

# Finding God in Motherhood: Release or Trap?

Mary Pepper and  
Margaret Hebblethwaite

*It was easy to anticipate that there would be some criticisms of Margaret Hebblethwaite's widely praised book "Motherhood and God" from conservative quarters, and what the criticism would be. And our publishing, in our last issue, of Deborah F. Middleton's article "God as Mother—a necessary debate" has brought us letters from readers arguing that all who discern "motherhood" in God must be mistaken. But questions about Margaret Hebblethwaite's book have not come solely from the right. Here Mary Pepper, one of the organizers of Christian Women's Information and Resources (CWIREs), criticizes the book from a feminist perspective and the author replies. We shall be publishing a review which looks at the book from yet another perspective later.*

*Editor.*

## I : MARY PEPPER'S CRITICISM

The publication of *Motherhood and God*<sup>1</sup> by Margaret Hebblethwaite happened just as the Church of Scotland Study Group presented its controversial report on *The Motherhood of God*<sup>2</sup>. So the book was launched amid the turbulence of dispute within the Scottish Church, evidence that the questions around gender and theology can no longer be ignored. The report, cautiously and reasonably, gives scriptural justification for describing God as Mother, but a minority of the group felt unable to agree that God might be properly *addressed* as Mother. (It was the outcry over a woman praying 'Dear Mother God' that caused the setting up of the Study Group.)

But in her very readable book, 'about finding God in motherhood and motherhood in God', Margaret Hebblethwaite has no difficulty at all. She writes of God as "she" and describes her as a mother so naturally that we wonder why it has so rarely been done before. Her aim is to bring together theology and ordinary life both to enrich the work of the academics and to help mothers who are Christians to see how their lives and their faith are integrated. Her theology is simple and free of technical language, but one never feels it is second-rate or woolly. She shows us that she has herself skilfully

integrated her life as a theologian and her life as a mother.

If we are God's children it might be helpful to imagine ourselves sometimes as in her womb. There could not be a closer image of warmth, security, and protection... In God's womb we can stretch and turn in every direction just as the baby, suspended in water, is as happy upside down as the right way up... Wherever God our mother takes us we will be safe and provided for... even though we have never seen our mother, perhaps are quite unaware of her, or even deny her existence, she is in perfect and constant intimacy with us, and when we are born into the light of her presence we will recognize that she has been with us all along.<sup>3</sup>

I read the book straight through, not being able to put it down. On more than one occasion I found myself in tears when she so vividly reminded me of my own responses to motherhood, the mixed feelings of anxiety and happiness, wonder and frustration, pleasure and anger, joy and boredom. It is important for me to make clear what I find very good about this book, because my main purpose is to draw attention to what I believe to be its fundamental inadequacy.

Margaret Hebblethwaite's book is, as she says, an example of the experience-based theology 'called for by theologians throughout the world'.<sup>4</sup> It is theology grown out of the heart of a particular material and historical situation and inseparable from it. But surely an experience-based theology needs also to be a sociologically and politically aware theology? Each individual's experience is not her or his own private affair, but is intricately bound up with that of the wider community—its social structures, its politics, its ideologies. To write adequately about one's own responses demands the recognition that one has been conditioned by ideologies of class and gender. We can only draw theological conclusions from our experiences by placing knowledge about our society, its politics and its ideologies, between the experience and the theology. This is what Margaret Hebblethwaite fails to do. She takes contemporary assumptions about the nuclear family, about motherhood, about female characteristics, as if they were given truths: but there is a large amount of evidence to indicate that these are in fact culturally-produced ideologies which ought to be questioned.<sup>5</sup> She makes no secret of the distance she places between herself and feminism, and yet she has a lot in common with Christian feminists. Her book makes women's lives visible, important and relevant to Christianity. She writes as a strong, independent and highly-educated theologian, making it clear that it is the vocation of women just as much as men to pray, to study, to lead and to teach within the church—to exercise a ministry. By writing of God as a mother she launches a direct attack on the ancient theological view of

women as not *quite* made in the image of God, and therefore inferior as human beings and subordinate as members of the church. Yet she does not ally herself with Christian feminists, criticizing them for seeking power.<sup>6</sup> The difference between them is not a superficial matter of style and tone, but it lies in a fundamental disagreement over the nature and causes of the subordination of women.

Feminism involves the recognition that the inequality between women and men is such a deep-rooted and pervasive phenomenon that only radical social change will bring about a more just situation. Feminism is by definition a co-operative task. Mutual support and solidarity are very important. The process of change is even more difficult because as women we have internalised the ideology which oppresses us, and it is a hard struggle to free ourselves from it, let alone to change the minds of those who oppose us. As they grow up girls and boys learn the approved characteristics of each gender. Yet these different 'male' and 'female' characteristics, the result of the relative power and dependence of men and women, are taken to be 'natural' psychological differences between them; 'natural' because seen to be conditioned by biological function. This abstract and reductionist way of understanding gender differences is rejected by feminists. For example, in *Women's Oppression To-day* Michele Barrett writes:

In so far as the social oppression of women rests—in however small a way—on biological difference, our task is to challenge and change the socially wrought meaning of that difference. The pattern of gender relations in our society is overwhelmingly a social rather than a natural one, but it is a social construction that caricatures biological difference in the most grotesque way and then appeals to this misrepresented natural world for its own justification.<sup>7</sup>

The growth of feminist consciousness has made the question of gender relations visible throughout society. Not surprisingly, the churches, as strongholds of conservatism and male privilege, have been rather late in taking the question seriously. But in the last few years there has been a development of widespread interest in the subject of women and Christianity. But all that glitters is not gold, and it should not surprise us that a certain amount of this interest is in fact proceeding in an anti-feminist direction. Some of it is in the traditional conservative *Kinder. Küche. Kirche.* mould, finding the subordination of wives to husbands to be divinely ordained. But the type of religious anti-feminism which is most pernicious is that which is influenced by the thought of C.G. Jung. Writers in this tradition may sound progressive because they write frankly about sexuality, and are enthusiastic about the body and bodiliness. Their way of discussing gender also may seem to be suited to a religious discussion

because of Jung's emphasis on spiritual matters. But, by basing their argument on Jung's abstractions of 'male' and 'female', they cannot accept that gender relations are primarily a social and political question, and thus they stand directly opposed to feminism.

Arguing against the ordination of women, Susannah Herzel has written:

The feminine, as woman, as *anima* and as the body is like Noah's ark and the nativity stable: it receives and *actively* holds within itself whatever of the masculine is poured in—ideas, words, man's lower animal nature. It carries these embryos until they are transformed into something new and then released into life. Hence, the ancient tradition of the oracles in caves, of holy virgins who were also temple priestesses. This ministry waits for its redemption, its *meaning* in Christ... if we just place woman in a role which is essentially masculine—woman will soon forget how to be woman. She will become incurably frigid, a sort of Lot's wife; incurably promiscuous, like the men whose world she's adopted; or destructive in the manner of Lady Macbeth or Herodias. If woman cannot value this hidden, veiled place within herself, knowing its importance within the general scheme of things, then of course it is very hard for man to value it.<sup>8</sup>

This is perhaps an extreme example of a romanticised biological reductionism and anti-feminist invective, but it is typical of the way 'woman' is abstracted from any social context. This abstract way of discussing gender is not confined to a narrow circle of Jungian writers, although they are the ones who promote it most powerfully within the churches. It is frequently met in our culture, and however it is expressed it is always opposed to feminism—although not necessarily in so explicit and brutal a fashion.

Like the Jungians Margaret Hebblethwaite has an essentialist view of what constitutes femaleness. In an article in *The Tablet*<sup>9</sup>, she argues for the ordination of women on the grounds that our view of God is impoverished without adequate symbols of the feminine. We need to be able to see in God the female qualities found in a 'caring nurse', a 'dependable provider of food and comfort', a 'creative designer', a 'thoughtful present-giver'. She treats the socially conditioned sphere of women as if it were an eternal reality. Such attitudes undoubtedly underlie *Motherhood and God*, but they are not presented in an abstract form because the book is so firmly rooted in the everyday reality of motherhood. With an open and lively honesty she gives us the material details of childbirth and toddler-care. She does not spare us the unhappiness of some of her experiences:

the child pushes its mother further and further to see how

much it can get away with. When Dominic did this to me I was afraid to vent my rage on him, and so I let it destroy me instead. Of course, destroying me, it destroyed both of us. Once I ran into the street and screamed as loud as I could, in the middle of a crowd of people... Even a year or so after the worst of the crisis there were days when, despite my embarrassment, I wept openly in the streets.<sup>10</sup>

I found the chapters about her difficulties very moving, reminding me not only of my own stress and unhappiness, but also of that of many other women I have known, who, like me, were driven to seek medical help in the form of sedatives and anti-depressants. Margaret Hebblethwaite's experience does sound particularly awful, but I would guess it is not uncommon. She overcomes the loneliness and the demoralisation of ceasing to be an individual in her own right by getting some paid help to look after her children. Recognizing that she is lucky and that not all mothers can afford this, she urges the need for some solution to give mothers time to themselves, so that motherhood does not become 'enduring in desperation'. But what sort of scheme could there possibly be that would really help the thousands of isolated and over-burdened women who are mothers—those who are poor, whose husbands are unemployed, who are single parents at the top of a tower block or in a damp basement; those who are imprisoned in the consumer-goods splendour of a new housing estate; those who married young, going straight from being a daughter to a mother, and have not discovered who they are as separate individuals; the women who take on the care of aged parents or a sick husband as soon as their children grow up? The enormity of the problem is evidence that it is the whole institution of the traditional nuclear family that needs looking at. It promises women status, fulfilment, the security and comfort of a home 'of her own': but the reality is that once a woman has a husband and children she forgoes the right to any identity or any money of her own, and the comfort and well-being of all of them becomes her sole responsibility. When both parents work outside the home the mother is still counted responsible, and goes out to work in spite of the burden of guilt and anxiety in trying to do two jobs.

The Church encourages mothers to collude in their own oppression by depicting them as model Christians in their lives of self-effacing service. But the Christian ideal of service—of giving oneself for the sake of others—should be freely chosen. It should not be imposed by appeals to 'nature', by one half of the species onto the other half.

The assumption in our culture that women are dependent and subordinate is perpetuated by the ideology of the family as the natural and ideal unit of human society. In it, fathers play a full part in

society, supported by their dependent assistants, their wives, who give the work, the love, and the care on which the family unit depends, but whose existence is defined by the men they have married.

Not 'biological' sex differences, but patriarchal household and marriage relationships generate the social-political inferiority and oppression of women. Patriarchy is rooted in the patriarchal household and its property relationships rather than in innate biological differences between women and men.<sup>11</sup>

So writes the Roman Catholic feminist theologian, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza. The liberation theology of Latin America starts from the structural injustice which leaves the majority of people powerless and oppressed. Theology must begin with ideological awareness, because traditional theology is bound up with the established power structures. So it is with feminist theology. Feminist theology involves the recognition that power relationships in society have coloured theological thinking and the life of the Church; that theology tends to express the viewpoint of the dominant gender as well as the dominant class. Margaret Hebblethwaite, seeing that theology is male-dominated, is redressing the balance in writing this book. But male-dominated theology is only a symptom. To make women more visible without questioning how and why they have been invisible is to leave the need for radical change safely unrecognised.

Writing in *The Tablet*, she takes Christian feminists to task for seeking power.

Women in the Church today are seeking power...  
'Women, men, and power' was the title of a Christian feminist conference in London last winter. But women in the Church should not seek power. Christians should not seek power.<sup>12</sup>

This is a favourite exhortation in the history of the Church; it has often been directed at Christians when they become too outspoken in their demands for a more just society. For centuries those who have power have contained the protest of the powerless by telling them that it is unchristian to seek a redistribution of power, that their duties lie in service and in finding God in their oppression. Margaret Hebblethwaite mistakenly sees the Christian feminist talk of power to be a demand for the ordination of women, when this is in fact not the main issue, although it is a vital campaign. Feminists, like socialists, talk about power because they want to reveal the system, unrecognised and invisible otherwise, which has such a limiting and damaging effect on so many lives. Yes, of course, at the moment it is the articulate middle-class women (and therefore not obviously oppressed) who are speaking the loudest. But they are speaking for all women, and are well aware of the women who are oppressed two or three times over;

such as women who are poor, who are working-class, or who live in countries that are kept poor by their economic dependence on the rich world.

It is only in recent years that the Church has been forced to pay attention to the criticism of the feminists within it, but criticism from socialists has been heard for over a century now, and the Church has deflected the challenge with outright hostility or with a defensive programme of evasion, which goes something like this: when socialists have talked of economic and social power, and have revealed how the Church is inevitably involved in politics, the countertactic has been to dismiss 'party politics' as superficial and divisive. It is argued that Christians should concentrate on deeper questions of reconciliation and truth, that above all the challenge of injustice should be met, not by politics but by a Christian love for people—or, better still, 'persons'. In this way the criticisms of the socialist Christians are rejected, but in such a way that the socialists are made to seem unchristian and unpleasantly divisive.

The Christian response to feminism looks like taking the same evasive path into an idealist world where politics is kept out because it is too worldly. Increasingly often Christians are saying to the feminists within the Church 'Let us get away from these divisive and strident arguments about power. Instead let us search for the truth about the nature of the "Female", and then let us incorporate it into our theology'.

Margaret Hebblethwaite's book is beautifully rooted in the everyday world, but her response to feminism—explicit in her article in *The Tablet*, and implicit in the book—is one these lines. She rejects talk of power, i.e. politics, because it is unchristian, pointing instead to a deeper reality, included in which is an abstract idealist notion of the female. Although there was so much that I liked about *Motherhood and God*, I think it can be used by the Church to help it build up its defences, to shore itself up against change. That is why I have thought it important to discover just what are the differences between it and Christian feminism.

1 *Motherhood and God* by Margaret Hebblethwaite, published by Geoffrey Chapman, London 1984.

2 Study Group Report *The Motherhood of God* ed. Alan Lewis, Saint Andrew Press 1984.

3 *Motherhood and God*, p. 21.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

5 Cf. e.g. Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today, Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, Verso 1980; Mark Poster *Critical Theory of the Family*, Pluto 1978; Michele Barrett and Mary McIntosh, *The Anti-social Family*, New Left Books 1982.

6 In an article in *The Tablet*, 26 November 1983.

7 *Op. cit.* p.76.

- 8 Susannah Herzel in 'The Body is the Book' p. 120, in a collection of articles against the ordination of women, *Man, Woman, and Priesthood*, ed. P. Moore, SPCK 1978.
- 9 26 November 1983.
- 10 *Motherhood and God* p. 52.
- 11 *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christians Origins*, SCM Press 1983, p. 86.
- 12 26 November 1983.

## II : MARGARET HEBBLETHWAITE'S RESPONSE

I am grateful to my friend Mary Pepper for the thoughtful attention she has paid to my book *Motherhood and God*, and for her many appreciative comments. I am also grateful to the editor, who has invited me to reply to her article. I acknowledge that there are some differences between my position and that of Mary Pepper and many other Christian feminists, and it may be useful to take a little time to tease them out. But she sometimes gives an extremely misleading impression of the views expressed in my book: we are not as far apart as she thinks.

The starting point for this discussion really is the fact that while *Motherhood and God* takes an apparently feminist line—speaking of God as our mother and calling her 'she'—it differs very markedly, as Mary Pepper points out, not only in style but also in methodology from anything else currently on the Christian 'feminist' market. So marked is this fact that it would not need a superhuman intelligence to conclude that I am not one hundred per cent happy about much that is going on in 'feminist theology' today—although it is not a question that I ever discuss in *Motherhood and God*, where I thought it far more important to build constructively on common ground rather than to pick bones with those whose views are in many ways so close to my own. However, now the discussion has been opened it cannot be ignored. Why is it that *Motherhood and God* is so strikingly different from all other books that try to call God 'mother'? Mary Pepper has made a challenging attempt to isolate the underlying divergences, but has seriously misrepresented my own position in doing so.

Her critique falls into two main categories—the political and the psychological. (Of course they are linked, but it will aid clarity to consider them one at a time.) I will deal with the psychological question first.

She usefully distinguishes what we might call the 'Jungian' position from the 'feminist' position. The 'Jungian' position speaks a great deal about male and female psychological characteristics (the *animus* and the *anima*). When Jungians want to discover the female side they have in mind a whole package of psychological characteristics that constitute what they believe to be essentially feminine.



This precision over what constitutes the feminine, or the *anima*, can lead them to conclusions about how men women should behave, what roles they should take on and what jobs they should do, that both I and Mary Pepper would find frustrating and distorting. And so Jungians might argue against the ordination of women on the grounds that it would 'just place woman in a role which is essentially masculine' (Susannah Herzel). Contrary to the impression that might be given by Mary Pepper, I am strongly in favour of the ordination of women. However, even if one accepts a Jungian psychological theory (and I, as a matter of fact, do not) these political conclusions do not necessarily follow, for every woman has her male side (the *animus*) just as every man has his female side (the *anima*). In offering herself for ordination a woman might justifiably be discovering and expressing her *animus*.

Over against the 'Jungian' position is the 'feminist' position, that rejects all categorisation of male and female qualities, because they are thought to be produced by our cultural situation rather than springing essentially out of what it means to be man or woman. In between the two, of course, is a scale of possible intermediate positions. I would place myself somewhere on this intermediate scale, close to the 'feminist' camp, in that while I believe there are probably some psychological differences between men and women, I do not think we can possibly pin down what they are. I would reject the view that there are definitely no differences between the male and female psyche, just as I would reject the detailed Jungian package.

But since it is *Motherhood and God* that is specifically under fire, let us look more closely at the positions taken up there. I must confess that it seems to me such a very un-Jungian book that I am amazed at Mary Pepper's assertion that 'Like the Jungians Margaret Hebblethwaite has an essentialist view of what constitutes femaleness'. From beginning to end I ground the motherhood of God not in so-called feminine qualities dubiously derived from biological differences, but in imagery taken straight and direct from undeniable, physical, female features such as breasts and wombs. For example:

If we are God's children it might be helpful to imagine ourselves sometimes as in her womb... (p.21). To see what you have made coming forth from within you, and in that moment of first vision, to love it totally and for always... Can anyone who has not given birth, in fact or in imagination, understand what it means for God to have created us? (p.32) ...the breast unites food, love, warmth and intimacy with the giver of our life. God our mother, we believe, gives us our needed nourishment with an equal love and intimacy. (p.39)

So systematically do I avoid hypothesising a specifically female

psyche, that it is the Jungians, rather than the feminists, who might have grounds for complaint. 'Does womanhood mean no more than breasts and wombs?' they might ask, or 'How can the woman who has not gone through the physical events of motherhood find herself mirrored in God?' To such a question I could only reply, 'Yes, womanhood probably does mean more than breasts and wombs but, since I do not know exactly what more, I have chosen not to speculate'.

Even when I speak of the many tasks falling on women in our society, I explicitly acknowledge the impact of cultural conditioning, and return again and again to ground my religious reflections on solid physical facts. And so, after detailing the enormous workload at Christmas-time I conclude:

At Christmas, mothers take the lead in preaching the gospel. There is a very good reason why this should be so (apart from the less good ones connected with traditional sex roles). Mothers know better than anyone else what the birth of a baby is like and what feelings it arouses. For them the Christ child is not the pale pink plaster doll of the crib, holding out its arms in welcome with the mature muscle-control of a ten-year-old: he is a wet, reddish, smeary new-born, with his cord-stump still on and with huge-looking testicles, howling and hardly knowing how to wave his arms in protest—a sight to a mother of total and tearful beauty. (p.93)

And so again I tread carefully in considering male and female roles in looking after a child:

One of the most beautiful things about motherhood is this ability to respond to distress and bring consolation. In fact it is more than anything that marks out a child's relation with its mother from all its other relationships, and it goes on right through childhood. However involved the father, for example, is with the child, the first and closest bonds of providing and intimacy and comfort are forged with the mother, through the womb and breast at least, even if the nappy-changing and dressing and bath and taking for walks are shared. (pp.37—8)

Finally, it must be pointed out that there could be no more radical challenge offered to the traditional sexual stereotypes than to write a book that calls God 'she' from start to finish. That disturbs and shakes us at a deeper level than any other assertion about the female could possibly do. I plead quite innocent of the charge that 'she treats the socially-conditioned sphere of women as if it were an eternal reality'.

In fact, the only evidence Mary Pepper can find to support her assertion is not found in *Motherhood and God*, but in an article in *The Tablet*. That *Tablet* article sailed much closer to the Jungian wind, but in the end avoided any commitment as to whether the male and female differences I referred to were essential or culturally-conditioned. I simply suggested that, as a matter of fact, nine times out of ten we prefer having a woman to look after us when we are ill, nine times out of ten it is a woman who gives us the most imaginative and carefully thought-out presents, etc. I called for more 'female' (whether essentialist or empiricist) images of God like the 'caring nurse' and the 'thoughtful present-giver'. But it is not justifiable to read back into *Motherhood and God* every view that I express elsewhere. I wanted *Motherhood and God* to be a book that anyone could agree with.

Turning now to the political question, Mary Pepper pleads 'But surely an experience-based theology needs also to be a sociologically and politically aware theology.... We can only draw theological conclusions from our experiences by placing knowledge about our society, its politics, and its ideologies, between the experience and the theology. This is what Margaret Hebblethwaite fails to do'.

I maintain that *Motherhood of God* does show political and social awareness, and in precisely the areas about which Mary Pepper is concerned. Thus, she talks of the problems of 'those who are poor, whose husbands are unemployed, who are single parents at the top of a tower block or in a damp basement...' and so on. She is quite right to draw our attention to these crying social needs. But the following passage from *Motherhood and God* will show that I am not oblivious to the social problems of poverty:

...imagine that I had been living alone with the children, so that I had no one with which to share the tensions of child-minding; I might have been living in cramped accomo-dation..., I might have been already troubled by financial worries that would have taken from me any ability to be amused and imaginative when faced with childhood japes. How could I have coped with such an evening then? (p.63-64)

I plead for practical help for mothers caught in the poverty-trap, and make suggestions for some steps that could be made (pp.65-6). I talk about the battered baby problem, and identify with the feelings of women for whom motherhood has gone all wrong:

So indeed will the mother grieve who sees not too much but too little of her child—who by force of poverty must leave her child in others' hands, sometimes fearfully, for she can afford nothing but the cheapest, and spend the day at work, when what she wants more than anything is for them

to spend the day together. So too will a mother grieve in more extreme circumstances, who by reason of war or imprisonment must lose months or years of her children's lives, and never know how he would have looked, how she would have toddled, how they would have played together. But truly too does the mother grieve who sees too much of her child, whose eyes are dimmed with fatigue, whose ears are deaf with the sound of crying, who is driven to hate what she most loves, to lose what she most has longed for, and who on top of this can barely forgive herself her inadequacy. Can we not, as a society, do something for these women—understand a little more, provide a little more, criticize a little less? (pp.68-9)

Is this a lack of social and political awareness? Is this the 'evasive path into an idealist world where politics is kept out because it is too worldly'? Is this the sort of contribution that 'can be used by the Church to help it build up its defences, to shore itself up against change'? I hope not.

So is there then no disagreement between myself and Mary Pepper? I think she is right to suspect that there is an important divergence, though it is not founded either on the psychological question or on the need for social and political awareness. What we disagree on is our political conclusions.

Mary Pepper believes that 'the inequality between women and men is such a deep-rooted and pervasive phenomenon that only radical social change will bring about a more just situation'. She believes that 'it is the whole institution of the traditional nuclear family that needs looking at'. She is in common with many other Christian feminist writers in taking such a far-left stance. I, on the other hand, would not be in favour of quite such sweeping social change—not at any rate so sweeping as to overthrow the institution of the nuclear family, in which I deeply believe. So, on this point, I fully acknowledge our differences. (Though I confess to being puzzled as to what Mary Pepper—who lives in a nuclear family and a very splendid one—would rather have to take its place.) So in the end her only criticism of *Motherhood and God* that stands up is that it is not a work of socialism. Too true, it is not.

This is a bigger issue than it seems at first, because where I become dissatisfied with most 'feminist theology' is where it becomes so overwhelmingly concerned with its own political ideology that it hardly begins to be theology at all. Even calling God 'mother' is often nothing more than a device to ease the Church's oppression of women, rather than also (and primarily) an attempt to express the love of God more adequately. And so, where I devote only a few pages of my book to the sociological position of women, the typical work of 'feminist theology' would probably never get off the subject. 'Feminist theology' often limits itself to a militant, socialist statement that actually prevents it 'speaking for

all women' (in Mary Pepper phrase). The number of Christian women who dislike what they hear Christian 'feminists' saying, and the way they are saying it, is very large indeed. And many men feel the same, and dare not say so for fear of appearing sexist. That is a pity, because there is a prophetic voice that needs to be heard, and changes that need to be called for. Let us not spoil our mission—which should be to the whole Church, indeed to the whole of humanity—by confining it too narrowly to a minority political judgment.

## **Community: The Place where Theology is made**

### **Bishop Patras Yusaf of Multan**

*An expanded version of a paper given at a seminar on "contextual theology" held in November 1983 at the Pastoral Institute at Multan, in the Punjab, Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>*

At the various meetings of Third-World theologians it is stated again and again that theologizing is not an academic exercise of a highly trained group of professional experts. Rather, the fundamental subject of theology is the Christian community. This is true of whatever theology exists, because it is the character of a Christian community, its life and witness, which determine the kind of theology it will produce. A truly Third-World theology, therefore, can only grow from within a community that is aware of its being part of the struggles of the Third World and has made an option for the poor and their liberation against the structures of evil and oppression.

Against this background, it is the purpose of this article to describe the history of the Punjabi Christian community and the theology which has been developed in this community, with its strengths and weaknesses, up to the present day. In this description certain directions for the future may perhaps emerge.