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# Deviant Speech: Women Preachers and Christian Anathema

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In giving an account for the death of Anne Hutchinson and her family in the hands of the Mohegan Indians in 1643, the Reverend Thomas Weld had this to say:

I never heard that the Indians in those parts did ever before this, commit the like outrage upon any one family, or families, and therefore God's hand is the more apparently seene herein, to pick out this woeful woman, to make her and those belonging to her, an unheard of heavy example.... Thus, the Lord heard our groanes to heaven, and freed us from this great and sore affliction. (Winthrop 1968, 214)

The affliction to which Thomas Weld refers is Anne's ministry and "heresy." Anne, a mother of fifteen was brought to trial, accused of subverting the "New England Way" to which the Bay Colony churchmen subscribed (MacHaffie 1986, 81). In her trials, Anne was charged with disturbing the peace by teaching in her home and therefore acting more like a husband rather than a wife. Her public meetings were "a thing not tolerable or comely in the sight of God nor fitting for [her] sex" (1986, 82). These unwomanly qualities made her preaching a frightening public ritual. Thus, she was both excommunicated from the Boston congregation and banished from the colony. They believed that she propagated the ancient pattern of women consorting with the Devil, and was branded as the "American Jezebel" (1986, 81-82).

For almost two millennia, women in the Christian tradition have been for the most part banned from preaching or speaking in public on

matters regarding faith and practice. Theological pronouncements and ecclesiastical decrees vigorously justify this exclusion of women from the clergy or the priesthood. Women's weaknesses based on so-called biological "defects," their sexual promiscuity derived from an inherent original sin, and their inferiority rooted in fleshly nature (which is the antithesis of the Divine and the Pauline prohibitions in the Epistles), have occupied the hostile debates on women's positions in the Church. Although there have been women whom official Church authorities recognized, these women were primarily considered as spokespersons against heresies. Frequently, however, they were judged as heretics themselves.

The characterization of women Christian leaders as heretics can be traced from the second century to the present. Early Christian writers have employed passages from the Epistles to deny women ecclesiastical offices.<sup>1</sup> At present, many Protestant denominations as well as the Roman Catholic Church still deny women access to the pulpit ministry based on compelling theological arguments that have resisted change for almost two thousand years. In spite of all the advances women have made in terms of equality and relative parity with men in the last century, the last bastion of institutional discrimination against women continues to be tragically—the Church. Current scholarship on women's writings from the medieval period, however, has yielded a bountiful harvest for those who are seeking basis for women's protest and struggle against the silencing ethos of a patriarchal/misogynist culture. In this article, I argue that women's authority to preach or teach has been "de-legitimated" by ruling authorities because it threatened the prevailing religious discourse of their times. When women defied religious edicts that prohibited them from preaching, they pushed the boundaries of authority, and endangered not only the established social status but exposed alternative routes for freedom and opportunity as well. Thus, their practice and speech were considered illegitimate, and their behaviour considered as deviant.

In the first section, I will show instances when women in medieval times were stigmatized as anti-models for acceptable female behaviour. I will show how "deviancy" is a construct formulated by control-agents to preserve order, and how this de-legitimizing process is a mode of

linguistic and spatial containment. In the second section, I will argue that present-day exclusion of women from the preaching ministry is an attempt by established ecclesiastical institutions to manipulate religious meanings and discourse, and that women's preaching is still judged as "deviant" speech. I will limit this section by focusing on issues relative to the North American context. I will conclude with how women's authority to preach today could derive its power from remaining "deviant" speech.

### The Medieval *Word*

As early as the second century, male Christian writers influenced by Greek culture have espoused negative attitudes concerning women. Origen (c.185-c. 251) wrote, "it is not proper for a woman to speak in Church, however admirable or holy what she says may be, merely because it comes from female lips" (Tavard 1973, 68). His successor Dionysius held onto the strict Hebraic laws of impurity and thus forbade Christian women from entering a Church during menstruation: "The one who is not entirely pure in soul and body must be stopped from entering the Holy of Holies" (Swidler 1979 342-3). Tertullian (c.150-after 220 C.E.), who is considered the Father of Latin theology and whose Montanist affiliations led him to espouse very moralistic views, also revealed his anti-woman sentiments in his writings. In strong language Tertullian speaks disparagingly of women as "[You]...the devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man..." (Swidler 1979, 346).<sup>2</sup>

Augustine (354-430 C.E.), himself, the most influential of the Latin fathers, was not exempted for anti-women biases. Scholars believe that Augustine's problem with his own sexuality influenced his loathing of women. Informed by dualistic philosophy, he associated women not merely with the lower part of the soul but with the flesh: "What is worse than a house where the woman has governance over the man? But that house is proper where the man commands, the woman obeys. So also is that person rightly ordered where the spirit

governs and the flesh serves" (Swidler 1979, 349). He thought that sexual differentiation was an original part of God's plan. The inferiority of women's nature as part of the "order of nature" then became an accepted theological view. It also established the basis for the subordination of women. Female leadership therefore was contrary to nature. It was this Augustinian view that dominated the anti-woman outlook of later canon law. Thus, Gratian, who is considered as the genius behind the twelfth-century collection of Church law, *Concordia Discordantium Canonum*, quoted Augustine to support the proscription of women's roles both at home and in the Church. He says "Women certainly stands under the lordship of man and possesses no authority; she can neither teach nor be a witness, neither take an oath nor be the judge" (Swidler 1979, 351). This restriction became a strong basis for excluding women from the ministry or priesthood.

With such barriers erected before them, women found alternative ways of entering the religious life. During the middle age, when monasticism was widespread, women flocked to convents where they could participate in various forms of religious life otherwise denied to them. Many women found themselves attracted to the life in the convent where they could focus on pious works. Within the monastic life, they felt free from the demands of a married state, which was the only other option for women then. A study of the Italian Church during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries reveals that the majority of women may have opted for the semi-religious life of the *penitents* and *conversae* that were linked with hospitals, monasteries, and even convents (Osheim 1990, 80). Research also shows that the roles women adopted varied from context-to-context, and therefore cannot be put under one general category. At least in late medieval Italy, the only thing that seems certain is that women were seen as "essential actors in the creation of vernacular spiritual literature and in the formation of a number of religious movements..."(Osheim 1990, 79).

Unfortunately, nuns in other religious orders found themselves restricted by the institutional Church, as with the Poor Clares. Founded by Francis of Assisi at the behest of the then twelve-year-old Clara of Sciffi, the Poor Clares suffered from the strict rule imposed by Pope Innocent III. The pope ordered that the nuns were not to leave

the convent except to found a new community, and imposed perpetual silence on all the members of the community (Tucker 1987, 151).

Although the convent offered women opportunities to become scholars, writers, artists, and musicians, women's roles in the institutional Church remained prohibitive. The male-dominated Church hierarchy insisted on close male supervision of the activities of the cloistered nuns. Those who found this situation too restrictive joined the communities of laywomen, outside the control of the Roman Church that sprung up all around Western Europe. It is not surprising that "heretical" groups also thrived during this period, and their anti-clerical positions often put them into conflict with the ruling Church and state powers (von Schurman 1998, xv). Under conditions of illegality and illegitimacy, women were forbidden to teach or preach on matters of faith. Women who joined religious sects that did not have the approval of the Church pursued public ministry at the risk of punishment.<sup>3</sup> For instance, in the ninth century, Theoda of Mainz claimed to have received a revelation concerning the end of the world, and therefore preached about it. People listened to her, and her ministry created disorder for the parish of a certain bishop. People under his jurisdiction "turned from doctrines of the Church...to follow her as though she were a teacher sent from heaven" (Tucker and Liefeld 1987, 138). That diocese could not tolerate such a type of a disturbance. In the end, Theoda had to give up her ministry of preaching or face public flogging (Tucker and Liefeld 1987, 138). Given that "heretical" or illegitimate groups attracted women of varying social positions and influence, and that the bishops and the papacy placed the ministries of these groups under surveillance, it is hardly surprising that besides heretics, the principal subjects of the strict administrative supervision by the churchmen were the female religious. Since the church hierarchy viewed women as dangers to religious males, they were to be kept outside the mainstream ecclesiastical life to preserve the accepted mode of spirituality (Osheim 1990, 80). This exclusion of women from clerical life was necessary to preserve the medieval notion of the divine ordering of society, which was in turn, foundational for the creation of Christendom during the twelfth-century. Equally significant was the radical reform of the clergy aimed at the complete

separation of the clergy from the laity. Since women cannot be part of the of the priesthood, they had no place in the new sacral order. Thus, attempt to tamper with the divine and sacred order of society “was nothing short of sacrilege” (Malone 2001, 95).

Women who voiced their dissent against the order of things faced not only religious sanctions but physical dangers as well. Since obedience and respect were owed to God’s representative, the disobedience of women was an anathema. Preaching and teaching by women despite papal condemnation was considered as religious rebellion. According to Malone, “authority and womanhood were seen as two antithetical concepts, a real imbalance in nature and a *total disruption of the divine will*” [italics mine] (2001, 26). The attack of women increased over the following centuries and culminated in the Inquisition.

The Inquisition (c. 1231) criminalized religious women who engaged in public discussion of moral issues because they were not authorized to do so. Women who were recognized as leaders in their communities and freely conducted “paraliturgical” functions denied to them by the institutional Church, were branded as heretics or frauds. They did not fit the image accepted by society and, worst, they rejected the role delineated for them by diocesan authorities. Followers of the Free Spirit, Waldensians, and Cathars faced the power of the Inquisitor’s ecclesial sword. In the early thirteenth century, eighty “heretics,” twenty-three of who were women, were burned at the stake in Strassburg (Tucker 1992, 157). The Inquisitors were dedicated in preserving the “uniqueness of the sacrament of ordination” and the distinction between laity and clergy (Osheim 1990, 91). Therefore, women who took on religious duties traditionally vested on ordained clergy, like offering communion and pulpit preaching, became targets of severe repression. A key issue that surfaced dealt with the control of sacramental authority. Women who exercised clerical functions were regarded as rebels to be subdued. Such was the horrific end of Marguerite Porete, who was burned to death as a heretic in June of 1310. Marguerite had the audacity to preach and teach her mystical ideas by appealing to the authority of her own voice (Malone 2001, 178).

Sometimes women preachers escaped the punitive hand of the Roman hierarchy. The Church sanctioned and supported independent

women preachers as long as their practices remained within the boundaries set by ecclesial authorities. The maintenance of the boundary was necessary to deter any serious challenge to the status quo, and was instrumental in preserving the dominant standards set by the patriarchal Church. By establishing the social and moral limits by which women could legitimately participate in religious vocations, the Church's authority on matters of faith would remain unquestioned. Thus, they allowed only those women who did not challenge the status quo to practice their ministry. An example would be St. Liutberga whose "humility and submissiveness to the hierarchy had been carefully scrutinized before she was allowed to practice an individualistic form of religious life" (Tucker 1992, 138). She also voluntarily limited her work to women in her neighbourhood. Also, women who prophesied and "preached" without questioning the belief of woman's inferiority, and whose popularity was mostly based on "holiness and piety," were also given a free rein. A few of these women like Hildegard of Bingen, Rose of Viterbo, and Catherine of Siena even managed to become very influential within the ranks of the Church, including the papacy.

The antagonistic nature of anti-female campaigns was underscored with later decrees issued by the Church. In his *De Eruditione Praedicatorum*, Humbert of Romans (d. 1277) stated four reasons why women should not be allowed to preach or teach in public. The reasons are as follows: (1) women were lacking sense; (2) they are bound by a subject condition; (3) if women preach, they provoke lust; and (4) in memory of the foolishness of the first woman, "she taught [just] once and subverted the whole world" (Jansen 1998, 68). By c. 1234, Pope Gregory IX forbade all preaching by lay people. This prohibition was later enshrined in the *Book of Decretals*. Again, exemptions were made when the women concerned seem to have a special divine dispensation, like Mary Magdalene (whose popular image as *apostolorum apostola*, or "apostle to the apostles," placed her in a unique category) and Catherine of Alexandria. Both were believed to have received their mandate from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, under this extraordinary circumstance, they were exempted from the Pauline ban (Jansen 1998, 68). Through these decrees, the Roman Church acted as effec-

tive agents of control relying on the “powerfully expeditious nature of its doctrines as to the nature and origin of the female and the attribution to her alone of the dangers of evils it imputes to sexuality” (Millet 1970, 51).

The linguistic mode of containment imposed on women preachers by the institutional Church overlapped with another form of containment—that is, the spatial containment through the *cloister*. The imposition of the cloister by the ecclesiastical reforms of the ninth and tenth centuries could fall under what is commonly termed today in feminist discourse as “institutional (gender) politics.” Although the monastic life gave women genuine access to religious life and even a haven from violence during the early Middle Ages, by the ninth century, as the demand for clerical celibacy grew, monastic women were forced into enclosures. Malone explains, “...now enclosures is recommended as a protection for men from the wiles of women, and as a necessary imposition on women, whose weakness and immorality endangered all” (2000, 216). While the nuns of the fifth century “...‘preached’ to family, friends, and visitors...” and taught Scriptures (like Hild of Whitby), the women of Gregorian reform were absolutely forbidden to speak in public. While nuns of the early Middle Ages performed the same services as the monks, including quasi-liturgical services, the Council of Paris (829 C.E.) forbade the nuns from ringing the bells and lighting the candles for the liturgy, accusing them of polluting altar vessels by cleaning them (McNamara 1996, 153).

In considering the intrinsic (masculine) nature of sacramental ministry, differentiated power positions of medieval men and women obviously lie at the heart-of-the-matter. Thus, the denunciation of women preachers during the middle ages “rest on some general assumptions about disobedience to the Roman Church and the order of the priesthood” (Kienzle 1998, 103). In the manual *Adversus Waldensian Sectar Liber*, Bernard of Fontcaulde, declared that “an unauthorized layperson is labeled a heretic, a disobedient usurper of priestly office who should be treated as the Anti Christ and diseased person...shunned in public and not admitted into one’s home”(Kienzle 1998, 107). Whenever a woman preaches, that is, whenever she “expresses her voice about religious topics and in particular the Scrip-



tures,” she became a threat to the social order and a challenge to the clerical hierarchy. This disobedience is “a violation of her God-given condition of subordination, sinfulness and seductiveness”(Kienzle 1998, 107). The various aspects of the vigilant exclusion of women from the preaching office evidently come through the control of the conditions within which women place themselves in society. This control specifies not only linguistic prohibitions discussed earlier but also includes subjection to hierarchical rule, restriction of an audience, enclosure of women communities, disbarment from institutions of higher learning, and ban from the pulpit—exclusions pertaining to what were regarded to be sacred spaces. It seems that the strict enforcement of this ban on women’s speech was necessary because they were in fact engaged in public speech. From Hildegard to Heloise, women engaged in intelligent discourse, mostly directed against ecclesiastical corruption. Although banned from the universities and unable to participate in the major intellectual movements of that day, women’s spiritual writings carried with them revolutionary teachings that warranted increased legal sanctions.

This banishment of women from socio-cultural spaces was not limited to religious functions but extended to other forms of crafts and “useful arts” as well. David Noble found that,

It was during the so-called Carolingian Renaissance that men, through the power of the reformed imperial state, were able to monopolize many social spaces formerly shared with women, from the monasteries themselves to the rarefied realms of higher learning. The Carolingian sponsors of such efforts at strict sexual segregation were also avid supporters of development in the useful arts, and it was under their protection, in the writings of court philosopher John Scotus Erigena, that the ideological transformation of the useful arts began. (1997, 219)

Noble also found that during the twelfth century, aristocratic women exercised sizeable power in society because they were propertied and were influential in the princely courts. In Spain and Southern France, women like the powerful Eleanor of Aquitaine, Blanche in Champagne, and Blanche of Castile took part in municipal politics. Sisters Joanna and Margaret ruled Flanders, which was a centre of great economic

activity. Ruling women became patrons of both economic activity and urban settlement (1992,13). Ordinary women also became active in diverse economic activities in the rising towns of Europe, including textile making, brewing, baking, bookbinding, shoemaking, butchering, candle making, and sometimes as merchants and moneylenders. Yet, he concludes that the most far-reaching growth was among women who formed new monastic orders and heretical movements (see Ovitt 1986, 187). Male clerics met these new movements with resistance especially since many of these women were never subjected to the organization or control of the official orders. In response, increased official strictures were imposed on religious women.

Allowing women to enter the sacred ministry was believed to be a violation of the divine order, and would therefore lead to the downfall of institutions dedicated to the service of God. The class that derives its ancestry from Eve, Jezebel, Delilah, Bathsheba, and Salome, has no place in God's household (McLaughlin 1974, 251-252). Likewise, women who have breached the domain of men by learning a trade and joined guilds have crossed the line. The attitudes toward them during the Middle Ages was not far from society's attitude towards witches and heretics that deserved to be repressed and annihilated (Duerr 1985, 40-59). Misogynist literature echoing Aquinas and Aristotle again ruled the day. At the same time, women continued to be associated with evil and heresy. During this period, the separation of women became the hallmark of purity (McNamara 1996, 289). Thus, although the religious orders did not close their doors on women, they nonetheless isolated women from society. The final seclusion of religious women from society was sanctioned in 1293 when Pope Boniface VIII issued a bull that prevented women from leaving the convent without the bishop's consent (Tucker and Liefeld 1987, 154).

Interestingly enough, the sectarian movements embodied the "protest" against the traditional enclosures of Catholic women in convents. Unlike other women's orders, the Beguines were not cloistered and spent much of their time outside feeding the poor and caring for the sick. They also practiced an egalitarian ministry, at least at the beginning, when women occupied powerful leadership roles. The Waldensians, in turn, shocked the Roman Catholic Church by claiming that

women had the right to preach as much as men, and they permitted laypersons to administer the sacraments of communion and baptism. It is not clearly known, however, if they allowed women to minister to both men and women and not only among the women themselves. The Taborites, who were known as "the most radical branch of the Hussite movement," also permitted women to preach even if they were considered "fundamentalists." In most cases, the Taborite sisters were free to come and go and to receive visitors in their communities. Because of the absence of enclosures, they were able to practice their pastoral mission more effectively (Brenon 1998, 121). This freedom of religious women to move around in pursuit of their pastoral ministry, to be "free" to walk and converse on the streets and villages of society like men, is a significant point in understanding the repressive sexist and misogynist socialization that preoccupied Church leadership of the medieval age. Efforts by women to preserve this freedom faced severe opposition. Thus, it was not surprising that most of these sectarian groups were wiped out at the close of the thirteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Although there were a few spokesmen for women in the ministry, like Boniface, the Apostle to Germany, generally, there was an evident lack of true ministries afforded women during the medieval period. There is doubt that even those engaged in "professional ministries" were effective at all. Perhaps Clare's description of herself as "the useless servant of the monastery of Saint Damian," reflects the truer picture of many medieval religious women (Tucker and Liefeld 1987, 170).

### The Modern *Word*

Edwin M. Schur claims that "deviation...is essentially a matter of definition.... Social and moral meanings are, therefore, central elements in all deviance situations and issues"(1980, 132). Schur studies the politics of deviance, the uses of power, and asks how stigmatization takes place. He is convinced that at the heart of struggle for power and control among different groups is the desire to define basic social and moral meanings (1980, 133). The important players in this struggle for definition of meanings are also involved in persuading public opinion to pay allegiance to a particular interpretation of the symbolic that

governs partisan discourse. Likewise, postmodernists like Michel Foucault argues, that reigning discursive practices are a form of social constraint. Foucault is concerned with how discursive practices legitimize (or de-legitimized) social behaviours, practices, and institutions. Feminist theologians following along Schur and Foucault's line are convinced that symbols are important parts of societal communication. When a society or a movement finds itself facing a "crisis" of symbolic reproduction, it registers two common responses. On the one hand, those who have the power to order the "meaning-production" process in the society can attempt to reinforce traditional meanings and characters, and persecute those who attempt to deviate from the set standards. Robert I. Moore talks about this tendency in his book, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (1987). At times, as described by Mary Douglas, society would separate itself from the "deviants" for fear of sexual pollution and social change (1970). Medieval writers used this approach when they associated women preachers with Jezebel, the harlot, and set her over against Mary the mother of Jesus, who embodied purity and silence. Occasionally, the imposition of the "correct" meaning of popular social symbols or images was exercised indirectly but powerfully as when heretics were burned at the stakes, thus reinforcing the Church's authority to both legitimate and de-legitimate meanings and practices. The burning of heretics, and the inquisitorial procedures exercised by the Roman Church during the middle ages, qualify as ceremonial or dramaturgical acts aimed at deterring those who challenge inherited tradition.

Since defining deviance consists of "the construction of stigmatizing classifications, the broad problem categories under which given situations might be subsumed have great significance and therefore may become objects of dispute" (Schur 1980, 143). This process is operational in two key areas of modern women's struggles. First, feminist theologians launched critical studies of women's history in Christian tradition(s). In their research, they found it necessary to redefine basic Christian doctrines, and question the long-standing symbolism of God and Christ as male subjects. Second, feminist theologians also find it necessary to define what constitutes "ministry," especially the preaching ministry. These re-definitions are necessary

because the patriarchal structures that mainline denominational churches have inherited from the distant past are still intact and are effectively excluding women from “the realm of public symbol formation and decision making” (Johnson 1996, 4).

Mary Johnson argues that the daily language of preaching, worship, catechesis, and instruction conveys a message that God is male and is more fittingly addressed as male. This male symbol of God functions powerfully as it becomes clear that “this exclusive speech about God serves in manifold ways to support an imaginative and structural world that excludes and subordinates women” (1996, 5). As this male-dominant language about God is honoured as the “right” speech for God, it conversely assumes that female images cannot bear and disclose the image of God. This exclusive God language undermines the access of women to divine hierarchy. Johnson warns against assuming that “men, ruling of otherwise, form a universal norm for defining humanity and speaking about God” (1996, 22). This is especially significant to her situation since the Catholic Church still excludes women “from full participation in the sacramental system, from ecclesial centers of significant decision making, law making, and symbol making, and from official public leadership roles whether in governance or the liturgical assembly,” because their “femaleness is judged to be not suitable as metaphor for speech about God”(1996, 26).

Meanwhile, Letty Russell focused on the “power of naming,” and contended that, “language and symbolism of domination and subordination that reinforces patriarchal religious, social, and political institutions is to be found in the Bible as well as in our midst”(1987,43). Russell discovered that the power of naming is linked with the establishment of authority, and the legitimization of forms of control. For her, language is power and therefore a God-talk that is centred on male images and symbolism brings with it male forms of domination. She points out the crucial interrelationship between power and language: “Power determines the way language is used...at the same time, language itself is a powerful force in establishing positions of domination and subordination and in legitimating authority”(1987, 47). Throughout history we see how “women and marginal groups in society lose

the power of communication because the way they relate to others is not recognized by dominant groups”(Russell 1987, 46).

For women preachers who have been struggling for recognition, the biblical narrative continues to be the locus of conflict. For those in the Christian faith who read the Scriptures in a literalistic fashion, patriarchal images of God do not seem problematic: God [is] the Father, [is] the Son, [is] the King, [is] the Lord, is adequate if not preferred. Christian feminists however have pointed to the abundant metaphors for God that offers new ways of speaking about God. Somehow, the predominantly male imagery used for God in Christian messages reinforces the belief in a “great white Father.” Thus, male clergy play the major role in ordained ministry. Since women are often disqualified from interpreting the Scriptures, a “theft of language” has occurred, and women are unable to claim their historic heritage (Russell 1987, 46). Russell notes that “the metaphors we use are powerful God-talk, for they determine the way we think about God and about ourselves as men and women, created in God’s image”(1987, 53). As long as God-talk or theology flourish under the auspices of sexism, women will continually be subjected to distorted patterns of relationships backed by legitimated speech, and will never find their place in the community of equals. That is why a “woman-preacher” continues to be one of the most disorienting and destabilizing sights in local churches. As “Christian priests in the Middle Ages used Latin invocations to draw the power of the Christian God to transform bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ,”<sup>5</sup> so clergymen of today use normative male language to transform the world into their image. Just as this power to alter the physical world is reserved to the priest in “the very strict context of the Mass,”<sup>6</sup> so also is preaching reserved in the context of the male pulpit.

However, it is also important to point out that for a brief period, in the early 1900s, women in the evangelical traditions found significant access to the pulpit ministry. This turn of the tide for evangelical women deserves a brief examination since the phenomenon reveals how group interests shape symbolical practices and how moral meanings govern partisan discourse.

In her well-documented study of evangelical women, Janette Hassey found notable “variant” models for women’s ministries during the turn-of-the-century. In contrast to her initial theory that it was difficult for women to enter the ministry, especially the pulpit ministry because of gender discrimination, she found instead that evangelicals actually insisted on the equality of women based on Scriptures. She claims that evangelicals believed that a literal approach to the Bible, especially regarding prophecy, demanded the leadership of women (1986, xii). She also asserts that based on the popular evangelical literature circulating then, evangelical leaders like D. L. Moody, or even self-avowed fundamentalists like W. B. Riley and J. B. Straton, taught that women preachers are in line with biblical tradition (xiii). Furthermore, Hassey proposes that the participation of evangelical women in the abolitionist cause may have contributed considerably to the acceptance of women in Church leadership roles. Several conclusions can be drawn from Hassey’s work.

First, among the early evangelical circles, the debate on whether women should be allowed to preach was more directly linked with the authority of the Scriptures and issues of interpretation of texts. Since evangelicals defined “minister” as pastor/preacher and not the sacramental role of the “priest,” they were not interested in debating whether women could be representatives of “Christ.” The issue of women’s ordination revolved more on the interpretation of biblical texts banning women from the ministry and not necessarily on a theological dogma concerning the “nature” of the priesthood itself.

Second, some evangelical leaders argued that since the issue also revolved on the “symbolic” of the minister, then the success of female leadership should not be overlooked. “Common sense, public opinion, and the blessed results of female preaching” should prove women’s *call* to the ministry (Hassey 1986, 100). This claim is an important clue for understanding how contexts, interests, and biblical interpretations were tied into the early evangelical debate. For evangelical women then, the contested Pauline ban mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:34<sup>7</sup> should be “applied only to the first-century babbling, immoral, uneducated women, and not to the devout, intelligent American Churchwomen of that day” (Hassey 1986, 102). On the same note, and in a

strongly opposite direction from traditional Catholic dogma, Baptist A. J. Gordon and Methodist Katherine Bushnell sought to root women's call to the ministry on the atoning work of Christ and not in the fall or Eve's sin.

Lastly, toward a more practical end, Hassey referred to the interweaving of Church ministry with social activism. She found that women who actively participated in social causes then gained a wider audience. Their participation with the temperance and suffrage crusades enabled them to develop skills necessary for the ministry. In the end, however, Hassey states that the gradual decline of the public participation of women in the ministry could be traced from the convergence of powerful forces and the counter-pressures that these groups exerted over the general society. For one, fundamentalist separatists subcultures appeared, and became close allies of right-wing politics, advocating extremist views that led to the restriction of women's opportunities in the public arena. Simultaneously, with the increasing institutionalization of the churches came the development of new criteria for ministry. The new ethos demanded a more educated clergy. But since women were gradually excluded from theological institutions, they were not able to get the necessary training for the ministry. Likewise, fundamentalist seminaries like Dallas Seminary became influential in the training of a new generation of male clergy (Hassey 1986, 139). The professionalization of the ministry at the turn-of-the-century relegated women to supportive positions as "charismatic" forms of ministry that once empowered women to preach and teach became less recognized in formal Church services. As Hassey notes, "concern for *social propriety* even dictated that only men take a service position like ushering in many congregations" [*italics mine*] (1986, 141).

Finally, the fundamentalist reaction to social change sealed the fate of most women attempting to prepare for pastoral ministry. As radical feminism challenged the social mores of the post-World War I era, churches identified women preachers and pastors with the "liberated women" who threatened traditional values and defied appropriate women's roles. Conservative churches bewailed the unsettling shifts in women's roles and behaviours, and were convinced that these changes



jeopardized the entire social order itself. This backlash also found biblical ammunition with the use of a fundamentalist exegesis where writers reverted to ancient and medieval views about women. For example, support of women preachers was equated with the denial of biblical inerrancy, while other dispensationalists interpreted women's leadership in the church as an evil sign of the coming of the end of times, like the "the whore of Babylon" portrayed in the book of Revelation (Hassey 1986, 143). Hassey's study calls attention to the fact that in the contest for meaning, in a given time and in a given place, certain definitions gain positions of dominance.

What is missing in Hassey's study, though, is the analysis of the critical role of the pulpit in shaping public opinion. The Protestant ethos permeated American culture during the mid-nineteenth century. The preachers upheld the hegemony that characterized the culture and "helped to mold the beliefs and behaviors of the nation. Through their *words*, they inspired the reforms that dominated the century, set moral standards, and planted ideas that often blossomed into social and political assumptions" [*italics mine*](Zink-Sawyer 2000, 2). Since this was the period that saw the beginnings of the woman's rights movement it is significant to note that it was also the period known for the vehement opposition to feminine equality by the ecclesiastical world: "Women preaching and speaking on behalf of woman's rights became a double subversive activity, a two-fold act of defiance against cultural norms, as these women defied propriety both through their *words* and through their actions" [*italics mine*](Zink-Sawyer 2000, 2). Hence, the pulpit became the locus of social control and women failed to get the "air of legitimacy" that they needed in order to become mainstream.

### Conclusion: *Eschatological Word*

In their attempt to respond to what can only be metaphorically referred to as the "banishment of Eve from the garden," feminist theologians find a rich source of wisdom in the eschatological teachings of the Scriptures. These women have become aware that change is possible despite centuries of subjugation. During the early years of the woman's rights movement, woman's rights preachers "confirmed the

rightful place of preaching within the realm of persuasive speech” (Zink-Sawyer 2000, 8). And although the influence of the pulpit in the broader American public arena no longer holds the same sway as before, the significance of the church and the pulpit as vehicles for social transformation remains compelling. As women during the Middle Ages found unconventional and mostly unorthodox platforms for public speaking, so did nineteenth-century women find that women suffrage preachers appeared to have contributed to radical social changes in the American culture. They were successful because they were willing to use the influence of their ecclesiastical offices (what little they have of it) to encourage the grassroots acceptance of woman’s rights. They were bold to support their actions with theological justifications, which were often adverse to traditional religious beliefs. They were prepared to go wherever they could to spread their message, be it in convention podiums or before legislative bodies: “Female and male preachers alike redefined sacred space by bridging the ecclesiastical and secular worlds as they promoted the very political issue of rights for women” (2000, 8). In other words, they were willing to invade the bastions of social normalcy.

According to recent deviance theory, the rise of the new “market structure,” and the accompanying cultural and social transformation brought about by the dominance of “market culture,” renders the idea of “deviant” for describing personality and social behaviour less and less meaningful. Instead, what we have is a redefinition of normalcy that absorbs “bizarre” forms of behaviour and/or “different” forms of human existence (Taylor 1999, 4). The idea of the “deviant” is now replaced by a “world in which an unpredictable series of parasitical and unwanted ‘Others’ are singled out for momentary ‘social censure’ and perhaps for the imposition of penalty and exclusion” (1999, 4). However, despite the alleged disintegration of the idea of the “deviant,” deviance theory continues to commit to the ideas of social control and penalty as explanatory categories. Thus, even in the most advanced market societies today, social control and penalties remain necessary to pacify the level of anxiety and/or panic among the citizens in the face of a crisis. Any such crisis could be triggered by something that is identified by an agency as crime, as well as anything related to ques-

tions of social justice (1999, 7). At the same time, deviance theory continues to explore *marginal* worlds within otherwise monolithic and orderly societies. Connections must still be made between the social constitution of the “normal” and the “Others,” and the increasing expansion of social control over modern lives. It is within this framework that feminist theology can be classified as “deviant” speech.

The official and strict separation of Church and state makes the case of American Christianity unique. Legally, the state cannot compel religious bodies to institute internal changes. At the same time, unlike Christendom, the state no longer infiltrates the machineries of the church and vice-versa. There is no overarching mechanism of control over the lives of the people. Officially, no case law can pronounce a woman a heretic, a witch, or a deviant if she speaks in public. It is apparent then that the prime weaver of the symbolic social order for the life of the Christian woman remains the Church. Thus, a solution to the crisis of identity for the female preacher, and her marginalization to the world of the “unwanted Others,” has to be found within the ecclesial establishment. The problem, however, is that feminist speech remains anomalous and characteristically deviant.

Feminist speech is “deviant” speech because it continues to breach the representational and historical boundaries between the public and the private spheres. It wants to critique the ordering of discourse where language is held hostage by the male tongue. Feminist theology criticizes the belief system that sustains these boundaries inherited from the patriarchal tradition of Western civilization. By breaking down the stronghold of androcentric God language, women can claim public (and sacred) space for themselves. According to Rebecca Chopp, feminist language is a “discourse that seeks to rend and renew—by questioning, interrupting, correcting, and subverting the basic terms of the order—the modern configuration of time and space”(1991, 23). Feminist theology understands the power of the Word. It recognizes that language not only has reflective capacity but constitutive capacities as well (1991, 25). It is central to self-formation and self-knowledge. That is why women remained invisible throughout much of human history. In the absence of language, they were not able to change the physical nature of their reality.

Second, feminist speech remains “deviant” because it offers “different” forms of human existence, which although in a postmodern sense could be assimilated by an insatiable marketplace, remains subject to regulatory management. Feminist vision encourages a “different” form of human existence characterized by equality and not domination, participation and not exclusion, and one that subverts the accepted social order. When “feminism moves from critique of oppressive systems and practices to vision and construction of new alternatives, it moves into the realm of the unknown” (Scholz 2003, 68). Therein, women become agents of chaos and fear, like the Beguines and the Cathars; and instruments of reforms, like the mystics, the martyrs, and the women suffragists. All of them paid a penalty.

Finally, as eschatological Word, feminist theological speech remains the speech of the “Other/s.” It persists in proclaiming the history of suffering and exclusion of women in society. When theological discourse is captivated by androcentric God language, women are prevented from having access to the Word, and thus, constantly relate to this exclusive language as the “Other.” As the speech of the “Other” or the “outsider,” feminist theological speech critiques the idolatrous pretensions of those who manipulate the life-giving force of language. Thus, Hispanic women use liturgies in their churches to express their resistance and hope in a “context of celebratory self-expression,” while Asian women emphasize the “gender-inclusive renewal of liturgy and language that draws on life-giving symbols and stories from indigenous traditions, as well as Christianity” (Ruether 1998, 235-237). As women from all religious traditions try to recapture the mystery of the sacrifice of Jesus in the Eucharist, they challenge the world-order created by almost two millennia of misogynistic language. Every time they proclaim the continuity of their experience with the life of the suffering Christ in their liturgies, they delegitimize an ecclesiastical culture and theological teaching that claims women cannot bear the image of Christ.

Just as teaching in the “vernacular” witnessed to a woman-initiated spiritual innovation during the medieval era, feminist theological speech is the new “vernacular” for the women of today. It gives voice to women’s everyday life that has been deemed irrelevant to tradition-

ally male-oriented theology. In this vernacular language, feminist theology moves out of the male-written script for women's lives and instead moves in the opposite direction towards New Creation. Feminist theological speech remains the deviant speech of the "others" who anticipates the coming new world order, proclaiming the "is" of the "not yet." This new "vernacular" is a "new language for a completely new phenomenon" because feminists design it as they go along, "making their own paths as they walked it" (Malone 2001, 273).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The debated passages include I Corinthians 11:3, 14:34-35; I Timothy 2:9-15; Colossians 3:18; Ephesians 5:22-23. Patristic fathers such as Tertullian (*On the Apparel of Women*), Jerome (*Against Jovinian*), and Augustine (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*), capitalized on these passages and were instrumental in spreading negative attitudes toward women (von Schurmann 1998, xii).

<sup>2</sup> For Tertullian, women had no business in public life. Women were expected to practice the virtues of obedience to men, silence, and chastity. A woman who raises her voice in public offended both the command to silence and to purity (Kreuzeder 2002, 2).

<sup>3</sup> It must be noted that from the earliest times, the office of the "deaconesses" was an "ordained" or "consecrated" position. The deaconesses, like the deacons, were consecrated by prayer and the laying of hands in a public ceremony. By 533 C.E. the office of the deaconess was abolished because of the supposed weakness of the female sex. With the abolition of the office of the deaconess, clerical offices were also closed to women (Tucker and Liefeld 1987, 132-133).

<sup>4</sup> It must be pointed out, however, that the Reformation Churches' position towards women was ambivalent at best. Ruether maintains that "Protestant Reformers generally saw female rule as inherently unnatural, unlawful, and contrary to Scripture, although they had to come to terms with female ruler who favored the Reformation territories" (1998, 114). She continues to claim that Reformation leaders like Luther and Calvin reaffirmed the "headship" of men over women. For Luther, for instance, although agreeing that women share in the image of God, redemption did not change their lesser status; while Calvin's teaching on the exclusion of women from government and from preaching and teaching in the Church was based on the doctrine of "divine

ordinance wherein sovereignty in domestic and state affairs was given exclusively to men" (1998, 124).

<sup>5</sup> Comoletti and Drout 2001, 113-141.

<sup>6</sup> Comoletti and Drout 2001, 3.

<sup>7</sup> "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the Churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says..." (Anonymous, 1989).

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