INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

Bell & Howell Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA

UMI
800-521-0600
FEMINIST ENCOUNTERS WITH SYMBOL, MYTH, AND RITUAL: MARY DALY, ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, AND ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER

BY

DARLENE M. JUSCHKA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN CONFORMITY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY, GRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

© Copyright by Darlene M. Juschka 1998
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-41445-0
There are a number of people in my life to whom I owe gratitude for the support given while I wrote this thesis. Too many, in fact, to name them all, but to them I send a smile and thoughts of warm gratitude. To those closer, my committee, Professors Roger Hutchinson, Johan Aikten, and Marsha Hewitt, I wish to thank for their unending support of this project. Roger was always there to give advice, a job in order that I could pay the rent, and a sense of calmness which grounded me in those moments when I felt rent and torn like a cloud in the face of great and gusty wind. Johan’s bright intelligence, and great empathy allowed me to believe in myself. while Marsha’s critical gaze and limitless wit help me to sharpen my academic skills and smile while I did it. To these three very import people in my life I own a large debt of gratitude.

Throughout this process, Lesley Lewis, the Centre’s untiring Departmental Officer, was an invaluable guide and friend, while Thomas McIntire provided both sound advice and was always supportive, especially in securing funding for myself.

A very large and important aspect of my academic development I owe to working as an editor on *MTSR* and my colleagues on the journal. Ann Baranowski, one of the founders, invited me to join the group, and in this evinced a faith in me I did not have myself. These people, Ann. Willi Braun, Arthur McCalla and Russell McCutcheon were supportive and helpful colleagues. Each of them encouraged me, and to each of them I owe a thanks for their support of, and assistance to, my academic work. I am exceedingly pleased that beyond our work together I enjoy good friendships with each of them.

The dear friends who were close by, Helen May Eaton, Stephanie Walker, Ellen Goldberg, and Linda Kelso I wish to thank for their belief in, and support of me. I basked in the sunlight of their intellectual keenness, and my own skills grew therein. Johannes Wolfart and
Clarice Kraemer-Wolfart are two people whose entrance into my life and the work of this dissertation cannot go unmentioned. These two people were very supportive friends and colleagues whose intellectual insights proved invaluable in my work. And, of course, there is Suzanne Rae, an old and dear friend, who supported my rather rash decision to take up the challenge of the PhD and never once condemned me for jettisoning the more pragmatic necessities of life.

My children, Justin and Amy, also never condemned me for throwing away the possible security of a nine-to-five job, a security that may have made their lives just a little easier. In all my efforts, disappointments, tears, confusion, and joy they stood beside me and believed in me even when I did not believe in myself. This, I think, takes a great deal of love and I thank them both for such a wonderful gift.

Finally, I wish to thank Bill Arnal for his constant and unfailing support in the writing of this dissertation. Without weariness he listened to, and read, just one more thought, one more paragraph, one more page. He argued with me, challenged me, commended me, and was always there to tell me I could do this thing—that I could write it and finish it—and so I did. His incredibly sharp mind forced me to sharpen my own skills, and allowed me to confront the limitations of my own thinking. For this I thank him very much.

With the greatest warmth and regard I thank these people, and my fellow students for the contribution they made to my life and the writing of my dissertation.
The feminist encounter with, and figuring of, the discursive categories of myth, symbol, and ritual have been ongoing processes in the discipline of Religious Studies. In the work of three significant feminist theologians, Mary Daly, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Rosemary Radford Ruether, the categories of myth, symbol, and ritual are central. These categories are not, however, autonomous. Rather, they frequently interconnect with the categories of language, history, and political action. Drawing on a variety of theories that allow them to deconstruct the androcentrism and misogyny found in religious practices, specifically located in the West, they reread, reconceive, and reconstruct those religious traditions they locate themselves with.

The study laid out in this text is one that focuses on Daly’s, Schüssler Fiorenza’s, and Radford Ruether’s understanding and use of the categories of symbol, myth, and ritual respectively. To further the analysis of their feminist projects of reclamation, I have examined their development of symbol, myth, and ritual as they intersect with theories of language, hermeneutics and history, and ideology critique and identity politics. In order to engage their feminist positions, I have further intersected their feminist theoretical positions with feminist theories developed in regard to poetry, epistemology, and difference. The study, then, broadly consists of an axiomatic engagement with their work: symbol, myth and ritual interconnected with language, history, and political action which are then further interconnected with feminist poetics, feminist epistemology, and difference.

Throughout this study I will continually contest their untheorized use of the categories of symbol, myth and ritual. These categories, or sub-genres in the field of religious studies, have not been theorized by the feminists within this analysis and I will point out the difficulties this lack of theorization introduces into their work. My intention is not to call for a rejection of the work...
Daly, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Radford Ruether have done, but rather to interact critically with their work in order to demonstrate the limitations therein, and hopefully generate further avenues of inquiry. It is my hope to extend not only feminist discourses within the field of Religious Studies, but also non-feminist discourses that seek to employ the categories of symbol, myth, and ritual.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction** 1

Chapter I Feminist Theory and the Categories of Language, Epistemology, and Difference 14

1. The Context 14
2. Language 17
3. Epistemological Locations and the Category of Women’s Experience 22
4. Difference 37
5. Feminism and Religious Studies 43

Chapter II Mary Daly and the Elements of Language 56

1. Mary Daly: An Intellectual Biography 56
2. Daly and Language 70
3. Critical Analysis of Mary Daly’s Theory of Linguistics 98

Chapter III Mary Daly’s Symbolic 111

1. Mary Daly and the Pirating of Symbols 111
2. Be-ing and the Sublime 145
3. Concluding Remarks on Symbolism in Mary Daly 152

Chapter IV Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: A Feminist Hermeneutics 165

1. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: An Intellectual Biography 165
2. Schüssler Fiorenza, Christian Myth, and a Hermeneutics of Suspicion 189
3. Concluding Remarks 216

Chapter V Schüssler Fiorenza, Feminist Myth, and History 221

1. New Historicism, Hayden White, and Schüssler Fiorenza’s History from the Ground Up: The Jesus Movement 221
2. Feminist History, Schüssler Fiorenza, and the Christian Missionary Movements 265
3. Feminist Standpoint Theory and Schüssler Fiorenza’s Feminist Epistemology 292
4. Concluding Remarks 303

Chapter VI Rosemary Radford Ruether and Liberation Theology 306

1. Rosemary Radford Ruether: An Intellectual Biography 306
2. Latin American Liberation Theology, Christian Basic Communities, and Radford Ruether: Possibilities of Political Action 324
3. Liberation Theology and Christian Basic Communities 370
4. Concluding Remarks 383

Chapter VII Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women Church, Ritual, And Difference 394
1. Radford Ruether, Women Church, and Ritual 401
2. Ritual Theory and Radford Ruether 441
3. Radford Ruether, Difference, and Identity Politics 450
4. Concluding Remarks 467

Conclusion 470

References 476
INTRODUCTION

Symbol, myth, and ritual are sub genres in the field of Religious Studies. They intersect with area concerns, phenomenological concerns, historical, concerns, social concerns, etc. Often within the study of religion myth, symbol, and ritual are left untheorized. When left untheorized they are elaborated within Religious Studies as the sui-generis kernels of truth that mark the rupture between the social world and the divine world. That myth, symbol, and ritual function in this way is indicative of their need to be theorized. As kernels of truth, and moments of that encounter with truth in the form of deity, nature, or whatever other is encountered, myth, symbol, and ritual cannot be taken into a project of study without a clear picture as to how they function. inform, and undergird or call into question power structures.

Myth, symbol, and ritual clearly intersect with power. They function in a number of ways to legitimate the self understanding, and world view of the group or people who employ them. Myth often functions as a foundational narrative that defines how a culture came about, for example, the exodus myth and the genesis myth are foundational myths for Judaism and Christianity. These myths are foundational in that they locate groups of people in the world, how these people relate to each other, and to other groups, how the world functions and their natural place therein, and their relationship with the divine or something “other” as the legitimating force in creation. Myths empower our sense of self in that they provide a mythical-historical identity. Therefore, the rise of Christianity from within Judaism, and its subsequent separation from Judaism, along with Christianity’s self conception as evolving act as aspects of the mythic-historical identity of Christianity. Christianity is at once Judaism and not Judaism. It takes Judaism’s history but leaves Judaism behind.
INTRODUCTION

Foundational mythic narratives can be seen, in part, as an attempt to explain the whys of human existence. These whys, answered in mythic narrative, reflect the social-historical location of the group who generates or appropriates the myth, eg., Christianity from Judaism.

Interpretation of myths can vary over the centuries, but each interpretation will reflect the historical social location of the interpreter(s). In the dominant discourse, then, that is the ruling discourse of those in power who determine how the world will be understood, a myth can be used in order to legitimate the subordination of a group of people, and in the instance of a feminist analysis, those subordinated are women. Feminist reinterpretations of myths challenge the dominant interpretation and demonstrate its ideological tendency. So for example, in the reading of the genesis myth, women as far back at the 14th century have argued against patriarchal interpretation of the text which insists that God established women as subordinate to men, and that Eve’s (as prototype of all women) error brought about a natural condemnation of women. These women have pointed to the fact that only Eve apparently had the wherewithal to speak to the serpent, and that Adam dumbly followed her lead. It was Eve who reasoned and Adam who acquiesced without thought. Eve’s actions emerged from her brain, Adam’s from his stomach. Therefore, a feminist interpretation will come to a different conclusion reading the same foundational myth. However, frequently, feminist readings against the grain of myths are not attempts to found a civilization based on the subordination of the male, but rather their desire is to bump up against and challenge a reading of the text that supports ideological suppositions concerning the natural subordination of women.

Myths, symbols, and rituals are, among other things, ideological instruments that are used, in part, to define a culture or group of people, used to demarcate differences between one
INTRODUCTION

They can be seen to explain or legitimate the ordering of existence, how things really are, they are both the negative and positive ground of our ethos, and inform and express that world ethos. They support and confirm the knowledge held by the group, a knowledge which is itself replete with myths and symbols, and often dependent upon ritual for its legitimation, i.e., conviction. Groups of people, societies, cultures, etc. participate in, practice, and behave according to belief systems, or an ethos which is in part constructed by an epistemology concerned to explain and understand the nature of existence.

Ethos, as I am using it, refers to the underlying system that informs one's world view. Generally, one's ethos is formed by one's society and/or culture, one's group etc. and is nuanced by one's interpretation of the known, i.e., philosophy. An ethos can be a philosophy one lives by, and ethics that which one practises in one's life. An ethos and ethics can rest upon teleology (design or purpose in nature, final causes) or etiology (origin of causes) that one imposes upon the universe. For instance the universe understood as operating with the mathematical precision of a clock is an ontology (nature of existence) that was initiated by the discoveries of Copernicus (15th -16th) and Galileo (16th-17th century). Their discoveries lead to the development of an ethos that functioned throughout the Enlightenment (18th century). This ethos, however, has been replaced in the West, for the most part, by a model of the universe that is understood to be more interdependent and relational. Einstein’s theory of relativity reflects and confirms this change of an ethos in the West. Now this ontological position understands that the perspective of the observer is important in his or her description of the world. An ethos then, can be reflected in, and by, such things as ritual practices, i.e., praying; meditating; going to church, temple, mosque,
INTRODUCTION

synagogue; lighting candles; casting circles, burying the dead; marriage; puberty rites; healing, etc. What we believe is exemplified and structured by such practices. Myths legitimate this ethos and symbols are natural signs that connect this ethos with the living organic world. The mere fact that one believes or disbelieves indicates a functioning ethos. Myths, symbols, and rituals undergird actions, behaviour, cultural narratives, they are scripts that tell us how it is we should be and explain being in the world at large. Because they intersect with something considered the sacred, i.e., God, nature, etc., they often act as scripts or texts which naturalize and mystify what is really socially determined behaviour.

Ideology has both its negative and positive aspects. An ideology provides identity, explains existence, and allows one to find a niche in that existence—existence has meaning. For example, a cosmogonic myth (cosmos = world; gonic - gonia = creation, begetting, seed, origin) will explain the origin of the world, explains how things came to be, it will order existence so that existence is not random but has meaning and, consequently, one’s place in that existence also becomes meaningful. An anthropogonic myth (anthrop - anthropos = human; gonia the same as above) of human creation, such as Genesis 3 or the Enuma Elish (Babylonia), the latter of which is both cosmogonic and anthropogonic, explains how humans came into existence. This myth begins by locating deity or deities in close proximity with the humans concerned, hence it acts a foundation for these humans and their connection with the sacred and its preference for them, but also determines their “right” or “true” role in existence: how one should behave, what is good, what is evil, and one’s relation to existence. Many of these myths often explain why humans die, and the origin of death is frequently connected with an oversight, an error, or a falling way from.
Demogonic myths (demo - demos = people, culture, society, gonia the same as above), however, are concerned not with the individual but with the social body. Demogonic myths describe and prescribe the social body—the whole of the group. They mark boundaries between a “them” and an “us,” and demarcate what essentially is indicative of an “us.” The demogonic myth establishes boundaries around the group, and establishes boundaries within the group. It legitimates the social structure of the group in relation to itself, the world around, and whatever legitimating force that it is connected to, i.e., god, nature, etc. Demogonic myths describe/prescribe, explain and legitimate the interrelations among the group, the group with nature, with god, or whatever “other” acts as its referent. The exodus from Egypt is a demogonic myth. In the desert, according to the myth, these people were taught how to be Hebrews, how to relate to god as a group, how the group was structured, i.e., hierarchies and naturalized social locations, and how to mark the group as separate, i.e., circumcision, and who was worth marking, i.e., men. Demogonic myths most explicitly intersect with and undergird ideological social formations. Myths often act as foundational and symbols are invested with meaning which legitimate the myth as symbols arise from a realm distant from the human realm—the sacred, while ritual will be the re-enactment, and in this re-enactment will legitimate both the mythic and symbolic.

Ideology as an explicit and implicit explanation of the context we enter, and which enters us, upon birth, is one we cannot escape as it both our context and content. When ideology interpellates us, either as group or individual, we recognize ourselves as subjects or objects in the moment of interpellation (Althusser, 1994). It infuses how we produce our realities from the moment we are born. We are born with a psychological predisposition to accept and validate our
INTRODUCTION

cultures. Symbols, myths, and rituals provide a metaphysical legitimation and a naturalistic explanation as to that culture’s conception of the world encountered. We have little sense of our construction of myths, symbols, and rituals, they are in place and as they are in place they are always already there. They supersede us, are there when we enter into existence, and therefore must be natural—in nature—and therefore true.

Our notion of reality is created/expressed, infused, supported, and engendered by language, and the categories of myth and symbol have particular connections with language. In the linguistic turn “[t]he world” argues Ludwig Wittgenstein, “is the totality of facts, not things” (Wittgenstein in Gerhart and Russell, 1984: 3). Language is symbolic in that it is a conceptual process of meaning making, i.e., a chair is something you sit on, running is a quick movement of the legs. Myth and symbol (and ritual in its way) partake of the natural as language partakes of the natural. Myth and symbol are dependent upon language for their expression. Ritual in its expression will use another kind of language, one of practice affiliated with experience in order to make its connection to the natural. In this, ideology will intersect with the “always already there” (myth, symbol, and ritual, as forms of speech or language) in order to empower and disempower groups of people, but also to provide a knowable context that creates a sense of comfort. “Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things. A tree is a tree. Yes, of course. But a tree as expressed by Minou Droucet is no longer quite a tree, it is a tree which is decorated, adapted to a certain type of consumption, laden with literary self-indulgence, revolt, images, in short with a type of social usage which is added to pure matter” (Barthes, 1972: 109, author’s italics).
INTRODUCTION

Now all of what I have indicated may sound rather deterministic, in that we as humans are locked into ways of being that precedes us. How can we think against, around, or more than what is already there? We know however that we change, and change those systems we are born into. How can this be explained? How do we re-describe reality? What is it in thought, language, and experience that allow us to move from the known to the unknown? These categories are what feminists like Mary Daly, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Rosemary Radford Ruether will use in an attempt to re-describe Christianity, or, in the instance of Daly, to invent a feminist spirituality.

Although language precedes us, its multivalence (combining capacities), its polysemy (multiple meanings), its infinite semantic variables achieved on the level of the sentence, i.e., metaphor, etc., do, in fact, provide for ways of re-describing existence. But the desire to describe/inscribe existence is securely located in the social historical conditions that bring about change, i.e., nigger as a pejorative term applied to African Americans which was appropriated by African Americans (post civil rights movement) as a term that took up the pejorative in nigger in order to make mean differently, to mean oppression shared by a group on the basis of race, and then marked members of that group by the use of the term which further connoted sister and brotherhood under oppression. As the means of production, social relations, and ideological formations shift in time, so do the ways in which the world is represented. As feminists reentered the political and epistemological fields in the late fifties and early sixties, so too one finds language giving evidence to their entrance. Terms, like patriarchy, take on new meaning, or terms like androcentrism, phallocentrism, phallogocentrism, etc. are introduced into the language. On the level of myth, symbol and ritual, feminists challenged these sub-genres
recognizing that women are absent and erased from, and objectified, in these genres. Knowledge
production, ideology, and human subjectivity came under their critical analysis in order to
determine these problematics of absence, erasure, and objectification, and old ways of being
were questioned, while new ways of being were proffered.

The intention of this thesis is to examine how three significant and influential feminists in
the area of Christian theology have dealt with the sub-genres of symbol, myth, and ritual. These
three fields of study require theorizing on the level of how they interact with epistemology,
require theorizing in regard to feminist theory, and require theorizing in regard to their adherence
to conservatism or their potential to initiate radical change. In this then I will examine each of
these three feminists in association with a corresponding field of study: symbol, myth and ritual.

In chapter one I attempt to essentially map out feminism as it intersects with Religious
Studies, and the feminist tenets that have influenced Religious Studies. Feminists in Religious
Studies have utilized arguments and insights engendered by feminists in a variety of fields of
study in order to challenge the epistemic boundaries of Religious Studies. Three areas of
contestation language, epistemology, and difference, found in feminist studies, I connect with the
sub-genres of symbol, myth, and ritual, respectively. The feminists I analyze, in this thesis,
locate themselves specifically in each one of these fields or sub-genres, so that, Daly, although
developing foundation myths for feminist spirituality, will largely achieve her feminist project
via a contestation of language and symbol. Schüssler Fiorenza, however, will locate her area of
contestation in the discipline of early Christian history in relation to the foundation myths of
Christianity, Jesus as the founder, and Paul as the propagator of Christianity. She contests the
epistemic field of early Christian history and engages mythology in her rereading the foundation
myths of Christianity. She does this in light of feminist history, new historicism and while employing hermeneutical techniques by which to unseat the epistemic frame of Christian origins. Although feminist analyses of language also come up in Schüssler Fiorenza's work, central to her analysis will be a remythologizing of Christianity. Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her work focuses upon male ideology and challenges the legitimating practices located therein. She will propose that a dialectical interaction between Catholic feminism and the Catholic institution of the church is necessary in order that the negative implications of ideology be circumvented. In this process, Radford Ruether will pay particular attention to the feminist epithet “the personal is the political” and argue that all theorizing must begin with praxis. Praxis, the lived of everyday lives, as the action that undergirds, reflects, and promotes out thinking is an idea that may well have lead Radford Ruether to propose that ritual can engender the necessary symbolic action that can bring about a feminist vision of the world. Although Radford Ruether also engages with myth and symbol, myth on the level of the mythology that informs Latin American liberation theology, or symbol in the form of female designations for the divine, it is her interest in ritual and its potential that prompted the writing of her feminist rituals. Ritual effects these new ways of knowing, and is itself affected by these ways of knowing. Ritual, in Radford Ruether's work, is the embodied action of feminist theorizing in Christian theology. Its embodiment means, then, that different social locations, geopolitical locations, and different ways of knowing the world will be engaged during the ritual process. It is here, then, that the contesting discourse of difference, found in feminist theorizing and the grounding epistemic claim of women's experience in feminist theorizing, interacts with Radford Ruether's ritualizations.

In chapter two I take up the feminist concern with language and systematically analyze
Daly’s use of language pointing to the promises and problematics encountered in Daly’s work. The potential is found in her play with language, and a play wherein she depends upon the fluidity and polysemic aspects of language. The problematics, however, are often generated from Daly’s assumptions in regard to language as fixed, in her belief that the word and the thing are the same, and in her search for origins. Her tendency to ontologize language, and symbols therein, stands in contradiction to her dependence upon the fluidity and non-fixity of language.

In chapter three I continue my examination of Daly, but now focus on her understanding of symbol, and her development of symbols in relation to her feminist spirituality. She will invert symbols in order that, according to Daly, the true or original meaning can surface. Patriarchy, according to Daly has inverted symbol systems and one must turn them back on their feet in order to ascertain the original and true meanings. Working within the framework of reversal she elaborates a symbol system for feminist spirituality, a system that understands symbols to be disconnected from the social and historical realm and generated by, and located in, an “other” realm, the divine realm of true be-ing. In order to engage Daly’s feminist ontology, in this chapter, I call upon the rhetorical strategy of the sublime as is it developed in poetry. In light of a feminist reiteration of the sublime, I challenge Daly’s sublime of Be-ing on the level that it is a rigid and reified construction. My strategy is to exemplify how Daly’s be-ing, in large part, reflects a patriarchal understanding of being. Daly’s ontology, and her theories of language and symbol do not challenge the form of hegemonic discourse, simply the contents.

Chapters four and five will consist of my engagement with Schüssler Fiorenza’s work in Christian origins. In chapter four I examine the hermeneutical techniques she develops in order to undercut patriarchal Christian history. I examine the narrative structures that inform her
INTRODUCTION

feminist hermeneutics and point to the problems I see, problems such as her entanglement in the founding farther great man narrative that underscores much of the history of the West. In chapter five I continue my examination of Schüssler Fiorenza’s work in light of new historicism, and feminist history and indicate problematics I perceive in her remythologizing of Christian origins. She both resists and is inattentive to problems located in the area of Christian origins. She resists the urban/rural dichotomy used by many historians, but maintains, and is subsequently inattentive to, the division between, and the monolithic view of Jewish Christianity and Gentile Christianity. She also resists pushing to its necessary conclusions, in her own study, the tenets of new historicism and feminist history when she refuses to decentre Jesus in the Christian mythic narrative: the ragtag groups of people who did engender Christianity are lost behind the heroic figure of Jesus as Christ. Finally in chapter five, I examine Schüssler Fiorenza’s remythologizing in connection with feminist epistemology and note that feminist standpoint theory informs her position. This theoretical position will guide many of her directives in her search for Christian origins, but the conflation of feminist standpoint theory with a feminist ontology occurs in her work when she locates the impetus for struggle in God, and not in the oppressed groups of Jews (the Q people) who contested their social and historical milieu using legitimating strategies of their day. Schüssler Fiorenza’s foundational myth for Catholic women remains anchored to the heroic figure of Jesus and locked in a romantic narrative.

In chapter six and seven I examine the work of Radford Ruether, but begin by locating myself in the discussion and to this end analyse patriarchy, ideology, and ideology critique. From here I explicate how Radford Ruether deals with these areas of concern which are fundamental to her analyses. Part of my analysis, in chapter six, consists of examining how liberation theology
and its subsequent offspring, the CEB, acts as a foundation myth for her understanding of women church. Her conception of both seems to lack the same kind of critical analysis she utilizes in order to historicize the Catholic church. Radford Ruether’s desire to maintain whatever duality and arrive at a synthesis of the duality creates, in my opinion, two difficulties for her: 1) one side of the duality, the positive, goes unanalysed; and 2) duality, itself, is understood as a given and not a product of ideology, i.e., the patriarchal myth of man the hunter/ woman the gather reflects natural human biological conditions and is not produced by ideological concerns.

In chapter seven I examine the rituals that Radford Ruether engenders for women church. Women church, in exodus from the patriarchal church, requires symbols and rituals that will sustain its members. To this end Radford Ruether invents rituals that hold to women’s concerns, women’s bodies, and women’s experiences. These will act as foundation to the definition of the group as female. The concerns that centre on women, and Radford Ruether’s use of ritual will be the focus of my critique in chapter eight. I argue that ritual is, for Radford Ruether, an uncontaminated verity, one that she does not have to critically engage. Further, sexual difference will also act as an uncontested truth in her rituals, a truth I contest.

In the work of these three feminists, myth, symbol, and ritual are largely left untheorized and are re-presented as kernels of truth which reside uncontested at the centre of their analyses. Holding to the divine spark they accredit to myth, symbol, or ritual, they can then locate that which they theorize against, patriarchy, in the social and historical realm. They will deny

---

1Throughout this text when I refer to the groups of women in the catholic church who are struggling to take back the church I will use the term women church. When I am referring to Radford Ruether’s text I will use her title Woman church.
patriarchal Christianity and/or religion this kernel of truth, but hold tightly to it when they propose a rereading, a reconceiving, and a rewriting of religious traditions.
CHAPTER ONE

FEMINIST THEORY AND THE CATEGORIES OF LANGUAGE, EPISTEMOLOGY, AND DIFFERENCE

The organizing principles of language and epistemology, and the necessities of the problem of "difference" are the means by which an analysis of the theories of three significant feminists in the study and practice of religion can take place. Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza have significantly affected how feminist theory is applied and carried out in Religious Studies. Their writings have been the ground for other feminists both, scholars and practitioners alike. However, one cannot assume that feminist theory is homogenous, and an analysis of their thought is necessary in order to determine not only the theoretical structures that undergird their work, but the inherent problems of the positions they assume. Marsha Hewitt (1992; 1995; 1998) has clearly shown the potential ideological consequences of the works of Daly, Ruether and Fiorenza. However, I wish to push Hewitt's analysis in a slightly different direction and examine how the significant categories of language, epistemology, and "difference" function in the feminist theories of Daly, Radford Ruether, and Schüssler Fiorenza. These categories have proved to be stumbling blocks in feminist theory at large, and I hope by theorizing these categories within the work of Daly, Radford Ruether, and Schüssler Fiorenza to further feminist theory in general, and feminist theory in the Religious Studies in particular.

1. The Context

Women have theoretically been excluded from the public realm of knowledge making until at least the mid-twentieth century. Although women have participated in all forms of
knowledge (science, philosophy, medicine in the ancient world, religious writings in the Middle Ages, political-philosophical and literary writings of the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Modernity), Virginia Woolf (1977: 58) noted that there was (and is) a marked absence of women writers. She wondered if women were less inclined to “make a mark upon the world: The desire to be veiled still possesses them. They are not even now as concerned about the health of their fame as men are, and, speaking generally, will pass a tombstone or a signpost without feeling an irresistible desire to cut their names on it ...” (1977: 57). In her discussion of the absence of women, Virginia Woolf was struggling with several issues: Did women have the wherewithal to write? If so, did they have the means, the time, and support? If women wrote,

1For an comprehensive bibliography of women thinkers in the ancient world see Mary Ellen Waithe (1987); Norma Olin Ireland (1970); Marilyn Bailey Ogilvie (1986); Barbara Lesko (1989); and Margaret Alic (1986).

2For example, Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Scivias; Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), The Dialogue; Christine De Pizan (1365–1430), Le Dité de Jehanne d’Arc; Glüchel of Hameln (1646–1724) untitled life story; Fātima Jahānārā Begum Sāhib (17th century) Risālat al-Sahibiyya; Lady Nijō (1258–?) The Confession of Lady Nijō.

3For example, Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), Liber Vitae meritorum; Christine Ebner (1277–1355), Bëchlein von der Gnaden Überlast [The Little Book on the Unbearable Weight of Grace]; Christine de Pisan (1364/5–1434), La Cité des Dames [The book of the City of Ladies]; Mariavle Jars de Gournay (1565/6–1645), Egalité des hommes et des femmes, Le Grief des Dames; Maria de Rabutin-Chantal Sévigné (1626–1696) Correspondence; Mary Astell (1666–1631), An Impartial Enquiry into the Causes of Rebellion and Civil War in this Kingdom, A Serious Proposal to the Ladies; Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay (1731–1791), History of England from the Accession of James 1 to that of the Brunswick Line; Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), A Vindication of the Rights of Women.

4For a comprehensive listing of women writers throughout these periods see Claire Buck (1992). For more specific kinds of analyses of women writing in particular times or places see Shari Benstock (1986).
where is their work? And finally, what does it mean for a woman to write in a patriarchal society?

Feminists, in a variety of disciplines, have attempted to bring the works of women writers and thinkers that were left unnoticed over the centuries to the public domain. Bringing women into history and into the realm of human knowledge was the initial step taken by feminists. In order to create a place for themselves in the world of meaning, feminists began to challenge patriarchal knowledge of how “woman” was written into its world of meaning. In this endeavour it became apparent that women either as inquirers or those inquired after were mysteriously absent from the world of meaning, and feminists contested the androcentrism which fostered this distortion. They insisted that knowledge was constructed, and within patriarchy acted not only as male descriptions of women’s being in the world, but as prescriptions for women’s being in the world. Women as inquiring subjects, and objects of study, remained securely bound by phallocentric inscription. Language and epistemology once presumed to be neutral were recognized as organizing principles for the privileging of white, male, heterosexual, and middle-class values. These androcentric and misogynistic principles were challenged. With the advent

---

\(^5\)When I say that women were not inquired after, I am referring to the reality of women as subjects rather than the fictitious male constructions of woman, mother, wife etc..

of feminist analysis, one of several contesting discourses, language and knowledge clearly emerged as socio-historical constructions. This meant that they too could be, and were, affected by gender, race, and class. The ideological proclivities concealed by reified knowledge and language clearly came into focus through the lens of the political-social movement called feminism. “Social movements—in this case the feminist movement—have often pushed disciplines into interests researchers long avoided” (Thorne et al. 1983: 8).

2. Language

Language, the ability to name and in that the ability to create,7 is one avenue toward epistemic power. Existence is prestructured prior to our entrance into the world. Culture is an organizing principle by which we understand the world and our place within it. We learn how to be human by interacting from the moment of birth with those enculturated significant others around us and a critical part of this process of interaction is communicated primarily through language.

The process of becoming human means, among other things, internalizing two ideals. The first is that to be a human, and being a human means being a subject in the world, is culturally conceptualized in the image of a male generally understood as white, heterosexual, and middle

---

7The notion of naming as an abstract act of creation can easily be seen in the book of Genesis, the Stoic understanding of the creative logos, or the mystical creative elements of Hebrew letters in Cabalistic Judaism. The recognition of the power of naming is an integral aspect of feminist discourse. Hillary Rose, (1985: 58) succinctly states this point when she says: “Naming is rightly seen within feminism as offering transformative powers. It brings into existence phenomena and experience hitherto denied space in both nature and culture.” For others who refer to language, epistemology and the power of naming see Griffiths and Whitford (1988: 1–28); Grimshaw (1986:27); Jagger (1988:88); Fulkerson (1994: 42–43).
class. The second is that to be anything but this image means being less human: to still be human but on the periphery. How people locate themselves in relation to this image imparts much to each of us about ourselves as subjects. To be a white woman, a black woman, a black man, an impoverished black man, is to fall outside what has been defined as the ideal human. This process of subjugation means internalizing the dominant group’s definition of the self or of one’s group as “other.” The subordinate group’s internalization of itself as “other” is necessary in order that domination appear natural, and this understanding of natural and true is held by both the oppressors and the oppressed.

Michel Foucault (1972: 208-216) suggests that there are three modes of the objectification of the subject. These modes of objectification consist of 1) dividing practices, so that the category of women (in this instance) is established apart from the category of men with gender ideology as the means toward legitimating this division; 2) scientific classification so that white women as a group or black men and/or black women as a group understands themselves to be biologically/psychologically different from the dominant group; and 3) subjectification, or the way in which human beings turn themselves into subjects, a subjectivity that is sanctioned by the dominant culture. It is the third mode of objectification, the classification of being “other” as defined by the normative group, that subjects use to define themselves as subjects (identity politics, more of which is said about in chapter 7). For example, my idea of what it means to be a black woman (and here I am thinking of being a black woman in a white patrilineal and patriarchal culture) is constructed upon a culturally defined “black woman.” It is this image that I internalize and can accept in whole or in part and either add to it in order to redefine the image, or reject and/or subvert it. But ultimately the image remains foundational to my self-definition.
Further, how I overwrite or alter this image will arise from my social and historical context. My point here is not that we are beings who are socialized, but that we are social beings. We are not affected by the social, but effected by the social. Language is an area in which the epistemic activity of objectification can take place. Language is a mode of production wherein the double enactment of being defined and defining oneself is played out. It is a mode of production wherein we make and remake our worlds of meaning.

In an attempt to deal with the subjugation of women as a group, feminists began to pay attention to such things as gender specific language. For example, Shari Benstock (1986: 12) notes that Gertrude Stein (1874-1947) allied herself with patriarchy when she assumed a male perspective. For example she says, “a writer looking at his own civilization should have the contrast of another culture before him.” Stein, like many women writers, identified with patriarchal culture when she assumed a male perspective. The totalizing nouns and pronouns of

---

8This line of reasoning assumes a view of subjectivity which is at variance with the popular conception (that is the conception of the human subject found in popular culture) that the subject is unique, sui generis, self-determining, and internal. The notion of subjectivity as socially determined or as a consequence of objectification has appeared in a variety of forms in relatively recent theoretical literature. For instance the process described here is analogous to Paul Ricoeur’s (1969: 10-19; 1970: 9-19; 1976: 53-69; 1991: 137-53) theoretical approach to symbols wherein they are first of all manifested in the cosmic dimension, secondly, internalized in the oneric dimension, and finally, restated in the poetic dimension. Or again, George Baitaille (1992: 27-42) argues that the conception of subject and its projection onto the external world is a direct consequence of separation from the external world and the positing of objects. Still again, Louis Althusser (1995: 100-139) argues that the human “subject” is actually created by the act of ideological interpellation—that is, the individual comes to recognize her/himself as a subject precisely by virtue of the hailing of ideology. This hailing of ideology refers to the societal apparatuses in place which recognize a subject so that a subject can recognized her/himself as a subject. For a fuller elaboration of Althusser’s interpellation see chapter 7.
man and mankind, he, his, and him\textsuperscript{9} insure that the male subject and his perspective are understood as normative, while the female subject and her perspective are completely erased. The analysis of language and its effects on the female and male subject is, of course, a product of current feminism. My point is not to criticize Gertrude Stein for assuming a patriarchal perspective, but rather to demonstrate that this is both a recent position developed in second wave feminism, and one worth taking seriously. Frequently, the seriousness of feminist contentions in the area of language is overlooked. Not only are women overlooked as historical subjects and concealed behind “man” and “men,” but if language is always and forever representative of only one perspective, and that one perspective persistently understands women and others as objects, women and those others also see themselves as objects. Within the process of Foucault’s objectification of the subject, language operates as an “always and already” form of this objectification. Language as a function of ideology\textsuperscript{10} interpellates women and others as

\textsuperscript{9}For a discussion on how thought is affected by, and patriarchal ideology supported by, the use of masculine nouns and pronouns as inclusive of women see Martyna (1983); MacKay (1983); Baron (1986). To understand how reading androcentrically effects the female and male reader so that women and men read androcentrically see Schweickart (1989).

\textsuperscript{10}My understanding of ideology is elaborated in chapter 6. However, simply put I understand that human beings as both historical and social subjects cannot escape the ideological. Ideology is not simply the process of mystification whereby the dominant group defines the nature of existence according to their understanding of that existence and in a bid to legitimate their view of existence. Ideology is this and more. There is no place that is not ideology, no outside of ideology simply because we are born into the social and historical and, therefore, are born into the ideological. In this understanding, then, I follow Althusser. One is not only contextualized but constituted by the social and historical and in this, then, one is both situated, and invested, in the social and historical reality one enters into: “Althusser conceives ideology as an immediately experienced relationship to the universe—as such, it is eternal; when following his self-critical turn, he introduces the concept of ISA, he returns in a way to Marx: ideology does not grow out of “life itself”, it comes into existence only in so far as society is regulated by the state. (More precisely, the paradox and theoretical interest of Althusser resides in his conjugation of the two
objects.

In order to deal with such erasure feminists began to analyze the structure of language itself, how it enclosed women as a group, erased them in the moment of their construction, and refused them admittance to the public realm. Feminists realized that in order to change institutions that reinforced patriarchal power they had to challenge this power on a social-political level. Language entrenches our understanding of how we are in this world. Language allows one to make sense of one’s world. Therefore how women speak, and are spoken of, was of necessity a primary focus toward effecting change.

The privileging of the male in language was just one problem. Further problems were the male monopoly on content, experience, symbols, rhetoric, images, metaphors, and analogies, in short the means by which humans creatively and actively structure their world of meaning. The kinds of questions asked, how the data is approached, theories conjectured and answers arrived at all demonstrate a marked relationship not only with the experiences of the individual as a social being, but the social-historical milieu that provides a foundation for the experiential location of that individual. Cultural meaning, then, is both constructed and encoded by the dominant group.

---

For example, Freud’s psychoanalytical theories are a product of the historical moment of their coming into being, dependant upon the kind of knowledge prior to, and contemporary with, Freud. Peter Gay (1988: 142–143), one of Freud’s biographers, succinctly states this when he says of Freud “[i]n working toward a general theory of sexuality he followed the route to discovery that was most congenial, almost necessary to him: Notions more or less inchoate, drawn from his patients, his self-analysis, and his reading, were floating about in his mind, and clamoured, as it were, for coherence....Yet while Freud reminded the world of what it did not want to hear, he was not the only one, or the first, to recognize the power of sexuality.”
Contextualized in a patriarchal/androcentric world of meaning, how do women locate themselves? Do they remain patriarchal constructions forever locked in a patriarchal world with every avenue being yet another detour to the patriarchal centre? For example, if one demands gender specificity in language, is one merely falling back into gender dichotomies, the logic of which is founded upon difference? If one attempts to put forward new epistemologies which place women's concerns at the center are they merely being coopted into creating just another ideology? How can women rise up from the deep, from the realm of human unconsciousness, to surface into the human story? How do women break into androcentric constructions such as language and epistemology in order to tell their own stories?

3. Epistemological locations and the category of women’s experience

Feminists attempting to humanize the notion of female, while insuring this simply does not mean making the female into a male, have run into an epistemological difficulty. How does one speak of the category of women under the sign of the female? In the past, both definitions of male and female and their analogues have depended upon a dichotomous relationship with each other for definition. Further, men, and not women, developed theses relationally defined categories of male and female: these categories lack input from the other category, women. If women are to define themselves need it be over and against men, as men have defined women in the past? How can women define the category of female and that of women outside this dichotomous relationship? One of the earliest efforts, emerging full fledged in the seventies, was to define women as a group by positing something called women’s experience. Women’s experience as foundational to feminist claims regarding language and epistemology depended upon the belief that experience was the ground for the production of knowledge, and that
women’s experience differed significantly from men’s experience.

3.1 Feminist epistemologies

Feminism has been divided into various and sundry factions. Divisions can be related to
politic positions and therefore terms such as radical feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist
feminism or socialist feminism are employed. Divisions can be marked by disciplines of
inquiry such as feminist literary criticism, psychoanalytic feminism, feminist historians,
women’s studies etc. And finally, divisions can be established along lines of ethnicity such as
Jewish feminism, Chicana (Mexican immigrant women in the United States and Canada)
feminism, Womanists, French feminists, Anglo-American feminists, British feminists. Third
World feminists, and Mujeristas. Each label suggests an allegiance to an epistemological
position. But amongst the different labels that suggest differing epistemological positions,
knowledge claims which undergird these varying groups of women can be narrowed to three
epistemological positions. Mary Hawkesworth suggests three kinds of feminist epistemologies:
“...feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theories, and feminist postmodernism”

12For a complete delineation of these politically named feminisms see Jaggar (1988).

13Within these various divisions there will of course be overlaps. Therefore mujeristas are
often largely influenced by Marxian theory, as it comes to them through liberation theology,
while womanists and/or black feminists can lean towards radical feminism, liberal feminism, or
socialist feminism, but in all instances they will use the category of race as primary to their
everistemological positions. Lesbian feminists are often understood to adhere to the political
leanings of radical feminism, i.e., separatism, to liberalism feminism, or to Black feminism, but
again incorporated into their epistemological positions is a critique of heterosexual gender
ideology. However, regardless of the divisions it should be remembered that the categories
created are artificial and are not rigidly adhered to. These categories allow one to discuss
different conceptions of knowledge that inform various groups of women.
CHAPTER 1

Feminist postmodern epistemology\(^\text{14}\) often takes an anti-foundationalist position: there is no Archimedean point from which one can produce a metanarrative. Challenged is the belief that conceptual apparatuses such as reason, truth, and justice are things-in-themselves that human beings can discover and fasten upon. Reason, truth, and justice are concepts produced by human beings within their social historical contexts: they have no autonomous existence. Cultural narratives, themselves products of the social and historical, are the producers of the known.

Equally challenged by feminist postmodern theory is the knower. A fixed subject that can know the world outside his or her social location is felt to be a product of Enlightenment thinking. According to postmodern logic, Enlightenment reasoning has misguided humanity by producing metanarratives that relied upon the notion of a stable subject, a subject that was unconditioned by his or her own location, and one that could ascend to an Archimedean point in order to not only to demonstrate the certainties of truth, justice, and reason, as if they had autonomous existence, but also to ascertain one’s position as located within the verities of truth, justice, and reason. Enlightenment, by the production of this metanarrative, betrayed its own utopian vision and contributed much to the colonialist discourse:\(^\text{15}\) a discourse understood to

\(^\text{14}\) My utilization of the term feminist postmodernism does not seek to do injustice to the variety of positions found in feminist postmodern discourses. I am fully cognizant and have taken seriously Judith Butler’s corrective: that a variety of positions located on the field of postmodernist play are erased in the monologism of “postmodernism.” She asks (1992: 5): “Is this effort to colonize and domesticate these theories [Butler is referring to the number positions one kind find under the sign of the postmodern such as Luce Irigaray, Helen Cixious, Jacques Michel Foucault, etc.] under the sign of the same, to group them synthetically and masterfully under a single rubric, a simple refusal to grant the specificity of these positions, an excuse not to read, and not to read closely?”

\(^\text{15}\) As I use the term discourse I intend it to be a narrative that need not necessarily be textually based, but also includes all forms of communication. Discourse also allows me to engage with
posit freedom, but freedom defined by its own epistemology. Because Enlightenment
epistemology utilized the fixed categories of reason, truth, and justice, categories understood to
transcend immanent epistemologies produced by cultures ("other" cultures), proponents of its
utopianism objectified Enlightenment epistemology and in the process insured it as the
metanarrative. In this then, Enlightenment discourse sought to "free" the world by the imposition
of its epistemology on a global scale. The Enlightenment discourse, invested as it is in the notion
of an autonomous individualistic human being who heroically battles for freedom, presupposes
that freedom, like truth, justice, and reason, is a thing-in-itself, an autonomous category that
exists outside of human knowledge. However, freedom is attainable by every human being as
long as those human beings resembled the subject of its metanarrative: man. Enlightenment
reflects, assumes, and re-entrenches the free movement of a subject by rigidly curtailing the
limits of rationalization.

Feminist postmodernists challenge a number of feminist positions for their engagement
with Enlightenment discourse. Because feminist postmodernism functions as a challenge, its
position, or lack of position as some of its adherents maintain (Butler, 1992: 4), is difficult to
locate. Postmodernism, and the feminists who utilize all or some of its tenets, are deconstructive,
suspicious, decentring and discursively located. Its "quest" is to challenge totalizing theories, be
they scientific, political, or philosophical:

The modern Western sense of self-certainty has been undermined by political and

two kinds of language intention. The first is that it encapsulates the idea of intertextuality in that
these forms of communication are in conversation with each other, and second, discourse
necessarily demands a context so that agents are understood to work within an epistemological
framework.
intellectual events. The meaning—or even existence—of concepts essential to all forms of Enlightenment metanarrative (reason, history, science, self, knowledge, power, gender, and the inherent superiority of Western culture) have been subjugated in increasingly corrosive attacks...Western intellectuals’ sense of epistemological security has also been disrupted by internal dissent. The “essential contestability” (and the “all too human” contingency) of the constituting notions of enlightenment metanarratives have been exposed. This creates a crisis of innocence, since these notions become mere artifacts that humans have created and for whose effects and consequences we alone are responsible. (Flax, 1992: 450-451)

The epistemological position held by feminist empiricists is one that maintains that there are empirical facts and in these facts one can locate the truth. This position locates feminist empiricists within the humanist project. Knowledge is attained by seeking the facts that point to the truth that is itself unmediated knowledge. “Feminist empiricism accepts the tenets of philosophical realism (which posit the existence of the world independent of the human knower) and empiricist assumptions about the primacy of the senses as the source of all knowledge about the world” (Hawkesworth, 1989: 535). The feminist empiricist perspective would have it that the difficulty in the past has been enacted on the level of interpretation by the androcentric observer. It is in and through the act of interpretation that the biases of the male scientific community have entered into and distorted the truth. Those who have sought knowledge (men) have imported their male biases into the results of their findings. Feminist empiricists believe that these biases can be eradicated when the subjectivity of the observer is controlled by utilizing even more rigidly neutral procedures. Feminist scientists, then, are in the position to locate unmediated truth because they as women are not invested in maintaining dominant positions. Their exclusion from power has meant that they perceive their perspective as more neutral than that of their male counterparts who are invested in maintaining their privileged positions in patriarchy.
CHAPTER 1

Nancy Hartsock (1983) delineates the epistemological position of a feminist standpoint theory in her work. Drawing upon Marxist theory, Hartsock replaces the group known as the proletariat with the group women. Utilizing Marx’s argument “that socially mediated interaction with nature in the process of production shapes both human beings and theories of knowledge,” Hartsock establishes a position in which women have a critical understanding of reality that is unavailable to white middle class males (patriarchy) in that women’s notion of reality is neither partial nor distorted by the desire to maintain a position of domination. As Hartsock states (1983: 284):

By setting off from the Marxian meta-theory I am implicitly suggesting that this, rather than his critique of capitalism, can be most helpful to feminists. I will explore some of the epistemological consequences of claiming that women’s lives differ structurally from those of men. In particular, I will suggest that like the lives of the proletarians, according to Marxian theory, women’s lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of the phallocratic institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy.

Standpoint epistemology, according to Hartsock (1983: 285), “posits a duality of levels of reality, of which the deeper level or essence both includes and explains the “surface” or appearance, and indicates the logic by means of which the appearance inverts and distorts the deeper reality.” Standpoint theories require that epistemological claims be grounded in concrete material life, or, what is understood to advocates of this position as, women’s experience.16

Within the varied discourses of feminist theories, and securely located in both feminist empiricism and standpoint epistemologies, the notion of women’s experiences is founded upon

---

16For further elaborations on standpoint theory see Jagger (1988) or Harding and Hintikka (1983).
what appears to be three particular theoretical lines that are at times intertwined. In the first, some feminists (the group often called radical and/or cultural feminists) locate the notion of women’s experience in the “feminine” cognitive realm of intuition, emotion, engagement, fluidity, immanence, and the concrete (for example, Ruddick, 1980, 1983; French, 1985; Griffin, 1980; Daly, 1978; 1984). In the second, feminists utilizing or developing psychoanalytic theories (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan 1982; Dinnerstein, 1977; Benjamin, 1987) ground their notion of women’s experience upon psychological theories (primarily Freudian theory as it is elaborated in object relations\textsuperscript{17}) that suggest women’s ways of knowing are generated from their

\textsuperscript{17}Object relations is a psychoanalytical school of thought with its initial proponents being D. W. Winnicott and Melaine Klein. As I understand this theory the child comes to recognized her/himself as an autonomous self through the process of individuation. This process takes place in the pre-Oedipal stage, as it must, since psychoanalysis now maintains that gender awareness exists before the second year. The awareness of being male or female and the sense that there is something significant about this appears to co-exist with the designation of a self. This notion of gender, has more to do with cultural prescriptions than actual physiological understanding of self as gendered. According to object-relations theory, at first the child understands the primary caretaker, in most instances the mother, to be a part of her/himself. There are no boundaries between mother and child. In time, the child learns, through such avenues as disappointment, that the (m)other is separate from her/himself. This awareness leads to unconscious hostile feelings toward the mother which accumulate in the child during this “painful” process of separation. The mother who is loved is also the mother who is hated. In our society, since most mothers are female, this ambivalence gets transferred to women and other feminized entities and categories.

It is in this process that another ambivalence arises: the time between the desire for fusion with, and the desire for independence from, the primary love object. This process peaks at about eighteen months. It is at this time the father (if there is one, and one wonder’s what happens if there is not—this is an inherent problem of object relations in that it assumes the nuclear family as a normative model) enters the picture and provides the child with a relatively safe and stable figure who embodies the seductive appeal of an external social reality (the masculine public world). The working out of this dynamic process in female and male children will affect their notions of gender. The male must remain differentiated, not only to maintain his own ego structures, but later to define himself as sexually different from the mother. The daughter, however, is not required by society to differentiate herself from the mother to any great degree as her mother is a model for her own sexuality. Hence the belief of some feminists (Keller, 1989) that the ambivalence experienced during this process has affected how men, the
psychosexual development and/or their socialization. Associated with this group is of course one
group of French feminists (Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixious) who utilize Freudian theory as it is
filtered through Lacan’s theory of the symbolic order.\textsuperscript{18} And finally, the ground for women’s
dominant group, have understood the operations of existence. There is a need to objectify in
order to maintain boundaries between self and other. Women, because they are identified with
mother, become other to men in order that men can maintain these boundaries. Since males must
do this process twice over, notions of masculinity connote autonomy, separation, and distance
(Benjamin, 1988).

\textsuperscript{18}Jacques Lacan proposes that there are two orders, the imaginary and the symbolic. The
imaginary represents the pre-oedipal stage, while the oedipal stage represents entrance into the
symbolic order. The imaginary order represents a time of oneness, when the child or self is
undifferentiated from the mother. There is no “other” as there is no separation. The child, mother
and world are one. The imaginary order is pre-verbal, irrational, hysterical and psychotic. The
symbolic order represents differentiation and with this differentiation anxiety is born. The father
intercedes between mother and child introducing to the child the phallus which represents the law
of the father (or the threat of castration), and the loss of the mother or the repression of the desire
for mother. It is in language that Lacan maps out his theories, pointing to the location of the
phallus in the “I am” as opposed to “your are” or “she is” (the subject to objects). This “I am”
represents the child taking his (or her) place in the symbolic order which means giving up the
claim to the imaginary self (Moi, 1985; Silverman, 1992; Grosz, 1990).

Lacan refutes Melanie Klein on the centrality of the mother in theories of symbol and
sublimation and replaces the mother with the phallus. Lacan claims in “The Signification of the
Phallus” that the phallus is the most symbolic: it is naturally the privileged signifier:

- The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark where the role of the logos is
  joined with the advent of desire. . . .because it is the most tangible element in the
  real sexual copulation, and also the most symbolic in the literal (typographical)
  sense of the term, since it is the equivalent there to the (logical) copula. It might
  also be said that, by virtue of it turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is

Lacan claims origin, action, generation, and matrix for the phallus. The phallus is naturally the
signifier because there is one libido and that One is male. Women can only come to culture and
language by wearing the phallus, and then always inadequately and incompletely. In this
rejection of both the material and the abstract woman is best seen, in his view of the symbolic
vulva, as empty, void, and void of meaning: vulva is the universal sound men make during
intercourse.

Lacan’s notion of phallus as signifier, that which inscribes and creates meaning, excludes
women from creating, participating, and having power over and in language. Woman, for his
notion is fixed upon an ideal rather than the material existence of women, is further eradicated in
experience is located in the sociology of knowledge and historical materialism. In this instance women’s subordination, the kind of labour they have engaged in, the “unification of manual, mental, and emotional capacities in women’s traditional activities” (Rose, 1983 quoted in Hawkesworth, 1987: 121) have been utilized to establish a privileged epistemological perspective located in women’s experience (Hawkesworth, 1987: 120–121; Hartsock, 1983; Harding, 1983).

3.2 Women’s Experience

The category of women’s experience has raised some interesting issues in feminism. For example, Sheila Greeve Davaney (1987) challenged the use of this category arguing that such a category had a totalizing affect. Its use meant the flattening out of differences among women in an attempt to create a homogenized group that provided self-identity for women: identity was founded upon a white bourgeois-feminist stance. Another difficulty with the category of experience (women’s or men’s), according to Joan W. Scott, is that it presupposes that one’s experience is contingent upon a social-historical situation, and yet extractable from it. This paradox functions according to an understanding that the subject is historically contingent, but his or her experience is not. Therefore, a subject is understood as constituted by her/his experience, but experience itself stands outside any constitution: it simply exists as the foundation upon which s/he stands. Scott argues (1992: 27):

the symbolic féminin. The féminin can be appropriated by the male. It can provide the necessary spark for creativity for it is in the void that original thought can come about. But the female can neither appropriate the phallus, nor properly use the féminin for that way leads to madness (Batersby, 1992: 135–137).
...“experience” whether conceived as internal or external, subjective or objective, establishes the prior existence of individuals. When it is defined as internal, it is an expression of an individual’s being or consciousness, when external, it is the material upon which consciousness then acts. Talking about experience in these ways leads us to take the existence of individuals for granted (experience is something people have) rather than to ask how conceptions of selves (of subjects and their identities) are produced. It operates within an ideological construction that not only makes individuals the starting point of knowledge, but that also naturalizes categories such as man, woman, black, white, heterosexual, or homosexual by treating them as given characteristics of individuals.

The dilemma for feminism is at once to validate the group called women as human subjects, and yet to undercut the category of the human subject demonstrating it to be a distortion since women have been excluded from it. Human is defined as male, and male is defined as human, female is defined as other, neither male nor human. However if feminists wish to define themselves as human, since human is defined as male, they must attempt to deconstruct the category of human and yet appropriate it for their use. One of the means to achieve these ends has been to use the category of “experience” to construct another kind of experience of being human. However, as indicated, what often remains untheorized is the category of experience itself. In order that experience operates non-essentially, and that it does not function as a totalizing category but rather one that elucidates the particularities and similarities of subjects, means “focusing on processes of identity production, insisting on the discursive nature of “experience” and on the politics of its construction” (Scott, 1992:37).

Feminist postmodernists resist the notion of a privileged position for women. They argue that by locating an Archimedean point on which to stand, an Archimedean point established upon the idea of women’s privileged position, social and racial differences among women are flattened out. Women are understood as “woman,” and the positing of “woman” necessarily demands the
question: Whom do we mean by that woman? Who is she? Frequently she has been a white, middle-class academic feminist. “[F]eminist postmodernism rejects the very possibility of a truth about reality. Feminist postmodernists use the situatedness of each finite observer, their social-political, historical context, to challenge the plausibility of claims that any perspective on the world could escape partiality” (Hawkesworth, 1989: 536).

Postmodern theorists Derrida, Barthes, Foucault, and Lacan resist the positing of a self one can know claiming that the concept of the self or the subject can be located in the Enlightenment project. Feminist postmodern theorists, Jane Flax, Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, or Joan Scott, following these theorists, take issue with the postulation of a knowing subject. This knowing subject is understood to be part of the Enlightenment discourse: a heroic (male) figure that can win through the primitive violence of his instincts to understand the reason within him that resonates with an idealized reason, a reason that exists outside humanity that will lead him to the Truth which is his own subjecthood. The notion of a stable and socially unconstituted subject is challenged by postmodern theories.

Spivak, Scott, and Butler, along with other postmodern feminists, disavow such a figure challenging both its maleness and its colonialist impulses. They argue against the importation of both the figure and the impulse into feminisms. Their criticism of Simone de Beauvoir’s work is on the basis of her adhering to the Enlightenment myth of the heroic figure. This mythic figure that resides behind Beauvoir’s theories comes into focus when she indicates that (1952: xxiv):

To decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal—this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the superior caste. Man-the sovereign will provide woman-the-leige with material protection and will understate the moral justification of her existence; thus she can evade at once both economic risk and metaphysical risk of a liberty in which ends
and aims must be contrived without assistance. Indeed, along with the ethical urge of each individual to affirm his subjective existence, there is also the temptation to forgo liberty and become a thing.

Implicit in Beauvoir’s theory are the beliefs that although the human subject is male it can be appropriated by the female, and that given the right information we can make the right choices despite our locations. According to Marilyn Frye (1996: 992), in Beauvoir’s theory one is faced with Hobbes' artificial man or leviathan: “The heroic being whose life is a continuous struggle through which he transcends, escaping the brutish life of subjection to given conditions.”

Influenced by existential theory, Beauvoir posits a subject that is both knowing and knows itself.

The notion of a knowing female subject posited by feminist standpoint and empiricist epistemologies, knowing further than men because her vision is not distorted by her position on the power grid of patriarchy, is contested by feminist postmodern theorists. Butler says of the female subject (1992: 14):

Surely there is a caution offered here, that in the very struggle toward enfranchisement and democratization,¹⁹ we might adopt the very models of domination by which we were oppressed, not realizing that one way that domination works is through the regulation and production of subjects.... Through what exclusions has the feminist subject been constructed, and how do those excluded domains return to haunt the “integrity” and unity” of the feminist “we”?  

¹⁹The use of the terms disenfranchised, enfranchisement, and democratization themselves would appear to be concepts that are posited upon the notion of a stable subject. However, Butler argues that postmodernism does not negate or deny the subject, but rather calls into question the notion of a subject as it presupposes secure foundations. She states (1992: 9–10): “The critique of the subject is not a negation or repudiation of the subject, but, rather, a way of interrogating its construction as a pregiven or foundationalist premise. At the outset of the war against Iraq,...it seemed that this hitting of the goal, this apparently seamless realization of intention through an instrumental action without much resistance or hindrance was the occasion not merely to destroy Iraqi military installations, but also to champion a masculinized Western subject whose will immediately translates into a deed...whose obliterating power at once confirms the impenetrable contours of its own subjecthood.”
Bound by and to the power grid of Western hegemony, the subject cannot loosen her/himself from the grid in order to gain a vantage point. S/he is constituted by her/his location on the grid and must operate within the parameters of the grid. The subject’s knowledge, and her/his idea of self is constituted repeatedly, never autonomous from, nor stable within, but always subjugated by the social historical location in which s/he find her/himself. Therefore an epistemological position such as that taken by feminist empiricists where neither the knowledge nor the general apparatus for seeking knowledge is biased or “that knowledge-seeking is usefully conceptualized as an activity of individuals in isolation from their social milieu. I think my thoughts, but it is my culture that observes through my eyes and arranges and rearranges thoughts in my mind” (Harding, 1990: 93–94) is contested. Postmodern feminists would contest the “I” in this equation, suggesting that “I” is not merely situated but is constituted by its situatedness. The use of “I” suggests that there is an intact ego that resides underneath the social, or “me.” The contestation put forward by postmodernism is, that the “I” is socially constituted and cannot be separated from its social constitutedness. Further, this argument does not assume a socially determinative stance wherein humans are passively constituted by the social and the historical. The argument also entails the belief that humans actively constitute the social and historical. However, what they do argue against is a self constituted outside of this dialectical relationship between the human and the social and historical. The relationship is dialectical, and therefore humans are both active producers and products of this relationship.

The notion of reason, which is largely untheorized by feminist empiricists and standpoint

---

20See Michel Foucault’s theory of the modes of objectification page 5.
feminists alike, is another area challenged by feminist postmodern theorists. Reason, in Enlightenment discourses, is understood to be that which impels humanity toward a more just society. It is our capacity to reason that allows humans to rise above our more base instincts to seek truth, justice, and freedom. Flax states that (1990: 40):

> The knowledge acquired from the right use of reason will be “true”—for example, such knowledge will represent something real and unchanging (universal) about our minds and the structure of the natural world....Reason itself has transcendental and universal qualities. It exists independently of the self’s contingent existence (e.g., bodily, historical, and social experiences do not affect reason’s structure or its capacity to produce atemporal knowledge).

What postmodern feminists desire other feminisms to realize is that a transhistorical self founded upon transhistorical reason is a product of androcentric theories which have valorized the male and vilified the female. Subjectivity founded upon a transcendental “reason” has been, according to postmodern theory, the means by which humans have been subjugated and controlled.

Postmodernists attack the “metaphysics of presence” and the Western philosopher’s self-understanding in a number of ways. They question the philosophies of mind, truth, language, and the Real that underlie and ground any such transcendental or foundational claims. Postmodernists claim that there is and can be no transcendental mind; on the contrary, what we call mind or reason is only an effect of discourse. There are no immediate or indubitable features of mental life. Sense data, ideas, intentions, or perceptions are already constituted. (Flax, 1992: 452)

The critique postmodern feminists have brought to other feminist theorizing is generated from the belief that there can only be historical and socially constituted subjects who in turn constitute the social and historical. The stable subject of feminist discourses located in liberalism, Marxist, standpoint or empiricist epistemologies are based upon the subjectivity of women qua women: a universal group. The difficulty therein has consisted of a positing of a collectivity of women that superficially acknowledges differences among women, but the experience that
grounds their respective epistemologies reflects only white, western, middle class, and often academic women. In this then, actual differences found among women themselves are negated. Women’s experience, founded upon the notion of women as basically a single homogenous group, overlooks, and in the process erases, the experiences of Black, Chicano, Latin American, and Third World women in the same way that epistemologies generated by men have overlooked women’s experiences. The necessity to take into account differences along with similarities, not only in the data, but also in the methods and theories themselves, has been shown to extend not only the research, but to alter the results of the analysis itself.\footnote{For an excellent example of how the conclusions one arrives at can in fact be altered, see Gordon’s (1995: 883-912) addition of the category of class to Patricia Stamp’s gender analysis (1991).}

However, there are also problems with jettisoning the category of a shared women’s experience. The feminist postmodern resistance to a shared common experience among women seems to have a logical inconsistency in that feminism is premised upon a category of women created by the belief of “women’s” oppression. If one posits the category of women, one seems to deny differences among women, but if one negates similarities among women then there would appear to be no reason for political alliances among various kinds of women. By denying either differences or incorporating differences (all differences), feminisms end up in theoretically difficult waters. On the one hand by not taking difference into account feminisms can reify the category of women, yet on the other hand by focusing on differences feminisms do not have a shared basis for political action. If one suggests oppression as a shared common basis for political action, one would ask why posit feminism at all? What is the basis of feminism other
than women’s experiences of oppression? How can a theory of difference both include women and differentiate women?

4. Difference

Arguments concerning the legitimacy of the category of experience in order to define gender differences, and the problems of legitimating that experience have led to the establishment of two main positions in feminism with a number of positions mapped out along its continuum. At one end of the continuum is a totalizing theory about the group known as women and the group known as men while at the other end, radical relativism wherein experience is individuated to the point of meaninglessness: common ground is erased so that the differences among and/or between groups remain the only focus.

Difference as a theoretical strategy can be mapped out via three interconnecting axes. 1) Difference is, as indicated, gender/sex differences between the group men and the group women. It is here that one finds the influence of Lacanian theory in the works of the psychoanalytically based French feminists. 2) Difference is the difference between feminist and non-feminist understanding of the subject (women) and its relation to institutions. 3) Difference marks the differences among women that are either racial, ethnic, geographical, social or economic (this latter notion draws within its discourse identity logic, and of course Derrida’s notion of

\[ \text{Sheila Greeve Davaney’s (1987) discussion regarding how Ruether, Fiorenza and Daly ground their feminist theories upon the category of women’s experience giving it epistemological and ontological status as well as using it as a theological norm nicely elaborates this problem.} \]

\[ \text{See note 16.} \]

\[ \text{The mapping out of the axes upon which the notion of difference is elaborated I have borrowed from Lauretis (1994).} \]
“différance” in which differance is understood to encapsulate two notions: to differ and to defer (postponement)).

4.1 Sex gender difference

Hester Eisenstein (1991) suggested that the discussion regarding sex/gender difference (men as a group and women as a group) clearly elucidates two strands of feminist theory. One strand, equality feminism beginning with Mary Wollstencraft and crystallizing in Simone de Beauvoir, argues that assumed biological difference, projected by patriarchy, undergirds the legalized and enculturated social differences (gender ideologies) between men and women found in patriarchy. First it was demonstrated that the differences understood to define the genders, men and women, were false differences that in fact were not natural but social historical constructions produced by the dominate group’s idea of its own superiority, and the inferiority of the “other.” Feminists rightly challenged the natural (biological and psychological) and/or god giveness of women’s inferiority and men’s superiority. Feminists have argued that women are

---

25 Derrida states: “But the word ‘difference’ (with an e) could never refer to differing as temporalizing or to difference as polemos. It is this loss of sense that the word differance (with an a) will have to schematically compensate for. Difference can refer to the whole complex of its meanings at once, for it is immediately and irreducibly multivalent, something which will be important for the discourse I am trying to develop” (Derrida, 1996: 446). Postmodern feminists, who invariably are affected by Derridean theory, utilize his notion of differance when they undercut the category of women. Postulating a category of women means by necessity calling upon difference in order to construct that category: the difference between men and women. Postmodern feminists maintain that the category women can only be recognized as such when placed in opposition to men as a category. Therefore the category has no ontological meaning, but rather its meaning is dependent upon difference. At the moment one realizes the artificiality of the category of women and it loses its semantic value. Once the category of women has lost its semantic value (and I mean by this the meaningfulness of the category as defined by the term women), the category of women breaks down, and the sameness once presumed among women has no basis what-so-ever.
human beings as well, and, as such, deserve access to the same rights and privileges men have.

However, by the mid-sixties feminists began to critique Simone de Beauvoir’s theories indicating that her corrective for the problem of women’s subordination meant valorizing the male over the female, and locating in the male the potential for freedom. Her elimination of inequality was the elimination of the difference between women and men, which meant women becoming like men. Further, they argued, Beauvoir was influenced by linguistic theory, and Claude Levi Strauss and assumed that binary opposition was basic to human thought processes. Beauvoir never deconstructed the dichotomous logic that underlay the categories of women and men, but assumed that women should be allowed to access the same privileges as men, and be seen to be no different from men: men and women are equally human and therefore desired to be equally free.26

As second wave feminism began to analyze the implications of equality, many feminists began to argue that difference should not, and could not be annihilated, but rather, women should look positively on their differences from men. This strand of feminist theory can be termed broadly as a feminism of difference. The writings of Mary Daly or Luce Irigaray (which valorize the female in the case of Daly, or the feminine in the instance of Irigaray) evince such a stance.27

26 Beauvoir’s move toward androgyny can be seen to be the foundation which supported early second wave feminism’s (1968–1975) attempt to positively utilized the concept of androgyny.

27 This notion of difference, however, cannot be assimilated to a particular form of feminism present in first wave feminism seen in such political-social movements as the Temperance Movement, or the Cult of True Womanhood. The difference between these two positions can be found in just who is purporting difference. In the former feminists are attempting to construct social symbolic categories that will allow women to have a definitive basis for subjecthood, while the latter utilized patriarchal notions of women as lesser than men in order to define space for women.
Two theoretical positions were established concerning the emancipation of women: equality and difference:

This debate over equality versus difference lies at the core of contemporary feminist thought, not merely because of the way in which it divides feminist theorists but, perhaps more important, because of its ability to link theory and practice. The decision to fight for equality or to fight for the protection of difference impinges directly upon women’s lives. (Fox-Genovese, 1991: 56)

Two significant figures whose feminist theories articulate the strategies of equality and difference are Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray:

The access of women to subjectivity is the central concern of the two major French feminist theoreticians of the twentieth century: Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray. Indeed despite their dramatically opposed positions, both share a fundamental grounding conviction: under the social arrangement known as patriarchy the subject is exclusively male: masculinity and subjectivity are coextensive notions.... For women to accede to subjectivity clearly means becoming speaking subjects in their own right. It is precisely at this juncture that the major difference between Beauvoir and Irigaray begins to assert itself, and once again I take them as representative of what Anthony Appiah has called the “classic dialectic”: whereas for Beauvoir the goal is for women to share fully in the privileges of the transcendent subject, for Irigaray the goal is for women to achieve subjectivity without merging tracelessly into the putative indifference of the shifter. (Shor, 1994: 46-47)

How feminists have conceptualized the category of women has been affected profoundly by this debate. Although all feminists agree gender ideologies are significant factors in the subordination of women, what they disagree about is whether these perceived differences between the male and the female should be the ground upon which feminists challenge patriarchy.

4.2 Difference in feminist and non-feminist understandings of the category of women

The politicizing of the subject women, although having a long history in patriarchal cultures, was problematised with the introduction of feminist theory. The category of woman was naturalized and essentialized in patriarchal cultures. The naturalization and essentialization of
women as woman were contested by feminist discourses: contested on the level of ideology.

Patriarchal ideologies\(^{28}\) functioned to subordinate women denying them subjecthood and allotting to them the social historical space of the object. Feminists, by deconstructing patriarchal ideologies, proved how social relations between the male and female had been mystified in order that men’s power over women remain secure. This process of securing male power operated on the level of gender ideologies that proposed for men and women distinct and separate relations to power. Dependant on cultural and temporal location, gender ideologies operated to naturalized and essentialized, and in this legitimized, distinct gendered spheres that undergirded human relations.

A non-feminist understanding of the category of women resists the politicizing of sex and gender, and insists upon the biological location of the relations between men and women. A feminist understanding of the category of women politicizes sex and gender, arguing that power and disempowerment underlie the naturalization of sex/gender. Feminists, drawing upon a Marxist understanding of ideology for example, insisted that patriarchal gender ideologies promote false consciousness among both women and men. Feminist notions as opposed to non-feminist notions of the subject women historicize and politicize the category of women:

...the essential difference of feminism lies in its historical specificity—the particular conditions of its emergence and development, which have shaped its object and field of analysis, its assumptions and forms of address; the constraints that have attended its conceptual and methodological struggles; the erotic component of its political self-awareness; the absolute novelty of its radical challenge to social life itself. (Lauretis, 1994:2)

---

\(^{28}\)I pluralize the term ideology in order to designate the social and historical contingencies that mark differences in patriarchal ideology. For an in-depth discussion see Chapter 6.
CHAPTER 1

Situated in the difference between a feminist and non-feminist understanding of the socio-historical gender relations between men and women is the concept of false consciousness generated in and through patriarchal societies.

4.3 Difference as differences among women

Feminists writing from different class, geopolitical, or racial positions have challenged mainstream feminisms (liberal, Marxist, social, psychoanalytic, radical, and postmodern, etc.) for their lack of colour, class, or geopolitical consciousness. White women writing within the academy, and/or white women socially located in the middle to upper middle class, had (have) neglected or negated positions that represent alternate epistemological perspectives which challenge not only the ideology of patriarchy, but white feminists' complicity with western, white patriarchy. A quick and superficial response has been to add the categories of race and class to the analysis—to tack them on as adjectives that define the parameters of one's research. However, adjectives are descriptive and do not contribute to the content of epistemologies:

Because Black women have access to both the Afrocentric and the feminist standpoints, an alternative epistemology used to rearticulate a Black women's standpoint should reflect elements of both traditions. The search for distinguishing features of an alternative epistemology used by African-American women reveals

---

29 For lack of a better term I use race to designate people of colour. I resist the term as it implies a human essence delineated along colour lines. Different skin tones are not representative of difference “races”. There is only the human race. However, race does have social, historical, and political implications that are in fact indicative of power relations, and it is to this I refer when I use the term race.

30 I do not include working class women in this delineation of feminists in the academy as the academy itself is a middle/upper class institution and those within have accessed a privileged place functional within the middle and upper classes. Although I myself am from the “under” class that I have succeeded in mapping my way through the university institution means that I have largely assumed a middle class ethos.
that values and ideas Africanist scholars identify as characteristically “Black” often bear remarkable resemblance to similar ideas claimed by feminist scholars as characteristically “female”. This similarity suggests that the material conditions of race, class, and gender oppression can vary dramatically and yet generate some uniformity in the epistemologies of subordinate groups. (Hill Collins, 1991: 206–207)

Class, race, geopolitical location, and gender intersect on a grid which marks social locations and in this access to the infrastructures of power. The grid illustrates the forms of various groups’ and individuals’ oppression both in micro and macro-politics. For example, a black woman in Mississippi would face a different kind of oppression than she would in Kenya. A white upper-middle class woman would face a different kind of oppression than that experienced by her Latina housekeeper. Each of these women could share the threat of rape, but each of these women does not share the threat of poverty or the threat of exclusion from the best medical care. Their locations on the grid not only define the kind of oppression they will face, but the kind of oppression they will enact on others. The white upper class woman by her own participation in capitalism and her complicity in white society, a society that fights to maintain its privileged position, stands in an oppressive relationship to the African-American woman, the African woman, or the Latino housekeeper. Differences among women’s social locations cannot remain untheorized, but must become part of feminist discourses. But nor can difference be essentialized since difference is the mark of the oppressors. Instead difference, as it as been elaborated by the oppressors and the oppressed, must be theorized in order to reveal the social historical relations between these groups: social relations are mystified when difference is located in nature.

5. Feminism and Religious Studies
Feminism in the study of religion has, at the very least, a history more than a hundred years old. The Women’s Bible was conceived and developed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton 1895, but movements such as the white Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the anti-slavery congress held in New York in 1837 were actions white American women embarked upon to address the “women’s problem.” Black women chafed for change, not just for change in racial attitudes toward black men and women, but change for themselves as black women, change that bespoke their experience of oppression not just as blacks, but as women as well. “Ain’t I a woman,” the response made by Sojourner Truth to white bourgeoisie men’s reaction to women’s demands for equality in 1851 at the Women’s Rights Convention held in Akron, Ohio, reflects this challenge black women made to white men concerning the “nature” of women. Christian affiliated black women’s clubs, “The National Association of Coloured Women,” organized to challenge oppression, while the “First National Conference of Negro Women in America” held in Boston in 1895 (Dodson and Townsend Gilkes, 1986: 81) openly addressed the specificities of black women’s oppression in the United States. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, journalist, lecturer and organizer of the first black women’s suffrage organization (Townes, 1995:168) wrote extensively on the subject. These women challenged social attitudes that restricted the freedoms of black women and men. These early feminists, black and white alike, utilized the same tool to fight for freedom that had been used to oppress them: the Bible. The process is called feminist hermeneutics. It means reading the Bible in order to find religious support for women’s active participation in the world at large, to find support for God’s belief in, and Jesus’ practice of, equality, and to set these readings over and against male readings of the Bible.

Women, working and practicing in the area of religious studies, have contested
interpretations of sacred text and offered new interpretations. They have challenged notions of orthodoxy versus heterodoxy pointing out how the dominant group of men have determined what constitutes both legitimate texts and methods of religious practices. Well known feminists such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary Daly, Judith Plaskow, Delores Williams, Emilie Townes, Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, Mieke Bal, Cheryl Exum, Phyllis Trible, Peggy Day, Elaine Pagels, Gloria Anzaldúa, Carol Christ, Kim Youngsook Harvey, Karen McCarthy-Brown, Caroline Walker Bynum, Ross Shepard Kraemer or Paula Gunn Allen propose new readings and interpretations of theology, text, history, and ritual. They have aspired to institute women’s visibility within various traditions. Symbols, myths, and metaphors are analyzed via a feminist prism and the multi-facetedness of possible interpretations are revealed.

Their process of reclamation is contingent upon the belief that women have different experiences from men. Included in this is the belief that these experiences have significance and are worth relating so that women also participate in the making of the human story. The notion of differing perspectives, ethics, expectations, and elaborations is extraordinarily visible in the area of religious studies. Susan Starr Sered argues that although gender has a limited impact on how women and men structure their religious beliefs, it does have impact on the infrastructure (1994: 8–9): “...the data offered in this book show that gender has a significant—although not absolute or universal—impact on how people image supernatural beings, on the form and interpretation of the rituals performed, on whether and why one seeks altered states of consciousness, and on the manner in which individuals grapple with the ultimate conditions of existence” (author’s italics).

Women in male or female dominated religions express certain concerns that are specific
to their own life experiences. As women’s reality shows marked concerns about relationships, family, children, health, and reproduction, oppression, and restriction, these concerns are taken up and expressed in elaborate symbol systems. Women’s lives are often contextualized in a concrete reality which calls for the dealing with daily concerns rather than relegating them to some “other”. These concerns are often reflected in how women approach their religiosity. For example, there is an emphasis upon ritual rather than theology and dogma, while in organizational practices there tends to be a conscious effort to create non-hierarchical structures and an effort not to privilege roles or kinds of contributions. In religions founded upon feminist consciousness, such as many current goddess movements, these particularities are even more pronounced. Because of women’s acute sense of restriction, a restriction clearly articulated in traditional religions, there is a tendency in women centred religions, and feminist responses within traditional religions, to challenge restrictions placed on any one person or group. In Catholicism, Theravada Buddhism, Hasidic Judaism, or Islam for example, women are excluded from particular positions that represent official status within the religious institutions. In these

31 What should be understood about women’s concerns emerging from their life experiences is not an implicit statement about women’s inherent biological tendencies, but rather a statement about the social historical realities of women’s lives that have placed women in the position of being responsible for reproduction, prevention of reproduction, feeding and tending children.

32 When I speak of relegation to an “other” I am including all colours and classes of women. However, I am fully cognizant that the “other” itself has levels of otherness, so that white middle class and wealthy women can relegate these duties to poorer white women, or poorer women of colour. But I maintain that responsibility for these duties that free up men from even considering such things as body maintenance still rests upon the shoulders of women. Affluent women, then, can relegate these duties to less affluent women, but this does not release them from responsibility to insure that children, home, and food are taken care of. In less concrete fashions, the area of fertility too, is relegated to women so that prevention or insurance rests upon the bodies of women.
four, then, women are excluded from assuming the position of priest, monk, rabbi or *imam*.

Feminists working within these traditions challenge male right to exclude women, while feminists in goddess oriented religions insist upon full participation of all women. Feminists working in the area of religious studies and frequently practicing the religions they study, have developed methods by which to expose androcentricity. They have challenged oppressive tendencies of institutionalized religions, and reintroduced women as acting religious subjects.

June O’Connor’s article “Rereading, Reconceiving and, Reconstructing Traditions: Feminist Research in Religion” (1989) broadly states the form which feminist work takes in religious studies. In agreement with O’Connor, I consider the task of rereading to mean that all textual material is read in such a manner as to reveal androcentric tendencies: tendencies that assume only the male as subject although the maleness of this subject is obscured behind the generic term “man”. Texts are understood to be prescriptive rather than descriptive, which means their intention is to define women (*qua* woman) rather than explain women as active subjects of inquiry. Reconceiving texts entails the act of looking at non-canonical sources, which means looking outside the normative to reconceive the tradition. It means bringing in new materials considered heterodoxic, non-textual (such as funerary inscriptions), or those understood to be non-historical(diaries). Finally, reconstructing traditions means not only understanding the historical and theological aspects of the religion from a different position, one that is inclusive of women, but also requires that one utilize different methods by which to reconstruct the religious tradition.

5.1 Examples of feminist research in religion

Rereading a text from a feminist perspective, whether it is canonical, historical,
CHAPTER 1

theological, mythological, etc. requires that one place women at the centre of the discourse: to frame one’s questions with women in mind. Are women present? If so, how are they presented? If women are absent, why are they absent? And what is the intention of the text when it comes to its descriptions of women? Mary Daly, once upon a time Christian theologian, now a theologian, began her odyssey out of Catholicism precisely by rereading the texts. In her second book, *Beyond God the Father* (1973), Daly moved out of Christian theology having shifted to a position that understand it to be a patriarchal theology. Her analysis begins by pointing to Christianity’s inherent androcentrism as well as its misogynistic tendencies. For example she rereads the second Genesis creation story and suggests that the patriarchal (Christian) notion of woman born of man is simply a reversal—the intent of which is to usurp women’s power of creation and place it in the hands of men and a male god. Therefore, she argues, according to this patriarchal religion the first and real act of creation was performed by a male god. Daly goes on to argue that, secondly, the Adam and Eve myth justifies women’s inferiority since Eve is read as the cause of Adam’s downfall, and subsequently the reason for all of humanity’s suffering. Therefore, Eve, having been brought second into the world as Adam’s helpmate, and having failed in that, was subjugated to Adam’s will and this in turn explains, in religious terms, why women are subjugated to men’s wills. According to Daly what one sees here is the male point of view metamorphosed into God’s viewpoint in order to justify patriarchal cultures (Daly, 1973: 1–12; 44–68). Phyllis Trible (1978), in her feminist rereading of this text, makes the point that

33Thealogy is a term that replaces theology and refers to the study of the goddess.

34Rereading the Genesis myth of humanity’s creation is not new. As early as 1600, women have contested male interpretation of this text. For instance, rather than read the creation of Eve
Christianity theologically privileges the second creation story (Gen. 2:21–23) over the first creation story (Gen. 1:27). Gen. 1 tells of God’s creation of man and woman in his image, while Gen. 2 relates the story of God’s creation of man out of whom he later created woman.

According to Trible, privileging one version over another suggests an investment in that version. The investment culminates in a gain for the investor, and in the instance of male hegemony, the gain is that the Genesis 2: 21–23 naturalizes the subjugation of women: it is/was by divine design. Rereading the text, then, refers to interpreting texts within a new paradigm, one that locates women at the centre.

The act of reconstruction requires that women’s voices from the past and in the present be retrieved. As many feminists have noted, stories about women written by men can be prejudice or prescriptive: the male author is speaking more about what he believes about women. For example a particularly misogynistic text from Middle Ages Europe, *The Malleus Maleficarum* states: “What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil. a natural temptation....” (Kraemer and Sprenger, 1484), while another less misogynistic but certainly prescriptive text indicates that “[l]aborious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroys the merits that are proper to her sex, and because of their rarity they can make of her an object of cold admiration: but at the same time they will weaken the charms with which she exercises her great power over the other sex” (Kant, [1763] in Genesis 2 as a clear indication of Eve’s subordination to Adam it can be interpreted that Eve was made from refined material (Rachel Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the Cynical Bayter and foule-mouthed Barker against Evah’s Sex*, London, 1617) or that Eve was the completion of the human race (Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes ad the condition of Woman* Boston,1838) or that Eve was the culmination of creation (Phyllis Trible, “Depatriarchalizing in biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 41, 1973: 30–48).
1960: 81). Both statements evince an idealized notion of women as “woman”: eternal, unchanging, mysterious, and other. Such writings do not inform readers about women’s lives, practices, or involvement in the human condition. In order that women be located in the text of humanity, feminist must carefully read such texts using them to understand sexed ideologies. In order to further the reconstruction, feminists have then sought to uncover the lost voices of women.

The act of reconstruction is nicely exemplified in Ross Shepard Kraemer’s edited text *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics* (1988). In this text, and others like it,³⁵ sources such as monuments, grave stones, public inscriptions, legal scripts (divorce agreements or wills), votive offerings, letters, texts, and documents, all of which are outside the scholarly canon, are utilized to bring women into human history and more specifically into the history of religions. She states (1992: 4–10):

> Recovering information about women’s religions from the sources from Greco-Roman antiquity is a complex often frustrating endeavor. It is first without scholarly endeavor. Many male scholars continued to hold the untested assumption that women’s experiences were either the same as men’s or else aberrant, irrelevant, or both, and in any case, not worthy of scholarly attention....I have found it extremely helpful to pay particular attention to nonliterary evidence from late antiquity....Such sources are less vulnerable to the biases of gender that affect the transmission of literature...

Women have, in large part, been written out of history. Their presence has, and continues to be, either ignored or subsumed under the generic man making them invisible. In order to bring into

visibility that which is conceived as invisible, feminist scholars have painstakingly scratched away at the years of accumulated sediment in order present a clearer image of human history.

Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed approach the study and practice of Islam from the position of feminists working in the academy. Their work utilizes the methods of rereading, reconceiving, and reconstructing Islamic traditions. In the process of rereading, both scholars challenge male interpretations of Islamic law basing their challenges upon the Quran. In the process of reconstruction both challenge male views of women, especially of female sexuality. or point to significant women in Islam: women such as Muhammad’s youngest wife Aisha, an intelligent and vocal advocate for Islam. In the act of reconceiving Islam, Mernissi and Ahmed do not suggest that the religious tradition be abandoned by Islamic women, but rather the history of Islam should be approached critically: “...even as Islam instituted, in the initiatory society, a hierarchical structure as the basis of relations between men and women, it also preached, in its ethical voice (and this is the case with Christianity and Judaism as well), the moral and spiritual equality of all human beings. Arguably, therefore, even as it instituted a sexual hierarchy, it laid the ground, in its ethical voice, for the subversion of the hierarchy” (Ahmed, 1992: 238).

Although many western feminists wonder at the possibility of women’s equal status within Islam, feminists like Mernissi and Ahmed challenge Western feminists for their ethnocentric/colonialist perspective: a perspective that perceives and then judges Islam from the position of the civilizing colonizer.

Religious beliefs affect, to the nth degree, both cultural and individual ethos and therefore can be understood as world-making. This makes it imperative that feminists examine and challenge prevalent paradigms concerning women within religious practices and beliefs.
CHAPTER 1

However, religion itself is a slippery concept. How does one understand the category of religion? Is it a cultural artifact that invents and determines how we conceptualize our reality? Is it a political and/or epistemological concept that goes far in legitimating social control as Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche would have it? Many would have it that religion is *sui generis*: an impulse inherent to all human beings across time and space. I would contend, however, that human beings are meaning-making in that they seek to explain theirs and the world’s existence, and religion has often functioned to do just that. But this does not make religiousness fundamental or biologically inherent in human beings. Rather, religion was, and continues to be, a narrative human beings have constructed not only to explain their existence, but to control that existence. It is a double-edged sword with both ideological and utopian impulses.

5.2 Feminist work in the area of symbol, myth, and ritual

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Mary Daly are working to define and redefine myth, symbol, and ritual from within a feminist perspective. Both Fiorenza and Ruether work within the Catholic Christian tradition. Their study of Christianity and its sacred text, the Bible, is motivated and affected by their belief that the subject of analysis is patriarchal only in its surface structures and can be reread from a feminist perspective. Mary Daly, however, has chosen to opt out of the Christian tradition judging patriarchy to be integral to the structure of biblical texts and Christianity itself.36

Mary Daly, a post Christian, moved out of the Christian tradition, or sadospirituality as

---

36 When using the term “structure” I am drawing upon the work of Pamela Milne (1989). Milne points out that reformist feminists perceive patriarchal bias to be something the text, in this instance the Bible, can be liberated from, whereas other feminists maintain that the Bible is patriarchal to its deepest structures: that patriarchy is integral to the text itself.
CHAPTER 1

she calls it, into the “background” wherein femaleness is the embodiment of the divine (Beyond God the Father, 1973; Gyn/Ecology, 1978; Pure Lust, 1984 and Outercourse, 1992). Her critical analysis of Christianity, and Western culture focuses closely on patriarchal ideology. She purports to show that patriarchy has functioned, essentially unchanged, against women since the inception of male civilization which has masqueraded as human civilization. Women, through “naming,” can deconstruct and construct new systems. They can unmask disempowering symbols while claiming and creating “woman” centred symbols. By developing rhetorical strategies women can resist male language and by creating new symbols women can achieve the necessary transformation required to develop metapatriarchal consciousness and true “Be-ing.”

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in her books In Memory of Her (1983), Bread Not Stone (1984), and But She Said (1992) articulates her method of a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion, remembrance, proclamation and liberative vision, all of which place women at the centre of the discourse. She deconstructs biblical texts demonstrating patriarchal perspectives in the text that have a historical and social basis, and further, points to the patriarchal interpretations of the text that have come down to us through history. Intrinsic to her method is the belief that there is no such thing as value-neutral or objective-descriptive history: there is no “history of,” only a “history for.” Accordingly, history thus far has been patriarchal and ultimately those doing it, consciously or otherwise, desire to further their own interests. Schüssler Fiorenza, then, by placing women at the centre of her project shifts the attention from male activity to female activity. Her desire to re-mythologize, and in this to claim, Christian history for women is motivated by her feminist concerns. Utilizing the rereading, reconceiving, and reconstruction of Christian narratives, Schüssler Fiorenza develops a feminist model by which, she believes,
women can reclaim Catholicism.

Rosemary Radford Ruether in her texts Sexism and Godtalk (1983), Woman-Church (1985), Womanguides (1985), To Change The World (1988), and Gaia and God (1992) critiques Catholic Christian tradition for its patriarchal mind set. Radford Ruether, in her critical analysis, places patriarchy within a cultural historical context, and asserts that Christianity, in its intentions, was meant to act as a liberative force. In her work Radford Ruether uses as “normative theology” the prophetic-liberating tradition of biblical faith she insists can be found in the prophetic works of The Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), and the prophetic teachings of Jesus found in the synoptic gospels of Christian scripture. Greatly influenced by liberation theology, Radford Ruether claims that a prophetic-liberating tradition flows through both Judaism and Christianity, a tradition which critiques oppression and demonstrates divine advocacy for the oppressed.

According to Radford Ruether, since women are the oppressed of the oppressed, they must also be among those whom God seeks/sought to vindicate and liberate.

Each of these feminist scholars seeks first to deconstruct existent patriarchal structures found in Western civilization, but most particularly in the Catholic Christian tradition. By critically examining symbolic language that re-presents deity, such as the trinity, and metaphors that create a social context by which to understand or approach deity (God the Father), Daly, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Radford Ruether can demonstrate the historical social context that informs religious metaphors and gives form to religious symbols. They reveal, reclaim, and recreate symbol systems, myth and ritual in order to develop social symbol systems that they believe are conducive to empowering women. Their work has assisted in challenging gender ideologies understood to be god-given or found in nature.
CHAPTER 1

By creating new symbol systems and redefining old ones, articulating new mythologies, and developing new rituals, these feminist scholars are attempting to create a reality that is inclusive of women as active agents in human history. It is my intention to examine the theories that provide an infrastructure to these “woman” oriented social symbol systems, myths, and rituals through a close study of Daly, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Radford Ruether’s writings.

As indicated, my work will consist of analysing how feminist theory informs their work. By examining how language in Daly, feminist epistemologies (and in that the category of feminist history) in Schüssler Fiorenza, and the three-tiered notion of difference in Radford Ruether are theorized or untheorized in their work, I can extend feminist discourse in the study of religion. A belief central to my feminist perspective, along with many feminists, is that women require models and modes of female identification in order that they may narrate their own lives. Both Virginia Woolf and Adrienne Rich in their search to find women authors/poets in order to employ them as models for themselves became acutely aware that women authors were almost nonexistent. What they met with was a monstrous/angelic image known as “woman.”

---

CHAPTER TWO
MARY DALY AND THE ELEMENTS OF LANGUAGE

1. Mary Daly: An Intellectual Biography

Mary Daly, feminist, theologian, philosopher, and prophetess has affected women’s views of the world, their lives, and their perception of divinity. She challenged the Catholic institution, strove to change it, and then came to the conclusion that such attempts at change were futile. Moving out of institutionalized religion she looked back and resolved that she really had no desire to act as a catalyst for the Catholic church. She determined that all institutional religions are patriarchal (1992, 1984 and 1978), and all patriarchy is gynocidal (1978, 1984). Daly’s understanding of the journey from the Foreground into the Background, from patriarchal consciousness to ontological being is charted in her autobiography Outercourse (1992).

1.1 Autobiography

Stephanie Kirkwood Walker when writing about the contexts of Emily Carr’s life, notes that autobiography has been a stumbling block for women. Without a self, as self is understood in modernity, how does a woman write her autobiography (Kirkwood Walker, 1996)? How does she narrate the facts and fantasies of her life, and inscribe meaning into the text of her self-creation? As Kirkwood Walker understands it (1996: 25), “[t]he significance of autobiography by women does not lie so much in its differences from male autobiography—both can write linear narratives, both disjunctive ones—as in what Donna Stanton (1987: 14) has called its “essential therapeutic purpose,” the constitution of the female subject, a recognition of the prohibitions and of the will to succeed.” Women have not been present in the history of humankind nor have they had legal selves by which to intersect with the “public” world. Therefore, women’s history and
the history of one woman’s life “will have to be read into the scene of its own exclusion. It has to be invented—both discovered and made up” (Kamuf, 1988: 154).

Mary Daly must also invent a self that can act as a centre for her autobiography. Like most women’s autobiography, this self will be constructed interrelationally in conjunction with the events that occur in Daly’s life. Daly both effects events in her life and is equally effected by the events in her life. This would seem to be true for all of us, but in autobiographies largely written by men, about men, the self is seen as an active agent creating both the context and the meaning in his life. He is an autonomous subject. Women, who have not been subjects in the world, do not have this privilege and cannot construct themselves as such. Their identities are relational, mother, sister, daughter, etc., and without autonomy women cannot construct an autonomous self. Daly, in an attempt to circumvent this problem creates a multiplicity of Dalys that are interrelational to each other in order to construct a self. Autobiographically, then, Daly does not conceive of herself as a static self propelled through time, but rather a layer of selves in the process of becoming. Susan Henking (1991: 518) notes: “In her remarks, Daly reveals a multidimensional present and a self that is processual, interactive, and textual. In her reflections.

we find a multiplicity of selves . . . .” One of these selves is Daly as the narrator of her life who can observe her life from a stable position (this position is the fourth galaxy of “Be-Dazzling Now: Moments of Momentous Re-Membering: Off the Calendar, Off the Clock.”) Daly as narrator is not subject to the fragmentation of a layered self, but rather can interpret the meaning each of the “selves” is contextualized in so that each self is located in a galaxy of meaning. Like much autobiography written by women, then, Daly’s autobiography does not re-present a static self, but rather there is a discovery and an invention of multiplicity through which the narrator is
able to perceive the meaning in the life—her life—that she presents. The meaning that Daly will conceive and apply to her life has to do with herself as a feminist and this feminism will be projected backward and forward so that each step is read as a movement toward feminist consciousness and feminist consciousness is read as a movement toward becoming human. For Daly the act of creating a self, which of course is the central process of autobiography, is a dialectical process between writing and being written.

Daly’s autobiography, *Outercourse: The Bedazzling Voyage* (1992), recounts her life, her thoughts, and her ambitions. She begins her autobiography with the initial moment of her birth and takes the reader through her life until the present. Throughout one notes that Daly’s body will disappear and one is left with only Daly’s thoughts: thoughts during her life and thoughts about her thoughts during her life. Daly does clearly indicate in *Outercourse*, that this will be a “[r]emember[ing] [of] my own intellectual voyage as a Radical Feminist Philosopher” (1992: 1, my italics), however, as Virginia Woolf notes (1976: 65): “Here I come to one of the memoir writer’s difficulties one of the reasons why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom things happened.” Woolf was referring to men’s autobiography’s and how the embodied human being is often absent. In Daly’s autobiography her thoughts are present but there is relatively little embodiment. This lack may be intentional and represent Daly’s refusal to include her body, as the female body is the only “self” women have been able to claim in patriarchy, or it may be that Daly, trained in the Western patriarchal tradition, has overlooked the need to include her body falling into the trap of the self represented in text as a transcendent self.

In *Outercourse* the reader is provided with an organized schematic of Daly’s thoughts
throughout her life. She ascribes periods of time to first, second, third, and fourth galaxies which are spiral galaxies and names each of them. The spiral, according to Daly, is in reference to the time/movement that operates in her life. It is not linear time of which she says: “women are constantly tempted to measure reality in terms of the measurements of Father Time, which are linear and clocked. This is a trap” (1978: 41n). Rather there is spiral time which consists of “monumentous moments” that, in this instance, propel Daly from one galaxy into the next. The main sections of the book are segmented into spiral galaxies which are themselves organized around the writing of her books. It is here that one sees the multiplicity of selves encapsulated in Daly’s autobiographical narrative. As she moves into the “Background”1 and enters each spiral galaxy a different self emerges: a self that is both affected by the entrance into the new galaxy, and a self that effects the new galaxy.

Daly’s galaxies are in perpetual external and internal motion. Each pinwheel-like galaxy spins around the other and consists of extended concentrations of matter circling a nucleus. Spiral time operates in the Background, which is female/nature space: the space of reality. Linear time operates in what Daly calls the Foreground, which is both patriarchal space and a creation of patriarchy. By connecting female space with all of creation, with nature as we exist within it, Daly is able to flip or reverse the meaning in philosophical patriarchal pairing of women/nature and men/culture. Women/nature no longer denote passivity, subjugation, or irrationality, but rather the active, autonomous, rational creativeness of empirical existence.

1 Daly has segmented reality into two separate dimensions, the Background which is the wild reality of women, and the Foreground, which is the falsification of reality by patriarchy. She demarcates these space/time dimensions by capitalizing the words, Background and Foreground, and therefore I will as well.
CHAPTER 2

Men/culture no longer denote rationality and dominion, but instead the irrationality of a constructed existence that seeks power through domination (1973; 1978; 1984; 1992). This is just one example of Daly’s reversing of patriarchal reversals.

As one reads Daly’s autobiography, it becomes apparent that her life is purposely interpreted and described through the prism of the present. Daly indicates at times that she is viewing the actions of one galaxy from another further on, and/or that the recollections are from a “logbook of a radical feminist philosopher”\(^2\) that exists only in her memory, meaning moves in/on tidal time—wherein the past, present, and future are mutually engaged. Such a perspective is a bird’s eye view, one of which is inherent to an autobiographical method of writing (Woolf, 1976: 75). Memories that remain locked in our minds are invested with meaning. These moments accumulate in order to create a narrative of being. For example, as Daly writes about her childhood she ponders over moments wherein she reflected upon the nature of existence. As a child she experienced the call of nature in the form of a clover blossom which spoke to her of being (“I am”) (1992: 24), while in another instance of remembrance a block of ice in the snow touched feelings which she later understood as elemental. Daly (1984: 173) relates these “monumentous moments” to Virginia Woolf’s moments of being, but Daly will nuance Woolf’s

---

\(^2\)The logbook qualifier suggests the notion of a daily recording of events that can be read over while living in the present. The next qualifier, however, that this logbook “exists in memory only”, signifies that Daly’s autobiographical musings, although apparently based on the recording of the past, remains securely located in the present as they are memories of events filtered through the present and not events written down after their occurrence. This means, then, that there can be no meaning at the time of the events only meaning derived from the memory of the events which is of course conditioned by the present. This condition of reading a past that is constructed only in the present is obscured by Daly’s rhetorical use of the term “logbook” even if she qualifies it as existing in memory only.
philosophizing in order that these moments are not only understood as moments of crystal clear awareness, but are seen as a series of moments that are strung together with each acting as a momentary touch of “real” existence or what Daly will call ontological being. The encounters with these moments of being warp and weave through Daly’s life and are used in order that she may map the various galaxies she will enter. Daly’s interpretation and stringing together of these moments as monumental and continuous are, of course, only possible from a location in the present (the future when writing the past) of the writing of the autobiography. She as narrator knows the outcome of her story, or rather, the meaning of the outcome as she interprets it. A narrator is securely located in both the present and the conditional future of the autobiography and therefore is in a situation whereby she can give a definitive statement on the past as she knows her own present and this conditional future. As the narrator, Daly can secure the necessary distance to inscribe meaning in the events of her life so that they can become moments of being. As the subject derived from only memory, the Dalys of the past can be interpreted by Daly the narrator in the present. Ultimately then, Daly’s autobiography tells the reader more about Daly in the present (or at the writing of her autobiography) than about who she may have been in the past.

1.2 Daly’s rise, and realization, of feminist consciousness

Daly indicates in *Outercourse* that her introduction to Simone de Beauvoir’s text *The Second Sex* (1952 [1949]) laid the seeds for her feminist thought which would germinate in the early sixties. She states that at the time of reading the text there was “no context, no movement, in which to realize de Beauvoir’s message” (1992: 55). By the mid-sixties a context had risen. Daly read an article by Rosemary Lauer entitled “Women and the Church,” and Daly’s “sleeping
powers of Be-speaking" were awakened. Daly wrote two articles concerning women and Catholicism and shortly thereafter she received an invitation to write a book on the topic. The book was published in 1968, a year after her mother’s death, and was entitled *The Church and the Second Sex*.

Although *The Church and the Second Sex* demonstrated a desire to reform Catholic Christian doctrine, Daly’s next book *Beyond God The Father* (1973) demonstrated a shift in perspective, and this developing perspective Daly called “radical feminism.” *The Church and the Second Sex* belonged to the first spiral galaxy, the galaxy Daly names “Be-speaking,” whereas *Beyond God The Father* was written after the attempted firing of Daly by Boston College. It belongs to the second spiral galaxy of which she names “Moments of Breakthrough and Recalling” (1992).

In 1971 Daly initiated the Harvard Memorial Church exodus. She had been invited to be the first woman to preach at the Sunday service. Daly and some “Cohorts” agreed that a walkout on patriarchal religion was in order (1992: 137). In the fall of this same year a women’s caucus of the American Academy of Religion was formed. Daly suggested a section called “a working group” for which she was named the chair (1992: 141). According to Daly, activities such as these along with the publication of her two books alienated the administrators and her co-workers of Boston College.

Daly’s difficulties with Boston College have been an ongoing issue since the writing of

---

her first book. Throughout the years Daly had been, according to *Outercourse*, persistently harassed by her department. This harassment has essentially been condoned by Boston College in general. Aside from attempting to fire Daly (1969) by giving her a one year terminal contract position, some associates and the administration of her department have: 1) directed students away from her courses; 2) snubbed her at official receptions; 3) ignored her credentials; 4) denied her the rank of a full professor twice, once in 1975\(^4\) and the second time in 1989;\(^5\) 5) monitored her classes; and 6) sent her letters reprimanding her for her public statements. Their attempts to shut Daly down, as well as her growing awareness of feminist issues brought about the preparation and writing of *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) and, according to Daly, the jump into the third spiral galaxy: “Bewitching: Moments of Spinning.”

Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* might well be described as the watershed book of Daly’s career. Although Daly herself points to 1975 as a watershed year (1992: 183; 1990 [1978]: xi), the year in which she was denied a full professorship, this book represents her break with any effort to reform, or reconcile with, patriarchy.\(^6\) For example, her article of 1970 states that: “... what we

---

\(^4\)Daly points out that at the time of her application for full professor she had published two books, one of which was a required text in some universities, contributed writings to more than ten books, published more than twenty articles in professional journals, had done substantial committee work, had given more than seventy public lectures, and had presented papers at learned societies. Her department head indicated to the college newspaper, when queried about the college’s refusal to recognize Daly’s academic work, that “[s]he has made no significant contribution to the field” (1992: 206).

\(^5\)At this point Daly had increased her published material by four books, and numerous articles published in journals and texts. Again she was refused, this time because the committee found her work questionable regarding its scholarliness (1992: 389).

\(^6\)Certainly, as Daly indicates (1992: 174), her “Feminist postchristian introduction” is indicative of her break with the Church. And quite early, in 1973, she gave a paper at the annual
need to see developed is an analysis of the man-woman relationship which rejects as alienating to both men and women the idea of sexual hierarchy founded upon "nature"..." (1970: 131), and as late as Beyond God the Father she maintained this reconciliatory tone (1973: 172): ‘The adequate “cosmosis” will require a breakdown of walls with the male psyche as well as within the female. It will require in men as well as in women a desire to become androgynous, that is, to become themselves.” However, by 1975, the watershed year, Daly wrote an article that critiqued the concept of androgyny,7 and, according to Daly, with its writing she journeyed into the third spiral galaxy. It is Daly’s opinion that the act of writing “…actualizes Memory in an especially potent way. The process of writing, and of seeing/hearing the words come forth on the page is journeying …. The chains of silencing are broken by continuing acts of creativity, inspired by Pure Lust” (1984: 173,175).

Gyn/Ecology belongs to the third spiral galaxy, along with Pure Lust and the Wickedary. This galaxy, according to Daly, corresponds to the foreground age of fragmentation (1992: 210). Daly took three years to write Gyn/Ecology. It was during this period of time that Daly appears to have entered a vortex and emerged a radical, lesbian feminist. Although she claimed herself to be AAR describing herself as a postchristian (1992: 174), while in January of 1975 she gave another paper in Vienna entitled “Radical Feminism: The qualitative leap beyond patriarchal religion” (1992: 183). But it is in Gyn/Ecology where she elaborates the thesis that patriarchy is a global phenomenon bent on the destruction of women and nature. She equates a woman seeking justice in a patriarchal system with an Afro-American seeking justice in the organization of the Ku Klux Klan.

a radical\(^8\) feminist in 1974, it was with the completion of *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) that Daly developed a perspective that understood all institutionalized male activities as patriarchal. She indicates that “[a] vast shift in my mode of writing is evident in *Gyn/Ecology*, which is Metapatriarchally Metaphorical. This Shape-shifting continued/continues throughout *Pure Lust* which is a work of Elemental Feminist Philosophy” (1992: 8–9).

The dramatic shift in Daly’s perspective was evidently brought about by her research for *Gyn/Ecology*, (see, “New Intergalactic Introduction” of *Gyn/Ecology*, especially xxv–xxvi and *Outercourse*, 1992: 210-213), but inclusive in this shift was her experience with Boston College and their refusal to award her full professorship.\(^9\) Daly was no longer concerned with finding a way for humanity to work out its problems located in such isms as sexism, racism, classism, ethnocentrism, etc. She had come to the conclusion, when writing *Gyn/Ecology*, that there was an overriding system, patriarchy, which was bent on the destruction of the other and the self. The

\(^8\)Daly utilizes the term “radical” to indicate a movement away from and out of patriarchy: a move that often incorporates separatist politics wherein women must learn to think and conceptualize out of the ken of the males of their group and in antithesis to patriarchy.

\(^9\)With the publication of Daly’s book *Gyn/Ecology* the harassment by administration of Boston College was, according to Daly, stepped up. This harassment took the form of legitimated academic institutional policing methods. In one instance observers were placed in Daly’s class with neither her knowledge nor her consent. Thereafter complaints to the College concerning Daly’s teaching practices were lodged by these plants. These complaints were used in order to justify the policing of Daly via monitors attending her classes (1992: 227–229). Daly’s response was to bring in the media whereupon direct harassment ceased. However, discreet forms of harassment continue even today. That Daly has not been awarded full professorship is indicative of one way educational institutions can control subversive discourse. When asked while lecturing in Ireland why she remained at Boston College Daly stated (1992: 283): “I did not reply with details about the buddy system of the academic men’s club or the workings of grapevine blacklisting or of the purging of Radical Feminists from academia... I gave the truest answer that I knew. This was, simply: ‘I choose to Stand my Ground.’”
writing of Gyn/Ecology, for Daly, brought into a sharp focus the atrocities carried out and fostered by institutions, and all institutions were and are understood by Daly to be products of misogynistic energy produced by the male (1990: 28): "Women and our kind—the earth, the sea, the sky—are the real but unacknowledged objects of attack, victimized as The Enemy of patriarchy—of all its wars, of all its professions...[and] males, and males only are the originators, planners, controllers, legitimators of patriarchy."

Daly, while writing Gyn/Ecology, travelled to Crete and examined the wonders of the Minoan artwork on the walls of the ruins of Knossos with her friend Denise. Influenced by J. J. Bachofen and Margaret Murray’s theories that matriarchal cultures existed prior to patriarchal cultures, Daly was highly affected by her trip to Crete. In the ancient Minoan culture she saw the possible proof of Mead and Bachofen’s theories (1992: 219). Understanding the Minoans as an early matriarchal culture, one which was overthrown by the Mycenaeans—clearly a patriarchal

---

Daly does not question either Bachofen or Murray in their understanding of a matriarchy which is conjectured to have preceded patriarchy. Bachofen saw patriarchy as a necessary evolutionary step in the human process of civilization, one which succeeded matriarchy, while Murray was extremely interested in witchcraft, and connected matriarchal cultures with the practice of witchcraft, nature cults, and paganism. However, Murray’s understanding of these latter three was distorted as it came through a Christian prism, and she saw Christianity as a natural progression toward the truth of religious belief. Further,Neither did Daly think to question the nature of the Minoan ruins and how they have been reconstructed according to a specific group’s (archaeologists) understanding of the past which in turn reinforced the group’s present. Knossos, and other Minoan cites such as Phaestos, have been re-created by archaeologists in an image not only conducive to their understanding of history, but conducive to the tourist trade. As to the presence of artifacts indicating a number of female deities at these ancient Minoan sites, India is a glaring example how goddess worship is incorporated into a patriarchal society.
culture—she pirated11 the symbol of the Labrys whereupon it became a basic metaphor throughout all her work (1992: 219).

Her feet now on the path toward separatism, a self-declared lesbian since 197712 (1992: 214), Mary Daly began to put together the outline for her next book: *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (1984). *Pure Lust*, according to Daly, arose out of philosophical concerns produced by the writing of *Gyn/Ecology*. Daly further relates that while heading out toward the east coast in 1980, she flew over the smoking cone of Mount St. Helen. This was on May 12, two days prior to its eruption. Daly, when musing upon and developing ideas that expressed a connectedness between women and nature, linked her own rising eruption of feminist ire with that of Mount St. Helen’s (1992: 242). Where *Gyn/Ecology* named patriarchy to be the demon, *Pure Lust* went on to elaborate upon the philosophical canon which empowered the demon.

In the summer of 1981 Daly journeyed to Australia where she visited friends and various significant sites in Australia such as Ayers Rock and the Great Barrier Reef. After spending several weeks there, Daly gave a lecture in Sydney. At the lecture were a number of women who were openly hostile to Daly and her perception of the world and women (1992: 262). Prior to flying to Australia while on a visit to Nelle Morton, a young woman had also responded to Daly’s feminist ideas with some hostility (1992: 259). As the writing of *Pure Lust* continued,

---

11 Pirating within Daly’s philosophy is a process of women taking back from patriarchy what was once theirs, or the utilizing of patriarchal symbols and myths for the purpose of radical feminist analysis (1992: 129–133).

12 According to Daly her statement of lifestyle is relevant: relevant to her feminism. She states: “The insight that Lesbianism in the deepest sense implies Feminism and that Radical Feminism implies Lesbianism has been shared by many women” (1992, 435: 10n, author’s italics).
Daly began to interpret this behaviour as “female Self-hatred...horizontal violence...tokenism and the scapegoat syndrome...” (1992: 277). It was incidents such as these which defined for Daly her understanding of false consciousness. This notion underscores her naming of those women who supported male ideology as fembots and token torturers: women who participated in the subjugation of women.

In June of 1984 Daly flew off to England to attend the First International Feminist Book fair (1992: 279). On this trip Daly journeyed to Ireland to lecture in Dublin, Belfast, and Cork. Although she had previously visited Ireland, this time was different, this time, according to Daly, it felt like going home. Her roots were in Ireland and an aspect of her self image was that of an Irish American (1992: 282). Ireland was to become a central theme in Daly’s comprehension of her own life story. There would be several trips to Ireland in the future, each one acting as both a connection to the past, and a catalyst for the future. Ireland (and by this I do not mean Irish culture or society) acted as the concrete image for the imagining of Daly’s mythic elemental Background. Ireland mythically act as a doorway between Daly’s conceptualizing of the Background and Foreground, and concretely established a connection between herself and her own sense of ancestral belonging. It established a link between herself and those she understood as her foresisters: female ancestors who were biophilic and representative of a pre-patriarchal society. In Ireland she could access the memories of those women, who, like her, were connected to their true selves. They had lived in a world where reality had been undivided between Background and Foreground (1992: 293). These ideas: a matriarchy prior to a patriarchy elaborated as a Background and a Foreground; false consciousness to explain women’s lack of insight into their own oppression; and “pagan” mythology as a doorway to the once held freedom
of the Background are elaborated in Daly’s *Pure Lust*, and make up the primary substance of her elemental philosophy, or better yet, her feminist mythology.

Returning to United States, *Pure Lust* having been released by the publisher, Daly moved from her cabin/loft/house at Leverett to an apartment adjacent to Crystal Lake in Boston. She then began to work on the *Wickedary* with Jane Caputi. Daly indicates in her autobiography that the idea of *The Wickedary* (1987) was conceived about “halfway through the Spinning of *Pure Lust*” (1992: 292). The *Wickedary* was to be a work that freed words from patriarchal control so that, like women whose reality is elemental to the Background, the archaic Background of words could unfolded (1992: 294). The words defined in the *Wickedary* are taken from Daly’s texts while each of the sections in the *Wickedary*, Word-Web One, Two, and Three (with a suggested Word-Web four and five), are connected to each of Daly’s galaxies. With the completion of the *Wickedary* Daly leapt from the third spiral galaxy into the fourth.

The writing of *Outercourse* (1992), Daly tells the reader, came from a conversation with a friend, Ann Louise Gilligan, who put into words what others have wondered: “Where *Pure Lust* and [her] other books came from...?” “How did it happen?” “How did you do it?” (1992: 337). Daly indicates she had been asked similar questions before, but now it seemed to be the time to write an autobiography. However, Daly indicates she was faced with a conflict: the desire to write something autobiographical, but also to continue to write in order to develop her philosophy. *Outercourse* was the result of both these aspirations. In the introduction of *Outercourse* Daly informs the reader that this work is more than just an autobiography, it is an elaboration of both the impetus behind her work and the growth of her ideas.

Daly’s work has been a significant factor in the women’s movement within religious
studies. Her books are used in courses, and she is quoted by countless women working in the field. Her books have been translated into German and Italian, and her lecture circuit takes her all over the world. Joann Wolski Conn, who agrees with Mary Jo Weaver (1992: 197), indicates that Daly must be considered in any discussion of a Roman Catholic feminist theology (1992: 21). Daly names herself as a radical, lesbian feminist and has come to concretely and symbolically represent that branch of feminism. Her third book *Gyn/Ecology* “has been extraordinarily popular with the grassroots radical feminist movement” (Jagger 1983: 93) and she is “probably the most important Radical Feminist thinker around” (Maitland 1991: 28). Although certainly not a populist such as Naomi Wolfe, Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* has become as much an essential reading for aspiring feminists as Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*.

Daly’s invention of a self spirals out from “moments of being,” the latter of which act as windows to the place she understands as the Background. Therefore, a clover blossom, icicle. confrontations with her male colleagues, and travels in Ireland and Crete, each of these monumentous moments Daly interprets as encounters with the real. This real, according to Daly will act as the engine that inspires her work. Each of her texts represents both an entrance into a new galaxy and a further realization of self. Each text articulates, and is articulated by, Daly’s development of a radical feminist consciousness, a consciousness expressed by and located in language.

2. Daly and language

_“I invest, dis-cover, re-member words.”* (Daly, 1984: 30)

*Mary Daly and Julia Kristeva are among the women who have argued in their writings for a radical theory of language, not as an intellectual luxury, but as an essential part of the struggle for women’s liberation.* (Cameron, 1985: 1)
According to the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud and the later Jacques Lacan, "children acquire subjectivity, and language in connection with their sexual and gender identification during the oedipal period." What this means then, is that children shift their "instinctual sexual needs" from their mother to their father in order that they acquire personhood and language at the same time that "sexual difference is structured and represented by and in language" (Roman, 1994: 9). Language, and in that power, is associated with the father. Language is the law of the father that brings the child into the realm of the symbolic. However, as women, and in that mothers, are understood not to be the bearers of language, they cannot confer this magnanimous gift onto their children. Although there are difficulties in the wholesale acceptance of Freud or Lacan's thesis, such as the giving away of language to men, the unconditional acceptance of the rule of the phallus, and language determinism, more of which I will say later, both Freud and Lacan recognized that subjectivity or language are interconnected. We come to our personhood by and through language and if that language erases, subjugates, or excludes groups of people, such as women, for example the masculine "generic," one's understanding of subjectivity cannot help but be affected. How language is used, whether or not one is in the position to name existence, and how one is located in language all affect not only subjectivity, but objectivity as well. How we understand ourselves as humans, and how we organize and understand the world that encapsulates us is largely expressed through language.

Feminisms of all kinds recognize the power that resides in language, and in this, the power to name. By naming—the act of establishing/defining—we make meaning in the world. To name something is to bring it into conceptual existence. If, in the naming game, the dominant group has control of language, that group then defines existence within that particular culture or
social unit. For example, in the majority of monotheistic religions deity is named by masculine names and/or pronouns. Even if the deity is abstracted and not anthropomorphised, the masculine pronoun and masculine name or designator names the deity as masculine if not male. Therefore, in Judaism (Adonis; Elohim; YHWH), Christianity (God, Father, Lord, Jesus) and Islam (Allah) deity is referred to and addressed by masculine names and pronouns and deity, then, is concretely conceptualized as masculine while if embodied, is embodied in male form. Naming the deity via masculine terms gave conceptual existence not only to a supernatural being but to a masculinized supernatural being. The dominant group within most cultures has been, and is male. Their god reflects their own generalized (generalized by and through gender) image so that god was/is male (and, in the West is white). In the process of naming god, dominant groups of men brought into being “his” and their own gendered existence: to be god is to be male-like, to be male is to be godlike whereas to be female is to be not-god-like.

In this act of naming god(s) men not only immortalize their gender, they deny it. As indicated, an aspect that marks divinity is maleness, but divinity is often understood to transcend gender in its universality. Therefore men, via the dialectical relationship with deity, are both immortalized (male god) in the same moment that their maleness is denied (universal). In other words, God is the ultimate founding father, the ultimate legitimation of rule by the male of the species, and the ultimate proof that maleness does not denote gender.

The masculine “generic” functions precisely this way in language because of the universalization of the male. Man, mankind, and he are understood not to “really” denote gender, but rather the masculine “generic” functions androgynously so that it can represent both the male and the female. However, studies have shown that the masculine “generic” functions not as a
CHAPTER 2

Men visualize the male when reading or hearing the masculine generic, and women visualize the male or suppress the image of male in order to make room for themselves (Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley, 1983:10; Martyna, 1983: 25–37). One wonders how it is possible to logically conceive of a gendered category that is both gendered and non-gendered. One of the ways such distorted logic can function is as an axiom, and the self-evident truth here is that as god is male, male must be like god, and since god is universal so too the male. Therefore, precisely because the male gender, unlike the female gender, is understood to be universal, the male gender in language (and otherwise), unlike the female gender in language, is universal. This is not to say that because god was named male, the generic male came into being, but rather, the logic that supports the dialectical relationship between “man” and “god” supports the masculine “generic.”

The masculine “generic” has been a primary force in the creation of the subject as male. As the universal the male shares a bird’s eye view with deity. By proxy through deity he names existence: he is the subject while all else exists as objects of his naming. Only the universal can transcend both time and space and not be subject to materiality. The essence of men—the male—that imbues both “man” and “mankind” is subject to neither history nor death. He has eternal existence, and, in that, subjectivity. His continuance through time and space has ensured that he is the subject of creation. As both god and human, man stands outside time and space at

---

13Although many now utilize gender inclusive language, there is still much resistance to letting go of “man” as a linguistic denotation of humanity. For instance, “Man Alive” or “Man” continue to use the masculine generic in their title, but will use the term humanity in the descriptions of their respective television program and journal. However, by juxtaposing “man” with humanity the association of the male (white and western) as representative of the human race is re-entrenched.
As feminists have recognized the power in language to name existence, so too have they recognized subjugation in being named. Named currently as “welfare mother” and “single mother” or historically as Miss or Mrs., women’s definitions and self-definitions have depended upon their relationships or non-relationships with men in cultural systems undergirded by patriarchal relations. Women functioning in an androcentric world that names them as other come to understand themselves as other. In the naming game power resides with the namer—and the namer has consisted of men encapsulated in a patriarchal ethos. This ethos has functioned both in an androcentric and misogynistic way. The naming has amounted to prescribing to women how men thought they ought to be. For whatever psychological or ideological reasons, men have described and prescribed women to themselves and to women. For example, “Julia Penelope Stanley (1977) found 220 terms for a sexually promiscuous woman and only 22 terms for a sexually promiscuous man” (Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley, 1983: 9). Women as subjects cannot exist in a world where they are refused admittance to, erased from, and/or maligned by that which signifies humanity, language. Michel Foucault suggests (Rabinow, 1984: 3–27) three modes of subjugation: 1) dividing practices wherein the subject is objectified by a process of division either within herself or from others, i.e., welfare mother, single mother, or prostitute wherein women are given both a social and personal identity; 2) scientific classification/objectification of the speaking subject in grammar (in this instance the masculine generic), the productive subject (economic viability in the public world), or the being alive in natural history and biology (biologically inferior in relation to the male and not defined in relation to herself), i.e., female as a designator which allows an ordering of women in existence;
3) and finally subjectification or the ways in which a human being turns herself into a subject. However, this self understanding is mediated by an external authority figure, i.e., father, husband, confessor, or analyst—a recognized authority—who will be, more often than not, male, and authorial because of his maleness—the penis, which acts as a metonymic device for the phallus (pen), accesses him to the symbolic, language.

Mary Daly, recognizing the power that resides in language, in the naming game, and women’s lack of access to this power, introduces discursive strategies which she believes will empower women. Mary Daly’s language strategies consist of the following: reversing the reversals; naming and renaming; and pirating patriarchal metaphors and symbols, stripping them of their patriarchal encrustation and then asserting their “true” meaning. In the use of these strategies Daly asserts that language or the symbolic may be under control of patriarchy, but with the help of feminists it can escape patriarchal control and become a tool for feminists: a tool to dismantle the master’s house. Unlike French feminist Luce Irigaray she does not give language (the symbolic) away to patriarchy without resistance while retaining the imaginary (pre-verbal) for women. She does not claim the interstices but rather lays hold of language and turns it against those who have used it to subjugate women.

2.1 Reversing the reversals

Daly’s first step is to “reverse the reversals.” One encounters the beginnings of this process in The Church and the Second Sex (1968: 88), an explicit use of reversing the reversals in Beyond God the Father (1974: Chapters two and three), a contextualization of it in Gyn/Ecology (1978), and a full elaboration of it in Pure Lust (1984). Daly’s thealogy reversals can be understood to be the result of two principles. The first is unintentional and a natural
outcome of the mirror effect. The foreground as a mirror image of the Background would reverse what it was a reflection of. The second, however, has intentionality in that the reversal is used to empower one group at the cost of another. Daly uses the first in order to explain the oppressed’s confusion. Mirror images look real, but are inversions of reality, therefore it is easy to be tricked. But once the mirror has been discovered, the trick can be uncovered. The trick, of course, is a slight of hand utilized by patriarchy. According to Daly, patriarchy as vampiric, as necrophilic, and as gynocidal seeks to enslave women, usurping and draining women’s “elemental” powers. In order to do such, patriarchy has reversed the truth, telling women they are evil, i.e., Jerome’s “the devil’s gateway,” or that women are the cause for human suffering and pain (Pandora or Eve), or that ultimately women are the source of everything deemed horrid in existence. Women are also told that they sprang from men or male gods, as in the Genesis myth, that they are weaker, less intelligent (i.e., Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, *On The History of Animals* or *On the parts of Animals*), and less moral than men (see the works of Augustine, Aquinas, Kant, etc. regarding this point). Daly flips all these notions on their heads. She demonstrates the lack of logic in patriarchal gender ideology, criticises patriarchy for the scapegoating tendencies of its oppressive power, for its intent toward the legitimation of its perspective, and finally, points out that the reversals conceal the essence of female power which is ultimately and essentially good. This female power finds it origin in the Background, the place of true Be-ing, and the place which generates all reality, regardless of the distortions thereafter.

In her work then, we see Daly challenge and reverse such myths as Genesis: a woman is not born from a man, an idea that is simply silly. Men are of course born from women. She states that (1974: 95):
The absurd story of Eve’s birth is an excellent example of a process that is prevalent in men’s treatment of women and their accomplishments throughout the history of patriarchy. I shall simply call this phenomenon *reversal*. In some cases it is blatantly silly, as in this case of insistence that a male was the original mother, and that “God” (a male) revealed this. In other instances it has been pseudo-biological, as in the centuries-long insistence that women are “misbegotten males”—a notion refuted by modern genetic research, which demonstrates that it would be far more accurate to designate the male (produced by a Y chromosome, which is an incomplete X chromosome) as a misbegotten female.

Daly flips not just myths, and philosophical, theological, and scientific treatises, but language so that a hag which is understood within patriarchy (and its dictionaries) as an ugly old woman especially a vicious or malicious one, is understood within Daly’s system of reversals as (1987: 137): “a Witch, Fury, Harpy who haunts the Hedges/Boundaries of patriarchy, frightening fools and summoning Weird Wandering Women into the Wild.” Terms or phrases, then, which have maligned women in the past and insured that women remain within patriarchal societal dictates of normative and acceptable behaviour for women are flipped by Daly. At any time in the past women have not wished to be known as a hag, nag, dyke, witch, prude, or spinster, but within Daly’s system these terms take on new meaning. Their definitions may stay the same so that a vixen is still understood as a “shrewish ill-tempered woman,” but a shrew is understood as one who can see the truth, who can see through the sham of patriarchal reversals and will rail against and scold the oppressors, while a spinster is a woman who Spins, and in this participates in the whirling movement of creation, as one who has chosen her Self, who does not define this Self via her relationships, but rather is “Self-identified” (1987: 167). Words are redefined by Daly, often by her use of archaic means so that Daly understands a hag, (hagazussa) to be a being who sat on the fence (hag) or at the boundary between civilization and the wilderness (Duerr, 1991: 46). Or
he can simply understand words in a slanted manner so that virgin means wild, untamed, never captured, a marriage resister (1987: 176).

Daly reinterprets language in order to develop a thesis which demonstrates that patriarchy, or the Foreground, is a reversal of reality, reality being the Background, the place wherein women, as essentially good and find their true homes. In Daly’s Background, nature, the cosmic universe and all “elemental life” perceived in the Foreground as chaotic (which has been understood as the nature of evil) find their true existence and definition. According to Daly’s development of the symbolism of good and evil, it is only in the Foreground that nature, women, and other elemental life are defined as evil, but this is a reversal, an inverted mirror image of reality, for the Foreground is merely a distorted reflection of the Background which is true existence. By reversing notions of good and evil (much in line with Nietzsche but with gender consciousness), so that good is really evil and evil is really good (1984: 269–71) women, who are perceived and perceive themselves in the Foreground as evil, are, in reality (the Background), good. Beyond God the Father (1974) and Gyn/Ecology (1978) are two of her texts which exemplify this process of reversing the reversals most completely.

Daly’s move to reverse the reversals operates in several different fashions. She can literally reverse the reversals so that, for example, she will butt up against the Adamic myth of Genesis’ biological reality in order to clearly demarcate the utter ridiculousness of the reversal when faced with the real: the male is born from the female. But further she takes the reversing of reversals from the literal dimension to the logical dimension. Eve’s subordination to Adam has been understood as natural in patriarchy because of her having been born from him which assumes she is second to his first, and first is understood as better than second. A second reason
for this subordination is based on the idea that she is a part of him and in this then he is whole while she remains merely a part. Daly employs the same logic of the myth, and if not the myth then certainly its interpretation in Western Christian culture, that first is better than second and that the whole is better than the part. Women then are shown empirically to be both first (she gives birth to the child) and whole (the child is formed from and in her body) and therefore superior to men. In this move Daly not only demystifies and grounds the myth in a social historical reality by bringing it into empirical reality, but she also uses the internal logic of the myth to debunk its own claims of male superiority.

Daly’s development of a Foreground reality which reflects (and therefore inverts) Background reality is another development of her rhetorical strategy of reversing the reversals. Utilizing the logic of Levi Strauss’ binary opposition, a logic which has often been used to demonstrate women’s inherent inferiority, Daly assumes binary opposition but reverses its interpretation. Metaphorically re-presenting the movement or logic of binary opposition as the movement or logic of a mirror, how these binary opposites have been read in the past is simply a distorting effect of the mirror: female, nature, and the wild are related to each other as analogues and have binary opposites: male, culture and order, but the former should be read positively as both right and real, while the latter are inversions and therefore should be read negatively as wrong and false. A mirror inverts, presents the opposite of what it is reflecting. But how does one know which is the reflection and which is real. The logic Daly utilizes is one that is consistently found throughout her work and in her use of language: the logic of origins (e.g., etymologies, prehistory, first is better). By implicitly drawing upon the idea that at the moment of origin there is purity without distortion (a premise utilized in fundamentalism), and then taking the originary
position offered to women in Levi Strauss’ theory of binary opposition, Daly secures for the female and her analogues the moment of origin and in that the position of the real which is supported by the category of purity.

Daly’s reversal of “the reversals” in regard to word meanings is achieved sometimes by the excavation of a word in order to find an originary meaning. For example, a prude, according to its earliest meaning was a wise or good woman (derived from the French prudefemme, Old French, prode, good, capable, a brave and femme woman) rather than the more current meaning which defines a prude as a person who is excessively proper or modest in speech, conduct or dress, and colloquially applied to women who resist sexual advances from men. Daly utilizes the oldest meaning of the word prude (1987: 157) “a good, capable, brave woman” and then she utilizes the movement of the metaphor to further denote a woman who is endowed with “Practical/Passionate Wisdom; one who has acquired the E-motional habit of Wild Wisdom, enabling her to perform Acts, which by the standards of phallicism, are Extreme.” Not yet satisfied, Daly extends her reversing of the reversals when she applies a positive reading to the term prude which she defines as “Lusty women who insist upon the Integrity, Self-esteem, and Pride of her sex; a Shrewd woman who sees through the patriarchal norms of “good” and “evil” constantly Re-membering the Good.”

In another move to shape different meanings for words, Daly will strategically partition words so that Re-membering, quoted above, means to defragment and in that moment to recall, while recover hyphenated, re-cover, can be seen to mean to cover again. Daly will hyphenate Dic(k)-tionary in order to make an explicit statement regarding men’s control of language, while Stagnation describes both patriarchy(stags) and its process (stagnation). Or she will use partition
in order to emphasize root words so that, for example, the word archetype (1984: 78–79) is
separated into two root words, arche which means original and typos which means an impression
of a seal, mould, or replica, in order to demonstrate the inherent contradiction in the word itself.14
Daly’s word play can take the form of alliteration as in “father’s flatland, Foreground,” “token
torturers,” “plastic passions,” or “realizing reason” or simply the substitution of letters so that
bureaucracy becomes bore-o-cracy (a patriarchal obsession with boring, self-fixated (bore)
details), or a substitution of the root word with another so that bureaucracy becomes clockocracy
(obsession with linear time) or cockocracy (fixation on male genitalia). Or Daly will employ the
language strategy of polyptoton wherein she plays on words bringing attention to other
meanings. For example, in the phrase “papal bull” the word play focuses upon the meanings of
the word bull so that both the animal bull with its irrational rage generated by its overabundant
sex drive, and bull referring to the manufacturing of lies is teased out. Papal bull, although still a
formal document, is understood within Daly’s work as a testosterone poisoned instrument which
stomps on women while it generates lies (1987: 187). Daly also employs the language strategy of
prosonomasia wherein words already employed can have their meanings metaphorically
extended so that, for example, the Godfather remains connected to the concept of crime, but now

14Daly’s use of archetype is to develop a universal movement that describes the act of
stereotyping. Since patriarchy is universal its obfuscating machinations operate on a universal
scale. Further, stereotyping, as both a term and action, has been diminished by overuse and does
not capture the internalization of stereotypes. Daly’s juxtaposing of the two contradictory ideas
of originary and copy allows her to redefine the term and incorporate both the society’s
stereotyped moulds, i.e., blonds are dumb, and the internalization of stereotypes by women, i.e.,
dumb blond.
metaphorically takes within its meaning God the father.\textsuperscript{15} And finally, Daly introduces new words in order to allow, she argues, for the expression of experiences that differ from men’s. Words such as “Archimage \textit{n} [derived fr. GK. \textit{archi-} original, primary + \textit{magos} wizard—\textit{Webster’s} \textit{1}: the Original Witch within \textit{2}: Power/Powers of Be-ing within all women and all Biophilic creatures \textit{3}: Active Potency of hags \textit{4}: Metaphor pointing toward Metabeing, in which all elemental life participates” (1987: 63) or Biophilia of which Daly states “the Original Lust for Life that is at the core of all Elemental E-motion and Pure Lust, which is the Nemesis of patriarchy, the Necrophilic State” (1987: 67). By using these rhetorical strategies Daly depends upon the fluidity of language. It is the lack of a stasis in language that allows her to play with sound and meaning. Because of the fluidity of language she need not accept the male control of the symbolic as represented by language. Language’s fluidity means, for Daly, that language is something that cannot be owned, controlled, or ordered. Language slips through the grip of the most iron fisted of patriarchs, while only those who understand the fluid nature of language can spiral with it.

\textbf{2.2 Concluding remarks on Daly’s use of language}

Feminists working in the area of language and linguistics have noted Daly’s creative use of language. Julia Penelope suggests that feminist approaches to language can change language, and this then serves a political purpose for feminisms. Feminists can redefine pejorative terms for women and instead use these terms in such a way that they reflect women’s usages and

\textsuperscript{15}See also Ratcliffe (1995: 65–106) for a discussion of Daly’s use of language. I am indebted to Ratcliffe for confirming some of my own thoughts on Daly’s use of language and for extending these thoughts with her own analysis which incorporated the language strategies of “polyptoton” and “prosonomasia.”
interpretations. Obsolete meanings of words found in male dictionaries can be reintroduced into women’s usage, and new words can be coined in order to describe women’s experiences and aspirations (1990: 218). She cites Daly’s *Wickedary* (1987) as illustrative of “how some women are rethinking the vocabulary of English and how we can introduce our own meanings into language” (1990: 218). Both Penelope and Daly concur with Dale Spender’s thesis (1980) that women cannot fully express their experiences because the language available to them is a language constructed by men which in turn reflects male experiences. Such a language is lacking or insufficient for women’s use. But because language has a natural fluidity it can escape patriarchal control so that others may utilize it and reclaim the power associated with language. Because language reflects society there will be instances where language is subverted and used to resistance to society. And because language is amendable to change, in fact can promote change, women like Daly can make use of language strategies such as reversing the reversals in order to make apparent the sexism that has been naturalized in language.

However, there are risks when using the language strategy of reversing the reversals. Although an excellent rhetorical strategy in order to reveal ideological mystification via language, it runs the risk of ideological re-mystification if this strategy is understood to be an end in itself. As an initial strategy, reversing the reversals brings the fluidity of language into focus while it demystifies language as something fixed and immutable. But to imagine that the definitions one introduces to language are more authentic than other meanings or synonyms, or that the archaic meanings of the words are more authentic than current meanings is to fall prey to the same logic one sought to undo. Daly runs the risk of this when she presupposes that original and primary meanings have more validity than current meanings. Because of her investment, to
reclaim language for women, Daly will postulate that the definitions she has mined have an authentic connection with the words, a connection that current definitions lack.

Meaghan Morris states that (1988: 34, author’s italics): “Daly nevertheless treats the usages she mentions as isolated ‘features’ of a thing called language (and not part of a process of discourse). The ‘usages’ are further items in the repertoire of the universal code of patriarchy. The consequence of this is that ‘meanings’ are regarded as inherent in the sign—frozen in there waiting to be unpicked and unpacked, and the ‘false’ replaced by the ‘true’.” When Daly plays with language and utilizes rhetorical strategies such as alliteration, partition, polyptoton, and prosonomasia she is pushing at the boundaries we have established for language usage. She demonstrates its openness and fluidity, but when she employs the strategy of utilizing etymologies she risks not only freezing language, but employing a language strategy that denies the fluidity of language. This denial of the fluidity of language puts her own project of claiming language for women at risk.

The logic underlying Daly’s reversing the reversals understands that the origin, or the first primary moment or meaning, is the authentic and true. Consequently, as in her understanding of a matriarchy prior to a patriarchy, she assumes that what came before in language, what was the initial or original meaning is primary and the word ought to be understood. The rhetorical strategy of reversing reversals allows Daly to argumentatively employ an enthymeme, in other words, she relies on an *a priori* assumption in her argument, an assumption that does not require explanation because its assumption is simply common sense. Therefore, in Daly’s reversing of the “reversals” as she names them, the assumption is that what was initially reversed is originary and real and therefore both pure and authentic. Patriarchy
simply reversed reality and produced a non-reality, the non-reality being that of the Foreground and its language. Daly does not need to argue that patriarchal interpretation is incorrect, or that her interpretation of words is correct. By naming patriarchal definitions as reversals, it can simply be assumed that they are incorrect. Patriarchy has things turned around, and all she needs to do are right them.

Another problem one can encounter when reversing the reversals is the re-entrenchment of systems of oppression. Daly exposes patriarchal oppression by reversing the reversals, but instead of resisting employing the system or its logic, for example, valuation established on the basis of the privileging one category over another and then comparing it with that other (the logic of A and not/A utilized by Emile Durkheim), she chooses to ignore the implications of utilizing such logic and instead leaves the infrastructure in place and dabbles with the contents. Therefore the belief in the idea of good and evil, something which has been utilized in order to annihilate large groups of people is never deconstructed. Rather, the content is tampered with so that the female is understood to be good, while the male is understood to be evil. By simply reversing the reversals one does not demystify systems of oppression, one simply flips the categories under comparison so that what was negatively valuated is now positively valuated. The implications behind the dichotomy of good and evil are never challenged. That the dichotomous category formation of good/evil is necessary in order to define the mediating factor, the human, and locate it in the world does not enter Daly's usage. I would argue that the meaning of this dichotomous formation is to define the category of human. The human, located between good and evil, and mediating this dichotomous categorical formation, can, in this mediation, be understood as a moral human being. This, it would seem to me, is the intention of the good/evil
Another difficulty with leaving structures of oppression in place and simply reversing interpretations is that it creates the illusion of a choice. Instead of questioning how we define value (i.e., gender ideology) what gets questioned is what we value (i.e., female, male). An illusion of choice is established when we believe that questioning what we value is at issue. But if we do not question how we value (gender ideology) we can never understand that the choice has already been made (either female or male but never anything else). Therefore the structure of all things as either male or female (gender ideology), the basis for how we valuate, remains intact so that there never really is a choice. One must always work within, and operate with, the categories of male and female.

The language strategy of reversing reversals is at its best a rhetorical strategy that brings the social constructedness of systems of oppression into focus. It reveals how systems of oppression, such as that which has been named patriarchy by Daly, use concepts and language in a will to power—power founded upon privilege. When used on the level of words in a process of naming and renaming, such as Spinster, reversing the reversals brings one’s attention to the fluidity and flexibility of language. But the act of reversing the reversals does not right a wrong in the sense of unmasking the demon to find an angel and an angel to find a demon, albeit this is how Daly uses it. It points to neither the real, the pure, nor the true. It can only do such when one works with the a priori belief that the originary is the better, the purer, and the more real.

2.3 The use of metaphor in Mary Daly’s work

Mary Daly places a high premium on the potential for metaphor to evoke change. Her use of metaphor is most clearly developed in her text *Pure Lust* (1984). In this text Daly’s
deployment of metaphor is one that evokes change through the process of naming and re-naming. In order to demonstrate the potential and problems of Daly’s use of metaphor, I will first discuss the potentiality for change located in the metaphor as delineated by Paul Ricoeur. Thereafter I will examine Daly’s utilization of metaphor as a rhetorical strategy to bring about a potential for change. Daly’s use of metaphor as a strategy for the empowerment of women is, as will be seen, a sword that cuts both ways: there is a potential for feminists to express new ideas that speak to their experience of the world found in the language strategy of the metaphor, but as Daly utilizes it, the polysemic potential found in metaphor is frozen and fixed in an archaic ontology that has no potential to express what it means to be a woman or a feminist in the modern world.

In Ricoeur’s theory of metaphor (1991: 65–64 and 303–321; 1981; 1976: 45–70) a metaphor functions by bringing together two knowns in order to create something new. According to Ricoeur, in classical rhetorical theory a metaphor was understood to be a trope, a mere ornament of language. It was understood as such because of its similarity to an analogy which simply substituted one idea for another because of a shared commonness on the level of conceptualization, i.e., the analogy between a heart and a pump, or a heart and a clock. Therefore a metaphor was understood to be the mere substitution of words wherein new information was not provided. However, as Ricoeur rightly notes, this is not how a metaphor functions. Metaphors do indeed provide new information and this creative aspect of metaphors can be determined in the simple act of attempting to translate a metaphor. As Ricoeur notes (1981: 87), a metaphor “…cannot be translated without ‘loss of cognitive content’. Being untranslatable, it carries new information; briefly it tells us something.” An analogue will put together like and like, while the metaphor will bring together like and unlike in order to create new meaning.
Ricoeur’s theory of the metaphor advances the notion that a metaphor does not function on the level of semiotics (the word itself as a sign), but rather functions within a semantic framework, a framework wherein the entire sentence or phrase is the metaphor. The level of meaning is not located in the word but rather in the intention of the phrase, sentence, or statement. Although certainly words have lexical meaning, Ricoeur states (1981: 69) that in the semantic sense “words have meaning only insomuch as sentences have meaning...Their intended content is a part of the whole intended content of the sentence.” Ricoeur, moving out from this premise and following I. A. Richards (1936), argues that words alone cannot be metaphorical, they are metaphorical only in the context of a sentence (1991: 77). It is by and through the sentence that the polysemy of words is brought into play.\(^\text{16}\)

Having located meaning in the sentence rather than the word, Ricoeur then elaborates how meaning comes into play in a metaphor. As indicated, in classical theory of rhetoric a metaphor was understood simply as a trope, a decorative addition to the sentence that worked on the basis of substitution. But rather than work with a theory of substitution which misunderstands the logic of a metaphor, Ricoeur utilizes and develops Richards’ tensive theory of metaphor. A substitution theory is a “sterile operation” that misses the creative impetus in metaphor. “It is the tension between interpretations at the level of the entire sentence that elicits meaning” (1976: 37).

\(^{16}\)The polysemy of words refers not only to the multiple lexical meanings of words, but also to the multiple sense meanings that words have (the “system of associated commonplaces” that is the associated meanings of a word that occur in a linguistic community) and the meanings that occur when words are contextualized in a sentence. Therefore the polysemic principle means that words can have multiply meanings and yet acquire more without the loss of prior meanings. The “vague character of meaning”, the “indeterminacy of semantic boundaries”, and the “cumulative character proper to the meanings of words” function in the polysemic activity of words (Ricoeur, 1981: 87, 110–117).
In the first instance of a tensive theory of metaphor, metaphor is the creative use of the polysemy of words. It is the bringing together of possible meanings of words in order to create new meaning, but only through interpretation and contained within a sentence, phrase, or statement. When the potentiality of the multiple lexical and sense meanings of a word is brought into play, it is not a process of substitution, i.e., one word for another, as classical theory of rhetoric would have it. Rather it is the tension between the two interpretations evoked by the polysemy of words—between the literal and the metaphorical interpretations that bring about a metaphor. A metaphor is self-contradictory in that a metaphor makes sense with nonsense: the literal meaning, if read literally, is nonsensical, but the tension between the literal and the metaphorical transforms a self-contradictory statement into a "significant contradiction" (Ricoeur, 1991: 78). For example, when Daly says (1984: 53) that the Catholic church has “under the guise of offering women spiritual food and drink...starved the souls of women, stuffing minds with false food” she utilizes the idea of the literal “to feed” but applies it metaphorically to the soul and mind. The nonsense here is, of course, that minds and souls (if there is such a thing as a soul) do not eat and therefore cannot be fed. But the sense meaning found in the idea of being fed points us to the meaning that is being played upon: that eating is an act of nurturing oneself, sustaining oneself, or keeping oneself alive. It is via the interpretation of both ideas—of feeding and of the state of minds and souls—that we can arrive at a new idea: that minds and souls require sustaining as much as our bodies require sustenance (and sustenance is polysemically read as food). Daly further develops the negative sense of the metaphor by drawing on the multiple meaning senses of stuffing and eating to interpret what it is women have
learned in the Catholic religion. By evoking the perception of overeating, while she also evokes the sense of being stuffed for cooking and consumption itself (like a turkey is domesticated and stuffed for consumption) she slams together eating, stuffing, and being stuffed with what happens to women’s minds in patriarchy. The minds of women have been stuffed with bad food while at the same time have been stuffed in order to domesticate them and so they themselves can stuff other women. As one notes, then, the interpretation of women’s reality in the Catholic church invoked by Daly depends upon the semantics of the sentence (the meaning expressed not by a single word but by words strung together) and the internal tension between nonsense and sense (the brain does not consume food but does consume ideas).

In the second instance of a tensive theory of metaphor, metaphor works by drawing upon, while nuancing, a resemblance in the context of the interpretation: “... it is the appearance of kinship where ordinary vision does not perceive any relationship” (Ricoeur, 1976: 51). Kinship found in the polysemy of words demands that the tension between sameness and difference remains intact. In a metaphor resemblance does not eradicate difference, but relies upon the integrity of both in order to bring about new meaning. It is in the sameness and difference which allow the literal and metaphorical interpretations to collide into each other and bring about new meaning. Ricoeur states that (1991: 81): “Likeness is the key word of metaphor because in metaphor, sameness and difference are not merely mixed, but remain opposed... in metaphor sameness works in spite of difference.” The likeness or resemblance, however, is not a surface resemblance, rather it lies in the multiple sense meanings of the words which are elaborated in the semantic structure of the sentence (Ricoeur, 1976: 45–69; 1991: 303–319).

In other kinds of discourse, such as ordinary discourse or scientific discourse, the
polysemy of words often interferes with communication or argumentation. In these kinds of discourses the speakers' or writers' intentions are to repress the multiple sense (and lexical) meanings of words and limit possible interpretations. In metaphorical discourse the intention is otherwise. The polysemy of words, or the limitless possible meanings that can come into play within the semantic structure, make possible the functioning of a metaphor. “Metaphor is a clear case where polysemy is preserved instead of being screened” (Ricoeur, 1991: 83). For example, in the metaphorical statement “I want to swim in the pools of your eyes” two different ideas are brought together: swimming in a pool and eyes. Now eyes are not pools, but eyes are like pools in that they are understood to be more liquid than solid (unlike bone), water springs from eyes (and in this we invoke another water phenomenon, a spring) and adjectives often used to describe eyes are related to and also describe water, for example deep, limpid, clear, glassy, glittering, sparkling, etc. New meaning is attained when the multiple sense (and lexical) meanings of words are employed within the context of a phrase or sentence which then brings together and places in tension two meanings in order to evoke a third meaning.

For example, The associations that lie between eyes and water allows the metaphor “swim in the pools of your eyes” to function. It twists the intentions of both phrases and it is in the tension created in the metaphorical twist that a metaphor results. A metaphorical twist refers to the “… metaphorical interpretation [that] presupposes a literal interpretation which self-destructs in significant contradiction” (1976: 50). The metaphor relies upon the polysemy of words, the multiple meanings applied to contextualized words, in order to make connections that are not evident in the initial juxtaposition. A pool is a pool and an eye an eye, but they are understood to resemble each other in the kinds of words that describe, define, and interpret them.
Therefore one can swim in the pools of another's eyes by assimilating the meaning of pool to eye through words associated with both and in this create meaning: swimming in someone's eyes (or drowning in them for that matter) which means, of course, desiring to be immersed in another person. The meaning implied by immersion in water is applied to immersion in another's eyes, and since eyes are metaphorical entrances into another's soul the meaning is further enhanced.

Daly recognizes both the power and play of language and utilizes metaphor in a way that is conducive to analysis within Ricoeur's theory of metaphor. When Daly uses metaphor she indicates that she intends metaphor as that which (1984: 25) "function[s] to Name change, and therefore they elicit change...Thus the very arduousness of the task of Naming and calling forth elemental be-ing requires metaphors." Daly understands metaphor as a creative tool that has a potential to free women from the patriarchal use of language. Her usage of metaphor goes far in opening up language, and, in that, developing an interesting language strategy for feminisms. However, as is Daly's want, these strategies are reified and in this are understood as a new mythos within which Daly can demarcate a feminist epistemology which is founded upon a new ontology for women. By drawing upon and utilizing metaphors, Daly hopes to open up a new space for women. But the space she is attempting to create is not in language. Rather, she attempts to use language to create a metaphysical space wherein women can find true "be-ing."

Drawing primarily upon Greek mythology, a mythology that assumes a separate female and male domain, one that is located in nature, Daly revives mythic figures such as Amazons and Harpies, corporeal metaphors which evoke mental images or icons, in order to metaphorically rename women. She renames a metapatriarchal woman (one who has taken on female consciousness leaving behind male consciousness) as a Harpy. The current definition of a harpy
is “a scolding bad-tempered woman, a shrew.” In Daly’s renaming of a metapatriarchal woman as a Harpy, she leaves the current definition in place but plays with the polysemy of the word in order to reinterpret the intention of the name. Understood within Daly’s mythology, a Harpy is (1984:13) “a person especially (now only) a woman given to railing or scolding or other perverse or malignant behaviour”—perverse however only to patriarchy which, in a feminist sense, means that the behavior since it is in defiance of patriarchy must be good. With her metaphorical naming Daly brings together two linguistic dimensions, a Harpy and Metapatriarchal woman, which then allows for the polysemic play of meanings. Each naming elaborates the other so that Harpy can be understood to be a Shrew (the sense meaning being shrewd), a woman who is not intimidated nor deluded by patriarchy, who is unafraid to scold the unscoldable, so that metapatriarchal means a woman who is no longer duped by a patriarchal imperative which insists that women who speak too loudly, sharply, or frequently are undesirable. In the process of renaming, a process that finds its impetus in metaphors, Daly takes what was a negative image of women in patriarchy—the Foreground—and through the potential of the polysemy of words is able to flip the negative intention found in a misogynistic discourse and restate a positive intention located in a feminist discourse.

Another example of metaphorical renaming is the mythic figure of the Amazon who is defined, within Daly’s understanding of Greek mythology, as man-hating, as operating outside of civilization, and ultimately perceived as destructive toward men and society. The lexical definition for Amazon is a powerful and aggressive woman. Again utilizing the polysemic play of words that allows for unlimited variation in meaning, Amazon as a metaphorical naming of women found in Daly’s Background draws upon the sense meanings or the system of associated
common places in relation to powerful and aggressive in order to positively utilize its meaning for women. She of course reads the power and aggression of an Amazon as a power and aggression directed against patriarchy. As a metaphor for women in Daly’s work, an Amazon continues to be understood as man-hating, but now this has a positive interpretation. Within Daly’s mythology an Amazon is a woman who is not deluded by patriarchy and therefore hates it—hence the perception of the Amazon as man-hating. She resists patriarchal society and in her resistance to patriarchal notions of reality she is destructive. Further, she understands that the more real is that which is in nature and with the labrys (her radical feminist symbolic weapon), is able to cut through Foreground delusion to get to Background reality. “A-mazing Amazons must be aware of the male methods of mystification” (1978: 8).

2.4 Concluding remarks on Daly’s use of Metaphor

Metaphor allows a naming process to take place. The polysemy of words, or the *topoi* (cultural treasure of meanings) as Aristotle calls them, opens language so that feminists such as Daly can invert intention and what was once considered to be a negative naming now can have positive meaning. Naming gives power in existence. As words do not have intrinsic meaning, but rather are social constructions that explain how we order our existence, Daly use of metaphor in order to rename the female (witch, hag, or shrews) and the male (snotboys, snoonls, or pluguglies) goes a long way in demonstrating how the power of language can be usurped. Daly’s process of naming draws upon metaphor which utilizes the connotative values attached to the words but which are applied in a new way to the principal subject. These sense meanings or the connotative values, such as man-hating, are applied in such a way as to evoke a positive reading of the subject. Therefore woman as Amazon is a woman who is strong, self-reliant, and female
identified (man-hating) while woman as a Harpy is a woman who is unafraid to speak out against patriarchy. Further, neither of these new names for women are reliant upon a relationship with the male for their definition. In fact both names invoke the resemblance of the “antisocial” as a sense meaning in order to flesh out the metaphor: Harpies and Amazons are understood to stand outside of culture and represent chaos in Greek mythology, and this sense meaning, chaotic and outside of culture and in nature, can be utilized by Daly to demonstrate “historical” women who resisted culturation and in this resisted patriarchalization. Metaphorically then, women who have moved out of patriarchy can understand themselves as Harpies or Amazons. Using Ricoeur’s theory then, I understand Daly to use metaphors in order to rename women and redefine women’s existence. This process of renaming and redefining will undergird her feminist ontology.

A problem with Daly’s theory of metaphor is her assumption that a metaphor has ontological roots which can direct human beings to “real” existence. In Daly’s work a metaphor is not a rhetorical device. Instead, a metaphor although expressed by language is really an ontological signifier that points to another reality. Because Amazons and Harpies do in fact turn up in Greek myth, Daly accredits these mythic figures with a certain amount of reality. As she argues for a matriarchal world that existed prior to a patriarchal world, she will located Amazons and Harpies as figures of women from this matriarchal world. In Daly’s work the Greek myths are not myths per se, but patriarchal historical records of those women who, in the matriarchal period, resisted patriarchy. This historical aspect of the Amazon or Harpy is carried into the future so that Amazons or Harpies are female identified women—lesbians—who have historical roots (see Daly, 1994: 11–19). Certainly symbols can take on this function as their roots are
located in, and are bound by, the cosmos but “[m]etaphor occurs in the already purified universe of the logos, while the symbol hesitates on the dividing line between bios and logos” (Ricoeur, 1976: 59). It is not in the linguistic dimension that ontology operates, although certainly language is the means to express ideas of existence, rather it is on the level of human experience. The linguistic dimension is the way through, and a means to express the non-linguistic dimension, but it is not the location of the non-linguistic dimension. In Daly’s work the separation between bios and logos remains unarticulated so that logos appears as if it is bios.

Daly’s understanding of metaphor as having ontological roots: that is a metaphor does not simply bring about new meaning, but in fact brings about new being in the world, is founded upon her belief that language has a mystical function. How she arrives at this understanding of metaphor is by assuming that words are intrinsic things in themselves and their meanings reflect this intrinsicality. In this then, it is evident that Daly works with an a priori: that words are the things that they refer to and that the definitions in the lexicon are pointers to their actual essences. However, as I. A. Richards (1934: 35, 71 in Ricoeur, 1981: 77–78) argues, words only have meaning in so much as they are contextualized and arrive at meaning through an abridgment of the context: “What a word means is the missing part of the contexts from which it draws its delegated efficacy. So it remains true that the word ‘holds true for,’ ‘stands for’—but not for a thing or an idea. The belief that words possess a meaning that would be proper to them is a leftover from sorcery [i.e., execration texts, curses etc.], the residual of ‘the magical theory of names’.” Constancy of meaning is simply constancy of context (Ricoeur, 1981: 78). Daly’s misapprehension of language occurs because she locates language, and in this metaphor, at the
level of ontology. For Daly words are the things in themselves, and meaning is inherent to them. Words bring us in contact with the essence of that which they name via their meaning. The thing is the word. The word is the thing, hence her ontological position. For example “... Shrews are aware of apparently faded metaphors, but unlike Langer’s theory, Shrewish analysis discovers a sexual politics of fading. Powerful old words whose metaphoric force has “faded” under the reign of phallicism include, Spinster, Witch, charm, spell, Weird, Goddess. In fact, these words have not lost their vitality but have been covered under rubble heaps of bore-ocratic verbiage. Dis-covering them is a Wonder-full Work for Websters, yielding endless riches. Like Gnomes who know how to find buried treasures, we unearth these riches and share this abundance with friends” (1984: 28) or, “Wording: Original activity of Word Witches; practicing the art of Word-Magic: Word Weaving; Be-spelling; communicating with the Race of Radiant Words” (Daly, 1987: 182). These two examples demonstrate how Daly’s rhetorical strategies have gone beyond the creative impetus of metaphors and claimed for metaphors, and words therein, ontological status. Hence, the archaic or original meaning of the word will act as the essence of the word, while the semantical quality of metaphor, its tension located in the sentence is negated by the essentializing of words as things.

A metaphor is a rhetorical device which is able to elaborate/create meaning so that when

---

17For an excellent discussion on Mary Daly’s propensity toward ontologizing the female see Marsha Hewitt (1991).

18See Meaghan Morris (1988) for a similar reading on Daly’s use of language.
a metaphor does become a trivial metaphor\(^{19}\) it then contributes to the polysemy of words. In this it thereby alters or adds to the sense of the word which is clearly indicative that there is no essence to words in and of themselves. Daly’s rhetorical strategy of naming the female and male can be faulted to the degree that she takes the position that the thing, the word defining it, and the meaning associated with it are the same. For Daly, then, the word, its definition, and sense meaning represent, and in this can connect women with, the essence of the thing. Further, this essence of the thing (Harpy or Amazon) can be found in the woman herself—it will be described by Daly as a woman’s “be-ing”. Metaphors can, without any reference to ontology, shatter previous structures of our language, and they also can shatter the previous structures of our reality (Ricoeur, 1991: 85). One does not need to invest in a mystical theory of language in order to shatter reality.

### 3. Critical Analysis of Mary Daly’s Theory of Linguistics

Mary Daly’s linguistic theory, a theory which underscores how she delineates her elemental philosophy in *Pure Lust* and her metaethics of radical feminism in *Gyn\Ecology*, contains a number of premises that need to be examined. In order to do such I will primarily utilize Deborah Cameron’s (1985) analysis of linguistic theories that undergird feminists’ analysis of language and patriarchy.

Cameron’s analysis of feminist theories of patriarchy and women that utilize language as a primary location of oppression argues that three axioms remain untheorized: 1) language

---

\(^{19}\)A trivial metaphor is one which has come into common usage so that the metaphorical meaning now belongs to the system of associated common places. This is how even a trivial metaphor can have an informative value.
determinism, or the assumption that “language is... the primary means by which we make sense of the world...” 2) male control of language or that “[i]t is men who decide what words will mean and who will have the right to use them. That is why language enshrines a male (and a misogynist) view of the world.” 3) and that power is located in language so that women are disadvantaged language users who are either alienated from themselves when they use male language or lack the means to express authentic female experience (1985: 93). There are three models of linguistic theory that legitimate these axioms that underscore the majority of feminists’ theorizing about the oppression of women via language: the dominant and muted model, the manmade model, and the psychoanalytic model, the latter which operates using Lacan’s theory of the phallus as the *prima facie* symbol of the symbolic order (1985: 93). Implicit in these models and axioms are several unexamined ideas: a definition of the term language, Saussure’s dichotomy between *langue* and *parole*, and where meaning is located. These thorny problems are assumed in Daly’s work, and ultimately mean her articulation of the oppression of women and their liberation is fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions.

Language determinism relates to the feminist belief, explicit in Daly’s feminist philosophy, that language determines an individual’s perception and in that reality (Cameron, 1985: 93). Daly states in her preface to *Pure Lust* (1984): “Recognizing that deep damage has been inflicted upon consciousness under phallocracy’s myths and institutions... [we] focus our Furing, firing/inspining ourSelves and each Other with renewed commitment to the cause of women and all Elemental be-ing. This commitment... requires unveiling of the master’s pseudogeneric and pseudorational language structures” (xii) and “[b]reaking the bonds/bars of phallocracy requires breaking through to radiant power of words, so that by releasing words, we...
can release Ourselves. Lusty women long for radiant words to free their flow, their currents, which like our own be-ing have been blocked and severed from Ancestral Memory. The Race of Lusty Women, then, has deep connections with the Race of Radiant Words” (1984: 4). Daly’s theory of language, then, begins with the assumption that language is the means by which reality is created. The Foreground under male control represents a reality that is false, a reality that is constructed by male language. The Background, however, is real, and entrance to it is achieved by changing one’s being which is accomplished by altering one’s language.

The problem inherent in a language theory which relies upon linguistic determinism creates problems within Daly’s work. Although Daly may not go so far as to state that language brings reality into existence, (like many of us, she probably believes that we as humans play a part in creating reality), language determinism does. In order to demonstrate patriarchal oppression Daly has unwittingly employed linguistic determinism. Where the determinism arises is in her articulation of the power and control patriarchy has over women. Power and control in the hands of patriarchy has meant the warping of women’s minds, a falsification of their beings which ultimately alienates them from their female selves.

Linguistic determinism (cf. Cameron, 1985: 99–100) embraces the belief that the processes of thinking are only attainable through language, and that those who do not use language cannot think: all that is in their heads is random mush. Within this theory, then, pre-linguistic children do not think, animals do not think, and those individuals who are hearing and speaking impaired (prior to learning a sign language) do not think. Secondly, if we utilize such a model, how could we think counter to the language we worked within? How could we think thoughts that have yet to be represented in language? How could new words come about, new
words that name new ideas such as feminism if language is that which structures our reality.

How could we escape the straitjacket of our own language? There could be no alternate reality other than the reality encoded in one’s language. Furthermore, there could be no possibility of dialogue between different language groups who hold different realities as their language would determine their reality. This theory also does not explain translation or the learning of a second language, for how could one translate a work into another language or learn another language if language creates reality—one would then have to be indoctrinated into that reality in order to translate or learn the language, but how can one enter the reality without learning the language. And finally, how does this theory of language allow for a creative use of language, a creativity Daly liberally uses in her own work? Words are fixed entities in this theory and disallow interpretation. Words are the things themselves: the signifier and the signified are the same thing, and yet we know this not to be true. A single word can have multiple interpretations. The polysemy of words allows for the creation of synonyms so that, for example, text can mean: the main body of matter in a manuscript, the actual or original words of a writer or speaker, any of a variety of forms in which a writing exists, and any theme or topic, a subject etc., while synonyms for text further demonstrate the polysemy of words: content, theme, passage, verse, manual and

---

20Cameron (1985: 96–99) calls this particular form of language determinism the Sapir—Whorfian hypothesis. Sapir and Whorf began to question differences in cultures by postulating that those differences where dependant upon language differences. Their ethnographic study was based upon the Hopi Indians of New Mexico, a group of people who did not partition time or understand that one could have a quantity of time. Sapir and Whorf conjectured that this concept of time was a direct result of a lack of tense in Hopi language. The obvious difficulty with their thesis is their assumption concerning causality. The Hopi’s concept of time could have just as easily brought about a tenseless language. It is impossible to tell which came first or really if the two are in a causal relationship. For example many Semitic languages are also tenseless and yet time is partitioned by these language users.
document. In this instance I have used a noun, a unit of language where meaning is often more
fixed than other kinds of language such as verbs, adjectives, or prepositions, and have still shown
the inherent flux in the English language. Daly depends on this flux of language in order to
reveal how language is a tool of patriarchy and therefore, in her argument concerning language,
cannot logically subscribe to language determinism. But, in order to explain patriarchy and false
consciousness in women, she employs language determinism and in this assumes that words are
the things in themselves. Her theory of language, then, is inherently contradictory.

A second axiom assumed in much feminist theorizing is a belief in the male control of
language. This largely unexamined theory understands that language is controlled by men, much
the same as all resources in a patriarchal society, and this control allows them to exert subliminal
control over their subordinates and perpetuate their own power (Cameron, 1985: 100). Men
decide what words will mean and how they will be used. This axiom is often assumed largely
because of the common practice of conflating language as a cognitive function and a language
utilized by a particular group. Languages, such as English, French, German, etc. are languages
and like the apparatuses of ritual, institutions, ethics, morality, etc. do not belong to everyone
equally, and can therefore be appropriated by an elite group. The difference here is between
discourse as that which is institutionally located (and therefore institutionally controlled), and
language as the ability to communicate, to mean, or to speak. In the first instance institutions do
attempt to control the use of language. Since these institutions primarily consist of men and are
the means by which their control is both insured and legitimized, it appears as if language itself
is under their control. However, language, the ability to communicate thoughts and ideas
lies with any who have acquired language, regardless of its form, i.e. spoken, signed, written, etc.
As Cameron notes (1985: 145) “[i]n every society one finds laws, rituals, and institutions which regulate language, (especially its more public modes) in particular ways.” These are the regulatory mechanisms that come under the control of the dominant group and not language itself. Although expressing ourselves may escape us at times, women have been able to communicate meaning, to speak, and do speak quite regularly. That their voices have been muted in public discourse, a discourse that is produced by the dominant institutions, has more to do with their exclusion from these mediums of expression than their inability to use language. And, regardless of this, women writers, poets, singers, and thinkers, certainly less frequently than men, have burst into the public scene and have utilized their individual languages in such a way as to impart their intentions to the public at large. If institutional forms of communication and ideology production such as universities and academics trivialize, ignore, or misunderstand what women writers, poets, artists, and philosophers have said, this has more to do with the social apparatuses which insist that women and men have separates spheres of existence, i.e., public and private or significant and banal. If women writers draw their data from, and write from experiences located in the domestic for example, then certainly those who operate outside such a sphere will simply not understand. This is not indicative of women’s inability to express themselves or that they are alienated from language. What it is indicative of is how oppressive institutions, which are often patriarchal, do not, or chose not to, perceive the day-to-day existence of those whom they oppress.

Language is not, as Mary Daly suggests, something which operates differently in the Foreground and Background. In the Foreground (patriarchy) there may be the desire to control the language, much as there is a desire to control economics, history, philosophy, science, the
environment, etc. That there is a plethora of pejorative words that describe a sexually active woman and a considerably lesser number that describe the same behaviour in a man (in fact several words that positively describe this behaviour in a man) is not indicative of the male control of language, but rather indicative of the attempt to institutionally define morality which can then be reflected in the language:

If we look closely at the regulatory mechanisms which grow up around languages, it is clear that they are rather closely connected with the power structures of their society. The institutions that regulate language use in our own society, and indeed those of most societies, are deliberately oppressive to women. Men control them, not in the rather mystical sense that they are said to control meaning, by making esoteric semantic rules or possessing the vital signifier, but simply because it is the prerogative of those with economic and political power to set up and regulate important social institutions. (Cameron, 1985: 145)

The last untheorized axiom frequently asserted by feminists is the belief that women are at a distinct disadvantage as languages users. This is founded upon two ideas: 1) that women are alienated from language because language is under the control of men (articulated by such theorists as Dale Spender, 1980), and 2) that as language is “man-made” women have no means to express authentic female being (Luce Irigaray takes this position) (Cameron, 1985: 93). It is Daly’s belief that there are authentic, often archaic word meanings that have to be pirated back, stripped of their patriarchal meaning, and thereby retrieved for women’s use. This assumes, then, that language is under male control and women have been alienated from language. She further argues that underlying the current meanings of words are the “real” meanings and these meanings can act as historical proofs of authentic female being which women can “dis-cover” in language and in this find a means to express their own authentic female being:

This requires reconnection of women with our own Words. Women have been
severed from our own Words, from our powers of spiration/creation. The interruption and distorted simulation of our Words is *verbicide*, that is, "deliberate distortion or destruction of the sense of a word." As a consequence of verbicide, words have become mere noises echoing each other in the father's flatland, Foreground, which is the place of babbleospheres.... One result of verbicide—this splitting of speaking from the Self's Elemental core—is a sense of shakiness in women who have heard the Call of the Wild, the Word of the Weird within, but feel overwhelmed by the omnipresent disharmonious vibrations of verbiage. Unable to recall the Source within, women become amnesic; unable to make verbal connections, women become aphasic. (Daly, 1984: 94 author's italics)

Daly's language theory assumes that there is a real language, the origin of which can be connected with women. This original language expresses authentic female being but it has been distorted, changed, perverted in the Foreground she names patriarchy. Language is not, as in Spender's theory, "man-made" rather it is female made (and if not made then certainly emerging from female ontology). However, the language of all those who live and work in the Foreground, which of course includes all of us, is a language that has been perverted and in this is "man-made." In this move Daly attempts to both empower women (the language was theirs) and demonstrate how they have been disempowered (it was perverted and turned against them).

Women are alienated from real language and, consequently, alienated from their authentic selves and therefore disempower. But as real language can be got at, so too can authentic female being. It is through language that women can find a way to their authentic be-ing.

In order to adhere to Daly's theory of authentic female being in linguistics a number of assumptions must remain unexamined. Firstly, meaning is understood to be fixed, words mean as if these meanings neither change nor shift (although Daly depends on the flux in language), secondly, language transcends language so that language is understood not to be a language, such as French or German, etc. but is a meta-language, thirdly, meaning is not located in the semantics
of a sentence and dependent upon the inter-relationality of words (although certainly this is what Daly depends upon in her use of metaphor), fourthly, meaning is not a process of communication but is fixed in language, and finally, that meaning itself is fixed and therefore individuals can communicate exact meaning—as if ideas can be extracted from one brain and dropped whole into another brain. Cameron states (1985: 142) that “perfect mutual understanding—telepathy—is not the normal or the ideal outcome of speaking.” As language users we are quite aware that language does not function so rigidly or abstractly, however when theorized within a scientific framework (linguistics and semiotics) it is necessary that this theory cut speech off from language in order that it not have to struggle with the subjectivity of language. Instead, langue and parole are separated and the former is valued over the latter. Parole is the common, the popular, and the sloppy use of langue, which of course is the simple (but complex) and beautiful object which can be fixed and measured by science.

The structuralist theory of Ferdinand de Saussure which separated language from the act of speech was utilized by Jacques Lacan. Lacan’s idea was to utilize linguistics, and Saussure’s theory of language therein, in order to develop a theory of the unconscious. By utilizing linguistics to understand the unconscious, Lacan’s theory, following Saussure, is committed to universalism in that there are universal properties of the human mind: that language is a system of signs (semiotics) defined by their difference from one another (structuralism) and therefore the unconscious, like language, is highly structured. Without language there can be no unconscious, therefore learning language makes us what we are (Cameron, 19–20). Working within this framework then, Lacan designated the period of time when humans are pre-linguistic as the imaginary order which is undifferentiated, suffers no lack, incompleteness, or unsatisfied desire,
wherein the mother and the child are one (Cameron, 1985: 120). Introduction to language meant an introduction to symbolic order which is separation, difference, lack, and the castration complex.

It is the symbolic order that is ruled by the phallus so that female children and male children enter the symbolic differently. Females enter it, and here is where Lacan utilizes Freud, understanding themselves as lacking the phallus, already castrated, while males enter it understanding themselves as holding the phallus, but this holding is determined by the fear of castration. This ruling of the symbolic order by the phallus is pre-fixed by the symbolic order itself. Women then, as females, who lack the phallus are marginal to language, while men whose penises are concrete signifiers of surplus (the phallus) have control of language. This control of language is directly related to their power and women’s powerlessness, and also means that men can, and have, encoded language with their experience which then explains how women’s experience has been erased. Language, then, in the moment of its indoctrination alienates women from themselves and from their own authentic being.

Daly does not wholeheartedly accept the Lacanian thesis of a patriarchal meta-language, as some French psychoanalytic feminists have, for example Luce Irigaray (who understands lack as difference) or Julia Kristeva (who understands lack as the potential for subversion within the symbolic order). She does not cite Lacan, but she does however, assume several of his tenets. First, she assumes the logic of binary opposition (Foreground/ Background, reversals, good/ evil, male/female, etc.) with little thought concerning the origin or implications of this theory of
CHAPTER 2

She, like others, simply overlooks the tautology that thought processes are structured binarily by language and language is structured binarily by thought processes. Cameron asks (1985: 122) ‘… for after all no one has ever denied the anatomical differences between sexes. . . . [But] [w]hat does seem problematic is the particular significance give[n] the female genitals in this account. Why should the child, comparing male and female genitals, decide that the boy ‘has’ something that the girl ‘lacks’? Why does the child already have the ‘binary opposition’ mentality that constructs the world into sets of opposites?’ For Daly, like Lacan (and Levi Strauss), binary opposition is a given. The question is, is it? Are our minds hardwired (cognition) so that binary opposition is both the way we understand the world and construct our language? But how can we construct language if language is that which constructs us and is something that is already always there? What exactly do we mean by language in this instance? Is language something that transcends languages? Is it a mystical ideal called langue (the code) that exists behind the languages we speak which gives rise to those languages? Lacan, utilizing Freud and Saussure, postulates langue as the symbolic order, an order that transcends languages and in this human society. Working within a Lacanian frame, or more conceivably, a psycholinguistic theory of language, Daly may reverse the valuation of categories, but she remains fixed in this notion that language transcends languages: langue is both at the centre of language and outside of language. For Lacan this dual movement of centrality and transcendence, a movement which supports the structure itself, is no longer symbolized by man or god but by

21Carol MacCormack (1980), an anthropologist, argues convincingly against the assumption that binary oppositions are indicative of a human universal, an assumption that underlies (and in the process legitimates) this theory.
the phallus. For Daly the phallus is a symbol (the real symbol of evil) that acts as the proof of patriarchy’s reversal which women experience in the Foreground. For her, real language, that which is not perverted by patriarchy, is symbolized by the undifferentiated, the completeness, the whole, and fulfilled desire—the female.22

The idea of male controlled language (the phallus which rules the symbolic order, which of course makes language the law of the father) is largely a product of psychoanalytic linguistics, and although Daly inverts Lacan and claims language for women, the language she claims is archaic. This then refers the reader to first meanings, and suggested in this move is Daly’s belief that these archaic meanings are the means by which be-ing can be reclaimed. In this, then, Daly accepts a split between the imaginary and symbolic, accepts that the phallus rules the symbolic in the Foreground and so takes up the imaginary order for women.

What is it that women give up if they accede language to men? Or, said differently, what remains unasked if it is assumed that the symbolic order belongs to men defacto and this ownership is proved by the symbol of the phallus? It would seem to me that what is acceded to is ideology. Women’s oppression, then, is not located in institutional discourses which have used languages in order to support the idea of men’s power and women’s powerless. Instead male rule—patriarchy—is a natural condition of human cognition which is encoded in the very structure of language. Cameron suggests (1985: 124) that what remains unasked is why the phallus (if one accepts that it is the prima facie symbol of the symbolic order) means what it does

Daly's use of language assumes that language determines reality, that it is under male control, and that women are alienated from real language as well as alienated from themselves in man-perverted language. Hawkesworth suggests (1988: 446) that this kind of rhetoric is a rhetoric of oppression and that the rhetoric of oppression "vacillates between a conception of language as a prison and a conception of language as a weapon." Women are silenced in language simply because as it is man-made (or male perverted) in the Foreground, and therefore languages as they function in the social realm cannot be the means by which women can express their experiences. Daly's theory of language understands that there is an idealized concept of language which operates behind, grounds, and is represented in languages that we use every day. This transcendent language is what allows us to be human beings, and if women can connect with "real" language, that which underlays patriarchal language, then they can find and express authentic female be-ing.

The separation of langue and parole reifies the signifier assuming it and the thing it signifies are the same thing. In such a theory language is fixed, but our own daily use of language (and Daly's use of language) proves this belief to be untrue. When Daly assumes this position in regard to language, communication as the intention of language is devalued regardless that communication is the main function of language. By maintaining a dichotomous theory of language Daly re-mystifies language and the ideological apparatuses that use language to empower themselves are left unchallenged. Ultimately, then, control of, and power in language have been confused with the myth that justifies the control of, and power over, language in patriarchal societies—the phallus (Cameron, 1985: 113).
CHAPTER THREE
MARY DALY’S SYMBOLIC

Throughout the course of Mary Daly’s text, *Pure Lust*, the elemental reality of language is will connect women with the elemental reality that exists in the Background. How the Background is proven is by the eruption into the patriarchal Foreground of symbols that can guide women to this Background and to their elemental Be-ing. It is from the Background that Foreground symbols once understood as good are realized to be mere distortions, and in this they are recongnizable as symbols of evil, while those once perceived as evil by foreground fathers are in fact good. According to Daly, women must, through the use of language, reclaim the world that was once theirs. This reclamation of th world also entails a claiming of the Self, in the sublime experience of Be-ing. Once achieved then women will truly know themselves. In order to achieve the sublime of Be-ing women must be prepared to both resist and challenge patriarchy.

1. Mary Daly and the Pirating of symbols

The symbol is a sign in that it communicates meaning. It signifies and although those things signified may have real existence in the world at large, such as a tree or the sun, it is “still in the universe of discourse that these realities take on a symbolic dimension” (1967: 14; 1970: 14). But not all signs are symbols. According to Paul Ricoeur, a “sign aims at something beyond itself and stands for something” but a symbol “conceals in its aim a double intentionality” (1967: 15; 1970: 12-13). As a sign there is a literal or first intentionality, but as a symbol there is a second intentionality: it points beyond itself, by the means of analogy, to another meaning. This relationship is not between the signifying word and signifying thing but between the relationship of first and second meaning (Ricoeur, 1970: 17; 1972; 1976: 55; Maeckelberghe, 1991: 65).
Ricoeur suggests that this is the opacity of symbols.

Clifford Geertz’s understanding of symbols deviates somewhat from Ricoeur’s. Geertz’s theory proposes that symbols are “tangible formations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms” (1973: 91). He understands culture semiotically, therefore action is considered to be symbolic and comprehensible in much the same way as language (Lindbeck, 1984). Within this, then, is an understanding of a system of symbols and models which are not found “in nature” but are culturally constructed. According to Geertz (1973: 91), symbols are “any object, act, event, quality or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception—the conception is the symbol’s ‘meaning.’” It is at this juncture that interpretation arises, whereupon Geertz’s thesis of thick description comes into play: when “a wink is a wink or merely a blink.”

Ricoeur’s criteria of a symbol are less clearly located in the cultural context since his beginning point is imagination (Kearney, 1989: 7), and although he is aware that cultural influences affect imagination, he develops his notion of imagination upon a model of a universal “man.” This universal “man” can be located in a historical and social context, but how he encounters that context, how he understands and explains symbols, how his imagination functions, emerge from a psychological construct that is static, static in two ways. First the subject is understood to be singular and unchanging when encountering a changing pluralistic reality and second, it is reified into a model of what a human is: a white, western male. This problem in Ricoeur’s work is largely due to his use of a Freudian model by which to elaborate his thesis on imagination. Freud’s model is problematic in that Freud constructs his notion of the development of humans as a species upon the development of a male child into an adult male. And the development of the child into the adult is analogous to the development of the species.
from primitive to modern. Therefore a child is primitive-like, while a “primitive” is childlike
(Freud, 1961: 51-52). The thesis is tautological and empirically vacuous. Further, the logic here
assumes a cohesive self that stands in history but is unaffected by it, a self which is social but not
a self constituted by the social, and a self which is gendered but unaffected by sex as there is
really only one sex—the male.

Working from Freud's premise, then, Ricoeur's “man” in the ancient Near East, in the
Italian medieval world, and in the modern world of United States never changes how he
encounters the world, only the world changes about him. Therefore the cultural can be historical
and pluralistic—the object—but the way in which the imagination—the subject—encounters this

---

1A further problem with Freud's notions of the evolution of the human species and the
development of a child into an adult is gender. The child is male, the adult is male, and
essentially the species is comprised of males, while the civilizing process is only enacted by
males. For an example of this see especially Freud, (1961: 42 note 4).

2For a discussion of the postulation of a core human being underlying the tenets of
psychoanalysis see Zaretsky (1994: 201) where he states: “... psychoanalysis developed a
method for considering the individual in abstraction from his or her social relations, i.e., race,
gender, class, etc. This method presumed that although we are different in different contexts
there is an underlying person—an identity—that runs through all of them, and that this can be
analysed.”

3The interesting phenomenon here is the contradiction that exists in the neutralization and
ensexed of males as a group. Women carry the corporeal and therefore the category of “man”
can be naturalized and represent the human. But at the same time, since the phallus is the
signifier and since the penis is the nearest concrete approximation of the phallus, men are sexed
and essentially exist as the only sex. Within the dichotomous logic of the A/notA, the female
does not take the position of the other sex, simply the “other”. Her sex, vagina, vulva, womb,
clitoris remains unrecognizable as sexed, simply because in the symbolic realm female is
understood as negation. Her sexual organs remain unsexed as they signify nothing. Simone de
Beauvoir states a similar idea when she argues that (1952: xviii) “[i]n actuality the relation of the
two sexes is not quite like that of two electric poles, for man represents both the positive and the
neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas
woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity.”
CHAPTER 3

object is ahistorical, androcentric, and monolithic. In his later works on narrative Ricoeur will extend the notion of cultural-historical context to include not only what is encountered—the signified—but the subject that encounters it—the signifying—and therefore deals with the problem of a singular Archimedean vantage point, although the concept of gender is never explicitly dealt with by Ricoeur.⁴

Victor Turner's polysemic or multivocal theory of symbols means that a symbol can be understood to have a variety of significations (Walker Bynum, 1991: 27-51; 1986: 1-19). For example, in his analysis of the Ndembu, a symbolic object such as the mukula wood can take the place of the meat and blood of a slaughtered animal as interpreted by the Ndembu hunting cults, and yet represent menstrual blood in rites relating to the onset of menses, and further still maternal blood in relation to birthing rituals (Turner, 1992: 18–19). That which allows a contingency between differing interpretations is of course the mukula tree's relationship with blood. Turner calls it the “blood tree,” and what is mutable are the kinds of blood it is seen to represent. What is evident, then, in Turner's symbolic system is that the symbol must be

⁴In Ricoeur's Time and Narrative (vol 1: 1984; vol. 2: 1985; vol.3: 1988), he clearly attempts to develop the cultural aspects of human experience. His development of symbol both in The Symbolism of Evil (1967) and Freud and Philosophy (1970) are worked out within a universal-individual paradigm: the symbol is seen as rooted in the experience of the human as individual, rather than human as cultural. Ricoeur, although critical of Freud's analogies between psychological phases and cultural stages, himself falls into this trap early in his career when he attempts to find an origin for the West's notion of evil. He assumes a singular consciousness found in “man” that has functioned over time without accounting for historical, geographical, and social multiplicities. However, once dealing with narrative Ricoeur attempts to transpose the Heideggerian Wiedenholung from a personal to cultural level through narrative liberating the possibilities in a communal past rather than a personal past (Clark, 1990: 163). When developing this Ricoeur then makes use of Geertz, and draws upon his notions of ideology and utopia (Taylor, 1986).
interpreted in relation to the context from which it emerged. As with language, the symbol
remains opaque to those who interpret the meaning of the symbol but do not grasp the rules of its
grammar. The mukula wood is symbolic of blood, and, in this, its interpretation is apparent,
however, by changing its referent—warriors or women—the meaning is fleshed out and, in the
first instance, it is the sacrificial element of animal blood, and in the second, it is menstrual blood
and its connotations of a rite of passage that are signified by the mukula wood. Therefore, if one
ignores the grammar of the symbol the multivocality of the symbol is also elided (Turner, 1992:
22). What one sees in these theories of the symbol is an understanding that a symbol is an
inanimate or animate object that meaning is read into. It exists exteriorly to humans (cosmic), but
it is interpreted as something more than just itself (oneiric), which is then given expression
(poetic).

A difficulty one faces when trying to analyse Daly’s symbol system in Pure Lust, is her
delineation of the difference between metaphor and symbol. Jacques Waardenburg (1980: 42)
indicates that:

A symbol, which is also expressed linguistically, is different from a metaphor. Though both have to do with double meaning, the metaphor brings together two dimensions of the same linguistic nature, whereas the symbol brings together a linguistic dimension and another dimension which is of a nonlinguistic nature.

Ricoeur’s notion of the difference between symbol and metaphor works along similar lines as
that of Waardenburg (who cites Ricoeur in the article indicated above). Following Aristotle’s
Poetics, Ricoeur indicates that “a metaphor brings an explicit and an implicit meaning into
relation” (1976: 46): “the application to a thing of a name that belongs to something else”
(Aristotle Poetics XXI, 4 in Ricoeur, 1976: 47). Simply understood, then, a “[m]etaphor belongs
to the language game which governs naming” (1976: 47). A symbol, however, brings together “two dimensions or two universes of discourse, one linguistic and the other nonlinguistic...a symbol in the most general sense, functions as a surplus of signification...[and one]...can only attain the secondary signification by way of the primary signification” (Ricoeur, 1976: 53-55). However, because of the surplus of signification that can only be accessed through its linguistic dimension—“a symbol gives rise to thought if it first gives rise to speech” (Ricoeur, 1976: 55)—a symbol utilizes the metaphorical function in order that its nonlinguistic dimension can signify linguistically.

Daly’s demarcation between symbol and metaphor appears to acknowledge this distinction but because metaphors are what allows a symbol to signify, she conflates symbols with metaphors. For example, Daly’s development of Marianology makes Mary both a symbol and a metaphor, albeit a broken metaphor. Rhetorically metaphors and symbols have different referents. Symbols refer through and in the sign to point to a nonlinguistic dimension: the bios grounded in human experience. Metaphors, on the other hand, refer through and in the sign to another sign. Its meaning and action is linguistically located. In Daly’s work symbols and metaphors are synonymous. She indicates that symbols (1984: 25) “participate in that to which they point. They open up levels of reality otherwise closed to us and they unlock dimensions and elements of our souls which correspond to these hidden dimensions and elements of reality. As Tillich pointed out they cannot be artificially produced, but rather grow out of the unconscious. ‘They grow when the situation is ripe for them, and they die when the situation changes.’” A metaphor although almost the same thing as a symbol is apparently more useful (1984: 25): “When I use the word *metaphor* (author’s italics) I intend this to include the qualities attributed
above to symbols. However, there is more involved. As theologian Nelle Morton has explained, metaphors evoke action, movement. They Name/evoke shock, a clash with the “going logic” and they introduce a new logic.” Certainly I am in partial agreement with Daly’s understanding of metaphor. It does and can evoke change, but its referent is not found, as I indicated, in some mystical dimension. The power of the metaphor lies in the fact that as a linguistic device it can evoke the polysemic play of language in order to think new thoughts. On the other hand, her sense of the symbolic is both limited and ungrounded. Her theory of symbol limits and ungrounds the nonlinguistic dimension when she locates it securely in the realm of the natural *cum* supernatural rather than the human dimension of historical action. Daly’s symbol systems are closed to critical analysis because of her development of the nonlinguistic dimension as “otherworldly” and therefore not within the parameters of social history. Only she as narrator (and within a text, then, “the hand of Goddess”) can effect and affect her symbol system. Beverly Wildung Harrison (1990: 198), a feminist theologian, suggests that, “[e]ven if Daly were clear, as I hope she is, that her use of the language of other worldliness is metaphorical, her imagery still seems misguided. Our need is for a moral theology shaped and informed by women’s actual historical struggle.”

In Daly’s theory of symbols that which will signify the natural *cum* supernatural is the unconscious, while it will also be the place where the soul and deity meet. Daly, in her understanding of Paul Tillich\(^5\) (regardless how contemptuous she is of him), assumes that where

---

\(^5\)Tillich (1957) develops a theory of symbols that include six characteristics. In the fourth characteristic one finds a grey area wherein he believes the soul and deity meet. He says (1957: 42) “[t]he symbol’s fourth characteristic not only opens up dimensions and elements of reality which otherwise would remain unapproachable but also unlocks dimensions and elements of our
women can find themselves and deity, where the door to the Background exists, where the
distortions of patriarchal culture do not exist, is in the unconscious. Further, she understands
Tillich's theory of a symbol to mean that symbols “grow” out of the unconscious (one might
wonder what the seed is and how it got there). As the unconscious is the meeting ground between
deity and woman, it is not surprising that she would understand symbols to “grow” out of the
unconscious. They would grow in the divine soil of the soul. Further, Daly utilizes the verb, to
grow, to connote images of the natural world in order to clearly establish a connection between
deity, natural world, and symbol. For Daly, symbols are not cultural commodities manufactured
and utilized by humans in order to engender meaning (However, ostensibly in her theory of the
symbol is her belief that the patriarchal symbols used to keep women in their place are, in fact,
cultural commodities, manufactured by patriarchy and therefore unconnected with both the
natural world and divine reality. These are not real symbols only “man” made symbols.).
According to Daly, symbols are natural, derived from nature or through some part of the human
which has access to the natural world, or from the very nature in humans themselves. This part of
the self that has uncontaminated access to the natural world is the unconscious. Daly indicates
that the unconscious, or deep/archaic memory as she names it, acts as a doorway to the

\[\text{---}
\]
soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality."

In Daly's elemental philosophy, there is women's memory (coming to consciousness) which
becomes ancestral memory (self-consciousness) which becomes elemental memory (reason)
which becomes tidal memory (Spirit) which becomes metamemory (Spirit becomes universe's
knowledge of itself). Within Daly's system, then, “woman's” memory, that which leads women
to self-consciousness, is the means to absolute knowledge. And since only women possess this
memory, only women are truly able to realize the absolute in themselves and all creation. The
absolute is “woman's” memory. The absolute then lies not in the social consciousness of women,
but in their instinctual consciousness (see Daly, 1984: 111-113; 169-178; 303-307).
CHAPTER 3

Background (the Background is the nonlinguistic dimension in Daly’s theory of symbols). She states that (1984: 170):

Similarly, the mere foreground memory of a symbol, in the context of which a woman forgets the deep mythic Background—remembering only the residue—for example the virgin Mary or the twice born Athena—is false because it is partial, because it is severed from its roots, because it is the reflection mistaken for the Original. And this is the kind of masked/masking memory that seals of deep ancestral Memory. Such memories that seal off Memory, however, insofar as they are partially true, can also function as vents through which the Background breathes forth Memory.

The symbols are generated from the Background where one finds both nature and the unconsciousness, understood by Daly as deep and/or archaic memory: “Their success is measured by the degree to which they are able to erase women’s Archaic Elemental Memory…women actively will not re-member deep Memory, for women-identified knowledge has been made to seem repugnant…Freed from the fathers, Virgins/Viragos reclaim our connection with the elements. Dis-illusioned Labrys-wielders break the barriers between our Selves and the natural world” (Daly, 1984: 112; 114).

The nonlinguistic dimension that Daly connects with the linguistic dimension is the place she names the Background. It is a place wherein women become women, where things, people, and reality have “true” existence. Daly’s notion that the true (noumenon) reside behind the artificial (phenomenon) seems to have connections to Kantian thought. Patriarchal reality is named the Foreground by Daly, or that which might be called the phenomenal world of Kant, while the Background is the place of the noumenal. The noumenon is the “thing-in-itself,” while the phenomenon is a thing as it appears in the mind (Kant 1951: 93, italics mine):
Nevertheless, the bare capability of thinking this infinite without contradiction requires in the human mind a faculty itself supersensible. For it is only by means of this faculty and its idea of a noumenon—which admits of no intuition, but which yet serves as the substrate for the intuition of the world, as a mere phenomenon—that the infinite of the world of sense, in the pure intellectual estimation of magnitude, can be completely comprehended...

In Daly’s development of reality, she has sought to demonstrate a duality of human existence, the duality of which is a creation of patriarchy. Daly develops a thesis wherein the world that has functioned as reality is in fact the Foreground, or in Kantian terms the phenomenal world. In Daly’s usage, however, the phenomenal world of the image is perceived as false, a world which is a distorted reflection of the real world named the Background or the noumenal world. The Background is in fact the real home of women: women, like the natural world, are integral to creation (1984: 3–4), whereas patriarchy and its technology have negated or are “fallen” from this reality.

In Daly’s development of a Background and Foreground Kant’s phenomenal world, or the Foreground takes on hues of sinfulness. It refers the reader back to the point of original sin (introduction of patriarchy) and the state before sin (biophilic female be-ing). Therefore the Foreground, as it functions in Daly’s philosophy, is a distortion of the noumenal world, a distortion imposed on all of humanity by patriarchy. According to Daly, this conception of reality is founded upon, and elaborated, by such ideologies as philosophy, psychology, history, religion, etc.: ideologies developed by the dominate group—males—which reflects, and in the

---

7When I use the term ideology I am specifically working within a Marxist framework wherein there is a process of the mystification of social relations so that they appear as natural, in nature, and god given. Theses mystifications will explain and legitimate hierarchal arrangements. My full understanding of ideology is delineated in chapter 6.
process legitimate, the phenomenal (Foreground) world. The Background, however, functions not only as the noumenal world but as that place which imbues symbols with meaning (1984: 4):

When reflecting the artificial lights of patriarchal prisons, words help us recognize the superficial coatings, the flashy phoneyness of the fathers’ foreground falsifications. Thus, for example, the word woman Names the alienating archetype that freezes female being, locking us into prisons of “forever feminine” roles. But when we wield words to dis-close the inner beauty, the radiance of the Race of Lusty Women, we/they blaze open pathways to our Background/Homeland.

The Background, then, exists behind the Foreground but unlike Kant’s understanding, cannot be directly accessed through the phenomenal world as this world is a distortion of the noumenal world. The process of accessing the Background is achieved through a process of coming to consciousness, about the true nature of existence and one’s being in existence.

According to Daly, it is the Background (noumenal world) that imbues symbols with their authentic power. It is a mystical place wherein all people (people appear to be women, but Daly does indicate in _Outercourse_, 1992 that men too can access the Background, but only if they are unpatriarchal) and all things in existence locate their actual being as it was meant to be. The difficulty here lies in the fact that the noumenal world—the Background—cannot be known, in any real sense, other than mythically, and even this knowing can only occur when one experiences a process of conversion. The conversion is of course feminist “be-ing.” Yet the conversion process has its own convolution: those who lack a particular consciousness, who do not know “be-ing,” cannot access the Background, but one cannot truly come into “be-ing” unless one has accessed the Background. Daly, however, attempts to circumvent this difficulty by introducing the notion that the “real” or “elemental reality,” as it is located in the Background, can shine through symbols used by Foreground perverters providing illumination to those minds
capable of understanding the nature of the light.

The magical and mystified qualities of Daly’s Background, the nonlinguistic dimension to which her symbols refer, ultimately remain a problem in her theory of symbols. This dimension because of its lack of bios, the concrete element of human experience, remains distant and abstract, a dimension closed to women who are historical actors in the world. Her symbols, regardless of her efforts, are as distant from women as Tillich’s God is from Daly herself. Because she has opted to locate immanence in transcendence and therefore locate the roots of symbols in a dimension far removed from the lives of women or their daily concerns, the Background, her nonlinguistic dimension is unknowable to all but Daly.

Daly draws upon and redefines symbols found in western ideology, both religious and secular. Her purpose is to provide women with symbols that are female constructed, and therefore reflect a female consciousness (1974: 6). In the process of this reclaimation, Daly perceives herself as a pirate, raiding the vessels (books) in order to undermine patriarchal power structures and then taking the “gems” she finds there she strips them of their patriarchal

---

8 The difference between what is called religious and secular is not always clearly demarcated in Daly’s work. However, what is clear is that she sees the mythic elements functioning in the secular realm. An example of such is of course the symbol of the whore-Madonna. This symbol has affected philosophy, popular culture, politics and even our legal systems (think for instance of a victim of rape having to prove her purity in order that the rape to be taken seriously). In support of Daly’s conflation of the religious and the secular I would argue that in the Western world we assume a split between “Church” and “State”, but what we neglect to recall is how much western morality, its ethos, and its ethics are highly dependent upon Judaic, Christian, and Roman law. In the instance of the latter, Justinian I and Theodora’s re-codification of the Julian law code (Digest 533 CE; Code 528, 534 C.E. and Institutes 533 C.E.) should be kept in mind. Throughout the Christianization of first the Roman Empire by Constantine in the 4th Century C.E. and then by ecclesiastical law of Medieval Europe, our political, philosophical, legal, and moral systems, all of which are infrastructures for Western culture, are affected by religious beliefs.
meaning/function in order that they can speak to women (Daly, 1992: 151):

I attacked “legitimate” vessels, for example, “scholarly” volumes used to transport materials that functioned to destroy my Tribe. Breaking into these vessels/containers, I wielded my labrys to hack away the trappings used to conceal important meanings and messages for women . . . I carried away armloads of the stuff the patriarchs had stolen from my Tribe and which they had converted/reversed to serve their own purposes.

An example of such redefinition, and one that nicely explicates Daly’s development of a feminist symbol system, is found in her treatment of Mary of the Christian faith, the “female” as the symbol of good, and in the (patriarchal) “male” as the symbol of evil. In the instance of Mary, Daly utilizes the rhetorical strategy of the metaphor in order to re-create Mary. In the instances of the female as the symbol of good and the (patriarchal) male as the symbol of evil, Daly employs two strategies. Initially, she utilizes her language strategy of reversing the reversals, while secondly, she develops a feminist mythology, a mythology that exposes the atrocities of patriarchy (cf. *Gyn/Ecology* and *Pure Lust*) while demonstrating that these atrocities are not simply against the female, but are, in every order, directed against creation, existence, and nature of which the female is an integral part. By connecting, and in instances conflating, the female with nature Daly is able to develop the notion of the female as the symbol of good simply by employing the binary conceptual notion emphasized by Levi Strauss (1969) that nature is metaphorically related to the female as culture is metaphorically related to the male. For Daly, like Levi Strauss, both nature and the female work within an economy of reproduction which Daly values as the good and Strauss devalues as the “raw” or uncivilized, while the male and culture (the other side of the dichotomy) work within an economy of production which is
symbolized evil according to Daly, and the civilized or good according to Strauss. Although Daly never refers to Strauss’ work, she apparently accepts the binaries articulated by Strauss and thereafter Sherry Ortner (1974), and reverses their valuation. Binary opposition or the structure is not the problem. Rather, the problem is how the binaries have been valued in patriarchy.

1.1 The Marian Symbol in Daly’s Symbol System

A reader finds reference to Mary both as she is understood within patriarchy as a symbol of women’s oppression (1968; 1974; 1978; 1984) and Daly’s reinterpretation and appropriation of this symbol. Pirated from patriarchy, the symbol of Mary will represent the potentiality of women’s emancipation (1974; 1978; 1984). In order to redeem Mary for women, Daly first deconstructs Mary as a symbol within the Catholic church. This process of reclamation consists of Daly developing a history of the symbol of Mary, and how Mary has been used by the Church in order control Catholic women. She will debunk their claim to Mary, and claim it for women connecting Mary to the symbols of ancient Goddesses.

Daly indicates that in 1974 Pope Paul suggested that Mary could be a “model of the liberated woman.” Daly argues that this simple manoeuvre by the Catholic church was in order to placate feminist sentiments when feminism resurfaced in the early sixties. She suggests that essentially the church wished to be viewed as supportive of women by its female members. To do such, Daly argues, the mainstream church placed new emphasis on Mary, an emphasis that underscored the femaleness of the Marian symbol along with her relationship with Jesus. But,

---

9Levi Strauss’ (and structuralism therein) observation and re-entrenchment of the metaphorical relationship between the binaries of culture/nature and male/female is analysed by Sherry Ortner (1974).
Daly points out, within the Catholic Christian myth Mary as symbol was, and continues to be, subordinate to male symbols, and in this subordination continues to function in order to legitimate female subordination to male authority within the Church (Daly, 1968: 42).

In *Pure Lust* (1984) Daly (historically) traces the symbol of Mary in the Catholic church, arguing that the church, throughout its entire history, has used the symbol of Mary in order to placate, delude, and co-opt women, especially during those times when women challenged, subverted, or productively managed patriarchal power structures. Sketching out her interpretation of the church’s historical record, she begins by pointing to the assumption of Mary in 1950, and connects this, “cronologically,” to a time of backlash against women. Daly argues that women who were working in large numbers in the public domain during the second world war were pushed backed into domesticity. Their jobs were taken from them, in order that men could take them over, and women were confined to the suburbs, a recent phenomenon of North America (1984: 124–130). Prior to this, in the history of the church Catholic, women were, according to Daly, patronized by the Church when it implemented the dogma of immaculate conception in 1854. Daly suggests that this “raising” up of Mary was in response to the rise of feminism at this time (the US’s first Women’s Rights convention was in 1848). Daly further interprets the dogma of immaculate conception not as the raising up of Mary as a symbol that Catholic women could connect with, but rather the erasure of Mary’s self which symbolically represented the erasure of women’s female selves. Although Mary was apparently elevated, in that she was understood to be even more sacred, this manoeuvre had more to do with the need to insure the sacrosanctity of her womb in order that it might be a pure vessel for Jesus (1974: 82; 1978: 83). Daly argues that real women cannot escape the nature of human reproduction, a process understood in
Catholicism as polluting. Mary, then, in the dogma of immaculate conception was necessarily purified by the male clergy of the Catholic church. As Daly states: “We have seen that on the symbolic level the immaculate conception fosters a delusion of advancement of women’s position while it undermines the possibility of conceiving any image of autonomous female transcendence” (1984: 108). Mary is not glorified because she is female, rather she is glorified because of her relationship with Jesus (1974: 82).

Winding her analysis of the Mary symbol back through the Middle Ages to the time of Augustine, Daly suggests that Augustine, Jerome, Origen, and other early fathers of the church promulgated the belief of a split female nature (1968: 85–90). “Woman” as Eve is seen to seduce the male which brought about his (and her) fall into creation. But “woman” in the figure of Mary raise up the male and allows for his salvation. The connotation of this, according to Daly, is that the female acts as a catalyst for the male, but as a catalyst she is unable to save herself. She is the object of both his failure and his salvation, and as an object is unable to act as a subject. She is unable to rise out of the materiality of her human objectivity, and can never transcend her objectivity as a catalyst. She is forever locked into the objective world created by God, herself a creature of God, and therefore never sharing in his subjectivity. Man, however, as subject, is not simply a creature of God, but rather shares in God’s subjectivity and is therefore able to transcend the objective world. From a feminist perspective then, Daly notes the privileging of the

---

10The ritual of “churching” is an example of such beliefs. A woman after having given birth must wait a prescribed amount of time (twenty days for the birth of a male infant and forty days for the birth of a female infant) in order to rejoin the religious community. This re-entrance into the community is recognized by a ritual known as churching which then allows the woman to once again take the sacrament. This ritual is largely a thing of the past but it is still practiced in some Catholic communities.
male over the female and the lack of female subjectivity within Catholic doctrine. She contends that this is an aspect of the patriarchal rape of the female essence, represented by Mary, who in turn is representative of the raped Goddess: “The catholic Mary is not the Goddess creating parthenogenetically on her own, but rather she is portrayed/betrayed as Total Rape Victim—a pale derivative symbol disguising the conquered Goddess” (1974: 83) or “[b]y their subliming of this monstrous mythic disguise for the Archimage [goddess], the impotent priests produced an archetype who could not have had a Divine Daughter because she had been purified of her Self, and indeed never had been her Self. Such a being would be inconceivable to herself” (1984: 106).

According to Daly, the Foreground symbol of Mary functions to insure women’s subordination. Although she appears to have status in the patriarchal world, her status is derived from her obedience to God and his son. Mary assents to be a vessel for the revelation of god, but as a vessel she has no subjectivity. And yet this symbol, indicates Daly, was not and is not always patriarchal. In the Foreground Mary is an inverted, distorted image, a mirror image of the goddess, and as such, the real image can, at times, shine through, and at other times is a mere glimmer (1984: 113–114).

Daly indicates that during the Middle Ages the real or Background image, the “Archimage” was extraordinarily powerful, so much so that “[t]he Archimage [Mary as she is in the Background] threatened to explode through the Arch-Image [Mary as she functions within the Foreground] and indeed volcanic eruptions of consciousness/memory in women did take place” (1984: 92). Such eruptions of memory, Daly indicates, can be located in women’s
activities during the Middle Ages, activities which, prompted the witchcraze.\textsuperscript{11} Mary as a symbol functioned to empower women during this period, insuring the connection between women and their true being. She acted as a channel to the Archimage (1984: 92) and inspired women to “acts of knowing and passion causing women to participate in such powers” (1984: 95, author’s italics). Although a “faded and broken metaphor,” “opaque as well as translucent, distorting as well as illuminating” (1984: 95), Mary remains a “possessed goddess” unable to be an authentic symbol of the Archimage, but still functioning as the “only signal of hope” to all women (directly and indirectly) in Western society (1984: 96).

In order to reclaim Mary even as the Arch-Image, Daly takes up the epithets of Mary and argues that these are proof of Mary’s connection with the Goddess. Mary’s epithets duplicate the epithets of goddesses. Following, in part, Marina Warner (1976) she notes the similarities between epithets of ancient goddesses such as Isis and Ishtar as the morning star, Diana as a lunar deity and an earth mother, and the earth as Mother Goddess to the epithets associated with Mary (1984: 97). For example, she will draw the reader’s attention to how the symbolism

\textsuperscript{11}Daly’s full thesis on the witchcraze can be found in her book \textit{Gyn/Ecology} (1978). Essentially, during the Middle Ages women began to re-connect with their true Selves and therefore their own power. Because of this, patriarchal institutions re-asserted their oppression by burning huge numbers of women (1978: 184). Daly, at one point estimates the figure of women killed to have been nine million (1986: 16) in the witchcraze (mid to late 15th century through to the 17th century). Although this figure is excessive, Anne Llewellyn Barstow (1988: 7–22) does suggest the number to be a minimum of 100,000 in Europe. Barstow demonstrates that female sexuality was a central feature of the witch scourges: 80% of those accused were female, while 85% of those executed were female (Barstow, 1988: 7). Further, Kramer and Sprenger’s \textit{Malleus Maleficarum} (1486)—a guide for the detection of witches—evidences an extreme misogyny, one that suggests an extreme fear of, and a desire to control, female sexuality.
connected with Black Madonnas replicates the symbolism exhibited by ancient earth goddesses like Ceres, Cybele, Isis, Diana, Artemis, Demeter, and Rhea (1984: 117). Mary, then, explains Daly, is a "remnant" of the goddess, of the Archimage which was usurped by Christianity, and in the 16th century erased by the Protestants of the Reformation. Mary as Arch-Image is a conduit for the Archimage and "only women who choose to participate in the Archimage can conceive of our Selves, creating our Selves and our tradition" (1984: 107).

Although Mary is not the only doorway for the Archimage, she is a significant one in Daly's work. As indicated, Mary symbolizes the manifestation of the goddess but this manifestation of the goddess in Mary not only symbolizes the sacred in female form, she also symbolizes the rape of the female. Mary, as a female symbol that carries ancient epithets, epithets which connect her with the past, symbolizes, for Daly, the condition of women in patriarchy. Women in patriarchy, like Mary in Christianity, have had their power stolen. They have been hollowed out and then filled with an artificial self—the feminine. In Daly's thesis the feminine is the fembot, a manufactured female who has internalized patriarchy and in many instances (i.e., her reference to the aunts in *The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985) fosters it. Like the Stepford wives then, women have been programmed by patriarchy to value the male and devalue the female. Mary as a vessel symbolizes this hollowing out while Mary filled by the Holy Spirit symbolizes the programming of women. But Mary, as a conduit for the Goddess, can also symbolize the potential for female freedom. Even though the symbol of Mary, according to Daly's reading of Marian mythology, has been appropriated and broken by patriarchy, it is still able to subvert patriarchal intentions and act as a beacon guiding women toward new possibilities. How Daly is able to explicate the symbol of Mary in such a fashion is by her use of
the polysemy of symbols.

Symbols are polysemic, have multiple meanings, and often these meanings can escape the intentions of those who utilize them. Mary, in Catholicism, is read as a humble and willing servant of the Christian god. But within a feminist semantic field of intentions another reading can take place. Beginning with the material, the condition of women in patriarchy, and how women have often participated in their own subordination—become subjects, which means accepting themselves as objects in patriarchy, Daly connects their false consciousness with what she considers the false consciousness exhibited by the historical Mary. Jacquelyn Grant (1989: 166) notes in regard to Daly’s development of the Marian symbol that: “Essentially Mary was “de-natured” in order to serve the purposes of the “god-son.” To put it another way, she was raped of her self. Mary (as all women), has been denied her female ‘elemental be-ing’.” The historical Mary, within Daly’s feminist reading of the semantic field, offers herself up for the use of patriarchy. She shares a similar false consciousness with women when she consents to be used by the father and the son. Women, in patriarchy, have themselves permitted patriarchal use primarily through their relationships with their fathers and sons. Historically then, both Mary and women have been willing victims—via false consciousness—of patriarchy.

Furthering the polysemy of symbols, Daly is able to read hope into the story of the oppression of the female. Utilizing the femaleness of Mary in order to connect Mary with “be-ing” which then connects her with the Goddess, Daly is able to read femaleness as the primary

---

12 See Walker Bynum (1986); Maeckelberghe (1991); and Soljeim and Borchgrevink (1993) for a discussion about the polysemic potential of patriarchal symbols for feminist readings.

13 See my comments “3.1 Concluding remarks” in regard to Daly’s historization of Mary.
CHAPTER 3

intention of the symbol of Mary and the Goddess. This symbolic is then evinced in the femaleness in women. The polysemic aspect of symbols allows for a Dalian feminist reading which focuses on a new semantic field of intention: femaleness. Femaleness in its primary meaning is read as a sign of oppression. To be female is to be oppressed. The latent meaning, which allows us to share the primary meaning (Ricoeur, 1968: 194; 1972: 314), can only arise when the symbol is situated in, and interpreted through, the context of a “radical” feminist epistemology which utilizes a standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint epistemology maintains that the oppressed have a more authentically vision of reality. Their ethos is undistorted because what is not at stake for them is the domination of others (Hartsock, 1983). Working within this framework then, the primary meaning of female as a signifier of the oppressed can direct one to a latent meaning of the female as the signifier of truth. From here Daly will then develop a thesis of femaleness as the symbol of good and patriarchy (read male) as the symbol of evil.

1.2 Female as the symbol of good

In the development of Daly’s symbolic theory it is the ultimate reality of the Goddess, known by many names and present in all biophilic women or radical feminists, that stand as the symbol of good in Daly’s work. This ultimate reality is located in the Goddess’ femaleness. This femaleness is realized in radical feminists who are “Nag-Gnostics, A-mazing Amazons, Original Witches” who have maintained the knowledge of femaleness, passed down through the ages until the present time, and can therefore act as priestesses, prophets, and guides to women who wish to realize their female potential (1984: 237). In Daly’s Wickedary (1987: 75) radical feminism is

14See chapters one and five for a more extensive discussion of the epistemological position known as feminist standpoint.
understood as:

1: the Cause of causes, which alone of all revolutionary causes exposes the basic model and source of all forms of oppression—patriarchy—and thus can open up consciousness to active participation in Movement, Transcendence, and
Happiness 2: be-ing for women and all elemental Life, which implies going to the roots of the oppression of all Others 3: way of be-ing characterized by (a) an Awesome and Ecstatic sense of Otherness from patriarchal norms and values (b) conscious awareness of the sadosphere’s sanctions against Radical Feminists (c) moral outrage on behalf of women as women: WOMAN-IDENTIFICATION (d) commitment to the cause of women that persists, even against the current, when feminism is no longer “popular”: CONSTANCY.

Radical feminism, in its first meaning, is a noun that names a revolutionary movement, a true movement unlike any that has preceded it. In its second and third meanings it is an adjective that describes a state of consciousness know as “be-ing.” This state of consciousness is open to “women and all elemental life.” On the level of the symbolic, radical feminist can symbolize the potential of femaleness.

Daly’s argument concerning the innate goodness of femaleness is grounded in the connection made between nature, women, and goddess, an argument begun in Beyond God the Father (1974) but more fully elaborated in Pure Lust (1984: 78–194). She does this in order to concretely legitimate her thesis of femaleness (exemplified in the radical feminist) as the symbol of good. According to Daly’s logic, if women are located in the realm of the natural—hence real—world, a world which supports all life and within feminism and the ecology movement is no longer deprecated as “the material realm,” while the male is shown to be alienated from this, then patriarchy and a male god can only symbolize evil while the goddess and the female can only symbolize the good.

In the age of environmental awareness, when the planet’s ecology is a central tenet in all
forms of discourse, i.e., religious, political, economical, popular, etc., Daly’s connecting of the rape of the planet with the rape of women is a clever dialectic. Within the symbolism of good, femaleness, the essence of “be-ing” a woman, although it may not be realized by all women (fembots, token torturers etc., but certainly by radical feminists), is located in the natural world. Femaleness, like the trees, like the stars, like earth, has true existence, and this true existence of the female holds within her the elements that metaphysically make up all aspects of reality: fire, water, air and earth (1984: 14–18). Women, who chose biophilic (life loving) be-ing, are (1984: 4–5):

... rooted, as are animals and trees, winds and seas, in the Earth’s substance. Our origins are in her elements. Thus, when true to our Originality, we are Elemental, that is, ‘of, relating to, or caused by the great force of nature’.

What is more natural, has more reality than nature? Since the 1960s people have become increasingly aware of the earth’s dwindling resources, the denuding of the forests, the pollution of lakes, rivers, streams, and oceans, and the depletion of the ozone layer. Western hegemonic and other discourses have been forced to reexamine ideas of dominion and unlimited resources in favour of an ethos that humans are immanently connected to the world, and if the world is destroyed, the human species, and most other spheres, will also be destroyed.

---

15 Daly’s elaboration of the rape of the planet and the rape of women is not an original idea, but is an aspect of her thinking throughout her work since the writing of the Church and the Second Sex (1968). It is most succinctly and explicitly laid out in the forward of Andrée Collard’s Rape of the Wild: Man’s Violence Against Animals and the Earth (1989). Daly states: “In this book, Andrée Collard Names with uncompromising Courage the evil wrought by the patriarchal rapers of Earth. Rape of the Wild is a major work of ecofeminism, demonstrating and explaining the unity of women and nature and the oneness of women’s struggle to save our Selves and to save the planet (1989: ix).
By reinterpreting the semantics of the connection between women and nature Daly attaches to her radical feminism two elements frequently found in environmental discourses. The first is the reality of nature itself, i.e., trees, winds, tornados, and volcanoes, and how nature's empirical existence exhibits a truth that is visible, one more visible than, for instance, an abstract scientific theory such as big-bang. Secondly, human attitudes toward their own environment have been destructive because of an intention toward domination, and this destructiveness can be located in political, economic, and scientific epistemologies—epistemologies developed in large part by western powers which have been, and continue to be, dominated by the male. Daly notes the common denominator of maleness (rather than class or race) and names this destructive force as patriarchy. For Daly patriarchy is the engine behind all destruction, and that destruction is focused upon nature, the last of which women are an integral and natural part. In order that creation continues, women, like all of the natural world, must survive the destructive inclinations of patriarchy.¹⁶ Within this discourse of the environment, one that intersects both scientific notions of environmental hazards and theological notions regarding the nature of creation, i.e., the earth as sentient, Daly elaborates the mythology of the Goddess.

In Daly's thealogy femaleness is the essence of all existence and it is symbolically represented by the "Goddess." The Goddess will take many forms but ultimately is the ground for all creation: "[when] I choose to use such words as Goddess it is to point Metaphorically to the Powers of Be-ing, the Active Verb in whose potency all biophilic reality participates" (1984: 26). The Goddess that Daly alludes to assumes a variety of forms. "Clearly this Goddess image

¹⁶The notion of patriarchy as evil I shall elaborate further on in the chapter.
was also possessed, diminished, distorted by phallic religions after the patriarchal take-over. In
discovering her, however, we uncover further layers of our stolen traditions. There are many,
many manifestations of Female Divinity in all cultures” (1984: 118) but what is common to all,
and most important to all is the female aspect of the Goddess.

In Daly’s feminist discourse “woman’s” story begins in a “once upon time before
patriarchy when women were whole and strong” (1984: 99). Her characters are A-mazing
Amazons, Weirds, Hags, Gnostics, Dryads, and other mythical creatures whose time and space
are outside current reality structures, which are, according Daly, patriarchal created linear time
and patriarchal created territorial space. In the narration of “woman’s” story Daly re-members
women’s power as elementally female represented by the Goddess.

The Goddess is narrated as the Memory which connects women to their elemental past: a
past that begins with creation (1984: 97-99). Throughout linear time, the time that has trapped
women, the Goddess and women have been maligned, manipulated, and murdered in patriarchy.
The Goddess, once the Archimage of elemental female power, was appropriated and subjugated
by phallocracy into the “Arch-Image.” One such example is Mary the mother of Christ. It was
the memory of the Goddess which threatens to break through the Arch-Image of Mary in the
Middle Ages and hence the witch-craze that saw the torturous deaths of thousands of women.

As Daly narrates the story of “female” it becomes apparent that Daly reinterprets the
meaning of broad historical events. She names current history as patriarchal history. Narrative is
a giving voice to, and, a means to a change. A new narrative can be a re-description of reality and
therefore empowering. The feminist invocation “You say you have lost all recollection of it,
remember . . . you say there are no words to describe it, you say it does not exist. But remember.
CHAPTER 3

Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent” (Monica Wittig 1969 [1971]: 89 in Christ, 1992 [1979]: 277) underlies Daly’s remembering of the Goddess and women’s power.

Daly’s development of the Goddess in history does not follow traditional interpretations. Understood traditionally, Goddess means “a female god or deity,” whereas God means “Supreme Being,” “the creator and ruler of the universe.” Only in lowercase does the word god refer to a male deity. Daly takes up the adjective female in the definition of Goddess, and underscores it, suggesting that it is the female element that allows the Goddess to stand not only as a symbol to women, but as a symbol of divinity. Reversing the reversals on the level of the symbolic, Daly locates divinity in the femaleness of the Goddess as Christians, and more obviously Catholic Christians, locate divinity in the maleness of Jesus and the masculinity of God.¹⁷ (The insistence of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church not to allow women into its priesthood is evidence of their belief in the sacrosanctity of both maleness and masculinity.) Her tendency then, is to leave gender ideologies in place and simply reinterpret the semantic intention of the ideology.

Daly goes on to argue (1978: 76; 1984: 100), that as men are born from women, God was born from Goddess. In Christianity, she explains, the concept of the trinity (1978: 75–79) was usurped by Christians from Goddess worship to represent its own trinity, and as a story within a story regarding the subjugation of the Goddess (1984: 88). Daly argues that the trine-aspected

¹⁷The difference as I see it between maleness and masculinity is one of body. Maleness is the embodied penis that visibly indicates gender. Masculinity is dis-embodied phallus and represents the absent father whose law and language reign. My differentiation is largely affected by feminist psychoanalytic discourse, and feminist literary criticism. For example see Jane Gallop (1982) The Daughter’s Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis. Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press; Patricia Yeager and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace (eds.) (1989) Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois Univ. Press.
CHAPTER 3

Goddess: the maiden, the mother and the crone, the daughter-mother relationship, as exemplified in Demeter and Kore and the earth as Mother-Goddess, precede any and all male gods along with Gods of monotheistic religions. Influenced by J. J. Bachofen (1967), Margaret Mead (1949), Margaret Murray (1921), Robert Graves (1973), James Mellaart (1967) and Marija Gimbutas’ (1982) notion of a matriarchy pre-patriarchy (Daly, 1968: 42; 1974: 94; 1978: 84–85, 88; 1984: 82, 117–118), Daly places Goddess, nature, and women prior to gods, culture, and men. Implicit in her argument is the notion that Goddess, nature, and women are natural, while gods, culture, and men are constructed. Although never citing Sherry Ortner’s 1974 article “Is Female to Male as nature is to Culture,” Daly unproblematically takes up the notion that culture, history, etc. are constructions of men, or patriarchy. The Goddess in her variant forms, with her plurality of names, in her femaleness, and in her connection to the “natural” or elemental world (1984: 5, 9, 12–13, 15, 78–121, etc.) is representative of a pre-fallen state (1984: 85–86):

The process of anamnesia—of Unforgetting our Elemental connections—is a process thwarted by the blinding, suffocating archetypes. . . . It is about recalling our first questions, our native powers—the Original lustrous radiant sunrise of our be-ing. . . . In order to reach our deep empowering memories, Archelogians must not only recognize the archetypes of the sado-sublime; we must exorcize them. Our exorcizing of these distorted/distorting molds involves/requires dis-covering the Archimage who is hidden behind the archetypes.

Whereas culture, men, and a monotheistic (masculine) god (and male gods) represent the real fallenness. Maleness is the root of evil.

1.3 Male as the symbol of evil

Patriarchy n 1: society manufactured and controlled by males; FATHERLAND; society in which every legitimated institution is entirely in the hands of males and a few selected henchwomen; society characterized by oppression, repression, depression, narcissism, cruelty, racism, classism, ageism, objectification, sadomasochism, necrophilia; joyless society, ruled by Godfather, Son, and
Company; society fixated on proliferation, propagation, procreation, and bent on the destruction of all Life 2: the prevailing religion of the entire planet, whose essential message is necrophilia. (Daly, 1987: 87–88)

Patriarchy as the evil of all creation is a frequent theme in Daly’s books. In her first book (1968), and less so in her second (1974), patriarchy is seen as a system of discrimination and oppression, but it does not function with the conscious intent to subjugate women. She states in The Church and the Second Sex that (1968: 197): “What is at stake is the character and quality of the man-woman relation in the Church of the future. There will be no genuine equality of men and women in the Church as long as qualified persons are excluded from any ministry by reason of their sex alone.” In Beyond God the Father (1974: 15) Daly takes up the notion of androgyny in order to transcend sexual difference. These views Daly will distance herself from and ultimately reject (clearly stated in the post-introductions that preface both books, and in her subsequent books).

It is in Gyn/Ecology (1978) that Daly takes up the notion that patriarchy functions with evil intent. Patriarchy consciously seeks to eradicate femaleness since femaleness is other but, as other, Daly argues, femaleness represents what is both real and sacred. In her preface to Gyn/Ecology (1978: xlv) Daly begins by saying “[t]here is no way to remove male/masculine imagery from God. Thus, when writing/speaking “anthropomorphically” of ultimate reality, of the divine spark of be-ing, I now choose to write/speak gynomorphically. I do so because God represents the necrophilia of patriarchy, whereas Goddess affirms the life-loving be-ing of women and nature.” Gyn/Ecology establishes a context wherein Daly can elaborate her thesis of the innate evil of patriarchy. It is her text, Gyn/Ecology, which lays out, sentence by sentence, chapter by chapter the atrocities enacted on women by patriarchy: from foot-binding, to genital
mutilation, to the witch-hunts of the Middle Ages, to Indian Suttee or widow burning and to American gynaecology. In each "Sado-Ritual," as Daly names them, women are the victims.

Patriarchy is no longer a vague notion of the institutionalization of male power, patriarchy consists of male power with necrophilic—death-loving—intentions and it is this necrophilia that signifies evil.\(^{18}\) It is in *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) that Daly begins her separatist journey, naming maleness as the representation of evil.

Daly's semi-historical naming of patriarchy as the evil in creation is supported in her texts by the connection Daly makes between death, destruction, slavery, murder, and war with evil. Naming these acts as evil, she then points to the precipitators of most of this evil—men who must be evil or, at the very least, under the control of evil impulses. She states (1984: 2):

> Phallic lust, violent and self-indulgent, levels all life, dismembering spirit/matter, attempting annihilation. Its refined cultural products, from the sadistic pornography of the Marquis de Sade to the sadomasochistic theology of Karl Barth, are on a continuum: they are essentially the same. This lust is *pure* in the sense that it is characterized by unmitigated malevolence. It is *pure* in the sense that it is ontologically evil, having as its end the braking/breaking of female being.

> Disguising male lust has been essential to the ruse. In creating sadospiritual religion, men have fled into pseudo-purified and disguised lust in the Name of the Sublime. Phallic lust—christened *religion, mysticism, duty, charity, patriotism, romantic love*—is not only all right, but the height of virile virtue. Indeed, male rape fantasies become high theology and elicit religious rapture. . . . (1984: 74)

> Evil externalized and functioning in the cosmic realm can be understood as the rape of the planet and all its elemental inhabitants. Serial killers are, for the most part, male and fixated

---

\(^{18}\)Interestingly, the paradigm within which Daly understands this evil to work can be discerned in her language. It is, of course, a Christian notion of evil (1978: 1): "[t]he journey, then, involves *exorcism* of the internalized Godfather in his various manifestations (his name is *legion*) (my italics).
upon power-over through sexuality (killers such as Jack the Ripper, the Boston Strangler, Ted Bundy, and John Dahlmer to name but a few), while killing on a mass scale has also been largely generated by men through wars, crusades, and genocide. The Nazi regime is an excellent example of such. Kings, cardinals, popes, governors, generals, inquisitors, professors, doctors, judges, all have been male. Men have had access to power, to the narration of reality, and throughout the ages have abused this power. And, even when other men have sought to dismantle oppressive regimes, these men have often set up equally oppressive regimes. As Herbert Marcuse noted, all revolutions have been failed revolutions. Many have rationalized the inclination toward the abuse of power to failings of human "nature." Daly, however, places the abuse of power squarely on the shoulders of male "nature." It is not about their humanness as they are not really human as defines defines it. It is about the male’s "natural" inclination toward destruction. The destruction engendered by the male, according to Daly, has women and female power as the focus of its intention (1978: 28; 59–61; 1984: 111–113). Daly understands this inclination to be biologically based in maleness and expressed in, by, and with technology.

In Daly’s *Wickedary* (1987) several definitions name the innate evil of the male. A male-factor, which is a noun, is defined as “1: male malefactor, evildoer” (1987: 209), while under the entry “male motherhood” refers to the

1: fundamental reversal characteristic of patriarchal myth, e.g., god the father creating the world, Adam giving birth to Eve, Zeus bringing forth Athena 2: male attempts to possess the creative powers of women, resulting in berserk and destructive simulations of motherhood—exemplified in the activities of obstetricians and gynaecologists 3: male endeavours to self-generate by means of necrological reproductive technologies which reduce females to the condition of incubators/vessels and which are inherently directed toward the annihilation women (1987: 210).
Under necrophilia Daly states that “...the most fundamental characteristic and first principle of patriarchy: hatred for and envy of Life; the universal message of all patriarchal religion: death worship...” —Valerie Solanas (1987: 84). Males are metaphorically named as “sniffers,” “fixers,” “plug-uglies,” “snools,” “botchers/butchers” and “rippers” (1984: 22).

Although Daly will at times, modify the noun male, with the adjective patriarchal in order to suggest a particular group of males, she remains inconsistent in this. Implicitly, and at times explicitly, the male as a sex is named as the repository of evil. Men as the concrete symbol of maleness are “filled with and fear their own emptiness and weakness” (1978: 361); are disgusted with themselves for not being female (1978: 360); and bond in relationships in a vampiric fashion which involves loss of identity and hierarchies: “ranking roles—like the military—on the model of S and M” (1978: 373). War, famine, pollution, and death are understood within Daly’s work as the evil product of an equally evil patriarchy. Patriarchy, as the planetary religion (1978: 39), is fostered by the evil inclinations of the necrophilic, sadistic male: the male who is unable to create and therefore seeks to destroy (1984: 20).

How the male expresses the evil that is his fundamental impetus is in and through culture and technology. Daly, who places women squarely in nature, will place men squarely in culture. Culture or Sado-society is “man-made” and functions to destroy elemental existence. The forms that cultures take and the ways in which they express themselves are inevitably patriarchal since sexism is a planetary caste system (1974: 2; 1984: 232). All cultures, as we understand them, function nefariously in the Foreground which is patriarchy. These cultures are fabrications of men, archetypes or mere copies of elemental female reality (1984: 10; 81) as the male is
incapable of creation (1978: 58–61). According to Daly theirs is a construction, a facade or edifice, a fabrication which is a reversal of creation (1987: 241):

The proliferation of elementary terms functions to destroy the ability of victims of phallotechnocracy/fellowtechnocracy to Name Wild reality, or what is left of that reality. At the same time, the incessant destruction and replacement of the Elemental world corrodes the ability of this society’s inhabitants/captives to recognize and be in Touch with even the remnants of Deep Memory. The replacement and covering of wetlands with shopping malls, the conversion of wildlife refuges and sanctuaries into hunting grounds, the transformation of rivers and lakes into lethal soups of radioactive wastes and pesticides the embedding of deadly subliminal messages into ads, news photographs, record albums, television images—together with the social imperative to watch television—all of these phenomena exemplify the sadosociety’s obscene determination to fabricate a soulless world.

Patriarchy as the foreground “unreality” seeks to destroy all “biophilic” life, of which women and nature are an integral part. Because the male is not a part of “real” existence, because he is not and cannot be biophilic, because he cannot create in the way women can create, his intention then is to domestic and consume, and in this enslave and destroy, what is not naturally his.

It is very difficult to argue with Daly’s thesis of the evil atrocities enacted by patriarchy, and just as difficult to accept that femaleness is the symbol of good. The difficulty, of course, is that Daly remains locked within the current western (mostly white) gender ideology. She does not deconstruct the gender ideologies operative in the historical moments she alludes to, nor does she dismantle the current gender ideology that she (along with all of us) is located within. She simply reverses it and instead of the valuation and privileging of the male she valuates and privileges the female. Femaleness is the symbol of good while maleness is the symbol of evil. Utilizing the binary opposites of male and female, culture, and nature, she flips concepts in metaphorical relation with the concepts of male/culture and female/nature so that good is now
metaphorically associated with female, and evil with male. She elaborates a theory that demonstrates how reversed valuation occurred, so that, for example, production and progress which have been valued as good for humanity can really be shown to be bad for humanity in general and women (and any other group such as people of colour, children, different ethnic groups etc.) in particular, whereas reproduction and preservation can be seen to be good for humanity and women in particular. In the former, symbolic associations allow us to understand that production has intimate connections with capitalism, while progress, in both the sense of civilization and technology, has symbolic associations with repression and destruction. Reproduction, however, is natural, and preservation symbolically denotes the preserving of the life force. Therefore, with the threat of annihilation of the human race either through nuclear war or through environmental destruction, the evilness of patriarchy can actually take symbolic form simply because the implications of such have always been there. The male, as a devouring wolf, works within the symbolic economy of the gender ideology that functions in the West. Progress as terrifying and devoid of human content has also functioned within this economy along with production as artificial reproduction and again devoid of humanity. Joan Cocks (1984: 36) suggests that Daly’s “Manichean universe is rather one torn by the struggle between reason and unreason: between the creative, life-loving female force of goodness and the destructive, necrophilic male force of death. Nothing could be more in harmony with reason that the love of life, or more perverse that the desire to destroy it . . .”

The female as the symbol of good is somewhat difficult to evoke simply because, again, the framework has remained the same—even if the valuation has been seen to be reversed. Gender ideologies tell us how to be male and female. Daly maintains the popular gender
ideology of the Straussian kind and suggests that the valuations should simply be reversed. The idea of gender prescription in relation to how one should be male or female is not challenged. Rather the meaning of what it is to be male or female is challenged. The structure, then, remains in place. Daly’s refusal to deconstruct gender ideology creates several problems for her theology. Firstly, particular ideological readings, especially those of the dominant group, will have more power than alternative readings. What is required to dislodge this particular reading is that one challenge the structure in order that one’s alternative reading not be subsumed by the dominant group. For example, “The Cult of True Womanhood” during the 19th century in North America sought to empower women using the current gender ideology. Flipping the valuation of the emotion/reason dichotomy, men were understood as the physical and intellectual superiors of women, but women were morally superior because of their emotions, emotions securely located in motherhood. The challenge made by these women to actual systems of oppression which they considered to be dehumanizing was swallowed up and regurgitated within that system as “natural” for men and women. A similar problem occurs in Daly’s use of the current gender ideology. The metaphorical relationship between the female and nature has been mapped out within a misogynistic framework and the connotations worked out within this framework cannot simply be ignored (Cameron, 1985: 18–19). To remain within a misogynistic gender ideology and simply reverse its interpretations means leaving intact this gender ideology without effectively deconstructing the hierarchical logic that undergirds it. It leaves intact the misogynistic connotations, which, as has been seen, have more power in our historical period than alternative, i.e., feminist, readings. Reversing the hierarchy, as Daly does, does not invalidate the misogynistic reading of female/nature, male/culture, it simply overwrites it and
assumes her alternative reading will have more power. Hers is an assumption based upon an illusionary belief that she and women can simply discard past meanings.

The political evisceration of Daly’s feminist epistemology is another problem when she assumes this kind of gender ideology. If being female means being in nature, being associated with reproduction, and the body, it means that culture, production, and technology, that which encapsulates all of us, is closed to women. As Cocks notes (1984: 37): “Once Daly juxtaposes the truth of a good female essence with the lie of civilization, there is only one place left for women to go—back to some primordial nature untainted by creation. For Daly, this means that women must give up all skills, customs, family and community relations, notions of enjoyment and pleasure that form the backdrop of their everyday lives.” Although this development of the good is understood by Daly to reflect what is really real, her realness is clearly metaphysical and this undercuts her feminist epistemology. The gender ideology she leaves intact means that the female engaging warmly with a tree, enjoying the fact that they are both “real” is exposed to and defenseless against the unreal, the imitation, the manufactured: a lead bullet, a steel knife, devastating war, all-encompassing poverty, environmentally induced ill-health, and debilitating starvation. Just as Christian metaphysics have promoted life after death in the face of such realities, so too Daly’s metaphysics when she assumes that the female and nature—the symbol of good—are separate from, unconnected to, and therefore helpless against, the male and culture—the symbol of evil.

2. Be-ing and the Sublime

Mary Daly’s feminist ontology is expressed by the intransitive verb “be-ing” which is a verb, she indicates, that directs women toward, and is intrinsic to, her Background. Although
cloaked in immanency, in that Daly argues that it is rooted in nature, Daly’s be-ing transcends immanency when it mythologises the “natural” world. Although apparently rooted in nature, the nature it is rooted in is one that is far removed from the mundane world and exists in the metaphysical realm of the mythic. This mythic place is inaccessible by any other means other than language—poetics. Like any poetics, Daly’s poetics has an intrinsic right to creative license, and to this I accede and therefore approach her notion of be-ing rhetorically. The concept of the sublime is a rhetorical device which I use to analyse the poetical/mythical aspects of Mary Daly’s “elemental philosophy.” It is a category of analysis which I impose upon in the moment I draw it out of her work. If the sublime is understood as that which is between “the momentary intense experience of a discontinuity between desire and the possibility of its fulfilment....” as “the creature of duality” in that it accentuates disparities or creates them (Diehl 1990: 2), and as that moment when the self is eradicated and renewed, then Mary Daly’s Background, the place wherein women un-become and enter into be-ing, is a location of the sublime.

Daly’s Background, or as I have indicated, the noumenal world in Kantian terms, is a rhetorical space that exists only in the imaginative narrative of her books. This space has no material existence as it has no actuality in the reality of patriarchal cultures. Patriarchal reality is named the Foreground by Daly or that which I would call the phenomenal world of Kant. The noumenon is the “thing-in-itself,” while the phenomenon is a thing as it appears in the mind (Kant 1951: 93).

Daly argues that the Background authentically belongs to the natural world, i.e., nature, and therefore has true existence. But I would argue that Daly rhetorically creates this space for women in the textual economy of the academy which has no “real” connection with nature. It is
from within this rhetorical space that I see her develop conceptual ideas that associate women with biophilic power that is, for Daly, both transcendent and immanent: transcendent in that it emerges from the fabric of ontological creation, and immanent in that this power is polytheistic and can be found in all individual aspects of existence. The catch is, however, that all those who are alienated from their true selves—their actual Be-ing as Daly uses the term—do not participate in biophilic existence, but are, if women, cut off from this experience, or if men, participate in necrophilic existence.19

One moved by its [pure lust/passion] magic is Musing/Re-membering. Choosing to leave the dismembered state, she casts her lot, life with the trees and the winds, the sands and the tides, the mountains and moors. She is Outcast, casting her Self outward, inward, breaking out of the casts/castes of phallocracy’s fabrications/fictions, moving out of the maze of mediated experience. . . . The struggle Named by the Labrys of this title [Pure Lust] is between reality and unreality, between the natural Wild, which is be-ing, and man-made fabrications that fracture her substance, simulate her soul. (Daly 1984: 3)

According to Daly then, a woman cannot find her true be-ing, her “thingness” in the Foreground, all that she will discover is her self as she appears in the mind, an appearance that has been constructed by patriarchal cultures throughout time and geographical space. In Daly’s feminist mythology be-ing occurs only in the Background and is “[t]he ultimate/intimate Reality, the constant Unfolding Verb of Verbs which is intransitive, having no object that limits its dynamism . . . is the Verb whom, in whom, and with whom all true movements move” (Daly

---

19My intention here is to focus on Daly’s resistance to deconstruct oppressive structures, which does not mean that I am unaware of her tendency to simplify complex issues (such as living in the world and all the complexity of human desire therein). I am cognizant that Daly flattens out these complexities so that “psychic life, according to this sort of view, has no endemic or intrinsic complexity, ambivalence or contradictions. Tangles, knots and spirals would all disappear if only the violence and brainwashing to which women are subjected could be removed. Self knowledge could be wholly unproblematic” (Grimshaw, 1988).
In the Background then, a woman can locate a self, a be-ing, which is separate from the patriarchal self. She first unbecomes: leaves behind what Daly would call her fembot, artificial, potted self and cognitively journeys into a space wherein she is the definition and the creatrix of reality. In the encounter with herself as definition and creatrix she meets the sublime—female Be-ing—and as the patriarchal self is eradicated, the feminist self is reborn. Daly, in her elaboration of the ontological female/feminist self, turns on its head what has been an androcentric understanding of the sublime. Rather than the subject overcoming the other, the other overcomes the subject: in the moment of the sublime, a false self is eradicated and the Self, which was there in the beginning—an “unfallen” Self if you will—is reborn. In this version of the sublime, it is evident that Daly does not deconstruct the paradigm of the sublime. She accepts (as she does all Western philosophical thought) that the structure itself reflects human reality as opposed to a social-historical oppression which is grounded in history. In her work the sublime is not understood as enmeshment in a gender net, but rather is the “truth” which has been reversed.

Patricia Yaeger and Joanne Diehl argue that the sublime, as it has been understood, is androcentric. This version of the sublime has been construed by male scholars/poets to be an experience wherein the self is eradicated and then renewed either by the subject overcoming and absorbing into “himself” the power of the sublime moment which has threatened his existence (possession), or by reasserting his own power of imagination and creation over and above the experience of the sublime (domination). The Greek term hypsos means height, and this was, in the 18th century, taken to mean transcendence, a movement away from the human toward what was understood to be the divine. Even Nietzsche was trapped in this movement when he
proposed that there were “heights of the soul from which even tragedy ceased to look tragic” (Nietzsche 1966: 42). Thomas Weiskel (1976:4) indicates that the romantic sublime, “was an attempt to revive the meaning of transcendence precisely when the traditional apparatus of sublimation—spiritual, ontological, and (one gathers) psychological and even perceptual—was failing to be exercised or understood.”

But the sublime encountered within another kind of feminist discourse can express difference. The duality of experience and definition in an androcentric sublime is subverted by and then extended into a feminist poetics which gathers up the threat of the sublime, and challenges the need for eradication. The subject stands with one foot extended over the edge of a precipice balanced between the infinite and the finite. Poised in this liminal space she has the opportunity to introject another kind of discourse. In this discourse the sublime is not elaborated as power over (“then there’s a dim/ smell of moose, an acrid/ smell of gasoline”), and that which one experiences/describes as other does not necessarily have to eradicate/be eradicated by the subject “in an oedipal phallic fight to the death with the father” (Yaeger 1989: 191). Instead, plurality is introduced and the sublime moment can touch the subject leaving in its wake an indelible mark of its passage. The brush with this other kind of sublime can be seen, in Elizabeth Bishop’s poem “The Moose”:

A moose has come out of the impenetrable wood . . .
. . . she looks the bus over, grand, otherworldly.
Why, why do we feel (we all feel) this sweet sensation of joy?. . .
. . . by craning backward the moose can be seen
on the moonlit macadam;
then there’s a dim
smell of moose, an acrid
smell of gasoline.

or Nikki Giovanni’s “Ego Tripping” when having named the world she opens her hands, releases her creation, and flies away:

I was born in the congo
I walked to the fertile crescent and built
the sphinx . . .
I sat on the throne
drinking nectar with allah
I got hot and sent an ice age to europe
to cool my thirst . . .
I am so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal
I cannot be comprehended
except by my permission

I mean . . . I . . . can fly
like a bird in the sky . . .

Their development of the sublime moment depends not upon subsuming the sublime in the eradicating act of the other so that the self can be reclaimed as one reads in Percy Shelley’s poem

Mount Blanc:

Mount Blanc appears—still, snowy, and serene—
Its subject mountains their unearthly forms
Pile around it, ice and rock; broad vales between
Of frozen floods, unfathomable deeps, . . .
. . . Mount Blanc yet gleams on high:—the power is there, . . .
. . . And what we, thou [Mount Blanc], and earth, and stars, and sea,
If to the human mind’s imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy?

or a desire to possess the other as in Rudyard Kipling’s “Recessional”:

God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our far-flung battle-line,
Beneath whose awful Hand we hold
CHAPTER 3

Dominion over palm and pine—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

Rather, it is an encounter with the other which leaves both the subject and the other intact. In Bishop and Giovanni’s poems, the sublime is approached, and touched by either some empirical sense such as sight and smell as in Bishop’s poem or one is swept up in the historical transcendence of blossoming civilizations, a bird’s-eye-view that names, in this process creates, and then flies off, claiming nothing but the delight of her motion. In both instances, the encounter with the sublime neither demands that one overcome it as in Shelly’s poem, nor control it as in Kipling’s poem. One is not remade, instead, one is touched. The sublime touches and is touched and both parties move away, always changed, but never converted.20

When deliberating upon Daly’s Background, it is clear that the encounter with sublime, with be-ing leaves neither the subject nor the other intact since it demands that the encultured self (read patriarchal self) be purged from a woman, and then she as subject subsumes/is subsumed by the other in order to affirm her participation in true Be-ing (possession and domination). And finally, the sublime encountered in Daly’s work moves even closer to the transcendent and requires, much like God did of Jacob, that the subject be made anew, in an act of renaming because of the encounter with the sublime. Jacob was renamed Israel because he worsted God, women are renamed crones, hags, amazons, angels and witches when they have worsted patriarchy and encountered Be-ing. Theirs will be a new identity, but only achievable by

20 For my development of the female sublime and three (Bishop, Giovanni, and Shelly) of my four examples I am completely indebted to Patricia Yeager’s article “Toward a Female Sublime” in Linda Kauffman (ed.) Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism, 191–212. (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989).
the eradication of what was there before. All individual, family, and cultural history is
annihilated in order that women can encounter this other, subsume it/be subsumed by it and then
become other. In Pure Lust (1984: 397, 294) Daly alludes to the process of this metamorphosis:

[A]ctual Shape-shifting, or Be-Witching, cannot happen without an awesome sense of Otherness from patriarchal norms and values . . . The inexhaustible Other encountered by a Be-Witching woman is, first of all, her Self, Who flows in underground connectedness with all Elemental be-ing. This Self is a Virgin—uncaptured and untamed—transcending the labels of man.

There can be no encounter with Daly's sublime. There can only be conversion. Utilizing reversals, instead of the subject overcoming the sublime (possession and domination), the sublime overcomes the subject (possession and domination). Reversals maintain the movement and simply reverse the intentions so that possession and domination remain intact. Within a framework of feminism and the utilization of the sublime, as Diehl and Yaeger note, it is the movement, the desire to possess and dominate which needs to be deconstructed. Those poets whom they feel have utilized a sublime that deconstructs the movement of the patriarchal sublime (Elizabeth Bishop, Nikki Giovanni)—a female sublime if you will—do not desire to convert, simply to touch.

3. Concluding remarks on symbolism in Mary Daly

Daly's interpretation of Paul Tillich's theory of symbols (cf. Daly, 1984: 25) effectively limits the horizons of her symbol system. Tillich's theory of symbols among other things, indicates that symbols “cannot be produced intentionally. . . . They grow out of the individual or collective unconscious and cannot function without being accepted by the unconscious dimension of our being” and “like living beings, they grow and they die. They grow when the situation is ripe for them, and they die when the situation changes” (1957: 43). Daly's
interpretation of Tillich’s theory is limiting for two reasons.

In the first instance she assumes that symbols come into being in a mysterious or mystical manner. Although Tillich is certainly speaking metaphorically when he states that symbols grow, live, and die Daly understands this metaphor to mean symbols are ideal types. Tillich is not making a literal statement about the birth, life, and death of symbols but by utilizing an existential metaphor Daly understands Tillich’s theory of symbols to mean that symbols are ideal types that exist outside of human historical and social creativeness. In this, then, she locates symbols in an ideal realm, much like Platonic idealism. One further wonders if Daly does not assume that symbols are implanted in the unconscious by some supreme or unknown force: some hand that plants the seed which will grow under the right circumstances. Following this logic, when individuals and/or societies have “matured” then current symbols die and are subsequently replaced by other symbols more conducive to human consciousness. Therefore, Daly can assume that the right kind of consciousness, a feminist consciousness, will be the necessary moment of maturation wherein symbols of the female can grow to the surface (This, of course, still does not answer the question: Why male rule? Why did it come about? Was matriarchy not mature enough?). Whose hand is implied in these activities but an abstracted God(ess) known as ultimate reality? It would seem that in Daly’s symbol system symbols have their own essence, and this essence is assumed to be a static force, unchangeable in its infinity, and one that employs historical circumstances in order to communicate with human beings. Working in this system, symbols are the language which “Goddess” uses to communicate with human beings. According to Daly, then, on one end symbols rely upon language to communicate meaning (human to human), but the other end, their latent and unconscious meaning, that which they point
toward, the nonlinguistic dimension, symbols are the means by which deity speaks to humanity. This dimension is located in a non-reality outside of the social-historical domain of humanity and in the domain of “ultimate concern.” She understands Tillich’s nonlinguistic dimension, “that which is the true ultimate [and] transcends the realm of finite reality infinitely” (1957: 44), to be a patriarchal understanding of the ultimate reality, the Background. Although participating in reality, she locates the symbol’s source outside of reality. It would seem that Daly’s understanding of Tillich’s notion of the unconscious as the place where deity and human (soul) meet is a metaphysical realm where the female as an image of the divine has recourse to the divine as the female.

When Daly utilizes Tillich’s theory of symbols, she locates the nonlinguistic dimension in a reality different from that which women experience. Ultimate concern does not reflect women’s experience, rather, women’s experience should reflect ultimate concern. This suggests that the power to emancipate women (Daly’s feminist intention) lies not with women themselves, but with a mysterious power that they can, if they believe (“the leap of faith” or “the courage to be” if you will), tap into. Daly’s symbol system is disconnected from social, historical, and political reality and therefore is disconnected from any real potential for women’s emancipation which is a social and historical project. Her feminist impulse is located in an “other” realm, the Background, and inaccessible to nonbelievers. Daly’s symbol system, employs a metaphysical theory of the origin of symbols which circumscribes her feminist political horizons via religious sectarianism.

A second problem with Daly’s theory of symbols is also connected to the criterion that symbols cannot be “intentionally” produced. If, as she suggests, symbols grow in the
unconscious their origin remains uncertain, and their birth a mystery, does this mean, then, that
the intentional creation of symbols is removed from human activity? According to Daly, symbols
burst forth fully constituted in the realm of the metaphysical, and their only connection with the
social and the historical is the moment of their entrance onto the historical stage and only when
historical conditions are correct. As Daly maps out the history of women’s oppression she notes
that the Archimage will shine through and break into history which then allows women to resist
patriarchy: “A study of theology, piety, art shows that indeed the Archimage was shining through
this attempt at manipulation and concealment. To describe this phenomenon I have invented the
word Arch-Image to Name the Mary image. The Archimage threatened to explode through the
Arch-Image, and indeed volcanic eruptions of consciousness/memory in women did take place”
(1984: 92). Accepting this as a definitive characteristic of a symbol means that one is limited in
one’s symbolic repertoire. One can only draw from current symbol systems and develop current,
or employing archaic, meanings. Daly accepts this characteristic and in this restricts herself to
pirating symbols from patriarchy. She can only utilize extant symbols and uncover archaic
meanings or attempt to reverse positive and negative readings.

Daly need not short change herself and limit her repertoire of symbols to past
mythologies such as Celtic, Greek, and Christian, or Gnostic. Where Daly misses the potential of
the symbol’s semantic economy is its polysemic exchange. Symbols, like language, precede us
and therefore appear to be natural. Their power to capture the imagination resides in the fact that
like language they are “always already there.” But like language, this “always already there” is
not indicative of an extra-human domain. Daly’s symbolic makes recourse to this extra-human
domain: “Symbols, in contrast to mere signs, participate in that to which they point. They open
up levels of reality otherwise closed to us and they unlock dimensions and elements of our souls which correspond to these hidden dimensions and elements of reality. . . . there is no way that elemental feminist philosophy can speak adequately to the realms of Wild be-ing without symbols” (1984: 25). The cosmic location of a symbol is the real world in which we inhabit, the oneiric dimension of the symbol is how that symbol is interpreted, its meaningfulness for those who employ it, and the poetic dimension is the speaking, telling, drawing, representation, of that symbol. All three dimensions are located in the realm of human social and historical relations.

The symbol is historically located and it is this historicity that allows for the intentional production of symbols. Symbols, like language, are neither static nor reified artifacts waiting to be pirated or planted by a divine hand. Their semantic economy derives from the multiplicity of human experiences and the potential for language to express this multiplicity.

3.1 Daly’s development of symbols

In Daly’s theology, the figure of Mary, like the figure of Jesus, is understood to be historical. As she is an historical figure what one sees then is an historical manifestation of the Goddess. This historical manifestation, as in the historical manifestation of Jesus, legitimates the concrete reality of the said deity. In Christian theology deity is understood in the abstract—inaccessible to material reality—unless it is through the figure of Jesus. In Daly’s system of belief, deity may be immanent, but she is equally inaccessible to material reality. Although immanent she resides beneath, behind, around, and in the unconscious of, but always in an ideal form and therefore transcendent.

Daly, in order to deal with an immanent abstraction, also utilizes the notion of incarnation. The supposition behind the notion of incarnation is the belief that truth resides in an
ideal realm, and a point of contact can be achieved through the incarnation of that truth into the realm of history. When a belief system manifests its deity in the historical realm, there is a believed engagement with empirical reality. The historical figure acts as a proof for the truth of that belief system. Mary, then, can act as empirical proof of the Goddess and therefore the truth of Daly’s thealogy. This reinterpretation of Mary as the historical manifestation of the Goddess, however, works within a Christian paradigm. As with Christianity, it means that the belief system tends toward the inflexible locating truth within its own system of belief. Western epistemology is founded upon the notion of proof, proof means truth, and historical figures used as proof come to represent truth. One is then propounding a belief system understood to be the truth and therefore universal. Other cultural systems of belief are either jettisoned or subsumed and in this then, Daly’s system, although claiming to be pluralistic, remains firmly entrenched in Christianity and ultimately monotheism.

Daly’s utilization of symbols, specifically female as the symbol of good and male as the symbol of evil, is founded upon a belief in a female and male principle. In each instance the principle is incarnate in historically gendered bodies of women and men, but this principle has been misunderstood. The male principle has sought to twist and distort the truth about itself and about the female principle. The female principle, or the “spark” if you will, needs to be reconnected with the Background in order that women can find their true selves, a radical lesbian feminist self or the female principle. In this elaboration it is apparent that Daly’s notion of good and evil symbolized in the female and the male works within a gnostic framework.21 What one

21 Joan Cocks (1984: 36) alludes to Daly’s Gnosticism when she refers to Daly’s universe as “Manichean”.

essentially sees is a struggle between good and evil, which is manifested in a space (Foreground) that is alienated from reality (Background). The male deity (the monotheistic god in any system) in Gnosticism, known as the Demiurge, believes itself to be the ruling power, creator of all, and oppresses those who actually contain the divine spark or as in Daly’s system, the female principle (women). Only emissaries, like Mary, or prophets, like Radical Feminists, Viragos Virgins, Amazing Amazons, etc. can enlighten other women as to their female principle, the latter of which will then lead these enlightened women to the Background (reality). Even gnostic ontology assists Daly in her explanation of patriarchy.

How is it, if women are so powerful and the female principle is a symbol of the true and good, that women have been, since the dawn of history, and continue to be, subordinated? In a gnostic system this is explained by the constant tension between good and evil. Although evil is lesser than the good, and brought into being by the good, it understands itself to be primary and according to its evil nature only seeks domination, and is jealous of the good which it recognizes as itself to lack. This conflict has continued over the ages with evil holding sway of the material realm (Foreground) while those who contain the spark seek the realm of the true being (Background). In Daly’s development of symbols there is, then, a strong undercurrent of gnostic beliefs which were held by some groups of early Christians. It is this dualistic ethos that is problematic for Daly’s thealogy, and her symbol system therein.22

22 Concerning Gnosticism in early Christian communities see: “The Hypostasis of the Archons (II, 4),” 161–169 and “On The Origin of The World (II, 5 and XIII, 2),” 170–189. The Nag Hammadi Library , Revised 3rd Edition. Trans. with introduction, James M. Robinson. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988, and Rudolph (1987). I am well aware most gnostic thought devalues the female, as she is associated with materiality, which would suggest that Daly would be appalled by this system of thought. However this system, within her thealogy, becomes usable
Located within a dualistic framework, Daly’s thealogy is subject to the rigidity of its own internal logic. Dualism utilizes a black and white framework where there is either wrong or right, but never half way between. It does not allow for any other reality other than the ones it proposes and, therefore, is highly engaged in a fundamentalistic perspective of a “them and us.” There can be no possibility of discourse between the right and the left, only antagonism. Dualism is a cognitive system that denies the realities of those things in between, i.e., steam, and limits the horizons of possibilities. If women value anything in the male, in culture, in technology, they are simply deluded, they don’t know the truth, and have no access to gnosis. Theirs is a false consciousness and they are patriarchal women. The possibility of recognizing complexities, nuances, and contradictions in the world do not exist, and cannot exist within a dualistic framework. One is forever locked in an antagonistic relationship with the one principality always seeking to gain power over the other.

The difficulties in Daly’s symbol system to which I point in the arguments above are linked. Daly’s desire to engage in the social and historical project of the emancipation of women is disconnected from social historical reality when she locates her symbol system in an ontological domain. Liberation from oppression is a distinctly human project, certainly one that can engage with metaphysical discourses, but not one that can be located in a metaphysical discourse. By locating the impulse and possibility for liberation in an ontological reality she both eviscerates the potential for human social, historical, and political action, and effects an internal stasis to her system when she confines it to the realm of the extra human: a place where humans when she utilizes her strategy of reversing the reversals. Here again, then, one simply has another instance of Daly reversing within structures while leaving said structures intact.
cannot effect change. As a result she can only draw upon those systems “always already there” when she removes symbols from human intentionality.

When Daly draws upon Christian symbol and myth in the image of Mary and the ethos of gnostic material dualism, she further restricts her symbol system within their limited horizons. The concepts of incarnation and dualism have their own internal logic, a rigid logic based upon oppositions, and are oblivious to that which is in between. The logic of incarnation demands an acceptance of the notion of a material and spiritual world that are separate from one another, and one, the spiritual, is understood to stand in a privileged relationship to the other, the material. The logic of dualism demands a polemic: that two things be utterly different from each other and that each are perceived as destructive to the other. Evil must destroy good or good must destroy evil and there is nothing in between. The result of all this is a symbol system removed from the quotidian of women’s lives in spite of Daly’s intended deployment of her symbol system being directed toward the liberation of women.

The problematics in Daly’s feminist mythology mean that her work must be used carefully. However, she has much to offer feminists in her development of rhetorical strategies which poetically challenge normative understandings of language while her creative use of metaphors introduces new ways in which to express the changing world. These strategies can go a long way toward challenging institutional use of language which rejects or ignores experiences of oppressed peoples. She is a sophisticated feminist philosopher who has attempted to bring to consciousness many unconscious patriarchal assumptions about women. Never dull to read, and certainly a creative writer, Daly stands at the front of the second wave feminist movement’s challenge to patriarchy.
Addendum

One of the primary areas that Daly has been critiqued by other feminists is for her white, middle-class perspective\textsuperscript{23} with regard to the kinds images or models she provided for women in her texts. However, as I see it, Daly’s point was to challenge male images by placing reinterpreted images of women over and against them. That these images were drawn from mythical Celtic and Graeco-Roman sources are not surprising considering her Western religious and philosophical background along with her Irish roots (1992). There were no black goddesses in Daly’s \textit{Gyn/Ecology} since they had no conscious place in her religious repertoire. Daly states in \textit{Outercourse} (1992: 232) that her book \textit{Gyn/Ecology} (1978) was not a “compendium of goddesses. Rather it focuses primarily on those goddess myths and symbols which were direct sources of Christian myth.” Symbols are cultural constructs, they emerge as experiential expressions of how we as humans construct meaning. Daly’s symbol system reflected/reflects how she wishes to reinterpret existence from her own feminist perspective which found/finds itself elaborated within American academic, white, middle class culture.

The difficulty in Daly’s work with regard to race or class, as I see it, is rather that her perspective lacks race consciousness in the development of her notion of oppression. In Daly’s work, oppression is understood to function in a pyramid-like fashion wherein those on the

\textsuperscript{23}For an example of such a critique see Audre Lorde (1982). \textit{Open Letter to Mary Daly} in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds.). \textit{This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color}, 94–101. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. Although Lorde’s point regarding the need for discourse between feminists is a good one, how her critique has been used to focus on Daly’s limited perspective has been less than helpful. Daly’s point of challenging male images of women was not located in the kind of examples she uses, which does demonstrate her “white” perspective, but rather the examples were there to support her argument. For an example of the misuse of Lorde’s critique see Eisenstein (1984).
bottom are more oppressed than those closer to the top. Therefore black women, for example, are
more oppressed than white women but the kind of power exercised over either group is
essentially analogous:

One of these man-made racetracks, is, of course, racism. When I write of the Race
of Women as participating in the Race of Elemental be-ing, I am Naming active
struggle to overcome and transcend phallocracy, the social, political, ideological
system that spawns racism and genocide as well as rapism and gynocide.
Confronting phallocracy includes opposing it in all of its forms/manifestations.
(Daly, 1984: 5)

This has justifiably been seen by some feminists as problematic in that it flattens out the notion
of oppression and homogenizes it: racism, sexism, and class come together and are
undifferentiated in the whole (King, 1989 and Williams, 1986).24 Further, Jacquelyn Grant notes
that (1989: 170-171):

[b]ecause Daly is an exclusionary feminist most of her energies are spent
addressing sexism….Racism becomes an issue only tangentially important
because some who are black experience it….Racism and slavery are described as
patriarchal institutions as is marriage….The apparent equation of these two
experiences slavery/racism and marriage—is only possible if racism is treated as a
non-entity and not an independent reality which would exist with or without
patriarchy.

Slavery and racism are analogues of oppression in Daly’s thesis, points of reference that act as
adjectives that further nuance patriarchy and as such then have no independent reality. When
patriarchy is understood descriptively through the notions of racism or slavery, both racism and

and lynching for blacks, genocide for Native Americans, and military conquest for Mexican-
Americans and Puerto Ricans is not substantively comparable to the physical abuse, social
discrimination and cultural denigration suffered by women. This is not to argue that those forms
of racial oppression are greater or more unjust but that the substantive differences need to be
identified and to inform conceptualizations.”
slavery are disconnected from historical reality and simply act as analogues rather than actualities.

A further difficulty encountered in Daly’s understanding of racism occurs when one attempts to treat Daly’s work on a pragmatic level. Her notion regarding racial and class oppression is metaphysical rather than social-historical. Grant and Williams both interpret Daly’s work from a Marxist-historical perspective (liberation theologies), when in fact Daly’s work is highly theosophical. Daly may make use of historical and social elements, especially in *Gyn/Ecology*, but they are there only to elaborate her own feminist ontology, an ontology that ultimately disconnects itself from the phenomenal world understanding racism, classism, and sexism within the notion of sinfulness: a having fallen away. That which is missed in a metaphysical understanding of racism, classism, and sexism, of course, is the historical actuality: economics benefits for governments, corporations, and individuals, ideological development in cultures, and psychological and sociological development in individuals. The complexities of racism, classism, and sexism are reduced to a single explanation, sin, which is then extrapolated as sexism. Certainly Daly locates herself within a theistic framework, but what does this framework prohibit? By operating within a metaphysical narrative Daly can presume racism, classism, and sexism are the same because all three systems oppress groups of people; however, by not separating the three and examining them on the level of their social-historical manifestations, Daly’s own ideological assumptions which underlie the equation of these three remains unexamined. In other words, her own position within the status quo remains unexamined. By using the term sin she can distance herself from the realities of racism and classism never scrutinizing what is at stake for her. For example, if I substituted racism for
sexism would Daly agree to operate under the rubric of race in order to delineate oppression? I would say an emphatic no as Daly implicitly understands racism to be an offspring of sexism. In this then, she is operating with the thesis that Gerda Lerner has elaborated in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986)—that the social relations between men and women operated as the model for enslavement. What remains unexamined, then, is Daly’s investment of prioritizing sexism over racism or classism: sexism affects her more drastically than either racism or classism, and in classism and racism she must position herself among the oppressors.
CHAPTER FOUR

ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA: A FEMINIST hermeneutics

1. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: An Intellectual biography

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is concerned with subjectivity. It is her belief, that the texts of the New Testament can be configured in such a way that both Christian women and men can claim their Christian subjectivity in the historical memories of the Christian past. Traditionally the texts of the New Testament have been used to subordinate women within Christianity and the Western world. An obvious example of this is the Catholic Church’s declaration that women cannot act as representatives of Jesus Christ (ordination) since they are not men. Many Christian feminists read this as a patriarchal statement, one which locates the sanctity and efficacy of Jesus in his maleness rather than his humanity in order to insure the maintenance of male powers structures with the institution of the Catholic church.1 Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that it is in such instances that a stacking of the historical deck is witnessed, that is, as in all history, there is no history of but rather a history for: “historical knowledge is dependent upon the self image of the social group for which historians speak and to which they belong” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1985: 51). Sacrality located in Jesus’ maleness is central for the continuation of patriarchal power within the Catholic church. In order to expose and challenge this continuation of patriarchal power in the institution of the Church, Schüssler Fiorenza began a work of “rereading, reconceiving, and reconstructing”2 her religious tradition.

---


2I have borrowed the phrase “rereading, reconceiving, and reconstructing” and its intentions from June O’Connor (1989).
In her book *In Memory of Her* (1990 [1983]) Schüssler Fiorenza utilizes the phrase the “Jesus movement” and suggests that it was an egalitarian movement. She locates this movement in Palestine, stating it to be an alternative prophetic renewal movement within Israel (1990: 100). Using the four gospels, which she indicates are “paradigmatic remembrances, and not comprehensive accounts of the historical Jesus” (1990:102), she places women at the centre of her discourse, pointing to their activities within this new movement. Her strategy is twofold: to challenge androcentric readings of Early Christianity and to shift attention from male activity to female activity. In order to ascertain the activities of women and other marginal groups within the New Testament, one must bring to her/his analysis new kinds of questions. The feminist movement needs to be acutely aware of the power that lays in religious traditions and that these traditions must be critically examined utilizing a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion² in order to expose their patriarchalism. But more than this, Schüssler Fiorenza desires to develop a critical feminist (Catholic Christian) theological articulation of liberation (1993: 2).

Schüssler Fiorenza argues that a retelling and rereading of androcentric text are necessary when considering women as reading subjects. She points out that reading and thinking in an “androcentric symbol system entices biblical readers to align themselves and to identify with,

³The term “hermeneutic of suspicion” properly belongs to Paul Ricoeur who utilized it in his text *Freud and Philosophy* (1970) to describe three modern thinkers who challenged their current epistemologies: Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Fiorenza has adopted and adapted the term and employs the term “hermeneutic of suspicion” in order to develop a feminist reading of patriarchal texts. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1983) is the first text in which we see this term. She indicates that (1992: 53): “It [feminist hermeneutics of suspicion] seeks to detect and analyse not only the androcentric presuppositions and patriarchal interests of the text’s contemporary interpretations and historical reception but also those of biblical texts themselves.”
what is culturally normative, that is, culturally male” (1992: 35). Patricinio Schweickart, a feminist literary critic, supports this kind of assessment stating that women are taught to identify with the male point of view, to read and think as men, to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values and in so doing disempower themselves: “...it draws her into a process that uses her against herself. It solicits her complicity in the elevation of male difference into universality and, accordingly, the denigration of female difference into otherness without reciprocity” (Schweickart: 1989:27). Schüssler Fiorenza has taken seriously the necessity to read women as active human agents back into the historical/mythic record. She does this by claiming feminist epistemological ground that engenders a rereading, reconceiving, and reconstruction of the patriarchal mythology of Christianity. Her epistemic position first argues that science is not the only epistemic field, religiosity also informs knowledge and, therefore, is an important epistemic field in need of critique. Secondly, she argues that current epistemologies require critique for their unacknowledged androcentrism which influences the kinds of knowledge produced. Often these fields of knowledge have been reified or thingified and are interpreted concretely so that they are understood to function in much the same way as gravity: certain, true, and immutable. However, the history of sciences, ethics, religions, as well as cultural or geographical differences that effect these areas of knowledge demonstrate that knowledge is conditional: it is both produced by, and contextualized in, human social and historical situatedness. For example, the Copernican/Galilean view of a heliocentric universe, accepted in the seventeenth century, introduced an epistemic shift into Europe. Science, and popular culture thereafter, reconceptualized the universe so that now the sun and not the earth was its center.

1.1 Schüssler Fiorenza: Theologian to feminist theologian
Elisabeth Schüßler was born in Tschanda, Germany April 17th, 1938. She was educated in Germany and received her M. Div. in 1962, and her Licentiate in 1963 from the University of Würzburg. In the same year the Second Vatican Council had been petitioned by Catholic women regarding women’s ordination. The faculty of Würzburg assured Schüßler Fiorenza she would be recommended for ordination if the council approved women’s ordination. Schüßler Fiorenza, however, wondered about her vocation to become a pastor in some isolated place and suggested the position of bishop might be a better vocation. The dean responded to her proposal with some ire: “‘[t]hat will never happen’...then we would depend on you and owe obedience to you” (Schüßler Fiorenza, 1993: 213). His response would always remain with her, and acted to motivate her to demand full equality in the church, not on the church’s terms, but on women’s terms. In 1970 she was awarded her Doctorate of Theology from the University of Münster.

Schüßler Fiorenza married Francis Schüßler Fiorenza in 1967 and emigrated to United States in 1970. Her one daughter, Christina, was born in 1972.4 Fiorenza was hired as an assistant professor at University of Notre Dame in Indiana from 1970 until 1975. She acquired the position of an associate professor in 1975 and in 1980 was made a professor of theology at this institution. In 1984 she left Notre Dame for the Episcopal Divinity School (EDS) in Cambridge Massachusetts because this “school could overcome the church’s misogyny and provide a vision for a church in which the ordination of women was not a concession but the *sine qua non* of its existence. Hence EDS seemed the ideal place to engage in theoretical feminist reflection on and theological development of ministry” (Schüßler Fiorenza, 1993: 276).

---

4Schüßler Fiorenza indicates (1993: 234) that her daughter was in first grade in 1979. This would make her approximately five years old and her year of birth 1972.
Fiorenza remained at EDS for only three years and left to join Harvard Divinity School in 1988, a decision, she indicates, that was not easily made. Taking this position at Harvard Divinity School, she indicates, was like taking a post at the Vatican and espousing feminist liberation theology. As difficult as it was, Fiorenza maintains this move was “a conscious decision to move to a “liberal,” pluralistic, interreligious, academic environment, in which, in the words of one of my students, a “critical feminist liberation theology” is as much out of place as ‘a fish with a bicycle’” (1993: 277).

Although Fiorenza does not clearly indicate why she opted to be a “fish with a bike” one might suggest that both the desire to enter the lion’s den to make one’s prophecies, and the academic acumen procured by associating oneself with Harvard might well have convinced her to challenge the “tension and paradox” brought about by her new position. It has been the contention of many feminists that the discourse and critique generated by feminists should be common currency in the institution of the University at large, and not one solely found in a Women’s Studies Department.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s text *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ekklesia-logy of Liberation* (1993) is a compendium of articles that chart her journey as a feminist. She indicates that this text is “a cartography of a particular feminist’s struggles in church and theology” (1993: 2). Each essay earmarks challenges, experiences, and perspectives developed throughout her career and relate the progression of her feminist thought beginning with her completed thesis in pastoral theology in 1963.

1.2 The Early years

Schüssler Fiorenza’s first book *Der vergessene Partner: Grundlagen, Tatsachen und*
Möglicheren der beruflichen Mitarbeit der Frau in der Heilssorge der Kirche, 1964) was her published licentiate thesis (1963) which focused upon the ministries of women in the Church. This book suggests a proto-feminist perspective in that Schüssler Fiorenza examined the roles of women. However, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, her examination did not include an awareness of women themselves as an oppressed group. Instead this text focuses on a number of issues which would be elaborated within a feminist paradigm in the future with the development of her feminist perspective. These issues would often take a central role in her feminist analysis of the church.

One of the issues that remain central to her work is the necessity of self-reflection in order to be fully aware of what is at stake in one’s academic endeavours. Her thesis focused upon her own engagement in theology as a theologian. She sought to "reflect theologically on [her] own experience" (1993: 13). She asked herself, what did it mean that she was the first woman in Würzburg to enroll in a full course in theology—a course slotted for those entering the priesthood? She maintained her status as a laywoman and did not (and could not) join the ranks of the church’s institution. Instead, she opted to become a professional theologian, certainly a position that entailed more freedom than those of either a sister or a nun. Her thesis carefully examined whether she had missed her calling by choosing to remain outside of the church’s governmental structures. This issue she will later relate to the feminist theological imperative of beginning with a “systematic reflection on experience” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993: 13).

Schüssler Fiorenza’s next methodological issue had to do with the hermeneutical question concerning “the new progressive ecclesiology…[which] did not correspond to the actual pastoral praxis of the Roman Catholic Church” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993: 14). Women, who
neither belonged to the orders of the church, nor were clergy within the church still acted as ministers for the church, but their work went unacknowledged. This utilization of women’s work while at the same time erasing this work meant that the church, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, is required to align its theoretical position with actual practices which occurred in it. This issue she will connect to the feminist liberation theological imperative that requires the recognition of the need to articulate theory which is generated from praxis, and not praxis that is generated from theory.

A third issue, indicates Schüssler Fiorenza, questioned the structural character of oppression. She explains that she was not “very interested in women’s special role in articulating a theology of the Church and ministry in which the ecclesial rights and responsibilities of all the people of G-d⁵ were foundational” (1993: 14). However, Schüssler Fiorenza contends, that because she argued for a participatory model of the church, which included an understanding that laywomen as ministers meant that women did in fact have professional status within the church, her book read like an argument for women’s ordination. But ordination for women would mean increased clericalization and this was not her intention. Rather, she argued for the declericalization within the structure of the mainstream church. Throughout this text and others, Schüssler Fiorenza will continually come back to this point. It is her belief that if the hierarchical structure was maintained and women were ordained within this kind of church, ordination for

⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza indicates in the Discipleship of Equals “Credits” (1993) that most of the chapters in this text have appeared as earlier articles, but that they have been revised for publication here. Hence she replaces the word God with G-d in the majority of these articles which were written from 1964 through to 1991. G-d for God is not incorporated in her work until 1992 (But She Said).
women must mean that they enter higher level positions, e.g., bishop. This would insure, then, that women’s contributions would not be coopted, and that women could “engender structural change in the Church” (1993: 15).

A fourth issue in this early work that will have future implications for her feminist theology of liberation is the necessity to develop a fuller understanding of gender ideology. Schüssler Fiorenza noted that the notion of the “eternal feminine,” found in the church, nicely dovetailed with, and buttressed, gender ideologies manufactured in cultural milieus: gender ideologies that understood the female of the species as other. She indicates that although she was aware of, and had partially accepted, Simone de Beauvoir’s (1952) philosophical analysis, she lacked at this time a “comprehensive theoretical framework to articulate such a different perspective” (1993: 15). At this time she desired a more sociopolitical framework, one which was compatible with her vision of the church and its ministry.

1.3 Schüssler Fiorenza’s rise of feminist consciousness

Throughout the next years Schüssler Fiorenza would continue to give lectures and write papers on these four central issues that had emerged in her thesis work. In 1967 she gave a paper on the ordination of women in the church to the members of St. Joan’s International Alliance. These women argued for women’s ordination, but an ordination that functioned within the dictates and charter of the church, and in this, then, acceded to the subordinate position of women within the church. Schüssler Fiorenza, instead, argued that “Catholic women needed to define their self-understanding and aims in terms of the Church as the people of G-d, rather than struggle for inclusion in the clerical hierarchy in its Constantinian form” (1993: 24). In 1972 she was invited to contribute to the Brooklyn Tablet’s (a Roman Catholic diocesan newspaper) first
issue on women and the church. In this article she focused upon the necessity of women’s theologizing beginning with their experience while understanding that experience to be shaped differently: it was shaped by oppression and therefore must challenge oppressive systems and therefore women must demand full personhood (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993: 47–48). She began, at this time, to shape her epistemological position of feminist standpoint. Refusing to compromise, much like Mary Daly, Schüssler Fiorenza maintained her position that if women were to become part of the church, their full equality within the church must be recognized. They must be seen to have full competence, and, in light of this, in 1973, Schüssler Fiorenza publicly took a proactive position on legalized abortion in the wake of the supreme court’s Roe vs. Wade decision (1993: 49–52).

Over the next several years, Schüssler Fiorenza would encounter opposition to her feminist theology. Her liberation theology differed from other liberation theologies in that it incorporated both the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas and feminist theory. She wrote an article for Theological Studies wherein she reflected upon the development of her feminist theology in light of a sabbatical year spent at Union theological Seminary with the “New York Feminist Scholars in Religion” initiated by Carol Christ. A key issue in this article was her analysis of the Mary myth, something which can still bring about the most startlingly vehement responses.⁶ After the appearance of this article, Schüssler Fiorenza’s chairman attempted to

---

⁶When Jane Schaberg initially wrote her text, The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives, it did not bring about a volley of abuse. Recently, however, after her article on Mary Magdalene in Bible Review, her text evoked a number of surprising responses. The Detroit Free Press, interested in her work, interviewed Schaberg, but the interview printed in the paper appears to have been a twisted knee-jerk response to feminism at large. The article represented her as a threatening feminist, one who was
persuade her to retract it. She refused and her ability as a scholar and teacher was challenged by her colleague. She comments, "[i]n spite of my critical analysis I still found it hard to imagine the forms of institutional violence that could be unleashed against women ‘who think about their own affairs as men don’t think they oughter’" (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993:54).

In 1975 Schüssler Fiorenza gave the formal address at the “The First Women’s Ordination Conference.” Again she took the position that if women were ordained, that ordination should be into the highest ranking stations in the Church. She further questioned how it was that women could not be Cardinals in the Catholic church when Cardinals need not be ordained. The underlying intention of her argument was directed against the clericalization within the Church, a design, she felt, that excluded the majority of its followers, and one that stood in direct opposition of “the inclusive character of Jesus’ message and fellowship” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993: 83).

In 1976 Schüssler Fiorenza wrote an article that appears in National Institute for Campus preaching “the gospel according to Jane” wherein she preached everything from Mary’s rape to abortion rights” (Schaberg, 1997: 148). Although Schaberg indicates that she received more supportive letters than negative letters, she did, however, receive death threats and calls for her resignation from the university she was employed at. The University of Detroit Mercy, Detroit MI, was quick to act on this matter and publicly disassociated themselves from Schaberg while at the same time accused her of bringing about a loss of funding to the university. They did not, however, document this accusation. Betrayed by her institution, and misrepresented by the public press, Schaberg remains tentative about the security of her position. She is, however, completely cognizant of the fact that feminisms are under attacked by right-wing fundamentalists groups who, it would appear, garner much governmental support. She states: “I got a quick glimpse of the abyss of endless, fruitless litigation and unemployment that would open under my feet as it has under the feet of other feminist scholars. Most importantly, I got a glimpse of the fanaticism and power with which patriarchy clings to images of women it creates—images of virgin and redeemed whore—and a glimpse of the uses to which these images are put to control women” (Schaberg, 1997: 155).
Ministries Journal 1 (1976: 29–34). It addressed her ideas concerning feminist religious identity, and her response to those feminists who located themselves in goddess spirituality, and who challenged the emancipatory potential in Christianity. According to Schüssler Fiorenza (1993: 92), “In spite of the masculine terminology of prayers, catechism, and liturgy and in spite of blatant patriarchal male spiritual guidance, my commitment to Christian faith and love first led me to question the feminine cultural role that parents, school, and church, had taught me to accept and to internalize. My vision of Christian life, responsibility, and community compelled me to reject the culturally imposed role of women and not vice versa.” In her view, then, much like the early followers of Jesus, or possibly Jesus himself, she rejected socially manufactured oppressions opting to follow what she considers the mandate of Christianity, egalitarianism: “[t]he early Christians considered themselves as those who were called and elected by God, as saints of God, this call broke through all limitations of religion, class, race, and gender” (1993: 96). Her hope that the institutional church would follow this mandate arose when The Second Vatican Council chose “to speak of the Church in terms of enabling love, inclusive community, and service to all humankind” (1993: 93). In her opinion goddess spirituality, when “absolutized, created a reversed sexist understanding of god in terms of cultural femininity” (1993:95). (I certainly would contest this point as I understand reverse sexism to be simply a rhetorical strategy that plays on a popularized idea of oppression rather than the reality of it. For example, a man assaults a woman who against this assault defends herself by striking back whereupon he claims he was assaulted. This is a too frequent understanding of “domestic violence” wherein I encapsulate the term domestic violence in quotations because I resist the ideological manipulations of this term. Firstly, the violence is understood to be located in the private realm
both parties were “fighting.”) Schüssler Fiorenza indicates that Christianity provided a liberatory experience for her both in the figure of Mary and in its teaching that *all* are called to sainthood: as demonstrated in the biographies of the saints. Mary represented for her emotionally, imaginatively, and experientially, and she suggests all children, the experience of the love of God in the figure of a woman.

According to Schüssler Fiorenza, and other Catholic feminists, throughout the history of the church the more transcendent God and Jesus became, the more Mary represented the Christian face and image of God. As for female saints, these women went “against the ingrained cultural mores and images of women” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993: 96). She states that reading the "lives of the saints" as a young girl contradicted the cultural message that women’s true vocation lay in the roles of wife and mother (1993: 95–96). Early Christianity and Christian sainthood will, for Schüssler Fiorenza, stand in opposition to the “patriarchalization” of Christianity and the dualistic anthropology Christianity adopted in the development of its tradition and theology. It was/is this dualistic anthropology taken from the cultural milieu, she argues, that obfuscated the original impetus of egalitarianism in Jesus’ teachings. But, according to Schüssler Fiorenza this dualistic anthropology can be overcome simply because Christian faith and theology are not inherently patriarchal and sexist. This does not mean one assumes that Christian churches are exempt from their guilt of “the sin of sexism.” She understands her task, and that of other like-minded feminists, as standing in prophetic roles. Their critical mission is to bring to bear upon

and not the public realm, when in fact violence against women no matter what form it takes can be in any place at any time. And secondly, because this term conceals what is really happening which *is* violence against women.
theology and the Christian churches their feminist critiques “in order to set free the traditions of emancipation, equality, and genuine human community that we have experienced in our Christian heritage” (1993: 101). The Catholic church, then, as Schüssler Fiorenza understands it, is a pilgrim church, one which must confess its sin of sexism and move toward change. It and its theology are “caught in the middle of history and, therefore, are in constant need of prophetic critique” (1993: 102).

Over the next few years Schüssler Fiorenza would continue to challenge the church’s position on women. Focusing on the church’s understanding of apostles and disciples in the wake of the Vatican’s Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (1977) she challenged the logic which presumed discipleship and the role of apostle to be inherently established along hierarchical lines and as the prerogative of men only. Participating in the discussion which responded to, and assessed the arguments of this document, (Leonard and Arlene Swidler’s edited text Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration, 1977), Schüssler Fiorenza indicates that the logic of the institutional Church is founded on faulty assumptions. Their position, she argues, assumes that the early Christian community was not a “discipleship of equals,” and it assumes that social equality was not reflected in the early Christian movements because there were designated leaders of these groups (therefore hierarchy is justified). It presupposes that the maleness of the twelve was “constitutive for their early Christian function” and that this “function was the apostolic leadership in the early Christian churches.” It assumes that the “twelve” mentioned in 1st Corinthians were “identical with the wider circle of apostles as well as with the wider circle of disciples.” And finally, it assumes that the gospels of the New Testament texts are read literally
as accurate historical descriptions of past events by those who produced this document: an understanding of history, she indicates, that is both outdated and ideological (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993: 105–106). These arguments will resurface in more detail throughout all of her texts.

Challenging the structure of the Catholic church situated Schüssler Fiorenza in opposition to the tradition she grew up within. Her next challenge (1979), however, was directed at academic structures and institutions. She noted that feminists in Religious Studies had looked at androcentric language and symbols in relation to belief systems, but there was little development on the level of political consciousness. Further, patriarchal and androcentric attitudes persisted in institutions and scholarship so that even though women might be found in greater numbers in the student body, “only one-third of the clergy women [were] able to move into ministerial positions immediately following completion of their seminary training” (1993: 119) while “very few women hold senior-level, permanent tenured faculty positions....”(1993: 121). She understood this problem as a separation of theory from practice. Not only did feminists need to become more politically proactive, but institutions such as the University needed to take seriously feminist analyses of structural oppression.

In her second address to the Second Women’s ordination conference in 1979 the declaration made by the Vatican remained in her sights. Her concern for the church continued to prompt her to challenge its view of women. At this conference she maintained her stance of resisting the church’s declaration that its female members were different but equally valuable within the church’s ethos. Schüssler Fiorenza understood the unwillingness of the church to

---

8The citations of Schüssler Fiorenza’s work are taken from a re-written version of her earlier article “The Twelve” originally published in Swidler and Swidler (1977).
allow women full participation within its political body as structural sin. She called for the dismantling of the hierarchal structure of the church and spoke of the need for women to take voice in the church and clamoured actively for change. To some this sounded like a call for revolution. By publicly taking this position Schüssler Fiorenza paid a cost. She indicates that this speech not only meant the loss of several job opportunities, but incurred the ire of a number of people who wrote letters of protest to Notre Dame University, while others threatened to cut off donations and support to the university if she was not dismissed. Nevertheless, she refused to give up and actively continued to fight for the full inclusion of women within the church.

In 1981 Schüssler Fiorenza read a paper at the Women and Ministry symposium (1978-1980) which was in response to the work of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). She indicated that at this time “‘Women in Ministry’ is not only one of the key topics of my theological work, but it has also decisively formed and inspired my own life and self understanding” (1993: 181). Since the age of thirteen, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, she had taken leadership roles within the church (the parish girl scout group), and had, throughout her adulthood, been involved primarily in ministering to other women within a church context. Because of this she understands herself to be actively participating in a church that essentially ignored her own leadership roles. She entitled her article for the symposium “We are Still Invisible.” She argued that the LCWR and the church both needed to begin their analyses of the “woman problem” with women’s experiences and ministries (1993: 183). She contended that the struggle to understand the “woman problem” should not begin within the prevailing ecclesiological framework which did not focus on the advancement of women in the church, but on the advancement of the church in general and women therein. For the study to be feminist it
needed to place women at the center of its inquiry.

Developing the methodological imperative of placing women at the center of the discourse, Schüssler Fiorenza in 1981 at the conference “Women Moving Church” gave a paper wherein she implemented the term “Frauenkirche” or as Diann Neu has translated it “women-church.” This term had been used in the 1960s but pejoratively and had referred to the feminization of the church. Aware of this Schüssler Fiorenza thought to reclaim the term for women. However, she decided to substitute the word kirche with the Greek word used for church in the Christian Scriptures, ekklēsia, which translates as the assembly of the people. By utilizing this term and qualifying it with “of women” Schüssler Fiorenza directs attention to the idea of democracy in the term ekklēsia which, she indicates, can only be historically realized when women are fully included (1993: 196).

1.4 Schüssler Fiorenza and Women Church

The “First International Woman-Church Conference” was held in Chicago 1983. During the same weekend groups of women met with bishops in Washington to dialogue about women and the church. Speaking for Women Church at his meeting in Chicago, Schüssler Fiorenza performed a liturgy of blessing, a ritual, she indicates that “carried all the overtones of ordination” (1993: 212). At the Washington meeting the topic of women’s ordination was not to be a central topic: bishops had been admonished by Pope John Paul II not to support groups or individuals who advanced the ordination of women to the priesthood. Here was an instance of the reality that faces many women in patriarchal institutions: affirmed by like-minded women and

---

9In the next conference of Woman Church the name of the organization was changed to Women Church in order to avoid the essentialization of women.
capable of the task at hand while undercut by resistant men and seen by them as incompetent on
the basis of anatomy.

In 1983 Schüssler Fiorenza wrote her best-known work, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist
Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. Following in the footsteps of Elizabeth Cady
Stanton (*The Women's Bible*, 1898) who had insisted that a revision of the Bible was necessary
because: the Bible is used to oppress women because women are faithful believers in the Bible
(and in all probability outnumber their male counterparts), and because reform needed to take
place in all areas of society (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984: 55), Schüssler Fiorenza developed and
used feminist tools of analysis in order to investigate and reconstruct Christian Origins. Her
strategy was to develop a feminist method of analysis in order to reassess both the texts of the
New Testament and the history of Christian Origins' scholarship. The tools she developed were
the feminist hermeneutics of suspicion, remembrance, proclamation, and liberating vision.
Utilizing these tools and following her mandate of placing women at the center of the analysis,
she deconstructed the New Testament texts, and utilized non-canonical texts, e.g., "Acts of
Thecla." In this pivotal text she utilized the phrase "the Jesus movement" in order to underscore
the lack of hierarchical structure. Neither did she explicitly interpret the Jesus movement as anti-
Judaic, but instead views it as a renewal movement within Judaism. By doing this Schüssler
Fiorenza sought to address the all too frequent juxtapositioning of a "patriarchal and oppressive"
Judaism with a gender egalitarian early Christianity, a position too frequently taken by feminist
Christians.

By examining the four gospel accounts as "paradigmatic remembrances and not
comprehensive accounts of the historical Jesus" (1990: 100), Schüssler Fiorenza, in her text *In
CHAPTER 4

Memory of Her, attempts to shift attention from male activity to female activity. When looking
at the Pauline material, she historically situates Paul not in a movement that he is understood to
have begun, but rather in association with an early Christian missionary movement which he
joined. These groups of early Christians, she observes, were often headed by women, women
whom Paul considered to be colleagues and not subordinates. Dovetailing her feminist analysis
of the New Testament with a critique of the androcentric bias found in Christian Origins, and
challenging value-neutral or objective-descriptive history for its pretense toward history without
bias, Schüssler Fiorenza has made a considerable contribution to the field, one that has often
been ignored. Jane Schaberg asks (1997: 147): “So I wished to raise the question of the effect
this studied ignorance or dismissal of her [Schüssler Fiorenza] work—that of the most eminent
feminist NT critic—has on the field, especially what impact it has on other feminist critics.
“State of the art” discussions in other fields such as psychology, literature, and history usually
feature analyses of how feminists’ studies have changed them. Why have they not changed this
field?”

In 1984 Schüssler Fiorenza was honoured with awards for her contribution to the
movements “New Woman, New Church” and “New Priestly Ministry” by the Women’s
Ordination Conference. These awards, and Schüssler Fiorenza was among the first to receive
one, were given to those women who have been prophetic figures within Christianity, and who,
in their respective fields, have sought to conceptualize new ways of being (Schüssler Fiorenza,
1993: 233). The women-church movement was a fact and not a fiction. Regardless of the pope’s
reiteration of his objection to the ordination of women, Schüssler Fiorenza and others, in a
variety of Catholic Christian movements, continued to hold to their belief that women should be
recognized as full members of the church. But her position is not located in a desire that women join the hierarchy, rather she desires that they clamoured for change—change in a church that has clung to the “Constantinian Roman patriarchal model of the Church” (see Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993: 226 for a schematic of this structure). Schüssler Fiorenza argues “[d]o we want to be called “father” in exchange for promising obedience and loyalty to a patriarchal institution and for celebrating androcentric liturgies? Or is the dream of creating a different ministry and priesthood, or transforming the patriarchal hierarchy into the discipleship of equals?” (1993: 236).

In 1984 she, as a member of the Catholic committee on Pluralism and Abortion, participated in the placing of an ad in the New York Times which presented their opinions on abortion. This ad contested the position of those Catholic bishops who had attacked the democratic vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro because of her pro-choice position. Many of those whose names were signed to this ad faced severe reprisals from the mainstream church for their position on this matter. Those “nun-women” who had signed this document were threatened with dismissal unless they publicly retracted their statements (1993: 238). In this same year Schüssler Fiorenza published her text Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation. This text laid out the feminist methods and theories she had developed in order to study early Christian texts and the Greco-Roman society in which these texts were situated. In Bread Not Stone she would advocate that the Bible was a “structuring prototype of women-church rather than … a timeless archetype” (1984: xvi-xvii). According to Schüssler Fiorenza, the Bible as a mythical archetype remains fixed, immutable, and subject to either rejection or acceptance but not critical evaluation. As a historical prototype the Bible is open to feminist theological transformation (1984: 10).
In 1985 Schüssler Fiorenza’s book *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement*, a compilation of previously published articles which focused on both the book of Revelation and the notion of revelation was published. In this same year Schüssler Fiorenza and Judith Plaskow pooled their resources and published the first issue of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. In this journal they hoped to provide a forum for feminists working in the study of religion. The journal was to be interreligious, ecumenical, and interdisciplinary. On the theological front in the same year, Schüssler Fiorenza and Sister Mary Collins co-edited the first issue of the feminist theology section of *Concilium*, an international Roman Catholic journal which was founded in order to continue the ideas generated by the Second Vatican Council. Both forums, along with Schüssler Fiorenza’s numerous publications, brought her acknowledgment as an eminent feminist in the field of Religious Studies, while her feminist activism and her commitment to bringing feminism into the academy, into the area of Christian Origins, and the Catholic church brought her much notoriety.

In 1986 Schüssler Fiorenza left her long held position at the University of Notre Dame in order to take a position at Episcopal Divinity School (EDS). This position would allow her more freedom in regard to her feminist agenda. Catholic theologians Leonardo Boff and Charles Curran had been silenced, and threatened with job loss, feminist nuns were faced with expulsion from their communities, and others in the church had simply been ignored, while those who supported a conservative church climbed the hierarchal ladder (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993: 271). EDS supported the idea of a different Christian theology, a Christian theology which included a feminist theology. Encouraged, Schüssler Fiorenza proposed a M.Div program, Feminist Liberation Theology and Ministry which began in 1986-1987 with Schüssler Fiorenza acting as
its first coordinator. (Schüessler Fiorenza, 1993: 275–277). But Schüessler Fiorenza remained only briefly in this position, and in 1988, she accepted a position at Harvard Divinity School. Insistent that feminism must be taken seriously in all parts of the academy, even those committed to conservatism under the sign of academic rigour, she took a position that placed her in one of the heartlands of institutionalized androcentrism.

Entering the new decade of the 1990s, Schüessler Fiorenza experienced both rejection and recognition of her critical feminist liberation theology. Invited to give the commencement address at St. Bernard’s Institute and awarded an honorary doctorate, she was also one among four who had been invited to participate in the one-hundredth anniversary celebration of the University of Fribourg/Freiburg in Switzerland. The theological faculty of the university had planned to confer an honorary doctorate (nihil obstat) on the four, but the Vatican had indicated two of the four were ineligible to receive this award. The faculty, then, drew up another list, jettisoned the four they had originally decided upon. Schüessler Fiorenza experienced this kind of politicking as “silencing, defaming, and manipulating” (1993: 290). This, she indicates, is a clear example of a clamp down on multiplicity within the church and an increase in ecclesiastical repression (1993: 290). The address she gave to the graduating class of St. Bernard’s focused upon liberation theology’s new understanding of early Christianity as a discipleship of equals, and juxtaposed this with the increase in the church’s policing activity and their silencing of theologians such as Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx. Twenty-five years after the “Second Vatican Council” which in her estimation opened long closed doors and windows in the church, the church had returned to its very conservative position held prior to Vatican Two, a position which denied the necessity to account for cultural epistemic shifts. Instead, it demanded
unquestioning loyalty and obedience to the government of the church. Questioning the church as citizens of the church had been, for a brief time, encouraged, but now to question the church was perceived as an act of disloyalty and punishable within the Catholic corporation. This resistance to cultural shifts within the church has had a long history. The Inquisition or the “Oath Against Modernism” (1907) are examples of the church’s fortifications against secularism.

Throughout the years of 1989 through to 1992, Schüssler Fiorenza toured across Europe addressing the subject of women-church. Affiliated with the “International Women-Church” movement Schüssler Fiorenza learned from this experience that the explication of feminist theological strategies must realize three criteria: 1) feminist strategies for change must be rooted in a common systematic analysis; 2) in order to engender solidarity and collaboration feminist liberation theologies must avoid dualist either-or positions which, Schüssler Fiorenza believes, is foundational to Enlightenment thought; 3) and a feminist theology must attempt to articulate a common vision that is able to encourage diverse movements of liberation (1993: 309).


In 1992 Schüssler Fiorenza released another text *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* which took seriously feminist theoretical concerns which had surfaced in
the late 1980s. It had become apparent that feminists had not taken into account power
differentials among women. They had neglected the voices of feminists of colour working and
writing in United States, in South America, and in countries once colonized by white Europeans.
Many white feminists writing and teaching in Western institutions had overlooked the privilege
they had been granted. They had neglected to deconstruct the Enlightenment ideal of human
identity, or their own stake in this identity. Identity was seen as fixed and central to human
nature. It neither shifted throughout time nor place, nor was understood to be built on the backs
of colonialised peoples For example one can determine that one is free on the basis that another
is not). Enlightenment identity was constructed within a dichotomous framework wherein human
was defined as “civilized” and juxtaposed with the other, the “primitive” or those people
occupying colonized countries such as Africa, India, South America, etc.

Schüssler Fiorenza, in But She Said, seeks to address the critiques generated by both
women of colour and colonized peoples, and postmodern feminists, the latter of whom most
clearly articulate the need to deconstruct identity. Schüssler Fiorenza framed her text as an
analysis of the New Testament understanding the New Testament itself to be compilation of
situated texts. Although in the past she was completely cognizant of the multiple layers of the
New Testament texts, she had primarily utilized a hermeneutical framework which incorporated
historical critical methods and form criticism, albeit enhanced by a feminist hermeneutics, in
order to analyze the New Testament. However, in But She Said she now contextualized her older
methods in a critical feminist rhetorical model which endeavoured “to exploit the contradictions
and silences inscribed in the text” (1992: 40). This model meant that not only did she keep in
focus the meanings of the texts which surfaced within a hermeneutical framework, but also the
"rhetorical interpretation and its theoethical interrogation of texts and symbolic worlds [which]
pays attention to the kinds of effects biblical discourses produce and how they produce them” 
(1992: 40). Four reading strategies are drawn into her analysis when she uses a critical feminist 
rhetorical model: ideological suspicion, historical reconstruction, theoethical assessment, and 
creative imagination. These, she indicates, are sustained only when contextualized in a feminist 
critical process of learning to identify and acknowledge sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and 
religious contradictions (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992: 53).

In this text Schüssler Fiorenza articulated a more complex analysis of “patriarchy.” She 
had tended in the past to historicize patriarchy as an overarching and ahistorical concept and had 
yet to develop a pyramidal understanding of oppression or its intersection within capitalism and 
colonialism. Resisting the gender dichotomy of female versus male, or the notion that women’s 
use of language and their ways of knowing are different from men’s so that sexual difference is 
seen to constitute different horizons of understanding, Schüssler Fiorenza focused upon a 
democratic feminism, one that understands gender and sex to be socially and historically 
determined (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992: 105–114; 1995:34–43), and one that sought freedom for 
all people within the conceptual framework of equality and democracy (Schüssler Fiorenza, 

In 1994 and 1995 Schüssler Fiorenza continued to write and teach. Her talk at the Annual 
American Academy of Religion in 1995 held in Philadelphia was an address tempered by 
frustration and despair. New Testament studies and Christian Origins, according to Schüssler 
Fiorenza, have continued to ignore feminist contributions to the field. One position held by the 
SBL (Society of Biblical Literature) was that feminists have contributed little to the continuing
discourse on Christian Origins. Analyses that had demonstrated the structuring components of
gender within the texts, the erasure and prescriptive attitudes of the texts toward women, shown
that academic work in the field had further re-entrenched androcentrism and n.isogyny, and
introduced new reading strategies to the field of Christian Origins were simply ignored. At be..t,
feminist contributions were subsumed under postmodern contributions. Androcentric scholars in
the field could continue to dismiss feminist analyses pretending they had nothing to say.
Schüssler Fiorenza, however, dismayed as she was in her presentation, continues to write new
texts on the subject. In 1993-1994 edited a two-volume work *Searching the Scriptures* with
Shelly Matthews, and in 1995 she published the text *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet:
Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*. She, along with other feminists in the field of Christian
Origins, may be dismayed by their continued erasure in the books of androcentric scholars
generated within the field, but there are many feminist students, inside and outside the field, who
utilize feminist analyses in order to develop their own ideas, or to extend those ideas generated in
the texts produced by feminists like Schüssler Fiorenza.

2. Schüssler Fiorenza, Christian myth, and a hermeneutics of suspicion

2.1 Introduction

Mythology in light of its perceived opposite, history, has been understood to be a
fabrication, a story rather than facts, and a body of uncritically held beliefs related in story form
(e.g. myth in popular discourse is used to denote falseness and/or fiction). Mythology belongs to
the ancient world and “primitive” societies: to all those peoples who had/have yet to
conceptualize the world in a scientific and rational manner. Mythology is understood to relate an
idealized and imaginative vision of the world, while history is understood to relate a factual
vision of the world. History is *logos* ("word as demonstrable truth"), while mythology is *mythos* ("word as authoritative pronouncement") (Heehs, 1994: 1). Because of the perceived difference between mythography and historiography, there followed, in the wake of Enlightenment, an impulse to demythologize human narratives: to remove from them any possible distortions incurred by the mythological impulse. However, the desire to demythologize has come to be seen, in postmodern theory, as an impossible project. History too, is an interpretative strategy, a strategy informed by the historian’s location, and grounded in narrative structures which inform her/his world. History, then, also participates in the word as authoritative pronouncement, it too will act prescriptively in the authors’ attempts to fit the past with the present. The critical movement between historiography and mythology is an underlying aspect of Schüssler Fiorenza’s historical development of early Christian myth.

The work of demythologizing which emerged from Enlightenment thought assumed that mythologizing was a process that explained the world in light of the lack of a scientific framework. Myth was the product of a pre-scientific mind-set, a mind-set which was jettisoned by the West in the modern world. Mythological thinking, then, would no longer need to be encountered in the West. However, old, tired, and defunct myths, are frequently replaced by new myths as the mythologizing process is not discontinued when old myths no longer function as meaningful within their originating culture. The impulse to understand existence meaningfully is the impulse that lies beneath myth making. In this impulse then, mythology can be both ideological and utopian. It fixes existence, “transform[s] history into nature” (Barthes, 1972: 129), and in both instances distorts human existence. In the same moment that it twists and distorts, it represents an impulse toward envisioning new ways of being in the world. The
mythological impulse, then, has both a negative and positive horizon. It is toward both these horizons, the negative and positive potential in mythology, that Schüssler Fiorenza sets her sights upon. She will deconstruct the ideological horizon of patriarchal myth and then envision new ways of being in the world when she re-historicizes early Christian myth. However, in this second project of re-envisioning early Christianity she cannot leave behind the ideological horizon as it always functions alongside of the positive utopian horizon and therefore it too must be accounted for in her re-envisioning of Christianity.

Schüssler Fiorenza draws upon and locates herself in the hermeneutical enterprise and in this employs the theoretical and methodological hermeneutical projects of Rudolph Bultmann and Jürgen Habermas. She will utilize the methods developed in new historicism and Hayden White’s proposition of understanding of history as narrative. And she will engage the tenets of feminist historical analysis in order to reread and remythologize biblical texts. The situatedness, the fluidity, the reading from the margins, while reading against the grain, the shifting from an androcentric perspective, and an engagement with social justice will, to some degree, assist Schüssler Fiorenza in maintaining an honest tension between the ideological and utopian horizons of mythology.

The three methods of analyses which inform Schüssler Fiorenza’s work in her text *In Memory of Her* have a complex history of development, and a number of tenets adhered to by their exponents. In order to understand how Schüssler Fiorenza incorporates the methodological imperative of hermeneutics, new historicism, and feminist history, a brief analysis of these pedagogical developments and their application in Schüssler Fiorenza’s work will be focused upon in this and the next chapter.
2.2 Verstehen: hermeneutics, and history

The development of hermeneutics emerges as a patchwork quilt with each theorist building upon the work of those who had came before. The contributions have been many, and often their relationships have been at a variance with each other. Although interpretation is a cognitive function of human beings, hermeneutics as a special discipline emerged in the Renaissance and Reformation. With the rise of Protestant theology and the need for Protestant theologians to legitimate their position of rereading biblical texts, and at the same time maintain the internal cohesiveness and comprehensibility of the Bible, a method was required. This method, hermeneutics, argued that the Bible had not been properly understood, and this lack of understanding was due to the “insufficient knowledge and faulty preparation of the interpreters.” something which could be remedied by “[a] thorough linguistic and hermeneutic training” (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 2). But the exegesis of the text must be done in light of the text as a whole so that each passage is interpreted in continuity with the whole of the Bible.

In addition to the use of hermeneutics in theology, philosophy, classical philology and jurisprudence recognized their reliance upon interpretation. Scholars in jurisprudence of the twelfth century, who worked on the code of Justinian, developed a hermeneutical method by which to explicate this body of material. Later, Constantius Rogerius in 1463 introduced a four-sequence program toward a legal exegesis that consisted of “the corrective, the extensive, the restrictive, and the declarative interpretations.” This methodology was utilized up until the nineteenth century (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989:3). Meanwhile, scholars in classical philology were attempting to reconstruct and establish the authentic versions of ancient Greek and Roman texts. In this field a number of systematic theories of interpretation were developed. In philosophy,
however, it would not be until Enlightenment philosophers desired to systematize all human knowledge that hermeneutics would enter this epistemic field. In philosophy, hermeneutics was located in the domain of logic, and from here the discipline of general hermeneutics came into being (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989:3–4).

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) took up several of the unconnected threads of the explication of hermeneutics, and wound them together, and in so doing began a tapestry which would grow over time. Adding his own distinct thread, Schleiermacher sought to ground interpretation, or hermeneutics, in understanding. Understanding (Verstand), according to Emanuel Kant, underlay “the capacity for thought and experience, and acts of understanding (Verstehen) which were present in all thinking and experience [which] was an expression of man’s rationality” (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989:9). Schleiermacher incorporated both Kant’s theory of understanding, and the Romantic movement’s new aesthetics and poetics wherein the author was a creator, and his/her work of art an expression of the creative self. This meant, then, that hermeneutics was not just a decoding of meaning, or the getting at proper understanding, but rather “was above all concerned with illuminating the conditions for the possibility of understanding and its modes of interpretation” (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989:9). Understanding, then, is “an unending task.” This task is taken up in linguisticality: “an act of speaking cannot even be understood as a moment in a person’s development unless it is also understood in relation to the language” and with intellectuality: “Nor can an act of speaking be understood as a modification of the language unless it is also understood as a moment in the development of the person” (Schleiermacher in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989:11). Thought and language were in a dialectical relationship with each other and affected and shaped each other, but all the while were played out
in the fluidity of human existence.

Wilhelm von Humboldt’s (1767–1835) contributions to hermeneutics were worked out in the field of history. Von Humboldt, like Schleiermacher, understood that language played a key role in both the interpretation and explanation of the text—in this instance the historical text. He introduced the concept of understanding to historical texts. This notion of understanding included the idea of the historian as a composer of history. It was the historian who supplied inner coherence connecting individual events to each other in order to compose a related whole. Each event was like a musical note, interesting but meaningless. It was only when they were strung together in a particular ordering that they become meaningful. It is in von Humboldt that one notes the beginning of the interpretative activity that would later become known as the “hermeneutical circle” (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 16). Humans have a “pre-existent basis of understanding” one which is constructed by language. This basis does not allow for a sharp division between subject and object: “Comprehension is by no means a developing out of the subject, nor a drawing out of the object, but rather both at once, for it always consists of the application of a previously present general idea to a new particular instance” (von Humboldt in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 112).

The concept of understanding was then picked up by Johann Gustav Droysen (1804–1884) and elaborated as verstehen or the method of understanding. Verstehen distinguished the nature and method of historical sciences from that of natural sciences which engaged in causal explanations (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 16). Droysen’s historical method consisted of “understanding by means of investigation.” Understanding consisted of a circle between the subject and object, it consisted of criticism and interpretation, and historical interpretation could
take the form of the “pragmatic, conditional, psychological, and ethical” (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 19-20). In this, then, Droysen demanded that interpretation must tend toward the explicit and this would find expression in the historian’s work. Ultimately, Droysen’s hermeneutical theory meant that he made an explicit division between understanding and interpretation. (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 20).

According to the history of hermeneutics, Wilhelm Dilthey’s (1833-1911) hermeneutical method represents the watershed between nineteenth and twentieth-century theories: nineteenth-century theories grew out of Romanticism while twentieth-century theories incorporated the philosophical hermeneutics and methodological interests of the social and historical sciences (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 23). Insisting on Droysen’s having distinguished between methods used in human sciences and those in the natural sciences in the face of those advocates of positivism, Dilthey went on to develop his hermeneutical theories from the vantage point of phenomenology. Leaving behind Schleiermacher’s inclusion of linguisticality as the base of every hermeneutical endeavour, Dilthey stressed that understanding as a methodological concept had its basis and its origins in human experience—“the category of life itself” and not language. This category of life referred to the quotidian and how humans require understanding to function on a daily basis. The comprehension of understanding developed on the level of the quotidian meant that “higher forms of understanding,” such as those utilized in the human sciences, could be included. Understanding arose out of lived experience, and lived experience reflects two interrelated ideas. As experience is “lived” it is located in a progress of time wherein “the present constantly becomes the past and the future the present.” This present “is a filling of a moment of time with reality.” As “experience” it is neither memory (past) nor ideas and wishes directed at some future
CHAPTER 4

moment. “Ideas, through which we know the past and the future, exist only for those alive in the present” (Dilthey in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 149). “Experience is a temporal flow in which every state changes before it can be known as each moment is dependent upon subsequent moments for its meaning and each moment has passed before it can be grasped” (Dilthey in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 150). It is this play in the historical experience of human comprehension which Heidegger will elaborate in Being and Time (1927).

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) adopted Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) phenomenological method in order to explore the data of immediate experience. Rejecting epistemological positions that propose a sharp division between consciousness and the external world, Heidegger argued that existence can only be apprehended through the analysis and description of human “being” or dasein—“being there.” Understanding is no longer located in the subject, but rather in the subject’s “Being-in-the-World.” Understanding, as theorized in hermeneutics, continues to depend upon lived experience, but that lived experience is contextualized in lived experience itself. Understanding Being, then, is an integral aspect of Being itself. The two are part of a circle, a hermeneutical circle, that make up the whole.

Interpretation or the explication of understanding occurs only within a given horizon of pre-understanding or dasein—“Being in the world.” Heidegger explains that “an entity whose kind of Being is the essential projection of Being-in-the-world has understanding of Being, and has this as constitutive for its Being” (Heidegger in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 219). For hermeneutics this meant a movement away from the Romantic notion of the sovereignty of the author (Schleiermacher) as the “subject creator of the work” or the reader who understands the author (sometimes better than the author understands her/himself?) through her or his work (Mueller-
Vollmer, 1989: 33). The act of understanding in Heidegger’s hermeneutics was necessarily complex. Understanding, itself, is grounded in Being-in-the-world as much as Being-in-the-world is grounded in understanding.

Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976) and the school of the New Hermeneutics would incorporate in their hermeneutics the ontological moment in Heidegger’s hermeneutics: the existential interpretation of humanity’s Being-in-the-world. For Bultmann this meant a new approach to biblical texts. The message in the texts resides in its existential appeal, and this message was clothed in the mythological discourse that was generated out of the social-historical conditions in which the authors of these texts were encapsulated. It was his belief that the meaning of the texts resides cloaked beneath what is said, i.e., mythological narrative, and interpretation, and “distinguishes what is said from what is meant and measures the former by the latter” (Bultmann in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 36).

Bultmann set out a theory for the interpretation of biblical texts. His hermeneutics consisted of: 1) the necessity for bracketing one’s prejudices (i.e., dogmatic faith assertions); 2) that exegesis, however, is not without presuppositions simply because as historical-critical research it presupposes its own method; 3) that there is a presumed life-relation of the exegete to the subject matter with which the text is concerned and in this, then, there is the pre-understanding of the exegete; 4) this pre-understanding is open in order that there may be an “existentiell encounter with the text and an existentiell decision”; 5) and finally that “the understanding of the text is never a definitive one” as the text remains open, interpreted anew by future generations (Bultmann in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 246–247).

According to Bultmann it will be the historical-critical method, a method that demands
that a text is interpreted according to the “rules of grammar and the meaning of words,” and the 
style of the text as every text speaks in the language of its social-historical location (i.e., rabbinic 
Judaism, Greco-Roman world context, etc.—this is where the project of demythologizing is 
engaged). It includes an understanding of history as a continuum wherein events are strung 
meaningfully together in a cause and effect relationship, and that biblical texts cannot be 
understood theologically until they are first understood historically. One sets aside one’s 
dogmatic prejudices and included in this, in order to approach the text historically, one does not 
begin with the assumption that the text speaks in another language, i.e., allegory (Bultmann in 
Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 243–244). But holding to these criteria does not mean, according to 
Bultmann, that the historical-critical method is value-neutral. Locating the interpreter in his/her 
own historicity means the interpreter stands in history and therefore shares in the responsibility 
for it. The encounter with a history that is an outgrowth of one’s own historicity is the existentiell 
encounter (Bultmann in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 246). This kind of encounter with history is not 
an understanding of history as subjective and reliant upon the whims of the exegete. Rather, one 
must understand, according to Bultmann, that the subject-object dichotomy that functions in 
explanatory theories cannot operate in theories that are directed toward understanding and 
interpretation: “…historical knowledge is never a closed or definitive knowledge—any more 
than is the pre-understanding with which the historian approaches historical phenomena. For if 
the phenomena of history are not facts that can be neutrally observed, but rather open themselves 
in their meanings only to one who approaches them alive with questions, then they are always 
only understandable now in that they actually speak to the present situation” (Bultmann in 
It is Bultmann’s hermeneutical theory that Schüssler Fiorenza draws upon in order to elaborate a feminist Christian Origins. His historical-critical methods, and his understanding of the historicity of the exegete she will bring to her analysis of biblical texts and challenge academic and religious claims to a value-neutral objective history: “Although the interpreter always approaches a historical text with specific contemporary experiences and questions, the scholar must attempt to become as free from preconceived understanding of the texts as possible, even though it is impossible to detach oneself completely from any pre-understanding” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 6). Although Schüssler Fiorenza does indicate that she does not employ Bultmann’s imperative toward the demythologizing of biblical texts (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984: 154, n.22) in order to “distinguish what is said from what is meant and measures the former by the latter,” I would argue that she does incorporate this method in order to read against the grain of patriarchy. What Schüssler Fiorenza will demythologize in her work is the androcentric/patriarchal perspective that pervades both biblical texts and biblical scholarship.

Jürgen Habermas has also influenced Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutical approach to biblical texts. In his work Habermas challenged the dichotomous separation of natural sciences’ employment of explanation and human sciences’ employment of understanding, both of which are then utilized as separate categories, the former privileged over the latter, following Max Weber’s theories in the social sciences. The categories of explanation and understanding stand in uneasy relationship with each other in Weber’s delineation of the sociological method. Habermas insists that Weber did not distinguish properly between understanding and explanation. Weber assumed that explanation simply approached a known static object which could be viewed without recourse to the motivations that underlie the study. According to Habermas, by
conceptualizing history as a static present, social and cultural phenomena of the past are reduced to empirical facts which can then be causally explained. Habermas desired to “rid the social sciences of their domination by empiricist reductionist methodologies” (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 42-43). To do such he incorporated hermeneutics in his own work, but he was also highly critical of the hermeneutical tradition, specifically the theoretical position of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Hans-George Gadamer argued that prejudices are an integral aspect of understanding: prejudices allowed for pre-understanding, and pre-understanding is the historical nature of understanding itself. The concept of prejudice, in Gadamer’s theories, utilizes both meanings of the term: “to judge too quickly” and “to follow custom or authority” (Ricoeur, 1981: 66).

Enlightenment philosophy insisted prejudices must be set aside in order that one may think, and in order that the maturation of the human race could be realized: tradition and reason were set in opposition with each other at the same time that tradition was understood pejoratively as distortion and blind ignorance. Gadamer desired to recoup the term and demonstrate that understanding could not occur outside of history or outside of tradition. Tradition need not be understood as false. “The historical object and the hermeneutic operation of the interpreter are both part of an overriding historical and cultural tradition or continuum which Gadamer called ‘effective history’” (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 39). Gadamer does not insist that prejudices are all positive for both negative and positive prejudices exist, but rather, in order that understanding and then interpretation take place, common ground and a way of knowing must already preexist the interpreter. It is this common ground, or a state of relatedness, and the historicity of the interpreter that provide the ground for understanding.

Habermas also felt that pre-understanding influenced knowledge, but one must approach
this pre-understanding as potentially either “pseudocommunication” (misunderstanding), or systematically distorted communications (ideologies). Gadamer’s “effective histories” Habermas names “effective deceptions” so that “historical situations of systematically distorted communication are stabilized by means of deceptions which conceal the mechanisms of repression” (Thompson, 1981: 94). What Gadamer calls effective histories sustains these ideologies and legitimates them. Whereas Gadamer locates authority in tradition following, although critical of, Romanticism, Habermas follows Enlightenment thought and rejects any truth claims located in authority, understanding authority located in prejudices, much like Enlightenment thinkers, as systematically distorted communication: “Gadamer’s argument presupposes that legitimating acknowledgment and the agreement in which authority is grounded are brought about without force. Experience with systematically distorted communication militates against that presupposition” (Habermas in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 316). For Habermas it will be reason as a principle of rational discourse that will provide the necessary check on these prejudices: “Reason as the principle of rational discourse, is the rock on which existing authorities split, not the one on which they were founded” (Habermas in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 316). Gadamer, however, argues that reason itself participates in historical consciousness and its representation takes form in antithetical relation to authority within Enlightenment discourse (Gadamer in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 285). Tradition, in Habermas’ theory is understood as devoid of reason. One might ask: why assume tradition itself does not participate in reason? What are the historical implications if we locate reason in the Enlightenment? And does one not unhitch reason from human history, create an idealized category, and give to reason a power which it does not have when it is understood, as in Habermas, as the principle of rational
Habermas' alliance with the Frankfort School and critical theory meant that he would continue to locate himself within Enlightenment ideals, albeit critical of the ways these ideals have been used. According to Habermas, a depth hermeneutics includes utilizing the hermeneutical method of explanation and understanding that have been incorporated into the science-oriented self-reflection of psychoanalysis as a model for cultural theory (Thompson, 1981: 83, 106). Further, a depth hermeneutics means a critical hermeneutics, one that passes over into a critique of ideology that is sustained by committed reason, "a reason which defends itself against dogmatism," on the plane of epistemology (Habermas in Thompson, 1981: 78). The epistemological status of critical theory will include reconstruction and self-reflection. The former requires truth claims be redeemed through the "normal processes of scientific argumentation," whereas the latter require validity claims which "can only be realized in the successful processes of Enlightenment which lead to the acceptance by those concerned, free of any compulsion, of the theoretically derivable interpretations" (Habermas in Thompson, 1981: 100-101). Schüssler Fiorenza will herself drawn upon this critical approach to history and text, an approach she will call a "hermeneutics of suspicion" which consists of consciousness raising and a systemic critical analysis. She will located her argument within the "scientific" discourse (form, source, and redaction criticism)\(^\text{10}\) of biblical exegesis, and she will, like Habermas,\(^\text{11}\) make

---

\(^{10}\) Her use of form, source, and redaction criticism is, however, informed by feminist concerns. See, Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 49–53.

\(^{11}\) Habermas states (1971: 37) "[w]e can, if needs be, distinguish theories according to whether or not they are structurally related to possible emancipation."
a commitment to historical analysis as a commitment to social justice. This she names a
hermeneutics of proclamation wherein she insists “that texts which reinscribe patriarchal
relations of domination and exploitation must not be affirmed and appropriated. In theological
terms, they should not be proclaimed as the word of G-d but must be exposed as the words of
men” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992: 54). A hermeneutics of proclamation “ethically evaluates and
theologically assess all canonical texts to determine how much they engender patriarchal
oppression and/or empower us in the struggle for liberation” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992: 54).

2.3 Hermeneutics of Suspicion and Proclamation: Bultmann, and Habermas

Schüssler Fiorenza locates her history in an existentiell encounter with her feminist
politics of theory and praxis. This historical moment has its most recent origins in the 1960s with
the rise of feminism in the academy. Intersecting with her feminist agenda is another political
agenda, social justice: a social justice that demands that hierarchical systems of oppression be
resisted (1990: 32). In order to do this Schüssler Fiorenza reads the New Testament texts in
accordance with her social vision of justice for the poor, and the marginalized, the majority of
which are women. Her reading of the biblical texts is not a justification strategy intending to
legitimate women entering and joining the hierarchal structure of the Catholic church. Rather,
she condemns both the exclusion of women from the full participation in the Catholic church and
the hierarchal and oppressive structure of the Catholic church itself (1993: 23–38; 80–90;
129–150). She demands that the Catholic church assess its structures according to the correctives
suggested by Vatican II (1992: 33), and the critical analyses generated by feminist theology
(1992: 140–150). It is from this political and historical position that she engages with the New
Testament texts. Her history of the early Christian movements consciously takes the position of a
"history for" as she writes against the grain of the history thus far: a history of the winners.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s agendas of social justice and feminist politics will inform the shape her questions take. The epistemology generated by these two positions will be the pre-understanding that informs her analysis, and represent one axis of her hermeneutical circle. This circle understands that the text and the world of the text are in continuous dialogue with the interpreter of the text. In this circle there can be “…no division of labor between the descriptive biblical exegete and the interpreting systematic theologian…” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984: 132).

Bultmann had indicated, that as much as possible, one should bracket dogmatism, which is to say, one should not begin one’s analysis with the answers and mould and shape one’s analysis according to those answers. Further, one should approach the inquiry by bracketing one’s presuppositions concerning the nature of one’s inquiry. Therefore, working within Bultmann’s hermeneutics, one should both attempt to suspend belief, e.g., that these are the words of God and therefore the texts transcend history, and allow the questions, which are generated by one’s pre-understanding and prejudgement, to inform the study rather than determine the study. In this endeavour Schüssler Fiorenza both succeeds and fails. She succeeds on the level of the hermeneutics of suspicion in that she challenges androcentric readings of the text along with the androcentric horizons of text, which will then lead her to demythologize the divinization of patriarchy. But she will ultimately fail on the level of a hermeneutics of proclamation because she resists deconstructing the “great man” narrative in relation to Jesus even if she is willing to temper this narrative with the additive of women.

Androcentric readings of the biblical texts continue to engage the text on the horizon of the male and men as the normative horizon of the text. The androcentric interpreter will fuse
his/her androcentric horizon with the androcentric horizon of the text. Androcentrism refers to a perspective that proposes to be gazing from “human” eyes at “human” subjects but the “human” in both instances is always male. Therefore, on the level of language use, the term “man” is understood to be inclusive of both men and women in an androcentric frame, but in point of fact if we do use such a term we erase women as subjects. “Man” or the use of only male pronouns as a universal category to represent the human subsumes and annihilates sex. The masculine “generic” does not really function as a generic. Some individuals continue to argue against inclusive language (using he and she) insisting it makes the text awkward. What is not acknowledged in this argument is that gender exclusive language validates the experience and viewpoint of one sex over the other, and it implicitly connects the sex it privileges with the universal which in turn legitimates this point of view.\(^12\) By legitimating one point of view those other points of view are marginalized and false consciousness is produced. As to the argument that traditionally language uses the generic, this amounts to resistance to language change itself, as if language is static and unchanging when in fact language is a fluid human practice, one which changes over history (spender, 1980, penelope, 1990). Schüssler Fiorenza will juxtapose how androcentric exegetes have read grammatically masculine terms as generic when speaking of the actual social body of early Christianity with the use of other masculine generic terms as indicative of only men when speaking of the leadership of the social body of early Christianity (1990: 45). It is a situation of having one’s cake and eating it too.

An androcentric reading of androcentric texts presupposes as normative men at the center

\(^{12}\)See chapters 2 and 3 for a full delineation of the argument regarding androcentric language.
of analysis and that all others are marginal to the discourse. When women and others surface in androcentric texts, this surfacing is read at face value in an androcentric reading of the text. For example, if women are spoken of prescriptively it is understood as descriptive so that the directive in 1st Timothy 2: 12 which indicates that women can neither teach nor have authority over men is read as a description of social practices in the early Christian missionary movements. However, if one read against the grain of the androcentrism in the text rather than reading this as a description of social practice, this passage would be read as polemical response to a social practice already engaged in, women in authoritative positions, otherwise why speak against women in authoritative positions if they are in fact not there?

How texts are interpreted often will act as the definitive interpretation of the text. Interpretations develop and underpin a normative reading of the text, and this normative reading will inform the meaning and intention of the text and its author. When texts such as biblical texts are used as ethical and moral directives for a world ethos, which includes social relations, then interpretations of these texts themselves also function as moral and ethical directives. Often a particular interpretation of the text can become the definitive normative statement on how to read the text. An androcentric interpretation of the text will re-entrench the androcentrism in the text and effectively limits not only the horizon of the text in order to legitimate the androcentrism, but also the horizons of those readers engaged in reading both the text and the interpretation of the text. An androcentric reading of an androcentric text is a reading strategy that maintains systems of oppression.

In an attempt to deal with these interpretations of the text, Schüssler Fiorenza will analyze the work of specific authors who are themselves attempting to develop a social history of
CHAPTER 4

early Christianity. In agreement with the need to examine Christian history within a socio-historical model, Schüssler Fiorenza, however, will read against the grain of their interpretations. Although their work has focused on the social-historical implications of this movement in light of its *sitz em leben*, their interpretation of the biblical texts is an androcentric reading of androcentric texts legitimated by their social locations in history which is an untheorized androcentrism.

Gerd Theissen’s (1982) sociological model is one which relies upon conflict theory as delineated within a narrative structure of millenarian movements first elaborated by Adolf Harnack. This narrative structure understands that Jesus and his original followers began as wandering charismatics, itinerants, who had given up home, family, and possessions. But over time as the movement grew, according to Theissen, it began to organize and as it grew and organized it necessarily adapted itself to its social milieu. According to Theissen, if Christianity, and here he is speaking of the missionary movements in the Graeco-Roman empire, was to survive then of necessity it must structure itself along hierarchical lines. These lines he called “love patriarchalism.” As Theissen saw it, love patriarchalism offered a different integrative pattern wherein there was an inner equality in Christ, while hierarchal social relations of the “other” kind were maintained (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 73–74).

Schüssler Fiorenza challenges Theissen on several counts (1990: 145–146). The kinds of itinerants he proposes are those who gave away their wealth and goods. They were not born into marginality but rather opted for it. Schüssler Fiorenza contests this interpretation pointing to the Q texts as indicative of a social class who contested their world from marginalized locations rather than as ascetics who had renounced material existence and taken up marginalized
locations. Theissen’s Jesus and his followers, when perceived as having relinquished their homes and families, take on the image of an all male group who travelled around Palestine teaching. This kind of figuring of the group excludes women by locating its concerns in a realm traditionally understood to be male. Theissen’s development of love patriarchal to describe the Christian missionary movement in the Greco-Roman world maintains and legitimates, in its articulation, the patriarchal family with a male head of the household who reflects in his image the image of the male god who rules over his house, the church. In both instances Theissen’s untheorized androcentrism fuses with the androcentric texts in order to produce a picture of the ancient world that includes mostly, if not only—or at least those who counted—men. In Theissen’s reading then, Schüssler Fiorenza demonstrates how both the horizons of the interpreter and the text were limited by androcentrism (1990: 72–84).

By reading against the grain of both androcentric interpretations and the androcentric texts Schüssler Fiorenza is lead toward a demythologizing of patriarchy. The myth of patriarchy is that it is all pervasive and natural. It is neither historical nor a product of human society and therefore irrevocable. Her hermeneutics of suspicion is what engenders a feminist reading of the biblical texts and the interpreters of the text. As a feminist she is politically engaged and reads

---

13 Luise Schottroff (1991) argues that women prophets also took up an itinerant lifestyle among the Jesus movements. However, Schottroff’s addition simply supports the premise that the Jesus movements included only those few women who may have been unencumbered by the demands of material life or felt in the position to unencumber themselves. It further supports the notion, presented particularly in Luke, that women, other than female itinerants, assumed a female role and supported the itinerant group of men (and a few women), provided them with food, clothes and shelter, but did not themselves contribute to the formation of Christianity simply because they remained attached to their families and lived in homes (see also Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992: 63 for a similar critique).
the text from the position of advocacy for women. An androcentric reading of the text that does not note the androcentric perspective engaged in, but rather accepts it as normative simply re-entrenches this perspective of the world. By reading against the normative vision assumed by both interpreter and the text, other possible interpretations of the text emerge, while effectively disclosing patriarchal ideology.

Patriarchy is not all pervasive, nor is it natural, and therefore irrevocable when one reads the a-familial pericopes of the Q (Quell or source) texts as challenging normative social relations in Palestine. Although Theissen will read the a-familial ethos of the Jesus movement in Palestine as indicative of itinerancy, Schüssler Fiorenza (1990: 145) argues that the idea of itinerancy is not implicit to Q texts, but rather belongs to Lukan redaction. Her reading of the a-familial texts (those pericopes that present Jesus as resisting family relations as definitive relation) p, a reading that keeps in mind the androcentric ethos of both Gospels and Q texts notes that Q represents Jesus as “destroying natural family bonds” when he separates with a sword, son from father, daughter from mother, and daughter-in-law from mother-in-law (Q 12:51, 12:53). The younger generation is removed from the authority of the older generation, but in this rhetoric of separation female relationships figure twice. Schüssler Fiorenza pays attention to both the issue that relationships of inherent power are under critique, and that women figure in a subordinate position in these relationships. She also notes the relationship of husband and wife is not addressed in this passage. In this, then, she understands that the hierarchical patriarchal family structure (father, mother, child, etc.) is directly under critique by Jesus, and in connection with this critique she suggests that a new system of kinship is proposed in the Q texts.

The new system proposed is one of equality, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, because, in
other passages, those relationships used to positively endorse social relationships, in direct contrast the negative figuring of the relationships above, are those of siblings and that of mother. Schüssler Fiorenza notes that in Mark 3: 31–35 father is not included among the community. She argues that “[t]he discipleship community abolishes the claims of the patriarchal family and constitutes a new familial community, one that does not include fathers in its circles...[i]nsofar as the new “family” of Jesus has no room for “fathers,” it implicitly rejects their power and status and thus claims that in the messianic community all patriarchal structures are abolished” (1990: 147). In her reading, then, patriarchy is demythologized. A reading against the androcentric grain demands that one pay attention to what is said about women and men and their social relations.

According to Schüssler Fiorenza, when the New Testament texts use as tropes social relations within the family they implicitly assume these relations are social and historical, otherwise why assume that these relations are in need of, or can be changed? According to Schüssler Fiorenza, patriarchy is not all pervasive when we read the texts as resisting the institution of patriarchy, and when we call into question and reject the “natural hierarchy” expressed by patriarchal family relations.

The critical and insightful results produced from a hermeneutics of suspicion allow for both a self-reflective and invested position of the interpreter while s/he deconstructs the power structures which infuse the writing, or the interpretation, of a text. A hermeneutics of suspicion reads ancient texts (as well as modern) as androcentric. It perceives that the glorification, the denigration, and marginalization of women are social and historical constructions produced in patriarchy. It perceives that the formal canons of codified patriarchal law are generally more restrictive than the actual social relations of men and women, and that one should pay attention
CHAPTER 4

211
to women’s economic autonomy and social roles in order to determine the actual statuses of women, instead treating prescriptive male texts, or ideological statements about women as representations of reality (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 108–109). It is a way to ascertain the history of women as women, and women in relation to their systemic oppression by patriarchal power structures.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics of proclamation in conjunction with a hermeneutics of suspicion allow her to open the text and interpret it anew while providing the potential for new readings for future generations of feminists. A hermeneutics of proclamation, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, insists that theologians not clothe patriarchal biblical texts in divine authority and proclaim them as the word of God. (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992: 69). A hermeneutics of proclamation not only evaluates “the androcentric dynamics inscribed into the structures of the text, it must also assess the sociopolitical contextualizations that determine how the “…text is read and heard today” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992: 69). Having demythologized patriarchy, Schüssler Fiorenza demands texts be read in regard to their implications for emancipation. If a text or a passage justifies oppression, such as a woman accepting brutality from her husband because she is to be humble and meek before her husband as he is God’s representative, then the text or passage should be read critically and in consideration of its tendency toward upholding systems of oppression. Therefore, 1st Timothy can be read as a text in support of the oppression of women and the interpreter, then, should critically analyze the text as to its ideological inclinations. 1st Timothy is read in light of the ideology it attempts to inscribe as normative in the text, and this ideology is assessed according to its sociopolitical context. 1st Timothy, in this instance, was not describing a practice, but if fact speaking against a practice of women speaking
out in public. If read from a feminist perspective this reading of the text emerges, if read androcentrically and its androcentric structures left intact, the text is read as if women were not authority figures within the movements and this lack of authority was sanction by God.

However, a hermeneutics of proclamation also demands that the Jesus myth as it is proposed by the biblical texts, and furthered elaborated by interpreters of the text, be subjected to a hermeneutical reading of suspicion and proclamation. Schüssler Fiorenza does do this on the level of content, i.e., making an explicit connection between the wisdom figure of Sophia in the Jesus movements, and the figure of Sophia, found in Gnosticism, which flourished within and alongside of the Christian missionary movements in the Graeco-Roman world, but neglects to do so on the level of form. The narrative forms which construct the figure of Jesus place him at the center of a narrative structure known as the “great man” narrative. In the “great man” narrative there is a founding father, a heroic male, whose wisdom and success will propel the subsequent communities toward the path of “truth.” The frequent figure, “the great man,” which haunts the history of Western discourse, cannot remain at the center of the historical narrative regardless whether he is human, semi-divine, or completely divine if one is doing a history from the ground up or a feminist history. The great man will always hold the centre and marginalize all other actors in the history. Further, if one is to work within the frame of Bultmann’s hermeneutics, dogmatic beliefs must be bracketed if one’s inquiry is to engender a reflective position. The reluctance to let go of belief hinders both one’s hermeneutical circle and one’s historiography. If historiography is done from the ground up, if the historiography is an attempt to locate and remember women, then placing Jesus and his myth at the center of one’s history is problematic. The dogmatic of both Jesus and Christ require bracketing in order that women truly take the
center of the stage. The androgynous figure of a Christ/Sophia, a figure that Schüssler Fiorenza finds in the Graeco-Roman world and relates to Palestine and the Jesus movements via the figure of Wisdom in the mythology of Judaism, is not sufficient in order to dislocate the “great man” narrative that remains at the center of her history of Christian Origins.

In Schüssler Fiorenza’s delineation of the history of early Christianity she does focus on women and analyses the text in relation to women. But always at the center of her inquiry is the figure of Jesus to whom women relate. The figure of Jesus is located at the center of the Jesus movements, while the figure of Christ is at the center of the Christian missionary movements. Although it would seem natural or appropriate that he is there, this naturalness is related to our expectation and acceptance of the “great man” narrative. The Jesus movements, as social movements, expressed their dissatisfaction with their social-historical circumstances via a legitimating rhetoric available to them at the time. This rhetoric consists of looking longingly back to a prehistorical natural state when only “God” disclosed the natural state of existence and all its subsequent elements, i.e., social relations or the distribution of goods (Mack, 1991; Arnal, 1997). This kind of rhetoric is both nostalgic—a pristine earlier time is interjected into the argument, and legitimating—one’s social view is underscored by the idea of divine justification. The people of the early Jesus movements were the actors and disseminators of what they believed to be true, and what they believed to be true was rhetorically ascribed to Jesus as a prophet of God or the son of God. This was their legitimating practice, and their narrative structure reflects their views.

The hermeneutical circle requires that one’s understanding of the past historical moment be delineated as one’s understanding of that moment and not retrojected back into the historical
field as an understanding implicit to those under study. When one seeks to understand those under study, focusing on the “great man” who is at the center of the narrative circumvents a historical understanding of the social and historical circumstances that prompted the rhetoric of the texts. Within this argumentative framework, one in which Schüssler Fiorenza indicates she participates, Jesus must be dislodged from his position as the “great man.” Belief requires bracketing in order that those who are marginalized in the text may themselves take centre stage. This means taking the risk of setting aside one’s theological beliefs, and if one is truly engaged in reclaiming a both early Christian history and Christian theology for women who participate in this religious practice, this risk is necessary. Women cannot share the stage with Jesus—at least not yet—because they do not yet have historical autonomy. Schüssler Fiorenza is aware of this problem but does not engage fully in challenging the narrative of Jesus as the “great man” narrative. She argues: “Its [feminist biblical hermeneutics] goal is not “identification with” or “consent to” the androcentric text or process of biblical reception but faithful remembrance of, and critical solidarity with, women in biblical history. In other words, it does not focus on text as revelatory word but on the story of women as the people of God” (1985: 140, author’s italics), and yet “Jesus is the initiator of the Jesus movement in Palestine, while Paul will not be the initiator of the Christian missionary movement in the Greco-Roman world (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 99). When Paul, who is human, is at the centre of the texts she has no problem relocating his position as merely one among many and then include women in this history. When Jesus, who is presumed to be God, is at the centre of the texts, he remains in front of, above, and ultimately more significant than any one of the others, male and female, in the early Christian history of Schüssler Fiorenza.
In the Christian missionary movements, which is narrated less as a history of Jesus the man/prophet/son of God, and more along the lines of a movement of peoples growing up around a myth, Schüssler Fiorenza does let go of Jesus as the founding father/great man since Paul has taken this position in the narrative of the Christian missionary movements in the Graeco-Roman world. The historical Jesus is subsumed by a Christ who is removed from the immanent world and therefore cannot act as the “great man” within the narrative as he has assumed complete divine status. This status is assured by the separation of the Jesus movements, as reflected in the Gospels, pre-Markan, special Matthew and Luke, and Q, from the Christ cult. This separation is not created by Schüssler Fiorenza, but rather is a product of the scholarship of early Christian Origins, and is something she engages when working within the parameters of Christian Origins. However, Schüssler Fiorenza does not question the separation between the Jesus movements and the Christ cult nor does she question what might be at risk if these two movements were delineated along different lines. Rather than understanding the plurality of the Jesus movements throughout Palestine, and in Jerusalem, as groups of people loosely linked and extrapolating different views, trajectories, and strategies, they are unified by Schüssler Fiorenza (and the majority of Christian origin scholars) into one group and seen as the propagators of the theology of circumcision and baptism. Set in juxtaposition to this group is the other group, now understood monolithically as those who were proponents of a theology of baptism only, the Christ cult (Christian missionary movements in Schüssler Fiorenza’s history of early Christianity). Neither of these groups existed as monolithic wholes, as the New Testament texts

---

14The term, Christ cult, is drawn from Burton Mack (1991).
clearly indicate (Acts, Galatians, Corinthians) but rather were enclaves of communities of people who sought to explain the world anew according to their own interpretation of that world in relation to the teachings of Paul and others. That the community in Galatia (Galatians 5) either practised circumcision or was seriously considering it is indicative of no one fixed group as the proponents of circumcision.\textsuperscript{15} Further, by not challenging the dichotomy established in circumcision/baptism (Jews) versus baptism (Gentiles), Schüssler Fiorenza leaves in place the anti-Jewish polemics that are inherent in the Christian delineation (past and present) of early Christian history.

3. Concluding remarks

Inherent to this structure of separation is a primary myth of Christianity. In this myth the Christianity that formed in Palestine is perceived as Jewish and the Jesus movements are understood to be active in Palestine with their center located in Jerusalem. This is the original movement. But according to the structure, as delineated in Acts and Paul’s letters, this founding group (the group has become one within the mythic narrative of Acts and in Paul’s letters) legitimates the Graeco-Roman groups, at least those affiliated with Paul. But the founding group

\textsuperscript{15}I am aware that Paul appears to be the main proponent against the necessity of circumcision, and that he had broken with a number of leaders, James, Peter, and Barnabas, over dietary restrictions in regard to eating with Gentiles. It is assumed from this (and Paul’s polemics), then, that these leaders, and others, would have extended the ritual of circumcision into Christianity, and that Paul resisted this (Crossan, 1998: xxv). However, I do not think the disagreements between Paul and a few others is indicative of two monolithic communities, one marked and one unmarked. The question of circumcision, for males, was possibly just that: if Jesus was a Jew (and circumcised) should I become one too (and get circumcised)? As this discussion gets extrapolated in the scholarship of the history of Christianity it established a division that separates those who remained Jews as Christians, and those who became “pure” Christian. Both the polemic here (triumphalism) and the dichotomy of the circumcised/uncircumcised (marked/unmarked or impure/pure and therefore different/same) require theorization.
continues to resist the inclusion of Gentiles as Gentiles (as expressed in table sharing), but if Gentiles are circumcised then they may join the movement. The Jerusalem group—the Jesus movement—is perceived as unwilling to expand the horizons of Christianity when it does not practice inclusiveness with Gentiles and instead adhere to the old standard of circumcision of Jewish law. This group has become archaic and is, in this, situated alongside of Judaism in its adherence to archaic ritual (Temple, and Torah), and, therefore, must be left behind. But those left behind are not forgotten, but rather the Jerusalem group is transformed into the figure of the twelve disciples which this is used as a symbolic foundation for Christianity. Their social-historical materiality has been superseded by the symbolic so that the myth of the Christian Origins can have two founding figures, Jesus (an extension of the myth of Jesus is found in his disciples) on one end and Paul on the other. Paul is legitimated through his connection to Jesus by his affiliation with, and acceptance by, the twelve, the original followers of Jesus, and by his acceptance of Gentiles, and refusal to circumcise,¹⁶ both of which Christian theological interpreters of the biblical texts locate with Jesus on the basis of Mark, Luke, and Acts. By maintaining this separation, a separation generated by the rhetorical strategy of Luke and Acts, which already supported Paul and his understanding of Christianity, and which has been maintained by a Christian theological impulse, Christianity can be deemed “new and improved” in relation to Judaism. What is at risk, then, is Christian theology’s self-understanding in regard

¹⁶Paul’s refusal to circumcise Gentiles, in Christian theology, is read as the inclusiveness of Gentiles as Gentiles in his Christianity, whereas circumcision is read as the desire to first make Christians Jews. This latter, then, is interpreted, within a Christian paradigm, as an act of exclusion and consequently understood to falsely overlay Jesus’ real intentions of inclusiveness for all people.
to both its autonomy and its relation to its parent, Judaism.

Although Schüssler Fiorenza will delineate the differences between these “two” movements not on the basis of context or background, but in terms of function. “Whereas the Jesus movement in Palestine was an alternative movement within Israel, the Christian movement was a religious missionary movement within the Greco-Roman world, preaching an alternative lifestyle” (1990: 101). She does not question the separation, but rather assumes its necessity. This mythic structure not only delegitimates Judaism as archaic, it is implicitly supported by, and supports, the “great man” narrative (Jesus). The separation of these movements in the ancient world which took Jesus as their founding figure creates a gulf between Judaism and Christianity, a gulf that takes on historical implications for the past and the future. The dismantling of this structure could well imperil current Christian understanding of the history of early Christianity wherein both a break and continuance with Judaism are maintained. The break is represented by the inclusion of Gentiles and the refusal to circumcise Gentiles, while the continuance is represented by the Jerusalem group’s sanctioning of Paul and his connection with them, for

---

17She does however, (1990: 73) in a criticism of Gager, note the problem of distinguishing between the Jesus movements in Palestine as rural and early Christian missionary movements as urban. Bultmann’s thesis of a Hellenised Christianity separated from a Jewish Christianity, which is later construed as rural versus urban, was largely accepted among scholars in Christian Origins, but is itself presently under criticism. Schüssler Fiorenza also challenges this dichotomy, but neglects to challenge the dichotomy between Jewish and Gentile Christianity. The dichotomous structure which allows for a dichotomous content remains, in her work, uncontested.

18Further, it is in the great man narrative that male lineage is legitimated and supported: God, Jesus, the twelve, and then Paul remain the historical trajectory of a true Christianity.
example, the sending of money and/or goods to the “church” in Jerusalem. The break allows Christianity to be perceived as different, and more progressive, than Judaism while the continuance allows for contact with the founding father and great man, Jesus.

In order to decenter Paul from the early Christian missionary movements Schüssler Fiorenza first must decenter Jesus as the “great man” who generated everything that followed: if she does not do this then Paul remains firmly placed at the center of the narrative of the early Christian missionary movements. In order to both resist the “great man” narrative and the myth of the two faces of Christianity a narrative structure that maintains a sharp divide between the early movements cannot remain unexamined as it supports the “great man” narrative and is itself supported by it. Beginning from the original male founder, and tracing lineage from his male disciples through to the male missionary, Paul, the line of legitimation is carried through male descendants. If women are to enter the history of early Christianity, if this history is to be done from the ground up, if a hermeneutics of suspicion engages all aspects of the Christian history/mythology, then neither Jesus nor Paul can remain at the center of the discourse. Women must be brought out from under the shadow of Jesus, the twelve, and Paul.

The Jesus myth with Jesus as the divine founder, the figure of Jesus and its engagement in the “great man” narrative, and the theological investment of maintaining two distinct groups of Christianity hampers and at times undercuts Schüssler Fiorenza’s writing of a feminist history of

---

19Jonathon Z. Smith’s argument runs on a similar trajectory as mine when he states (1990: 83): “The later studies have shifted focus to Jewish ‘backgrounds’. In this latter endeavour, Judaism has served a double (or a duplicitous) function. On the one hand it has provided apologetic scholars with an insulation for early Christianity, guarding it against ‘influence’ from its ‘environment’. On the other hand, it has been presented by the very same scholars as an object to be transcended by early Christianity.”
Christian Origins. Both these narrative structures (more of which will be said later in the section devoted to the Jesus movements) required critical analysis on the level of their historical utility (not only for women, but for those of the cultural-historical milieu under examination) and on the level of theological commitment: a commitment that continues to define Christianity as better than, and superior to, while holding to the belief that it is the final truth in a long history of human-divine relationships. According to Bultmann (who also was not very successful in setting aside his theological commitment), one’s beliefs must be bracketed in order to allow for the possibilities of the historical endeavour when doing a history of early Christianity. This does not mean a history which is objective and value neutral, nor that the interpreter is without pre-understanding. It does mean, however, working against the grain of one’s own prejudices and applying a hermeneutics of suspicion to one’s own perspective while engaging in a historical project from an invested position. The task is difficult, but possible. In Schüssler Fiorenza’s study of early Christianity she is at time successful in this endeavour, and at other times less so. However, both the successes and failures are valuable for those individuals interested in developing a feminist history of early Christianity.
CHAPTER FIVE

SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA AND FEMINIST MYTH AND HISTORY

Four primary strands of interdisciplinary academic work appear in Schüssler Fiorenza’s feminist Christian theology. Situated firmly in Christian Origins and critically respecting such methods utilized in the field, e.g., form, redaction, tradition, source, text, and rhetorical criticism (1990: 49), Schüssler Fiorenza will also employ an overarching hermeneutical approach, one that acknowledges the interpretation of historical texts so that the interpreter is located in the historical present and therefore conditioned by the demands of that present. But, at the same time, hers is a hermeneutical approach that attempts to be as free from preconceived understandings of the texts as possible (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 5–6). Having, drawn upon the work of Bultmann and Habermas in the area of biblical and philosophical hermeneutics in order to sharpen her hermeneutics of suspicion and critically locate her hermeneutics of proclamation, she will employ the methods of new historicism, and with this the work of Hayden White (MetaHistory, 1975), to undergird her method of a hermeneutics of liberative vision and imagination, and finally, feminist history in order that a feminist hermeneutics of remembrance is articulated.

1. New Historicism, Hayden White, and Schüssler Fiorenza’s History from the Ground Up: The Jesus Movement

When attempting to develop a history of early Christianity, the historical enterprise of holding to the foundational myth of a founding figure is implicitly an ideological endeavour that legitimates both the historical continuity of, and an originary moment for, Christianity. In this approach there is a desire to anchor the corpus of the New Testament and the oeuvre of Jesus, Jesus as an originating subject— an identifiable “I”—to a historical moment, but a moment
which will emerge from nowhere. In the argumentation of the historical Jesus and his genuine words (works) one sees both an impetus to anchor these words and an impetus to anchor the figure of Jesus. The Christian corpus (New Testament texts) without a great founding figure to hold it together shatters into mere fragments written by unknown authors while Jesus without a corpus fades into the realm of myth or the mundane. The Christian corpus without a founding figure and a founding figure without a corpus are historically undefinable:

These differences may result from the fact that an author's name is not simply an element in a discourse (capable of being either a subject or object, of being replaced by a pronoun, and the like); it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from, and contrast them with, other texts. In addition it establishes a relationship among the texts. Hermes Trismegistus did not exist, nor did Hippocrates—in the sense that Balzac existed—but the fact that several texts have been placed under the same name indicates that there has been established among them a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentication of some texts by the use of others, reciprocal explication, or concomitant utilization. (Foucault 1984, 107)

The phantom of Jesus and the unity of the Christian corpus continue to act as a rhetorical device wherein Christianity has a legitimate historical foundation, while the figure of Jesus acts as a standard for the truth. The notion of tradition and continuity founded upon an originating “I” and a concomitantly unified Christian corpus became the means, in the centuries that followed, by which Christianity dominated Western discourse. But the Christianity that dominates Western discourse is one manufactured by the winners of the historical endeavour as Schüssler Fiorenza has argued. In order to engage seriously the androcentrism and elitist history produced, she engages the theoretical imperatives of New Historicism, Hayden White, and feminist history. To the extent that she focuses on women in these texts as a marginal group she will fulfil these imperatives, but to the extent that she resists challenging the narrative structures of founding
figure as proof of an originary moment, and the historical continuity of Christianity which begins in this originary moment she will be less successful.

1.1 New historicism and the development of cultural history

In the separation of the writing of history and the writing of fiction (17th and 18th centuries), history’s discourse was elevated, raised above common discourse, and set apart. This setting apart allowed historiography to claim common ground with science and philosophy as a rational discourse\(^1\) since they share a common signifier—fact.\(^2\) In Western epistemology the word fact has replaced truth, as the word truth was problematised and understood to be ideological. Further, history was also conceptualized as different from the chaotic discourses produced by the irrational minds of most human beings. In this it was seen to be a controllable discourse with checks and balances. Michel de Certeau (1993:200) argues that:

> In its struggle against genealogical storytelling, the myths and legends of the collective memory, and the meanderings of the normal tradition, historiography establishes a certain distance between itself and common assertion and belief; it

---

\(^1\)Certeau succinctly argues (1988: 5): “Between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, what allows the seen body to be converted into the known body, or what turns the spatial organization of the body into semantic organization of a vocabulary—and vice versa—is the transformation of the body into extension, into open interiority like a book, or like a silent corpse placed under our eyes. An analogous change takes place when tradition, a lived body, is revealed to erudite curiosity through a corpus of texts. Modern medicine and historiography are born simultaneously from the rift between a subject that is supposedly literate and an object that is supposedly written in an unknown language.”

\(^2\)Horkheimer (1989: 153) succinctly names the conceptual apparatus behind the belief in fact and datum when he states: “Logically, thus unrestrained isolation of science rests on the hypostasis of the abstract concept of datum or fact. From Descartes on, only that which every individual could recognize as existing was to be accepted as such. Empiricism, however, by eliminating the subject has eliminated the critically discriminating factor, and has therefore obliterated all distinction between the concept of the datum and that of anything else, so that datum, fact, and object, merely seem to possess determinate meaning.”
locates itself in this difference, which gives it the accreditation of erudition because it is separated from ordinary discourse.

In the desire to insure the factuality of historiography, to legitimate its discourse via the epistemological field that ascertains credibility, science, historiography cut off fiction from its epistemic consciousness. Fiction, then, became the repressed in historiography. Fiction creates the world, mythology utilizes the narrative structures of fiction in order to make an authoritative statement about the world, while history simply records the facts about the world. In historiography both writing and reading were understood as apolitical and decontextualized from their present epistemic fields. In good history one did not interpret the datum. Rather the datum spoke for itself.

The repression of the fictional in historiography meant that necessary strategies to authenticate one’s epistemological position went unnoticed: strategies that included marking off boundaries between the past and the present, and a “them” (those who operate mythopoeically—the primitive mind set) and an “us” (civilized peoples). What marks humans off from their earlier, more “primitive” roots, and demonstrates the extent of their development

3“Mythopoeic” cognition, as theorized by its proponents, suggested that ancient and “primitive” humans did not utilize the scientific correlate of subject-object, nor was there a separation between society and nature. With humans securely located in nature, humans then were dependant upon cosmic forces. The basic relationship of humans to their environment was an “I”-“thou” relationship rather than an “I”-“It” relationship experienced by the modern human being. For an example of this theoretical position see Rudolf Otto’s text The Idea of the Holy (1929) while, for a discussion of ‘mythopoeic” thinking see H. And H.A. Frankfort (1977 [1946]: 3–30). My utilization of this kind of thinking, a thinking I would call wrong-minded, is to demonstrate the sharp distinction made between what was understood as history and myth and those who used this form of “explanation.” There is a certain amount of investment when one established one’s way of thinking over and against not just the past, but representatives of the past in the present—the primitive—in order to secure the foundation of one’s own mode of thought.
of civilization is their ability to conceptualize the world and its occupants as they “truly” are in reality. No longer deluded by mythology, but enlightened by reason, factuality, and objectivity humans could now stand at the end of history and were no longer enmeshed in its machinations. They could factually explain the world and the way those other (past and present) humans thought. They could enlighten the world as to the true nature of the world and existence. A final epistemology had been located, and no longer did the chaos of fiction and mythology threaten knowledge: they had been successively allocated to the province of the ancients, “primitives,” children, and the female.

This paradoxical procedure [historiography as a labour of death and a labour against death] is symbolized and performed in a gesture which has at once the value of myth and ritual: writing….It appears to me that in the West, for the last four centuries, “the making of history” has referred to writing. Little by little it has replaced the myths of yesterday with a practice of meaning….This practice of history is an ambitious, progressive, also utopian practice that is linked to the endless institution of areas “proper,” where a will to power can be inscribed in terms of reason. It has the value of a scientific model.” (Certeau, 1988: 5–6)

But the positivistic approach to history, an approach that ignored epistemic shifts in science which had occurred in the 20th century, but rather clings to the scientific models of the 19th century (Kramer, 1989: 100) was challenged. Historians such as Gerda Learner (1979), Judith Newton (1981), Natalie Zemon Davis (1975), Mary Beard (1946), Sheila Rowbotham (1973), Hayden White (1973) and Dominick LaCapra (1983), and philosophers of science and history such as Thomas Kuhn (1962) and Michel Foucault (1970) challenged the positivistic paradigm questioning such “givens” as the subject-object dichotomy, power, situatedness, gender, and the impossibility of an apolitical position on the part of the historian. Objective-value neutral history came under attack. These individuals, as well as a plethora of others,
questioned the possibility of a narrative, for that is historiography’s form, without interpretation, and if one acceded to interpretation, then one must also accede that interpretation is not objective and value-neutral. They questioned the possibility of facts and data which simply presented themselves to the historian, as if selection, a priori assumptions, political investment, and one’s relationship with the power structure at hand were irrelevant. Horkheimer argues that “[t]he facts which our senses present to us are socially performed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ” (1989: 201). Facts, in Horkheimer’s critical theory are first presented to us by our senses. They are not objects unto themselves, but rather exist as objects within our understanding. This understanding is a historical understanding, one that conditions both the objects and ourselves. The subject, then, is in dialectical relationship with the object rather than a dichotomous relationship. In the former relationship, the object is conditioned by human culture and history and exists only in relation to this condition, while in the latter relationship, the object stands in existence to itself outside of both history and culture.

This epistemic shift in historiography began with a move toward the social, wherein history was done from the “bottom up,” and/or structurally. Two dominant paradigms of explanation had influenced this shift in history from “great man” theories to a focus on the nameless masses, Marxism and the Annales. A social history influenced by Marxism did not focus upon, as in the more tradition histories, political leaders and institutions, but rather set its focus upon the social composition, and daily lives, of workers, women, servants, ethnic groups, etc. These are the people once considered unimportant to the historical endeavour (Hunt, 1989:1–2). The Annales utilized a structural method of inquiry, articulated by Fernand Braudel, a
central figure in the Annales school in the 1950s and 1960s, which “posited three levels of
analysis that corresponded to three different units of time: the structure or longur durée,
dominated by the geographical milieu; the conjoncture or medium term, oriented toward social
life; and the fleeting “event,” which included politics and all that concerned the individual”
(Hunt, 1989: 3). Marxism had always been interested in the economic and the social, but by the
end of the fifties and into the early sixties Marxist historical inquiry began to focus on a “history
from below.” Both schools of thought, however, began to shift toward culture inquiries in their
increased focus upon language. Philosophy of language, or semiotics, has affected a number of
disciplines as scholars began to recognize the dialectical relationship between language and
culture. Language was not just a product of culture, but had a share in the production of culture.

With this refocusing from the “social” to the cultural, with the realization of the semiotic
influence on culture, those scholars working within history began to question not only the
“object” of history’s inquiry, but also the production of its inquiry. Historical texts employed
narrative structures that were reflective of the historian’s own social-historical context: “the
number of strategies available to the historian for endowing events with meaning will be
coterminous with the number of generic story types available in the historian’s own culture”
(White, 1986: 488 in Kramer, 1989: 109). History was/is closer to fiction and fiction closer to
history than once thought. The repressed, fiction, had been brought to historical consciousness in
these kinds of historical inquiries.

It is the repressed of history that Schüssler Fiorenza will attempt to bring to conscious
through what she calls a hermeneutics of liberative vision and imagination wherein she seeks to
“actualize and dramatize biblical texts differently....[c]reative re-imagination employs all our

Hayden White’s theory of historiography argues that history has an explanatory structure. It seeks to provide a meaning—a “kind” of story, i.e., Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, or Satire, or to form an argument—the point of it all, what it adds up to, or the ideological implications—“a set of prescriptions for taking a position in the present world of social praxis and acting upon it (either to change the world or to maintain it in its current state)” (White, 1973: 7–29). These forms of explanation are extrapolated within narrative structures which create the form and define of the meaning of history, and are dependant upon generic story types which are meaningful to the historical period of the interpreter (historian).

Schüssler Fiorenza takes seriously White’s argument and applies it not only to the biblical texts, but to those writing histories about these texts. White’s arguments will support her argument concerning the patriarchal texts and those exegetes who have written without gender ideology in mind. The biblical texts and subsequent interpretations are “histories for” and not “histories of.” They have ideological import and seek to legitimate and preserve the ethos (patriarchal) presented in the original historical text and the ethos of those analyzing the text (patriarchal). Therefore, there is engagement on the level of the text itself and on the level of the interpreter of the text. Objective value-neutral history, then, cannot exist as neither the writer of the text nor interpreter of the text is disengaged from their worlds. They will draw upon known forms (generic story types) by which to communicate meaning in their social locations. This
argument further suggests that there cannot be a separation between historical facts and their interpretation. Historical discourse consists of a “combination of facts and meaning which gives to it the aspect of a specific structure of meaning that permits us to identify it as a product of one kind of historical consciousness rather than another” (White in Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984: 101).

1.2 Hermeneutics of liberative vision and imagination: New Historicism and Hayden White

Schüssler Fiorenza’s critical historical approach to the New Testament will mean taking into account several of the strategies employed by new historicism and Hayden White. These two approaches will often intersect and overlap in her work. Their concern to focus on the every day, to resist the “great man” narrative, to question the position of the writer or narrator of history, and the questioning of an objective-value neutral history connect these historical projects in Schüssler Fiorenza’s work.

Schüssler Fiorenza, like the scholars of new historicism, will write a history from the ground up and focus upon those in the Jesus movements who often remain unnamed. Positions concerning the possibility of objective value-neutral history or a historiography that ignores its own interpretive position while it examines facts and data that have “presented” themselves to the historian are questioned by Schüssler Fiorenza. In this delineation of early Christian history, Schüssler Fiorenza will, of course, focus on those historians who construct a social and historical world which will encapsulate the New Testament texts. She will insist upon understanding the texts in their sitz em leben or life setting, and although this is not new to historical criticism of biblical texts, Schüssler Fiorenza pays attention to the sitz em leben which means, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, rejecting an idealized Christianity and a genderless world (1990: xv).

Schüssler Fiorenza’s first step, then, is to critically examine the kinds of models
employed by scholars in order to interpret the biblical texts. In this endeavour she will critique theological positions for their lack of historical acumen. She further notes four models of biblical interpretation. The first is the doctrinal approach which takes literally the texts of the Bible understanding that they are divine revelation and canonically authoritative. The second is a positive historical exegesis which challenges the doctrinal interpretation (and in this reactive stance demands a scientism that denies its own subjectivity). Value neutral, objective inquiry is the necessary method for analyzing biblical texts. Although the realization of the impossibility of objectivity has made its way into this model of biblical interpretation, value-neutral interpretation continues to be considered good history. The third model is a dialogical-hermeneutical interpretation which includes in its method the concerns of the second model, but has incorporated the realization of the interaction between text and community and text and interpreter. In its dialogical concern, form and redaction criticism have been utilized in order to develop the social worlds of the texts, while its hermeneutical concern invokes the hermeneutical circle wherein the historian and her/his social location and preconceptions are engaged by the text so that her/his interpretation of the text is meaningful to the contemporary world. And finally, liberation theology which understands that the historian is politically and socially engaged, and therefore must approach the texts critically in order to assess their emancipatory potential. According to this method, history is an ideological endeavour and therefore engaged either for or against the oppressed (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 4–6).

These models are produced themselves from social-historical contexts, and reflect the exegete’s historical program which will often determine the results of the inquiry. For example, all four models explicitly or implicitly engage in explanation by ideological implication, but only
two are willfully conscious of this, liberation theology, and dialogical-hermeneutical interpretation. The kind of model chosen often reflects how one perceives the world. Models are not objects in existence. Rather, they are cultural constructions developed to make sense of the world so that in the instance of biblical interpretation, models that best express group ideology, and social-historical location will be employed in order to understand the texts meaningfully. If these texts are important to the dominant ideology, as certainly biblical texts have been and continue to be, then they will be understood within the paradigm most preferred by the dominant group. Currently, in the West, this has meant that the model known as positivist-historical exegesis has been the preferred model as it is understood to best re-present the truth of the text.

Opposition to this model, a model derived from Enlightenment thought which used reason as a device to determine truth value, exists. This model has come under scrutiny in the modern era by both postmodern and feminist theorists, although hermeneutics, throughout most of its history, has also resisted this model of knowledge (Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 8–12).

Schüssler Fiorenza will critique each of these models and problematise their perspectives. The first model, she indicates, tends toward literalism so that it denies that the texts could have been interpreted differently in the past, and asserts that there is conceivably only one interpretation in the present. For this group the tendency is to understand biblical texts as both inerrant and the word of God which means, then, that their position is incontestable. It refuses an academic discussion of the texts that utilizes a historical critical analysis, and therefore functions solely as theology, a rather rigid one at that. The second model, positivistic historical exegesis is problematic, indicates, Schüssler Fiorenza, simply because it assumes that there can be an object-value neutral analysis of historical data. The data exist as facts out there that can be assessed in
order to determine the reality of history. Schüssler Fiorenza (1990: 5) states that “[a]lthough this
scholarly detachment is historically understandable it is theoretically impossible.” According to
Schüssler Fiorenza, the third model, although useful, can fall prey to “conceptualizing the
situation of the early Christian communities too much in terms of a confessional struggle” (1990:
5), while last model, liberation theology, indicates Schüssler Fiorenza, has structural problems.
She indicates this model has often unwittingly served the political interests not of the religious
groups, but rather of the academy: in the attempt to sever its tie with ecclesiastical authority it
associated itself with the academy. As the academy is androcentric and understands the male as
the normative subject of scholarship, this position risks serving the interests of the status quo (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 6).

Schüssler Fiorenza, after pointing to the kinds of models traditionally used, the majority
of which are androcentric, then examines several feminist models of biblical interpretation that
belong to the liberation theological model. She analyses several models: feminist neo-orthodox
interpretation, feminist sociology of knowledge, and the model she constructs and chooses to
use, a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation.

In the neo-orthodox model she notes that Letty Russell, who makes use of this model,
engages in a search for the canon within the canon so that authentic interpretations can be found
in the biblical texts. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that, according to Russell and others who share
her feminist biblical method, “patriarchal imagery and androcentric language are the form but not
the content of the biblical message” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 15). Therefore androcentric
intentions, such as the subordination statements in Paul, are understood as “script” as opposed to
“Scripture” since they are “situation-variable.” The problem in this kind of interpretation,
according to Schütsler Fiorenza, is how “can content and language, form and essence be distinguished in such a way that historically contingent form becomes the mere container for its transhistorical, theological content or essence?” (1990: 16).

Rosemary Radford Ruether, Schütsler Fiorenza claims, also utilizes a feminist neo-orthodox model and, like Russell, assumes the texts can be gleaned separating the usable grain from unusable chaff (canon within the canon). Some texts, although androcentric and/or patriarchal, have attempted to subvert the dominant power structures for emancipatory reasons. These texts, the “prophetic-messianic traditions,” are unconsciously patriarchal, but because they speak against oppression can provide biblical legitimation for the emancipatory program of Christian feminists. They can be used to challenge and undercut hierarchal interpretations of the texts. Schütsler Fiorenza indicates that the difficulties with Radford Ruether’s development of the liberation theological model is that it ignores the social-historical locations of the texts. The prophet-messianic stories of the biblical texts are outgrowths of their own social historical present (when the actual events may have occurred) and the social historical aspects of the written texts themselves (when they were recorded, narrativised, and codified). She suggests that Radford Ruether idealizes the picture of biblical and prophetic traditions and overlooks the oppressive and androcentric tendencies of these traditions (Schütsler Fiorenza, 1990: 17).

Schütsler Fiorenza places Mary Daly in the feminist sociology of knowledge model and contends that feminists who utilize this model tend to reject all knowledge production thus far in human history judging this knowledge to be androcentric, patriarchal, and largely misogynistic. Therefore, the intention of knowledge generated within a patriarchal paradigm is to insure that the female (and in this all women regardless of social location) remains oppressed.
Consequently, this knowledge base not only employs androcentric language in order to engender this task, but is ideologically bent on oppressing women. Within this model, then, biblical texts, which are often the founding bedrock of patriarchal legitimation, must be rejected and women must find a new way of being: a woman’s way of being, which will generate new knowledge, a new vision, and new constructions of reality (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 22). Schüssler Fiorenza criticises this position on the basis that it leaves history behind. In the model that Daly employs, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, women must jettison human history thus far, must live on the boundaries of patriarchy, and must create their own environment. Change in the world at large is seen as hopeless and futile in Daly’s model. In order that women realize their power, they must step into the Background which is a sacred feminist space (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 26).

Schüssler Fiorenza’s names her model a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation. In this model she hopes to be able to reclaim Christian history without engaging in Christian apologetics. She situates herself within her analysis as a Catholic Christian feminist theologian who is seeking to reclaim the history of early Christianity for women. She rejects the possibility of a value neutral history and understands that she is politically engaged in her historical project. The history of Christian Origins that she writes is a history for Christian women which includes herself. The model she incorporates is one that locates itself in the contemporary project of emancipation. Its ideological implications are generated from a position in the present world of social praxis and theologically intent upon changing the world. Schüssler Fiorenza desires to dislodge and unseat patriarchy and has no desire to maintain its current state. “It [historical reconstruction and theological revisioning] is concerned not only with analyzing the historical oppression of women in biblical religion but also with changing the social reality of the Christian
One of the main subjects in her historical inquiry is the unnamed, or women, and in this then, Schüessler Fiorenza writes a history from the ground up. The history she indicates she compiles is largely focused on those in the early Christian movements who have been ignored, or whose individuality has been erased, i.e., since they are all the same, naming women is unnecessary. She will look at everyday men and woman who joined the Christian movements in their earliest years. For example, she will point out the often, but strangely overlooked, historical point that Paul did not found the Christian movements located outside of Palestine, but rather joined one. Paul certainly became important within the group, but he was neither its initiator nor its sole leader (Schüessler Fiorenza, 1990: 101).

In her model she also insists upon a social historical setting for the texts, but she will push this a little further and include the intentions behind the historical data itself so that biblical texts are seen to produce their own ideological intentions, e.g., the legitimation of patriarchal rule or the separation of Christianity from Judaism. She will include these and other such intentions in her analysis as aspects of its sitz em leben. For example, in the instance of the Jesus movement, she will continue the argument that its sitz em leben is the Hellenised culture of Jewish Galilee, but she will extend this argument to further contend that the Jesus movement functioned as an “inner-Jewish renewal movement.” In the instance of the “Christian missionary movement” associated with Paul, she will follow traditional scholarship, and situate it in the large urban centers of Syrian Antioch and in Asia Minor, but will again extend its sitz em leben to include an understanding of the Christian missionary movement as consciously functioning to
embrace a variety of different people who had different cultural experiences, national origins, social status, and “religious” practices. Schüssler Fiorenza’s position that life setting, and not just geographical setting, influences how movements take form allows her to differentiate the two movements according to their functions (as opposed to simply perspectives) and the challenges they faced (see Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 100–101).

Schüssler Fiorenza’s strategies for a reinterpretation of early Christian history are multiple. She will tie together the different strands of Christianity rather than interpret some as heretical, such as Gnosticism has been understood in the past. She will underscore and give significance to different characters in the texts, such as Mary Magdalene whom she places at the head of a Jewish renewal movement in Jerusalem and in direct competition with Peter as an apostolic witness and authority, and by doing this she extends her model toward an understanding of Christianity as multivalent. Christianity becomes Christianities which are made up of geographically and culturally diverse social movements. Christianity ceases to be a monolithic movement.

In an effort to demonstrate the possible discrediting of Mary Magdalene in biblical texts and by later historians Schüssler Fiorenza utilizes biblical texts such as *Pistis Sophia*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Mary*, biblical texts outside of the canon, to strengthen her argument. The tension between Mary and Peter is explicitly focused on in these texts, and Peter’s resistance to Mary as an apostolic witness and authority is understood to be located in his

---

4 As I have indicated there is a basic problem with separating into two large homogenous groups the various groups of people who participated, in whole or in part, in Jesus worship. However bracketing this concern, one notes that Schüssler Fiorenza will extend the boundaries of this theoretical position.
CHAPTER 5

misogyny: "My Lord, we shall not be able to endure this woman, for she takes our opportunity and has not let any of us speak, but talks all the time herself" (Pistis Sophia in Schüssler Fiorenza, 1979: 53). Utilizing non-canonical sources in order to challenge the early Christian social history which was developed primarily through the use of canonical texts that assumed little or no contestation or competition in regard to the authority allocated in Peter means that Schüssler Fiorenza has been able to problematize the traditional perception of early Christian communities, and demonstrate that Christianity rather than a monolithic movement, consisted of diverse movements which were, at times, in contention with each other. Further, she will push the analysis beyond this and focus on the political intention expressed in a gender ideology and suggest that "[w]hereas egalitarian groups trace their apostolic authority to Mary Magdalene and emphasize that women as well as men have received the revelations of the resurrected Christ, patristic authors pit the authority of Peter against Mary Magdalene" (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 54).

Finally, Schüssler Fiorenza’s model feminist critical hermeneutics of interpretation will approach the New Testament as a prototype and not an archetype. She explains that as an archetype the text is understood as an idealized model and in this conception it is fixed, unchanging, inflexible, and timeless. A prototype, however, is a beginning. It too is a model but one that insists upon change and transformation for the term itself denotes fluid conception which is meant to instigate thought rather than halt it and in this, then, is historically located. She indicates, following Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1975) that, “thinking in terms of prototype historicizes myth” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 33). She reconceptualizes the object of her study and in so doing reconceptualizes her own project to stand within a similar framework: biblical
texts are no longer understood to be the last word on Christianity, so too, then, her historical
reconstruction of early Christianity is not the last word. Further, Schüssler Fiorenza’s generic
story type, in one breath, acknowledges the fictive that underscores the narrative structure of the
historical. Her generic story type, in part, resists archetypal structures (Romantic, Tragedy,
Comedy, and Satire) and instead opts for a story that understands both its narrative and the texts
it seeks to analyze as prototypes, or “original model forms on which to base the self and its
action—forms open to transformation, and forms, unlike archetypes, that offer similar patterns of
experience to others, rather than imposing these patterns on others” (Blau DuPlessis, 1975: 219,
authors italics).

By utilizing data and sources that are not considered normative, by locating the texts in a
social milieu and extending that milieu to include life praxis, by reconceptualizing both oneself
as a subject in the study, and one’s object of study, by acknowledging and developing the fictive
in the “real,” and working history from the ground up focusing on those people once considered
of little importance to early Christian history, Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutics of liberative
vision and imagination extend the boundaries of early Christianity to include the many nameless
people who contributed to the founding and development of these movements, people who were
often women. However, as Schüssler Fiorenza develops a narrative structure by which to
historically locate the Jesus movements in Galilee and Palestine, her narrative structure shifts to a
Romantic story type which locates Jesus as a heroic figure at the center of the history and not, for
example, those people who wrote the texts of Q.5 According to White (1976: 8–9) “[r]omance is

5 I say this even in light of Schüssler Fiorenza’s awareness that frequently Christologies take
this form. She refers to these kinds of Christologies as “liberal enlightenment” and notes that
fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it and his final liberation from it ... it is a drama of the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness, and the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall.” The people who provided the texts of Q, the Gospels, and New Testament writings were addressing their own social-milieu and responding from their own epistemic positions. When Jesus is placed at the center of all movements, when the great man is given all the good lines, all those “other” actors are erased from the historical record. By holding onto the Christian theological imperative of Jesus Christ as the son of God, Schüssler Fiorenza loses sight of the historical foundations of those people who founded the Christian traditions. The intentions she aspires to, that of a history from the ground up, one that is distinctly aware of the legitimation practices found in texts, and an awareness of narrative strategies (all of which are related in her lengthy delineation of her methods and theories), are not fully realized in her treatment of those texts most closely associated with the Jesus movements in Palestine. The next part of this chapter will examine the problematics of Schüssler Fiorenza’s history of those she locates nearest to Jesus: the Jesus movements in Palestine.

they often depict Jesus as an “exceptional, individual hero, or true religious genius to be imitated [and] in turn have resurrected the “divine man” of ancient Greece who is always male, autonomous, and defiant, and stands beyond all human limitations” (1995: 18). Although she has no desire to depict Jesus in such a fashion—always male, autonomous etc.,—she does locate the origin of egalitarian praxis in him. It is Jesus whom she sees as evincing this model of behaviour (therefore transcending the culture around him), a model which his followers were then to emulate.
1.3 The Jesus Movements

The explorations of this book have two goals: they attempt to reconstruct early Christian history as women's history in order not only to restore women's stories to early Christian history but also to reclaim this history as the history of women and men (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: xiv).

The term "Jesus Movement" which Schüssler Fiorenza uses to describe the groups that surrounded/followed the protagonist of the four gospels she has taken from Gerd Theissen (1978) who differentiated between the Jesus movements in Palestine and the Christian missionary movements of the Graeco-Roman world (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 73). In order to describe and interpret the gestalt of the Jesus movements she will draw upon Q (30—65 CE), the synoptic saying source which was used by the authors of Matthew and Luke,7 Mark, the gospel considered by some to be the earliest (70 CE), pre-Q materials, pre-Markan materials, materials drawn from special traditions used by Matthew and special traditions by Luke, and finally the earliest strata found in John (1990: 103). The development of her argumentation for an inclusive early Christianity means that she will utilize particular narrative strategies, engage with the historical material from a particular perspective, and develop a social context she argues is more true to history. In this argumentation there are problematics that undercut the new historicism mandates, mandates of which she draws upon in order to support her own work. In the following section I

---

6I wish to thank William Arnal for our many discussions concerning Q, his recommendation of reading materials, and his invaluable comments on this chapter itself.

7Although the term "saying source" suggests orality, John Kloppenborg convincingly argues against the idea that Q was originally oral and, after a time, written down. He points out that four considerations argue against an oral Q and point to a written Q: "the presence of strong verbal agreements of Matthew and Luke, the use of peculiar or unusual phrases by both evangelists, agreements in the order of Q pericopae and the phenomenon of doublets" (Kloppenborg, 1987: 42).
CHAPTER 5

will address some of these difficulties.

From the outset Schüssler Fiorenza indicates that she will approach the above-mentioned sources as “remembrances” (1990: 103) of both Jesus and the Jesus movements in Palestine. The implication of the term remembrances, however, invokes less of a sense of history and more of a sense of recalling past events, a remembering of experiential moments which held great significance. In the use of the term remembrance, then, Schüssler Fiorenza rhetorically evokes a sense of closeness to both Jesus and those who followed him. By closely approximating these sources with Jesus, Schüssler Fiorenza plays upon an implicit assumption: that the closer a group or source is to the founding moment, in this instance Jesus, the more authentic. Although she does indicate that authenticity is not invoked in order to separate Jesus from his followers or from Israel (1990: 121), what she does do when she invokes this sense of authenticity via proximity to Jesus is legitimate her perspective of Jesus and the Jesus movements. If the sources can, by inference, demonstrate a direct linkage to Jesus, and following this, if her interpretation works logically with these sources, then her interpretation is legitimized simply through the inferred direct connection back to the founding moment and figure.

This kind of strategy has been enacted before in the Protestant critique of the Catholicism. During the reformation the rising Protestant movements utilized the scriptures in order to counter Catholicism’s underscoring of post-biblical traditions “as equal in importance for Christian faith and practice” (Mack, 1993: 17). Mack (1993: 17) goes on to point out that under the impetus of Enlightenment thinking new strategies were developed wherein Protestantism sought to demonstrate that the historical development of Catholicism moved away from the original intentions of Jesus and his earliest followers. It employed truth texting in order
CHAPTER 5

to legitimate its own break from Catholicism while devaluing Catholicism’s interpretation of Christianity. Protestantism’s interpretation of the biblical texts got to the truth of Christianity. Schüssler Fiorenza, in her rhetoric of “remembrances” engages this same strategy in order to undercut the political authority of the modern day papacy. Patriarchy is understood, in her work, as an overlay on the original intentions of the earliest movements, therefore Catholicism, in its historical development, has fallen away from these original intentions. These original intentions are then located in the “remembrances.” Similar to the argumentative frame used by Protestantism against Catholicism, then, Schüssler Fiorenza will insist that the patriarchal papacy has moved away from the original intentions of Jesus and his early followers, intentions she has ascertained. It would seem that her theological intentions have overridden those of new historicism. A history from the ground up seeks to engage with historical subjects who have been overlooked rather than theologically engage in “truth” texting.

One of the main tenets of Schüssler Fiorenza’s reconception of Christian Origins is the egalitarianism practiced by both Jesus as founder and the Jesus movements as his followers. She does this through a succession of arguments founded upon her interpretation of these texts. She will first stress that “[t]he earliest gospel strata assert again and again that Jesus claimed the *basileia* [kingdom] for three distinct groups of people: (1) the destitute poor; (2) the sick and crippled; and (3) tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes” (1990: 122, author’s italics). She further argues that as this is one of the earliest and most repeated statements, it therefore must be an authentic theological imperative: “God called not Israel’s righteous and pious but its religiously deficient and its social underdogs” (1990: 130). Consequently it must be a founding concept of Christianity since it was “historically”—a history invoked though memory—and geographically
closer to the founding figure of Jesus. That this imperative has been overlooked throughout most of Christian history is a product of, as Schüssler Fiorenza argues, patriarchal oppression which found its way into Christianity through the Christianity of the Christian missionary movements (i.e., Pauline and post-Pauline churches), and the development of the Church into a monolithic orthodoxy legitimated by, and in mimesis of, the Roman hierarchical state. She argues (1993: 224) “an historical analysis can show that this model of patriarchal church is more determined by Roman imperial structures than by the Christian vision of the discipleship of equals.” This model she will name a “Constantinian Roman Patriarchal Model of the Church” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993: 226).

Situating her argument in this understanding of Christianity, Schüssler Fiorenza is able to argue that as Jesus included the poor, sick, tax collectors, prostitutes etc., then his vision of the new kingdom (basileia) must have been egalitarian, or at least can be read as representative of this impulse in these earliest sources. And if the Jesus movements in Palestine followed the praxis of Jesus, then they too must have practised egalitarianism. For example she states “The Jesus movement articulates a quite different understanding of God because it had experienced in the praxis of Jesus a God who...” (1990: 130). Aside from the problematic of assuming Jesus was a god, she ascertains that the egalitarianism of the Jesus movements via their association with their founder, and then opens up egalitarianism to include women because: a) the group as egalitarian, if truly egalitarian, would include women, and b) if Jesus meant to include the marginalized “tax collectors and sinners” (Q 7: 34) then women must have been among this

---

8References to the Q text will be designated by Q and the passage number which is paralleled in the Lukan text unless I am directly quoting an author.
group. Although such an extension of the argument is problematic, she attempts to support this interpretation by demonstrating that women were frequent figures in the saying sources and healing stories, e.g., Q 13:21 and Luke 13: 10–17, and that women in these texts numbered among the listeners (Luke 11: 27 [Q?]\(^9\)) and followers (Mark 15: 40-41). Patriarchy, then, is not implicit to Jesus and those who truly followed his example, but rather belonged to the social milieu and in this assumes that Jesus and his followers were unaffected by their context. This kind of argumentation evinces three problems: 1) it assumes Jesus transcends (because he is God?) his social-historical context and is able then to lift his followers from their social-historical context; 2) it is an instance of demonstrating the true intentions of Jesus and how the Church has gone astray; 3) and finally, engages in the Romantic narrative wherein there is “fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero’s [Jesus and through him his followers] transcendence of the world of experience [patriarchy], his victory over it and his final liberation from it….it is a drama of the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness, and the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall” (White, 1976: 8–9).

1.4 Egalitarian Jesus movements versus cultic Judaism

Another difficulty one notes in Schüssler Fiorenza’s history of early Christianity is how she delineates the egalitarianism of the Jesus movements. Through a succession of arguments, 

---

\(^9\)According to a personal communication with William Arnal, it is uncertain if Luke 11:27 is Q since it does not obviously demonstrate a double tradition (parallels in both Matthew and Luke). However, a variation of the text is found in Matthew and consistency in the ordering that mark some kinship with Luke do argue for this passage to be included as a Q text. The IQP project voted to include this passage as Q text.
each built upon the other, Schüssler Fiorenza attempts to prove that Jesus and the Jesus movements were egalitarian. There is a necessity to demonstrate the egalitarianism of Jesus and the Jesus movements in her work largely because this allows her to argue that women were important to, and participated in, the movements, and that their presence in these movements was desired both by Jesus and some of his male followers. If she can substantiate this, then Jesus is neither misogynistic nor patriarchal, but rather understood patriarchy or the male rule of women as another manifestation of oppression. This will ultimately, then, allow her to restore Christianity to its female adherents. However, in the development of both the egalitarianism of Jesus and the Jesus movements, Schüssler Fiorenza runs the risk of depicting Judaism as a negative and archaic model of religion when juxtaposed with early Christianity, and forcing an interpretation upon the Q texts that ignore both their rhetorical strategies and their own sitz im leben.

When Schüssler Fiorenza seeks to establish the egalitarianism of the Jesus movements both in Palestine (this is the Jesus movement she associates with Q, see 1990: 129; 131; 134–136; 142) and in Galilee (this is the pre-Markan Jesus movement, see 136; 142) she juxtaposes these movements with their Jewish contexts. She understands the Jesus movements as “renewal movements” (1990: 107) in Judaism and in this, then, suggests that these movements were attempting to bring about a change in Judaism. One might wonder why it should be historically assumed that Judaism was in need of a renewal?

In an effort not to take up an anti-Semitic line of argumentation, one that ignores the

---

10 Luise Schottroff (1995: 8) indicates that Schüssler Fiorenza has adopted the concept of the Jesus movement as a Jewish renewal movement from Gerd Theissen (1978).
Jesus movements’ obvious affiliations with Judaism, Schüssler Fiorenza’s locates the Jesus movements (those associated with Q and the pre-Markan group) inside of Judaism. This she understands is not only historically more correct, but also reduces the risk of an unconscious anti-Judaism creeping into her work. She indicates that: “To speak about the Jesus movement is to speak about a Jewish movement that is part of Jewish history in the first century C.E.…historical reconstructions of Christianity over and against Judaism can be continuing resources for Christian anti-Judaism…” (1990: 105). However, as she locates the Jesus movements inside of Judaism, then they must be responding to Judaism on some level. The level she will delineate is one that construes Judaism as cultic and the Jesus movements as anti-cultic. This may nor appear problematic, except when we understand what cultic implies in her delineation of the “renewal” aspect of the Jesus movements.\(^\text{11}\) The cultic appears as traditional, something of the past, and belonging to that past. As different Jewish renewal movements sought to “realize in every aspect of life the obligations and hopes of Israel…….the Jesus movement refused to define the holiness of God’s elected people in cultic terms, redefining it instead as the wholeness intended in creation” (1990: 113). The narrower, more traditional cultic practices are archaic in light of the changing world. Therefore, the Jesus movements in their new approach of “inclusiveness”—which meant not working within a paradigm of the world which included cultic practices—would attempt to take Judaism into the new world. This inclusiveness included what

\(^{11}\) Luise Schottroff also finds the concept of the Jesus movement in Judaism as a “renewal movement” problematic. She argues: “I find the concept “renewal movement” unsuitable because it may suggest that the Jesus movement sought to overcome false and abusive situations within Judaism rather than have at heart the suffering of the Jewish people, which Rome caused by its political and economic oppression” (1995: 8).
Judaism excluded, the ritually unclean: a designation that works only inside a framework of cultic practices. Therefore, Judaism, in its lack of inclusiveness, was in need of renewal and it would be the Jesus movement which attempted to bring about this renewal. They introduced the notion of inclusiveness to Judaism, a notion that Judaism resisted (Schüller Fiorenza, 1990: 129–130):

The stories assert, then, that Jesus and his movement invited into their table community not only women but even notorious and well-known sinners. Sinners, prostitutes, beggars, tax collectors, the ritually polluted, [my italics] the crippled, and the impoverished—in short, the scum of Palestinian society—constituted the majority of Jesus’ followers…but how could Jesus have been a prophet of God, and his movement a prophetic movement in Israel making the basileia experientially available, when this inclusiveness ran counter to everything previously thought to be the will of God revealed in Torah and Temple?

The patriarchal god of Abraham is set in juxtaposition to the inclusive God of the Jesus movements. Understanding God as the patriarchal God of Abraham is seen as archaic because this God requires cultic activity, and cultic activity defines the boundaries between those who are in and those who are out. According to Schüller Fiorenza, the Jesus movements were not cultic and in fact anti-cultic, and any cultic activity (death of Jesus as atonement of sins) which was introduced into Christianity came later with those movements (Christian missionary movements in the Graeco-Roman empire know as the “Pauline” churches) geographically removed from the place of Jesus’ perceived ministry in Palestine and Galilee (see Schüller Fiorenza, 1990: 130). Judaism, in Schüller Fiorenza’s delineation of these Jesus movements, was archaically attached to cultic or ritual activities which excluded groups of people and in this marginalized them. This marginalization was due to an attachment to the archaic practices associated with Temple and Torah. Here is the place where Judaism required renewal: its practices of exclusion were
theologically archaic and in need of change.

A further problem evinced in this line of reasoning is rather than understand the Jesus movements as social movements in response to social issues, Schüssler Fiorenza understands these movements as religious movements responding to the religion of Judaism. This is highly problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it reifies Judaism interpreting Judaism as if it was monolithic and homogenous, which it certainly was not. This flattening out of Judaism neglects the various historical groups within Judaism that were arguing for alternate forms of practice such as the Pharisees or the Essenes. Although she points to these differing groups within Judaism and locates the Jesus movements among them (1990: 112–113), these movements continued to adhere to Temple and/or Torah practices which by their very cultic concern excluded the most important group—within the logic of her own theology—the marginalized and therefore the oppressed. Normative Judaism then, is defined by Temple and Torah practices and in this is reified into a monolithic religion called Judaism: “None of the stories told by or about Jesus evidences the concern for ritual purity and moral holiness so typical of other groups in Greco-Roman Palestine. While Jesus shares their vision of Israel as the “elect people and nation of Yahweh” (Exod. 19: 5f), he does not share their understanding that the “holiness” of Temple and Torah is the locus of God’s power and presence” (1990: 120).12

12Although Schüssler Fiorenza does seem to be aware of the risks of interpreting the Jesus movements as renewal movements which focused upon undercutting the cultic imperatives of Temple and Torah, she addresses these risks but indicating that Jesus and “his” movements did not reject the Temple and Torah but rather provided an “alternative interpretation of them by focusing on the people itself as the locus of God’s power and presence . . . cultic practices must not be set over and against humanizing praxis” (1990: 120). However, her attempt to negotiate these risks are negated in the moment that she assumes that Judaism is in need of renewal because of certain beliefs held by various Jewish groups such as the Sadducees and Pharisees.
By understanding Judaism as reified whole religion, one that is unwittingly attached to an archaic belief in God, Schüssler Fiorenza does an injustice to both Judaism and the Q texts. Judaism, at this time, was not a unified and seamless religion centred upon Temple and Torah practices. Many Jews lived in the diaspora, while Jews in Galilee and Palestine did not live in close approximation to the temple. Judaism, as demonstrated by many scholars, consisted of diverse groups of people who called themselves Jews and practised according to their understanding of Judaism. My point is not to undervalue the Temple nor the Torah as “the Jews took what they had, ancestral traditions and the privilege of practicing a local cult, and constructed from them a complex, self-sustaining society” (Mack, 1991: 28–29), one that allowed them a measure of self-government under the rule of such conquerors as the Persians, Greeks, Ptolemies, Seleucids and Romans. And aside from the measure of self-government, the claim to ancestral traditions ensured that both the Temple and the Torah were significant symbolic and social factors for Jews both in and outside Judea. But this neither precludes diversity nor insures that the Temple and Torah were an exclusive definitive factor of Judaism as a religious practice.

The Temple, however, will become an exclusive and definitive factor for the Gospels of the New Testament. The writers and redactors of the Gospels understood the destruction of the

This is further problematized when these beliefs are then refracted back on Judaism so that it is understood as a unified religion, unified in its adherence to Temple and Torah.

13 Schüssler Fiorenza is aware that there is no such thing as “normative” Judaism at this time (1990: 109). However, her argument for the Jesus movements as renewal movements in Judaism, renewal based on its anti-cultic position, must presuppose just that. When one is renewing, there is something already in place which requires renewal. It represents the normative while the “renewal” operates as the extraordinary.
Temple as a signifier of the negative judgement of God on Judaism. Although Schüssler Fiorenza certainly does not understand the destruction of the Temple in such obvious polemical terms, she does negatively view cultic practices as the willful exclusive of marginalized people, and associates cultic practices with Temple and Torah which inadvertently locates her argument in association with this view of the Temple destruction: a view that is picked up in Christian polemics and used against Judaism down through Christian history (see Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 12). Jesus and “his” movements are evinced in the Gospels as anti-cultic or at least in criticism of it. In the Gospels the anti-cultic gains significance simply because these texts were written after the destruction of the Temple and the destruction of the Temple—cultic practices—becomes definitive, for late Christians, of Judaism’s theological error and God’s negative judgment on that error. When Schüssler Fiorenza connects cultic practices with systems of oppression, in that they generate kinds of behavior which marginalize particular groups of people (the poor, women, the sick, and sinners), and as theologically archaic and therefore theologically in error, she too develops a history of Christian Origins in light of the destruction of the Temple. By implicitly connecting elitism, exclusivity, and patriarchalism with cultic practices delineated by the Temple and Torah, and by associating Temple and Torah practices with a religion called Judaism she negatively judges Judaism as theologically deficient. Moreover, she does so in a way that is nearly identical in form with a fairly typical Christian theological condemnation of Judaism: it wasn’t big enough, it wasn’t broad enough, it wasn’t inclusive enough because the Jews clung to outmoded ideas. This, of course, is not a historical assessment, but a theological assessment, a problem if one is attempting to write a history of early Christianity. The Jesus movements of Palestine and Galilee did not judge Temple and
Torah as oppressive. Rather, they were in competition with the Pharisees and Sadducees.

1.5 The community of Q as a Jesus Movement

Q, as both text\textsuperscript{14} and a social-historical group, is erased when Schüssler Fiorenza utilizes it in her development of Christian Origins. Q as text, demonstrates both a rhetorical strategy and argumentative structure that define it as an autonomous text. Although stratified, and in this suggesting a succession of writings from different times and possibly people throughout its entire writing, Q does not appear to be a compilation of sayings gathered together and then used by Matthew and Luke as a source for the authentic sayings of Jesus. Each of its successive layers demonstrates a coherency of rhetoric. For example, in the first layer of Q the argument concerning mercy and justice (Q 6:36–42) moves from a general statement about ethical behavior to the specific argument about ethical behavior in an ever tightening spiral to the center where the individual’s behaviour, rather humanity’s, is under examination. The rhetorical strategy gathers the reader in by opening with a general positive statement about mercy and then winds her/him in with a negative statement about judgement (“Be merciful”), to an imperative statement assertively declaring the argument (blind leading the blind), to a pragmatic statement that demonstrates the argument (a disciple who does not know more than his teacher), and finally to an emphatic statement about how best to achieve justice (“Hypocrite! Remove first from your eye the log, and then you will see clearly to cast out the speck…the eye of your brother”).

\textsuperscript{14}Throughout my work with biblical texts, when I refer to historical activity located therein, I am working with a history that has been written and narrated within the text itself, and not some abstract history that exists beyond its boundaries. I do this in order to avoid New Testament arguments about what is real history versus mythology and fiction in these texts. To engage in this argument I would have to involve myself in another thesis, one contextualized in the field of Christian Origins.
developments of both style and argumentation in Q do not argue for an understanding of it as a compilation of oral sayings remembered by the followers of Jesus. This position simply ignores the textuality of Q itself. But Schüssler Fiorenza will frequently employ the Q text as if it is simply a compilation of oral sayings saved by the followers of Jesus. For example when she states “while Q already claims the beatitudes for the Jesus community” (1990: 122) she implies that these blessings found in the Q text are the remembered words of Jesus written down at a later date. Or she will say (1990: 127) “Jesus’ movement and praxis included everyone….this historical praxis is reflected in the Markan (2:15) and Lukan (15: 2b) redactional overlay as well as in the Q tradition (Matt 11:19; Luke 7: 4).” Q, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, “are probably the earliest historically available accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus and of his followers’ interaction with him, they, nevertheless, are interpreting and interpreted remembrances of Jesus” (1990: 103, author’s italics). As remembrances Q ceases to be texts unto themselves, texts which were attempting to speak to their own social-historical context. Throughout her text, Q as remembrances are implicitly, and at times explicitly, interpreted by Schüssler Fiorenza as the words of Jesus.\textsuperscript{15} The text of Q as the writings of groups who were critically assessing and challenging the social world of their own horizons is erased.

\textsuperscript{15} Another example is: Q 14:16–23 which she interprets to mean: “Not the holiness of the elect but the wholeness of all is the central vision of Jesus. Therefore his parables…”(1990: 121). In the Q passage both the vision and the parable are produced by the Q community. One cannot assume that here are the authentic words of Jesus. Within the Q documents Jesus acted as a legitimating figure for the expression of their ideas. Or, again, “[t]he Jesus movement articulates a quite different understanding of God because it had experienced in the praxis of Jesus…”(1990: 130). In this instance what one sees by locating the ethos of the Q movement with Jesus, is the erasure of their own critical assessment and their subsequent written responses to this oppression.
The social and political climate that prompted the writing of Q is a complex scene wherein the stakes were high and often the game unnamed. Herod, was a client-king of Rome, and ruled over the entire area of Palestine and Judea until 4 B.C.E. Throughout the time of Hasmonean rule and under the rule of Herod Galilee was ruled and taxed by Sepphoris. In the gap between Herod’s death and the rule of Antipas there was a movement in Palestine toward asserting independence from Herodian and Roman rule. This movement was severely put down by the Romans, and in Galilee, according to Josephus, Sepphoris was razed, and the inhabitants enslaved (Josephus in Horsley, 1995: 62).

Although the archaeological data does not support Josephus’ narrative of the story, it is probable that the villages surrounding Sepphoris (often where “brigands” hid and lived) were razed and the villagers enslaved (Horsley, 1995: 62). The Romans, having reasserted their control of Palestine, divided Herod’s realm among his sons. With the division of Herod’s kingdom into three districts, Antipas was put in charge of Galilee and Perea. No longer sharing the weight of Herod’s building projects and expressions of status with the rest of the realm, Galilee and Perea took the full weight of Antipas’ building projects and self-aggrandizement which included the building of the new administrative centre, Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee. Tiberias, however, was clearly associated with Roman rule, while Sepphoris had stronger economic and social attachments to the Temple and priests in Jerusalem. This meant that the villagers and peasantry of Galilee supported two rivalling administrative centres both of which were large centres of consumption and a heavy burden for those in Galilee. That Tiberias was located on the Sea of Galilee meant that its chára, or the agricultural area used for the city’s consumption, could significantly be expanded as water transportation was considerably less
costly than land transportation (Arnal, 1997). This increased the pressure put on the peasantry of Galilee.

In 39 C.E. Antipas was deposed and Herod Agrippa I took over control of Galilee. By 41 C.E. he was also in control of Judea and Perea. Herod Agrippa I, who spent most of his time in Rome when he ruled Galilee, set up a seat of administration in Caesarea after he gained control of Judea and Perea. By 43 C.E. Herod Agrippa was dead and a series of procurators were implemented in order to control Galilee, Judea, and the surrounding areas. The frequent changes experienced in the power structure, the heavy taxes levied in order to support not just Rome, but Rome’s client-king and/or procurators, and taxes procured by those in the internal governmental structures of Galilee, Judea, etc. which saw to the maintenance of their own social institutions in the cities and in Jerusalem, created a situation of dissatisfaction and poverty.\textsuperscript{16}

To further complicate this problem, the concentric circle of political control began to tighten when Antipas was placed in direct control Galilee. Under Antipas, and with the building of Tiberias, a tight control of Galilean economics was effected. People were overtaxed and lost their land and livelihoods. They became indebted to the rich for they had used their land to secure their debts, and lost their land when unable to repay these debts. When the direct control of Galilee was loosened after the death of Antipas, taxation systems in place continued to function under Herod Agrippa.

\textsuperscript{16}William Arnal (1995: 485, n.54) indicates that he questions whether the Roman taxes were responsible for this trend as there is “very little indication that the Roman tax burden was significantly more onerous for the peasantry than the arrangements prior to Pompey’s conquest.” However, the effect may in fact have been accumulative and after many generations one finds large land-holdings and fewer and fewer small land-holdings. This situation may have reached a crisis in the first century C.E.
Although Herod Agrippa did not locate himself in Galilee (he was in Caesarea in northern Judea), but he continued to utilize Tiberias in order to secure taxes from Galilee. Several decades after his death (44 C.E.), the Jerusalem high priestly government, after the outbreak of the revolt in 66 C.E., asserted their control over Galilee and sent their representatives, the Pharisees and Scribes, into Galilee to maintain the taxation mechanisms already in place (Tiberias and Sepphoris) (Horsley, 1995: 70). The governmental structures under the control of High Priests in Jerusalem maintained the heavy taxation systems, and the presence of Judeans, the Pharisees, as their representatives may have had more to do with Q’s critique of the Pharisees and Scribes and their affiliation with the Temple (Q^2: 11:43–52) than the cultic activity associated with the Temple or Torah. According to Horsley (1995: 71) “[w]e can readily imagine how the economic and cultural impact of Antipas’ building activities in the first century and then the political power vacuum created by the rulers’ neglect of Galilee in mid-century may have contributed to the origin and development of the movement(s) that found expression eventually in the gospel of Mark and the synoptic Sayings source Q.”

Village economy was developed along the lines of providing enough food for one’s (extended) family. It was a household economy and if there was surplus it could be traded or sold in order to secure other goods. Incrementally, however, taxes began to eat away at not only the surplus produced (if any) but at the goods grown and produced for everyday consumption by the household. Over the years debts increased until one’s land no longer sufficed as a deposit for one’s debt and the land was taken. The family, in such a situation, would continue to live on, and maintain, the(ir) land, but now as tenant farmers. The land now belonged to whoever held the debt, frequently large land holders. William Arnal indicates (1995: 485) that “[w]hile our
knowledge of first-century Palestinian economics is fragmentary and anecdotal, there are
nevertheless some compelling indications that the first century was a period marked by
increasing debt among smallholders, and consequently by increasing concentration of wealth in
the hands of a small number of elite.”

Large land-holdings consisted of “royal estates (including land granted to royal officers)
worked by tenants, city land worked by peasants over which powerful figures (such as prominent
priests, Herodian families, and royal officers) had gained control through debt mechanism”
(Horsley, 1995: 209). This debt mechanism was not concerned with the earning of interest from
the debtor, but rather:

The wording of the loan documents from the period offers some indication that
foreclosure was a major motivation behind lending. Exorbitant and punitive
interest rates (the usual penalty for late repayment was a fine of half the principal),
clauses explicitly anticipating execution of the loan on the debtor’s property or
person, and records of complaints about overzealous lenders exacting repayment
unfairly or above and beyond the terms stipulated, all indicate that usurious
lending and subsequent foreclosure were preponderant social phenomena.
(Horsely, 1995: 486–487)

This kind of burden overlaid upon an already difficult existence could have acted as the
significant impetus for the social unrest which prompted the challenge of social-political systems
in place. Goods produced in the villages where shipped off in the form of taxes to administrative
centres such as Sepphoris and later Tiberias to be distributed among the elite: upper class
Galileans, Judeans, and Romans and their cohorts, while any kind of luxury item would simply
have travelled by the villages en route to the elite in these cities. In light of these caravans,
banditry, although a dangerous occupation, would certainly have been lucrative.

It was in this milieu that Q was written, and it was this social, political, and cultural
context that the writers of Q sought to address. Both Q's critique of social structures and its method of argumentation suggest that Q be read as written documents which critiqued the social milieu and not as the "remembrances" of Jesus. Q's use of rhetorical strategies, such as authoritative legitimation wherein the name of Jesus is evoked or an allusion to tradition (e.g., Q 11:31 and 11:32), are argumentative strategies that take the reader into an ever tightening spiral where one's own behaviour is called into question. Analogies used to support argumentation, i.e., "[e]ven now the ax is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore not bearing good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Q 3:9) are indicative of texts that were composed and written and not a compilation of oral sayings that have been attributed to Jesus (or in the example above, John the Baptist). To treat these texts as if they are nothing more than this does an injustice to these texts, and completely ignores the historicity of the texts and the writers of the texts. Q, along with defining how its own people should behave, critiqued the social, political, and cultural world the writers found themselves in. Q, utilizing the rhetorical strategies of the day, e.g., hyperbole, analogy, legitimation via a well-known prophet or respected speaker, etc., sought to challenge their increasing loss of self-government in the villages, heavy taxes that threatened the loss of their lands, and the legitimating cultural systems in place which commended/condemned behaviour according to traditional codes, i.e., honour/shame (Q 6: 29, 13: 30), and the naturalness of the system of debt (Q 12: 58). When one interprets these texts as the "remembrances" of Jesus, as his words which are then written down, one erases the hands that wrote these texts, ignores the communities the Q text arose from, and eradicates and devalues their resistance to oppressive systems of their social and historical milieu.

Again and again Schüssler Fiorenza's Christian Origins will center upon the notion of the
egalitarianism found in those early Christian communities, an egalitarianism destroyed by the rise of the Constantinian church. "The canonization process of early Christian writing has preserved not only the patriarchalizing texts of the New Testament but also those earliest Christian traditions and texts that still permit us a glimpse of the egalitarian-inclusive practice and theology of early Christians" (1990: 56). This egalitarianism she locates directly in the person of Jesus: "This reality of God-Sophia spelled out in the preaching, healing, exorcisms, and inclusive table community of Jesus called forth a circle of disciples who were to continue what Jesus did. Sophia, the God of Jesus, wills the wholeness and humanity of everyone and therefore enables the Jesus movement to become a 'discipleship of equals'" (1990: 135). The difficulty with her reading, however, is a reading of the texts as "remembrances" of historical moments that represent facts and not as narratives that utilize rhetorical strategies. Therefore "tax collectors and harlots" (Matt. 21: 31–32, Q 7: 29–30) are read as factual statements that prove the inclusiveness of the Jesus movements. However if one reads the texts as narratives which utilize rhetorical strategies in order to make their point, it would seem more the likely that the authors of Q often used a negative analogy, as in the above, by which to demonstrate the shortcomings of those whom they polemicized against (e.g., Pharisees, Saducees, Rome, etc.). The intention of this particular pericope above can be read as expressing contempt for those who would not listen by juxtaposing them with the "dregs" of their society, the tax collectors and harlots (the unrighteous). In the Matthean text, Jesus is placed in the Temple and is set in opposition to the priests and scribes—they cannot hear whereas the lowest of the low can, while the writer of Luke utilizes this passage to demonstrate the willful obtuseness of the group whom he is polemicizing against, the Pharisees and lawyers. The writers of both Luke and Matthew
recognized the polemical nature of the pericope and utilized it as such. Therefore, it would seem problematic to read this pericope (a Q text) as evidence for the inclusiveness of the Jesus movements when it would appear that harlots and tax collectors are rhetorical devices by which the Q community wished to castigate those who opposed their perspective. What is Schüssler Fiorenza’s argument for literally reading this pericope? Why is Q read literally, when other texts of the New Testament are not? The literalness of Schüssler Fiorenza’s readings would appear to be located in her insistence that some texts found in the New Testament are “remembrances,” the remembered words of Jesus and can be read as such. The problem here, as I see it, is that Schüssler Fiorenza herself is playing the canon within the canon game, something she contests in the work of Letty Russell and Rosemary Radford Ruether. On the level of the text, the pericopae of Q cannot be read as the actual words of Jesus as God remembered by his followers. Q, like Matthew, Mark, Acts, etc., is a text and requires reading as such.

Egalitarianism as a description of social relations, as Schüssler Fiorenza is using it, is derived from liberation theology, a phenomenon of the twentieth century. Liberation theology also reads the rhetoric of these texts as facts regarding the members of the Jesus movements. The current meaning of the term cannot be retrojected onto the past in order to define the social relations to the writers’ of Q or those people who counted themselves members of the Jesus movements. That is not clear in Q are the actual social arrangements within the groups’ structures. What is clear is that the writers’ of the Q texts feel themselves marginalized in the face of social, economic, and political structures of the time. They challenged the competitive and/or dominant groups with such rhetorical strategies as inversion, analogy, and the use of tropes such as metaphor. It is certainly plausible that the writers of Q did not consider themselves
among the elite which is suggested by the kinds of tropes they used. However, these tropes cannot be used as proof regarding who belonged to the Q groups, i.e., harlots, or indicative of an internal egalitarianism among the writers’ of the texts themselves.

John Kloppenborg notes that an often taken position on the egalitarianism of the early Christian movements is one that understands the Christian movements to have incorporated hierarchal structures in the second century while in the first century these groups lacked a hierarchy of any kind (1996: 249). The assumption is that under the pressure of social conformity, the vision of equality in the early Christian movements was overlaid by a dominant ethos which was hierarchical and patriarchal. The difficulty here is a perception that assumes that “...the earliest Christian groups existed at the pinnacle of pristine social and theological purity, from which, in the ensuing decades and centuries, they unceremoniously descended” (Kloppenborg, 1996: 252–253). There are no pristine moments of any social group as all groups arise in society and necessarily reflect their social paradigms. The writers’ of Q belonged to a social-historical milieu that informed their world ethos, and therefore were as much subject to it as to those whom they polemicized against.

Read differently, texts of Q, do not suggest that the authors wished to dismantle the paradigm of oppressive relations, but rather they desired to reverse the positions of those within it: therefore the poor and not the rich would experience the basileia of God. Hierarchal relations are left in place as normative (Q 12: 45–46), while the underclass is used as negative analogies within the polemical discourse (Q 7: 34), and certain kinds of women (i.e., the harlot, the menstruant) appear to be examples of “otherness” in order to rhetorically emphasize the marginality of the group. Women, and especially impure women, are excellent tropes by which
to exemplify otherness. Within the dominant paradigm of hierarchal social arrangements, then, it would seem that the writers of Q articulated their sense of alienation by analogy through tropes of otherness and a desire that these relations be reversed.

Schüssler Fiorenza could well argue that the ideal of egalitarianism aspired toward is present in the writings of Q but an ideal is not proof of social relations, and her intention is to historically examine social relations specifically related to Christian Origins. There is no pristine moment wherein a movement is not “contaminated” by its own social-historical milieu. Social movements come about in social-historical locations and are subject to these same locations. During the first century C.E. in Palestine the society at large was hierarchal, slavery was normative, client-patron relations were normative, class oppression was normative, and patriarchy was normative. The only possibility for early Christian movements to gain an Archimedean point, a position which would allow them to step outside of their respective cultures and critique what they considered as normative structures, is for Schüssler Fiorenza to posit Jesus as that Archimedean point. In Schüssler Fiorenza’s analysis, like much of liberation theology, Jesus is an Archimedean point that allowed these people to transcend their social historical situatedness. For Schüssler Fiorenza, then, Jesus is an absolute break: he is God and can be nothing other than God. This premise, then, is theological and not historical.

In this analysis of Schüssler Fiorenza’s proposal that the Jesus movements were egalitarian, my point is not to contest the presence of women or other marginalized people who may, or may not have, belonged to the Jesus movements. The issue is, rather, that egalitarianism as we understand it in the modern world cannot be retrojected into history and then used to describe social relations in the ancient world in order to justify one’s own theological position.
Further, although texts such as Q utilize rhetorically a potentially egalitarian discourse, one cannot presuppose that this egalitarianism, as we understand the term, was practiced among the writers of Q and those who belonged to these early Jesus movements. The texts themselves continue to draw upon hierarchal relations, i.e., master and servant, and utilize rhetorical tropes that express otherness (and therefore perceive these people as other), i.e., the harlot, in order to delineate their own position. These figures and rhetorical strategies are neither deconstructed nor challenged in Schüssler Fiorenza’s history of early Christianity, but rather, are seen to be normative. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that if the texts demonstrated egalitarianism, then, by extension, women shared in this egalitarianism. Luise Schottroff (1995a: 347) convincingly argues that:

> Throughout the sayings source Q, an androcentric language corresponding to this patriarchal ideology is spoken. Women are never acknowledged as independently operative outside of the home—the Queen of the South (Q 11:31) being the exception that proves the rule. They are objects of men’s transactions in marriage (Q 16:18, 17:27) and in divorce (Q 16:18). Women are only acknowledged as operative within the domestic realm in their chores (by milling in Q 17:35; by baking Q 13:20f). The conflict in the patriarchal household brought about by Jesus’ message is acknowledged only in the conflict between a son’s duties toward his father (Q 9:59–60) (author’s italics).

To understand the tropes, negative analogies, and polemics as instances which can represent facts that stand as proof of egalitarianism does an injustice to the texts, and to the social movements of the time who utilized their current epistemic locations in order to challenge the dominant discourse of their social historical milieu.

### 1.5 Concluding remarks

The tenets of new historicism and social history which require that history be done from the ground up, are to some degree followed by Schüssler Fiorenza. In her critical engagement
with scholars in the field of Christian Origins, in mainstream and feminist theology, she underscores the paradigms that inform their positions and problematised assumed knowledge in their theories. She creates her own paradigm to work within, and writes an engaged history. She argues that the writers of the New Testament texts, and the scholars who work with these texts are the historical winners and their perspectives are what has become history for us all. She is careful to politically declare her historical intentions as engaged in the emancipation of the oppressed. Her political/historical intentions, then, are clear, she wishes to write a liberative imaginative history of early Christianity, a history that Christian women can claim. However, this political intention is enmeshed in, and overridden by, her theological commitment, and consequently when dealing specifically with the Jesus movements, largely because she understands them to be re-presenting the historical Jesus—God’s historical emissary, her history is more concerned with demonstrating Jesus to be truly liberatory, and therefore “real” or authentic. By extension, then, Christianity is truly liberatory. Hence her history becomes a Christian apologetic.

Further, and again because of her theological commitment to Jesus as God, difficulties also arise in her history from the ground up. Although she does incorporate references to these marginalized groups within her text Jesus as God remains central to her historical analysis, and therefore remains central to her retelling of Christian Origins. On the level of naming the unnamed, the unnamed in her early Christianity, are only named in relationship to the founding figure Jesus. The resistance to the “great man” history, a central strategy of the romantic narrative structure theorized by Hayden White, is severely undercut by Schüssler Fiorenza’s theological commitment. If she had focused upon the group, be it Q, pre-Markan, Markan, etc.,
in order to imaginatively reconstruct the group as a group located in their social historical milieu, a history of early Christianity from the ground up, as she had envisioned in her introduction (1990: xiv), may have been achieved. However, by locating resistance and justice in the figure of Jesus rather than with the members of the Jesus movements she erases them as historical actors in the ancient world.

A further problem is evinced on the level of the social historical context Schüssler Fiorenza develops. The Judaism she proposes is largely reified Judaism, one that is loosely situated in the Greco-Roman world. Reified as a religion committed to the continuance of cultic practices that hitch it to archaism, Judaism stands in opposition to the innovative religion she sees emerging under the guiding hand of Jesus. Secondly, although she theorizes heterogeneity in the ancient world, when developing a history concerning the Jesus movements, this heterogeneity fades into the background. Certainly it provides a rich scene behind the Jesus movements, but the context is a scene that engages neither the groups nor Schüssler Fiorenza. The history that emerges is not one concerned with the social and historical embedment of the Q groups, and what they sought to challenge, but is a history of an idealized Jesus who words were captured by the Q communities, the words which represent the remembrances of Jesus’ intentions and not the intentions of the community or the text as a text. The social history of Q fades behind the romantic and heroic figure of Jesus who sought to right the injustices of the world. Finally, the historicity of the Q texts as texts, as the writings of those people who sought to legitimate their ethos over and against other contesting groups, such as the Pharisees, is ignored when Q is engaged on the level of the literal rather than the rhetorical. Q read as the literal words of Jesus ignores the textuality of Q as texts written in order to explicate and legitimate the community’s
position.

The desire to understand one’s history as a prototype rather than an archetype is a commendable historical venture. Schüssler Fiorenza, in the writing of *In Memory of Her*, was one of the first feminists to attempt this project. As a first it has difficulties, but it also holds promise, and this is fulfilled, in large measure, when she engages feminist historical theory to determine the historicity of women in the Christian missionary movements.

2. Feminist history, Schüssler Fiorenza, and the Christian Missionary Movements

The work of feminist historians has intimate links with social history and new historicism. The history of women in its first conception was concerned with the addition of “notable women” to the historical canon (Lerner, 1975: 5). Like intellectual history (which includes political history), then, this historical approach to women did not focus on women as a group, but rather focused on those women who were exemplars of the group. In the next move to lift the curtain on women in history, the focus shifted to “women’s contributions to, their status in, and their oppression by male defined society” (Lerner, 1975: 5). Both of these approaches continued to understand women within an androcentric model in that the questions historians had developed were simply applied to women. As to their oppression, women were simply seen as victims of the male abuse of power. That which is missed, then, are not only women’s original contributions to the history of humankind at large, but also a feminist perspective on the liberation of women as a historical phenomenon in and of itself. Women’s resistance to subjugation is ignored and considered nonexistent, or at least until the Enlightenment and modernity. For example, women like Christine de Pisan (1364–1430?) or Rachel Speght (1597–?) within an androcentric framework are interpreted as exemplary women, rather than as
early feminists concerned with the oppression of women—the latter of which is a central tenet of feminist politics. Pisan’s *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), was in defense of women and in response to misogynistic tracts on women. Rachel Speght’s *A Mouzell for Melastromus* (1617) was a rejoinder to Joseph Swetnam’s attack on women in his *Arraignment of lewd, idle, forward and unconstant women* (1615). The intentions of these women were clearly focused on challenging male attitudes and assumptions about female nature and women. Pisan’s, like that of many women following her including Speght, attempted to address the *quelle des femmes*, a question which would become the ground upon which much feminist thinking was built (Kelly, 1984: 66).

The focus of family history, a subsidiary branch of social history included a concern for women. However, women as human beings were overlooked as women’s activities were analyzed in regard to their relationships with men, as wife and mother, while the relationships of sister and daughter were ignored. This view of women also tended to overlook single women, widows, lesbians, etc., and instead focused unquestioningly upon the family as a naturalized category wherein human behavior, primarily male behavior, could be analyzed. As Gerda Lerner (1975: 8) notes, “family history has been used to describe the relationships of fathers and sons and the property arrangements between them.”

But social history, under the influence of Marxist analysis, readjusted the lens and brought into perspective history with class consciousness in mind. The first step was to shift focus from the elite, the wealthy, and the “famous,” to do history from the ground up, and examine what “common” people did. This refocusing meant that underprivileged groups were the provocateurs of historical interest. Women as a group, understood as a historical
"subgroup," entered as active participants in the manufacturing of human reality.

The various feminist approaches utilized in order to create a history of women consist of a number of different methodologies. One of the first, in the modern era, was to focus on women as subjects of inquiry. This meant going beyond histories written by men, which were often prescriptive in regard to women’s behavior, in order to ascertain just what it was women were doing. This gathering of information was utilized to demonstrate that women made historical contributions alongside those of men (e.g., their efforts in the civil rights movement at both the turn of the century and in the 1960s). A difficulty for later feminists, however, was that women were essentially fit into the male historical record, so that, for example, issues like periodization—the allotment of time according to political movements that are teleologically understood to have positively affected population at large which often had a positive affect on only middle-class and upperclass men, and had a negative affect on the female population—were never questioned. Joan Scott (1988: 19) notes that: “…an impressive mass of evidence has been compiled to show that the Renaissance was not a renaissance for women, that technology did not lead to women’s liberation either in the workplace or at home, that the “Age of Democratic Revolutions” excluded women from political participation….”

“Her-story” as the method has been aptly named, began to branch out, and while maintaining the methodological necessity of placing women at the center of the historical narrative sought to address the above shortcomings. Later investigations departed from conventional historical methods and introduced new narratives, different periodization, and different causes. Feminists in the field of history also began to utilize data not primarily conceived as historical data such as journals, diaries, letters, and sources of oral history. As one’s
data were different from the usual tomes and archives employed, new methods for dealing with these materials were employed. The quotidian was no longer bracketed off as having little historical significance. For example, it became apparent that women’s concerns for the maintenance of their homes and children meant their active participation in, for example, trade unions and labour parties. The central aspect of this approach, as Scott (1988: 20) notes, is “the exclusive focus of female agency on the causal role played by women in their history, and on the qualities of women’s experience that sharply distinguish it from men’s experience.”

“Her-story” contributed much to the founding of feminist historical analysis but it also presented problems. For example, women still remained a separate group marked off from what is considered the human, men. Although possibly understood as equal they remain separate, other, equal but different. The concept of “women’s experience” is central to this problem. Another difficulty, within the paradigm of “her-story,” is that women’s culture is often understood to be better than men’s culture, that whatever women did was good. The Sisters of Mercy are an order of nuns who manage orphanages throughout the world. An Irish orphanage run by these nuns is currently faced with charges of child abuse and the possible murder of an infant. Such examples should put this notion to rest but it does not. Women are understood to embody motherhood and therefore are innately nurturing, less violent, and more inclined toward love than hate. This myth of motherhood denies women the full range of human emotions, whether these emotions are conceived as negative or positive. The study of women in history is an interesting and necessary endeavour, but not everything women did and do was/is of value, interesting, or worth positive assessment.

The development of social history and its focus offered much support to women’s
history. Social history provided methods of quantification in its uses of details from everyday life, and its utilization of methods from other fields such as ethnography and sociology which then could be employed by feminist historians. It refocused the lens of observation and chose instead family relations, sexuality, and fertility as significant historical data (and not the male as head of the household). It challenged political history for its focus on white affluent men as the catalysts for historical change or simply the only group worthy of historical interest. This meant, then, that previously marginalized groups could now take center stage as historical actors and no longer simply perceived as passive recipients of history (Scott, 1988: 21).

Gender, class, ethnicity, and race are categories that social history endeavours to analyze. The difficulty in this kind of methodology, however, is that each of these categories is understood as descriptive of a social group, and indicative of wealth distribution, but the depth of particularities, such as subjectivity, ideology production and consumption, and development of the ethos of individuals and groups remains untheorized. Each of these categories must be understood as explanatory in themselves. Identity and identity production are historical categories, categories that can be charted and used to develop historical understanding. Studying the category of gender means studying women and men within gender ideologies and how both sexes are located upon the grid of social productions such as law, medicine, political participation, epistemological production, or prescriptive mandates of sexed behavior (Scott, 1988: 23). And studying gender means not locating sex as the Ur text of gender. Sex is not the organic and natural base which generates gendered behavior. Sex, like gender, is a social-historical phenomenon, manufactured within human society (Delphy, 1996: 30–41). As Linda Nicholson (1994) argues, sex cannot act as a biological coatrack that both supplies the form and
supports gender. Sex, too, is an interpreted phenomenon and therefore is subject to history.\textsuperscript{17}

The methods developed and theories formulated, theories regarding how one goes about reclaiming women and bringing them into the historical record without distortion, undergird Schüssler Fiorenza’s historical method. Her process of a hermeneutics of remembrance wherein one cannot take “grammatically masculine allegedly generic language and texts about women at face value,” and where feminists must “develop designs or models for historical reconstruction which can dislodge the eradicating frame of the androcentric biblical text…seek[ing] to recover all possible remnants of textual and material information in order to rearrange them in a different and more plausible historical picture” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992: 54) incorporates historical method and theory delineated by women in history.

2.1 Hermeneutics of remembrance and feminist history

Feminist history requires that women as women be written back into the record. The title of Schüssler Fiorenza’s text \textit{In Memory of Her} speaks to this project. The title refers to an unnamed woman found in Mark 14:9 who anointed Jesus’ head with expensive ointment.\textsuperscript{18} The focus of non-feminist scholars on this figure has been to focus on the action of Jesus and his disciples, while negating this unknown woman, considering her to be nothing more than an insignificant figure whose actions set the scene in motion (Jesus’ intimations concerning his upcoming death). Focusing upon the actions of a woman ministering to the man Jesus, and

\textsuperscript{17}My understanding of the historicity of gender, sex and sexuality is informed by Foucault (1990), Nicholson (1994), Scott (1988), and Leonard and Adkins (1996). See also Juschka (1998) for a full delineation of my argument regarding the sex/gender dichotomy.

\textsuperscript{18}In the Gospel of John this woman is said to be Mary of Bethany.
pointing out her namelessness in order to signal the necessity to read against the androcentric
grain of the text, Schüssler Fiorenza brings this nameless woman’s activities back into the
historical record, within the world of the text, and invests them with significance. Within the
microcosm of the world of the text this woman’s actions of anointing Jesus signify
foreknowledge of Jesus’ approaching death (a dead person is generally anointed during the
funeral preparations which were largely in the hands of women), and it signifies an
intertextuality between old stories and new stories when it intimates a historical remembrance of
Samuel’s actions and points to the symbolic intentions in the anointment of Saul and David by
Samuel’s hand: Samuel conferred on Saul and David the divine legitimation of their kingship.
The text employs this unknown woman in order to signal the divine legitimation of the kingship
of Jesus. She who is nameless is not simply added to the historical record of the text, by
Schüssler Fiorenza, but is given signification within the narrative of the text.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s development of the Christian communities, which sprang up
throughout the Graeco-Roman empire, utilizes a number of the tenets of feminist history. She
approaches the biblical texts, their interpretations, and their translations as androcentric and
therefore averring a male view of the world: one that understands female views as distorted,
illogical, uninteresting, and illegitimate. An androcentric perspective understands only other
male (generally white and western) views as legitimate, and in this process legitimates male
domination. The interpretations and translations of texts of the New Testament demonstrate such
androcentrism. For example, in instances of translation one finds that instead of a generic term
found in the original Greek which indicates a human being or a person, the word man is used.
Man is understood to be inclusive and genderless, when it fact it clearly is not (see chapter one).
Another aspect of incorporating androcentrism into translations is the desire to assume masculine names when sex is unspecified and the name is indicative of either a male or a female, e.g. Junias to Junius.

On the level of interpretation, one sees a resistance upon the part of scholars to include women in positions of authority. Consequently, when a term which denotes authority is used in connection with a woman in the text, the title is immediately interpreted diminutively. Therefore, *Dikonomos* (deacon) read in association with men signifies a position of leadership in the Christian community, but when read in association with women (i.e., Phoebe, in Romans 16: 1–2), signifies a position of service, and assistantship. The interpreter, then, imposes his/her androcentrism onto the text. Schüssler Fiorenza notes, for example, that one exegete, H. Lietzmann indicates that Phoebe’s position allowed her to tend the sick, the poor, and assist in the baptism of women. Phoebe is not a leader in her community as the term *dikonomos* suggests. Rather she is a charitable (and wealthy) woman who assists those in authority (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 47).

Working carefully with the texts, both primary and secondary, Schüssler Fiorenza reads these texts utilizing a hermeneutics of suspicion, a hermeneutics which understands these texts as, more often than not, prescriptive of women, while they legitimize a patriarchal and androcentric perspective. She will focus on women in the texts, understanding that much that is said is prescriptive, but notes, however, that texts can often escape the horizon of the author and subvert his/her intentions. For example, an author can argue vehemently against women in leadership roles insisting that women are best suited to a cloistered life rather than a life in the public world. This can even be an argument that understands itself as seeing to the best interests
of women. However, by reading against the grain of the text it becomes clear that the author is arguing against something and that something may well be women already holding leadership roles or posed to do so. By reading against the grain of the text and understanding that it too purports an ideology, the text is opened up to reveal the unsaid.

A primary tenet for doing feminist history is the examination of gender as it is delineated within the gender ideologies generated by the cultures under study. Gender acts as a definitive tool by which to analyze the data examined. Schüssler Fiorenza will, to some degree in her text, undertake the analysis of the perception of women and their status in society. Her text, however, was written several years prior to the theorization of the category of gender by feminists in a variety of fields. In Schüssler Fiorenza’s text gender is an operative in androcentrism and patriarchal oppression. She will understand that that which powers and legitimates patriarchy is oppression by the dominant gender (male) because of the perceptions and ensuing prescriptions, be they materialistic as in the law, or directives concerning social behaviour delineated along lines of gender, or idealistic as in metaphysics or philosophy. Schüssler Fiorenza will theorize the category of gender in regard to feminist theory as in her text *But She Said* (1992: 105–118), but largely leaves it untheorized in her text *In Memory of Her*.

Women are the subject of her inquiry (albeit this tenet will be undercut by her theological position evinced in her history of the Jesus movements in Palestine and Galilee) and, in her historicizing of the Christian missionary movements, female agency—women as social actors in causal roles—are, in large part, at the center in the development of the Christian missionary movements. In this history women are not only challenged by their oppressive situations, they find the means to resist this oppression. As active agents in history they are not simply victims of
systems of oppression, but participate in, construct, subvert, and deconstruct systems of oppression. Schüssler Fiorenza indicates (1990: 85): “[f]eminist historians, therefore, seek a theoretical framework that can maintain the dialectical tension of women’s historical existence as active participants in history as well as objects of patriarchal oppression.” She further suggests this information can be ascertained by examining the “patriarchal household and family structures as heuristic categories” in order to explore the “a-familial character and the love patriarchalism of the early Christian movement” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 91). To retrieve such information she states that she will use canonical but also non-canonical material, i.e., *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, or will utilize archaeological remains such as inscriptions. In the instance of developing her argument for houses churches in the Christian Missionary movements, she will draw upon historical data related to particular house cults in the Roman empire. In the upcoming section I will discuss and critique her narrative strategy which undercuts the great man narrative (Paul) that stands as a history of the early Christian missionary movements; her hermeneutics of suspicion, in other words, how she reads against the grain of the text; and her development of the house churches which, along with her reclamation of women missionaries provide the content for her hermeneutics of remembrance. I will further examine her continuing argument that egalitarianism can be found in the early Christian movements, and the problem generated by this concept in relation to gender ideology. And, finally, I will look at the very significant problem of her feminist *theological* impetus which compels her to understand the development of Christianity as the “gradual patriarchalization of early Christianity” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 84).

2.2 The Christian Missionary Movements
As previously indicated, one of Schüssler Fiorenza’s intentions in her history of early Christianity is to de-establish Paul as the founder of the Christian missionary movements found outside of Galilee and Palestine. Although it is clearly indicated in the New Testament texts that Paul joined a movement already in progress, the common assumption has always been that it was Paul who took the Jesus movement out of Judaism and into the Graeco-Roman world to its Gentile inhabitants (Acts: 9:15 is a declarative statement concerning this and Paul assumes this position in Galatians). A reading that focuses solely on Paul develops a history of early Christianity wherein Paul is the founder of Christianity while Jesus is the god of Christianity. In Schüssler Fiorenza’s historical analysis, she does not gloss over statements made in Acts that clearly state that Paul was taken in, and presumably taught, by Barnabas (Acts 9:27, 11:25-26). Barnabas had prior knowledge of Christianity, and he had a church in Asia Minor. Therefore, Paul joined Barnabas’ church. When Paul then sought to disseminate his understanding of this new movement in Asia Minor there were Christian groups already active (“Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners; they are men of note among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me” (Romans 16: 7). Some of these groups may have been led by women, or at the very least, women from these communities were the individuals Paul had had contact during his travels (Romans 16: 7, I Cor.16: 19) and considered co-workers.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s intention in her history of the Christian missionary movements is to dislodge the great man narrative that places Paul as a foundational figure of Christianity in the Roman empire. It is clear that Paul founded a number of churches throughout the Roman empire, i.e., Corinth, Colossea, and Thessalonia; however, other churches, i.e., Antioch and Rome predate Paul. Christian history and much of the scholarship that has sought to unravel the
development of Christianity have generally focused upon the actions of men judging them as causal to the development of Christianity throughout the Roman empire. A women such as Tabitha in Joppa, named as an apostle in Acts 9:36, is understood by historians as an anomaly, or the term affiliated with such a woman is understood to be a loose expression and certainly not indicative of authority within the early Christian movements. Schüssler Fiorenza, in her delineation of the development of Christianity alters this perspective and instead understands women like Tabitha, Phoebe, Prisca (Priscilla), Junia, and Thecla and Aquila, to also be significant to the development of the Christian missionary movements. It is by challenging the Romantic narrative, which places at its center the heroic figure of Paul, that Schüssler Fiorenza can introduce other protagonists to the story, specifically female protagonists.

To further her argument about the importance of women to the spread and development of early Christianity throughout the Roman empire, Schüssler Fiorenza investigates the practice of house churches noting several significant aspects that have been overlooked. She begins by pointing out how women are frequently named as the benefactors who provided their homes to be used as churches. These women, of course, would have had to have been somewhat wealthy in order that their homes be large enough to accommodate meetings and communal meals. In past scholarship these women have been understood as benefactors of the Christian missionary movements and nothing more, expect possibly chaste, maternal creatures who tended to the needs of the male missionaries or to the sick, the poor, and other women. This reading is completely possible in light of the androcentrism found in the New Testament texts which frequently presents women in traditional roles. Therefore Tabitha, who is named an apostle in Acts, is glorified not for her words and preaching to her community, but rather by her “good
works and acts of charity” or for the “coats and garments which Dorcas [Tabitha] made while she was with them” (Acts 9:39). As Schüssler Fiorenza recognizes, one must read against the grain of the androcentrism in the New Testament texts as these texts were generated by individuals and groups who functioned within a gender ideology produced by their respective social-historical milieu. Reading against the grain of these texts is a necessity when approaching a concrete praxis such as house churches and women’s roles therein.

2.3 The Housing of the Christian missionary movement

Houses which served as cultic centers or churches were not an invention of Christianity. In Judaism, the synagogue (meaning gathering) in its first inception may well have been located in a member’s house where the group gathered in order to communally worship, discuss business, and socially engage with each other. Most likely these house-synagogues began in villages found throughout the Graeco-Roman empire and were far from the Temple. Bernadette Brooten (1982: 104) indicates that “with the exception of the Theodotos inscription (CII 1404), there exist no undisputed synagogue remains from the Second Temple period. This is probably due to the fact that the floor plans of the earliest synagogue differed little from those of normal houses and cannot be identified by archaeologists as synagogues, if by “synagogue” one means a building whose main function was to house the worship of service.” From this we can extrapolate that it is possible homes were used in order to accommodate gatherings, especially if the earliest evidence of possible synagogues is difficult to determine since they architecturally resemble houses (see also Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 177). If the synagogue came about in peoples homes, the first effort to create an autonomous structure that served as a separate building meant for
communal religious practices (and social and legal practices therein) would have logically been drawn up along the lines of a house model. It was only long after the first century—after the destruction of the Temple—that synagogue ruins became much more identifiable and demonstrated a variation in architecture from the house model.\textsuperscript{19}

In the Graeco-Roman empire cultic practices related to Demeter, Isis, Adonis, Dionysus, etc. also seemed to have been celebrated in the homes of richer patrons within the group.

Schüssler Fiorenza relates several examples of references to cultic practices in private houses (1990: 176–177). The private house as a location of cultic practice dates to a time prior to the advent of Christianity, for example women’s devotion to Adonis in 5th century B.C.E. Athens took place among private groups of women on the roof of one of their houses, while in Alexandria in the third century there is reference to Arsinoe II, queen of Egypt, sponsoring the festival of Adonis in the main palace (Shepard Kraemer, 1992: 30–31). An example more contemporaneous to the Christian missionary movements is related in the history of Tacitus in regard to Messalina, the consort of Claudius. The history of Messalina is problematic to say the least as she is cast as a malignant and sexually depraved woman who was justly executed. However, aside from the obvious defamation of her character, we are told that on the day of her arrest she had been holding a celebration for Dionysus in her house: “Messalina meanwhile, 

\textsuperscript{19}Sharon Lea Mattila (1996: 265) indicates that the earliest synagogue ruins excavated thus far (1st century B.C.E. on the island of Delos) were that of a house in a residential area. She states that (1996: 267) “[o]f the five post-70 Diaspora synagogue buildings that have been excavated extensively—Priene (fourth century), Sardis (third to fifth Century), Stobi (second to third century), Ostia (first to fourth century), and Dura-Europos (second to third century)—all but one seem to have been renovated from private dwellings typical of the domestic architecture of their particular locale.”
more widely profligate than ever, was celebrating in mid autumn a representation of the vintage in her new home. The presses were being trodden; the vats were overflowing; women girt with skins were dancing as Bacchanals dance in their worship or frenzy. Messalina with flowing hair shook the thyrsus, and Silius at her side, crowned with ivy and wearing the buskin, moved his head to some lascivious chorus” (Tacitus, Annals II. 31).

The precedent for worship in private homes, then, was well established in the ancient world. Early Christianity utilized this precedent in order that its members come together to eat, discuss relevant issues, exchange information, preach, pray, etc. Schüssler Fiorenza, having established the concrete reality of house churches, then extrapolates from this to argue two relevant points for women as leaders in the community. First she establishes that the house was the sphere of women’s activity and therefore women, more than likely, had a lot to say about how the concrete realization of the gathering would look, e.g., how people would be seated, fed: essentially they arranged the meeting. The “domina of the house, where the ecclesia gathered, had primary responsibility for the community and its gathering in the house church” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 176, author’s italics). She then argues that the house church was a decisive factor in the missionary movements, and therefore from this it can be argued that women were also decisive actors in the early Christian missionary movements. Pointing out the number of women’s names mentioned, that a number of women were seen as benefactors to the early Christian movements by opening their homes for meetings, Schüssler Fiorenza can then argue that as these churches were located in their homes, and as benefactors of the movements these women may well have held the position of patron, a position of power in the Graeco-Roman
CHAPTER 5

280

world. These women, then, were active agents in the spread, and support, of the early Christian missionary movements.

2.4 Religious associations and the Christian Missionary movements

Having located the early churches in private dwellings, which then allows women to become active and prominent participants, she then discusses the social model these groups might have incorporated in order to organize their communities. The organization model Schüssler Fiorenza argues for is one developed along the lines of the religious club or association found in the Graeco-Roman world. These associations could reflect hierarchal arrangements of their social-culture milieu or, in some instances, reject these social arrangements. Some clubs and associations did admit slaves, women, and members of the lower classes, but others often drew for their membership from their own class, sex, or socioeconomic group, e.g., military men.

Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the model used but the Christian groups tended toward the former, and made no distinction based on class, sex, or ethnic group (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 180). She suggests that the early house churches were associations comprising equals, and those members who were of the wealthy strata received little reward other than the exercising some influence within the house church. This influence, although mapped out upon the lines of the client-patron relationship in the Graeco-Roman world, was, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, benign in the Christian churches. She indicates (1990: 181) that “without question the house church, as a

---

20 The patron-client relationship in the Graeco-Roman world was a hierarchical relationship where one party, the patron, acted as a protector of the client, while the client owed to the patron her/his complete loyalties. This loyalty could translate into a number of different concrete expressions such as arriving at the house of the patron first thing in the morning to inquiry if s/he required a duty to be performed.
voluntary organization, was structured according to this patron-client relationship. Moreover, Christians like Phoebe also must have acted as guardians for the community or for individual Christians in dealings with the government and the courts. With their network of connections, friendships, and influence, Christians from the upper strata eased the social life of other Christians in the Greco-Roman society.

Although many still argue against women in authoritative roles in early Christianity, and women as active female agents who were instrumental in the propagation of early Christianity, Schüssler Fiorenza does make a good argument for women's authoritative roles in the early Christian missionary movements in the Graeco-Roman world. Women do appear, as they appear in other religious and social practices such as Judaism, the cult of Demeter, Isis, Dionysus, etc., as leaders and patrons of these early house churches. The existence of house churches that supported the practices of the Christian missionary movements, and the Jesus movements in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) certainly brings the history of early Christianity into the domestic sphere, a sphere always considered to be female. This locating of the church in the household, however, cannot be used as indicative of equality in the early Christian missionary movements, and does not guarantee equality in the domestic realm as these households were often established along the lines of a patriarchal household.

The house-church as a private dwelling wherein women have full control is a difficult thesis to maintain. One of the difficulties is the assumption that because the group met in the private home of an individual these meetings can be interpreted as "not public." In all probability they were public meetings, otherwise why were issues concerning appropriate behavior at these meetings addressed in the Pauline letters? The public entered the private dwellings of individuals
and this may have certainly given women a greater access to the public realm now within their homes, but it also meant more work for these women as organizers, or labourers who saw to such things as food preparation for the meetings.

There is also another assumption that lurks behind the idea of the Christian house-church: the Christian house-church is assumed to be a unique phenomenon in the Graeco-Roman world, something it was not. Understood as a unique phenomenon, then, the Christian house-church need not participate in the usual social practices that occurred in spaces where groups gather publicly. It is further assumed that women at public meetings in synagogues or temples were subordinated since women’s power was considerably less in the public realm. Therefore, in the private home their power would have been greater. However, when the public realm entered the private realm the public did not become private but rather the private became the public. Sharon Lea Mattila (1996:268) argues that “[w]hat this would have meant for women is this: both in the synagogue [or house-synagogue] and in the house-church, they would have been expected to behave as they would in any respectable, Graeco-Roman public forum. Both the synagogue and the house-church were understood to be public spaces devoted to public use, and this notwithstanding the particular stage of their renovation from private homes” (author’s italics).

In order to circumvent the patriarchal household as a model for social relations in the house church of early Christianity, Schüssler Fiorenza develops the theory that the organizational structure used by early Christian missionary movements was that of the voluntary association found in the ancient world and not that of the patriarchal household. She argues that the social relationship developed in these house churches reflected more the egalitarian potential expressed in religious clubs and organizations, which then allows for, in her argumentative framework, full
CHAPTER 5

participation by women and leadership by women. The social relations practiced by some associations, and understood by Schüssler Fiorenza to be practiced in these Christian associations, stand in juxtaposition and challenge the model of the patriarchal household in the Graeco-Roman world. The patriarchal household model of social relations would not have been conducive to female participation and female leadership, and therefore Schüssler Fiorenza must de-establish it by drawing upon another model, that of associations, a model which she believes can accommodate ideals of equality.

There are, however, several difficulties with Schüssler Fiorenza’s argument. First, she argues that the patron-client relationship in Christianity was somehow differently expressed by Christians than it was by other associations in the Graeco-Roman world. Secondly, she assumes that the egalitarianism experienced by upper stratum women was somehow also experienced by the lower stratum women in Christian associations. These assumptions are based on a theological belief that hierarchy no longer functioned among these people. These people, because of the teachings of Jesus, had somehow managed to extract themselves from the social-historical milieu of their situatedness and redefine their social relationships according to an egalitarian model, a model, according to contemporary Christians invested in this model, which had been delineated by Jesus.

Iwhen one examines the first problem, it should be noted that the patron-client relationship was generally not something that had been established by the wealthy in order that they could act as benefactors for the less fortunate. The patron-client relationship was an important social and ideological tool in the Roman empire. As Rome ruled its conquered foreign clientele provinces in a variety of fashions, i.e., “friends, allies, free cities bound to Rome by
various treaties, directly governed non-citizen subjects, or half-citizens, or full citizens who
nevertheless formed self-governing communities (coloniae and municipia)” (Wallace-Hadrill,
1989: 75), so the patron ruled his/her client. This relationship was also markedly different for
those who were freed slaves of the patron and those who voluntarily became clients. The freed
slave was legally obligated to act as a client to the patron and could face legal consequences if
s/he failed in this duty.

The patron-client relationship provided status for the patron who was to act as a mediator
for her/his client. The patron was to mediate the power structures, something the client was
excluded from. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (1989) argues that the patron-client relationship was an
instrument of social control. It insured the continuance of hierarchal structures by making those
whom the system oppressed complicit with their oppression. The system was established so the
rich, powerful, and elite, had control of all the major lines of communication that connected with
the centre of state power and its resources. Therefore, those who did not have access, the
majority who were lower class men and women, tenants, freed men and women, slaves etc., had
to rely upon the ability of another, the patron, to access the power structure for them. But, as
Wallace-Hadrill argues, this was a necessary fiction of the social structure of the empire.
Although patrons did have access to the power structure, they certainly could not assist their
many clients. Wallace-Hadrill comments upon the workings of the patron-client relationship and
its fiction (1989: 73): “Their success in control lay as much in their power to refuse as in their
readiness to deliver the goods. In this light, the inability of a few hundred to satisfy the needs of
hundreds of thousands, their manifest failure to alleviate poverty, hunger, debt, indeed their
exploitation of these circumstances to secure themselves advantage....”
The patron-client relationship was fraught with hierarchal implications, and the assumption of beneficence in Schüssler Fiorenza’s work is a very real problem. If there was any kind of generosity that beneficence depended upon the individual patron and certainly not the social expectations of the relationship itself. The patron-client relationship was more beneficial for the patron than the subordinate client. If the patron was cruel, wicked, or merely indifferent the client’s life was certainly difficult. When Cato, in his later years, took as his second bride the very young daughter of one of his clients, his client, as a client, was in no position to disagree, but had to acquiesce (Cato-Maior 24.2–4 in Evans, 1991: 30). Schüssler Fiorenza assumes that the wealthy members of the Christian missionary movements acted as beneficial patrons to the less fortunate Christian clients. This assumption has no basis other than the assumption (founded upon a theological desire and not historical evidence) that the Christian missionary movements were egalitarian and therefore the wealthy and powerful, and the less fortunate, would have perceived the patron-client relationship markedly different from the rest of the Graeco-Roman world. Considering the admonishments concerning status in the Pauline letters, this assumption is certainly doubtful. These Christians, adult converts socialized in the Graeco-Roman world, would have understood the patron-client relationship as normative and there is nothing in the New Testament texts that suggest this particular relationship was deconstructed or reinterpreted. The ideological myth of the patron-client relationship was that the wealthy and powerful did assist the less fortunate, but as indicated this was its social legitimation, and this ideological myth has been maintained in Schüssler Fiorenza’s conceptualization of social relationships in the early Christian house churches.

The second problem is intimately connected to the first, and in all likelihood was what
allowed the patron-client relationship to slip by unanalysed. It is central to Schüssler Fiorenza’s argument that these early Christian movements were egalitarian and therefore provided a new impetus for social relations among human beings. The necessity to prove this argument lies in her desire to challenge past and current attitudes concerning women found in the Catholic church. If she can demonstrate the apostolic leadership of women in the early Christian house churches, then there is a precedent set for women’s participation in all aspects of the church. However, her desire to challenge current standing of the Catholic church on women in positions of authority also includes a desire to deconstruct the hierarchical arrangements of the Catholic church. Therefore, she is not in favour of women included in positions of authority within the Church if these positions continue to be expressed in a hierarchical fashion. These desires, women as full participants in the Catholic church and the primary structure of early Christian social arrangements as egalitarian which therefore prove that the current hierarchal structure of the Catholic church is wrongheaded, mean that she obliterates any possible hierarchical relations found among women in the ancient world. Therefore, women found in the New Testament, regardless that most mentioned apparently are located in an economic group which had access to social-political power in the Graeco-Roman world even if tentatively because of their marginalization as women, Jewish women, or freedwomen etc., are not differentiated along the lines of social status. She assumes, then, that because they are marginalized by being women, this marginalization means they are in solidarity with all (female?) members of the group regardless of social standing.

---

21 Therefore, as we see in Acts 16:37 Paul demanded and received an apology from the judicial organization of Philippi for their treatment of him on the basis that he was a Roman citizen.
This kind of logic, as demonstrated in many kinds of social movements and in feminism as well, does not pan out. It cannot be assumed that since a group or an individual experience marginalization in its or her/his social milieu that it or s/he will not practice relations that are delineated along lines of status. For example, white North American feminists understood themselves as oppressed but were not conscious of their involvement in the oppression and/or erasure of African American women, feminist or otherwise. Therefore white feminists in order to secure their autonomy and economic status utilized the economic oppression of African American in order to hire these women to perform what was once their duty in their homes. African-American women became nannies, cooks, cleaners, etc., when white women, feminists included, went off to make their mark upon the world. Feminists, conscious of oppression, were not conscious of the privileges their social status afforded them. Therefore in Schüssler Fiorenza’s argument regarding early Christianity what is yet to be proved is that women of higher social status whose names are remembered in the texts did not access this power off the backs of other poorer women of the group. Without this kind of proof, one cannot assume that women of higher status (and men as well) jettisoned their understanding of the patron-client relationship, an inherently hierarchical relationship, when they entered the early Christian missionary movements.

John Kloppenborg (1996: 252) notes that belief in the egalitarianism of the early Christian missionary movements is built upon three main arguments: 1) “three Pauline and deuto-Pauline baptismal texts, Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Colossians 3:1, each of which apparently proclaims an abrogation of ethnic, social, and gender markers within the group,” 2) “prosopographic evidence” reinforces the first evidence as it is clear that women and
men, slaves and free, and Jew and Greek did belong to the house-churches of the early Christian missionary movements, and 3) the frequent use of fictive family terms which "suggests a rather sustained rhetoric of belonging...." Kloppenborg suggests, however, that the evidence requires a closer examination. The rhetorical context of the statements situated within the argumental framework of the first, i.e., Galatians 3: 28, and Paul’s purpose for making such statements, needs theorizing rather than the simple assumption so that Paul, within the missionary movements, is seen to espouse a rhetoric of egalitarianism because that is what this movement was all about—especially if one is certain that Jesus as God must be egalitarian. Therefore the argument delineates itself along the lines of arguing that Paul was egalitarian because what he said was egalitarian, and what he said was egalitarian because Paul was egalitarian, and further since the movement was egalitarian, because Jesus was egalitarian, therefore Paul must have been egalitarian: a rather tautological argument at best.

Kloppenborg (1996: 252) stresses that what should not be lost sight of are several important factors that underscore how Paul wrote his letters and why he wrote his letters. Within the argumentative context of the letters Paul wrote, description and prescription are used while Paul’s overarching argumentative intention in for example, Galatians 3: 28 was to argue against the necessity of circumcision for the male members of the movement in Galatia. However, in order to increase the weight of his argument in the letter to the Galatians, Paul utilized (6: 21–31) the rhetoric of the free as opposed to enslavement in order to demonstrate that the Galatians were better off baptized by the spirit rather than circumcised under the law. He likens Judaism to the enslaved woman whose descendants were illegitimate and the Galatians to the free woman whose children inherit the word of God. However, rather than read this as Paul casting negative
CHAPTER 5

judgement on Judaism, or reading Galatians 3: 28 as a positive statement of egalitarian membership within these movements, the analogies act as rhetorical devices which Paul utilizes in order to strengthen his argument against the necessity of circumcision.

It is difficult or impossible to substantiate that the Christian missionary movements discarded hierarchal social statuses in order to join these early movements, but sometime (and somehow) later hierarchy slipped back in to assert itself. This argument assumes that in their original incarnation early Christian missionary movements in the Graeco-Roman world resembled more closely those early Jesus movements, which were of course egalitarian since they were historically and geographically closer to Jesus. It was only over time that the Christian churches became patriarchal and began to write such texts as The First Letter of Paul to Timothy. Schüssler Fiorenza takes such a position and in this attempts to secure her argument that the earliest level of Christianity was inclusive of women as full and equal partners. This kind of position ignores the social contexts of both the Jesus movements in a Hellenised Palestine and the Christian missionary movements in the Graeco-Roman world. These groups of people were a part of the social milieu. They were Jews, Greeks, Romans, etc., and ascribed to the values of their social milieu which tended toward hierarchy as a natural and normal phenomenon. Along these lines, then, they also adhered to a gender ideology, one which had little chance of being recognized as oppressive since gender and gender relations were naturally hierarchical, reified on the basis of sex, and legitimated by the association of sex with nature. How that ideology panned out depended upon the cultural milieu so that in Philippi, which appears to have held a gender ideology which understood the male and female as markedly separate but each sex is important,
women had more social leverage, but only in those areas deemed appropriate for them. My point is, that attitudes about sexual-social relations differed depending upon the gender ideology practiced by the group or groups of people who came together in the Christian missionary movements. Christianity did not purport a fixed gender ideology based upon the belief in the equality of men and women, and nor did the social milieu within which Christianity worked. Therefore, Paul had his own ideas about how men and women should behave, and those ideas came into conflict or agreement with existing gender ideologies when Paul sought to bring his version of Christianity into a targeted area.

2.3 Concluding remarks

The tenets of feminist historicity demand that women remain central to the analysis, that androcentrism is engaged both on the level of reading these early texts and on the level of interpretation by those scholars engaged in analyzing the early Christian movements. Women must of necessity work within a paradigm of female agency, and to these tenets Schüssler Fiorenza remains true. Women become, in her feminist history of early Christianity, active participants as well remain objects of patriarchal oppression. These women are remembered as women who worked within the movements and acted as agents toward its dissemination. Her decentring of Paul as the founder and main protagonist in the narration of early Christian history is a positive statement of her work as a feminist historical analysis of this time period.

However, in an attempt to secure Christianity theologically rather than historically for women, she leaves untheorized social relations located in the patron-client relationship and the

---

22See Abrahamsen (1995) for an elaboration of women’s and men’s social and sexual roles in Philippi.
gender ideologies which functioned at the time because of theological assumptions. An idealized gender ideology presumed to be held by the early Christian movements is set against a unified and total gender ideology purported for the Graeco-Roman world as if all the differing countries and cities within its boundary adhered to a single monolithic gender ideology, an unchanging homogenizing gender ideology which over the centuries gradually infiltrated early Christianity and distorted its original intentions.

The Christian missionary movements surely encountered gender ideologies throughout the empire which challenged, and/or informed their own gender-perspectives of the world. As Acts and the various letters in the New Testament each demonstrate differing gender ideologies that are in conflict, or agreement, with each other in the New Testament texts, so too, one would expect the differing communities who embraced Christianity to hold varying gender ideologies. Schüssler Fiorenza locates the patriarchalization of early Christianity outside the early Christian movements and so insulates Christianity from the Graeco-Roman world. But these movements cannot be insulated from this world as this world is the world they moved within and one which generated their particular vision called Christianity. The gender ideologies which underpin patriarchy can be found in the early Christian movements as much as outside of these movements. The boundary that Schüssler Fiorenza constructs between the world and the early Christian missionary movements establishes a false dichotomy between a “them” and an “us,” instead one might historically consider that “them” was “us.”

In order to understand the shifting attitudes toward gender and sexuality, it is best to examine the cultural period, the groups therein, and their resistance to, and reflection of those attitudes inherent to the social milieu in which they lived. History engaged on this level would be
a feminist historical endeavour, whereas establishing a false dichotomy between a them and us and demonstrating how “them” are a threat, or the means of a contamination to us, that which oppressed us, is simply to resist the risk a dialectical history, one that might challenge some unexamined “truths.” Kathleen Corley (1996: 61) suggests that the reason women encountered growing opposition within the Christian church in the second and third centuries may have been due to “an overall reversal of attitudes about women’s roles throughout the Graeco-Roman society from the late first through the mid-third centuries. Rather than being a simple historical situation to reconstruct, it seems more likely that a complex combination of social, cultural, and economic factors led to the decline of women’s participation in various aspects of Hellenistic life and society as well as in the church.”

3. Feminist Standpoint and Schüssler Fiorenza’s feminist epistemology

Schüssler Fiorenza’s methods of analyses, her hermeneutics of suspicion, remembrance, proclamation, and liberative vision and imagination, intersect on a number of levels with the feminist epistemology position known as feminist standpoint. This position, as indicated in chapter one, has been elaborated and supported by feminists such Nancy Hartsock, Dorothy Smith, Hilary Rose, Sandra Harding, Jane Flax, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Patricia Hill Collins, and Rosemary Hennessy to name but a few. Each of these feminist scholars is located in their own fields of study, i.e., Rose, Smith, and Harding in science, Hartsock in political theory, Flax in psychoanalysis etc., and develop their standpoint theories within their pedagogical locations. However, the standpoint theory developed by each in their varying locations does share commonalities, although they also demonstrate marked differences.

The primary building blocks of feminist standpoint theory that are shared by those
CHAPTER 5

working in differing pedagogical locations are: 1) a distinct feminist epistemology grounded in a theory of gender activity and social experience; 2) women, as an oppressed group, are in a position to have a clearer and less distorted picture of reality as they are outside of, or marginalized to, the dominant narrative and therefore considerably less invested in maintaining it (Collins, 1990) (In this then, they can provide a “powerful critique of phallocratic institutions and ideologies.”); 3) an insistence upon an interested or engaged social location “the conditions which bestow upon its occupants scientific and epistemic advantage” (Harding, 1986: 148) in that they will construct a narrative that reflects their resistance to oppression; 4) an opposition to Cartesian dualism which continued into Enlightenment epistemology, a dualism that separates and places in opposition mind/body, subject/object, reason/emotion; and 5) knowledge generated from everyday life and not a rarified position of abstraction wherein everyday life is removed

---

23 The justification concerning the distortion of knowledge in the works of the majority of these women, i.e., Harding, Rose, Smith, and Hartsock, is derived from Hegel’s insight into the master/slave relationship and Marx and Engels’ development of the proletarian standpoint. Hartsock (1983: 283–305), utilizing Marxian meta-theory rather than his critique of capitalism, indicates that based on the Marxian ideas of “epistemology growing from exchange not only inverts that present in the process of production, but in addition is both partial and perverse” (287), and the recognition of power realities operative in community that function as ideological (therefore perversely in a Marxist paradigm) are made to seem real by this dominant group (288). In the shift from proletariate standpoint to feminist standpoint women stand in the position of the oppressed and therefore their vision is an inversion of that of men which then allows them a base on which to expose masculinity as both partial and fundamentally perverse—“as not only occupying one side of the dualities it has constructed, but reversing the proper valuation [i.e., birth is death] of human activity” (1983: 299). Women too participate in these distorted social constructions of reality and these constructions cannot simply be dismissed as false (i.e., Mary Daly), but rather one must go beneath the surface, as the real destructiveness of the dominant ideology (in this instance patriarchy) is concealed under the dualistic and inverted ideology, and discover the different levels of determination which define the relations between male and female. As patriarchy is invested in maintaining its vision of the world which empowers it, it is unable to see beneath the surface. Only the oppressed can determine the operations based upon their experiences and envision a means to move beyond these relations.
Some feminists contend that attempting to develop epistemologies that reflect women's knowledge merely duplicates the oppressive systems in place while establishing a new hegemony. Afro-American feminists have challenged Western feminisms for the whiteness of their notion of "women's experience" which underlies its epistemological stance. The critique is a good one, but it does not invalidate the need to produce positions wherein women can generate their own ideas about what knowledge is and how it reflects their lived experiences.

Nancy Hartsock's feminist standpoint theory has been elaborated over the years since its appearance in 1983, and in its development she has attempted to address the black feminist critique (specifically Patricia Hill Collins, 1990) of the racial blindness articulated in feminist standpoint theory and the postmodern critique of the fixed knowing subject generated by those feminists who advocate a postmodern feminist epistemology. She indicates (1997: 368):

In writing the article "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," I was attempting to translate the concept of the standpoint of the proletariat into feminist terms (Hartsock, 1983). Marx, in Capital (1967, 1:19), adopted a simple two-class model in which everything exchanged at its value. By examining the institutional sexual division of labor, I argued that a feminist standpoint could be developed that would deepen the critique available from the standpoint of the proletariat and that would allow for a critique of patriarchal ideology. In following this strategy I committed an error similar to that of Marx. While he made no theoretical space for any oppression other than class, by following his lead I failed to allow for the importance of differences among women and differences among other various groups—power differences in all.

However, for Hartsock this does not mean giving up subjectivity or the notion of the subject. Rather, she suggests that in order to account for differences that reflect power differentials among groups of oppressed people one requires an understanding that the margins are populated
with a multiplicity of people: people who, through their own subjectivities located in one or more of class, race, ethnicity, and sex, have developed a knowledge of themselves, their group, and their world. This knowledge is a result of the "historical, political, and theoretical process of constituting ourselves as subjects as well as objects of history" (Hartsock, 1987: 204)—hence her social constructivist theory of the subject. What should be jettisoned, she indicates, is a false sense of "we" and instead there is a need to understand "we" as multiple while a variety of subjugated peoples should become the ground for a standpoint epistemology. But, she indicates, multiplicity does not require that one abandon the goal of an accurate and systematic knowledge of the world as postmodernism demands. If, she states, we are to construct a new society, and certainly this was what Marx was pointing toward in his critique of the social, historical, and political world, "we need to be assured that some systematic knowledge about our world and ourselves is possible" (Hartsock, 1987: 205). This multiple "we" must develop an account of the world "which treats our perspectives not as subjugated knowledges, but as primary" (Hartsock, 1987: 205). Her argument, that subjugated groups are in a position (as the oppressed) to have a clearer, less distorted picture of reality, does not mean that "oppression creates "better" people.... Rather it is to note that marginalized groups are far less likely to mistake themselves for the universal 'man'" (Hartsock, 1987: 205).

Although Schüssler Fiorenza will distance herself from a too narrow feminist standpoint in later texts (1995: 25), in her initial study of Christian Origins (In Memory of Her, 1990), a feminist standpoint position is clearly articulated. It is with the advent of But She Said (1992) that she sought to take into account postmodern feminist critiques of the subject of Enlightenment discourses, in this instance the essentialistic group known as "women." Schüssler
Fiorenza will later resist what she terms logic of identity (*But She Said*) understanding it to be a perspective that was engendered in Enlightenment politics. This perspective was unconsciously assumed in early feminist discourses when feminists proposed a categorical group of undifferentiated women. The logic of identity proposes that all situations can be equally dealt with by the same rules “which can be reduced to the unity of one rule or principle. The logic of identity strives to eliminate both the differences among moral subjects and the specificity of particular situations” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992: 140). In her latest work *Jesus, Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet* (1995) Schüssler Fiorenza utilizes the work of Rosemary Hennessy (1993) who critically juxtaposes the epistemological positions of one branch of French feminist theory (psychoanalytic) and North American feminist standpoint epistemology in order to develop an analytic “that extends postmodern and feminist critiques of the centered subject without giving up a commitment to the possibility of transformative social change” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1995: 25).

However, Schüssler Fiorenza, like Nancy Hartsock, does not reject the female subject, although both acknowledge that the category of the subject cannot be fixed. Rather the female subject (as well as the male subject) as a subject is multiple, shifting, historical, social, and always fluid. But, Schüssler Fiorenza argues, to give up subjectivity and with it a critical position from which to challenge dominant and oppressive discourses, is to eviscerate feminist political action. Schüssler Fiorenza indicates that (1995: 24–25):
heterosexuality, colonialism, age, and health. Nonetheless, I do not think that feminists can relinquish the analytic category “women” entirely and replace it with the analytic category “gender” if we do not want to marginalize or erase the presence of women in our own feminist discourses.

Although I certainly do not agree that altering the word women with a slash represents any kind of clear awareness of the realities of power imbalances implicit in the categories of race, colonialism, etc., and do feel that this is one of the least useful kinds of appeal made to postmodernism and its critique of the subject, Schüssler Fiorenza’s point that the category of women cannot be jettisoned is well taken. If the category of the subject is fractured and fragmented and made unavailable in order to level a critique, then women, or rather the female, remain locked into the category of the object while men retain the subject. Old patterns require dismantling, but dismantling does not occur by declaring the categories to be void as if this will fix the problem. Feminist standpoint epistemology challenges the current dominant western scientific epistemology for its distortion of reality that seeks to secure its power and the dominant position of its adherents. A feminist standpoint position both legitimates its own perspective in the face of the perspective of the dominant discourse, without relativizing its view as just one of many (the fractured and fragmented subject) and therefore lacking signification in culture.

The risk of radical relativism is one of the more dangerous outcomes of postmodern thought. Postmodern epistemological positions allow themselves to be subsumed by, without dislodging, the dominant discourse. Postmodern theories, by particularizing their own discourses as simply one of many in an attempt to particularize the dominant discourse, have had little political affect on the dominant epistemological position. When postmodern theories adhere to an extreme relativism they lack a justificatory strategy as no one position is more justifiable than
CHAPTER 5

298

another. How does one critique a political system and determine it to be oppressive when it simply is just another perspective? Without a justification strategy there is no impetus to adopt a different epistemological position from that of the dominant one. What needs to be demonstrated is how a new epistemological position will enhance human knowledge.

The implicit standpoint epistemology found In Memory of Her provides the political impetus and epistemological certainty that allows Schüssler Fiorenza to tell a different story about the women of the early Christian period. Her reconceptualization, which includes the fiction of history, or in the instances of biblical texts the mythology of historical Christianity as the repressed, means that she can locate the female subject as the repressed in the intersection between androcentric memory and the writing of history. In Schüssler Fiorenza’s work feminist standpoint theory cooperatively functions with her use of hermeneutics, new historicism, and feminist history, all of which underscore the methods and theoretical position she delineates in In Memory of Her.

Schüssler Fiorenza adheres to the tenets of a feminist standpoint theory when she grounds her theory of the recoupment of early Christian women to the historical records, looks for androcentric biases, reads the texts as androcentric, and applies suspicion to androcentric readings of the text. The category of gender, for Schüssler Fiorenza, does not consist of social behaviors mapped out along the lines of biological differences between men and women, but rather the category of gender consists of social behaviors that have been explained by recourse to an understanding of biological difference. Biology is used to explain the naturalness of the oppression of one group by another, and, in this, biology is used to legitimate that oppression. Biology has functioned not only to explain the oppression of women, but the oppression of
CHAPTER 5

people (women and men) of colour, and legitimate classed societies. Although Schüssler Fiorenza does not delineate a theory of gender, she does articulate that gender “understood in social terms with reference to patriarchal relationships of inequality within the private and the public spheres, is also theoretically able to account for the variations of social status, class difference, and cultural identity” (1990: 86–87).

In her analysis of androcentric texts and interpretations, Schüssler Fiorenza implicitly adheres to the standpoint proposition that women as the oppressed, and therefore the less invested as they stand outside the imperatives for patriarchal rule, have a less distorted picture of reality. But as women share the patriarchal vision since this is their situatedness, the women who resist the dominant discourse will be those whose perspectives can provide a “…powerful critique of phallocratic institutions and ideologies….Because scholars use androcentric heuristic models that cannot do justice to the position and influence of women, like Phoebe, Prisca, or Junia, or adequately integrate them into their conception of early Christian leadership, their reconstructions serve to legitimate the patriarchal practice of the contemporary church” (1990: 48). Her position, then, is one of engagement, an engagement for the oppressed (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990: 32) who resist oppression and struggle for liberation. Schüssler Fiorenza’s feminist critical hermeneutics is “concerned not only with analyzing the historical oppression of women in biblical religion but also with changing the social reality of the Christian churches in which the religious oppression and eradication of women takes its specific historical patriarchal forms” (1990: 30–31). Although her resistance to dualistic heuristic models is not explicitly stated, within her hermeneutics of suspicion is a resistance to the subject/object dichotomy, a resistance to the possibility of an objective-value neutral history, a refusal to engage in the
assumed dualism of reason and emotion, and a challenge to many who are reluctant to defrock
the reified gendered embodiment of women and men. And finally, according to the tenets of a
feminist standpoint theory, the knowledge she wishes to generate, and does to a large degree in
her delineation of the Christian missionary movements, is a knowledge that is connected to the
quotidian, to the demands of day-to-day of these women. Therefore meal preparation, child care,
thological statements, pronounces, and preaching are also central to her historical development
of early Christianity.

Critics of standpoint theory may contend that Schüssler Fiorenza has made a contribution
to the sociology of knowledge but not to epistemology in and of itself. This critique has been
levelled at feminist standpoint theory in general by epistemologists, philosophers of science, and
some postmodern critics, while other sociologists of knowledge and some postmodern critiques
contend that standpoint theory is too epistemological, its theory is excessively foundational
(Harding, 1991: 165). Standpoint theorists, however, contest this interpretation of their
endeavour. Their project neither is transhistorical nor begins at a fixed point: research begins
with women's lives, and as women's lives\(^2\) are fluid, non-static, complex, social, and historical,
its foundations are mutable. But equally, a feminist standpoint epistemology is more than a
sociology of knowledge as it seeks to transform the way we know, not just what we know. When
Schüssler Fiorenza engages a feminist standpoint theory, she engages the history of Christianity

\(^{2}\)In regard to the difference between the category of women’s experience, and the category of
women’s lives Harding states (1991: 123): “For a position to count as a standpoint, rather than as
a claim—equally valuable but for different reasons—for the importance of listening to women
tell us about their lives and experiences, we must insist on an objective location—women’s
lives—as the place from which feminist research should begin.”
on epistemological grounds. To some degree she will challenge ways of knowing this material, demanding that androcentrism be taken seriously, and arguing that the perspective of Christianity thus far is partial—at its best distorting, at its worst oppressive. She will also critique and revise what is known within this body of knowledge. She does this because the world view of human beings is often developed along the lines of both science and metaphysics therefore making it imperative that both the content and the form of early Christian history be challenged and revised in order to alter how modern day Christians interpret, understand, and explain their world.

Schüssler Fiorenza’s implicit use of standpoint theory provides a firm grounding for her development of a feminist history of early Christian Origins. When she delineates a history that includes women as active subjects, feminist standpoint theory provides a foundation on which she can stand. By taking an epistemological position that understands itself as invested but also less distorted, due to the lack of a desire to maintain systems of oppression, she can provide another reading of the texts. This is what a feminist epistemological position provides for those who challenge a dominant epistemological position. She will, in later texts, temper her epistemological position with correctives from feminist postmodernism (see Schüssler Fiorenza, 1995: 24–25). She resists the category of gender if it is used to replace women in feminist analyses. Gender as a category of analysis should (and I quite agree with Schüssler Fiorenza) augment the category of women rather than replace it. Instead she suggests, following Patricia Hill Collins (1991) and Sandra Harding (1991), that instead of grounding feminist analyses in “women’s experience” they be grounded in women’s daily lives. Schüssler Fiorenza states that (1990: 86): “…feminist historians reject heuristic concepts such as “biological caste” or “women’s experience as essentially different from that of men” because these categories render
women passive objects of mere biological differences or male dominance. They seek instead for heuristic models that explore women’s historical participation in social-public development and their efforts to comprehend and transform social structures.” These daily lives will be informed, however, by the experiential as each of us cannot escape from our day-to-day existence.

The experiential, as taken up in feminist standpoint theory according to its adherents, does not mean that women’s daily lives will produce common experiences upon which a feminist epistemology can be constructed in order to stand in opposition to the dominant epistemology. Hartsock argues that she is not “claiming that women are a unitary group, or that Western white women have the same experiences as women or men of color, or as colonized people,” but rather, she argues that these marginalized epistemologies can challenge the dominant epistemology not by giving up their status of “subjects,” as postmodernism would have, it having problematised the category of a knowing subject and the possibilities of a general theory of the world. She suggests that rather “than getting rid of subjectivity or notions of the subject, we need to engage in the historical and political and theoretical process of constituting ourselves as subjects as well as objects of history” (1987: 204). This is the epistemic position which Schüssler Fiorenza takes in her text In Memory of Her. In this text she did, however, overlook how her feminist standpoint epistemological position, without the necessary correctives, excluded other marginalized epistemologies, a problem she has attempted to correct in her subsequent texts.

Ultimately, however, Schüssler Fiorenza continues to resist relinquishing ontological ground for women as Sheila Greeve Davaney has rightly criticized Schüssler Fiorenza for (1987: 47–48). It is Schüssler Fiorenza’s conflation of a feminist standpoint epistemology with a feminist ontology, that provokes Greeve Davaney to comment (1987: 44): “…all locations of the
struggle against oppression, the loci of revelation by the one God of liberation are the loci of
revelation by one God of liberation, and all correspond to ontological reality and divine
purpose." Schüssler Fiorenza's adherence to a theological impetus undercuts her feminist
standpoint epistemological position. Her theological commitment generates an epistemological
position that continues to function ideologically. God is the legitimating force behind her
position. This is a position for which she has severely criticized patriarchal institutions. She has
argued that knowledge is socially and historical produced by human beings and is not some
reified category that the right people can tap into, but in her own work she has, at times, assumed
this position.

Epistemology, how we know, undergirds the many ways we have of expressing that
knowing. It underlies our production and writing of history and determines the meaning that
history will have for the group concerned. It acts a bridge that connects history and mythology:
the way we see ourselves (history) and the way we would like to see ourselves (the utopian pole
of mythology). These two endeavours, the historical and the mythological will overlap and what
will often result is ideology: the will to power through epistemology. But because of this will to
power, epistemology cannot be jettisoned as simply a tool of oppression since it would become
the repressed and surface in ways that are invisible. Instead a full frontal engagement is required
for as long as human’s think there will be epistemologies.

4. Concluding Remarks

Schüssler Fiorenza’s feminist hermeneutics of suspicion, proclamation, imaginative
liberative vision, and remembrance are feminist methods grounded in a feminist standpoint
epistemology. Her history of early Christianity desires to be a feminist history which presents the
possibility of a different view of the world both in past and the present. In many ways she is successful, pointing to androcentric readings, ancient and modern, and successfully decentring Paul as the founder of the Christian missionary movements. Her feminist hermeneutics recalls women as agents who played a causal role in the development of Christian history. She juxtaposes women’s oppression and their historical agency, and negotiates between both poles in order to write a history of early Christian women. She is, however, less successful when she attempts to deal with the figure of Jesus, and the Jesus movements. In both instances her desire to maintain Jesus at the center of Christianity has undercut the intentions of both a social history and a feminist history of early Christianity. Both the peoples who populated the Jesus movements such as Q, and women among these groups disappear behind the romantic, heroic, and mythic figure of Jesus. Jesus transcends social and historical practices, and in time, according to Schüssler Fiorenza’s development of early Christian history, under the pressure of the social and historical the members of these groups fall back into their old patterns of living, patterns that were hierarchical and oppressive. These groups, and women therein, are, in Schüssler Fiorenza’s work, the mouthpiece of Jesus, and in this, although they may be by the side of Jesus, as social historical persons they remain mute. The words, which were theirs, are given over to Jesus and what they had to say, what they critiqued in their world, are ascribed to the heroic figure. The great man continues to get all the great lines. It is he who acts as the catalyst for justice, and is the “big bang” event that propelled some humans toward justice (justice as it is perceived within the paradigm of liberation theology).

Some of the difficulties Schüssler Fiorenza encounters are due to the heuristic models found in the field and understood to be the best way to approach to material, i.e., a historical-
critical paradigm and the division of Jesus moments from Christian missionary movements. These models she has also accepted, but these models have their own structural problems, such as maintaining anti-Jewish polemics or the great man narrative. Some of the difficulties arise because she resists reading the rhetorical strategies of the texts, preferring to read the “figures” of women in the text literally, so that the rhetoric which negatively engaged the female is seen to be an affirmation of women as in Schüssler Fiorenza’s reading of Q.

But the largest hurdle for Schüssler Fiorenza to jump is that of her feminist theology. Her theological commitment, not to the poor, but to the Christian God and his son, undercuts her historical development of the Hellenised world of Palestine and the Graeco-Roman world and their people so that religious practices are not only elaborated within a monolithic narrative, they are found archaic in light of the teaching of Jesus, i.e., Judaism’s cultic practices, or guaranteed egalitarianism because of their association with Jesus. She resists examining the social practices such as the patron-client relationship in the Graeco-Roman world because she desires to believe that Christian women must have been egalitarian, egalitarian because they were Christians and they were women. Her theological commitment to conserve Jesus as the son of God at the center of her feminist history of early Christianity means that the historical women Schüssler Fiorenza was trying to write back into the historical record are filtered through the Jesus lens so that anything and everything they did they did in response to him. Jesus spoke and they listened, Jesus acted and they followed, Jesus commanded and they obeyed. Female agency is accomplished through the agency of Jesus.
1. Rosemary Radford Ruether: An Intellectual Biography

Rosemary Radford Ruether, professor, author, Catholic theologian, and advocate for the oppressed, began her academic career in 1954 at Scripps College in California. She continues to work in academics and is presently employed as a professor of theology at Garrett-Evangelical theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. The mother of three, Radford Ruether’s political commitments have lead to active contestation of oppression in its many guises. Whether as writer or front-line combatant, as in 1965 when she traveled to Mississippi as part of the group of students working with the Delta Ministry in order to support the Civil Rights movement, Radford Ruether believes in active resistance to systemic oppression.

Radford Ruether has written a plethora of texts throughout her career, the most significant being *Faith and Fratricide* (1975), *Sexism and Godtalk* (1983), and possibly *Gaia and God* (1992). She indicates that central to all of her analyses is a dialectical engagement with the dualities that support hierarchies. Her dialectical method of challenging oppression began early in her career and is evident in her one of her earlier tests, *The Church Against Itself* (1967). By methodologically approaching oppression in a dialectic framework Radford Ruether resists polemical positions. She indicates that both the dominant discourse and its repressed subversive elements are essential to her analysis of hierarchical oppressive institutions. There is no scapegoat in Radford Ruether’s work, rather there is a realistic attempt to deal with the intricacies of power so that, for example, Christian tradition is played out along both its trajectories of oppressive fixity and comforting continuance. However, one might contest that Radford Ruether overlooks the ideological implications hidden in the concept of tradition when
she does not unpack how comforting continuance functions to make palpable oppressive fixity, more of which will be said later in this chapter.

1.1 Growing up Christian

Radford Ruether’s Catholicism was inherited from her mother. Her father had been an Anglican (Radford Ruether, 1989: 18). In several of her texts she discusses the Catholic tradition that has encapsulated her since childhood (1975b; 1989). She “grew up assuming that Catholicism was the cloak of a mysterium tremendum” and she felt safe in ignoring it when it “exhibited a vulgar or narrowly doctrinaire style” (1975b: 36, author’s italics). Radford Ruether speaks of family as one with an “exacting sense of history,” and of having a “consciousness of being rooted in the stories of many generations” (1975b: 34).

Radford Ruether lived in Greece with her family for several years and while there attended an Ursuline convent. During a period of time when her mother was absent from Greece, Radford Ruether’s father died. Alone for a brief time, until her mother returned, Radford Ruether felt a “strange detachment” and was “haunted” by memories of her father being lowered into his grave. This was her initial personal experience of death and it left her with “a strong sense of human mortality, the finitude of the individual self” (1975b: 39).

Several years later she and her mother moved to La Jolla, a place which afforded Radford Ruether a community which had strong matrilocal bonds. Her mother had grown up near by in San Diego and was returning, as a widow, to a place her own mother and grandmother had returned to when widowed (Radford Ruether, 1975b: 38). At this point Radford Ruether exited from a strictly Catholic education and entered public school. In high school Radford Ruether began to develop a social consciousness that was critical of situations that empowered one group
of people by disempowering another group. This kind of critical consciousness would continue to inform Radford Ruether’s perspective and underscore all of her academic work.

Radford Ruether attended Scripps College in Claremont intending to continue to develop her artistic talent. However, her interests “shifted dramatically” toward classics and ancient history. It was throughout this time that she felt she had developed a historical consciousness that was infused with a hermeneutical understanding of religion (1975b: 41–42). She was also taught to think “mythopoetically” wherein rather than beginning with doctrine one began with the “theophany, the real encounter with the numinous: first the god, then the story, then the dance” (Radford Ruether, 1989: 26–27). Equipped with these tools of analysis and a critical awareness of social injustices and their historical basis and functioning, Radford Ruether turned to the study of the Bible, Christianity, and Catholic theology.

In her study of Christianity, Radford Ruether built a “fundamental tendency toward dialectical thinking” into her method which had been acquired prior to her introduction to the Hegelians (Radford Ruether, 1975b: 44). She was suspicious of any idea that “appeared to be one side of a dualism” (Radford Ruether, 1975b: 44). Using this method, then, she was able to discern a polemic and develop from it a dialectic. An example of her method is Radford Ruether’s discussions concerning Judaism and Christianity: how Christianity’s rebuttals of Judaism in the gospels were the attempts of early Christianity to justify Jesus and itself over and against Judaism1 (Radford Ruether, 1989: 69), or her critical analysis of the church’s attitude toward women. Evinced in the early church, according to Radford Ruether, was a desire to

---

1See for example The Radical Kingdom: The Western Experience of Messianic Hope, 1970; Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism, 1974.
normalize the new religion which lead to the patriarchal enculturation of these early Christians. Hence members such as Paul began to interpret Jesus’ message in eschatological terms (Gal 3: 28) rather than in terms that related to the social material conditions of the time (Radford Ruether, 1990: 35). Radford Ruether critiques her tradition from a position that understands Christianity to have emerged from a patriarchal context, in other words, both Christianity and Judaism were (and are) products of historical and social responses to the belief in God, and both, then, were (and are) encapsulated in, and informed by, patriarchal societies.

Radford Ruether’s understanding of life, the “exacting sense of history” she felt around her own family, is one of the tools she has used in order to understand Christianity. This historical consciousness was further developed in college, and one can see in all her writings her comprehension of life and religion in historical terms. The death of her father introduced Radford Ruether early in her life to human mortality, and her understanding of the “finitude of the individual” is expressed in her understanding of Christian eschatology. Jesus was addressing the wrongs in the material world and not establishing a means for entrance into an “other world.” Further, her understanding of immortality took on a collective meaning rather an individual meaning. We as the human race continue into time, but individuals die. After the death of her father she was centred in a “women’s” space, one that I think allowed Radford Ruether to develop a positive sense of being a woman: her femaleness was affirmed and not diminished.

God/ess as the mysterious tremendum was above human definitions, analogies or adjectives, but this needed demonstration, and so she continued to work critically on her own tradition. In order for Radford Ruether to remain in her tradition, in spite of her critical work which demonstrated how completely her tradition had used its dogma in order to oppress other
peoples, she needed to find a way not only to understand her tradition critically, but to reinterpret and reclaim the teachings of Christianity. Her own dialectical method and liberation theology helped her to do this.

1.2 Liberation theologian and critic of Christianity

Radford Ruether came early to a critical awareness of social inequalities. During her high school years, one of her teachers introduced into the class “the evils of American racism” (Radford Ruether, 1975b: 40). Focusing on social inequality and Christianity, Radford Ruether began to investigate the work of liberation theologians. Liberation theology incorporated aspects of Marxist analysis and framed it within a Christian dialogue. The writings of theologians such as Leonardo Boff, Jon Sobrino, and Jose Miranda suggested a “different starting point for Christology” (Radford Ruether, 1990: 19). Jesus, within the paradigm of liberation theology, was a prophet who spoke against oppression, oppression of the poor, the sick, and society’s outcasts.

In this then, according to Radford Ruether, he shared in a tradition of social critique generated by the Jewish prophets of the Tanakh. According to Radford Ruether, liberation theology “does not start first with a dogma about God becoming “man” or divine epiphany….Rather, liberation theology focuses first on the historical Jesus, specifically on his ‘liberating praxis’” (Radford Ruether, 1990: 20). Liberation theology takes up the “good news” as revealed by the historical Jesus of the gospels and the self critique found in the prophetic books of the Tanakh (Radford Ruether, 1990: 5). Liberation theology seeks to bring the “kingdom of God” closer to the social, material world. The “kingdom of God,” according to Radford Ruether’s understanding of

That part of The Bible referred to by Christians as the Old Testament.
liberation theology, is “the overcoming of every evil, the wiping away of every tear” (Radford Ruether, 1990: 21). The evil that liberation theology and Radford Ruether speak of is not just personal evil, which is seen by them to be alienation from God, nor is it a metaphysical evil, but rather, is an evil that functions in the social, historical, and physical world and is experienced as “poverty, nakedness, homelessness, lameness, blindness, and diseases” (Radford Ruether, 1990: 21), racism, sexism, and classism (Radford Ruether, 1983: 159–92). “Evil comes about precisely by the distortion of the self-other relationship into the good-evil, superior-inferior dualism” (Radford Ruether, 1983: 163). Liberation theology attempts to take the theory of Christian theology as a liberating force and bring it among the people. It is both the liberating message of the teachings of Jesus, and the method by which Jesus critiqued his own religious tradition that liberation theology and Radford Ruether have applied to Catholicism (Radford Ruether, 1989: 64).

Radford Ruether recounts that Christianity is not the religious truth (Radford Ruether, 1987: 141), nor does she see Jesus to be the final and most perfect word of God (Radford Ruether, 1990: 31–37; 1989: 72). Instead she suggests that Christianity and the message of Jesus can be the impetus for social change. Working within a liberation theological framework, Radford Ruether is able to bracket the dogma of the Church in order to reinterpret the teachings of Jesus. She argues that these teachings dealt with concrete material questions of existence, which are as applicable now as they were then. According to Radford Ruether “[t]he teachings and liberating praxis of Jesus prove to be a focal point for this critical and transforming vision. Jesus discloses the transformatory and liberating patterns of relation to each other and, through them, to God, not only for his situation, but also in ways that continue to speak to our situation”
According to Radford Ruether, Jesus attempted to address oppression within in his religious culture. He took issue with what he felt to be the fundamental root of oppression: love of prestige, power, and wealth (Radford Ruether, 1990: 15). His method was to model a new form of leadership based upon service to others (Radford Ruether, 1990: 15), and in this service to others demonstrate, in his liberating actions, his “preferential option for the poor” (Radford Ruether, 1990: 20). Radford Ruether states that the liberation of the poor as the critical locus of God’s action in history has “nothing to do with the romantization of outcasts” or the “righteousness of the poor” simply because they are outcast or poor, but rather has to do with a reversal whereby the teachings of Jesus as found in the gospels “turns upside down the present order,” but not simply to invert the system of ruler over ruled, but to introduce a “new order where hierarchy itself is overcome as a principle of rule” (Radford Ruether, 1990: 53). Radford Ruether believes that if the Church is to be true to the teachings of Jesus, it needs to establish itself among the poor and the outcasts rather than with the elite, as it has so often done in the past and continues to do in the present. The Church, according to Radford Ruether, needs to address the suffering of humanity on a physical level as well as on a spiritual level, rather than ascribing the eschatological message of salvation to Jesus and, in this, setting up a dichotomy between the immanent and the transcendent. According to Christian doctrine, God took the form of a human in order to bring to humanity salvation. Radford Ruether points out that God chose in the figure
of Jesus a human vehicle to speak to humanity which suggests to her, then, that the material concrete world was/is as much as a concern as the immaterial world of the soul. Radford Ruether suggests that (1990: 29) “[i]n Jesus’ cross God abandons God’s power into the human condition utterly and completely so that we might not abandon each other.”

Radford Ruether’s Christology is derived from a material and social perspective which has incorporated aspects of the Marxian understanding of the relationship between religion and people. In her use of historical criticism and her immanent liberation theology, Radford Ruether removes many of the illusions that disguise the oppressive theory and praxis found in the Church, in particular, and Christianity, in general. Her own critical awareness of the social-historical formation of all human activity allows Radford Ruether to understand the social-historical formation of her tradition, and since it is grounded in human activity she too can point to its failings. It is by understanding that the Church is neither infallible nor the authority on deity that Radford Ruether is able to maintain commitment to her tradition (Radford Ruether, 1975b: 39):

Such a critical discarding of the central doctrine of Catholic popular faith [doctrine of personal immortality of the soul], the very nub upon which all discipline and doctrine are hinged, could only mean that, in an irrevocable sense, I had crossed over from heteronomous to autonomous selfhood. Whatever else I made up my mind to believe in thereafter would be because I personally found it believable not because “the Church” taught it.

---

3 For example, Radford Ruether argues: “It is the task of history, therefore, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world. The immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of history, is to unmask human self-alienation in its secular form now that it has been unmasked in its sacred form. Thus the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics” (1978: 54, author’s italics).
Radford Ruether, following liberation theology, took up Marx’s critical stance that religion (and in all cases here, including Marx and Engels, religion stands for Christianity) has been used in order to sustain social oppression by professing a dogma of equality in the hereafter (Radford Ruether, 1990: 25–26). Turning this understanding of Christianity on its head and reinterpreting the message of Jesus, she suggests that it was to have been a liberatory message for the material world of the here and now. Mainstream Catholicism’s understanding of Jesus has been, and to a large degree continues to be, exclusive. The dogmatic theology of Jesus Christ is “that two, the divine and the human, became somehow uniquely one in Jesus of Nazareth; that in Him was achieved a union, elsewhere unparalleled, of God with man” (Jesus Christ, II in New Catholic Encyclopaedia 7, 1967: 918, my italics).

Catholic theologians continue to re-examine their christological dogma in light of contemporary biblical scholarship. However the discourse continues to focus on the nature of Jesus, rather than on the social, historical interpretations of the “Christ” event. Radford Ruether, and others like her, attempt to place the christological dialogue in a new framework. Rather than focusing on the divine and human natures of Christ they fix upon his teachings and his actions, and suggest that Jesus was not attempting to bring humanity into the divine realm, but rather he was attempting to bring the divine into the realm of human activity (Radford Ruether, 1990: 15). For examples of her work in the area of liberation theology see Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power (1972); To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism (1990 [1981]); Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian (1989 [1982]) or A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism (1992).
1.3 Feminist Liberation theologian

A number of Radford Ruether’s works have focused on the liberation of women. *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (1975); *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church* (1977); *To Change The World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (1990 [1981]); *Sexism and Godtalk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (1983); *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology* (1985); *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (1985); *A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism* (1992) and *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (1992). Radford Ruether’s studies, in preparation for her dissertation work, took her into the area of patristics. The works of men such as Jerome, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and Tertullian came under her critical gaze. But her gaze was not antagonistic to these men, rather she attempted to understand them within their own contexts. She notes that they are very much a product of their cultures, and affected by the needs of the Church within their own time. Therefore a figure such as Tertullian wrote in condemnation of Christians such as the Ebonites (a Jewish branch of Christianity which believed in the indivisibility of God and therefore denied Christ’s divinity, and the virgin birth) who were considered heretical by mainstream Christianity (“Jesus Christ, II” in *NCE* Vol. 7: 918).

Tertullian likewise condemns all women as descendants of Eve—she who betrayed God and Adam. Therefore, all women are deceptive and are responsible for bringing death into the world (Radford Ruether 1983: 167). Her point is that Tertullian, although misogynist and anti-Jewish, was very much a man of his times, and was responding to what he perceived to be a threat to the

---

4See her “Mysogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church” in *Religion and Sexism*, 1974 for a critical, yet fair, treatment of men such as Jerome.
unity of Church. However, Radford Ruether contends, nor should his words be understood within the Church as the “right” formula in regard to Jews and women. Radford Ruether does not apologize for men such as Tertullian or Jerome, but neither does she excuse their bigotry regarding pagans, Jews, women, and nature. But she does not anticipate finding in their work a 20th century consciousness. Still, Radford Ruether maintains, they, and others like them, established/support a Christianity that operated in adversus to the teachings of Jesus. “In her [Radford Ruether] estimation, therefore, orthodox Christology in its mature form replaced the historical person of Jesus with a cosmological myth that issued from contemporary religious philosophy...the myth of transcendent or ideal anthropology and cosmology” (Synder, 1988: 47).

When referring to deity, Radford Ruether uses the term God/ess. The term God/ess is not, according to Radford Ruether, an attempt to project onto “the heavens” male and female social roles. But since all language for deity is metaphorical and analogous, symbolic images of deity that privilege one group are used to legitimate and establish as normative that one group, and similarly establish as normative representations of deity in their symbol systems. Therefore, “[i]mages of God must be drawn from the whole range of human experience, from both genders, and all classes and cultures” (1984: 16). In order to develop a mythic concept of God/ess, Radford Ruether draws upon Judaic and Christian traditions that used feminine images, or feminine activity such as birthing and breast feeding to characterize the divine and its interactions with humanity. For Radford Ruether, “God/ess” is both mother and father—creatrix and creator.

Radford Ruether critiques the hierarchal symbols representing deity and interprets them as power over symbols. She states that “[p]erhaps the whole concept of God as omnipotent
sovereign is thrown into question by the death of Christ, by the martyrdom of the just. Such a God is modelled after the powers of domination” (Radford Ruether, 1990: 29). The symbols representing deity which are imaged after a select group, more often than not the ruling class, is a legitimating practice of the ruling elite. As Radford Ruether notes, members of the church are aware of their “tradition” of analogy yet “…images such as ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ for God are not regarded as partial images drawn from a limited (male) human experience, but are taken literally. ‘Daughter’ or ‘mother’ are not regarded as equally appropriate analogies” (Radford Ruether, 1990: 46).

Radford Ruether does not take issue with deity conceived as pure, wise, rational or authoritative. However she does point out that these attributes have often been connected with maleness rather than femaleness. Deity may be symbolically associated with such characteristics, but certainly maleness in and of itself is not. These characteristics have been associated with maleness, because they are associated with deity and deity has been presumed male.

Celibacy,⁵ maleness, transcendence, and racial designation of deity are preconceived notions which belong to the white male ruling class (Radford Ruether, 1984: 9–33). It has been assumed by males in Christianity and the Church (this perspective is very much affected by Greek philosophy) that sexual activity and material being (both of which connote mortality in Western thought) are ways in which humanity earns in the sight of deity. Because of the connection between sexuality, procreation, creation, and death (material and corporeal being) it is theorized within Christian theology that deity because of its immortal status would not be sexual

⁵Radford Ruether does not take up the issue of celibacy although she herself advocates for priests being allowed to marry (Radford Ruether, 1985: 24–56).
or material. Deity in many ways then has been conceptualized as antithetical to humanity. Yet religion in humanity has often called people to emulate deity. In order for people to emulate deity they must of necessity deny their humanity. Although one may choose not to be sexually active, one cannot be other than a material being. Males in an attempt to mirror deity and divine attributes have projected onto women essential aspects of humanness such as materiality and sexuality, and by doing so have attempted to deny their own humanity. These men, then, are scapegoating women by projecting onto women that which they have determined to be sinful: being a human.

Radford Ruether’s feminist liberation theology does not attempt to transcend the created world. Her theology is fixed in creation and in a particular understanding of the history of humanity. In her work she will juxtapose transcendence and history creating a dialectic between that which may be, and that which is, rather than a polemical juxtaposition between transcendence and immanence: the uncreated and the created. Radford Ruether relates that her own “assumption is that the Divine Being...is truly universal, and is the father and mother of all peoples without discrimination...God/ess is the ground of all beings, and not just human beings” (Radford Ruether, 1987: 141).

Radford Ruether addresses the problems of the misogynist and patriarchal behaviour of the Church. She recognizes and criticizes Catholicism and Christianity for its exclusiveness: “…the imaging of God and Christ as white, male ruling class persons...are not merely intellectual errors, but sins, the sins of idolatry and blasphemy” (Radford Ruether, 1990: 26). By locating Christianity in the realm of historical, social, and political activity, the onus for this kind of exclusivity resides with those who practise and perpetuate them. According to Radford
Ruether, it is not God, God/ess, or Jesus in Christianity who excluded women from the human race, but rather, men. Although the historical Jesus is male, Radford Ruether maintains that

"[t]he historical accidents of Jesus’ person—maleness, Jewishness, social class—do not suggest that God is more incarnate into these particularities than into others. This has always been clear in terms of ethnic and social identity" (Radford Ruether, 1984: 21).

Where it has not been clear, according to Radford Ruether, is in terms of gender. Radford Ruether maintains that women must continue to argue their right as human beings to follow a priestly vocation. Jesus’ maleness was not a reflection of a male gendered deity or the deification of the male gender. The theology of the Catholic Church, its organization, and its appendages are at best lopsided and reflect only a male perspective. Within the context of Catholicism and Christianity, Radford Ruether suggests that women create a new midrash, a feminist midrash on scripture, one that reflects women’s interpretations of the gospels and critiques traditional versions of the gospels for their androcentric perspective (Radford Ruether, 1987: 147). She suggests that a feminist midrash should “enter into dialogue and controversy with patriarchal religion” (Radford Ruether, 1987: 147). Radford Ruether maintains that a Christian feminist midrash must also remain open to “feminist exploration of religions in other traditions including alternative forms of goddess religions” (Radford Ruether, 1987: 147). Ultimately, Radford Ruether believes that “[j]ust as women have been able to experience themselves in the crucified rabbi from Nazareth, men must be able to experience Christ in the raped woman and thereby come to experience the question mark this directs at male culture in which the tortured female body is regarded as pornographic rather than the expression of the sufferings of God” (Radford Ruether, 1987: 147).
Radford Ruether herself chooses to remain within the tradition of Catholicism and suggests that a feminist midrash needs to continue to deconstruct current sexist and hierarchical patterns within the Church. She states that “feminist liberation community rituals are written and shaped to express the root message of redemption as liberation from sexism” (Radford Ruether 1984: 29). Further, these communities should disassemble “clericalism” as she suggests clericalism is fundamentally hierarchical and sexist. The community, as a whole, needs to take responsibility for its religious activities. This, however, is not an argument against leadership within the community. “Leadership is called from within the community rather than imposed upon it” (Radford Ruether, 1984: 29). Those with special gifts in the community can realize those gifts, but not as better than or over others, rather as those who have something to share with their fellow human beings.

Radford Ruether names a Christian feminist liberation community “women church.” According to Radford Ruether, women church needs to establish itself apart from the hierarchical church in order that it can create a structure that validates those who work toward a church that is neither patriarchal, hierarchal nor sexist (Radford Ruether, 1985: 59). She indicates that as an exodus community, women church provides a space where women’s experience and knowledge are legitimized and not marginalized or trivialized. This assertion is in response to her belief that women need a space where they can speak without fear of being humiliated or silenced, and where their ideas are honoured and taken up as valid contributions to the community. But women church, argues Radford Ruether, does not set itself up over and against men, creating a dichotomy between women and men. Radford Ruether clearly states that the need for a separate base is “in order to form a critical culture and should not be confused with ideological
separatism” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 59).

Women church does not deny males the capacity for “authentic humanness,” but it does deny that patriarchy is the normative of authentic humanity. Until women are recognized as fully human within the Catholic church, there is no place in this church for women as authentic human beings. Radford Ruether indicates that women church does not mean breaking off from the church into a sectarian group, but it also does mean not fitting into the church on its terms (Radford Ruether, 1985: 62). She suggests that the feminist exodus community will be an ongoing process, and one that will not find a quick and easy resolution. But if the process is maintained, in time receptive males will join with women church in order to transform existing structures that are sexist and hierarchical (Radford Ruether, 1985: 63). Women church is not in exile, but in exodus (Radford Ruether, 1985: 73). By this Radford Ruether means that women in this community make a choice to stand apart from the church rather than being told to stand behind it. A community, such as women church, is understood by Radford Ruether as a viable option for those women with feminist leanings who wish to remain Christian. Radford Ruether suggests that a persistent action generated by women, in the form of a feminist midrash, should be directed at the male controlled institution of the Church.

A feminist midrash, according to Radford Ruether, is helpful when looking at Christian teachings, but frequently, especially within the traditional Catholic Church, a feminist midrash is not considered a legitimate interpretation. Traditional sexist attitudes regarding women persist in the Church and are even fostered by the Church. But by grounding this kind of bigotry in the social, political, and historical realms of human activity, Radford Ruether and other Christians like her are able to maintain their faith in their religious traditions. According to Radford
Ruether’s theology, it is not God/ess who promotes the subjugation of a group of people based on gender, colour, and/or class, but by those who benefit by such subjugation.

1.4 And now ecology

Radford Ruether’s focus on systems of domination leads her to examine human practices in regard to the earth and environment. Her analyses, although directed at humanity at large, critique how legitimating practices in Christianity have undergirded the West’s appropriative attitudes toward the earth. Like women, the earth has been objectified. Its domination can be directly linked with Western attitudes toward the “other.” Her work of exposing the ideology that supports human destructiveness toward our environment is represented in New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation (1975), “Women, Ecology and the Domination of Nature” (1975); “The Biblical Vision of the Ecology Crisis” (1978), and Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing (1992). The development of her thought leading from the oppression of the poor, and the “other” as represented in her work first by African Americans, then by Judaism and Jews, and then by women, shifted to the earth itself.

All the categories of the oppressed she examines are ultimately (re)presentations of the “other”—that which is not Western, Christian, white, and male. But women, women of colour, Jewish women, etc., are those who best (re)present this “other” named in all dominant discourses: “Domination of women has provided a key link, both socially and symbolically, to the domination of earth, hence the tendency in patriarchal cultures to link women with earth, matter, and nature, while identifying males with sky, intellect, and transcendent spirit” (Radford Ruether, 1992: 3). Although the symbolic representation of maleness and femaleness is not the same in every culture, i.e., sky is male in classical Greek mythology, sky is female in ancient Egyptian
mythology, the above is certainly a logic that undergirds Western ideology.

Radford Ruether’s text examines the Western ideological biases which, she indicates, have contributed to distorted relationships. By analysing these distorted relationships, i.e., between humans and the earth, the West and the rest, men and women, etc., she hopes to reclaim “two lines of biblical and Christian tradition” for ecofeminist theology and spirituality. Again, what one sees in Radford Ruether’s work is the play of exposure and revaluation—that in every oppressive discourse exists its subversive alter-ego which can then provide a means toward understanding and accepting its evil twin.

The development of Radford Ruether’s thought and work has consistently located itself within a pedagogical paradigm of social justice. Whether it is objectification on the basis of colour, ethnicity, sex or sentience, Radford Ruether resists hegemonic practices and especially condemns their legitimation by religious beliefs. The legitimation of oppression through recourse to God or nature she condemns as ideological. In religion, as that which is ideological, there are distortion and false consciousness, in other words an obfuscation of both the objectification and the intention behind the objectification. In order to resist totalizing discourses that seek to subjugate people for any reason, Radford Ruether proposes basic Christian communities which, she believes, can resist hegemony in the church and the world at large. Women church, as Radford Ruether understands it, is a feminist form of a Christian basic community. Women church can resist the sexism and sexage (oppression on the basis of sex difference, Delphy, 1996) of the hegemonic and totalizing discourse of patriarchy. In the next section I shall examine Radford Ruether’s understanding of patriarchy and ideology and her belief that Christian basic communities (communitarianism) grounded in liberation theology, can resist and possibly alter
CHAP TER 6

the hegemonic discourse of the ruling elite inside and outside of the Catholic church.

2. Latin American Liberation theology, Christian Basic Communities, and Radford Ruether: Possibilities of political action

The underlying logic of Radford Ruether’s delineation of women church arises from Latin American liberation theology and its offshoot Christian Basic Communities (CEBs). She has utilized the conceptual apparatus of Christian Base Communities engendered by liberation theologians, such as Leonardo Boff, in order to envision communities of Christian women who would also “reinvent” the Church. The critique of the Church and its cooption by the powerful elite, who represent the minority of society, elaborated by liberation theologians is utilized by Radford Ruether in order to further critique the church for its sexist politics. According to Radford Ruether, the addition of a feminist perspective to liberation theology will push its critique even further. Rather than understanding that the Church has simply opted for the “wrong” side, and that it has mirrored oppressive structures found in society as one finds in liberation theology, her critique challenges the basic structure of the church. The church itself is an oppressive government, one that must be overthrown by the people of the church. If one understands the church as government, and an oppressive government, then revolution is called for. Revolutionaries do not flee their countries en mass, but rather love their countries and opt to fight for change from within. They will overthrow the repressive regime. Working within this logic, then, Radford Ruether can maintain her citizenship—Catholicism—and fight for change.

---

6 I wish to thank Helen May Eaton-Ramirez for her invaluable assistance in directing me to pertinent sources in my analysis of Latin American liberation theology and CEBs and for our many conversations which assisted my understanding of liberation theology and CEBS although I take full responsibility for what I have written.
Liberation theology and its counterpart, Christian base communities, have become the means by which to challenge the hierarchy of the church and press for political and social change.

The church is, in her analysis, a political institution, one which has denied its political involvements imagining itself not to have been influenced by, or to have influenced, the earthly realm of human politics. This critique of the church can also be found in liberation theology, but its intentions are to point out the church’s lack of self-reflection. Radford Ruether argues that the church has not only participated in the political sphere of worldly concerns, but that it has incorporated those concerns within its own framework. The church, then, not only supports church ideology, but produces ideology.

In order to analyze Radford Ruether’s conceptualization of women church, it is necessary to examine the theoretical apparatuses that underscore it. Radford Ruether indicates her method is dialectical. In the dialectic she utilizes in her work, she indicates she demystifies ideological imperatives found within Western society, Christianity, and the church. Her dialectic consists of pointing to the social and historical origins of human practices that have been represented by the dominant group as natural and/or by divine decree. She will locate this position in a history of human practices, within whatever culture under examination, practices that must be acknowledged and seen for what they are in order to move toward practices that are more liberatory. Therefore she will juxtapose the oppression in a system of thinking with a liberatory impulse located in the same system, and one will act as the ideological horizon, the other as the utopian horizon. Her dialectic, then, is not a process of locating one’s analyses in the tension between differing perspectives understanding both to be ideological, but rather she understands one set of practices as ideological while the other, in this instance feminist liberation theology, as
free from the ideological (in its pure form, more of which I will say further on in this chapter).

Her ideological position, then, although Marxist in that it utilizes the notion of mystification, is not fully Marxist because she resists historical materialism. One side of her dialectic will be historical, but its counterpoint will ultimately locate the legitimation of its perspective in the divine or in the natural. Therefore, history is brought into the church, but Christianity as belief is not brought into history or patriarchy is generated from social and historical beliefs, but sex difference itself belongs to the realm of the natural. That which Radford Ruether wishes to deconstruct will reside in the realm of the historical—the historical as immanent human social practices—and that which she constructs will be justified by its referent to the divine and the natural.

2.1 Ideology

Defining ideology is a difficult, if not a seemingly impossible, task. The term is ambiguous and tends to slip from text to text, article to article, surfacing in a number of different ways. Slavoj Žižek (1994: 3–4) remarks that: “‘Ideology’ can designate anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognizes its dependence on social reality to an action-oriented set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium, in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power.” Louis Althusser (1994: 120) notes that “the expression ‘ideology’ was invented by Cabanis, Desutt de Tracy and their friends, who assigned to it as an object the (genetic) theory of ideas. When Marx took up the term fifty years later, he gave it a quite different meaning, even in his Early Works. Here, ideology is the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group....” The elusiveness of ideology lies in the fact that it is not a thing in and of itself,
although it can become a thing inasmuch as ideas are things and therefore have material existence and in this, then, ideology is material, but its materiality is located in an “apparatus, and its practice or practices” (Althusser, 1994: 126). Some of the difficulty is, I suspect, that ideology is a theory about human social relations, but the ‘theory of’ and ‘concrete social relations’ are often conflated, so that ideology is often confused with the thing-in-itself. For example, ideology is understood to become the thing when it is read as “false ideas.” These false ideas act as somethings which legitimates a dominant political power (To further the confusion, dominant political power is the subjective of ideology, but as the subjective it is also the object of ideology.). In their action they are perceived as things: However, the actors are humans who have produced, internalized, and reproduced the false ideas. Therefore, the concrete social relations (human activity) is the thing, while ideology is the theory of the action. In another example, ideology as “a system of the ideas and representations” is seen as the thing that dominates, and in this, again, one has the action of the thing, the mind of man or social group, and the object which is also the subject. Ideology understood as a concrete thing in-and-of-itself further mystifies historical and social practices. Ideology, could, in the narrowest sense, represent the problematic of the thing (false ideas), but this does not make it the thing-in-itself. My point is that ideology is not self-generating. It does not have existence unto itself although it may seem as

7In the instance of the control by, and the manufacturing of, ideology the subject/object dichotomy is blurred so that the subject is an object of ideology. In the process of mystification we all appear as objects of this naturalized law, but some of us will be subjects, while others cannot access this status. Those who are subjects benefit most by the ideology proffered because they are recognized as subjects—they are interpellated as subjects within the given ideological framework. Those who will benefit the least will be interpellated within the ideological framework as objects, i.e., women in a sexist ideology, people of colour in a white supremacist ideology, etc.
if does. Rather, it is produced, propagated, extended, altered, enforced etc., by human beings—that which dominates are the ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) which are generated from the object when a subject.

A primary difficulty, then, would seem to be saying what ideology is, how it works, who generates, and is (e)affected by it. These questions point to one of the reasons ideology as a theory has been, in the recent past, either avoided, rejected, or dismissed—historical relativism. Ideology participates either as a thing located in history and is therefore not theoretically relevant, in that it cannot transcend history, or anywhere one might stand in relation to the interrogatives of what, how, and who alters the ideological perspective so that ideology looks as if “it is a mere expression of social circumstances” (Žižek, 1994: 9) at best, or at its worst “…the critique of ideology involves a privileged place, somehow exempted from the turmoils of social life, which enables some subject-agent to perceive the very hidden mechanism that regulates social visibility and non visibility. Is not the claim that we can accede to this place the most obvious case of ideology?” (Žižek, 1994: 3).

It is from the point of view of the classes, or class struggle, and here I would widen the term to include race and sex as they too evince class struggle, “that it is possible to explain the ideologies existing in a social formation” (Althusser, 1994: 138). Althusser’s development of a theory of general ideology and specific ideologies means that specific social historical manifestations of ideologies are not forever locked into each moment of time without relationship to any other specific manifestations of ideologies, while a theory of general ideology means that these specific instances can be analysed in regard to each other, not in order to compare truthfulness, but in order to explain and understand:
It is only from the point of view of the classes, i.e., of the class struggle, that it is possible to explain ideologies existing in a social formation. Not only is it from this starting point that it is possible to explain the realization of the ruling ideology in the ISAs [Ideological State Apparatuses] and of the forms of class struggle for which the ISAs are the seat and the stake. But it is also and above all from this starting point that it is possible to understand the provenance of the ideologies which are realized in the ISAs and confront one another there...ideologies are not ‘born’ into the ISAs but from the social classes at grips in the class struggle: from their conditions of existence, their practices, their experiences of the struggle, etc. (Althusser, 1994: 138)

Althusser (1994: 121) in his reading of Marx, notes that in The German Ideology Marx conceives of ideology as “an imaginary assemblage [bricolage], a pure dram, empty, vain, constituted by the ‘day’s residues’ from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence. It is on this basis that ideology has no history in The German Ideology, since its history is outside it, where the only existing history is, the history of concrete individuals, etc. In The German Ideology, the thesis that ideology has no history is therefore a purely negative thesis.” Althusser indicates that ideology is a negative thesis, in that, ideology is nothing “in so far as it is a pure dream” and ideology has no history of it own, albeit certainly, as Althusser notes, there is history in it (1994: 121–122). Althusser then goes on to formulate his own theory of ideology, one that maps out the abstract, ahistorical ideology or “general ideology” from “ideologies” (intentionally pluralized) which have a history of their own.

In Althusser’s thesis of ideology as non-historical, not in the negative sense wherein its history is external to it, but in a positive sense, he argues that (1994: 122): “This sense is a positive one if it is true that the peculiarity of ideology is that it is endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, i.e., an omni-historical reality, in the sense
in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history, in the sense in which the Communist Manifesto defines history as the history of class struggles, i.e., the history of class societies.” Ideology as omni-historical refers not to ideology transcending history but rather to ideology as omnipresent, transhistorical and therefore immutable throughout history. Drawing upon Freud’s theory of the eternal unconscious, Althusser argues that ideology in general, i.e., non-historical ideology, is also eternal, it has no history per se, but rather is “the history of social formations containing social classes” (1994: 122). Ideology in particular, or ideologies, are “the history of social formations, and thus of the modes of production combined in social formations, and of the class struggle which develop in them” (Althusser, 1994: 121).

Although I have indicated that I understand ideology as a theory of social relations—what kind of theory remains yet to be fully explicated. In order to locate oneself in the gap or class struggle and generate not the truth but possibly what could be understood as the socially-historically real, a theory of ideology is required in order to do ideology critique. Althusser’s theory of ideology first on the level of a general ideology that is eternal, in the way, as Althusser explains, that Freud’s unconscious is eternal, and then on the level of ideologies, informs my understanding of ideology and ideology critique. Further, Althusser’s understanding of ideas as material I too follow, so with him I understand that the material manifestation of a general ideology is evinced in the ISAs, while on the level of the individual or the group, ideologies are material in that: “his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject” (Althusser, 1994: 127, author’s italics).
Following Žižek and Althusser, then, the theory of ideology and ideology critique that underscores the work in this chapter begins by understanding that both abstract and concrete ideology has material existence in the apparatuses (ISAs—ruling ideology located in family state apparatus, educational state apparatus, etc.) that engenders it, which are themselves historical, and in the subject (group or individual) that is engendered by it, and who is her/himself (themselves) historical.

In order to critically assess ideology it is necessary to locate oneself in class struggle or the gap between opposing ideologies to approximate a non-ideological position. This does not mean a standpoint located in the “best” ideological position, for everyone understands her/his as the “best,” but rather in the antagonism between existing groups in order to ascertain the ideology that provides the base of the differing ideological positions. The method I will utilize is dialectical in that my critique will be generated not from a position that legitimates one socio-historical position over another, but one located between two opposing systems in order to assess the ideology that underscores both positions. For example, the governmental state apparatus in Ontario has explained the financial deficit as the result of overdeveloped social assistance programs which are overburdened not because there is a lack of employment in Ontario, but because the system makes it easy for “certain” people to be lazy, passive, and dependent, who then use the system in order to wilfully continue this “bad behaviour.” Therefore “welfare” is not something that assists people, but something which makes them weak.

This is an ideological position that draws upon current psychological analyses in order to support itself. Poverty, enhanced by a minimum wage, limited income, and dependents, etc., is not the issue, certain persons’ bad behaviour is the crux of the problem. And, the “welfare”
system needs to be cleaned up not only because bad people use it, but because good people who use it become bad—it makes them lazy, dependent, and passive. Therefore, welfare—something which use to mean looking to the welfare or care of the citizen body—is bad and needs to be jettisoned. Welfare, as a term, now has negative connotations: it makes people weak. The ideology is apparent here, and one of the means employed in order to logically justify this position is reversal—good denotes bad and bad denotes good, or in this instance, to aid is to oppress, and to oppress is to aid.

A group which stands in opposition to the government’s position on welfare argues that the Ontario government is using instances of welfare fraud in order to dismantle the program, a program that was put in place to address the problem of citizens living beneath the poverty line. According to this perspective, in a rich country no one should go without and many of those citizens deemed as “poor” go without proper food, medicine, or housing. It is believed by those adhering to this position that the government is refusing to acknowledge the right of every citizen to a certain standard of life, and if their material circumstances cannot provide this, then systems must be in place in order to insure a certain standard of living for all citizens. In this instance welfare is another term for “charity,” a seeing to the needs of the less fortunate, those who, for whatever reason, are unable to meet their own needs. Welfare in this ideological position is not so much seen as making people weak, but rather as assisting those people who are weak.

In both these positions one notes that welfare is never welfare as such but is enchained to certain equivalences: capitalistic conservative in the first position—a free market produces independent, rich, and productive citizens; and capitalist liberal in the second position—a free market produces independent, rich, and productive citizens, but this will be on the backs of the
poor who then deserve to be, at the very least, minimally taken care of. What we see here is that neither of these positions is “true,” and that victory will depend on which of these two groups achieves discursive hegemony and then can appropriate “welfare” so that welfare will mean what the dominant group will make it mean. Welfare, then, is a free floating signifier, the meaning of which “is fixed by the mode of...hegemonic articulation” (Zižek, 1994: 12). My point, then, is that in order to do ideology critique both of the above positions must be seen as problematic because they are ideological in that they mystify social relations. Both work from a premise that perceives neither social systems to create economical imbalances (and in so doing disadvantage certain people) nor social locations as a product of social systems. Rather, these positions assume a belief in the inherent and natural weakness of human beings as individuals, either to be weakened or to be weak. The character of social relations is a given in these ideologies, along with the given of the divisiveness of society: the poor and the rich are natural and immutable. Following Althusser and Zižek I would suggest that in order to generate ideology critique as such, once must locate oneself in the fissures between such positions and contest, in this instance, the fixing of welfare (as weak) in hegemonic articulation.

When ideology and ideology critique are minimized to positional statements of an individual or a group, then there is no resolution for the playing field has been flattened so that every and any two points mark the entrance to the goalie’s net. Here is the conundrum of ideology and ideology critique: there is no place outside of ideology, therefore when critiquing ideology one stands inside an ideological system. When I critique patriarchy as an ideological system, I am aware that I am located within this system. My position is not outside, but rather in, and as in, invested either to dismantle, protect, ignore, etc. My position is, of necessity,
ideological, but in the moment of my critique I can resist mystification by locating myself in the place of class struggle, in the place that recognizes the real of the struggle, and not the truth of the struggle. The real of the struggle is that there are opposing beliefs, opposing epistemological positions, and power differentials and in the last recognition that a ruling ideology exists. The truth of the struggle would be a belief that one ideological position has recourse to certitude located outside of the social and historical. This then would be participating within that ideological paradigm while securing the ideological perspective adhered to by recourse to ideology itself. This then is not ideology critique. Ideology critique can be, and is generated from within ideology, however, the critique generated does not attempt to mystify its own discourse, but rather locates itself in the social and historical to make its critique.

Žižek in his introduction to Mapping Ideology (1994: 26–27), utilizes a wonderful example taken from Levi Strauss’ Structural Anthropology that explicates the position I have assumed in relation to my attempt to deal with ideology. In this example one encounters a group of people who live in a village. According to Strauss the villagers are divided into two subgroups within the social relations of the village itself, and when a member of each group was asked by Strauss to illustrate (on paper or in the sand) a ground plan of the village Strauss encounter two different schematic representations of the area of the village; the first perceived the ground-plan of the village as circular or a ring of houses arranged around the central temple, whereas the second schematized the village in “two distinct clusters separated by an invisible frontier…” As Žižek notes one could send in a helicopter in order to ascertain whose vision is closer to the truth, and therefore less ideological, but this bird’s eye view negates the social intricacies that produced the two schematic representations of the village: “In this way we obtain an undistorted view of
reality, yet we completely miss the real of social antagonism, the non-symbolizable traumatic kernel that found expression in the very distortions of reality, in the fantasized displacements of the ‘actual’ arrangement of houses...what emerges via distortions of the accurate representation of reality is the real—that is, the trauma around which social reality is structured” (Žižek, 1994: 26). The rupture between opposing ideologies, or the struggle, the social antagonism (hence racism, sexism, ageism, etc.), or class struggle as Marx named it, is the place wherein one can recognize the ideological. It is here that ideology critique can locate itself and in the process leave open, or leave incomplete, historical materialism, which then positively addresses historical relativism.

Ideology critique, then, generates its insights from the struggle rather than in the certitude of any one ideological position. However, as its location lies in the gap between two ideologies it cannot generate a completed concrete reality which might or might not work. Instead historical materialism remains incomplete and open, it can neither be fully defined, but nor does it propose a teleological end or a utopian horizon. It takes the risk of historical relativism in order not to guarantee Truth, Justice, Freedom, etc., recognizing that these notions are themselves socially, historically, and ideologically generated from the social reality of humankind and not a natural reality of humankind—there is no natural human or a human generated from nature, what it means to be human is defined by the current social and historical conditions.

Following Žižek (1994: 25), I would agree that social antagonism (class struggle) can be interpreted as “[r]eal, not as (part of) objective social reality.” In the instance of the latter, objective social reality, one’s epistemic location insists that one’s perspective is located in a pristine deified position, or has recourse to Plato’s ideal types, truth, justice, love, etc. In the
CHAPTER 6

instance of the former, class struggle, there is “concrete social analysis” wherein the “very constitution of social reality involves the ‘primordial repression’ of an antagonism, so that the ultimate support of the critique of ideology—the extra-ideological point of reference that authorizes us to denounce the content of our immediate experience as ‘ideological’—is not ‘reality’ but the repressed ‘real’ of antagonism.”

Marsha Hewitt notes that ideology critique risks falling prey to ideology production. Her point is not to demand that the critic locate her/himself outside of ideology, as if that were possible, but argues instead that without a clear perception of the task at hand and the stakes involved, one risks promoting one’s own self interest in the guise of ideology critique (Hewitt, 1999, forthcoming):

Ideology critique in the study of religion can also locate and reveal those inner emancipatory impulses that may exist in subterranean forms within religions and act, however marginally, as counter discourses that harbour a critical potential to combat the specific religion’s repressive affects. But even more than this, the study of religion as ideology critique must interrogate those counter discourses of emancipation with a view to demonstrating how those counter discourses themselves unfold into new forms of ideology—ideology understood in the Marxian sense as closed systems of thought that in their declarations of universality and self-referential abstraction conceal the alternative material interests they actually serve. Further, and just as important, ideology critique in the study of religion must be alert to the ways in which ideology critiques themselves may be manipulated in order to generate new ideologies which serve self interests under the guise of ideology critique.

The path, then, is treacherous and the tools of our analysis may in fact prove to be those that undo us. Ideology, and ideology critique require careful consideration and measured analysis. Hewitt, in her critical analysis of feminist work in the study of religion, has demonstrated the difficulties of doing ideology critique when recourse is made to religious certitude: someone or some group must be pushed to the margins in order that the group and its
ideological formations, can take the center. Ideological certitude is ascertained through a
recourse to an external authority, i.e., truth, justice, god, etc., who is called on in order to
legitimate one’s perspective. In this kind of ideology critique class struggle is not the location
from which the critique is generated. Ideology approached as both abstract and particular, and
not a thing in itself, and ideology critique located in class struggle allows one to critique the basis
of the social struggle rather than argue which of the groups involved in the struggle occupies a
position of truth. This does not preclude one from taking a political, moral, or ethical position,
but does preclude using the position one has taken in order to definitively guarantee the truth of
the political, moral, or ethical. Certitude of knowledge is relinquished in favour of the historical
material basis of knowledge.

2.2 Radford Ruether and Ideology Critique

Rosemary Radford Ruether has, throughout her work, striven to theorize how ideology,
patriarchy, and the church, have figured in conditions of oppression. From the civil rights
movement in the sixties, to anti-Semitism in the seventies, and women’s oppression from at least
the early seventies, she has sought to understand both the oppressed and oppressors. For Radford
Ruether this has meant locating her theology, for Christian theology is the paradigm in which she
works, in praxis. She has maintained a position that understands academic theological discourse
(and in this one senses that academic theological discourse stands for Christian theory) as empty
if it is not grounded in experience. For Radford Ruether experience and praxis are coterminous:
one flows out of the other. She states in a letter written to Thomas Merton, letters exchanged
between the two over a period of eighteen months, that “I love monastic life dearly (I am a Third
Order Benedictine) but today it is no longer the eschatological sign and witness in the church.
CHAPTER 6

For those who wish to be at the ‘kingdom’ frontier of history, it is the steaming ghetto of the big city, not the countryside that is the place of the radical overcoming of this world, the place where one renews creation, disposes of oneself and does hand to hand combat with the demons” (letter to Thomas Merton, February 1967 in Tardiff, 1995: 20), and “I distrust all academic theology. Only theology bred in the crucible of experience is any good” (letter to Thomas Merton, February 1967 in Tardiff, 1995: 25). According to Radford Ruether, then, theology, if it is to be legitimate theology, must take place at the front lines of history, in the struggle for authentic human existence, and is grounded in the experience of this struggle. Experience, and her own experience of challenging racism: “[b]ack at our headquarters in Beulah, we regularly posted an all-night watch to guard the campus against white nightriders. Indeed, one carload had recently ridden through and sprayed the buildings with gunshot. Our defence was to ring a bell, if such an event occurred, to warn the workers to take cover under beds and away from open windows” (Radford Ruether, 1989: 78); of challenging war: “[t]he decade of my work in Washington also saw the peaking of the peace movement. It would be hard to count how many marches I participated in; how many sing-ins, pray-ins, and lie-ins won me brief stays in Washington jails during this period” (Radford Ruether, 1989: 82); and challenging sexism: “[s]hortly after our marriage, Herc and I visited the crusty old Monsignor of his parish church in Cincinnati. Roughly he informed us that if I wasn’t pregnant within a year, he would know that we were “living in sin.” . . . I was left to work out my own dissent, both what to do and what it signified. This means that an enormous amount of energy in the first ten years of marriage went into simply defending myself against this assault…” (Radford Ruether, 1989: 116) all become the ground from which Radford Ruether worked. Her theology, her understanding of women church,
her historical work, and her feminist analysis are, in large part, generated from, and conditioned by her life experiences.

Radford Ruether’s approach is further nuanced by her understanding of false dualisms or dichotomies that distort reality. These false dualisms, she insists, have lead the world and its occupants into, what she terms, social sin. Although social sin is a problematic concept, one I will discuss further on in the chapter, her belief is that false dualisms are an alienating view of reality (see 1972: 16–22; 95–114; 1974; 1975: 3–35; 1983: 72–115; 1983a; 1990; 1992). Her method, then, is to name or bring to awareness false dualisms, be they male/female, body/mind, matter/spirit, Jew/Christian, or subject/object. According to Radford Ruether, these dualisms not only function polemically so that they nullify any middle ground, they function hierarchically so that one partner in the dualism is set over the other and understood as better. Therefore male is over female, spirit over matter, mind over body, Christian over Jew, or subject over object.

Radford Ruether contends that (1972: 18) “[i]n actuality, however, social oppression in Western culture is very closely related to the mentality that has created body-alienation and earth exploitation. Social oppression in Western culture has operated out of a psychology that projects this same dualism of body and soul, subject and object into sociological alienation and oppression.” Only by finding “a new unity of opposites through [the] transformation of values,” according to Radford Ruether, can these false dichotomies be overcome and authentic existence located. She suggests that (1992: 256) “[w]e need a foundation for ethical theory that is not based on a dualistic negation of the “other,” whether woman or animal or body, pagans, gentiles, or barbarians (or the counter cultural reversals of these projections) as bearers of our ‘shadow’.” Throughout her entire works Radford Ruether will focus her analyses upon dualisms and
challenge the ideology of valuation, in other words challenge the hierarchical structure of
dualisms and their legitimating functions.

Radford Ruether’s understanding of ideology operates largely within the Marxian sense
of the term, although she does temper this understanding of ideology when she generates an
ideology critique from a position of the negation of dualisms. Within a Marxian frame ideology
is “a system of illusory and deliberately misleading beliefs…”(Hewitt, 1990: 25). More
particularly:

the ideas of the ruling class are, in every epoch, the ruling ideas: i.e., the class
which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling
intellectual force….The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of
the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped
as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one,
therefore the ideas of its dominance….their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.
For instance, in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy and
bourgeoisie are contending for mastery and where, therefore, mastery is shared,
the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is
expressed as an “eternal law.” (Marx and Engels, 1978: 173, author’s italics)

The dominant group, or oppressors, generate the current ethos and locate that current
ethos in nature, and naturalize it so that it appears as both a given and common sensical. These
beliefs and ideas are never theorized since they are not perceived as produced by humans in
society, but rather are found by humans in nature or are divinely ordained. Radford Ruether,
influenced by the cultural milieu of the sixties and liberation theology, assumed a Marxian
understanding of the social, historical, and political relationships of human society. She applied
this kind of critique to the church, to human institutions, to society in general, but she never fully
adopted the Marxian view (much like liberation theology) that religious belief itself was
ideological.
Radford Ruether’s critique of Christianity, instead, is focused upon the historical development of Christianity, most particularly in its later developments such as those that occurred after Constantine. Religion, however, or religion as the “religious” is never question. For Radford Ruether the founding moment of Christianity represents a non-ideological moment of truth, it is the breaking into the historical by the spirit in order to define truth, justice, and liberation, and only Christianity in its social and historical development from this break in history comes under her critical purview. Marx understood religion, and in this he is thinking of Christianity, to mystify hierarchical social relations. Radford Ruether, instead, suggests that religion, as the religious, is real and not mystifying. Rather, how it has been developed by humans is the source of its mystification. She argues that (1983: 18) “[t]o look back to some original base of meaning and truth before corruption is to know that truth is more basic than falsehood and hence able, ultimately, to root out falsehood in a new future that is dawning in contemporary experience.” Consequently, “[i]deological criticism of the truthfulness of the religion may still allow for some residue of genuine insight into the original religious experiences and foundational teachers. The prophets of Jesus may be said to have had truthful insights into just and meaningful life, but this became corrupted and turned into its opposite by later teachers, even within Scripture” (Radford Ruether, 1983: 17).

Radford Ruether’s dialectic, then, refers to a bringing to surface of the subversive voice contained within the oppressive voice. According to Radford Ruether, this voice will challenge the oppressive voice, reveal its ideological position, and bring the possibility of liberation to potentiality. She will continually argue throughout her work that to reject one pole of the polemic—the oppressive—and assume the other polemic is to continue to engender false
dualisms. One must, instead, locate oneself in the tension between what she calls tradition and non-tradition, utilizing the non-traditional (subversive voice) in order to critique the traditional (oppressive voice). It is here, according to Radford Ruether, that one finds the historical meaning of the past which can be used in the present. She states that:

The answer of Christian tradition to the vital issues of our times, then, turns out to be double-edged. On the one hand, we must confront the fact that scripture and theology have contributed to these very evils that trouble us. They have functioned as sanctions of evil. Yet we discover within the prophetic tradition and the gospels essential resources to unmask these failures of religion. We also find there revelatory paradigms by which to construct a redeeming vision of an alternative humanity and world. The teachings and liberating praxis of Jesus prove to be a focal point for this critical and transforming vision. (Radford Ruether, 1989: 5)

According to Radford Ruether, then, tradition can provide both the historical ground (1983: 20–22) and the necessary self-criticism in order to locate oneself in a meta-ideological position. In this she assumes a hermeneutical position in alliance with Gadamer who states: “In fact the horizon of the present is being continually formed in that we have continually to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past” (Gadamer, in Mueller-Vollmer, 1989: 37). Radford Ruether will, of course, be critical of that past, but none-the-less argues that one cannot jettison the past. This is of course true for all knowledge hinges upon history, but one’s question might be, why is tradition acting as an analogue for the past? Are “tradition” and “the past” interchangeable concepts?

There are several difficulties, I think, in Radford Ruether’s ideology critique, difficulties that will affect her conceptualization of ritual and underscore her development of women church.
The first is, as I have suggested above, an assumption that “the past” and “tradition” are analogical terms. Although tradition occurs in the past and certainly legitimates itself by this pastness, the terms are not interchangeable. The idea that tradition and the past are the same thing merely because the former takes place in the latter (and hence is legitimated by its location in the past) is part of tradition’s ideology. One cannot assume, as Radford Ruether has, that tradition is an ideological tool used by the dominant group in order to distort the past, but rather, tradition is ideology.

Tradition as a concept incorporates two moments: origin and mimesis. As an origin it is original, first, foundational, and legitimating. As mimesis, and I am utilizing Paul Ricoeur’s three moments of mimesis (1991: 137–155), it is, in its first moment, a copy of this originary moment, an “imitation of the action” but as a copy, in its second moment, mimesis reenacts the original moment over and over again signifying “the production of a quasi world of action through the activity of emplotment” which gives it semantic autonomy. Even though there is a recognition of an originary moment and that all following moments are but repetitions or mere copies of that originary moment, because of the emplotment of this second level of mimesis, tradition is reified and becomes a thing which human beings participate in, rather than create. Mimesis in its third moment marks the intersection of the world of the text, and by text here I mean tradition, and the world of the believer so that the action of the believer is seen to be the action of tradition and the believer is enmeshed in tradition and him/herself becomes that which s/he believes. This is how tradition is ideology:

…‘tradition’ has been commonly understood as a relatively inert, historicized segment of a social structure: tradition as the surviving past…. For tradition is in practice the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures
and limits. It is always more than an inert historicized segment; indeed it is the most powerful practical means of incorporation....Most versions of ‘tradition’ can be quickly shown to be radically selective. From a whole possible area of past and present, in a particular culture, certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded. (Williams, 1977: 115)

Although aware of the selectivity of androcentric Christianity and its choice of canonical texts as definitive of traditional Christianity, Radford Ruether neglects to take a critical stance on the notion of tradition itself and instead holds to tradition, as if it is inevitable and a given rather than an already constructed form, because it will ultimately support her own project of women church. She assumes tradition as if it is a given. Although she does argue the content of tradition, she will hold to the concept of tradition itself, and set up a secondary tradition (spirit-filled community, more of which will be said later) which runs parallel to that which she desires to undercut and names as ideological (the church). Tradition is a particular selection of the past. Moments are extracted from the continuous flow of history and inscribed with meaning. The concept of tradition reifies the historical in that it fixes particular and specific moments, plucks them from the canvas of time, and then freezes these moments into meaningful figures, while the concept of tradition mystifies social relations in that social relations are negated as the basis for the construction of tradition. Radford Ruether begins her analyses by locating herself in this already bounded off, meaning laden, and interpreted moment of the past.

As I have argued earlier, ideology critique means risking historical relativism in a historical materialism which remains incomplete and open, neither fully definitive nor proposing a teleological end. Therefore, in ideology critique, there is no moment when one can opt to legitimate one’s position by associating it with a truth, regardless of how morally sound that truth
appears: truth like anything else is historical, a point Radford Ruether has argued very well throughout her many works. In ideology critique there simply is no ground regardless of what Radford Ruether desires: “Only by finding an alternative historical community and tradition more deeply rooted than those that have become corrupted can one feel sure that in criticizing the dominant tradition one is not just subjectively criticizing the dominant tradition, but is rather, touching a deeper bedrock of authentic Being upon which to ground the self. One cannot wield the lever of criticism without a place to stand” (Radford Ruether, 1983: 18). I do not disagree with Radford Ruether’s argument that one must stand somewhere, but I do disagree with her invocations of “deeply rooted” and “deeper bedrock” both of which rhetorically evoke origins and beginnings which further evoke foundations, and in this truth, while her “authentic Being” invokes the notion of a transcendent reality. Where does authenticity lie? How is it defined? What does it mean when it is connected to Being? How does the corruption of this being occur? And, importantly, how is this tradition found (and not constructed)? The roots of tradition must be more deeply rooted, rooted in a bedrock of authenticity. Radford Ruether’s understanding of tradition, then, also lays hold of the legitimating force of mimesis in the concept of tradition. She holds to an originary moment, a moment of the past which in its second moment of mimesis, can be reified into something which humans participate in rather than create—authentic being. In the development of a third moment of mimesis in the concept of tradition, Radford Ruether’s women church will be the realization of that tradition.

The second serious problem with Radford Ruether’s ideology critique is her assumption that the originary moment—Jesus—as an originary moment unto itself can reveal something of the past. What the hermeneutical circle reveals are not the concerns of the past, but how these
concerns are conceptualized in the present. What requires critical attention is not what an originary moment was, but rather how a particular time and action conceived in history are focused upon and named as an originary moment. “We must postulate that every great religious idea begins in the revelatory experience. By *revelatory* we mean breakthrough experiences beyond originary fragmented consciousness that provide interpretive symbols illuminating the means of the *whole* life” (Radford Ruether, 1983: 13, author’s italics). To assume that this moment was a break in history, for originary moments are breaks in history, in that something *else*, something *different*, has emerged and begun a new or different line of history, is again ideology production. The originary moment of tradition is understood to be outside the historical, and to have entered into history as something other. The early Christian movement is not perceived historically as a movement of peoples challenging their current systems of oppression, rather an “other” entered into history and initiated this challenge. The impulse and moment of challenge are mystified, and tradition is reified as a container for this mystification. I would argue that originary moments and revelation as such do not exist unto themselves, but rather are constructed as things unto themselves and invested with meaning. Part of the process of investment with meaning is a removal of the time, and that which signifies in the time, Jesus, outside of the social and historical framework. As originary it breaks into time, but does not emerge from time, and as revelatory, it continues through time but is never in time. As originary and revelatory the moment exists outside of time, and this is a process of mystification: “For if a singular, permanent essence is at last *identified*, the apparent opposition of temporality versus permanence becomes a moot point because such “identity” is precisely what *persists* through time, and time is external to it; or, to put it in a formula from of old, it is *in* time, not *of* time”
Radford Ruether calls on the historical Jesus as an ideology critic \textit{par excellence} (1989: 5),\(^8\) but not simply as an ideology critic \textit{par excellence}, but as an ideology critic who is at the same time god: “Jesus discloses the transformatory and liberating patterns of relation to each other and, through them, to God, not only for his situation, but also in ways that continue to speak to our situation. For this reason he does not simply disappear into the past as a historical figure about whom we can know something...he continues to disclose to us, then, the Christ, the messianic humanity, whose fullness of meaning we being to glimpse in him...” (Radford Ruether, 1989: 5).

The implication behind Radford Ruether’s critique is that both the person, Jesus, and the moment of a breaking into history by God are removed from history in order that the message can signify for that age and this age. They are “in time but not of time.” Both Jesus and God are seen to be outside of human history, and tradition will be the means that allows them to enter into history. Therefore, tradition acts as the container for this originary moment of truth. Tradition leads directly to an encounter with this “outside” of history. If it is outside of history, it is outside of the social, and therefore outside of the ideological. Catholicism, as the specific tradition which Radford Ruether locates herself within,\(^9\) in its purest form, at its originary moment (women church as a feminist liberation theology may be the closest approximation to this form yet),

\(^8\) It is interesting that the portrait of Jesus resembles very much those theologians, like Radford Ruether, involved in critiquing their own systems of belief.

\(^9\) Although it appears that Radford Ruether locates herself in the Christian tradition when she calls on tradition, her vision of the early Christian movements is filtered through a Catholic theology and is therefore contained by it.
escapes the social and the historical through recourse to God and is therefore both truth and non-ideological. This is, of course, ideology production and not ideology critique.

The mystification of human resistance to oppressive systems, or social relations, in the figure of Jesus as Christ, and as Christ or the divine all knowing—having full and unencumbered knowledge (would the divine have any less?)—denies history, undercuts the potential for resistance located in the social and, finally, operates by the same rules Radford Ruether calls into question in her challenge to the patriarchal and hierarchical church. In Christianity as a whole, and the church more specifically, social practices were mystified by recourse to a divine entity. In Radford Ruether’s ideology critique, mystification by Christianity and the church is challenged as ideological, but her proposed dialectic is equally mystified by its recourse to divinity and is therefore equally ideological.

2.3 Patriarchy

There is some difficulty in talking about something called patriarchy. One is not sure if it is a specific manifestation in the form of an ideological state apparatus or an ideology that acts as an infrastructure that determines the specific manifestations of ideological state apparatuses. Rather than assume an either/or position, I suggest that one understand it as both, delineating it abstractly (Althusser’s general ideology) in the much the same fashion as Joan Cocks (1989) and more specifically (Althusser’s ideologies) as Sylvia Walby (1989) has done. In this way the term patriarchy can be opened up so that its historical and symbolic manifestations can be adequately dealt with.

Both Cocks and Walby note in their works that a frequent criticism of feminist analysis has been the “ahistorical” theorizing of that infamous opponent to feminism, patriarchy. Both,
then, in their work specifically deal with patriarchy as a historical material manifestation of power. Cocks separates phallocentrism from patriarchy indicating the latter is markedly manifested in the past, while the former she indicates has continued into the present. She argues that whereupon there once was a state-supported “father-rule,” in late capitalism this father-rule has been replaced by the rule of the phallus. Certainly the two are coterminal, with each supporting the other, each located in the past and the present, but she contends that in this time—late capitalism—one sees a shift from a patriarchal power base to a phallic power base.

Patriarchal power has been displaced for a number of historical reasons. One reason she suggests is a decay of the “father’s” economic power located in “the move of production out of the domestic sphere and the absorption of wives, sons, and daughters into the social labour force” (Cocks, 1989: 211). Certainly in the past one’s wife and children laboured, but the labour was appropriated by the father/husband whereupon it was then appropriated by the state as the father’s labour. In late capitalism wives, sons, and daughters’ labour is now directly appropriated by the state and the father is not required to act as proxy. This has severely undercut the position of the father as the “head” of the family and a state representative. Secondly, a further undercutting of the father’s authority is evinced in the challenging of the hierarchical ordering of the family which placed the “father” at the head of a ranked family. The adult woman as his wife was subordinate to him, a position once supported by, but now less obviously so, the legal state, societal rules of behaviour and conduct, and cultural imperatives, such as movies, books, religion, etc. As Cocks notes (1989: 211) “[t]here has been a whittling away of the spatial base of patriarchal relations through the increasing fragmentation of the family, under the pressure of both economic and cultural factors, to the point at which the father often disappears entirely from
the familial scene.” Thirdly, and finally, Cocks argues (1989: 211) that there has been a "replacement of paternalistic rule in society at large by impersonal, bureaucratic authority" an authority that is "wielded anonymously, not personally" and one that is attained "on the basis of competitive achievement rather than an inherent characteristic or inherited position."

The replacement of patriarchal rule by phallic rule, in Cocks’ argument, is not a progressive process, as phallic rule has always undergirded patriarchal rule. The phallus signified by the penis was the means by which one identified the father. The maleness of the father was/is a necessary factor in patriarchy. For example, in Japan in the late 19th century Kusunose Kitas demanded voting rights on the grounds that she was the head of the family after her husband’s death. She argued that there could be no taxation without representation (Mackie, 1996: 261). But she could not have the vote as she was a woman. Therefore her role as “head” of the family was undercut by her lack of the necessary maleness. She could not truly be the head of the house as she was female and lacked the penis which signified(s) the phallus. Phallic rule, then, has always operated with patriarchal rule. However, in the historical period of the present, and the geopolitical location of the West, the mystification of male rule via either a male god, or some other great man narrative, has been challenged. As Cocks notes (1989: 211-212):

[t]hat masculine power has a fissured, partly contradictory make-up is an analytic point, but there is an historical point to be made as well. For it is clear that the contemporary West is witnessing at least a partial eclipse of masculine power as

---

10 The penis and the phallus are not the same thing and certainly this is not what I am saying. Rather, the phallus is an abstraction, the symbolic representation of power in a patriarchal world. The phallus is concretely manifested in the material realm, in and through the penis. The penis is a the concrete symbol seen in the cosmic dimension that points toward the phallus which functions in the oneric dimension as the lingusitic and finally is re-presented as power in the poetic dimension.
patriarchal power in familial and public life. This eclipse has come largely as the result of the logic of capitalist development and the solidification of the modern ethos.... Yet the very historical transformations that led to the atrophy of the patriarchal principle (and, by the same stroke, to the rise of feminism, which then pressed its weight further in the same direction) paved the way for the pre-eminence of phallic over patriarchal right.

The challenge, however, is not in favour of equality. Although phallic rule locates its legitimating discourse in the subject, the subject is always male. "It's as if, after centuries of pointing upwards and talking sanctimoniously about the divinely prescribed moral superiority of the father, that phallic self coarsely points downwards and declares: 'Here—this has been the only real basis of masculine power all along'" (Cocks, 1989: 213). Cocks argues that the penis, "although a far more fantastical ground of prerogative that the paternal position," is less mystifying than the myth of the father as Kusunose Kitas' story suggests. 11

Cocks points are helpful in order to analyse patriarchy in late capitalism in the West as they historicized both patriarchal and phallic rule. Father rule has been superseded by phallic rule in the West so that the demystification of the "Father" has revealed the phallus as the central symbol of the Father (for example the Catholic church has finally owned up to why women cannot be priests: the material representation of god, Jesus, had a penis and, therefore, so too must priests), but, it would appear that this revelation has in part, as one sees in Lacan and others, re-entrenched male rule, or rather re-legitimated it on the level of the body so that sexual

11 However, I would contest this and suggest that the myth of the penis as overcharged and oversexed, always ready to erect and always verging upon an erection, undergirds the phallic principle. In the myth of the ever-rigid phallus impotency, flaccidness, and petiteness are attributed to the "feminized" male (and lack then to the total female) are the repressed of the exaggerated and brute penis which acts as the signifier (and then signified) of the phallus. My point is, real penises are not the concrete representations of the phallus, but rather imagined penis takes on this function.
difference (on the level of the body), then, is the natural and non-historical reason for male rule. God is no longer required to legitimate male rule, the phallus as a disembodied penis now stands in his stead.

Cocks’ delineation of patriarchy works on the level of the symbolic realm so that its conception of patriarchy resides on an abstracted level. She is not attempting to demonstrate particular instances of patriarchal rule, the “ideological state apparatuses” wherein the ideological is manifested, but is instead pointing to sexist ideology as a general ideology in that it is always already there with no history of its own (the history of social formations containing hierarchal divisions), although there is certainly history in it (class struggle).

Walby, on the other hand, rather than delineating as dual system theory of patriarchy as Cocks has done, suggests that patriarchy requires conceptualization at different levels of abstraction. Broadly understood patriarchy is “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (1989: 214). She indicates that at its most abstract, patriarchy exists as a system of social relations, and in the West this exists “in articulation with capitalism and racism,” although it is not homologous with capitalism. However, she argues that in order that the concept of patriarchy be theorized rather than assumed, it is necessary to break down the monolithic concept of patriarchy. One level down from patriarchy at its most abstract—its most abstract being a system of social relations (general ideology as indicated above)—she suggests six structures (Althusser’s ideologies) that make up the composition of patriarchy: “the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions, such as religion, the media and education” (Walby,
1989: 214). Although I do not necessarily agree with her categories as I recognize all of her six structures as cultural institutions and therefore would not establish a sixth category called “cultural institutions,” and further, I would follow Althusser and see each of what she understands as structures as instantiations of oppression—ISAs—I do agree that particular instantiations or that which she calls structures must be recognized, connected, and then reintegrated in order to appropriately understand patriarchy or the sexed ideology that is a priori to all ideological state apparatuses. It is in the ISAs that there is a realization of an ideology, and “the unity of these different regional ideologies—religious, ethical, legal, political, aesthetic, etc—being assured by their subjection to the ruling ideology” (Althusser, 1994: 125–126). Sex is the sine qua non of subjecthood. I recognize myself not as a neutered subject but always as a sexed subject.¹² Therefore every ideology will at the outset assume an unsexed subject (the male) and a sexed object (the female).

¹²Mary Poovey (1992: 241–243) takes a similar position when she attempts to define some of the problems inherent in the position taken by those who support legal abortion. She argues that by locating one’s ground on the individual and her/his freedom and utilizing the fourteenth amendment in order to buttress this position one opens the door for attack on this ground by those who are against legal abortion. The difficulty here is defining an individual as human as if there is some essential humanness to an individual. Therefore anti-abortionists simply begin to argue that the foetus is human from conception and therefore has individual rights from conception which inevitably then leads to a position wherein the rights of the woman and the rights of the foetus came into contestation. A woman’s rights can only be maintained against foetal rights, then, if she is in danger: one life for another life. Poovey argues against the assumption of an essential core that defines a human and from here an individual under the law, (the metaphysics of substance wherein “every subject has a substantive being or “core” that precedes social and linguistic coding”) and maintains that there is no human but simply persons who are socially constructed. Within the body of this argument she notes that although gender appears to follow the human in the development of identity, rather, it precedes it. To be human is to be gendered. As our identity is socially constructed, the first place of our construction is gender for gender determines the kind of one’s humaneness.
If a monolithic patriarchy stands as that which a feminist theory is theorizing about, around, or against, feminist analyses cannot help but leave their object as ahistorical, universal, and undiverse. There is a necessity to recognize both the continuity and social-historical specificity of patriarchy, but this recognition should be elaborated synchronically and not diachronically so that its overarching mechanism can be accounted for while each instance of patriarchal rule is analyzed according to its social and historical manifestation. If patriarchy is encountered in this fashion, one does not elaborate a monolithic theory of patriarchy, but rather a theory of patriarchy that recognizes that each instance may share similarities with other instances which can then provide some insight into the present system under analysis.

Following and nuancing both Cocks and Walby, then, I would suggest that in order to speak from a feminist place, a place that does not exist without patriarchy, patriarchy cannot be left untheorized. Patriarchy is always the object, and therefore the subject of power in all feminist analysis. On a first level of abstraction Cocks’ theory of father and phallic rule allows for a theorizing of patriarchy on the symbolic level without leaving the cultural or the historical behind. One sees the history in patriarchy—father and phallic rule—but we also recognize the omnipresent immutable form throughout history—social formations. And following Walby’s lead but nuanced by my understanding of ideology, instantiations of patriarchy visible in Ideological State Apparatuses, i.e., the law, the economy, education (religious and secular), political legislation, etc., are historical manifestations of phallic and patriarchal rule. To leave patriarchy untheorized is to remystify it making it a homogeneous and monolithic power that stands in the face of what appears to be fragmented and subversive discourses which oppose it. In order to understand these dissenting discourses as legitimate it is necessary to fully denaturalize,
Patriarchy is the sex of ideology and the means by which that ideology was (is) further legitimized. Patriarchy as father and phallic rule is the sexed aspect of all (the matriarchy of some feminist discourses can stand as the sexed for their ideological discourses) ideologies for no ideology is neutered or sexless. Men do not rule because they are male, but rather, men rule because they have become male.

2.4 Radford Ruether and Patriarchy

Radford Ruether’s use of patriarchy as that which feminism moves against is partially theorized throughout her work. She understands patriarchy as male ideology (1975: 4) with historical instantiations of this rule. The critique of male ideology, and here I am understanding male ideology as phallic rule and therefore a sexed ideology, is central to her analyses of the oppression of women as the female sex. She argues that (1975: 3) “[t]he reason why sexism is the “last cause” is doubtless because its stereotypes are older and deeper in our culture than any others….Sexual symbolism is foundational to the perception of order and relationship that has been built up in cultures.” Looking at the various cultures which are foundational to the West, i.e., Near Eastern, Ancient Greece, Judaic, and Christianity she will analyse the myths of male dominance in order to develop her critical analysis.

In part one of Radford Ruether’s text New Woman/New Earth (1975) she theorizes that there are three interlocking stages in the historical development of patriarchy which reflect a changing symbolization of the “feminine” in patriarchy wherein “the female person possessing a different but strong body and an equal capacity for thought and culture, was subverted and made to appear physiologically and intellectually inferior” (1975: 5). She will sketch out the “broad lines of this development of social reality and its symbolic rationalization” as: “(1) the Conquest
of the Mother, (2) the negation of the Mother, and (3) the Sublimation of the Mother” (1975: 5).

In the first stage within Radford Ruether’s thesis of male domination, the symbol of the mother is women’s power centred in economic life generated from the domestic sphere: women’s power found in matrilocal and matrilineal societies, and women’s power located in nature as the nurturing female and expressed in female deities, i.e., the primal mother goddess figures—Tiamat in Ancient Near Eastern mythologies, and earth mother figures—Anath in Canaanite mythologies. This symbol of the mother is developed and utilized by the male ruling elite in order to uphold and legitimate their power via a recourse to women’s power. Women’s power in the symbol of the mother supports men’s power in the symbol of the father. Radford Ruether contends that this should not be read as patriarchal rule usurping matriarchal rule, but rather as the ruling males’ usurpation of female power located in her reproductive capacities, and her role in economic life, i.e., food gathering and transformer of raw material (wheat) into processed material goods (bread). “The female is seen as a life force, to be used or worshipped in relation to a male-centred definition of humanity, rather than as person from her own point of view” (1975: 6).

According to Radford Ruether’s theorizing, men gained ascendancy in early tribal culture largely due to their work as hunters and warriors and it was from here that they “generally took exclusive control of the political arena” (1975: 7). There are, of course, difficulties in assuming the position Radford Ruether has here. For example, although she does postulate a later separation between public and private worlds, her theory of man the hunter and woman the gatherer is based upon a dualism that assumes private is naturally located with gathering and cooking while the public is naturally associated with hunting and war. There is a basic tautology
here in that war and the hunt define what is public and public defines the activities of war and
hunting, and likewise for food gathering and preparation, and the private realm. I would argue
that there is no “naturally” located anything here for all the activities are from their outset social.
War and hunting are defined as public because they are associated with men not because they are
public. The question here is what do the categories of public and private really mean? Why has
labour been divided thus other than to ideologically support divisions of labour already based
upon the duality of sexed difference in order to valorize one of the dichotomies over the other.
Still, her point is well taken on the level of the symbolic if not the historical. What is evident in
these early mythologies is not a matriarchy (and this I think this is really her point—a
contestation with some branches of feminism which postulate a matriarchal period) but the use of
female symbolism in order to support male-centred ideologies. In Radford Ruether’s theorizing,
the mother is the ground upon which male power will be built, either as a reordering of the
matrix which they symbolically subdue and control, i.e., the Tiamat and Marduk myth of
Babylonia, or an ordering of agricultural and nature in relationship with the earth mother as in
the myth of Anath and Baal of Canaanite mythology. In both instance the male holds the power
which is either taken from, or given him by, the female.

Radford Ruether indicates that the second stage, the negation of the mother, occurred in
the first millennium B.C.E. In Greek and Hebrew cultures, and occurring in axial periods of other
classical cultures, there was a reconceptualization of nature and in this a movement away from a
dependence upon nature toward the domination of nature. She argues that patriarchy no longer
saw power in nature or desired to usurp nature’s power. Instead it would control it. Nature is
symbolically identified with the “female,” and male ideology understood the human (read male)
to transcended nature. It defined nature as a base while patriarchy located its power in a principle that resided beyond nature, a power that in fact was seen to provide the real foundation for nature. This power was spirit and spirit was the real while matter was the unreal: “[t]he primal matrix of life no longer encompasses spiritual power, gods, and souls, but is debased as mere “matter” (a word which means “mother”). Matter is created by an ego-flat from a transcendent spiritual power. Visible nature is posterior and created by transcendent “Mind”’ (1975: 14).

A hierarchical dualism is established wherein spirit and body, mind and matter are set in oppositional relationships. Body and matter, which are analogically associated with the female, are subjugated to spirit and mind, which are analogically associated with the male. Maleness is identified with this higher transcendent while femaleness is identified with the lower immanent. “This view of women [the female] as inherently inferior, servile, and “carnal” beings creates a symbol system which is also applied to the relations of masters and slaves, ruling and subjugated classes and races” (1975: 14). These reversals, a subject which Mary Daly focused upon (see chapters 2 and 3), are foundational myths to classical Greek and Hebrew cultures. The female is brought forth from the male, i.e., Genesis 2:21-23, or she is simply the receptacle (matter) of the male seed (spirit) out of which new life is formed as in Aristotelian biology.13 Not only is the female subject to the male and perceived as lesser than the male, the female as the embodiment matter, and matter is death, becomes that which accommodates evil, and in this, then, the female

---

13 Aristotle’s biology was contested by the human biology generated in the Hippocratic Corpus. The Corpus did what Aristotle did not do, it allowed women a seed as well. Women, however, still remain the weaker in that the seed carrying female inclinations was considered weaker (On Generation 4.1; 6.1 in Lonie 1981, 2–3). Nevertheless, it was Aristotle’s biology that came to dominate Western anthropological epistemology.
is both the catalyst and container for all evil in the world. Death is unclean and evil and women through sexuality become mothers and in this are associated with all that is unclean. Life is spiritual death and death is spiritual life, therefore, women who become mothers when they give birth are, in this distorted view, they who give death. Only the mother who remains a virgin and gives spiritual birth, i.e., the Virgin Mary in Christianity, remains untainted by femaleness.

In her third stage, the sublimation the mother, Radford Ruether argues that another form of male ideology arises. In this version spiritual femininity is set over and against carnal femaleness (1975: 19). In the bourgeois family feminine purity becomes the focus of this male ideology, a purity that can nurture male rationality. Man’s world or the public world was one of extreme rationality, hard materialism, and unfit for the gentle frail female creature. The female as mother in the sanctuary of the home provided the soul in a soulless world (Radford Ruether, 1975: 22). Her role was in the home while his role was in the world at large. If she ventured into this world in the form of securing a livelihood or an education (and certainly women did engage in securing a livelihood for themselves and their families) she risked losing both her feminine purity and her ability to reproduce. The correlation between brain activity and the size of the uterus had been medically demonstrated to be a biological fact: the more developed a woman’s brain the less developed her uterus. To insure the continuation of both the species itself, and the moral and spirituality of that species, women, or rather certain women, i.e., middle and upper class women, must be kept from the public world. “Morality is lodged in the private sphere, symbolized by marriage. The real world of public man is the realm of competitive egoism, where it is “unrealistic” to speak of morality….Morality and religion become the realm of the home, of women” (Radford Ruether, 1975: 23).
Within these stages, Radford Ruether (1975: 7–8) notes two critical turning points for the study of the socioeconomic history of women. The first is the transition from tribal or village to urban life, wherein a new elite group of males whose power extended from the physical prowess of hunter/warrior was now relocated in the “inherited monopoly of political power and knowledge.” This power base was defined, entrenched, and legitimated by cultural spokespersons, i.e., scribes and priests, and excluded women on the basis of women’s natural and inherent weakness, a supposition founded upon her role as mother. The mother was “she” who gave life and not death as the hunter or warrior did. The ability to kill either to secure certain kinds of food, or to protect the group was indicative natural strength. Man was the protector. Woman and her offspring were the protected.

The second critical turning point, according to Radford Ruether, in the development of patriarchy was the production of mass industrialization. In this one sees the extension of urbanization over more geographical area, and economic production shifting from small local units based on kinship relations to depersonalized and separated spaces. In these depersonalized spaces unrelated groups of persons known only by their production rather than any identity (until Marx at least) were housed for long hours. These critical points influenced the development of all three stages, according to Radford Ruether, in that in the first critical turning point created a new group of elite males whose power was disseminated through the control of political power and knowledge, while the second meant that women were, as a group, marginal to production which ultimately lead to their dependence on male work for survival (1975: 7–8).

Three distinct layers of sexist ideology are evident in the West, then, according to Radford Ruether’s thesis. In the first layer one sees woman as servant and the object-tool of male
power, in a second layer, which moves beyond this objectification of women toward a paranoia of women, we see woman as the “other,” the enemy within, while the third layer is where this suppressed “other” is idealized as the angel of the house: the symbol of humanity’s soul in a soulless world (Radford Ruether, 1975: 27–28). This somewhat historical development of patriarchy will undergird Radford Ruether’s understanding of patriarchy throughout her entire oeuvre. (See for example, 1983: 72–92; or 1992: 15–31; 173–201). In other texts she may develop the density of the thesis but it largely remains the same. Her historical development, however, is a diachronic understanding of patriarchy rather than a synchronic understanding. Her history is a linear development of patriarchal history that tends toward a teleological explanation of patriarchy as the sin of humanity. Each epoch leads unquestionably to the next as if they were pieces in a puzzle. Rather than understanding the development of the instantiations of rule by men, who had developed, had access to, and continued to generate ideological state apparatuses, we see instead a will to power that is located not in seeking assurances of privilege, but in a will to power for the sake of power. There is no clear explanation why patriarchy takes form as a power, only that it wills toward power.

Further, in each epoch there is no real historical context developed, but rather symbolic and philosophical concepts are put forward as instances of history. The complexities of power relations that operate in the social-historical world of everyday life which produce, and in the same moment are legitimated by, symbolic representations of these power relations remains untheorized. Her development of patriarchy remains locked in the realm of ideal types and therefore is excluded from history. This idealistic interpretation of patriarchy rather than a materialistic interpretation, one that she suggests she gives when she seeks to historicize
patriarchy and in fact demands that it be historicized, benefits Radford Ruether’s argument in a
significant way. It means that Christianity in its origins can escape patriarchy—Jesus can escape
patriarchy as patriarchy amounts to distorted ideas rather than the reality of social historical
relations that are present in each and every moment of human history. Patriarchy as a social sin is
an evil that is exterior to human social relations, which allows for the removal of patriarchy from
humanity. And further, patriarchy as evil cannot be located in either Jesus or God as they are
good. Christianity in its conception arose from the pure thoughts of God and it was not until
humans (particularly male humans) got their grubby little hands on it (particularly in and after
the Constantinian period of the church) that it became distorted. This, of course, is a problematic
development of patriarchy, a historical development distorted by theological apologies and
concerns. Patriarchy is the condensation and monolithic representation of evil that manifests
itself in society.

I do not deny the necessity to deal with symbolic representations of sexist ideology in
human history. As Cocks demonstrates, the abstract of patriarchy has to be theorized. However,
in Radford Ruether’s thesis the abstract is presented as the specific, or historical manifestations
of patriarchy. Hunter/gatherer, culture/nature, and public/private are assumed as historical
categories, and not categories that are in fact analogically and metaphorically dependent upon the
male/female dichotomy. What is a hunter? And why is it assumed male? When women take
spears and hunt reptiles in order to provide food, are they not hunters? How is culture separate
from nature? Do we not live in nature in that we live in the world? Was there ever a time that
humans were not social? And finally, is not the public and private division, in Radford Ruether’s
thesis at least, already ideological in that it determines kinds of spaces in order to explain and
CHAPTER 6

legitimize the division of labour?

Radford Ruether’s reliance on Friederich Engels’ “The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State” has in part lead her into these difficulties. Resisting Engels’ notion of an actual matriarchal period that preceded a patriarchal period, she, none-the-less, establishes three periods where power located in the symbolic mother is usurped by men. The idealization of human epochs of development that are presented in Engels, savagery, barbarism, and civilization (Engels, 1978: 744) ignores material history. It proposes divisions that have since its writing been called into question because they in themselves are mystifying (see Hewitt, 1995: 37–76, and Vogel, 1995:66–82). Radford Ruether’s epochs are equally idealized, and real historical women fade into an idealized and mystified woman as the sexually differentiated female. Her historicizing of patriarchy although located in idealism does represent, to some degree, a general ideology of patriarchy. But these ideals rather than producing ideologies, or specific manifestations, are generated from within patriarchal ideology itself. Patriarchal ideology in its most abstract is the delineation of ideologies based on sexual difference. Sexual difference is made meaningful in society, and the idealism proposed by Radford Ruether in her three stages, are an already invested quasi-history, or better yet tradition, of patriarchy which has generated these sexual stereotypes itself. Further, since these ideas are represented as historical instantiations (ISAs), Radford Ruether’s theorizing of patriarchy excludes actual historical social relations. They simply are not here. One level of patriarchy is theorized as if it is both an abstract and specific theory. The stages proposed by Radford Ruether (and the actual historicity of these stages is questionable) are already explanations for sexed ideology. The stages she develops do not delineate a theory of patriarchy, but rather, they are dichotomies produced within patriarchal
ideology in order to explain and legitimate its own claim to power. Therefore, her theorizing of patriarchy simply reproduces the mystification of social relations and re-entrenches sexual difference, what I would consider the abstract ideology of patriarchy, in nature. She assumes that these divisions are unfair, and not that they are in themselves ahistorical.

The upshot is that by deconstructing dualisms without first challenging the ideology that underscores a dualistic interpretation of the world means that one will continue to generate new dualisms, i.e., theory/praxis, oppressor/oppressed or assume old ones, i.e., hunter/gatherer, culture/nature, etc. What Radford Ruether leaves untheorized is the question of dichotomies themselves. She uses them as if they are real, as if there is natural separation, and simply critiques the vilifying of one side of the dichotomy. Her dialectic refers to assuming the truth of the dichotomous structure in itself and simply balancing its content.

2.5 The Church

The Roman Catholic church as an institution has a history. However, as a religion it, in and of itself, has no history as cultural imperatives are products of their own time and are not dependent upon those produced in any other time. It is the history of the institution, then, and not the religion that must figure in any feminist analysis of the ideology that undergirds the church as an ISA. As an institution the church is not autonomous from the political, historical, social, or secular world. It cannot transcend ideology and in fact legitimates its institution with ideology in the guise of religion, hence its gods are male (father, son, and holy ghost\textsuperscript{14}) and function within a

\textsuperscript{14}In the symbol of the Holy Spirit, the third aspect of the Trinity, I would argue that one is confronted with a male symbol. First, as the father, son and holy spirit are consubstantial and of the same essence, the holy spirit subsequently takes upon qualities of maleness. Secondly, images of the Trinity painted and carved more often represented the three as male (Dogmatic
hierarchical structure. This sexed and hierarchical divine structure, created by humans, is at one
and the same time a model for the church’s hierarchical formations and a model of these
hierarchical formations. A naturalized hierarchy in the church meant, and means, of course, that
the church is not critical of other hierarchies. It affiliated, and affiliates, with other likeminded
institutions. Therefore, up until the recent past the church in Latin America was oppressive in
and of itself, and worked with oppressive regimes. My point here is not that the church is
totalitarian, but rather, that the church assumes as normative hierarchical relations and does not
recognize systems of oppression. Certainly there were and are dissenting voices in the church,
factions which proposed differing interpretations of what Christianity meant/means, but the
dominant discourse, in spite of Paul VI’s somewhat socialistic influences, remains hierarchical.

Vatican II, in spite of its desire to shift from a preferential option for the rich to a
preferential option for the poor under the influence of Latin American liberation theology,
continued to assume the naturalness of hierarchical social formations. In relocating itself with the
poor, an option that has not survived Vatican II, the church did not challenge hierarchical
formations but rather sided with the poor. The poor were the downtrodden, the outcasts, the
marginal—the lost sheep that must be tended. But this kind of perspective, much like liberal
attitudes toward “welfare” in Ontario, does not question the rightness or wrongness of these
social formations, but rather attempts to assist those who are oppressed by these social

Sarcophagus mid 4th cent., Lateran Museum) although there are a few paintings representing the
holy spirit as the mediating female between the two males (14th cent. fresco in Urschalling
Church, Germany). Because of its association with the father and son: “emanating from the
Father and the Son” in traditional Catholicism (Holy Trinity in NCE, 14: 301) it is implicitly
formations.

However, in Latin America, to a limited degree and for a brief period of time, such hierarchical social formations were challenged. Liberation theologians, influenced by their own interpretation of Vatican II, by Marxist theory,\(^\text{15}\) and by the Cuban revolution not only located themselves with the poor in everyday life, but located themselves with the poor in revolution. Priests, like Leonardo Boff, introduced a socialistic critique of the church itself and its doctrines. This socialistic critique had been influenced by the Cuban revolution, and the revolutionary fever that gripped Latin America. Social unrest generated from the marked gulf between the many poor and the few rich, militaristic dictatorships that ruled with an iron fist, and the support of these totalitarian regimes by first world countries meant that many in Latin America were looking for a way to analyze the systems which produced this unrest. Those affiliated with the church began to read the New Testament through a lens coloured by popularized Marxism, the latter made larger than life in its association with the Cuban revolution. Jesus was a revolutionary and his words were those of social critique. He situated himself among the peasants, the proletariat—he opted for the poor. The institutional church had misread the New Testament.

2.6 Radford Ruether and The Church

Radford Ruether’s understanding of the church is largely historical. The institution of the church is a social formation—in this instance hierarchical—which shapes its institutional life according to its social and historical context. According to Radford Ruether, this mirroring of the

\(^{15}\)Alistair Kee argues (1990: 169) that liberation theology, as initiated by Gustavo Gutiérrez, was influenced by Marxist theory primarily on the level of critical social philosophy. Marx’ critique of religion and Marx’ historical materialism are ideas largely unrealized in Latin American liberation theology.
"political social forms of the various societies" over the two thousand or so years of its history can be seen in its adoptions of Roman imperial bureaucracy beginning in the 4th century with the Constantinian church, medieval feudalism in the church's ecclesiastical hierarchy and papal absolutism which "borrowed from and reenforced the growing absolute monarchies of early modern European national kings," to a contemporary organizational model configured upon "patterns of the multinational banking corporation" (Radford Ruether, 1992a: 9).

Radford Ruether does not critique the church for shaping its institutional structure according to social models, although she does critique the models in and of themselves, but rather challenges the church on the level of its denial of its own social and historical situatedness and the imposition "upon the identity of the church [of] an unhistorical theory of a church structure that is unchanging and derived from outside of history" (Radford Ruether, 1992a: 10). This position, she argues is itself historical and reflects "a premodern view of the cosmos as an unchanging hierarchy of being, and social order as a sacral reflection of this hierarchical cosmic order" (1992a: 10). This attitude, according to Radford Ruether, means the church is closed to repentance because of its claim to inerrancy (1989: 100). The church as institution has taken within itself the evils of the world, making "Christ the apex of a class hierarchy of rich over poor, men over women, masters over slaves, clergy over laity, nobles over serfs, and finally Europeans over Asians, Africans, and Indians" (1989: 100). This is, according to Radford Ruether, social sin, which continues across generations, is historical and ultimately are those systems of domination which we inherit (1981: 46; 1989: 100-101). The church, too, is complicit in social sin and because of this, the institutional church must repent and refind itself in the poor, the underprivileged, and "be prepared to lose its privileged position in society, to become one of the
persecuted, the tortured, the murdered. It must be ready to be a martyr church” (1989: 101).

Radford Ruether in her critique of the historical institution of the church will challenge the male ideology that undergirds the institution of the church. She locates herself in the historical development of feminist politics within the church. In Radford Ruether’s delineation of the history of the feminist movement in the church she begins with St. Joan’s International Alliance founded in 1910 in Britain as the “Catholic Women’s Suffrage Society” in order to support women’s suffrage among Catholics. This group changed its name in 1923 to “St. Joan’s Political and Social Alliance” and thereafter incorporated “international” in its name when it began to spread to other countries. This international association of Catholic women was the first to officially request the Vatican to consider the issue of women’s ordination in the priesthood (Radford Ruether, 1979: 373–374). Their request was rejected. But even in the face of this rejection by the polity of the church, feminist women, religious and laity, continue, to challenge the church’s position on women and women’s ordination.

Throughout the 1950s American catholic nuns engaged in a struggle with the hierarchical church in order to improve their educational levels, while at the same time Mary Luke Tobin of the Sisters of Loretto, the current head of the then newly formed Leadership Conference of Women Religious, endeavoured to be present when women auditors were allowed to attend the Second Vatican council (Radford Ruether, 1992: 193). At the second Vatican council women religious were encouraged to renew themselves, and as a result these women sought to democratize their communities, i.e., they modified or rejected religious habits that set them apart, and over, laywomen. By 1974 women religious as part of the leadership conference of Women Religious organized a national conference which focused on the ordination of women in the

In October 1976\textsuperscript{16} the Vatican released an official statement regarding the ordination of women. Women could not be ordained because “by their very nature were incapable of ‘imaging Christ’” (Radford Ruether, 1993: 198). Further, the exclusion of women from the priesthood was “founded on Christ’s intent and is basic to the Church’s understanding of the priesthood, and that therefore it cannot be changed” (Radford Ruether, 1979: 380). Radford Ruether will understand the church’s refusal to allow women into the priesthood as a continued belief and participation in hierarchy and male ideology. She sees in the church’s 1976 declaration increasing conservatism (1992: 194), a conservatism that was largely in response to the liberalism present in the position assumed by Vatican II.

Radford Ruether states that Vatican II began to reconceptualize the institutional church in a more democratic fashion. Under John the XXIII and Paul VI the documents of Vatican II, and especially the document \textit{Guadium et specs} (1965), took up issues that dealt with social justice and oppression. According to Radford Ruether “Vatican II enunciated themes from the New Testament and from later theology that undergird the fashioning of a multifaceted democratic church. Collegiality, people of God, pilgrim people, and many other terms from the council denote an egalitarian and communal church” (1992: 248). This council sent out a new message to its members throughout the world, but this message would be suppressed with the advent of a new pope, John Paul II. John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger, the head of the Sacred

\footnote{\textsuperscript{16}In another article (1979: 379) Radford Ruether dates the release of this document \textit{Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood} to January 27, 1977. The difference of several months, however, is unimportant; rather the intent of the document is at issue.}
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, were two powerful adversaries of Vatican II who rescinded and/or tempered many of its liberal tenets. Their most vehement contestations of Vatican II would, in fact, be directed at Latin American Liberation theology.

Radford Ruether’s critique of the politics of the institutional church is clearly a place where her ideological position remains uncomplicated by a utopian rereading of biblical texts. Her sharp criticisms of the church’s refusal to see itself as a historical institution, although not unique or path breaking, are certainly true. She consistently locates herself as a legitimate critic of the church and its politics. Her criticism never wavers, and her rhetorical strategy of understanding the church as government, (1992b: 3–6) and therefore subject to its citizen body, allows her to maintain a political incisiveness that is undiluted by theological apologies or yearnings. This makes aspects of her work invaluable to those people inside the church who are oppressed by the church’s medieval perspective. However, in her usual dialectical method she will balance this criticism of the church with a perspective undergirded by Latin America liberation theology. Liberation theology will be the positive that stands in opposition to the negative of the church. This adherence to Latin American liberation theology, which informs her own theological position and her development of women church clouds her very acute critique of the church. Her idealistic reading of liberation theology and Christian basic communities means she will not apply to liberation theology and CEBs the same critical scrutiny she utilizes in her analyses of the church.

3. Liberation theology and Christian Base Communities (CEBs)

The advent of Latin American Liberation theology in the 1960s came at a time when there was much social unrest throughout the world. The 1960s seems to have been a time when
previously oppressed groups found their voices. In United States both the Civil Rights movement and the newly burgeoning feminist movement were developing momentum. Citizens of United States were questioning the Vietnam War and their need to die or kill for a system that largely ignored its citizenry. Around the world those countries under the economic and/or military thumb of ruling foreign powers challenged the legitimacy of their colonialist attitudes. This was a decade of reassessment and of social and political unrest, both of which signified the final settling of the shift from the modern world into what is now termed as the postmodern world. What was thought to be a global reality shattered in the face of rising doubt and what was left in its wake was a geopolitically fragmented world strained even further by the pressure of its fractures and fissures developed along the fault lines of identity politics. Nevertheless, as shaky as this time appears, the challenge put to hegemonic practices brought about a disenchantment of the populace with these practices. It became apparent that authoritarianism did not necessarily mean order, rather, it meant oppression. Although the pendulum appears to be swinging again toward the right and authority—an ordered world (by someone who knows) is a safe world—for a time unrest was embraced by people willing to risk chaos.

3.1 Liberation Theology

With the second meeting of CELAM (the Latin American Council of Bishops) in Medellín, Columbia (1968) and, Pope Paul VI’s presence at this meeting, liberation theology was firmly rooted in Latin America. Latin American Catholic theologians such as Leonardo Boff, Juan Luis Segundo, and Gustavo Gutiérrez working within a framework of liberation theology, challenged the church’s self perception as either exterior to the social problems in Latin America, or as a gentle admonisher of the underprivileged for their lack of ambition and/or verve, a lack
which ultimately pointed toward a lack of faith. It is not surprising that the church took such a position. It was simply assuming the ideology of the global politics of the first world which interpreted itself as developed and those “others” as underdeveloped. Poor nations were poor not because more powerful nations were appropriating the wealth of these nations, but because these poor nations lacked development, or rather did not properly mirror the first world. They were perceived as not having developed the necessary industrialization and technology in order to “compete” in the global market. Hence they were underdeveloped.

The illusion of underdeveloped nations was challenged by Latin American Liberation theologians: “Latin American misery and injustice go too deep to be responsive to palliatives. Hence we speak of social revolution, nor reform, of liberation, not development; of socialism, not modernization of the prevailing system” (Gutiérrez, 1983: 45). With members of the church, both lay and religious, challenging an ideology that blamed the poor for being poor, the church, at least in Latin America, could no longer adhere to such an ideology. Members of the church’s orders used the church’s own sacred texts in order to empower their own position. This, of course, would prove to be a problem in the future, in the present of the 1990s, but for a time a rereading of the texts that interpreted Jesus as a revolutionary in its most radical understanding.17

---

17 When Kee is comparing “the leaders of the two faiths,” Jesus and Marx, he evinces this position in his reading of the gospels and the life of Jesus. He states (1990: 134): “If Marx had fallen in a hail of bullets in the front line of a revolutionary march he might have been more credible. But Marx, so far as I know, never put himself in physical danger at any time for the sake of the cause. By comparison Jesus of Nazareth was arrested by the Jewish authorities, and sentenced to death by the imperial power, the Romans. He died by crucifixion, the prescribed form of execution for dangerous enemies of the state.”
or a victim of the state for his social critique in a more moderate understanding, empowered those religious citizens who wished to bring about a revolution in Latin America.

In their reinterpretation of biblical texts Jesus opted for the poor, the downtrodden, the marginalized, and was crucified as an enemy of the state. He risked his life in the service of truth and justice for all—truth and justice in this world and not the hereafter. Here would be the myth, then, that legitimated the social focus of liberation theology not only to the official church, but for liberation theologians and their sympathizers. My point is not to challenge the truth of the belief that Jesus was an insurrectionist, but to point to how this interpretation functions to bolster the tenets of liberation theology. Frequently the sense is that liberation theology arose from a right reading of the New Testament texts. I would challenge this and propose that the social circumstances present in Latin America since the end of World War II, and the historical continuance of a marked interrelationship between church and state prompted the sympathy of those ensconced in the church, initially at its lower levels, who then in their readings of the New Testament texts interpreted it in light of their own social and historical location. Because of the turmoil around them, the poverty and injustice, they read anew the actions of Jesus and his teachings seeing in them a critique of their present situation. This rereading of the New Testament

---

18For example, William M. Ramsay (1986: 52) cites a statement taken from CELAM held in Medellín, Columbia in 1968: “God...sends his son...so that He might come to liberate all men from the slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness.” We of course know that God sent his son to die, and now we know what he died for: the liberation of the masses.

19In both instances of underscoring my point about myth-making I have not directly quoted liberation theologians, but rather those reading liberation theologians. It seems to me that mythologization is best seen not in its makers, but in its consumers.
Testament and its reinterpretation of Jesus acted as a foundational myth, and foundational myths act as justificatory truths, for liberation theology. Through their readings of the New Testament they could justify their social and political actions. And, because Latin America did not have a reformation as experienced in Europe, there was no reallocation of power between the religious and secular realms, so those of the church felt further justified in their actions against the state. “Religion and politics have depended on and influenced one another since the origins of what we know as Latin America....Historically it is true that the weight of Catholic influence (both material and symbolic) has gone to reinforce existing social arrangements in Latin America. But this is not a necessary relation. For it is not religion per se which produces conservative effects, but rather a particular set of historically determined concepts, traditions, and organization commitments” (Levine, 1979: 16, author’s italics).

3.2 CEBs

Underscoring Latin American Liberation theology is the belief that praxis must inform theory, hence we find the implementation of grassroots movements that were focused on raising social and political awareness within a religious paradigm. The Bible is read as “a progressive political manifesto....the Latin American masses were deeply religious; they were Catholic; they respected the word of the priest; priests were calling on them to struggle for social justice; therefore, they would respond” (Burdick, 1993: vii). These groups are known as comunidad(e) eclesial de base in Brazil or Basic Christian Communities (CEBs). CEBs were conceived by liberation theologians as the base and praxis of the Catholic church in Latin America.20 Such

---

20CEBs, as political and socially active groups of Catholics who relate their religious beliefs to the society around them, are a phenomenon securely located in Latin American liberation
concrete problems as the lack of clergy—men and women religious—in the Catholic church: “the archaic and inappropriate micro-structures such as parishes and devotional groups…” and the “…growing ideological commitment to work with the masses all find a solution in the CEBs” (Bruneau, 1979: 226).

Thomas Bruneau, who did ethnographic fieldwork in association with a number of CEBs in Brazil, describes CEBs as small groups of people, usually 20-30, from the same neighbourhoods who gather together to reflect upon their social concerns and relate these to the Bible. Their reflections are generated from their own local specificity and the Bible is used in order to orient these reflections and draw conclusions about their lives. CEBs are largely made up of people from the lower classes whose “…initial stimulus is normally found in concrete problems which are common for people “on the margins.” These include lack of services (water, transport), particular cases of injustice (a forcing from land and illegal housing), and natural disasters or recurring shortages which are so common for the lower classes” (1979: 229).

CEBs were and are initiated by liberation theologians and therefore remain connected to the institutional church. These theologians, however, stress that the Bible is back in the hands of the people and those people interpret it in relation to their lives. Priests and men and women religious of the church, then, are no longer seen as the mediators of the Christian god, but the word of god, as represented by the Bible, is directly interpreted by the layperson. Latin American theology. The council at Medellin, although not explicitly establishing the structuring of CEBs, did emphasize the concepts of conscientización, liberation, and participation (Poblette, 1979: 46). These are key elements in the raison d’etre of CEBs.
liberation theologians conceptualize the "new" church, and CEBs therein, with Christ/Spirit emanating from the centre and CEBs arranged in a circle around this centre. God, Christ, and Spirit merge as a primary impulse which influences people to organize, but not in a linear hierarchical fashion, as in the current historical church, but rather in a circular fashion which recognizes the contributions of all, and does not privilege one person or one group over another. Leonardo Boff's schematic (1986: 25) suggests a relational model rather than a pedagogical model. CEBs, according to Boff, are in dialogue with the institutional church, both affected and effected by it, while the church is equally altered by CEBs. He argues that (1986: 26) "Christ's power (exousia) resides not only in certain members, but in the totality of the People of God as vehicle of Christ's triple ministry of witness, oneness, and worship. This power of Christ's is diversified in accordance with specific functions, but leaves no one out. The laity emerge as creators of ecclesiological values."

Thomas C. Bruneau, suggests that conceptually CEBs are to reverse ecclesiastical authority and bring this authority into touch with Catholic practitioners in Latin America. These practitioners are not the elite and rich, but rather, belong to the majority of the "poor" of Latin America. Noting this, liberation theologians argue that the church in Latin America, if it is to be in touch with its adherents, must reposition itself with the poor, and the marginal. The church itself must become critical of its own hierarchical structures if it is to remain true to its own Christian theology (as reinterpreted by Latin American liberation theologians—Jesus' option for the poor and marginal as evinced, according to them, in the Gospels). CEBs, according to liberation theologians, are the means by which the church can reconceptualize its structures in order to reposition itself with the poor and marginal.
CEBs, Bruneau tells his readers, are founded upon the positive resolution of practical social problems facing people every day which in turn, then, empower these people so that they no longer feel like victims, but rather, are active participants in their own lives. By relating everyday life to the Bible, the Bible is radicalized and its utopian impulses can be tapped in order to envision a future free from oppression (Bruneau, 1979: 235). CEBs are, according to Bruneau, “the single most important change in the Latin American churches” (1979: 236). CEBs are the locus for raising political and social awareness which is fostered by the clergy or pastoral agents who read with members liberationist study guides and the Bible. Both the Bible and the guides are used to discuss their implications for the everyday lives of the CEBs’ members, and hopefully these people are then inspired to struggle for social justice. The church, according to liberation theology, is “to help the poor overcome their fear, rediscover their spirit of community, develop a critical understanding of the social nature of the violence they face. Such conscious Catholics will then fulfill their role in the battle for the Kingdom, by entering political and social movements for progressive societal change” (Burdick, 1993: 2).

In the 1990s the optimism of liberation theology and the promise of CEBs has dimmed. The social critique generated by revolutionary fervour (Cuba) and Marxist analysis has been disavowed, while the hope that CEBs would both change society in Latin America and the church itself has faltered. Liberation theology has persistently come under attack by the official church hierarchy which has questioned liberation theologians’ mixing of Marxism and Catholic theology. Leonardo Boff was one Latin American liberation theologian criticized and then

21The document that discusses the Marxist contamination of Catholic theology is called the ‘Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation”’ signed by Cardinal Joseph
silenced for one year in 1985 for his “unconsidered” use of Marx. Others, however, felt that it was Boff’s criticism of the hierarchical church which brought this punishment upon his head. He was silenced once again in 1991 by the hierarchy of the church. But still, liberation theology has persisted. The church could not obviously advocate against human liberation. Therefore, individuals such as Cardinal Ratzinger chose to understand liberation dissociated from social roots and rooted in eschatology. As Kee notes (1990: 220) “[i]f the theme of liberation cannot be eliminated, then it must be espoused. Liberation did you say, we speak of little else in Rome.

New? On the contrary, it has been central to the history of Catholic theology, just as it is central to both Old and New Testaments. The Instruction [see note 21] therefore attempts to define liberation from a Roman perspective, and denounce it in its Marxist form.” Liberation theologians, having lost the support of the institutional church, begin to back peddle and dissociate themselves from any rhetoric that sounded Marxist or even socialist. While on the ground floor, CEBs themselves had encountered their own problems.

John Burdick’s ethnographic research focused upon CEBs in São Jorge, a bairro of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In order to grasp the larger picture, Burdick examined CEBs in relation to their social context. This meant not only studying CEBs and the Catholic church, but Pentecostal and Umbanda practices in the area as well. He notes that although Latin American liberation theologians had hoped that CEBs would sweep the nation taking up the majority of the population who would then, within the ideological paradigm of the CEBs, challenge the social-

Ratzinger and Archbishop Alberto Bovone, respectively prefect and secretary of the congregation for the doctrine of the Faith (a body previously known as the Inquisition) and approved by Pope John Paul August 6, 1984 (Kee, 1990: 210–211).
political systems that oppressed the poor, it has not. Brazil, the country wherein the local
hierarchy of the church explicitly supported CEBs, has the largest number of CEBs. By the early
1980s the estimated number of CEBs in Brazil was 80,000 (Burdick, 1993: 2). However, Burdick
points out that even with an inflation of these figures within a population of 500, 1000, even
10,000 baptized Catholics only 20-100, respectively, will belong to a CEB. What these figures
translate into is that five million participants or approximately 5 percent of the Brazilian
population fifteen and over belong to CEBs whereas the Assembly of God, Brazil’s largest
Pentecostal church claims to have more than thirteen million baptized members while more than
20 million of Brazil’s population appear to be regular visitors of Umbanda centres. It would
appear that the Pentecostals and Umbandistas outnumber active CEB participants by at least two
to one and possibly even three or four to one (Burdick, 1993: 4). According to Burdick, in these
figures one sees a paradox. The paradox is that the church sought to be a people’s church, a
church of the masses with increased clerical influences among these masses. But the masses
appear to have greater enthusiasm for the church’s major religious rivals (Burdick, 1993: 4).
Burdick’s ethnographic research is focused upon exploring this paradox.

An obvious problem of Latin American liberation theological theory is their belief that
the poor represent an unfractured group. The poor and the elite are each conceptualized as
homogenous wholes and differences among these groups remains unaccounted for. Among the
poor there are class differences, race differences and gender differences. The poor are not in
solidarity with each other, but rather are themselves stratified along hierarchical lines wherein
levels of poverty, i.e., Razoável (getting along reasonably well in economic terms); está comendo
(“is able to eat”); miserável (extremely poor) or miséria (dire poverty) is uncounted for. Equally
so, race and gender figure into these fractures and women of all classes are in subordinate positions to those men of their class (or race), whereas race, i.e., negros or pretos (black); mulatos or morenos (mixed), Indian, and white, also intersect with class and gender to determine an individual’s position in society and the group. Further, it is apparent that gender and race are significant factors in that those located at the most extreme levels of poverty are often women and/or black. One of the basic problems, then, of Latin American Liberation theology is a conceptualization of the poor as a homogenous group that was not fractured along class, race, and gender lines (see Burdick 1993 for an extensive discussion of this oversight).

Within the CEBs themselves the differences among people mark who might belong to a CEB and who might have a leadership role in the CEB. What Burdick and others have noted, was that CEBs tend to be made of up whites: whites who were bom de vida (economically well off such as lawyers and doctors), middle class, i.e., melhor de vida (“better-off”: the family is able to eat superior cuts of meat several time a week, a variety of vegetables, etc.) and upper levels of the poor, i.e., razoável (“getting along reasonably well”: the family is able to eat lesser cuts of meat once or twice a week). These people were often literate, and although members of CEBs are sometimes illiterate, in most instances the literate, and not the illiterate, occupied leadership roles (Burdick, 1993: 76–77). According to Burdick (1993, 76–77), leadership in a CEB requires one be literate in order to read the liberationist study guides, something the majority of the lower levels of the poor are unable to do. Keeping one’s children in school requires that one earn enough in order to support them. Frequently those just eating, those barely eating, and those starving must appropriate the labour of their children in order to survive. Literacy, then, remains something that distinctly marks status. Within the CEBs those who
cannot read the bible study must depend upon those who can. Further, the more one participates in a CEB the more Christian one is, and the higher one’s consciência. As Burdick notes those, who do not belong to CEBs are considered by its members not to be Catholics in good standing. Within the CEB if one does not contribute to the fullest measure then again one’s Christianity is judged by the members of the CEB to be lacking (Burdick, 1993: 42). Literacy, then, becomes a means by which one’s contribution can be determined, and the means by which one’s social and Catholic standing are measured. “In the comunidade, despite the claim that all members are equal, those who read well or articulate clearly the new orthodoxy in public are more equal than others. If one is illiterate, the chances of becoming a Minister of the Eucharist, a Bible-Circle Coordinator, or any other sort of leader are slim indeed” (Burdick, 1993: 77).

Aside from literacy, poverty is also marked by the clothes one wears and the home one inhabits. CEB meetings are formal affairs held in participants’ homes. If one does not dress properly or one has only one dress to wear and is seen wearing this one dress at every meeting, if one’s home demonstrates evidence of poverty such as a dirt floor, lack of a refrigerator, TV, or indoor plumbing, one is exposed to community judgement. The likelihood of poor citizens joining the CEB and risking exposure, judgement, and humiliation is remote. Clothes and homes are the markers of one’s sociomaterial status in the community so that those who lack are at risk of being judged by those in better material circumstances (Burdick, 1993: 72).

These are a few of the reasons why the “masses,” those whom the church felt it was motivating by its liberation theology, resisted CEBs and even withdrew from the church. Women in the communities felt that they could not bring their domestic concerns to these groups for fear of reprisal, i.e., their concerns were private and not public, had to do with their own lives and not
CHAPTER 6

382

the good of the community and therefore were not aspects of this thing called *consciência*, or simply provided fodder for gossip (fofoca). In this first instance, one lay leader argued that “[i]f you are really *consentizado*, you can’t just help your family. Any woman takes care of her family. You have to do something further: that’s what’s difficult! If you help your own family, you’re not Christian. The true Christian helps people outside her home” (Burdick, 1993: 95). The domestic has no place in the public world of raising awareness of social and political concerns in the ideology that underscores liberation theology. In the instance of gossip, one notes that CEBs recruit members on the basis of kinship, friendship, and the neighbourhood. Therefore if one were to bring one’s domestic concerns to the group, the majority of those in the group would know or be related to one or either of the persons and so partisanship would occur. As Burdick points out (1993: 92) “[l]iberation theology’s assumption that the smaller the group the more natural its solidarity and mutual good will quite simply flies in the face of tension-ridden, gossip-prone reality of neighbourhood and kin relations.” In all these instances, then, one notes the problems in CEBs—the unaccounted for fractures and fissures that determine peoples social locations. It is not simply a matter of the elite oppressing the poor. Rather there is a complexity of social relations wherein status goes all the way down and is not simply a matter of them and us. Difference marks identity and identity is the means by which status is declared in and amongst a number of social locations. The poor are not a homogenous group who practice solidarity amongst its members, but rather, the poor are human beings who participate in oppressive relationships on both sides: as the oppressed and as oppressors.

The problematics of Latin American Liberation theology and CEBs as its praxis are important factors when one looks at the transplantation of liberation theology throughout the
world and particularly in United States. Latin American liberation theology’s vision of a socially just world and the development of this social vision in connection with the Bible has fuelled a number of Catholic movements in the United States. The struggle in Latin America and the United States’ involvement in the support of totalitarian and oppressive regimes in Latin America became the focus of many North American theologians’ critiques. Found amongst this group of critically oriented theologians is Rosemary Radford Ruether.

4. Concluding Remarks

The tenets of liberation theology, as espoused in Latin America, are central to Radford Ruether’s theology and the critique that she directs at Christianity, in general, and the Catholic institutional church, in particular. She argues that “[f]or Christians, Latin America has a special role in the development of a theology of revolution or a theology of liberation” (1972: 175–176). It is central because Latin America is primarily, or was primarily, Christian. In Latin America, after much time, the Latin American church, for the most part, stood against the oppression of its practitioners. Officials in the church such as Archbishop Oscar Romero in San Salvador, El Salvador stood against the oppressive governmental machine and died for his efforts. In some instances, priests and nuns of the church supported the taking up arms to battle against the dictatorial regimes and explicitly sided with those revolutionaries who sought to bring down oppressive governments. According to Radford Ruether a theology that was generated from praxis that was also self-critical was initiated arose in Latin America (1972: 176). No theology is neutral. All theology is generated from, and contextualized in, social-political systems and participates in and propagates or resists those systems (Radford Ruether, 1975: 176; 1989: 91). Developed from within this understanding of theology, theology as a social formation, was an
interpretation of some biblical texts as representing the spokespersons of God (Old Testament prophets) and the activity of Jesus (Jesus as God's divine representative) as revolutionary (1975: 188–193; 1989: 92–93; 1990: 21–22). These prophets resisted systems of oppression found in their own time and spoke out against these systems. This, according to Radford Ruether following the tenets of liberation theology, was the real intent of God's actions in history: "The liberation of the poor becomes the critical locus of God's action in history" (Radford Ruether, 1989: 93).

The practical manifestation of liberation theology, aside from explicitly locating itself in the struggle, are found, according to Radford Ruether, in grassroots communities or CEBs. These communities represent, to her, a doing of theology that is from the ground up. CEBs are the place wherein conscientización can occur. Conscientización is a process of "inner self-liberation," a liberation from one's own distorted image of self and group. Utilizing the conceptual apparatus of Paulo Freire (1970), she understands the process of conscientización as "transform[ing] a person from an object of conditions which determine his reality and consciousness to a subject of his own history and destiny" (Radford Ruether, 1975: 178). This means, then, being critical of the oppressive systems and how these systems create systems of oppression that a(e)ffect not only the oppressor but the oppressed. She believes that to turn oppressor/oppressed on its head and reverse the action does not eradicate systems of oppression (i.e., revolution that simply replaces those in power with others), but rather, simply continues these systems, albeit, with new players. What is necessary is a movement toward dialectical consciousness, in Marxist terms, which will bring about the "new man." Under ideology (in the Marxian sense) consciousness is false but a revolutionary consciousness that is dialectical consciousness "breaks out beyond the
present form of society, and the false consciousness that it creates, and perceives its ideological character” (Radford Ruether, 1975: 179). CEBs, then, become the means by which to acquire “critical consciousness” that is “transcendent to social being” (1975: 179).

Radford Ruether argues that small renewal communities are as old as Christianity itself. Christianity in its origins consisted of community members meeting in each other’s homes. As the long history of the church develops, she argues, this model continues to resurface. One sees, again and again, the rise of renewal groups as small communities within the institution of the church, i.e., the Franciscans or Dominicans. These renewal groups are, according to Radford Ruether’s historical analysis, a converted community which then has had an affect on the institution of the church itself. Catholicism, as she understands it, consists of “a creative interchange between converted community and historical institution in which both recognize the specific role of the other, in which the committed community does not become strangled by trying to replace the historical institution, and the historical institution does not rebuff the self-actualization of the community” (1981a: 234). There are of course schism groups, as she well recognizes, but there have been other groups that have “flowed into the renewal of the parent institution” (1981a: 234).

For Radford Ruether, CEBs located within Latin America are grassroots communities, like those communities that arose after Jesus, whose focus is not the interior life of the Christian, but rather “unite[s] theological and biblical reflection with social analysis leading to action for justice” (Radford Ruether, 1981a: 234). In their social analysis they are “converted communities,” communities which can function as the impetus for renewal in the Catholic church. And, liberation theology, with its “interconnection of praxis and theological reflection” is
“constitutive” of these basic Christian communities (Radford Ruether, 1981a: 234). Institution and converted community can work cooperatively in order to realize the true Christian message.

In liberation theology and CEBs, Radford Ruether sees a reconceptualizing of the church. This reconceptualization, she argues, was apparent in the documents of Vatican II wherein the church was conceived as a “pilgrim people of God” and a “living changing community of the faithful making its way through history” (Levine, 1979: 21) This community represented in many ways God’s hand in history (Levine, 1979: 22). The social justice focus of Medellín in 1968 where, for example, sin was interpreted within a social framework as opposed to an individual framework, so that injustice, oppression, and institutionalized violence were understood as sinful (Levine, 1979: 24), is critical for Radford Ruether’s theology (1981). What was evinced in both councils, according to Radford Ruether, was the necessity to understand poverty as a structural problem of the human historical social situatedness so that, one either opted for the poor or located oneself with the status quo. For Radford Ruether, this dictum provides the ultimate ground of praxis for liberation theology and CEBs (see for example, 1975; 1981a; 1989: 75–108; 1990: 19–30). These are tenets of liberation theology that Radford Ruether understands as the conceptual apparatuses that undergird the actual formation of CEBs. CEBs, in their turn, will allow for a reconceptualization of a non-hierarchical church: “In the minds of members of base communities and of liberation theologians, however, these groups are not just obedient agents of the hierarchy in carrying out an evangelization dictated from the top. Base communities imply a reversal of the hierarchal concept of the church. The church arises from the base, from the local gatherings of the people” (Radford Ruether, 1981a: 236).

In order that CEBs be able to carry out effectively such transformative possibilities,
Radford Ruether argues, that the twofold dynamic of belief, and praxis and reflection must be actualized. This actualization requires biblical reflection on concrete realities that shape their lives (within the CEB) and the lives of others which can then be transformed into social action. She feels this is only possible, however, when these communities comprise “self-actualizing” adults who are engaged in self-definition and are not “agents of control from above” (1981a: 236).

It is Radford Ruether’s belief that liberation theology and the CEBs of Latin America have theorized a means by which to democratize the church. The themes of consciousness raising, an option for the poor, grassroots participation, and structural change toward justice make liberation theology “eminently applicable to democratic reform of church institutions” while the base community itself as a model of Christian community,, although “numerically modest,” has a significant potential for the renewal of the church (Radford Ruether, 1992: 252). It is telling that the idealistic perception of grassroots communities held by Radford Ruether fulfills the “five principles for a democratic restructuring of the church” which is delineated by Radford Ruether and Eugene Bianchi in the conclusion of their text A Democratic Catholic Church (1992: 253): “participation, conciliarity, pluralism, accountability and dialogue.” The models of liberation theology and CEBs generated from the social-historical conditions of Latin America are universalized, while remaining particularized as Latin American, in order to provide a new model for the Catholic church. The question is, how viable is this plan?

The historical particularities of Latin America are: its colonization during the Protestant reformation, which may in fact have been instrumental in the particular blurring of boundaries between the secular and the religious—a dichotomy emphatically played out in the politics of
Europe and North America; its particular social history of slavery, racial animosity, and genocide of native South Americans; the patron-client relationship; its oppressive militaristic governments; the appropriation of its material goods by first world countries; its revolutions; and its geography are some of the many factors that figure in the development of Latin American liberation theology. To therefore use a model that is socially and historically dependent upon its context as a model for the universal church uses the historical development of the perspectives found in Latin American liberation theology while in the same moment denies the history of Latin American liberation theology itself. Latin American liberation theology is a product of the social and historical productions found in Latin America. Therefore, to assume the tenets of liberation theology represent universal truths is to deny Latin American liberation theology’s own history while the social and historical perspective which informs its critique is negated by Radford Ruether’s theological impulse.

As a grassroots movement, liberation theology’s roots are local and to assume that it is transportable is to do it, and those communities that one fosters it upon, an injustice. Further, the oppression, the capitalism, the governments, the false consciousness, the hegemony, etc. that one encounters in United States or Canada, are markedly different and require strategies generated from their own social and historical contexts. This is not to say theoretical imperatives can only be utilized by the group that engenders them. But these imperatives are responses to their social locations and in order that they might be useful elsewhere they require adaption. How is the blurring of the boundary between the secular and religious that occurs in Latin America and informs the political theorizing of liberation theology going to be adapted in order to deal with the marked separation between secular and religious found in the United States, in Europe, and in
Canada? Race, gender, and class are obvious issues for Radford Ruether, but as I have argued, CEBs have not been particularly successful at dealing with these social problems. How can these problems, which are related to identity, i.e., race, sex, ethnicity, etc., be addressed when CEBs themselves have often fostered identity politics based on class, sex, and race?

Although the idealistic implication of Radford Ruether's theological project of social justice is commendable, her lack of critical acumen in regard to Latin American liberation theology and CEBs is highly problematic. Locating her understanding of theology as necessarily theory grounded by praxis, demanding that the every day be of value in the understanding of theology, that action and words work in a dialectical relationship, she, nevertheless, ignores the problematics of CEBs and liberation theology noted by Burdick in his ethnographic work. The poor, in her work and like other liberation theologians, are homogenized into one solid mass which then could not reflect any kind of classism. As indicated above there are levels of poverty and those levels are reflected in the social relationships of those members of the CEBs. Because one is poor, does not necessarily ensure that one does not participate in hierarchical social structures. One simply does. Our societies are complex webs of social relations fracturing along lines of economic location, education, gender, race, ethnicity, etc. The fractures and fissures are found in a multiple of locations defined geographically, economically, sexually, racially, etc. One is at once both an outsider and insider at any given time. One cannot simply theorize a them and an us, the oppressed and the oppressor, or simply assume oppression is a product of false consciousness that can be programed out of people.

Radford Ruether does include the potential of false consciousness among the oppressed, and this false consciousness is seen by her to be reflected in the oppressed’s potential for self
destruction under oppression, or found among those who are newly liberated and who simply reverse power structures, get caught up in revenge seeking, or use unnecessary and excessive violence (Radford Ruether 1975: 10–16). The notion of false consciousness comes closest to a recognition that CEBs may promulgate hierarchal relations especially if the required conscientización has not taken place. However, Radford Ruether argues that if a liberation from within takes place which appears, in her understanding, to be generated by anger and pride (1975: 12), then the community will appreciate itself and those in the community will appreciate each other. But as Burdick has argued, CEBs as communities appear to have firm boundaries which demark such things as insiders from outsiders, real Catholics from pseudo Catholics, and a social hierarchy structured along class lines that utilize such markers as literacy, social-material status represented by material goods, gender, race, etc. in order to demark who is the most equal of their own groups. Can we say, then, that these people within the CEBs have simply failed on the level of conscientización while the theory of equality generated by liberation theology that informs the logic of CEBs is largely correct? Would this not be problematic on the level of one’s praxis, especially if one has argued, as Radford Ruether does, that action—praxis, is the place where all theorizing begins?

That CEBs did not right the injustices of the world is not, it would appear to me, a reflection upon its members lack of conscientización per se, but rather a reflection upon where in fact liberation theology, and CEBs therein, did begin: with theoretical premises which were then applied to the quotidian. Praxis did not inform theory, theory informed praxis and the necessary social and historical problems arose thereafter. My critique is not that liberation theologians should have placed praxis before theory, but rather I suggest that there was, and is, a lack of self-
reflection that would allow these people to realize that 1) theory is never without praxis—all thought arises from the experiential—and their use of Marx should have informed them of this, and 2) that when it came to CEBs theories generated from liberation theology preceded CEBs and were developed from an idealistic experience of liberation that was informed by theological biblical concerns. As idealistic and informed from biblical texts and not the social historical locations of those of the CEBs, the possibility of inequalities arising in CEBs is negated at the outset so that the inequalities that exist are ignored or the responsibility for them simply fostered onto particular members of the CEBs (for example, see Radford Ruether 1981a).

Finally, liberation theology and Radford Ruether utilizing its tenets, assume that Jesus, and the early communities that then came about were egalitarian, and that parts of the New Testament express this egalitarianism. Their reading of the New Testament and the life of Jesus is generated from within a paradigm of liberation theology. This they are aware of to some degree, or at least Radford Ruether is cognizant of this. She speaks of the hermeneutical circle that informs her theology. I do not contest the notion of a hermeneutical circle, but I do wonder just how thoroughly it has informed her position (and other liberation theologians as well). Liberation theology, and hence also Radford Ruether, assumes that all people will read biblical texts as liberation theologians reads these texts. They have ascertained the truth of the texts, but have argued elsewhere that there is no inherent truth found in these texts, but rather a hermeneutical circle in which one read the Bible. How then can they assume the truth of their reading and then further assume the poor will read it in like manner (and considering literacy levels this is even more presumptuous) unless it is because they assume the poor, who are God’s chosen, will see the truth of the texts—an innate truth that transcends interpretation—which they
read. This assumption leads liberation theology to either interpret the New Testament texts as inherently true in some parts, or that the poor, or themselves reading for the poor, speak from a privileged standpoint.

Ultimately a standpoint epistemology does inform liberation theology and Radford Ruether therein, but the standpoint they opt for is not simply located in the poor, but rather, is located in the poor with the right kind of conscientización. One wonders, then, just who determines what is the right conscientización. Either position is simply a denial of the social and historical contexts of texts and people in the moment of calling on the social and the historical context of these texts and people in order to legitimate the position assumed by liberation theologians. Further, either position insures that liberation theologians do not have to question their assumptions about the poor, but rather permits them to dismiss any of the poor who do not see the truth of their theology. If liberation theology is truly about liberation, and truly about the critique of systemic oppression in society then liberation theologians need to relocate themselves in their own social and historical contexts and begin their theorizing from this position and not some belief about what they think God thinks about how they as humans think.

Ideology critique, patriarchy, the hierarchical church, liberation theology and CEBs as grassroots communities are some of the key factors in Radford Ruether’s theorizing of women church. She approaches the hierarchal church as a dictatorial government which needs to be challenged by its citizens, i.e., members of the church (a plenary address to the Sixth National Conference May 6 & 7, 1995). She employs ideology critique to demonstrate the failings of Christianity and the church. She develops a theory of patriarchy in order to explicate both women’s oppression and environmental destruction. She envisions a new theology for women
and uses the tenets of liberation theology and the praxis of CEBs in order to envision a new church wherein women and their needs are represented in structure, liturgy, and ritual. It will be the manifestation of these key factors in Radford Ruether’s ritualization and the problematics associated with these key factors that I will focus on in the next chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER, WOMEN-CHURCH, RITUAL, AND DIFFERENCE

Rosemary Radford Ruether’s vision of women-church and its *modus operandi* are generated from her ideological position, her understanding of patriarchy and the church, and her conceptualization of the tenets of Latin American Liberation theology and its offspring the CEB. Radford Ruether understands women-church as *Feminist Base Communities* (1992a: 194). Women-church is the gathering of women in faith communities and as such are church in that they are “exemplars of the ‘people of God’” (Radford Ruether, 1992a: 194). Her ideological position, then, locates spiritual truth in women-church. Patriarchy is that which oppresses all women, and the church is a social and historical institution which manifests patriarchy. Latin American liberation theology has authentically represented the theological imperatives of God, while CEBs are the ground floor operations of this authentic representation.

Radford Ruether indicates that in the 1983 Chicago meeting of the third annual Women’s Ordination Conference, the focus of women’s ordination “faded away, as both a distant and questionable goal. Instead the conference organized around the theme of ‘women-church’” (1992a: 194). Women-church did not organize in order to exclude men, but rather, the focus was to empower women as members of the church who could come together in order to define their own religious needs while experiencing and creating communities that served these needs (1992a: 194). Women-church is in exodus from the hierarchical church until that church recognizes its androcentric and often misogynist ideology, and in this, then, come to an awareness of the equality of its female members (both religious and lay). Catholic women, Radford Ruether indicates, were inclined in 1983 to take their spiritual and worship life into their
own hands. Therefore, they performed the Eucharist themselves without recourse to the intercession of male experts in order to worship as Catholic Christians (1992: 194). By the second annual conference of women-church, held in Cincinnati in 1987, women-church was being clearly articulated by feminist Catholic Christians. They desired women-church to be ecumenical and include women of Protestant denominations. They desired it to be multiracial, and to maintain a focus on social issues related to women such as marriage, the reproductive rights of women, rape, pornography, prostitution, lesbian rights, etc., to be directed toward women’s survival, in regard to those women and children who are without family, poor, and/or on welfare, toward women refugees, militarism, unemployment, and work toward networking and organizing women-church (Radford Ruether, 1993: 199).

For example, connected to this feminist impulse of women-church arose the organization of Mary’s Pence, “an alternative fund to which progressive Catholics could give to support the ministries of women to poor women and children” (1992a: 202). Catholic women religious were angry that they as faithful fund raisers for the church had little say as to where that money ended up. In a final instance of outrage, women religious having raised 75 percent of the cash required in order to provide counselling and support services for women in prison, when they appealed to the cardinal that the church might contribute the last 25 percent it needed, they were refused. Because of this, they opted for a strategy to insure a financial source for women. Women religious, desiring to use their anger against effacement in the church generated the idea of Mary’s Pence as a means to fund women’s grassroots movements (Radford Ruether, 1989b; 1992: 202).

According to Radford Ruether, women-church “signified a new stance of feminists
Chapter 7

396
toward the institutional church, no longer petitioning the male leadership for “permission” to enter canonical leadership, but defining church for themselves” (Radford Ruether, 1993: 199). She indicates that women-church, as an exodus movement out of the church while remaining in Catholic Christianity, is neither defined nor confined by the institutional church’s laws, boundaries, or forms. The patriarchal church is “a falsification of the true message of Christian community and Women-Church its authentic expression” (1993: 199). Women-church must resist the hierarchical authority of the church, and declare for themselves what church really means.

Clericalism, found in the institutional church, is an organizational pattern modelled after “the patriarchal relation of the pater familias over his wife, children and slaves” (Radford Ruether, 1993: 200). This model, claims Radford Ruether, is in antithesis to liberation and community, and is a model women-church rejects. The Eucharist is taken from the hands of priests and put in the hands of all the people of the church. It is not represented to the church as “a magical fetish” but rather the “ordinary food and drink of daily meals of the Mediterranean world” (1993: 202). Ordinary life, Radford Ruether contends, is celebrated in the bread and the wine while the power these symbols represent is located in this world and not some other place distant from human beings (1993: 202). Women-church, she challenges, understands leadership as “a ministry of function rather than of clerical caste” (1993: 203). Leaders are enablers and interchangeable so that no one person is elevated over any others. Five types of enablers are named by Radford Ruether as instrumental to women-church: liturgical creators, teachers, administrators and organizers, social justice experts, and spiritual counsellors (1993: 203–204). Leadership is not rejected by Radford Ruether, but rather a hierarchical arrangement that places
one role over another is repudiated by women-church. As no role is valuated over another so neither one sex over another.

Women-church rejects gender stereotypes, and instead, affirms a variety of lifestyles which allow people the freedom to choose their relations. God is not gendered, but in “women-church spirituality the tendency is to explore primarily female or women-centred images of god” (1993: 206–207). This is not a statement, maintains Radford Ruether, that attempts to establish women-church as a matriarchy that preceded, or will replace, patriarchy, but rather, is “an effort to release symbols that affirm women’s own experience as related to God” (1993: 207). In women-church, according to Radford Ruether, there is a non-dualistic view of ontology. Nature and God are not set apart and although there is evil, that evil “resides in turning of life-giving into death-dealing relations.” God has been used to oppress women, and women-church reclaims God/ess who journeys with it into exile.

Is women-church post-Christian? Radford Ruether recognizes the potentially divisive conflict which hangs over women-church. Her response is to indicate that women-church has not made any decision to move out of Christianity but nor will it be confined by patriarchal Christianity. She states that women-church “finds some Christian symbols reclaimable for feminism and others unredeemable. It is engaged in creating a new synthesis between the symbols it finds good in Christianity and symbols drawn from goddess religions. Its genius may lie in refusing to be forced into one side or the other of the boundaries that divide Christianity from other religions—especially from nature religions—but in reaching a new synthesis across this divide” (1993: 208).

This, then, for Radford Ruether is women-church. Women-church is engendered by the
notion of liberation and small grassroots movements with women and women’s experiences at its
centre. It is from here that Radford Ruether theorizes ritual for women-church. However, her
dismissal of the historical and social roots of Latin American liberation theology, and her
idealized understanding of both liberation theology and CEBs exists beneath her envisioning of
women-church.

Briefly, one notes that the tenets of liberation theology are simply transferred to the North
American context without considering how grassroots movements might operate effectively in a
clearly demarcated first world, capitalistic society. CEBs arose in contestation to a particular
political climate, and attempted to address this political climate. Their intention was to challenge
the violence by naming that violence, by naming those individuals who were affected and
obliterated by that violence. Their modus operandi was to challenge their oppression through
active resistance, but what went unacknowledged was their own participation in systems of
domination. Therefore, as indicated in chapter six, social hierarchies were largely assumed in
CEBs. Class, race, and gender, remain untheorized, because class, race, and sex, had not been
that which CEBs had sought to challenge. CEBs challenged political systems of oppression that
used military force to insure the continuance of its power. The “poor,” in liberation theology, are
conceptualized as a monolithic group, but this group has fractures and fissures along the lines of
sex, race, and class which are obtuscated by a monolithic grouping.

When women-church makes its demands, for whom does it demand? Its primary
members appear to be white, and economically unthreatened. Are there groups belonging to
women-church that truly represent the poor (and who do we mean by “the poor?”) as found in
North America? Or do women-church help the poor, something the North American
organizations that Radford Ruether lists in fact do (for example, 1989b; 1992a). Although
Mary’s Pence seeks to help women empower themselves when it funds women’s programs, do
they? These programs are focused on different areas: pastoral ministry, spirituality; legal
advocacy; child care and head start; education and literacy; care for the elderly and homebound;
and shelters and housing (1989b: 98–99). However, its perspective appears to be more charity
oriented than what one might call opting for the poor. For example, within these areas a number
of different projects were funded: Incarnation House in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a residential
program for pregnant women and young mothers recovering from chemical dependency, mental
illness, prostitution, and physical and sexual abuse; or money was given to Works of Mercy
Advocacy Network of Far Rockaway, New York in order to expand this program which assisted
housebound elderly women, women with Aids; or the support of Magdalen House in Denver,
Colorado in order to hire a counsellor who assisted women “escaping prostitution” (1989b:
99–100).

How is this different from the charity position adopted by the church other than these
charities focus specifically on women? How is social justice enacted within the boundaries of a
capitalistic society? In these examples, is the social justice evinced not simply a version of a
liberal ideology which assists those in need but does little to challenge systemic oppression, the
latter of which requires the poor to remain poor in order that those in a privileged position remain
privileged? Where is the political activism, or better yet, the feminist political activism that
would empower sex workers as sex workers without an underlying moral imperative that these
sex workers “escape” from the industry? I certainly do not condemn these feminist Catholic
communities for the help they give, but the reality remains. What happens when organizations
move in and attempt to manage the desolation capitalistic economic and political systems leave in their wake? Because they pick up the pieces and provide some sort of social safety net, system of domination can continue to function. Charity is the conscience of capitalism and not a tool of social justice.

The social activism in the form of funding women’s programs through Mary’s pence, in regard to political and economic considerations, appears to be rooted not in a liberative perspective of society, but rather a conservative perspective of society, a perspective that perceives oppression in society but leaves it *insitu*, and instead lends a helping hand to those who are oppressed. This conservatism is also a telling factor in regard to the social location of women-church. It largely locates itself as a middle class organization whose members are derived from the middle class itself. By helping people rather than pushing for radical social change, the women of women-church can maintain their class location while helping the “underprivileged,” and by helping the “underprivileged.”

Difference on the level of race and class, then, is not deconstructed. Instead what one notes are different groups of women whose own social and racial statuses define the boundaries that make up their groups. Women-church can assist these groups while unapologetically maintaining their own boundaries located in their identity as white, middle class, feminist Catholic women. This is not to say that black women or Asian women would not be welcome among the groups of women-church. They would be. But it is to say that since female is the defining factor for women-church, class and race are of necessity secondary to it. In Radford Ruether’s delineation of women-church, identity is located in the female so that identity politics underscore, and in turn, are underscored by, ritual.
1. Radford Ruether, Women-church and Ritual

Radford Ruether, in her text *Women-Church* (1985), outlines a number of women-centred rituals. The first part of the text is concerned with relating the history of the Catholic church, and in this establishes a mythological basis that can act as foundational for women-church. What also is developed is a historic contingent hermeneutic that legitimates women-church. After establishing this legitimating practice that will ground women-church in the historical church, Radford Ruether then provides a history of women-church and a clear explanation of its ideological presuppositions. In the second part of her text, Radford Ruether focuses on the invention of rituals that, according to Radford Ruether, empower women. These rituals are generated from a feminist ideology, ideology not understood in the Marxist sense as false, but neurally in the sense of a world ethos. As Catherine Bell notes (1992: 187–188) ideology is mapped out along two trajectories: “[o]n the one hand, ideology has been seen in terms of the neutral perspective of a cultural world view, the body of ideas, values, and assumptions fundamental to a society and shared by all members. On the other hand, ideology has also been cast in a more critical perspective as sets of doctrines promoted by the dominant social group because those doctrines support their interests over the interests of other groups in society.” When Radford Ruether deconstructs the Catholic church and the history of Christianity she will use the latter understanding of ideology, but when delineating women-church, it will be the former neutral understanding of ideology that underscores her work. This is a rather slippery aspect of Radford Ruether’s understanding of ideology, one that informs her ideology critique, but I would not suggest this is done with malicious intent. It does, however, leave her open to
criticism on the level of the production of ideology when she attempts ideology critique itself.\textsuperscript{1}

This seemingly neutral ideology Radford Ruether engenders for women-church is not neutral, but rather is the unacknowledged utopian impulse that resides as the repressed of ideology critique.

Ideology critique is not generated from a neutral space or Archimedean point that exists outside of society. Ideology critique is generated from a political position which, in order to perceive something as negative, must have a positive in mind. This positive, if unacknowledged, can act as the repressed within ideology critique. Situated in a social and historical context, ideology critique generates its negative appraisals from its own social historical position, a position that risks relativism in the moment it locates itself in historical materialism (see chapter 6, \textit{Ideology}). When doing ideology critique one cannot ascertain one’s own ground while denying certitude to the system under critique. An ideology critique that recognizes its own lack of certitude is aware of its own social and historical locations which act to delimit it. Ideology critique is not generated outside of ideological systems but is itself ensconced within ideology. There must be a recognition of the critic’s own social and historical limitations that will act to determine both the critique and the utopian horizon which fuels the critique. This is how ideology critique can bring to consciousness its own repressed utopian horizon in a way that can effectively enhance its critique.

Radford Ruether’s utopian horizon, which fuels her critique, is located in God and his view of a just humanity. This means that her utopian horizon is mystified by theological

\textsuperscript{1}See Hewitt (1999) for a critical analysis of feminists in Religious Studies who generate new ideologies when doing ideology critique.
concerns and therefore outside of social and historical criticism. Rather than situate her understanding of a just humanity in the social and historically real of human struggle, what a just humanity is, is defined by that which is extraneous to humanity, god, and therefore not subject to critique. It is mystified in that those interpretations of a just humanity that are generated by people, people like Radford Ruether, like the writers of the gospels, like the theologians of liberation theology, or like the Catholic church are obscured behind the figure of God. Although one of these definitions may have a firmer moral basis, the determination of that moral basis is a human occupation conditioned by the same requirements indicated above. Because she mystifies her utopian horizon, as if it is not located in social relations, her ritualization of feminist concerns will themselves be ideological: ideological in that her Christian feminist enterprise is projected as a neutral world ethos—how the world is or ought to be when exterior to systems of oppression—that is then legitimated through its appeal to certitude located in the divine. Her mystification of social relations locates her in the camp of those she critiques. By appealing to God as the referent of her social vision, her project differs from those she critiques only in its content and not its form. This, I would contest, is not ideology critique but ideology formation.

In order to demonstrate these problems, as I see them in Radford Ruether's work, I will focus on her development of the mythic legitimation of, and foundation for, women-church; her perspective of what women-church represents; how she understands ritual to function; and how ritual will bring about the conscientización of women in women-church. The mythological foundations, her representations of women-church, and her certitude that ritual will bring about altered consciousness arise from her mystified utopian impulse which is rooted in her belief that god supports her project. These conditions of Radford Ruether's women-church are foundational
for her Christian feminist ideology.

1.1 The Myth

The mythological legitimation for (when I use myth I am referring to belief and meaning and not falsity) women-church is Radford Ruether’s historical understanding of Christianity as the “continual tension and conflict between two models of the church: church as spirit-filled community and church as historical institution” (1985: 11). Each of these acts as trajectories that are woven together by Radford Ruether to form the history of Christianity. Radford Ruether locates this split at the very origin of Christianity, but in an interesting fashion. Jesus, in her historical analysis, did not desire to found a new historical institution or a new historical religion (this interpretation acts as one historical trajectory, a trajectory the church will follow and one that does not fulfill God’s intentions), rather, she contends, they (Jesus and his immediate followers) “conceived of their mission as preaching “good news” to Israel” (1985: 12). Therefore Jesus and his immediate followers, as the originary moment of Christianity, are a “spirit-filled messianic” cult within Judaism (Judaism itself is conceived as a historical institution and therefore this originary movement can also be separated from Judaism as well). From this moment of origin, as she interprets it, she will develop a historical trajectory based upon the concept “spirit-filled community” and this will be an authentic trajectory in that it fully comprehends Jesus’ intentions. Spirit-filled community will be rooted in the moment of the origin of Christianity, with Jesus and his immediate followers, and will end with women-church as the present manifestation of “spirit-filled community.”

2I am aware that Radford Ruether frequently critiques the strategy of legitimating one’s position through an appeal to an originary moment. For example, “[h]owever, today we must
trajectory is legitimated by the ideology of tradition (see chapter 6) that incorporates within itself the conceptual apparatus of pastness as a means to appeal to the truth of its own perspective. Although Radford Ruether does not explicitly naturalize this trajectory, one end is securely anchored to Jesus as god and so the moment of origin is naturalized in that it stands outside of social and historical conditions. What further problematizes this implicit naturalization is her naturalization of the historical process itself, as if it and tradition are neutral in themselves and are simply used as tools of ideology rather than are ideological in themselves. As I have earlier argued, this neutrality located in tradition (chapter 6) and history (chapter 4), as if neither are hegemonic in themselves, is certainly problematic.

In her contestation of the institutionalized and historical church as the legitimate version of Catholic Christianity, Radford Ruether establishes two trajectories: a trajectory on which the historical church is mapped out along, and an trajectory on which the spirit-filled community is mapped along. The former will be the tainted, the latter the authentic. Juxtaposed to the trajectory of a spirit-filled community as the authentic and primary interpretation of God’s intentions, Radford Ruether will develop a trajectory mapped out along the historical and one that represents recognize that this concept of reformation as return to origins is itself a historical myth....Thus a Christian feminism particularly cannot use the reformation model literally” (1985: 37). But I would contest that she unintentionally plays the origins game when she defines the origins of Christianity as a “spirit-filled messianic sect” founded by “Jesus and his earliest disciples” who initiated it as a “renewal movement” which sought to “restore prophetic Judaism” (1985: 11). This description of early Christianity looks remarkably like liberation theology (as a renewal movement located within Christianity rather than Judaism in this instance) and Radford Ruether’s own understanding of Christianity as it ought to be. Aside from her lack of self-reflection regarding her understanding of early Christianity, the question is: why make a connection between one’s view of how Christianity ought to be and what one perceives as the intentions of Jesus other than to legitimize it through an origin argument?
the history of the church. It is on this trajectory that the original “good news” of Jesus is distorted. The church, because of its social and historical entanglement, an entanglement that “spirit” would lift it above, sought to legitimate its own hegemonic practices, and in the process, misinterpreted Jesus’ intentions. Therefore, in Radford Ruether’s history of Christianity, the authentic trajectory will be the history of those she names as “spirit-filled communities” which moves out from Jesus and is the intentional and primary interpretation of church as projected by Jesus—Jesus mythologically understood as a revolutionary and radical leader, while the secondary or unauthentic trajectory, the history of the Catholic church per se, will be set alongside this authentic trajectory and found to be inadequate.

According to Radford Ruether, the secondary and distorted interpretations of Jesus and his intentions came about when the church had to “adapt to its historical existence” because the proposed second coming of Jesus simply did not occur. This lack of a return required an explanation, and deliberation concerning the socialization of the church. In order to accomplish the first, eschatology took form and the spiritual and physical worlds were severed, and to accomplish the second, the socialization of the church, a leadership pattern which adopted both a hierarchical and patriarchal familial model was implemented. Further, social and historical immurement occurred throughout the next few centuries when the hierarchy in the church was reinforced and established along the lines of the political structures of the late Roman empire, i.e., presiding bishops were established at major sees who then supervised bishops and elders. Moreover, in the attempt to legitimate a self perception of the church founded upon such hierarchical arrangements, a perception that Radford Ruether argues was in opposition to the contesting discourses of charismatic, prophetic, and millennialist Christianities in the third
century, the church declared these discourses, and any other, e.g., Arianism, to be heretical. The church delegitimated other contesting discourses, e.g., Montanists, Radford Ruether argues, by “develop[ing] a theory of historical legitimacy based on the myth that the twelve apostles of Jesus [as] the first bishops and the founders of the leading episcopal sees” (1985: 12–13).

Finally, the church would further distort the originary moment of Christianity when it became an imperial religion under Constantine. The historical trajectory of an institutional historical church that adopted(s) oppressive practices gleaned from society versus the historical trajectory of “spirit-filled communities” that subvert these oppressive practices, the latter which in most of its manifestations, according to Radford Ruether, adopted egalitarian practices on the level of class and gender (and then later race as in African liberationist churches), Radford Ruether will map out over a two thousand year period. This mapping out will culminate in the opposition between the church as an oppressive, and a socially and historically entrenched institution, and feminist liberation theology or women-church as a spirit-filled community (Radford Ruether, 1985: 11–23).

---

I am well aware that one finds historical evidence in Catholicism of a tension between two versions of the church wherein one represents an official version of the religion, and the other an unofficial version: an orthodoxy versus an unorthodoxy. In the former hierarchical structures are located as it is the official church, whereas in the latter, hierarchical arrangements tend to be resisted and a popular understanding of the faith is embraced. However, what I am arguing against when Radford Ruether proposes two historical trajectories are: 1) the locating of spirit in one version, the unofficial, and social historical conditions in the other version, the official church; 2) her lack of social and historical analysis in regard to the unofficial church, especially problematic if one recalls the hierarchical arrangements found in CEBs, an unofficial version of the church; 3) her implicit assumption that social and historical conditions introduce sin into the world, and the only way this can be resisted is to seek recourse to something outside of social and historical conditions, i.e., spirit; and finally, 4) that the version she favours, the unofficial version one, is legitimated by the spirit since spirit locates itself in this version of the church.
Two historical trajectories, then, are established in the myth which act as foundational for women-church. Both trajectories will act as a mythic foundation for the interpretative correctness of the theological position of women-church. As a spirit-filled community it can locate Jesus as its originary moment, and in opposition to the institutional church, it can establish its interpretation as primary and directed, and not secondary and misguided. Although she appears uninvested in either of the trajectories, arguing that she is: a) presenting a historical record of church, and b) locating herself in a dialectical position between the two trajectories she proposes to be the history of the church, it is evident that she is in fact invested in the trajectory known as “spirit-filled community” and extremely critical of the other trajectory known as “institutional church.” Her criticisms of the first are slight. For example, she insists that if spirit-filled communities are to truly work, they must ensconce themselves in the history of the parent institution in order to resist the myth of reformation. This means, then, that the parent institution will carry all the implications of an “ongoing unredeemed human history” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 23) because, unlike the spirit that seemingly acts as a historical corrective for those communities filled by it, the parent institution, in this instance the church, is securely located in, and generated by, the materiality of social location.

Radford Ruether develops these two trajectories and then locates women-church as if it is the synthesis of these two trajectories, although women-church is clearly located in the trajectory of spirit-filled communities. She argues that the dialectical position necessary here, is achieved by claiming both trajectories, but it is not clear that the historical trajectory that the institution of the church is located in is in fact claimed. Rather, it would seem that it is set in juxtaposition to the spirit-filled communities and found inadequate.
Radford Ruether’s intention of the inclusion of the church is a strategy which lays claim to the history of the church in the moment that it rejects it. She does this in order to maintain women-church as a Catholic Christian formation. In order to legitimize its subversive discourse within Catholicism, Radford Ruether has established the legitimacy of the historical practice of contestation in Christianity at large, i.e., Spiritualists, Anabaptists, Quakers, Christian revivalists, etc., and within the Catholic church itself, i.e., monastic movements, Beguines, and liberation theologies. She argues that “throughout this history [Catholic Christian] we find a tension and contradiction between two fundamentally different concepts of church. The church as historical institution tends to sacralize the established social order—its political as well as its familial hierarchies….by contrast, the concept of the church as spirit-filled community tends to break down these social hierarchies” (1985: 22). Women-church is located in spirit-filled communities, but it requires stabilization within the historical institution in order not to become a schismatic community (1985: 36) or a new sect. Consequently, Radford Ruether will employ what she terms a dialectic wherein both trajectories are incorporated in the new Catholicism (1985: 32), but the one “fallen” trajectory, the institutional church (1985: 23) is renewed and redeemed by the unfallen, if unstable (1985: 23) trajectory, the spirit-filled community.

Hence the stage is set whereby women-church, as the now historical example of a spirit-filled community, can legitimately remain in the church, as it is the authentic church. This not only provides legitimation in the face of the institutional church’s own position on change and tradition, i.e., if you do not like it then leave, but also in the face of feminist concerns which have questioned the possible cooption of women-church by the church as a patriarchal institution. This setting of the stage has all appearances of a dialectical location within the church itself, the
acceptance of a bad and good history, but several problems occur. First, in her historical
development of Christianity, one trajectory is conceptualized as bad, a misinterpretation of the
original intentions of Jesus and locked in social hierarchies, while the other holds true to Jesus’
original intentions and is therefore good, and in this, somehow escapes social hierarchies. The
interpretation of these two trajectories is itself not located between the two in a dialectical
fashion, but is generated from the position of the “good” trajectory, i.e., women-church. In
Radford Ruether’s thesis, women-church, as spirit-filled community, will represent the good
trajectory and the spirit’s location among them is proof of the legitimacy of its position.
Therefore, Radford Ruether’s position is also ideological in that she desires to legitimate and
naturalize women-church (and women-church is where she locates herself) through a recourse to
a supposedly neutral historicity, proposed in the notion of the two trajectories, as if she lays
claim to neither, but women-church is claimed by her and is located within the paradigm of the
good trajectory of “spirit-filled communities.”

Secondly, the interpretation of the history of the church put forward by Radford Ruether
is questionable. How is it the church could not escape the history of social institutions, i.e., the
Greco-Roman world, Roman imperialism, monarchy, etc., while spirit-filled communities could?
There is an assumption here that since spirit-filled communities (whose spirit? God’s spirit) were
and are closer to the original intentions of God they could escape the social, cultural, and
historical practices of oppression in which the church was immured. For example, according to
Radford Ruether early and later Christian groups as spirit-filled communities did include women,
e.g., Montanists and Shakers, and this is indicative that they evinced within their formations
some form of egalitarianism. But this inclusion of women cannot act as a historical proof that
these groups practiced egalitarianism as we understand the term now. She appears aware of this problem and does account for variations in how women were accepted in these groups, i.e., spiritually equal but not socially equal as in Shakers, but her argument is that when and if these groups were institutionalized (entered the social and historical) this is when they incorporated hierarchical arrangements in their structures. Therefore, variations in how women functioned in the groups are indicative of the groups’ movement away from the spirit and a subsequent endorsement of social stratification because they are no longer moved by the spirit (Radford Ruether, 1985: 23). They then suffer from historical boundedness, something to which spirit is immune from. If spirit is adhered to, then, the spirit that motivates spirit-filled communities will allow a proper understanding of egalitarianism and true liberation. These spirit-filled communities, then, on the level of the spirit are not subject to history and it is only when they enter history that they are distorted: “So far, no historical polity has proven to do this infallibly, nor has any polity proven an insurmountable barrier to the workings of the Spirit” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 34).

Aside from locating the impetus (spirit) of these groups outside of history, and therefore the social, there is an interesting dichotomy established. The church is now the body (which is bad as argued above) while the spirit-filled community in its various manifestations throughout history is the spirit (which is good). Catholicism in Radford Ruether’s historical development is dichotomized so that spirit, which is good and true in its realization of authentic human history is located in one group, and body, which is bad and false in its rejection of authentic human history as proposed by the spirit, resides in the other group. Throughout her critique of Christianity, and the church in particular, Radford Ruether has argued against such dichotomizing of body /spirit
and has also argued against the valuation of the spirit as good and the body as bad, locating such
dichotomies in patriarchal and androcentric concerns. Her ideological imperatives have meant
that she simply altered the content of these dichotomies and left the form intact.

The mythic base that acts as foundational for Radford Ruether's women-church is itself
enmeshed in legitimating practices. Women-church as spirit-filled community has its roots in the
originary moment of Christianity, while the institutional church has generated a fallen history,
one that misconstrues this originary moment because of its own will to power. Women-church
can escape social and historical immurement because spirit acts as its guiding force, while the
institutional church is imprisoned by both the social and historical because it lacks this guiding
force. The pastness that women-church can claim through the shared spirit found in spirit-filled
communities is one of crystal clear clarity that the institutional church lacks due to its distortion
of history because of its own hegemonic impulses learned when in the social and historical
conditions escaped by spirit-filled community. Women-church, then, is a fully legitimate
Christianity in a way the institutional church is not.

1.2 Women-church

Women-church, within Radford Ruether's conceptualization, is in part, as I have argued,
perceived as a spirit-filled community. It is a feminist basic community within the institutional
church itself. Located in affiliation with the church, then, it is Catholic Christian, but in some
aspects it moves beyond Christianity and incorporate ideas and beliefs generated by feminist

4Certainly there are women-church movements founded in other Christian denominations, but for the purposes of the examination of Radford Ruether's work I will focus on women-church within Catholicism as delineated by Radford Ruether.
spirituality movements, e.g., female metaphors of the divine (Radford Ruether, 1993: 207–208).

Women-church, as indicated, is in exodus from the institutional church which means that the hierarchal, bureaucratic, androcentric, and misogynistic aspects of the church are rejected by women-church. As a feminist community it struggles toward the liberation of women in particular, but all oppressed people in general, and represents “the first time that women collectively have claimed to be church and have claimed the tradition of the exodus community as a community of liberation from patriarchy” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 57).

Patriarchy is, according to Radford Ruether, “a historically contrived social system by which the “fathers”—that is ruling-class males—have used power to establish themselves in a position of domination over women and also over dependent classes in the family and society. Ruling-class males have built social structures and systems of cultural justification to assure that they would monopolize the cultural, economic, and political power of the society” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 58).

As I have argued in Chapter 6 Radford Ruether’s historicizing of patriarchy tends toward an understanding of it as a monolithic ideology that manifests itself in a variety of social and historical formations. But as she delineates patriarchy, it is, in and of itself, an ideal type. She begins by assuming that the gender ideology described and prescribed by patriarchy is a historical moment, i.e., the dualistic hunter/gatherer or the division of labour as a given rather than historical class formation, so that patriarchal historical formations which are supported by and support phallocentrism, or power symbolized by the phallus, remains untheorized. Although she does designate patriarchy as a “historically contrived social system” as a concept in her theorizing is left to override history in essentialized aspects—male rule—which then manifests
itself in history—“social structures and systems of cultural justification.” And, as I have argued, if a monolithic patriarchy stands as that which a feminist theory is theorizing about, around, or against, feminist analyses cannot help but leave their object, patriarchy, a-historical, universal, and undiverse. There is a necessity to recognize both the continuity and social-historical specificity of patriarchy, and this recognition should be elaborated synchronically and not diachronically so that each instance speaks for itself, and one avoids inadvertently elaborating a monolithic theory of patriarchy based on these moments, but at the same time each instance may share similarities with other instances and then provide some insight into the present system under analysis, a system one can theorize about.

Women-church, established outside of and in rejection of patriarchy (Radford Ruether, 1985: 58), seeks to reconnect women to each other, something, Radford Ruether argues, that patriarchy is rather paranoid of. Women-church seeks to institute a safe space wherein women can regain their voices and communicate their ideas and experiences with each other. Because of patriarchy’s investment in silencing women’s voices and devaluing women’s ideas and thoughts, women-church can provide a safe space where this kind of activity can take place. In order that this be realized, according to Radford Ruether, women-church must necessarily be in exodus from patriarchy so that women can find their own voices. This separatism, according to Radford Ruether, is neither a rejection of the male nor a permanent situation, but rather is a necessary process in order that women can form “the critical culture that can give them an autonomous ground from which to critique patriarchy” (Radford Ruether 1985: 59). Women-church, then, is the “Christian theological expression of this stage of feminist collectivization of women’s experience and the formation of critical culture” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 61).
Women-church is a stage “in a dialectical process that must lead on to the cohuman church” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 62). A cohuman church is a community engaged in “liberation from patriarchy” but the realization of this cohuman church is a process yet to be realized since patriarchy is, according to Radford Ruether, too old and too deeply rooted in psyches and cultures to be quickly dealt with. The process, then, for the realization of this cohuman church will not be instantaneous. Therefore, women-church as a community of “feminist collectivation of women’s experience” (1985: 61) is a “feminist counterculture to the ecclesia of patriarchy” that locates itself “within and on the edges of existing church institutions” (Radford Ruether 1985: 62).

In its separatism, contends Radford Ruether, women-church is not a schismatic formation which has separated from the church to form a new sect, nor does it fit into the church on the church’s terms. Women-church means “establishing bases for a feminist critical culture and celebrational community that have some autonomy from the established institutions” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 62). Women-church in its affiliation with the institutional church can maintain contact with those women who continue to attend liturgies in traditional parishes, but who periodically seek to experience feminist vision and interject this back into these traditional parishes. But at the core of women-church will be those women who are centrally located in women-church as a feminist exodus community in order that they may “work intensely and exclusively on imagining an alternative culture in a way that cannot be controlled or limited by patriarchal culture, but also are in dialogue and interaction with women within the institutions who can then adapt and make use of what is being developed in alternative communities …” This then, as Radford Ruether sees it, allows the “…possibility of a genuine transformational
Women-church as feminist basic communities, in Radford Ruether’s work, are grassroots movements that arose from the lower levels of the church’s hierarchical structure. Women-church is an umbrella term that encapsulates feminist Christian grassroots movements. Women-church is ecumenical in that it is, as perceived by Radford Ruether, open, albeit critical at times, i.e., goddess movement, to various discussions of other religiously located feminist groups. What is central to women-church’s organizing principle, which is shared by other religiously located feminist groups, is its theologizing of feminist concerns. According to Radford Ruether, women-church is the church as it ought to be.

Radford Ruether argues that women-church is not in exile but in exodus, and as such, the church (as it was in Jesus and as it ought to be now) goes with it. In Radford Ruether’s (1985: 69) theological reflections on women-church, she puts forward several theological claims for women-church: “We have a controversy with the representatives of patriarchy who claim to be the authentic spokesmen of the church. We say that the temples of patriarchy have disfigured and hidden our true Mother and Teacher, and replaced her with a great mechanical idol with flashing eyes and smoking nostrils who spews out blasphemies and lies.” Women-church “repudiates this idol of patriarchy” and “denounces it in the name of God, in the name of Christ, in the name of Church, in the name of humanity, and in the name of the earth” (1985: 72). “As women-church we claim the authentic mission of Christ, the true mission of the Church, the real agenda of our Mother-Father God who comes to restore and not to destroy our humanity…” (1985: 72).

Working within a theological paradigm, how is this position, one wonders, different from a “reformation” position, a position resisted by Radford Ruether as definitional for women? How
is women-church not a schismatic community if in fact it challenges that the “parent” community is participating in a false theology (much as Martin Luther did)? She argues that women-church is not a schismatic, sectarian group because the “authentic” church, the church as it ought to be, is women-church, and not the institutional church which is a patriarchal church. Because of the church’s continued participation in patriarchy, and more than this, its establishment of patriarchy as a “false idol” within its structures, means that “this idol blasphemes by claiming to speak in the name of Jesus and to carry out his redemptive mission, while crushing and turning to its opposite all that he came to teach … The powers and principalities of rape, genocide, and war achieve their greatest daring by claiming to be Christ, to represent Christ’s mission … God’s Shekhina, Holy Wisdom, the Mother face of God has fled from the high thrones of patriarchy and has gone into exodus with us” (1985: 72).

However, this argument does not convince me that women-church avoids sectarianism. Claiming that women-church is the church as it ought to be is not much different from what the Protestant reformation sought to do, reclaim Christianity as it ought to be. Protestant movements sought to reread those texts and reinterpret the mission of Jesus in light of their own political and theological agendas. Radford Ruether does not claim authentic Christianity as early Protestants did, but she does claim authentic church, and likewise rereads biblical texts and reinterprets the mission of Jesus in light of her own political and theological agenda. Because she claims the church for women-church, she assumes that she can escape the problems, as she interprets them, encountered by Protestant movements: the giving up of changing the “parent” institution; historical institutionalization wherein there is a necessity to duplicate all the functions of historical institutions; excessive bitterness and misrepresentation on both sides; and a return to
Chapter 7

origins which is in itself a historical myth (Radford Ruether, 1985: 36–37).

These schismatic problems as Radford Ruether represents them, do appear to have been encountered by women-church. Although not specifically giving up changing the church, Radford Ruether understands women-church in exodus away from the institutional church, but carrying with it authentic church. There is no need, then, to alter the institutional church since one carries with one the authentic church. The authentic church is lost to the institutional church when the institutional church obstinately remains lodged in its distorted view of the world.⁵

Although Radford Ruether does suggest that there can be a shared identity (1985: 36) in Catholicism between women-church and the institutional church, one is uncertain just what kind of identity she is proposing. How far do the shared theological imperatives of the institutional church and women-church go if women-church understands the institutional church as sacralizing the maleness of deities in order to legitimate its patriarchal structures?

Radford Ruether’s insistence that women-church is ensconced in the institution of the church, in a desire to evade duplicating the functions of historical institutions, is somewhat naive. Women-church has already developed its own history, and its own political and social apparatuses by which to locate itself in the world. Clearly, women-church with its mandate, subgroups, meetings, economic endeavours has not escape institutionalization. And if the desire here is to escape the duplication of those errors generated by the parent institution, this assumes that the negative (?) social and historical contexts of existence can somehow be sidestepped.

---

⁵ This ‘historical’ assessment of the church is similar to the Christian view of Judaism’s obstinacy in the face of Jesus’ proposed reforms and suggests in its negative appraisal of the church, like Christianity’s negative appraisal of Judaism, triumphalism).
Chapter 7

Certainly one can learn from the errors of others when reformulating one’s group, but only those things deemed as errors by the newly formed group can possibly be sidestepped. This is precisely how Protestantism did not escape gender ideology. Gender ideology was simply not perceived as an erroneous perspective. Equally so, women-church is located in a social and historical context and will be informed by this context, for good or ill. Like any schismatic group or church for that matter, it cannot escape this social historical context and will therefore reflect aspects of it.

Women-church is of history not simply in history. There would appear to be an assumption by Radford Ruether that somehow the right church, theology, or resistant community can stand outside of both history and society. This may well be a problem generated by her insistence of “spirit-filled” communities.

Finally I would suggest that the idea that the church is possessed by the evil of patriarchy, that it promotes false idols which are representatives of patriarchy, and that under the influence of patriarchy engaged in “war, burning children, the violation of women, and the rape of the earth” does vilify the church. I do not deny that the church has participated in such historical and social practices, but not because it is possessed by patriarchy, but because the social and historical reality that makes up the church is riven by systems of oppression. I would also suggest that in Radford Ruether’s rereading and reconceiving of the Christian New Testament and the mission of Jesus, especially when this reading is set in opposition to the church’s reading of the texts, that there is an engagement with an origin’s myth. As earlier argued her vision over and against the institutional church’s vision of Jesus and his group as a “spirit-filled messianic renewal movement” locates Jesus and his group in her camp and certainly not the church’s camp. Jesus as a leader of a rebellion within Judaism has some marked resemblances to that of Radford
Ruether’s rebellion against the institutional church. Her understanding of some new Testament
texts as patriarchal, and her use of the prophets from the Old Testament are a means to
theologically legitimate her position which of necessity means drawing upon a myth of origins in
order to undergird that position. Origin myths found one’s theological, political, social, etc.,
positions and legitimate one’s current understanding. Radford Ruether’s reading of Jesus and his
intentions along with her use of some Christian texts clearly locates her project as participating in
a reformationary search for authentic origins. Although she does contend that women-church
should recover insights buried in past traditions (1985: 37), Jesus and his intentions are not
simply insights but are the core of the Christian myth, and her rereading of this is certainly a
return to origins and an attempt to wrest this myth from the patriarchal institutional church.

It would seem that in many ways women-church does qualify as a schismatic community.
Although Radford Ruether does not explicitly separate women-church from the church, it
certainly is implicit in her arguments. She does not wish women-church to be seen as working
within the model of a reformation movement, but instead insists that the authentic church is
found in women-church. But this assumes again that the real church is not the social historical
church we see in our world, but a spirit church that resides outside of history, much like women-
church resides outside of the historical institutional church. These kinds of claims and the
location of the real church resist theorizing, resist self critique, and locate the tenets of women-
church outside of critical scrutiny.

In order to achieve women-church, as authentic church, there is a process of raising
consciousness, a feminist consciousness that acts as the core of women-church. Although an
umbrella concept of women-church is proposed, wherein a number of different groups locate
themselves within women-church, i.e., The National Coalition of American Nuns, The Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual, The Women’s Ordination Conference etc., at its centre is an identity located in women, but more specifically in feminist women. How this identity is manufactured and reinforced will be through a process of re-invention located in ritual.

1.3 Women-church and Ritual

The second half of Radford Ruether’s text, *Women-church*, consists of both liturgies and rituals that will bring about the conscientización of women in women-church. The process of raising consciousness is connected to the development of a critical culture for women that can provide “an autonomous ground from which to critique patriarchy.” Her purpose of proposing women-church is so that groups of women can come together in order to conceptualize the world from their own experiences. She argues that “[i]t is not enough to hold an ideology of criticism and social analysis as an interpretative base…one needs communities of nurture to guide one through death to the old symbolic order of patriarchy to rebirth into a new community of being and living. One needs not only to engage in rational and theoretical discourse about this journey; one also needs deep symbols and symbolic action to guide and interpret the actual experience of the journey from sexism to liberated humanity” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 3). In the process of creating separatist communities a new kind of consciousness must be formed. Within women-church, at least at its centre, this new kind of consciousness, a feminist consciousness, can be developed and then shared with other women: “Only if some groups work intensely and exclusively on imagining an alternative culture in a way that cannot be controlled or limited by patriarchal culture, but also are in dialogue and interaction with women within the institutions who can then adapt and make use of what is being developed in alternative communities, does
the possibility of a genuine transformational dialectic take place” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 62). This new kind of consciousness, a feminist consciousness, is grounded in rituals that relate to women’s experience. In the development of Radford Ruether’s rituals and liturgies one notes that ritual is understood as both the praxis, i.e., symbolic action, and the embodiment of belief that will affect a change in consciousness.

Theorizing ritual entails understanding the ideological implications that both inform ritual as a social category and that result from ritual itself. In order to demonstrate how Radford Ruether leaves ritual untheorized, and subsequently entrenches her conceptualization of women-church in a sexed ideology and identity politics, I will examine a number of these rituals as demarcated in her text, juxtaposing them, in part, with field work that I did with a group of women who sought to realize their spirituality in ritual. Thereafter I will examine Radford Ruether’s rituals in light of Catherine Bell’s work in ritual theory.

The liturgies and rituals laid out in Radford Ruether’s text are divided into four chapters which are reflective of four different sequences of observance. The first focuses on the formation of the group (understood in her work as church) as “a community of liberation from patriarchy and oppression” (1985: 107). The second series of liturgies and rites focuses upon healing in regard to experiences of either violence or crisis. The third series focuses upon those rites related to a life cycle, while the forth focuses upon seasonal celebrations. Radford Ruether indicates that the symbolic text of these rituals will be drawn from “layers of Mediterranean and Western religious traditions: nonbiblical Ancient Near Eastern tradition, Jewish tradition, and Christian tradition” (1985: 99). These rites and liturgies, she indicates, affirm pagan or folkloric beliefs, but she insists this paganism is different from that appropriated by the pagan feminist movement.
of recent years. Having established her sources, then, Radford Ruether develops a series of rituals that she believes empower women as feminists. These rituals are intended to effect and affect feminist consciousness in feminist basic communities.

Elaborated in chapter seven of Radford Ruether’s text are the liturgies and rites which are meant to demark the group or mark a group’s formation. At the outset the group should define what they see the group as, i.e., a discussion group, consciousness raising group, etc., and how this will be realized, i.e., worship community, a theological study group, etc. Having determined the nature of the group, a covenant book is written (this should be, according to Radford Ruether, regularly rewritten) wherein “…the basic credal statement and description of the theological vision of the community” are set down (1985: 124). This statement should represent the group’s

---

6 The feminist goddess movement, Radford Ruether argues, lacks a grounding in history, or real historical rootedness (1985: 105) and tends toward a romanticization of the human and the natural world. But I am unsure how Radford Ruether feels that she has historical rootedness when she gleans rituals from Ancient Near Eastern texts. We only have fragmented Near Eastern texts that relate ritual either indirectly, e.g., “Inanna and the King: Blessing on the Wedding Night” or incompletely, e.g., Akkadian New Year’s Festival. One does wonder just how much “history” we can glean from the fragmented, and obscure ancient Near Eastern archaeological remains. And if goddess spirituality is taking rites and liturgies from patriarchal historical periods, i.e., Classical Greek, Hellenistic, Greco Roman, and Celtic, and attempting to glean information useful to their religious practices, what make the project so much different from Radford Ruether’s gleaning of tidbits from this patriarchal history of the bible and related texts? She argues that those feminists attempting to reread, reconceive, and reconstruct ancient religious traditions related to goddess worship fail because goddess worship was androcentric. Agreed, it was, but so too the Bible, as she has argued. It would seem to me that the issue of paganism itself is more problematic for Radford Ruether than she might admit. Further, when Radford Ruether refers to historical rites noted in ancient texts she is approaching ritual as static and never changing once it has been set down. I also question her conception of history, most especially, in relation to religious beliefs and practices. Her approach suggests that the rites she will glean from history are ascertained because they are located in history as if history is a factual recording of events rather than narratives written in order to express a particular group’s vision of the world (see chapters 4 and 5).
basic theological affirmations which then are rewritten at each reconvenanting (1985: 143). What form these affirmations take, will depend upon the community. Found within the covenant book are the formalized roles necessary to the smooth operation of the group, and the names of those women who will fill these roles. The organizational design of the community is established, while the commitments of the community are indicated in the covenant book. Once complete, this book will be used in the covenant celebration. The process of forming this book will occur in retreat. Implicit in Radford Ruether’s delineation of the covenant book is a sense the book will be written by all the community’s members. The practicalities of this process, then, demand that the group be small.

The covenant celebration marks the boundaries of the group. The covenant book will act as core for the group’s self definition. The covenant celebration, as Radford Ruether envisions it, begins with a rite of baptism. At the outset of the group’s formation baptism will be used to initiate all the members, thereafter it will be used to initiate new members to the group. Radford Ruether (1985: 125) indicates that this rite marks a turning away from an old way of being—a “metanoia from the powers and principalities of personal and systematic oppression” toward a new way of being, that of a feminist. The rite, then, marks a shift in consciousness. She advises that the person seeking baptism should reflect on the meaning of “this turning point in their consciousness and life commitments” (1985: 128). The process of this reflection can be guided by those people skilled in theological and social analysis, those women of the group who have developed a feminist consciousness marked by this same rite of passage. The process of the rite requires that the individual seeking baptism develop a life history which incorporates and makes sense of this turning away from and a turning toward. The initiate could also choose a new name
to represent this shift in being.

The rite of baptism, then, both marks development of a conscientización that would allow the individual to join the group, and determines the form this conscientización ought to take. In the rite the community forms a semicircle around the initiate, they request to know the initiate’s new name, and welcome her to the group. The initiate then proceeds to relate her history and statement of faith. Thereafter both the community and the initiate recite a “litany of exorcism” from the powers and principalities of patriarchy. During this recitation one person holds a candle while another rings a bell at the conclusion of each statement of exorcism. Radford Ruether provides an example of such a litany in her text. The powers of the corruption of humanity which “turn males into instruments of domination and shape women to be tools of submission are exorcised, powers of militarism, of domestic violence, of violence in society, of racism, and of wealth and exploitation are exorcised” (1985: 128–129). Thereafter salt is placed on the initiate’s tongue with the words “let your eyes always see the truth and your lips always speak the truth” (1985: 129). Following this, the initiate descends unrobed into a pool of water and submerges three times, or water is poured on her head three times. During the ablutions the initiator(s) speaks an incantation that utilizes the power of water to further the exorcism and bring the initiate into the community: “Through the power of the Source, the liberating Spirit, and the forerunners of our hope, be freed from the power of evil. May the forces of violence, of militarism, of sexism, of racism, of injustice, and of all that diminishes human life lose their power over your life….may you enter the promised land of milk and honey and grow in virtue…” (1985: 130). The initiate then rises from the water and is clothed in a white garment. Her forehead is anointed with oil, a candle is placed in her hands while an embroidered stole
wrapped around her shoulders. The initiate, now part of the community, shares with them a Eucharist of milk and honey. In the Eucharist ceremony a cup of milk and honey and sweet cakes are blessed: “this is the loaf of the beloved community, which had been scattered in the world of patriarchy and now gathers together into a new people to anticipate a new world liberated from oppression…” (1985: 130). The newly baptized eats and drinks first then the entire community follows. A kiss of peace and a song shared among the community, who are holding hands, ends the baptism.

Once the baptism is completed, the covenstanting celebration continues and the community recites together their credal statement. They read their commitments from the book of the covenant and all members enter their names. If roles are allocated, this is then stated within the ceremony and the individuals and the roles they will be assuming are named. The community then lays their hands on each of these individuals and commissions them in their role. The covenstanting celebration ends with the community members passing the peace, linking arms, and singing a final song. The culmination of these events can then end in a party or feast (Radford Ruether, 1985: 124–130).

Clearly what is seen here is a marking of members as members, and a marking of the community in a shared identity. Like all identity politics there is a realized identity that is both created by, but stands against, the perceived other, in this instance patriarchy. Entrance into the community requires a commitment to stand against the external force of patriarchy. There is a boundary demarcation between a them and us. Within the rite of baptism patriarchy is conceived as a monolithic evil which has distorted the minds of the community and which demands changed consciousness: a conscientización. The process of baptism seeks out the evil residue that
causes distortion in the minds of the community and exorcises it, removing it from the community’s members and places it outside of the community.

Although the social manifestation of this monolithic patriarchy is recognized, the socializing process of interpersonal relationships, politics, history, culture, etc., is understood as something which can be stripped from the individual who is now a pure and socially unencumbered human being. The human is not perceived in this ritual as a social being, but a being that has been socialized. One is faced with a sense that there is an essential human self which has been overlaid by a social self. The necessity of raising feminist consciousness, then, is to remove from oneself this social self and discard it. Further, the rite of baptism largely reifies patriarchy: it becomes a thing, an evil thing, one that has an autonomous existence and in this existence preys upon the “natural” innocence of human beings.

In another rite, which contributes to the formation of the feminist basic communities of women-church, Radford Ruether establishes a ritual intent upon the cleansing one’s mind from the pollution of sexism. Radford Ruether indicates that this rite consists of the holding up of symbols which represent differing aspects of sexism. A makeup kit is held up and acts as a symbol of “a coy girl who learns to flirt and display her body as a sexual object” (1985: 133). A can of cleansing power symbolizes the role of the household drudge, a broken pen symbolizes those women who willingly discarded their aspirations for careers and education because they succumbed to the belief that women belong in the home. A picture of a woman with a taped mouth represents the cooption of women in patriarchy, a stuffed wallet represents hierarchical violence between women of classes and races, a flag with a feminist symbol on it represents lateral violence among different kinds of feminists, while a gold ring represents lateral violence
between lesbian and heterosexual women. Finally, crossed sticks symbolically represents the lateral violence between separatist and liberal feminists. After the display of each of these symbols and their exegesis by the ritual leader, the group sits in meditation and dwells upon each symbol and the implications of these symbols for themselves and society. They are given a bit of paper with a word or symbol on it and prior to the raising of the next symbol these “execration texts” are burned while one member cites an incantation that calls on the purifying aspects of fire. The rite culminates with each woman touching a partner on the forehead while reciting words of forgiveness and freedom. Then they embrace and sing (Radford Ruether, 1985: 133–134).

In this rite one again sees an exorcism at work, and since this rite is located in those rites affiliated with formation, identity also becomes central. In the process of mind-cleansing, feminist identity as Radford Ruether delineates it, means rejecting certain images or symbols generated within the social realm: the coy girl, the drudge, the compliant woman, the coopted woman (fembots in Mary Daly’s œuvre), the privileged woman, the strident feminist, the homophobic woman, and the fundamentalist feminist. In this rite we see the rejection of cultural images of women—negative images of women one might well locate in “patriarchy.” Negative behaviours of women practiced within the feminist movement, which have caused further divisions among women, are rejected. The symbols found in this rite of mind cleansing are images that represent women’s collaboration with their own sexual exploitation (1985: 133).

Two aspects of feminist identity are elaborated by the perspective generated within the rite. In one we see accountability: women are accountable for their participation in systems of oppression. In the second we see female stereotypes that feminists reject; the coy “girl,”
symbolized by the makeup kit who objectifies herself in an attempt to be a desirable, or the
drudge who makes no demand on others to share the work load. Although I quite agree
accountability and critical analysis are central keys to feminist political action, I do question the
simplification of human social and psychological processes. I would argue that the intricacies of
human socialization which operate on every level of human interaction demand a more complex
analysis. I would suggest this complex analysis of social relations is missing from Radford
Ruether’s work because patriarchy is conceptualized as a monolithic and evil thing which
feminists come up against. It is the thing which creeps into our minds which then requires that
we cleanse our minds. The complexities of human social behaviour are left behind and what
remains is a caricature of these complexities. They are simplified into easy assailable objects we
can reject outright: “…it is unhelpful to rate an entire culture as patriarchal or not patriarchal.
Cultures are complex—men may dominate in one realm and women in another; and even within
a given culture different women have different life-experiences—old women may be much freer
than young women, and women of nobility are likely to exert greater power than poor women”
(Starr Sered, 1994: 8). Frequently, the young woman has yet to achieve the sophistication
acquired by life experience in order to reject negative images of the feminine presented to her,
images her mother may in fact promote herself. The drudge may well be a woman who faces
physical abuse if she demands that all those who live in the house share in its work. She may not
be in a position to challenge hierarchical structures in her home due to poverty, lack of education,
fear, or any number of complications.

Radford Ruether’s rituals ignore such complexities and assume that women have a place
to stand which can locate them outside of cultural/social/personal/historical imperatives. She also
assumes, in her delineation of ritual, that a well balanced psychological state wherein women are freed from guilt, anxiety, or low esteem will result if women are freed from patriarchy. The complexities of society and its costs on the human psychological state cannot all be chalked up to patriarchy. Although I understand that Radford Ruether’s motives are well placed, I would suggest her understanding of ritual, what it can effect, and the human condition itself are far too simplistic. Oppression in the wide world cannot be simply dealt with as a sin or something evil that infects people, a thing that is manifested in a monolithic thing called patriarchy, and something we can cleanse ourselves of. We are social beings and, as such, the social is inherently us. It cannot be cut off, and cast out, leaving behind a pure human being. The problematics evinced in these identity rituals Radford Ruether creates may in fact be a problem of her lack of theorizing ritual. Radford Ruether’s lack of theorizing ritual I will address further on in this chapter.

Chapter 8 of Radford Ruether’s text is concerned with healing in a number of different circumstances. These rituals focus on healing related to women’s experiences of battery, sexual abuse as a child, rape, illness of mind or body, abortion, and miscarriage or still birth. Also found within this chapter are rituals related to divorce, a change of name, and a ritual that focuses upon the affirmative acceptance of lesbian sexuality. The majority of these healing rites are focused upon the abuse of mind, body, and verve women face in a patriarchal world (1985: 149), while a few other healing rites seek to acknowledge the intense inner conflict generated by these experiences which have then lead women to blame themselves for the violence enacted against them. In the process of acknowledging such conflict the rituals attempt to assist the individual seeking healing through purification, but not impurity located in women, who has been
victimized by such violence, but rather purification from the violence itself. Violence experienced is invasive and intrusive and affects how the recipient of such behaviour understands herself. Cultural stories that continue to make the individuals who suffer these atrocities responsible for them, i.e., an unconscious desire to be raped, the sexual seduction of a parent, the masochist who desires to be hit and therefore incites her own battery, and social intervention that minimizes societal encouragement or erasure of these problems are challenged by these rituals. In other rituals, such as divorce and abortion, the rite established seeks to acknowledge and support decisions made by responsible adults, while in the naming ritual both autonomy and the power to name are claimed by the ritual participants.

On the level of healing Radford Ruether rituals sit comfortably in what might be called “women’s cultural knowledge”: cultural knowledge in that the knowledge often associated with women has been located in the quotidian. Within the quotidian there are the concerns of tending the body and this focus has historically been termed “women’s concerns.” The need to be able to contribute to healing and the concern for healing have arisen within women’s daily lives in connection to reproduction, caretaking, and the mediation of family concerns. These rituals that reflect upon women’s lived lives are more the focus than female identity. As Susan Starr Sered (1994: 6) argues, “[e]ven within male-dominated religious contexts women “domesticate” religion by emphasizing rituals and symbols that give spiritual meaning to their everyday lives…” so that “[t]he most conspicuous similarities among women’s religions emerge in the realm of suffering and healing. Whereas all religions deal in some way with explanations of and solutions to suffering, women’s religions are characterized by the particular emphasis placed on illness and curing” (Starr Sered, 1994: 103). Certainly the feminist tenets regarding the
reinterpretation of rape, battery, sexual abuse, abortion, etc., are present, and certainly the
naming ritual is feminist in its intentions, but feminism within these rituals has more to do with
interacting with, and a renegotiation of, women’s lived experiences rather than establishing the
parameters of the group.

The healing rituals Radford Ruether develops find a context in this social historical
location. Starr Sered (1994: 103) notes that women as primary caretakers of children (and men,
along with elderly parents) have developed knowledge in relation to health care and tend to be
“domestic” healers. As subordinate members of sexist societies, women tend to suffer from
nebulous illnesses, e.g., headaches, dizziness, etc., which are not amenable to modern or even
folk medicine and therefore must see to their own health. Further, women bear the brunt of
responsibility for reproduction; either the prevention or the promotion of fertility, and all the
consequences therein. The rituals that Radford Ruether develops, and also recounts in this
chapter, reflect the everyday lives of women, be they feminist or otherwise, and are focused upon
understanding, interpreting, and validating the events found in women’s everyday lives. There is,
then, in these rituals both historical continuity and social emplacement. Because these rituals are
grounded in the everyday lives of women, they tend toward the empowerment of those women
seeking healing. These rituals, rather than attempting to construct a fixed (and illusory) identity
as in the rituals intent upon the “midwifery of women-church” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 122),
instead assume the social and historical location of these women.

In the last two chapters two categories of rituals are elaborated by Radford Ruether: those
concerned with rites of passage; and those concerned with seasonal celebrations. One of the most
marked aspects of her rites of passage is their focus on gender and the marking of gender: men as
male and women as female. Radford Ruether indicates that (1985: 182):

These rites also concentrate mostly on the female life cycle. There are some liturgies that apply equally to males, such as namings, baptism, birthdays, leaving home, covenancing, moving to a new house, dying and funerals. Other rites allow for males as participants, such as the birthing liturgy. Yet there remain important areas where specifically male rites of passage need to be written, such as puberty rites for young males and retirement of older males. These I believe must be written by men.

The puberty rite for a young woman, which takes place after her first menstruation, is a ritual that focuses on her sexuality as female and welcomes her, in this capacity, to the community of women. These women will themselves have all begun to menstruate and included among them will be her mother, female relatives, and close female friends. The ritual acknowledges the young woman as a sexual female, and a potential mother as she has begun to menstruate. After having immersed themselves in water with the young woman and discussed with her the various subjects related to menstruation and her own sexuality, the community of women forms an assembly into which the young woman, newly clothed in a colourful dress, with a bright sash wrapped around her waist, and crowned with flowers is brought to the circle. They sit around her and holding up symbols for women’s bodies and objects to care for women’s bodies. They recite a claiming chant in unison wherein the young women claims her body, as a body and not a sexual object. Thereafter the women speak to the young woman about the implications of menstruation: a symbolic threshold to adulthood, sexuality, conception, and autonomy. A baby or a doll is placed in her arms and again the community of women speaks to her, this time of potential motherhood and the responsibilities it entails. Finally the young woman is given an egg and she recites with the women, while holding the egg, prose concerned with the mystery of life found in a woman’s body and the cycle which menstruation begins.
Underscoring this awareness of the power of life is responsibility for it. The young woman breaks the egg into a bowl and the circle of woman say to her “You are now one of us. We welcome you into the community of women” (1985: 190). The young woman receives her covenant book, a place where she might write, and a book which holds her secret name. This name was given to her at her naming ceremony and is revealed to her only at puberty. She calls herself by this name and is greeted by the community with this name. The rite ends with a party (1985: 188–190).

Rituals in the chapter of Seasonal celebrations recognize the rhythms of time. Although a number of particular times are celebrated in ritual, i.e., Christmas, or events in history, i.e., the holocaust of women (remembered through a ceremony similar to the Jewish Kaddish), or the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I wish to focus on those rites, and one in particular, that are significant to time and women. Radford Ruether’s cycles of the moon festivals signify the connectedness between time as cyclical and women. This signification is bodily represented by menarche and the moon. Her point in these rituals is to reclaim women’s menstruation as a “symbol of female potency” (1985: 218). She elaborates a ritual to reclaim menstruation, a New Moon ritual, and makes reference to the Mikvah ritual. In these rituals women’s menstruation as a symbol of female power resides at the centre. One intention of these rituals, Radford Ruether develops, is to move away from the understanding of women’s menstruation as impure, while a second intention is to locate women’s power in their potential for reproduction. Women’s time and natural time, i.e., phases of the moon, are interconnected and their interconnection is understood of evidence of female power: “[o]ut of the void the new moon rises, giving promise of a great light to come, which will light up the night sky. Just so, the powers of new life arise
In these rituals we clearly have a process of delineating gender. Gender is defined by one’s body, and the femaleness (sex) that underscores women (gender) is an essentialized element. Although Radford Ruether is clearly aware of gender ideology and the social creation of gender, she builds her notions of gender upon the unanalysed category of sex. Radford Ruether assumes sex to be a natural category, and the division of labour to be a result of that natural category of sex. Sex is located in the natural world, and so too reproduction. The new moon as a symbol of the natural potency that is analogically associated with female potency which is located in her ovaries with the cosmic signification of this potency being menstruation.

Christine Delphy (1996) argues that the dichotomous split between gender and sex, with gender understood as a cultural overlay that attempts to define sex, confuses the analysis. She further argues that sex, like gender, is a social historical construction, and that sex ideology is preceded by gender and not vice versa. Further, she states that the presupposition of sex preceding gender although “historically explicable, is theoretically unjustifiable” (Delphy, 1996: 30). Following the development of the category of gender in academic discourses, she suggests that gender as a concept is founded upon “sex roles”—a line of analysis that looks at the division of labour and the differing statuses of men and women. This line of thinking was picked up and developed in feminist discourses with the popularized notion, one she ascribes to Anne Oakley (1985), that sex consists of biological differences between the male and female while gender is the cultural manifestation of these differences: a social dichotomy determined by a natural dichotomy (Delphy, 1996: 32-33). Delphy asks why it is assumed that sex would give rise to any sort of classification? “...sex itself simply marks a social division: that it serves to allow social
recognition and identification of those who are dominants and those who are dominated....That is
that sex is a sign, but since it does not distinguish just any old thing from anything else, and does
not distinguish equivalent things but rather important and unequal things, it has historically
acquired a symbolic value” (1996: 35).

Delphy’s position is clear. Both gender and sex are social constructions. Her point is not
that feminists have failed to understand the real situation of sexual domination, as sex and sex
roles and/or gender were necessarily separated from each other in order to locate sex in the social
realm. However, having done so, hanging onto some “natural” or biological aspects of sex does
not push analyses far enough. Moving back through the concept of gender to the concept of sex
allows feminists to question the “naturalness” of sex, but should not necessitate the assumption
that sex precedes gender, and therefore oppression can be directly connected to gender and not
sex. As she indicates, “hierarchy forms the foundations of difference and sex is the sign of
difference” (Delphy, 1996: 37). In order to eradicate the hierarchy one must let go of difference.
This has been a contentious point in feminisms, as many feminists believe that in so doing what
will result is the negation of female difference and the valuation of male difference. However, as
Delphy points outs (1996: 39):

Within a gender framework such fears are simply incomprehensible. If women
were the equals of men, men would no longer equal themselves. Why then should
women resemble what men would have ceased to be? If we define men within a
gender framework, they are first and foremost dominants with characteristics that
enable them to remain dominants. To be like them would also to be dominants;
but this is a contradiction in terms. If, in a collective couple constituted of
dominants and dominated, either of the categories is suppressed, then the
domination is *ipso facto* suppressed. Hence, the other category of the couple is
also suppressed …One can no more conceive of a society where everyone is
‘dominant’ than of one where everyone is ‘richest’. 
Radford Ruether’s ritual of female puberty naturalizes both sex and sexual difference as if the body, now sexed female, is in nature, while the subsequent interpretations of that sexed female “nature” are understood as social. Underscoring her rituals is a belief that the dichotomy between male and female and sex and gender are natural dichotomies that simply have been interpreted incorrectly. There is a natural division in humanity, and all creatures for that matter, between the male and the female. But the fact that we have named this a difference, have marked or signed this as difference, and are invested in maintaining this difference should raise some questions regarding why there is a continuing investment in a sexual identity. In the rite of passage for young women and in the menstruation rituals, sexual difference is underscored, and a separate community of women identified as the female sex is underscored. There is a sense Radford Ruether’s rituals that one can return to the natural state that preexists social categories, a return to the garden of Eden, if you will.7 Underlying this rite, and a number of others is the idealistic category “woman.”

The ritual circle I participated in was largely populated by Catholic women, lay and

7My allusion to the Garden of Eden and the Biblical creation story is intentional for two reasons. First, I would suggest that as a Catholic Christian the creations stories in Genesis are a part of Radford Ruether’s theologizing. I suggest the first Genesis story of god creating them, male and female (Genesis 1:27), is the story that intersects and supports Radford Ruether’s essentializing of the female and male. Secondly, however, I would contest her theological certainty and point to the second genesis story regarding the creation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2 and 3), wherein the social location of the categories of male and female and sex are implied in the text. According to this text Adam and Eve feel no shame and marked no sexual difference between themselves, but with the eating of the apple from the tree of knowledge (epistemology?) they are represented as recognizing sexual difference, marking it, and then move on to create new categories based on that difference. The ambivalence concerning the naturalness of sexual difference produced by the juxtapositioning of these two foundational myths further supports my point that sexual difference is a social category.
Chapter 7

religious (Loretta nuns). Some of the women had been sisters in the church but had withdrawn from the church as it maintained a negative attitude toward women and women’s leadership within the church. The members of the group varied in number from seven to twelve. We met approximately every three weeks in the home of two of the sisters. The meetings began at seven and generally ended by nine p.m.. In our initial meeting we met each other and discussed the general format our meetings would follow. Each of us was to lead a ritual throughout the coming months. This meant that leadership was not located in one individual but passed along. There was a general consensus that as oppressed people we had difficulty finding our voices in groups. Therefore a rainstick (and sometimes a shawl) was used to indicate that a person had the floor. That person would not be interrupted, and questions and reflections on what had been said would be generated after the individual was finished speaking.

The rituals were to follow a pattern. We would gather downstairs sitting in chairs that had been formed into a circle. The ritual leader of the evening would begin the process by lighting a candle. She would lead the ritual using whatever symbols and myths she hoped would elaborate her intentions. After approximately forty minutes we would retire to different parts of the house in order to reflect and meditate upon the ritual. With the ringing of a bell we would rejoin each other and reform the circle. Reflections on the meditations provoked by the ritual, and on the ritual itself, were shared among the group. The ritual leader, then, would officially close the circle and we would go up to the kitchen for a light snack provided by the ritual leader and tea, provided by the women of the household.

Throughout the four months I attended the rituals I found that the members of the group tended not toward defining themselves as women, feminist women, or non-feminist women, but
rather sought to renegotiate their understanding of themselves as women. What did it mean to be a woman in a society which did not recognize her as a subject? How could she negotiate the violence present in her day-to-day existence, violence often directed at her because she is a woman? How could she speak of life and death in a way that expressed her social and historical understanding of these categories?

For example, one ritual focused on gift of the beauty of flowers and the shortness of their lives. The ritual’s intention was directed toward developing an understanding of ours lives through the analogy of a flower and its life. Therefore the uniqueness, fragility, and endurance of flowers became the means by which to understand ourselves and our lives within this analogical framework. Within the ritual frame the ritual leader, Sharon,\(^8\) began with a song and referred to the gift of flowers. She passed around a basket of flowers and reflected upon the theme of flowers. She told a story about the budding, blooming, and death of a flower that women bore witness to, and then asked us to meditate on this. Upon our return we shared our meditations after which a song was sung and the evening ended with each of us giving a flower to another. In this ritual the fragility and beauty of life were the focus. Certainly the ritual did hold Christian overtones evinced most clearly in the story of the flower and those women who were witnesses to the brief life of the flower (this story was a metaphor for the lives of those women who shared in Jesus’ life and death), but what was not in evidence was a ritual intent upon marking identity or naming femaleness.

\(^8\)In our first meeting when we discussed my role, one of my commitments to the group was to insure that their anonymity would be protected. Therefore, I have changed all the names of the women referred to.
In another ritual held on October 14, 1994, the ritual leader, Mary, focused upon water and its gift of life. Working from her own writings and reflections she elaborated upon water as a primal source of power, on water in our everyday lives used for drinking, cooking, bathing, and cleaning. She spoke of water as emotion, sexuality, fluidity, the unconscious, and spirituality while in the background the calming sound of a waterfall drifted in and out of consciousness. I noted that while sitting in the darkened room with each of us holding a small bowl of water, a beautiful Minoan jug brimming with water placed in the centre of the round table which we grouped around with a candle flickering and the interweaving of Mary’s words with the music of a waterfall, that a sharp sense of the mystical was evoked. In time we went off to meditate upon Mary’s ritual and after twenty minutes returned to share our thoughts. At the end of this ritual we took our bowls and emptied their contents into one of the many plants that lived in Emma’s house.

In this ritual, one again sees a ritual more intent upon elaborating the mysteries of life. Now certainly the elaboration of these mysteries arose from a woman’s experience who sought to express it in way other women might understand, not because they are female, but because they share similar social circumstances as they have been categorized as female by the society in which they live. In the rituals I attended the emphasis remained persistently upon how we encounter life from our own lived experiences. Certainly, these lived experiences are marked by sex and gender, and hence being female was reflected upon by the group. The group was specifically designed as a women’s spirituality group. But the “specifically for women” had more to do with women who shared an experience of oppression and found support in a group with others who have shared in this experience. Ours was a commonness not of sex as female but of
women as oppressed in a society that attempts to control us in the moment it erases us. Here was a safe place to express ourselves without fear of ridicule or silencing. The rituals I participated in, as a participant/observer, were not employed to define us as women or change us as women. Their purpose, as I saw it, was to reflect more meaningful on the everyday lives that we as women lived.

The rituals delineated in Radford Ruether's *Women-church*, I think, attempt to do a similar thing. However, the production through ritual of the identity of women as female, of women as sexed female, and female sex mystified as natural I would challenge specifically from my position as a feminist. An essentialized female identity created by the oppressors which is then appropriated by the oppressed in order to empower themselves has its own pitfall, the like of which feminist discourses on difference have attempted to unravel. In Radford Ruether's rituals, ritual is understood as praxis and is not theoretically encountered (see Bell 1992: 19–37). This is one of the reasons that the dichotomies in Radford Ruether's rituals are left intact, dichotomies such as male and female. I would also argue that ritual perceived as a psychological tool for raising consciousness and provoking social change is a romantic encounter with ritual. Here there is a literal (literal because ritual is understood as pure action) understanding of ritual that assumes ritual actually does what it says it does. This is a “ritual illusion” (Crapanzano in Bell, 1997: 57).

2. Ritual theory and Radford Ruether

There are number of theories and methodological approaches in ritual studies. From various schools of thought, e.g., philosophical, psychoanalytical, phenomenological, functionalism structuralism, literary analysis, cultural symbolic, linguistic, performance, practice
etc., to theorists themselves who have nuanced the theories and methods coming out of these schools, e.g., respectively, Susanne Langer, Gananath Obeyesekere, Mircea Eliade, Arnold Van Gennep, Claude Levi Strauss, Northrop Frye, Caroline Walker Bynum, Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner and Gregory Bateson, and Catherine Bell. The approaches and correctives are many. In my analysis of Radford Ruether’s ritualizing, I wish to theorize upon those aspects of her rituals and her understanding of ritual itself which I see as problematic. These consist of the maintenance and creation of dichotomies, the marking off boundaries which leads to identity formation, and the belief that ritual is a direct process which can alter self-conception, ethos, and ethics. In order to do this I will rely primarily on Catherine Bell’s critical and deconstructive work in ritual studies which focuses on both academic and popular conceptions of ritual. As for a definition of ritual, I understand ritual to be a broad range of social actions specifically demarcated by the group and/or individual in order to hold symbolic meaning. Ritual consists of communicative expression in thought and action and has integrative intentions directed toward the members of the group, and is inclusive of a larger referent, i.e., deity(ies), state, etc., in other words, an overarching authority.

When reading Radford Ruether’s rituals and her interpretations of them, it becomes apparent that Radford Ruether has a rather romantic conception of ritual. Ritual can serve to reconnect people (in these rituals, women) to the rhythm of the world, the rhythm of their bodies.

---

9 For an extensive discussion of the history and development of ritual studies, and its theories and methods, along with those theorists who have contributed to the field. See Bell, 1997; 1992; Grimes, 1996; and Doty, 1986.

10 For a similar but extensive definition of ritual see Platvoet, 1995: 27–37.
as part of this natural world, and ultimately to a truer self that lies beneath the social self.

Women's true selves (and also men's) have been lost in patriarchy, and ritual becomes one of the means by which to reclaim this self. She states that:

The first sequence of liturgies in Chapter 7 focuses on the formation of church as a community of liberation from patriarchy ... In rejecting ideologies and social systems of oppression, we also reclaim our true relationship with somatic reality, with body and earth, and with the Great Goddess that sustains our life in nature. For Women-Church, entry into messianic community means, particularly, conversion from patriarchy as ideology and social system. It means the formation of a critical culture and community of liberation from patriarchy. It means our nurture and growth in our new and true humanity as women, and as men and women together. (1985: 107–108, italics mine)

This romantic approach to ritual interprets both ritual and the ritual process as a universal phenomenon. There can be only one understanding of the process and efficacy of ritual regardless of culture, location, or time, and although the specificities of rites may vary and change, the ontological roots and teleological projections of ritual as a category does not. As Bell notes "...the emergence and subsequent understandings of the category of ritual have been fundamental to the modernist enterprise of establishing objective, universal knowledge that, as the flip side of its explanatory power, nostalgically rues the loss of enchantment" (Bell, 1997: xi).

The loss of enchantment, in Radford Ruether's work, is encountered in the socialization process wherein we, as pure humans, are ideologized into systems of oppression that distort our humanity and cause us to sin. Social sin, according to Radford Ruether, "continues across generations. It is historically inherited, individuals are socialized into roles of domination and oppression and taught that these are normal and right" (1981: 46). Although I certainly do not disagree with the analysis that systems of oppression are historical and social, or concerning how we are made subjects within oppressive systems so that we accept our inferiorized positions or
participate in the oppression of “others,” in other words the objectification of human beings. I would question an analysis that assumes that the social can be scraped off to find the genuine human underneath. There is an underlying assumption, in Radford Ruether’s rituals, that sets the natural in a dichotomous relationship with the social. Is this not an understanding and approach to ritual that is similar to Mary Daly’s “background” which also transcends the social and historical context of culture? In Radford Ruether’s romanticizing of ritual and what it can do, there is a similar project of bringing about a transcendency of culture, one which allows an access to an idealised and pristine humanity.

The dichotomy of the social human and the natural human are not clearly evident in Radford Ruether’s development of the human condition largely because she utilizes aspects of social analysis that lead to an assumption that she is analysing systems of oppression and how people and societies participate in them. Her approach to this problem falls in line with much ideology critique. However, where the problem surfaces is in her understanding of the human as a being born into history rather than a being of history; in other words Radford Ruether understands humans as beings in history rather than as historical beings. If one is born into history, one can shed it, remove the historical skin, and place it in a box as memorabilia. If one is a historical being—both a producer of history and historical production of history—constituted by her personal history, family history, cultural and societal history, etc., there is no possibility of

---

11Michel Foucault (1984: 3—27) maps out a three fold process wherein we become “subjects” in the world. The first is a set of dividing practices whereby the subject is objectified by a process of binary polarization, e.g. male/female. The second mode is scientific classification, e.g., biology, while the third mode of objectification focuses on the mediation of subjects by an external authority figure, e.g., nature, god.
shedding it for it is what one is as a human being. Further, just as history thoroughly constructs human beings, human beings thoroughly construct history. History is as much a product of human beings as human beings are produced by history.

Radford Ruether, throughout her entire *œuvr,e* will legitimate her feminist strategies through a recourse to both Marxian and historical analyses, demanding that ideological systems are understood as social and historical constructions that benefit some while oppressing the many, and with this I quite concur. However, when producing systems that can empower, in this instance women, she produces her own dichotomies of society/nature; history/the present; gender/sex; body/spirit; oppressor/oppressed; and bad/good. Behind these dichotomies is, it seems to me, an assumed position wherein the human is understood to engage in the social and historical, and is largely affected by the social and historical, but is not a social and historical being in and of itself. She assumes that a person enters history already constituted as human being. This assumption is then transferred to how Radford Ruether understands and creates ritual. Ritual, within Radford Ruether’s *Women -Church* (1985) has been reified. It is a thing that stands outside of the social and historical as if ritual is not part of this condition, although rites in themselves may well be. So again one is faced with another dichotomy of rite/ritual, the former which belongs to history, the latter which transcend history, much like the “true” female human transcends her historical limitations created by a situation of patriarchy.

As I understand ritual, it is a social and historical representation of a group’s world view. It is neither timeless nor unchanging although it is often understood as such. “The definition, incidence, and significance of so-called ritual practices are matters of particular social settings and organizations of cultural knowledge” (Bell, 1997: xi). Whatever world view is engaged in is
in itself a social and historical phenomenon, and ritual is one of the means by which this view can be naturalized in order to appear to belong to the natural order rather than a social order.

When one sees ritual used in this fashion, and I would suggest that the majority of ritual is used in this fashion, it is certain that ritual acts as a process of the legitimation of one’s world view. The use of ritual is indeed one of mystification, and this is precisely where ritual participates in the production of ideologies.

Religious or political rituals do in fact legitimate a world view, one that the community holds. As Bell notes when discussing political rituals (and I would suggest that Radford Ruether’s rituals found in *Women-Church* (1985) are clearly political in that they are feminist in intention)”[w]hen expressed in ritual, [the] sociocosmic order is implicitly understood as neither human nor arbitrary in its origins; rather, it is natural and the way things *really are* and *ought* to be” (Bell, 1997: 137, my italics). When one engages in descriptive and prescriptive strategies, one is engaging in ideology production.

The production of feminist consciousness, as evinced in Radford Ruether’s rituals of convening, rites of passage, and to some degree in her healing rites and seasonal celebrations, the latter understood by Radford Ruether as “encircling our transformation,” insists that a particular perspective be adopted. This perspective is a political perspective but one that is ensconced in, and to some degree mystified by a recourse to power located outside of the social and historical realm. Feminisms, in their numerous forms, are social and historical critiques of existing social systems. A basic endeavour of feminist perspectives has been the questioning, historicizing, and

---

12 I would argue that all rituals, regardless if seen as religious, are political in that their intentions are to re-present the world through the group’s understanding of the world.
in this process, the deconstructing and delegitimating of the ideological processes that maintain the oppression of one half of the human race on the basis of their sex. This is a sociopolitical project. In the process of this project, numerous feminisms assume further political locations, e.g., radical, liberal, social, Marxist, materialist, deconstructionists, etc., and then focus upon a particular area of concern, e.g., popular culture, law, politics, education, or academics (and within academics there is further narrowing, e.g., religion, history, philosophy, literature, etc.). But at no time do any of these projects cease to be politically located. The process of raising political consciousness should be questioned when that process is not one of political argumentation but rather is concealed behind a rhetoric of divine legitimation that will, in the manifestation of its spirit, confirm the alteration consciousness.

An alteration of consciousness is a questionable practice especially when the political intentions are concealed. Why attempt to naturalize, dehistoricize, and de-socialize feminist political action through ritual other than to insure the truth of one’s position, and attempt to insure the inaccessibility of one’s position? Why mystify a social political practice that calls other social political practices into question for their mystification of the social? Why assume that ritual is the pristine moment in religion that transcends social and historical concerns if not to bring god into one’s camp. In other words, why employ, while assuming, as Radford Ruether apparently has, at least as she represents ritual in her text Women-Church (1985) that ritual is innocent of ideology and can be left untheorized? If Radford Ruether assumes the category of ritual with little thought as to the ideological potential found in ritual practices is this not a process of assuming that ritual practices are innocent of political intention even if that intention is concealed behind a deity? The mystification of the political may not be Radford Ruether’s
intention, but how she uses ritual pushes her in this direction.

Ritual is a social and historical practice. And here I do not understand practice to mean action without thought: action cannot occur without thought, i.e., what kinds of action do I take, and thought cannot occur without some form of action, i.e., thinking, but rather, practice is situational, historical, motivated, communicative, and social. Therefore, ritual as practice participates in every aspect of the social. This does not mean that all action is ritual action, but rather, all ritual is generated from a social and historical context and reflects that context. But more specifically, ritual practice is the marking off of what the group understands itself to be. It can occur religiously, politically, in play, in business, etc.

Ritual is an identity marker that groups of people, or individuals, will create, use, develop, or modify in order to define themselves, and themselves in the world. As a means of definition, ritual can indicate to the members of the group what the group is, how to belong, who belongs, and who does not belong. Ritual can be a practice of identity politics: a social and historical means of defining identity. But in ritual one sees the manufacturing of identity mystified in the process of its manufacturing. Identity markers are represented not as the social but as the natural. In Radford Ruether’s rituals, feminist consciousness is removed from the political sphere and located in a reified female sphere through ritual enaction. Feminist consciousness is the positive reclamation of female identity. The body, but more specifically the genitalia, becomes the marker for this identity. Therefore a young girl coming into adulthood comes into it through her ability to menstruate. Aside from the naive belief that ritual does what it says it does, i.e., make female adults, in these rituals identity is marked by the processes of one’s body as if it is the sum total of what being a woman consists of, regardless of class,
Within Radford Ruether's ritual constructs, feminist consciousness is the realization and positive valuation of a female identity. By assuming such a position, sexual difference is understood as a rarefied and natural category, one that is immune to social and historical processes. Although Radford Ruether clearly argues throughout her texts that gender is a social and historical category, by leaving sex as a foundational and definitive category for gender, the “real” (sex) underlying the constructed (gender) remains rooted in the “real.” If sex is rooted in the real, it is not a social historical category, but rather is the real that is taken into social and historical categories. According to this kind of conceptualization of sex/gender, gender is simply a distortion of the real by the social and the historical. One simply must dig down to the real of sex and an undistorted essential human is revealed.\(^\text{13}\)

By assuming female identity marked by female genitalia, Radford Ruether remains locked in the paradigm established by the dominant androcentric discourse. Female is essentialized across space and time, as if female is the same in every given place and time because of bodily functions associated with one kind of body, women’s bodies. Radford Ruether

\(^{13}\)As Linda Nicholson has commented in her article “Interpreting Gender” (1994), the category of gender has been used 1) as contrasted to sex, or 2) as a social construction but one that is intimately connected to the body (1994, 79). According to the former definition, gender and sex are juxtaposed as antithetical categories, one mutable, the other not. According to the latter definition, sex is subsumed by gender. But how does sex continue to function in relation to gender? If gender is a social construction, what does the construction rest upon? If we say sex as in male and female bodies, then as Nicholson rightly warns in her article, we hang our sociological construction on a biological coat rack, what she calls biological foundationalism. Biological foundationalism allows one to maintain commonalities on the basis of a biological female and male body, while postulating difference on the basis of culture (Nicholson 1994, 81–82). The problem with using such a “coat rack” is that sex, although subsumed under gender, remains an immutable category.
contests and resists the content of the oppressor’s discourse, but not its form. She does not question that meaning has been *located* in male and female genitalia, while, for example, it has not been located in the digestive tract. In Radford Ruether’s work sexual difference, then, acts as a free floating signifier whose meaning has been fixed by the mode of its hegemonic articulation (Žižek, 1994: 12). The fixity of the meaning and its enchainment to biology and the perceived immutability of the biological removes sex difference, women *qua* female, from the social and historical realm leaving it to men *qua* human. As Bell (1997: 241) notes in this new model of ritual, new in the sense of contemporary and therefore reflecting current understandings of ritual, “ritual is primarily a medium of expression, a specific type of language suited to what it is there to express, namely, internal spiritual-emotional resources tied to our *true identities* but frequently unknown and undeveloped”(italics mine). By establishing sexual difference, and a true female identity, both of which are realized through feminist *conscientización*, and all of which are achieved and/or reinforced by the efficacy of ritual, Radford Ruether’s rituals are removed from the social historical project she has laid claim to, and located squarely in an idealistic project, a position she has critiqued and dissociated herself from. Because ritual and sexual difference remain untheorized and natural categories in Radford Ruether’s rituals for women in women-church, identity politics and sexual difference become the ground from which her ritualization springs.

3. *Radford Ruether, Difference, and Identity Politics*

Difference in feminist theories is largely developed along the lines of three trajectories: 1) sex/gender difference which begins with male and female difference and takes within its argumentative frame a theorizing of gender as the social category which negotiates the power
differential in male and female sex difference; 2) differences among women, feminist or otherwise, that are theorized along the lines of class, race, ethnicity, culture, and economic locations and dependant upon geographical locations (colonial and post-colonial); 3) and finally, differences among feminists themselves along with differences between feminist women and non-feminist women. The introduction of the conceptual apparatus of difference has meant that certain assumptions found in feminist theories were revealed. Feminism, once construed as monolithic and constituted by its inclusion of all women under the rubric of “female difference” and then later “women’s experience,” were challenged for the hegemonic practices revealed in their tendency to promote the universal category of women, as if all women were the same based on these subsequent categories. It was this assumed sameness of femaleness that allowed women of one group to represent their concerns as the concerns of all women. This position was adhered to by feminism represents the first stages in what is often called second wave feminism which began in the 1960s. Simone de Beauvoir’s text *The Second Sex* (1953 [1949]) was an influential text that acted as one catalyst, among many, that initiated this second wave of feminism.

In time the feminist position that advocated sameness based on the category of the female or the category of women’s experience began to be challenged by feminists located in different class, ethnic, racial, and geopolitical positions. It became apparent that the women who were speaking for all women were largely white women located in the more affluent classes of Western society. These women had represented their concerns as the concerns of feminism with little or no analysis regarding different forms of oppression that were as significant as sexual oppression. From challenges put forward by women of colour, from post-colonial feminists, and
class conscious feminists arose awareness that the category of the female and/or women's experience utilized by feminist analyses was replete with unnegotiated obstacles. The obstacles had simply been obfuscated by the desire to form a political unity based on sameness. As Sheila Greeve Davaney (1987: 46) argues “[w]e… must confront the possibility that women’s experience does not have an overriding common character and that the historical and social divisions that define our experience may be more constitutive of that experience than whatever elements we share in common. In this view, commonality and solidarity among women are historical projects, yet to be achieved, not unquestioned presuppositions.” The feminist proposition of sexual difference between male and female—taken over unanalysed from those who used this proposition in order to legitimate the subjugation of women and then developed into argument for an identity for all women based on this category of the female—underscores the inherent racist and classist positions (unintentionally?) assumed by a feminism that located itself in sameness (universal) discourse. Further, this same proposition of sexual difference between male and female also underscores and determines the difference between feminist and non-feminist women. Difference is adhered to by both feminist and non-feminist discourse, but in the feminist discourse is used to promote women’s equality, while the non-feminist discourse is used to argue the equal but different position, i.e., women are weak and men are strong but this is how things should be.

To begin with there is a very real problem in assuming, or taking on, a categorical formation that historically arose as a discursive practice used in order to legitimate oppressive practices of the “female,” as they named her, in all her social manifestations, i.e., virgin, wife, mother, or whore. These many and varied discourses on sexual difference were developed in
order that social practices that favoured, privileged, and valued the male sex over the female sex were understood as natural, in other words the manufacturing of sex ideologies in order to mystify social relations. Throughout history women have challenged these discourses, but it has only been with the rise of feminism, that societal change, in greater and lesser degrees, was effected.

3.1 Sexual Difference

Feminism developed an analysis of sexual difference based on what they considered to be a secondary formation, gender, and pointed to how, historically, social roles had been defined using gender ideology, and this gender ideology had created this thing called the feminine nature. The naturalness of this proposed female nature came under fire. But within this argumentative frame, some feminists had neglected to see the male as gendered and considered the male to be the norm. Therefore if women were to become human within human society, they must jettison the female and assume the male. This early form of egalitarian feminism soon came under sharp criticism (and so too Simone de Beauvoir). Why was the male sex understood as human and the female sex as other? Could not women lay claim to their female sex and demand this too be recognized as fully human? From this analysis arose the positive feminist valuation of the category of sexual difference located in the female, a category initially resisted by feminists when posited by androcentric and misogynistic discourses concerning women, but assumed when feminists argued for an inherent female nature located in the female body as a sexually different body. But if feminists resisted the category of “woman” as many did (including Schüssler Fiorenza and Radford Ruether), how could one posit an alliance among women if female nature as such was jettisoned? In North America feminism women’s experience became the new
foundation upon which to argue for the similarity of women’s oppression in a patriarchal world, and a new foundation upon which to posit a unified action against this oppression. However, women’s experience, like female nature still relies upon a basic essence, a sexually different body.

Sexual difference as it is mapped out between the male and the female begins by assuming that the category of sex itself is natural, while the category of gender is the social application of human understanding that is then mapped out on this natural. In this treatment of sexual difference, the body becomes the primary symbol that marks difference. The body acts as the real (sex) which then provides a foundation on which the abstract (gender) can rest. But I would suggest, following a number of feminists like Joan W. Scott and Christine Delphy, that the body as that which is sexed is also a social and historical category. Sex that marks a body, sex as meaningful—full of meaning—and bodies as material-symbolic representations (e.g., as a tree becomes material-symbolic so that meaning is located in its materiality—it exists in the world, as a tree, but its materiality is no longer singularly self-referential and becomes a tree as treeness, that then acts as referent for something else—a tree as treeness as god. The tree stands for treeness, but treeness has to do with something else, god, for example, and not the existence of a tree in and of itself, hence the material-symbolic) are not so in and of themselves. However, I would argue that sex and the sexed body, if not the body itself, are social historical constructions and are not things that carry a meaning unto themselves. As Butler, following Foucault (1978), argues:

The category of “sex” is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a “regulatory ideal.” In this sense then, “sex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is whose regulatory force is
made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls....regulatory norms of “sex” work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex, to materialize sexual difference in the service of the consolidation of the heterosexual imperative. (Butler, 1994: 1–2)

Sexual difference as a notion is already laden with meaning. It is a divisive social practice that has been mystified and reified as if it is neutral and resides in the realm of the natural. Sexual difference, as a natural category, is then used as a foundation for gender in the sex/gender dichotomy—a dichotomy analogous to nature/culture, natural/social, eternal/historical etc.

Instead of questioning the ideology of sexual difference, Radford Ruether locates it in nature. Sexual difference is in itself ideological in that it mystifies social relations wherein the division of labour and the appropriation of labour is carried out and sexual difference acts to legitimate and continue these kinds of social relations. Further, sexual difference is reified as if this difference exists meaningfully outside of human and social relations. These kinds of assumptions are not surprising considering how entrenched sexual difference (even in our understanding of animals, plants, and inorganic substances) is in human social relations. To repeat Delphy (1996: 35) “[s]ex itself simply marks a social division: that it serves to allow social recognition and identification of those who are dominants and those who are dominated. That is that sex is a sign, but that since it does not distinguish just any old thing from anything else, and does not distinguish equivalent things but rather important and unequal things, it has historically acquired a symbolic value.”

Radford Ruether’s rituals developed for women-church assume that sexual difference between the male and female are natural categories. Her rituals delineate this naturalness when she develops rites that mark this sexed difference located in bodies, e.g., menstruation, gestation,
or new moon ritual. Her unanalysed use of the sex/gender dichotomy is evinced in her rites of
mind cleansing, baptism, and a number of healing rites, e.g., from rape, incest, and wife battery,
for each of these suppose an underlying bedrock of natural sexual difference which has been
overlaid with cultural meaning located in the category of gender. Gender is the social historical
manifestation of sexual difference that requires demystification. Women must cleanse their
minds of what patriarchy has said the female is and ought to be, and then develop a new
understanding of themselves as females, or come to a feminist consciousness of what being
female is. In this analysis, then, sex is understood to precede gender, rather than gender
preceding sex. As Delphy and Butler argue, hierarchy is the ground of difference and sex is the
sign of that difference. Sex, and sex differences therein, are social and historical categories that
were constructed within the dominant discourse as a means to explain and legitimate social
oppressions in the moment this dominant discourse normalized sex, i.e., male/female,
transvestite, hermaphrodite, and sexual practices, i.e., hetero/homosexuality, virginity,
promiscuity, or prostitution.

Sex and sex difference, then, are conceived of as categories that have been expropriated
from nature and distorted for ideological purposes, categories women en masse must
reappropriate in order to locate their true selves, as if there is a true self to be recovered. This
idea of true self connects to what Radford Ruether and others have referred to as women’s
experience, which furthers an identity politics based on the female and female experience. The
first participates in the homogenization, and in this the negation, of women’s situatedness and the
confusion of experience with epistemology, while the second, identity politics, which is
grounded in the notion of experience as epistemology, demands bounded off communities with a
gatekeeping mechanism located in an essentialized aspect of identity such as sex, race, or ethnicity.

3.2 Women’s Experience

The differences between women are neutralized when women are homogenized as a group based upon the belief of a common women’s experience. This experience speaks to an essentialization of women, and women regardless of the divisiveness and plurality of their existences, share something with each other, something core that underlies their social and historical identities. The problems inherent with an assumed essentialized identity are that it presumes a fixed essence located in either nature, the body, (biology) in psychological make-up, e.g., nurturance, empathy, supportiveness, non-competitiveness, or social activities, e.g., intuitiveness, emotional responses, concern for others. All women across space and time have their historical beings mapped out onto these essential characteristics. This fixed essence, then, “implies a limit on the variations and possibilities of change—it is not possible for a subject to act in a manner contrary to her nature … Essentialism thus refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions that limit the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganization” (Grosz, 1994: 84).

My use of Grosz in the context of my argument may lead the reader to believe she concurs with my position. This is not quite true. Grosz, in this article, is arguing not to jettison the category of sexual difference, but to argue for a pure category of difference which is not located in identity, but rather the “right to be and act differently” (1994: 91). She further argues that sexual difference is a requirement in order that feminisms have a place to stand in order to make their bid, and although located in a patriarchal paradigm, difference, and essentialism therein, can still be a tool by which to challenge and displace the effects of patriarchy (1994: 95). I question why sexual difference is a necessary prerequisite in order to be and act differently, but I do agree sexual difference was once a useful category in order to articulate that human really meant white middle/upper class men. However, difference as a category would seem to be that
Chapter 7

The essentialization of women *qua* woman suggests that at the core of every woman is sameness spawned by their biology, their psychological make-up, or their social practices. Sexed ideology, produced by dominant groups made up primarily of men, also assumes sameness among all women, sameness that was markedly different from the individuality of men (white and western men, for black men are all the same, Indian men, etc.). Women as sexually different, were different from men, but in themselves were no different from each other. Their breasts, vaginas, and wombs which generate “her” maternal instincts insured that all women shared this sameness. This same perspective is held to when we assume that women share an essence that undergirds and is not affected by social or historical concerns. Women’s essence located in her sexed body, which produces the same experience among all women, make of her a singularity in opposition to the plurality of men. Men are not sexed and therefore their individuality can surface, while women as the sexed of humanity are the singular when sex acts as the referent of their humanity.

Extrapolated along the lines of identity and the realization of differing potentials, i.e., butcher, baker, candle stick maker, the plurality of men allows for an infinity of potential, the singularity of woman confers a finitude of potential. I am not arguing that equality is located in a “being” as defined in the male as human, but rather arguing that a “being” founded in sex as a

which is presently ungrounding feminisms in their challenge of androcentric and misogynistic societies. The abortion argument wherein women’s bodies as sexed bodies obfuscates women’s bodies as social, historical, and politicized bodies, or rape as a *sexual* crime and not a crime of violence so that the victim’s sexual practices take on legal ramifications (either explicitly or implicitly), are clear examples of where sexual difference can obscure the social and political practices of the systematic oppression of a group based upon sexual difference.
natural category is already circumscribed, limited, and negatively defined. Women’s\textsuperscript{15} plurality is negated by the essentialistic argument that uses sex as its mark of difference. It is this negation of plurality that women in differing locations related to social and historical concerns, e.g., poverty, class, race, colonialism, etc., have challenged in feminism. Women in these locations have pointed out that their experience was not used in order to define the category of women’s experience, and that this category largely represented white, middle/upper class women’s concerns—those women who, because of their own privilege, were able to access positions wherein their voices could be heard.

Radford Ruether is certainly aware of this problem, but like a number of feminists she is unwilling to give up the category of the sexed female body, either biologically sexed as in her rituals, or psychologically and socially sexed as expressed in other texts, i.e., \textit{New Woman, New Earth} (1975); \textit{Gaia and God} (1992), or \textit{Sexism and Godtalk} (1983). Instead, she acknowledges other social and historical aspects of one’s experience, but ultimately grounds sexual difference in nature. She maintains the mystification of sexual difference in order to maintain her category of women’s experience, and in order to make a connection (which has some similarities with Mary Daly’s mystification of sexual difference) to the divine. For Radford Ruether, as the divine exists outside of history but enters into history in order to manifest itself in a meaningful way, so does sexual difference. For example, “[a]t their best, historical institutions create the occasion for

\textsuperscript{15}Some may contest my continuing use of women as a sexed category and wonder why I have not jettisoned it. My use of women as a category is social and historical and not essentialistic. I am working within the parameters of a discourse which has historically sexed bodies as male and female, and in order to make sense within this discourse I must of necessity use the terms that allow my discourse to make sense in my social and historical setting.
the experience of the spirit. But they cannot cause the presence of the Spirit, which always breaks in from a direct encounter of living persons and the divine” (Radford Ruether, 1985: 35). The divine transcends the social and history, and women, in their essence as the female, also transcend the social and historical. Women in their essences as female, and the experience that arises from this, can make this connection to the spirit while in the same moment the female is legitimated by this connection as the divine acknowledges women as female.

Radford Ruether’s ritualization makes a direct connection between this divine and the femaleness of the members of this community. It is their femaleness dually recognized by feminist consciousness that will allow the spirit to break in, and those feminist females of the community to understand what is offered to them by the spirit. In response to the Catholic church’s sexist position on women, and the glorification of men as legitimate representatives of god, Radford Ruether’s women-church will respond with the legitimation of the female by god. Greeve Davaney argues that (1987: 37) “...feminist experience and norms are grounded in the encounter with the divine and that such encounter gives them a validity, a “true” quality, that the experiences and criteria of the “false and alienated” world of patriarchy do not have.” In Radford Ruether’s conceptualization of this process, although men are not excluded from their own encounters with the spirit, women will encounter this spirit, as evinced in her female-sexed rituals, in their female bodies that act as the locus of meaning within these rituals. Men will encounter the divine, it would seem, when they divest themselves of patriarchal society.

### 3.3 Identity Politics

As sexual difference remains the ground for her ritualization as well as her theologizing Radford Ruether does not truly legitimize other experiences that are instrumental in the forging
of social and historical identities. Because sexual difference is located outside of the social and historical, it maintains primacy and all other identity factors are subsidiary. Women in other locations who have felt the oppressive hand of women in privileged positions contest this kind of prioritization of sex over all other aspects of identity. If sex, like race, class, and geopolitical locations, had been historicized in feminist work such as Radford Ruether’s, then the priority of sexual difference would have to be discounted, and the fluidity, changefulness, and non-fixity of identity could have become the ground from which oppressed groups could politicize their oppression. Using this perspective, then, oppressor and oppressed are no longer fixed identities, one can be both victimized and a victimizer, but no longer is one a victim \emph{per se}. Sexual difference as a social and historical category can be seen as an area of contestation rather than a mark of irrefutable and irreducible difference. The fluidity and plurality of identity does “not involve the “coexistence,” one by one, of a plurality of subject positions but the constant subversion and overdetermination of one by the others which makes possible the generation of “totalizing effects” within a field characterized by open and determinate frontiers” (Mouffe, 1995: 34). Therefore as a \emph{woman}, this aspect of my identity can be overdetermined and I feel the totalizing effects, but as a \emph{white} woman, this aspect of my identity can go undetermined and I may miss the totalizing effects that the denotation of race as black, brown, or simply put another “other,” will carry.

The categories of female (woman) and women’s experience are those untheorized markers that undergird Radford Ruether’s rituals. Although, in other texts, she is critical of an overarching category “woman,” Radford Ruether, nevertheless delineates rituals, such as the rite of passage for young women or the new moon ritual, that embrace the conceptual framework of
“woman.” Woman as other, who cycles with the moon, is a mystery, a mystery which is located in her biological functions. Her femaleness is biologically located in the body and understood to be meaningful, meaningful in that it creates women’s experience. Menstruation and gestation are used as symbolic markers that define this group of people as distinct from the other larger group proposed, men. Sexual difference defines the category of woman, and whether postulated positively or negatively, meaning located in the morphology of the female (or male) genitalia is mystified, reified, and unhinged from any kind of social and historical analysis. One can analyse gender, but not sexual difference which acts as the ground for women’s experience. Sexual difference is the natural, and is a bedrock formation that supports all subsequent historical behaviours and ideas that interpret it, i.e., gender ideology. It, however, remains in itself uninterpreted. Women’s experience, although attempting to subsume social and historical formations of women, assumes that there are particular common experiences, common in their presentation and common in the responses that they generate, shared by women. Her rite of mind cleansing, rite of passage for young women, new moon festival, and baptism, are examples of ritual that assume this category in order to communicate its intentions.

Women’s experience, as a number of feminist have noted, is a problematic category when left untheorized. As I have indicated, experience as a concept assumes sameness, regardless of time, place, or persons, on the level of its presentation and on the level of response to that presentation. Therefore, when dealing with the category of experience on the level of presentation, one sees a schematisation which allows for a generalization of that experience in order that all may participate in its commonness, its sameness. This schematisation is unacknowledged, and remains beneath the text of the experience in order that it be useful as a
means to create a bond among the group—an understood sameness that members of the group can share. For example, one’s individual experience of oppression is dramatically represented (performed) to the group, but as it is represented it is conceptually generalized so that its larger meaning, oppression of the whole group as experienced through the sameness shared with that member, can surface. In the first moment of dramatic representation, experience acts as the signifier—a subjective experience of oppression. From here meaning is expanded so that the subjective experience of oppression felt by one member is conceptually generalized in order to include all members. Therefore, in the second moment of dramatic representation, experience acts as the signified—objective experience of oppression is now shared by the group. This objective experience, the signified, having subsumed the subjectivity of the experience can now act as knowledge or epistemology for the group. In this development of experience, experience is shifted out of its sematic framework and made to stand for epistemology. Experience no longer denotes knowledge gained from what was encountered, but stands for knowledge in and of itself.

Experience, then, is knowledge. The shift is implicit, but once established becomes explicit and a means by which the group knows insiders from outsiders. The subjectivity of experience is subsumed into the objectivity of experience in order that both may then act as a symbolic marker for the group to rally around. The subjective is the real, it will establish the truth of the statement, and in establishing the truth of the statement it has recourse to an abstraction of that truth, to the objective, which is understood, then, to be knowledge. “When the evidence offered is the evidence of “experience” the claim for referentiality is further buttressed—what could be truer, after all, than this kind of appeal to experience as uncontestable evidence and as an originary point of explanation....”(Scott, 1992: 24)
On the level of the commonness of response to the presentation of experience, again, sameness is proposed.” In the first instance of presentation, the generalization of experience will attempt to insure like responses among the group. In the response to this generalization of experience it is assumed that members of a group will react similarly to the presentation of experience. In the category of women’s experience, then, women will respond in a like manner to patriarchal oppression. They will all equally experience patriarchy as oppressive, resist it, and understand it as morally, politically, theologically, etc., wrong. If one, some, or another group does not, the category of “false consciousness” is introduced. Women who are not like-minded suffer from false consciousness and those women of the past who did not actively seek to erase oppression suffered from false consciousness. Therefore, if experience on the level of response to presentation is not uniformlly the same it is understood as aberrant. Both the presentations of experience and the responses, then, become the means of demarcating the group. Experience, untheorized, can act as the unconditional gatekeeper that defines the identity of the group. So those who do not share this experience, and this experience is now perceived as epistemological certitude, are outsiders. Outsiders who do not share “the experience” (experience as the signifier and signified) can never know:

It is particularly in the notion of “experience,” that one sees this operating. In much current use of “experience,” references to structure and history are implied but not made explicit; instead, personal testimony of oppression replaces analysis, and this testimony comes to stand for experience of the whole group; the direct experience of a group or culture—that is, membership in it—becomes the only test of true knowledge ... The exclusionary implications of this are twofold: all those not of the group are denied even intellectual access to it, and those within the group whose experiences or interpretations do not conform to the established terms of identity must either suppress their views or drop out (or form their own groups based upon their difference, i.e., black women). (Scott, 1995: 10).
Located in ritual, experience is even more schematized so that the subjective experience is understood to be the subjective of the group as a unified whole, while the objective experience, given epistemological certitude by the group (identity politics), is given natural and/or theological legitimation. The group’s experience is authorized by a supra-ordinate being, i.e., god/dess, that locates itself outside of their experience, outside of the social and historical, and therefore can ascertain the truth of this foundational experience, i.e., Jesus as God opposed to oppressive social practices.

Ritual as a means for the sacralized demarcation of the group entrenches further the identity politics produced by both “woman” as the female sex differentiated from the male sex, and the category of women’s experience. Although Radford Ruether (1985: 120–121) indicates that different groups can alter the forms of their rituals, and that she is not giving a definitive group of rituals that must be adhered to, what is clearly underneath her understanding of ritual is a belief in the cohesion of a shared identity, shared by first by the sexually differentiated body of the female which then provides the basis for a common shared women’s experience. Both the body and the experience that arises from that body will become the means by which the group can recognize its members. But that experience is and ought to be feminist. The identity that underscores Radford Ruether’s rituals is a feminist identity derived from a common women’s experience which is grounded in the female body and then reinterpreted through a feminist conscientización.

“The effect of...statements, which attribute an indisputable authenticity to women’s experience, is to establish incontrovertibly women’s identity as people with agency. It is also to universalize the identity of women and so to ground claims for the legitimacy of women’s history in the shared experience of historians of women and those women whose stories they tell. In addition, it
literally equates the personal with the political, for the lived experience of women is seen as leading directly to resistance to oppression, to feminism. Indeed, the possibility of politics is said to rest on, to follow from, a pre-existing women’s experience.” (Scott, 1992: 31)

The fluid shifting identities of human beings which are historically conferred are totalized in and through ritual.

In Radford Ruether’s rituals the multiplicities of identifications are erased, and one identity, the female, is given ontological status. The ontological status of female identity is emphatically legitimated by its location outside of history—the non-historical—with the legitimizing other, god/dess, who also is located outside of history. The movement of ritual within Radford Ruether’s ritualization is a process of naturalization and legitimation via the “interpellation” or hailing of the female identity by the non-human “other.” The female identity that underscores Radford Ruether’s rituals is hailed in recognition by the Spirit. According to Althusser (1995: 130—136), the process of interpellation refers to a recognition of an individual as a subject. By hailing that individual, one names the subject, and in the process of hailing the subject, the subject recognizes herself as a subject—identity is formed. Therefore, not only does Radford Ruether generate a politics of identity which treats identity as fixed and outside of history, and further buttresses this identity with the category of women’s experience which is understood to give an epistemology certitude to this identity, but in the final movement confers divine legitimation on this identity when deity is understood to recognize this identity. Ritual is a classical example of Althusser’s concept of interpellation and Radford Ruether’s use of ritual, which is an untheorized use, participates in ideology formation: “...ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or
‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpella~ion* or hailing…” (Althusser, 1997: 131). The rituals proposed by Radford Ruether are ideological in that they recruit their subjects (female) from individuals (multiply identities), transform the individuals into subjects (females who have women’s experience) by hailing them as really women who then recognize themselves as really women who have been hailed.

4. **Concluding Remarks**

The difficulties encountered when using untheorized ritual should be quite obvious. When I say untheorized, I am referring to Radford Ruether’s willingness to theorize religion, to challenge ideological practices evinced in religion in general, and Christianity in particular, to read “sacred” texts as androcentric texts, to resist, in effect, interpella~ion in an ideological system that naturalizes class, racial, and sexual oppression, but she is unwilling to apply these same kinds of analyses to ritual. It is as if ritual is the ideological uncontaminated within religion itself. It is the *sui generis* kernel of truth located in religion. As Radford Ruether must of necessity, for her feminist project, theorize Christianity, likewise she must of necessity examine the ideological implications inherent in ritual. It is in ritual that she assumes that the non-historical human, a sexually differentiated non-historical human, one that has a raised feminist consciousness, and can be realized by the non-historical entity which she calls Spirit.

In Radford Ruether, as ritual is the pristine (ahistorical) moment in religion (historical), so too is there a pristine human (ahistorical) underneath the layers of socially and historically accumulated behaviours. These behaviours, which are distortions of the Spirit’s envisioning of humanity, are what Radford Ruether has referred to as social sins. Although, in this, she attempts
to bring the political into the religious, she has in fact made the political religious. Social and historical systems are mapped out within a framework of religion rather than religion mapped out within the framework of social and historical systems. In doing this, Radford Ruether, has inverted Marxist theory, a theory which sought to expose the mystification of the social and political practices of oppression via the naturalization of these systems, most pointedly in their manifestations within religious discourses. In her attempt to legitimate women-church, and feminism in general, she has mystified the social, historical, and political practices of resistance engendered by feminists against oppression. Feminist resistance is legitimated not because of a theorized or argued rightness of its social and historical practices, but because of God/dess’s legitimation of its practices. Women-church is theologically correct, because as a spirit-filled community it has ontological connections with Jesus’ spirit-filled messianic movement, and teleological connections with the divine intention for the human race. The social and historical history of humans thus far is a fallen history, but the history of a future found in spirit-filled communities, like women-church, has the potential to realize a salvific history.

Within the rituals of women-church the primary identity that these rituals demarcate is the identity of the female human, who realizes this femaleness not only in her body but through the experiences located in that female body: women’s experiences. When this is appropriately understood, then, feminist consciousness is realized. The culmination of these three determinatives demands that other differences, such as class, ethnicity, racism, geopolitical location, be subordinated, regardless of how important they are. Multiple and diverse identities, which are socially and historically conferred, are denied in order to insure the epistemological, and theological certitude of women-church. Difference is embraced, but only one kind, sexual
difference, is understood to be *real* difference. Other differences are perceived as social and historical, and within Radford Ruether’s framework of the denial of the historical in juxtaposition with the eternal of Spirit, in other words her theological imperatives evinced in her rituals, these differences are negated when set alongside the *real* difference of sex. The identity politics found in Radford Ruether’s women-church’s rituals ultimately undo any social and historical project for the liberation for women that she has in mind. They, as unanalysed categories, have undercut her feminist intentions:

The search for identity by means of ritual assertion is never-ending, because people always tend to strive for the highest distinctions—in their class. There is always an identity more noble than the one they now have. The pursuit of identity, then, is in reality the pursuit of power, honour, and prestige. They constitute what Bourdieu [1992: 112–121; 1993: 171–183] calls symbolic capital; the more of this capital one accumulates, the more benefits one enjoys. The adjective ‘symbolic’ underlines the fact that the advantages are not necessarily crudely material. They are, as André Droogers [1995] observes, not personal possessions, but largely the outcome of ritual negotiation. (Platvoet and van der Torn, 1995: 358)
CONCLUSION

The feminist analyses of Mary Daly, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Rosemary Radford Ruether engage in ideology critiques. In each instance these three feminist theorists will critically engage Western epistemology and argue that it is situated in, and produced by, current social and historical conditions. These conditions amount to the legitimation of the male over and against the female. All women, as the female, are historically, biologically, socially, metaphysically, semiotically, philosophically, etc., inferior to the male. History has demonstrated the knowledge of the inferiority of the female, and current social conditions continue to reinforce this knowledge. Feminists like Daly, Radford Ruether, and Schüssler Fiorenza stand against this kind of knowledge production and argue that it is distorted, that this knowledge is not a given, is not found in nature, and is, in fact, produced within the hegemonic practices known as patriarchy. Patriarchy mystifies its current social relations of oppressive practices in order to propound and secure their knowledge of women as the inferior female.

Each of these women contests patriarchal knowledge on a number of grounds, but each will also locate themselves within a theoretical paradigm in order to contest the current hegemony. Daly establishes a project of reclaiming language for women, Schüssler Fiorenza establishes a project of reclaiming early Christian myth for women, and Radford Ruether establishes a project of reclaiming the encounter between the human and the sacred for women. Each frames their contestations within a historical and deconstructive framework, and challenges the knowledge produced arguing that it is invested knowledge, invested in the maintenance of the dominant group’s hegemonic practices, and in order to secure its investment, epistemology is itself mystified so that the real intentions of patriarchal knowledge, which is not knowledge
seeking, is obscured: the maintenance and procurement of power.

However, when each of these feminists contests the hegemonic practices of patriarchy, each seeks a sure foundation upon which to stand. They seek a foundation from which to level their critique against patriarchy, a foundation that will insure the certitude of their positions, and in every instance the ground they will claim is located outside of social and historical considerations, and in the realm of some “other” which is located in nature or a naturalized form of knowledge. The epistemological certitude located in the divine is claimed by these feminists regardless that each of their critiques, levelled against patriarchy, has been a contestation of patriarchy’s recourse to the divine or the biological in order to legitimate its social practices. These feminist, then, likewise make a recourse to the divine and the biological (Schüssler Fiorenza is one of the three who resists engaging the biological in order to provide sure foundations for her feminist project) in order to guarantee the truth of their analyses. They too mystify the social when they locate sex difference in nature, and authentic human being outside of social and historical conditions. In their analyses all three will jettison women, as the subject of their studies, outside of historical contingencies but locate their object of study, patriarchy inside of historical contingencies.

The resistance to historical contingencies for the subject of their study, women, is intimately connected, in the works of all three feminists, with their theological concerns. Their desire to ascertain deity for women, be it in old traditions or newly found traditions, means that each has left unanalysed her own assumptions regarding the nature of existence. They appear certain, at least in the texts analysed, that their beliefs are free from an engagement with ideology, that their beliefs have captured the truth of existence, even if it is only for this
historical moment, and that their epistemic positions (although each heartily disagrees with the epistemic position assumed by the others) are grounded in truth. It is this engagement with truth, located in a realm outside of the social and historical reality of human existence, which undercuts their critical analyses and immerses their work in ideology production.

That we are social and historical beings demand that we, of necessity, engage in ideology. As Althusser has argued, we recognize ourselves as subjects when we are interpellated by ideology. But that we are in ideology does not negate the possibility of ideology critique, or imply that our contestations will be ideology producing. In order to do ideology critique, something all three of these theorists engage in, there is a necessity to locate oneself in class struggle, to recognize that different views have come into conflict with each other, and, therefore, epistemic ground is being contested. But the epistemic ground contested is a product of social and historical conditions, and therefore its contestation should be argued from within a social and historical framework. Recourse to deity, to a reality guaranteed by truth, and human authenticity that deity has decreed, is simply another instance of recourse to ideology: Truth as an idealised category cannot act as criterion for the adequacy of discourse, but a truth generated from, and located in, current social conditions can act as a criterion for the adequacy of discourse.

The social, historical, and political actions generated from feminist concerns are a current epistemological position that has emerged from social and historical conditions. Its referent is not located outside of the social and historical, but firmly located inside so that its critique of current social systems is a critique generated from within current epistemological understandings of morality, ethics, freedom, liberation, etc. Where these last terms signify is in the social and historical realm. As part of human language, human thought, and human contestations, their
meanings belong to the social and historical realm of human action. They are not ideal types located outside of the lived lives of human beings.

Engaging current ideology through a recourse to social and historical conditions is not, I believe, an engagement with radical relativism. By arguing from within the framework of ideology, and utilizing in the argumentative framework current epistemic positions, knowledge itself as a reified commodity can be challenged, and shown to be relative to its social and historical location. These differing positions, feminist and patriarchal, in contestation for epistemic ground, then, are relative to each other, and in being relative to each other they are equally recognizable as social and historical discourses, and are equally subject to critical discourses generated from within current social and historical conditions. That there is a contestation between these two positions is the “real” of the situation, and any veracity of the situation is only ascertainable within the frame of the social and historical, and not in an extra-ideological referent. The risk here is not radical relativism, but a risk of recognizing that there is no epistemological certitude, and that there are no guarantees that we have got it right. There is only the social and historical realm (at least as far as we know now) wherein we attempt to explicate what it means to be human.

Symbol, myth, and ritual are three categorical formations wherein the activity to define existence has taken place. How life means and how we mean that life to mean are evinced in symbol, myth, and ritual. That these three sub-genres of Religious Studies are approached as kernels of truth in the analyses of Daly, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Radford Ruether attests to the incompleteness of their social and historical endeavour. For Daly, language and symbols are the historical ground that deity breaks into, for Schüssler Fiorenza, narrative is the historical ground
from which deity arises, while for Radford Ruether, signifying praxis is the place into which
deity breaks into the social and historical realm. Although all three recognize that hegemonic
practices have utilized symbol, myth, and ritual in order to legitimate these practices, they
assume that these categories are themselves extra-ideological. Symbol, myth, and ritual, as
represented in their work, are instantiations of the divine and not social and historical categories
that describe and prescribe human relations. The contents of symbol, myth, and ritual are
emptied out in their feminist analyses, but that which holds the contents, the forms are left intact
and unchallenged. The construction of symbol, myth, and ritual remains unquestioned. Rather,
symbol, myth, and ritual are dealt with, in the analyses of these three feminists, as natural
categories, categories produced in nature, which are, because of their naturalness, capable of
containing the divine. Rhetorically speaking, then, the previous contents are shown to be
poisonous draughts substituted by a recalcitrant and disobedient patriarchy, but the new contents
are seen to be the refreshing and cool draughts of the divine. This new nectar is not poured into
the containers of myth, symbol, and ritual by these feminists, but fulfilled by their action of an
“emptying out” which then allowed for a “filling up” of myth, symbol, and ritual by the divine.
Myth, symbol, and ritual, then, remain idealized categories in the works of these feminists.

Although my analyses of Mary Daly, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Rosemary
Radford Ruether may seem harsh at times, my point is not to invalidate the whole of their work. I
take very seriously the work these women engender, and part of this “taking seriously” is my
desire to push at the boundaries of their analyses in order to extend their work. As a feminist I
believe these women have contributed much to feminist discourses, and provoked a sitting up
and taking notice by those groups they have challenged. At many times their analyses are
insightful and incisive, and because of the critical acumen evident in their work, I chose to analyse their work, not to approach their work apologetically, but in order to push their work across a threshold in order to augment feminist epistemology. My respect for them is sufficient enough that I chose to begin from their work in order to do my own work.
REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER ONE


Gero Joan M. and Margaret W. Conkey (eds.) (1993). *Engendering Archaeology: Women and


Laurentis, Teresa de (1994). "The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism


Speght, Rachel (1617). *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the Cynical Bayter and foule-mouthed Barker Against Evah's Sex*. London.


**CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE**


Gerhart, Mary (1979). *The Question of Belief in Literary Criticism: An Introduction to the


**CHAPTERS FOUR AND FIVE**


Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth and Mary Collins (eds.) (1985). *Women Invisible in Theology and*


Valdés, Mario J (ed.). A Ricouer Reader: Reflection and Imagination. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.


CHAPTERS SIX AND SEVEN


— (1992). “‘Experience’.” In Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds.), Feminists Theorize the


