
The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion*

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The writing of this article presents a minor dilemma. I do not wish simply to rewrite ideas which I have presented elsewhere. Yet there is a background or frame of reference, or context, out of which the present article is written. To resolve this I am setting forth in very skeletal form, in the form of twenty-three statements, a context discussed at length in a number of articles and in two books (Daly 1973; 1975).

Prolegomena

1. There exists a planetary sexual caste system, essentially the same in Saudi Arabia and in New York, differing only in degree.
2. This system is masked by sex role segregation, by the dual identity of women, by ideologies and myths.

* *Editor's Note:* In response to the editors' invitation to contribute to this thematic collection of articles, Dr. Mary Daly suggested republishing this essay in order to call special attention to the continued relevancy of the issues addressed. This essay originally appeared in *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly* 1.4 (Spring 1975): 20-40 and is published here with the kind permission of the author. The article is reproduced here as it appeared in the original 1975 version. Professor Daly has been, unquestionably, one of the most prolific and influential feminist thinkers of the late 20th century. Her theories have been explicated in seven major books, which I have added to the Works Cited section, and she is currently preparing a new work entitled *Amazon Grace: A 21st Century Radical Feminist Adventure*.

3. Among the primary loci of sexist conditioning is grammar.

4. The “methods” of the various “fields” are not adequate to express feminist thought. Methodolatry requires that women perform Methodicide, an act of intellectual bravery.

5. All the major world religions function to legitimate patriarchy. This is true also of the popular cults such as the Krishna movement and the Jesus Freaks.

6. The myths and symbols of Christianity are essentially sexist. Since “God” is male, the male is God. God the Father legitimates all earthly Godfathers, including Vito Corleone, Pope Paul, President Gerald Ford, the Godfathers of medicine (e.g. the American Medical Association), of science (e.g. NASA), of the media, of psychiatry, of education, and of all the –ologies.

7. The myth of feminine evil, expressed in the story of the Fall, is reinforced by the myth of salvation/redemption by a single human being of the male sex. The idea of a unique divine incarnation in a male, the God-man of the “hypostatic union,” is inherently sexist and oppressive. Christolatry is idolatry.

8. A significant and growing cognitive minority of women, radical feminists, are breaking out from under the sacred shelter of patriarchal religious myths.

9. This breaking out, facing anomy when the meaning structures of patriarchy are seen through the rejected, is a communal, political event. It is a revelatory event, a creative, political ontophany.

10. The bonding of the growing cognitive minority of women who are radical feminists, commonly called *sisterhood*, involves a process of new naming, in which words are wrenched out of their old semantic context and heard in a new semantic context. For example, the “sisterhoods” of patriarchy, such as religious congregations of women, were really mini-brotherhoods. *Sisterhood* heard with new ears is bonding for women’s own liberation.

11. There is an inherent dynamic in the women’s revolution in Judeo-Christian society which is Antichurch, whether or not feminists specifically concern ourselves with churches. This is so because the Judeo-Christian tradition legitimates patriarchy—the prevailing power structure and prevailing world

view—which the women’s revolution leaves behind.

12. The women’s revolution is not only Antichurch. It is a postchristian spiritual revolution.

13. The ethos of Judeo-Christian culture is dominated by The Most Unholy Trinity: Rape, Genocide, and War. It is rapism which spawns genocide, for sexism (rapism) is fundamental socialization to objectify “the other.”

14. The women’s revolution is concerned with transvaluation of values, beyond the ethics dominated by The Most Unholy Trinity.

15. The women’s revolution is not merely about equality within a patriarchal society (a contradiction in terms). It is about *power* and redefining power.

16. Since Christian myths are inherently sexist, and since the women’s revolution is not about “equality” but about power, there is an intrinsic dynamic in the feminist movement which goes beyond efforts to reform Christian churches. Such efforts eventually come to be recognized as comparable to a Black person’s tying to reform the Ku Klux Klan.

17. Within patriarchy, power is generally understood as power *over* people, the environment, things. In the rising consciousness of women, power is experienced as *power of presence* to ourselves and to each other, as we affirm our own being against and beyond the alienated identity (non-being) bestowed upon us within patriarchy. This is experienced as *power of absence* by those who would objectify women as “the other,” as magnifying mirrors.

18. The presence of women to ourselves which is *absence* to the oppressor is the essential dynamic opening up the women’s revolution to human liberation. It is an invitation to men to confront non-being and hence affirm their be-ing.

19. It is unlikely that many men will accept this invitation willingly, or even be able to hear it, since they have profound vested (though self-destructive) interest in the present social arrangements.

20. The women’s movement is a new mode of relating to the self, to each other, to men, to the environment—in a word—to

the cosmos. It is self-affirming, refusing objectification of the self and of the other.

21. Entrance into new feminist time/space, which is moving time/space located on the boundaries of patriarchal institutions, is active participation in ultimate reality, which is deified, recognized as Verb, as intransitive Verb with no object to block its dynamism.

22. Entrance into radical feminist consciousness involves recognition that all male-dominated "revolutions," which do not reject the universally oppressive reality only reforms. They are "revolutions" only in the sense that they are spinings of the wheels of the same senescent system.

23. Entrance into radical feminist consciousness implies an awareness that the women's revolution is the "final cause" (pun intended) in the radical sense that it is the cause which can move the other causes. It is the catalyst which can bring about real change, since it is the rising up of the universally and primordially objectified "Other," discrediting the myths which legitimate rapism. Rapism is by extension the objectification of the human species and of all life on this planet.

Radical feminism, the becoming of women, is very much an Other-world Journey. It is both discovery and creation of a world other than patriarchy. Some observation reveals that patriarchy is "everywhere." Even outer space and the future have been colonized. As a rule, even the more imaginative science fiction writers (seemingly the most foretelling futurists) cannot/will not create a space and time in which women get far beyond the role of space stewardess. Nor does this situation exist simply "outside" women's minds, securely fastened into institutions which we can physically leave behind. Rather, it is also internalized, festering inside women's heads, even feminist heads.

The journey of women *becoming*, then, involves exorcism of the internalized Godfather, in his various manifestations (His name is legion). It involves dangerous encounters with these demons. Within the Christian tradition, particularly in medieval times, evil spirits have sometimes been associated with the Seven Deadly Sins, both as personifications and as causes.¹ A "standard" and prevalent listing of the Sins is, of course, the following: pride, avarice, anger, lust, gluttony,

envy, and sloth.² I am contending that these have all been radically misnamed, that is, inadequately and even perversely “understood” within Christianity. These concepts have been used to victimize the oppressed, particularly women. They are particularized expressions of the overall use of “evil” to victimize women. The feminist journey involves confrontations with the demonic distortions of evil.

Why has it seemed “appropriate” in this culture that a popular book and film (*The Exorcist*) centre around a Jesuit who “exorcises” a girl-child who is “possessed”? Why is there no book or film about a woman who exorcises a Jesuit? (See Bargowski’s 1974 review of the film.) Within a culture possessed by the myth of feminine evil, the naming, describing, and theorizing about good and evil has constituted a web of deception, a Māyā. The journey of women becoming is breaking through this web—a Fall into free space. It is reassuming the role of subject, as opposed to object, and naming good and evil on the basis of our own intuitive intellection.

Breaking through the web of the Male Māyā is both exorcism and ecstasy. These are two aspects of the same journey. Since women have been prohibited from real journeying, that is, from encountering the strange, the unknown, the women’s movement is movement into uncharted territory. The process involves removal of the veils which prevent confrontation with the unknown. Let it be noted that “journey” is a multidimensional word and that the various meanings and images conjured up by the word are not sharply distinguishable. One thinks of mystical journeys, quests, adventurous travel, advancement in skills, in sports, in intellectual probing, in psychological integration and transformation. So also the “veils,” the insulations against the unknown imposed upon women by male mediators, are multidimensional and intertwined. The veils are woven of religious myths (for example, the myth of the “good woman,” the Virgin Mother who has only a Son, not a Daughter), legal restrictions, social customs, medical and psychoanalytic ideologies and practices, academic restrictions (withholding of access to “higher” education, to certain professions), grammatical conditioning (“he” supposedly includes “she”), economic limitations. The very process of exorcism, of casting off the blinding veils, is movement outside the patriarchally imposed sense of reality

and identity. This demystification process, standing/moving outside The Lie, *is* ecstasy.

The process of encountering the unknown, of overcoming the “protection” racket, also involves a continual conversion of the previously unknown into the familiar.³ This requires the use of tools and instruments now in the possession of women’s captors. Amazon expeditions into the male-controlled “fields” such as law, medicine, psychology, philosophy, theology, literature, history, sociology, biology, and physics, are necessary in order to leave the Fathers’ cave and live in the sun. A crucial problem has been to learn how to plunder righteously while avoiding being caught too long in the cave. In universities, and in virtually all the professions, there are poisonous gases which are almost invisible and odorless, and which gradually stifle women’s minds and spirits. Those who carry out the necessary expeditions run the risk of shrinking into the mold of the mystified Athena, the twice-born who forgets and denies her Mother and Sisters. “Reborn” from the Father, she becomes Daddy’s Girl, the mutant who serves the master’s purposes. The token woman, who in reality is enchained, possessed, “knows” that she is free. She is a useful tool of the patriarchs, particularly against her sister Artemis who knows better, respects her womanself, bonds with her sisters, and refuses to sell her freedom, her original birthright, for a mess of respectability.

Exorcism, Processions, and Remythologization

What clues can we find concerning the “nature” and direction of the Other-world journey of radically feminist (i.e. conscious) women? Some important hints can be discovered in *The Guineas*, an astonishing book published in the 1930s by a prophetic foremother. In that book Virginia Woolf links processions (e.g. academic, churchly, military, judicial) with professions and processions. She says:

What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them? What are these professions and why should we make money out of them? Where, in short, is it leading us, the procession of the sons of educated men? (1966, 63)

Clearly, there are leading us to destruction of the human species and of the planet. The rigid, stylized, hierarchial, gynocidal and genocidal processions of male-controlled professions—of church, state, university, army—are all intimately interconnected. These processions capture and reify process. They are deadly. It is important to understand them in order to understand what feminist process/journeying is *not*.

Patriarchal processions both generate and reflect the archetypal image of “procession” from and return to God the Father. In Christian myth, this is a cyclic pattern: separation and return. Christians participate in the procession—they join the parade—through Baptism, which explicitly contains a rite of exorcism. This mythic symbolic procession toward “God,” then, begins with belief in possession by evil forces (“possession” technically in a broad sense, of course), released from which requires captivity by the church. What is ultimately sought is reconciliation with the Father.

Clearly, the ultimate symbol of “procession” is the All Male Trinity itself. In various abstruse ways theologians have elaborated upon the “mystery,” or some would say, the “symbol,” of the Trinity. What is of great significance here is the fact that at this is a myth of Father and Son (no Mother or Daughter involved) in total unity, so total that this “love” is expressed by the Third Person, the Holy Spirit. This is the epitome of male bonding, beyond the wildest dreams of Lionel Tiger. It is (almost?) erotic male homosexual mythos, the perfect All Male Marriage, the All Divine Family. It is asymmetric patriarchy carried to the sublime absurdity of contradiction, christened “mystery.” To the timid objections sometimes voiced by Christian women, the classic answer has been: “You’re included. The Holy Spirit is feminine.” The conclusion of this absurd logic arrives quickly if one asks: How then, did “he” impregnate the Virgin Mary?

Mere human males, of course, cannot fully identify with the divine Son. Perfect consubstantiality with the Father, therefore, cannot be achieved. The earthly processions of the sons of men have as their basic paradigm an attempted identification with the Father. (God the Father, the Godfather, the Oedipal Father.) The junior statesman dreams of becoming The President. The academic junior scholar (dis-

ciple) dreams of becoming The Professor (Master). The acolyte dreams of becoming The Priest. And, as Woolf recognized, the death-oriented military processions reveal the real direction of the whole scenario, which is a funeral procession of the human species. God the Father requires human sacrifice.

Women becoming must indeed recognize the fact of having been possessed by the structures of evil. However, the solution is not “rebirth” or Baptism by the Father’s surrogates, for it is this socialized “rebirth” which is the captivity from which we are trying to escape. Radical feminism is *not* reconciliation with the Father. It begins with saying “No” to the Father, who attempts to eradicate our Mother and to transform us into mutants by forcing “rebirth” (whether from the head of Zeus or from the rib of Adam or from baptismal “grace”). More than this: radical feminism means saying “Yes” to our original birth, the original movement—surge toward life. This is both a remembering and a rediscovering. Athena remembers and rediscovers her Mother. That which is generated between us is Sisterhood. We are then no longer confined by our identities as “Mother” or “Daughter.” The Daughter is *not* obedient to the Mother “unto death.” The Mother does not send her forth to be crucified for the sins of women or of men. Rather, they go forth as Sisters. Radical feminism releases the inherent dynamic in the Mother-Daughter relationship toward Sisterhood, which is thwarted with the Male-mastered system. The Mother does *not* demand self-sacrifice of the Daughter. Rather, both demand of each other affirmation of the self and of each other in an on-going personal/political process which is mythic in its depths—which is both exorcising and remythologizing process. The “sacrifice” that is required is not mutilation at the hands of men, but rather the discipline needed for action together, for self-defense and self-actualization on a planet dominated by the Reign of Terror which is the Reign of the Godfathers. It is important that we consider the actual conditions of this terrain through which we must make our journey.

The Land of the Fathers

As Phyllis Chesler has pointed out, the story of the Virgin Mary, impregnated by God to bring forth his only Son, is classic patriarchal rape-incest myth. The Madonna has no Divine Daughter. Moreover, as the same author perceptively says, she foregoes sexual pleasure, physical prowess, and economic and intellectual power in order to become a “mother” for her “divine” son (1972, 24-26). And this is the primary role-model for women in our culture. This is the life that women are condemned to live out—an alienation which is personal, social, mythic—and which is all the deeper because unrecognized, unacknowledged.

In a society in which women are in fact *robbed* of physical prowess, of economic and intellectual power, we live in a State of Siege.⁴ As Jeanne Lafferty and Evelyn Clark wrote:

Every female person knows the humiliation of being constantly harassed and solicited by males. Having her person talk at, whistled at, yelled at, grunted at, hooted and howled at, visually dismembered or stared and winked at by males everywhere—on the street, at work, at school, at home—everywhere. (1970, 96)

This is the very real condition of women in a rapist society. Moreover, the dismemberment is not always only visual. Male fetishism concerning women’s bodies, the cutting into objectified parts which is the prime material of advertising and pornography, has as its logical outcome the brutal rape murders and actual physical dismemberments which take place in such a society. In a world ruled by God the Father this is not considered a serious problem. A feminist author wrote: “Rape is too personal and too terrible a crime to be left to the punishment of indifferent male law.”⁵

In a society possessed by the sexual caste system, that is, in a rapist society, there is a deep struggle on the part of those designated “victims” to cast out the deception that warps the soul. The deception inflicted upon women is a kind of mindbinding comparable the foot-binding procedure which mutilated millions of Chinese women for a

thousand years.⁶ Just as footbinding destroyed the capacity for physical movement—walking, running, dancing—mindbinding damages the capacity for autonomous creativity, action, thinking, imagining, willing. Stripping away the mindbindings of lies that reduce women to the status of physical, mental, and spiritual rapes is the basic loving act in such a society.

The Qualitative Leap

Creative, living, political hope for movement beyond the gynocidal reign of the Fathers will be fulfilled only if women continue to make qualitative leaps in living our transcendence. A short-circuited hope of transcendence has caused many to remain inside churches, and patriarchal religion sometimes has seemed to satisfy the hunger for transcendence. The problem has been that both the hunger and the satisfaction generated within such religions have to a great extent alienated women from our deepest aspirations. Spinning in vicious circles of false needs and false consciousness, women caught on the patriarchal wheel have not been able to experience women's own experience.

I suggest that what is required is *ludic cerebration*, the free play of intuition in our own space, giving rise to thinking that is vigorous, informed, multi-dimensional, independent, creative, tough. *Ludic cerebration* is thinking out of experience. I do not mean the experience of dredging out All That Was Wrong with Mother, or of instant intimacy in group encounters, or of waiting at the doctoral dispensary, or of self-lobotomization in order to publish, perish, and then be promoted. I mean the experience of being. *Be-ing* is the verb that says the dimensions of depth in all verbs, such as intuiting, reasoning, loving, imagining, making, acting, as well as the couraging, hoping, and playing that are always there when one is really living.

It may be that some new things happen within patriarchy, but one thing essentially stays the same: women are always marginal beings. From this vantage point of the margin it is possible to look at what is between the margins with the lucidity of *The Compleat Outsider*. To change metaphors: the systems within the System do not appear so radically different from each other to those excluded by all. Hope for a

qualitative leap lies in *us* by reason of that deviance from the “norm” which was first imposed but which can also be *chosen* on our own terms. This means that there has to be a shift from “acceptable” female deviance (characterized by triviality, diffuseness, dependence upon others for self-definition, low self-esteem, powerlessness) to deviance which may be unacceptable to others but which is acceptable to the self and *is* self-acceptance.

For women concerned with philosophical/theological questions, it seems to me, this implies the necessity of some sort of choice. One either tries to avoid “acceptable” deviance (“normal” female idiocy) by becoming accepted as a male-identified professional, or else one tries to make the qualitative leap toward self-acceptable deviance as ludic cerebrator, questioner of everything, madwoman, and witch.

I do mean witch. The heretic who rejects the idols of patriarchy is the blasphemous creatrix of her own thoughts. She is finding her life and intends not to lose it. The witch that smolders within every woman who cared and dared enough to become a philosophically/spiritually questing feminist in the first place seems to be crying out these days: “Light my fire!” The qualitative leap, the light of those flames of spiritual imagination and cerebral fantasy can be a new dawn.

On “Androgyny”

Feminists have searched for a word to express the concept/reality of psychic wholeness, of integration, which we are just beginning to glimpse intuitively, experientially, as realizable. In this search for the right word we have experienced the poverty of the language bequeathed to us, and we have recognized the manner in which it constricts and even distorts our thought. In my book *Beyond God the Father*, I frequently use the word “androgyny” to express this intuition and incipient experience of wholeness, which transcends sex-role stereotyping—the societally imposed “eternal feminine” and “eternal masculine.” Feminist ethicist Janice Raymond has written perceptively of an “intuition of androgyny” as identical with the intuition of being (1974). Two young theologians, graduates of Harvard Divinity

School, used the term to convey a feminist understanding of wholeness in a much discussed jointly published article (Barufaldi and Culpepper 1973). Feminist poet Adrienne Rich used the word in her poem *The Stranger*, which concludes with the following lines:

*I am the androgyne
I am the living mind you fail to
describe
in your dead language
the lost noun, the verb surviving
only in the infinitive
the letters of my name are written
under the lids
of the newborn child.* (Rich 1973)

All of these authors now experience some hesitancy about using the word “androgyne” to express our vision(s). This hesitancy is at least in part due to an increasing understanding of the political use and abuse of language. This increased sophistication has resulted from some distressing misinterpretations of the word.

In speaking to audiences, I have sometimes had the impression that people hearing this term vaguely envisage two distorted halves of a human being stuck together—something like John Wayne and Brigitte Bardot scotch-taped together—as if two distorted “halves” could make a whole. That is, there is a kind of reification of wholeness, instead of recognition that what is being described is continual process. This non-understanding of “androgyne,” which feminist have used when attempting to describe the *process* of integration, is also reflected in the assumption of the part of some women (and men) that a woman who is successful in a career on male terms (for example, a successful business executive) and at the same time a model housewife has achieved “androgyne.” In fact, this career housewife as described fails to criticize radically either the “masculine” or the “feminine” roles/worlds. She simply compartmentalizes her personality in order to function within both, instead of recognizing/rejecting/transcending the inherent oppressiveness of such institutions as big business and the nuclear family.

When one becomes conscious of the political usages of language,

she recognizes also that the term “androgyny” is adaptable to such mystifying usage as the expression “human liberation” has been subjected to. That is, it can easily be used to deflect attention from the fact that women and men at this point in history cannot simply “get together and work it out,” ignoring the profound differences in socialization and situation within the sexual caste system. Both “androgyny” and “human liberation” function frequently to encourage false transcendence, masking—even though unintentionally—the specific content of the oppression of women, and suggesting that wholeness depends upon identification with men. Some of us do still use the term “androgyny,” of course, but less frequently, more circumspectly, and with some apprehension that we will be misunderstood.

Some feminists began to feel somewhat less comfortable with the word “androgyny” when the implications of a small terse fact surfaced to consciousness. That fact is etymological: the first part of the word obviously is derived from the Greek *aner*, *andros* (man), while the second part is from *gyne* (woman). This, of course, carries its own message. A first reaction was to employ the word “gynandry,” which, from the perspective of women’s becoming, is more appropriate. But it soon became evident that the priority problem in the etymology of the word was really symptomatic of deeper problems.

In fact, the term “androgyny” comes to us heavily fraught with traditional associations, that is, associations of male-centred tradition(s). The image conveyed by the word is that of a “feminized” male. This fact has been brought home to me in public discussions with male Christian theologians who, confronted with the problem of the inherent oppressiveness of Christolatry, have responded earnestly that there really is no problem since “Jesus was androgynous.” Whatever this may mean, it has little relevance to the problem of women’s becoming *now*, and in fact it distracts from the real issues confronting us. Dressing up old symbols just will not work for women who are conscious of sexist religiosity.

“Gynandry” helps to shift images away from the traditional biases, but only to a limited degree. Placing the female part of the word first does not dissolve the inherent dependency of the word itself upon stereotypes in order that there be any meaningful content at all. To

put it another way, in an “androgynous” or “gynandrous” society it would be senseless to speak of “androgyny” or “gynandry” since people would have no idea of the sex-stereotyped characteristics and/or roles referred to by the components of the terms. Use of these terms at this point in history is dysfunctional to the extent that it encourages on some level a perpetuation of stereotypes (as is the case with Jungian ideology of the “anima” and “animus”). “Gynandry” or “androgyny” *can* function in a liberating way if they are seen as “transitional” words, or, more precisely, as self-liquidating words. They should be understood as having a built-in planned obsolescence.⁷

Wanted: “God” or “The Goddess”?

Feminist consciousness is experienced by a significant number of women as ontological becoming, that is, being. This process requires existential courage, courage to be and to *see*, which is both revolutionary and revelatory, revealing our participation in ultimate reality as Verb, as intransitive Verb.

The question obviously arises of the need for anthropomorphic symbols for this reality. There is no inherent contradiction between speaking of ultimate reality as Verb and speaking of this as personal. The Verb is more personal than a mere static noun. However, if we choose to *image* the Verb in anthropomorphic symbols, we can run into a problematic phenomenon which sociologist Henri Desroche calls “crossing.” “Crossing” refers to a notable tendency among oppressed groups to attempt to change or adapt the ideological tools of the oppressor, so that they can be used *against* him and *for* the oppressed. The problem here is the fact that the functioning of “crossing” does not generally move far enough outside the ideological framework it seeks to undermine. In the “Black theology” of James Cone, for example, we find a Black God and a Black Messiah, but this pigmentation operation does not significantly alter the behaviour of Jahweh & Son. Crone’s Black God is as revengeful and sexist as his White prototype. For feminist eyes it is clear that this God is at least as oppressive as the old (for black women as well as for white women). The message in the alteration of symbol is simply about *which* male-ruled racial group will

be on top and which will be on the bottom. The basic presupposition of *hierarchy* remains unaltered: that is, the presupposition that there must be an “us” or a “them” on top, and a corresponding “them” or “us” on the bottom.

Some women religious leaders within Western culture in modern times have performed something like a “crossing” operation, notably such figures as Mary Baker Eddy and Ann Lee, in stressing the “maternal” aspect of the divinity. The result has been mixed. Eddy’s “Father-Mother God” is, after all, the Christian God. Nor does Ann Lee really move completely outside the Christian framework. It is interesting that their writings lack the thirst for vengeance that characterizes Cone’s all too Christian Black theology, which is certainly in their favour. But it is also necessary to note that their theologies lack explicit relevance to the concrete problems of the oppression of women. Intellection and spirituality remain cut off from creative political movement. In earlier periods also there were women within the Christian tradition who tried to “cross” the Christian all-male God and Christ to some degree. An outstanding example was Juliana of Norwich, an English recluse and mystic who lived in the last half of the fourteenth century. Juliana’s “God” and “Jesus” were—if language conveys anything—hermaphroditic constructs, with the primary identity clearly male. While there are many levels on which I could analyze Juliana’s words about “our beloved Mother, Jesus, (who) feeds us with himself” (Juliana of Norwich 1966, chapter 61), suffice it to say here that this hermaphroditic image is somewhat less than attractive. The “androgynous” God and Jesus present problems analogous to and related to those problems which occur in connection with the use of the term “androgyny” to describe the direction of women’s becoming. There is something like a “liberation of the woman within” the (primarily male) God and Jesus.

Indeed, it is harder to perform a transsexual operation on the Judeo-Christian divinity than a mere pigmentation operation. This is one reason, no doubt, why Cone is able to achieve a purely Black God and Black Messiah, rather than a Mulatto, whereas the Christian women mentioned brought forth hermaphrodites, with emphasis upon maleness. Indeed, they did something on the symbolic level which is

analogous to “liberating the woman within the man.” Since they went only this far, they accomplished little or nothing, in social or mythic terms, toward the genuine liberation of women.

One fact that stands out here is that these were women whose imaginations were still partially controlled by Christian myth. My contention is that they were caught in a contradiction (which is not the case in the work of Black *male* theologians). I am saying that there is a profound contradiction between the inherent logic of radical feminism and the inherent logic of the Christian symbol system. I would not have said this ten years ago, at the time of writing the original edition of *The Church and the Second Sex*, which expressed hope for reform of Christianity in general and Roman Catholicism in particular. Nor would some women today say this—women who still perceive their identity as both Christian and feminist.

Both the reformers and those who leave Judaism and Christianity behind are contributing and will contribute in different ways to the process of the becoming of women. The point here is not to place value judgments upon individual persons and their efforts—and there are heroic efforts at all points of the feminist spectrum. Rather, it is to disclose an inherent logic in feminism. The courage which some women have in affirming this logic comes in part from having been on the feminist journey for quite awhile. Encouragement comes also from knowing increasing numbers of women who have chosen the route of the logical conclusion. Some of these women have “graduated” from Christianity or religious Judaism, and some have never even been associated closely with church or synagogue, but have discovered spiritual and mythic depths in the women’s movement itself. What we share is a sense of becoming in cosmic process, which I prefer to call the Verb, Be-ing, and which some would still call “God.”

For some feminists concerned with the spiritual depth of the movement, the word “God” is becoming increasingly problematic, however. This by no means indicates a movement in the direction of “atheism” or “agnosticism” or “secularism,” as these terms are usually understood. Rather, the problem arises precisely because of the spiritual and mythic quality perceived in feminist process itself. Some use expressions such as “power of being.” Some reluctantly still use the

word “God” while earnestly trying to divest the term of its patriarchal associations, attempting to think perhaps of the “God of the philosophers” rather than the overtly masculinist and oppressive “God of the theologians.” But the problem becomes increasingly troublesome, the more the “God” of the various Western philosophers is subjected to feminist analysis. “He”—“Jahweh” still often hovers behind the abstractions, stunting our own thought, giving us a sense of contrived doublethink. The word “God” just may be inherently oppressive.

Indeed, the word “Goddess” has also been problematic, but for different reasons. Some have been worried about the problem of “crossing.” However, that difficulty appears more and more as a pseudo-difficulty when it is recognized that “crossing” is likely to occur only when one is trying work *within* a sexist tradition. For example, Christian women who in their “feminist liturgies” experiment with referring to “God” as “she” and to the Trinity as “The Mother, the Daughter, and the Holy Spirit,” are still working within all the boundaries of the same power structure. Significantly, their services are at the same place and time as “the usual,” and are regarded by most of the constituency of the churches as occasional variations of “business as usual.”

As women who are outside the Christian church inform ourselves of evidence supporting the existence of ancient matriarchy and of evidence indicating that the Gods of patriarchy are indeed contrived, pale derivatives and reversals of the Great Goddess of an earlier period, the fear of mere “crossing” appears less appropriate and perhaps even absurd. There is also less credibility allowable to the notion that “Goddess” would function like “God” in reverse, that is, to legitimate an oppressive “female-dominated” society, if one is inclined to look seriously at evidence that patriarchal society was not structured like patriarchy, that it was non-hierarchical (see Briffault 1927, as well as Bachofen 1967).

Would “Goddess” be likely to function oppressively, like “God”? Given the present situation of women, the danger is not imminent. “Would it function that way in the future?” My inclination is to think not, but it is not my intention to attempt to “prove” this point at this time. The question has a quality of “abstraction” and remoteness from

the present social realities and it is, it seems to me, diversionary. When it is raised, and it is usually raised by men, one senses an “atmosphere” about the question, an aroma of masculine hysteria, a fear of invading hordes of “matriarchs” (read: female patriarchs) taking over The Man’s world.

There are, however, two points concerning the symbol “Goddess” which I think are relevant to the existing situation. First, it can at the very least be pointed out that whenever the pendulum has swung extremely in one direction (and it *has*—for millennia), it is psychologically/socially/ethically important to emphasize “the other side.” The hermaphroditic image hardly seems satisfactory for anyone. For an increasing minority of women—and even for men⁸—“Goddess” is becoming more functional, meaningful, and loaded with healing associations. As this minority grows, Western society will be shaken by the presence of gynarchic symbolism in a new and potent way. It should be noted that women are inclined to speak and write of “The Goddess,” whereas one seldom says “The God.” In our culture it has been assumed that “goddesses” are many and trivial, whereas the “real” divinity is “God,” who does not even require the definite article. The use of the expression, “The Goddess,” is a way of confronting this trivialization, of exorcising the male “God,” and of affirming a different myth/reality.

A second, and related, point has to do with the fact that the “self-transcending immanence,” the sense of giving birth to ourselves, the sense of power of being within, which is being affirmed by many women, does not seem to be denoted, imaged, adequately pointed to, or perhaps even associated with the term “God.” With her permission, I will relate a story told to me by a theologian for whose insights I have the greatest respect. This woman told me that in the past when riding in planes (and feeling fearful in the situation) she often conjured up images remembered from childhood of “God” as “having the whole world in his hands.” Later, this image/prayer? became meaningless. When she was on a plane recently, the ride suddenly became extremely “bumpy” and rough. It occurred to her to “try on” the name/image “Goddess.” The result, as she described it, was immediate, electrifying, consoling. She sensed a presence and had/heard? the thought: “Just let

go. Just sit on the seat and sit on the air waves and ride.” The ride, though as rough as before, became a joyful experience.⁹

Clearly, it would be inappropriate and arrogant to try to “explain” or “interpret” this experience of another person. I can only comment that many women I know are finding power of being within the self, rather than in “internalized” father images. As a philosopher, my preference has been for abstractions. Indeed I have always been annoyed and rather embarrassed by “anthropomorphic” symbols, preferring terms such as “ground and power of being” (Tillich), “beyond subjectivity and objectivity” (James), “the Encompassing” (Jaspers), or the commonly used “Ultimate Reality,” or “cosmic process.” More recently I have used the expression “Intransitive Verb.” Despite this philosophical inclination, and also because of it, I find it impossible to ignore the realm of symbols, or to fail to recognize that many women are experiencing and participating in a remythologizing process, which is a new dawn.

It is necessary to add a few remarks about the functioning of the confusing and complex “Mary” symbol within Christianity. Through it, the power of the Great Goddess symbol is enchained, captured, used, cannibalized, tokenized, domesticated, tranquillized. In spite of this, I think that women and at least some men, when they have heard of or imaged the “Mother of God,” have, by something like a selective perception process, screened out the standardized, lobotomized, dull, derivative and dwarfed Christian reflections of a more ancient symbol; they have perceived something that might more accurately be described as the Great Goddess, and which, in human terms, can be translated into “the strong woman who can relate because she can stand alone.” A woman of Jewish background commented that “Mother of God” had always seemed strange and contradictory to her. Not having been programmed to “know” about the distinctions between the “divine” and the “human” nature of “Christ,” or to “know” that the “Mother of God” is less than God, this woman had been able to hear the expression with the ears of an extraenvironmental listener. It sounded, she said, something like “infinite plus one.”¹⁰ When this symbolic nonsense is recognized, it is more plausible simply to *think* “infinite,” and to *image* something like “Great Mother,” or “Goddess.”

It may appear that the suffix “-ess” presents a problem, when one considers other usages of that suffix, for example, in “poetess,” or in “authoress.” In these cases, there is a tone of depreciation, a suggestion that women poets and authors are in a separate and “inferior” category to be judged by different standards than their male counterparts. However, the suffix does not always function in this “diminishing” way. For example, there appear to be no “diminutive” overtones suggested by the word “actress.” So also it seems that the term “Goddess”—or “The Goddess”—*is not only non-diminutive*, but very strong. Indeed, it calls before the mind images of a powerful and ancient tradition before, behind, and beyond Christianity. These are multi-dimensional images of women’s present and future becoming/be-ing.

“Priests” or “Priestesses”?

I would suggest that “priestess” has diminutive connotations if it is applied within the framework of Christianity (Episcopalian priestesses?), since of course within the limitations of that framework the role “acted out” by women has to be seen as derivative. It is only when one considers the possibility that the Christian tradition is itself derivative from a far more ancient and woman-centred tradition, that one’s perception of priesthood changes. For women to be priestesses then no longer perceived simply as a derivative phenomenon, but as primary and authentic. But then neither is it a Christian phenomenon. The priesthood of women need not seek legitimation within Christian churches. Nor need it be seen as a title or office conferred upon certain officially designated women to the exclusion of others.

Moreover, there are impossible contradictions in the idea of woman-identified Christian priests. While it may be possible for a twice-born Athena to “say Mass,” or to commit baptism “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,” this sort of behaviour presents incredible problems, that is, problems of credibility. Moreover, as I have said, it is inconsistent simply to try to fit a “feminine” symbolism into these sclerotic vessels. The “form” would still be the message, with some alterations in “content.”

Is it true, as Malcolm Boyd has recently argued, that “when the

(Christian) priest is a woman, even God is no longer a male?" (1974). At one time, some years ago, I might have agreed with this. However, it is important to look at Protestant churches which have been ordaining women for years. Clearly, their God (and Gods) are still male. Large patriarchal institutions are still male. Large patriarchal institutions are still capable of absorbing a few tokens and in fact of profiting from this, appearing "liberal" while at the same time attracting women who are doubly devoted to the task of serving male Gods. I say "doubly devoted" because, as the cliché goes, a woman has to be twice as "good" as a man to get half as much recognition.

It is instructive to read the list of 110 Catholic signers who have called for the ordination of women "to the priesthood of the universal church."¹¹ Having read some writings of some of them, I question 1) whether they can possibly understand that the logic of feminism is all about (i.e., leaving behind and thus leaving to die the inherently oppressive structures of patriarchal religions); 2) whether they *do* "understand" what the logic of feminism is about and see "containment" as an important tactic for holding women in bondage as long as possible.

The women's movement *is* about refusal to be merely contained as well as refusal to be mere containers. It is about saying "Yes" to ourselves, which is the deepest way of saying "Yes" to others. At some point in her history a woman may sincerely see ordination to the Christian priesthood as her way of saying this "Yes." It is my hope that such women will *continue* their journey. Ambition to "ordination" perhaps reaches a respectable altitude for the jet age, but it does not reach very far, I think, into feminist space/time. It is my hope that these sisters will raise their ambitions and their self-respect higher, immeasurably higher, that they will one day outgrow their books of common prayer and dream less common dreams.

Notes

¹ An elaborate historical study of the Sins is to be found in Bloomfield 1967.

² Bloomfield gives a variety of "listings" of Deadly Sins in different periods and cultures, with useful contextual information.

³ This idea is developed in a remarkable article. See Allegro n.d.

⁴ This expression was used by Emily Culpepper in an unpublished paper entitled "Reflections on Ethics and Self Defense: Establishing a Firm Stance."

⁵ Elizabeth Gould Davis, author of *The First Sex* (1971), wrote this in an article about her own devastating rape in *Prime Time* (June 1974, 3).

⁶ The horrors of footbinding are recounted by Andrea Dworkin 1974, 95-117. These "tiny feet" were malodorous, mutilated humps. Women fell from one to the other. These stumps were described in fantastically deceptive euphemistic language and were the objects of sadistic male fetishism.

⁷ In a speech delivered at the Modern Languages Association Forum, December 1973, Cynthia Secor noted that there is no "Androgyne Quarterly"—most probably because there are no androgynes around to publish it.

⁸ Kenneth Pitchford chooses Goddess imagery, which occurs frequently in his more recent poems.

⁹ This story was told by Professor Nelle Morton of Drew Theological Seminary, and paraphrased by myself.

¹⁰ Comment by Linda Franklin, Boston College student.

¹¹ Reported in *National Catholic Reporter*, 8 November 1975 on page 5.

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