specify which aspects of the situation are morally relevant; and second, a failure to appreciate that 'moral notions' are tied up with our very definition of situations and hence that the situation cannot simply be separated from norms. (For a discussion of the latter point, see Hauerwas, Vision and Virtue, chapter 1). Feminist ethics avoids both these problems. By giving a perspective from which situations are to be viewed--namely, the 'partisan' bias of concern for women--it provides a tool for delineating which aspects of the situation are 'relevant'. Further, it undertakes directly an analysis and redefinition of moral notions as they have developed and been utilized in patriarchal society. While work remains to be done in both areas, it is clear that feminist ethics will avoid some of the pitfalls of situationism.

32. A parallel approach is taken by Major Jones in Christian Ethics for Black Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974) in which he argues that the message of ethics is different for whites (the oppressor) than it is for Blacks (the oppressed).
- 33.. Minimally, it means that academicians would be permitted, and indeed required, to spend a portion of each year involved in social or political activity. Much teaching and learning would go on beyond the walls of the academic institution.
34. Anais Nin, Diary, p. vii, quoted in Collins, Heaven and Earth, p. 38.
35. Way, "Reflections...", p. 11.
36. Collins, Heaven and Earth, p. 145.
37. I have argued this point in an unpublished mss. See especially the debate between Nickel and Cowan in Barry R. Gross (ed.), Discrimination in Reverse: Is Turnabout Fair Play? (NY: New York Univ. Press, 1978).
38. The italicized terms are adapted from Daly, Gyn/Ecology.
39. See, for example, Collins, Heaven and Earth and Ruether, Religion and Sexism (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1974).
40. Collins, Heaven and Earth, p. 94. It should be noted that Mary Daly now rejects the term "herstory", claiming that it implies a desire to parallel male history. (Gyn/Ecology, p. 24) This interpretation is plausible, but it seems clear that Collins and others did not intend an imitation of male history but rather an imaginative creation of myths and events that goes beyond patriarchal historical methodology.
41. Christ and Plaskow, op.cit., p. 7.
42. See, for example, Susan Rae Peterson, "Coercion and Rape: the State as a Male Protection Racket" in Vetterling-Braggin et.al., op. cit., pp. 360-71.
43. For example, the Center for Women and Religion at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, Calif., has long had a pattern of shared leadership. An entire society based on non-hierarchical structures is proposed by Marge Piercy in Woman on the Edge of Time (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett, 1976).
44. Daly, Beyond God the Father, p. 109.
45. Raymond, op.cit., p. 5. The term "empire" is also used and explained by Roy Sano in his Asian-American liberation theology. See "Ethnic Liberation Theology: Neo-Orthodoxy Reshaped--or Replaced?" in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (eds.), Mission Trends No. 4 (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

46. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass: G. & C. Merriman Co., 1974).
47. I say "may have" because a careful reading of earlier feminist texts also reveals glimpses of a vision of an entirely different society. See Miriam Schneir (ed.), Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings (New York: Random House, 1972).
48. This is not to say that feminists always succeed in holding this focus. In "Black Women in Ministry" (CWR Newsletter, v. 4, no. 2, p. 17, Winter 1978), Adele Smith charges that in one feminist discussion "The question raised was not why a 'pie system' exists but rather why Ms. X had not received a larger piece..."
49. Examinations of the impact of language are legion. See for example, Janice Moulton, "The Myth of the Neutral 'Man'" in Vetterling-Braggin et.al., op. cit., pp. 124-137.
50. For example, Alison Jaggar argues that feminists disagree about such fundamental issues as the nature of freedom, of the state, of the individual's relation to the state, and so on. See "Political Philosophies of Women's Liberation" in Vetterling-Braggin et.al., op.cit., pp. 5-21.
51. Sandra Lee Bartky, "Toward a Phenomenology of Feminist Consciousness" in Vetterling-Braggin et.al., op.cit., pp. 22-34.
52. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, op.cit. Careful attention to definitions is one of the techniques Mary Daly employs in Gyn/Ecology.
53. One is reminded here of William Stringfellow's argument that the task of the Christian is to bear witness to the signs of "Babylon" and of "Jerusalem" in our midst. See An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1974).



*Put in GTU lecture.*

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grant us peace



# Feminist Ethics:

## A SCHIZOPHRENIC WITNESS

by Karen Lebacqz

*During the fall quarter, Professor Karen Lebacqz of Pacific School of Religion gave the GTU Faculty Lecture. Speaking to an audience composed largely of her professional colleagues (i.e., male academicians) Karen presented her vision of an emerging feminist ethic. Noting that women are necessarily bi-cultural and bi-lingual, Karen said that she would speak in a traditional academic language, as her sisters would be able to translate that language for themselves. Karen, a long time friend of the Center for Women and Religion, donated her honorarium for the lecture to CWR, and has provided the following synopsis of her lecture to the Newsletter.*

Very little feminist work constitutes an explicit or systematic ethic. Nonetheless, feminist thought, as it is expressed in poetry, drama, analyses of ethical dilemmas, fiction, and non-fiction can be used to discern the general contours of a feminist approach to doing ethics.

Feminist methodology for doing ethics begins and ends in women's experience. Women think and write about issues that affect them most deeply and personally — abortion, family structure, rape, and the like. Moreover, they test the validity of any ethical system against the experience of women, asking, does this answer ring true to my experience? In this sense, then, experience is the crucible for ethics.

Implications of this methodological starting point are profound. First, women take themselves and their own experiences as authoritative.

This necessitates a radical break from the past, where women's experience was not given validity, and a radical openness to the future. Feminist ethics is therefore eschatological ethics. Moreover, since much of women's experience has been painful, feminist ethics begins with an acknowledgement and a valuing of the pain and anger of women.

In turn, this means that feelings are accepted and understood as a clue to the rightness or wrongness of things. Feelings are valued as a path to knowledge. Where traditional ethics is objective, scientific, and rational, feminist ethics is warm and emotive, intuitive and subjective. Truth or falsity derive not out of the rationality of one's argument nor out of its objectivity, but rather out of the commitment or standpoint from which the analysis is done. Feminist ethics is



unashamedly partisan and, indeed, feminists would argue that all ethics is partisan and that it is dishonest not to acknowledge that.

Because feminist ethics begins with experience, it also tends to remain concrete. There is very little abstract theorizing in feminist ethics. Rather, feminists expose and analyze particular problems, issues and experiences of women. This means that the task of ethics is to find the proper message for the situation at hand, not to find universal principles. Though an occasional principle will be upheld, such as Jan Raymond's use of "integrity" in the case of transsexualism, these principles are understood to be changeable, depending upon the particular problem analyzed.

This means that much feminist

ethics follows the mode of "praxis" that is used by liberation theology. There is a dialectic between engagement or commitment and analysis or cerebration. Those who know the experience are the ones who must speak of it and present it accurately. Traditional academic analyses are suspect, not simply because they are patriarchal, but also because they derive from a stance of (presumed) non-involvement.

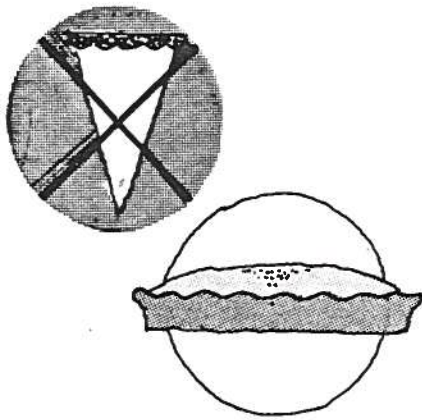
Since feminist ethics begins with experience, it also begins in the sharing of that experience and hence has a communal or group flavor. Most feminist ethics is not done in isolation by the single scholar. Women understand themselves to stand in a community whose hopes, strengths, dreams, problems, and disappointments are shared by all. The sense of identity with others is what empowers women, enabling those today to carry on the struggle that our foremothers left so that our granddaughters may benefit.

In short, the methodology of feminist ethics is a methodology that revolves around women's experience and the analysis and interpretation of that experience.

To rename and reclaim one's experience is to redefine reality. Thus, the focus of feminist ethics is the social construction of reality. Feminist ethics involves exposing the destructiveness of current myths, social structures, and interpersonal relations and substituting for them alternative and constructive myths, social order, and interpersonal relations.

Three loci of reconstruction have been particularly important for feminists. The first of these is history. Redefining and exposing the myths and stereotypes that have been used historically to keep women in their place and substituting a positive understanding of the role of women in our past-sometimes called "her-story" is a major focus.

The second focus of the social construction of reality is social structures and institutions. Feminist ethics does not analyze the particular act to see whether it is right or wrong but looks, instead, to social systems and structures. Indeed, even institutions are not dealt with in isolation but are understood to form interlocking webs and networks which can be called "empires". Thus, the focus of feminist thought is the entire social system and the impact of that system on the lives of women.



This stress on the system should make it clear that does not consist of arguments for the equality of women with men and that equal rights is not all that feminist ethics seeks. Rather, feminist ethics is concerned not simply with the entry of women into current systems but with the expunging of demonic systems and the substituting of creative systems. Feminists are not simply asking for a piece of the pie; we are asking for a different flavor of pie.

Finally, because language plays a

large part in shaping social reality, much feminist ethics has been directed at an examination and reconstruction of language. Here, for example, we note the substitution of "Ms." for "Mrs." or "Miss." Thus, feminists create woman-centered language.

In traditional language, what happens in feminist ethics is a shift from concerns about normative action to concerns about character and ends. Yet feminist ethics goes beyond traditional questions of character and ends and asks the metaethical question about the definition of reality itself. Feminists agree that the definition of reality presented by the patriarchal world is false, and that new definitions must be found or created. Though feminists do not all agree on the nature of these new definitions, some positive values are widely shared in feminism. For example, the value of co-operation instead of competition. Underlying feminist ethics is a hermeneutic of suspicion, a refusal to trust the systems and structures of dominant society, and a constant war-

iness that seeks to find more accurate interpretation.

I call this ethics based in experience that examines and reconstructs social reality, an ethics of witness. To witness is 1) to testify to something, 2) to have personal or direct cognizance of something, 3) to take note of things, and/or 4) to constitute the scene or time of something. Feminist ethics is a form of witness in all these senses. It may never evolve a set of rules for behavior. What it will always provide is concrete witness to the oppressive and deceptive nature of social systems and structures, to the needs and capacities of women, to the possibilities of a future that is not dependent on nor reminiscent of forms of the past. At the present time, this witness is a schizophrenic witness, one that bridges the gap between two worlds, speaking to women but in traditional modes. Someday the witness will be a pure witness born of women's advent experience and given flight through "ludic cerebration".

## Help Along The Way

by Judith Stone

Last year I was turned down for ordination by the Ministerial Applicants Committee of the California Nevada Conference of the United Methodist Church. Later their decision was overturned by the Board of Ordained Ministry, of which the Ministerial Applicants Committee is a sub-committee. I was ordained a Deacon last June at the Annual Conference, and am presently serving as the pastor of a church of about one hundred thirty members, in Chico, California.

With the love and crucial caring of others, I was somehow able to persist in asking for ecclesial authorization of my ministry, even when it wasn't immediately forthcoming. I was able to treasure my own best wisdom about myself and my call to ministry, and to embrace my own doubts as part of my call to faith and ministry. I could have never done it without the help and urging of others, particularly of women.

In reflecting on this very painful experience, I know that I am grateful

for it, because it developed qualities in me which I vitally need for ministry: assertiveness, a positive self-image, and an ability to state my strengths and gifts for ministry clearly and positively. Perhaps most importantly, the experience helped me recognize the need to creatively mobilize anger. I believe all pastors, but particularly women, have to come to terms with the reality of anger and its creative potential. By using my anger creatively, it has become possible to take issue with another's view of my worth (even if it's a committee as "honorable" as an Ordination Board). I learned that there is more to the dynamics of interviewing than just reacting or responding. With a clear understanding of my own gifts for ministry, I was able to maintain my own authority, rather than give all of it to the committee. I want to share my experience by offering some concrete suggestions for other women entering into the interview process with their denominations. These suggestions reflect a cumulative wisdom that was shared with me by my friends and which I personally learned as I went through the interview process.

1. Find a way to communicate yourself positively to others; focus on your strengths and gifts for ministry. I think it is much easier for women to

state or dwell on the areas of their ministry that need attention or development.

2. Practice role-playing interviews with other women so that you can state your theology and ministry in a way that's comfortable to you.

3. Be assertive. Don't be afraid to disagree with the committee, but stick to issues, eg. "What you're feeding back to me just doesn't sound like me. This is how I perceive myself."

4. When you answer a question, answer it briefly and succinctly; then elaborate on what you've said to draw out the meaning, or to clarify what you've said. Then re-state in summary what you've said.

5. Maintain your integrity. Be open, but remember that there are some people who are willing to misuse vulnerability. Be careful!

6. Drive to the interview with a friend who is not being interviewed; a friend who is a support person and an advocate- someone who can cheer you on and pray with and for you.

7. Talk to the women at the Center for Women in Religion. There is some real wisdom there, as well as love and concern for women!

8. Remember and know in your heart of hearts, that our Christian Faith is a Resurrection Faith and that no matter what, a Resurrection will come. It will come.