

**WOMEN AND THE WORD:
ISSUES OF POWER, CONTROL
AND LANGUAGE IN SOCIAL
AND RELIGIOUS LIFE**

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*'The first step in the elevation of women
under all systems of religion
is to convince them that
the Great Spirit of the Universe
is in no way responsible
for any of the absurdities'.*

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

PREFACE

✧The intention of this thesis is to offer a perspective on the current debate over women's *place* in Western religious institutions, i.e. the Judaeo-Christian tradition; and to provide a way of thinking about those issues which will lead to a positive, progressive and realistic vision of co-humanity, and a method of achieving it.

The thorny battleground of the 'women's debate', as it is inaccurately named, was not my original choice of thesis topic. A lifelong commitment to feminist principles has been matched with an equally lengthy wariness regarding society's attitude towards such matters. Also, the understandable obsession of South African religious studies departments, and journals, with the issue of racism has had the inevitable result of trivializing the related issue of sexism as secondary. The narrowness of such thinking has led to strange distortions, including the belief that evil can somehow be 'ranked' and that there can be a 'hierarchy' of oppression.

My intentions changed during a search of religious publications and journals while completing a post-graduate assignment. It was abundantly apparent that the scale of the debate on women's place in religion was fast outstripping most other debates. However, it was not an area which had been treated locally with seriousness. It had unfolded into a comprehensive and highly contentious debate in North American and British campuses and religious institutions, and the proliferation of books and articles on the subject by not only theologians but also sociologists, anthropologists and linguists had greatly extended the platform and the level on which the debate was to be fought. It appeared that women working in many fields were laying claim to religion, and were engaging issues which had previously been left to the handful of articulate women working at least nominally within orthodox structures.

Of particular significance was the way in which women were no longer dismissing sexist practice in religion as a sorry manifestation of an irreparably oppressive institution. They were reclaiming their right to full religious participation in their communities, and calling for an end to wrongful male domination and control. The debate, it seemed to me, had taken a healthy turn; no longer was it defensive, but it had rather taken the 'high ground'. Its well-structured, tough arguments were engaging fundamental tenets of religious thought and practice, ^{on levels other than strictly theological} and were forcing proponents of the patriarchy into increasingly shaky defenses.

The success of this systematic attack has subsequently been seen, at least in part, in the decision by the Lambeth Conference *to take the issue of women's place and position in the Church seriously*. This was the major achievement of Lambeth 1988, not the results of any decisions taken. Only five years before, in 1983, Jill Tweedie of *The Guardian* recorded her dismay at the refusal by the bishops to even consider the debate. Work by women activists during this past half-decade has so conscientized the Church that the 'women's debate', which is really a debate about sexist society rather than women, has been elevated to major status.

My concern began to grow when calculating the huge gap which was widening between us and our international counterparts, as a result of our South African failure to grapple with these same issues. Not only were we falling behind on a major theoretical ^{and} sociological debate, but we were consigning yet another generation of women to the disempowerment and despair caused by lack of knowledge, support and training which are needed to enable them to take up the issues at a sustained, systematic and sophisticated level.

The rough configurations of the debate are known locally to only a minority of women — and fewer men. It seemed that a systematic exploration of women's place in religion could be of assistance in ^{contributing to} a foundation for future debates.

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As far as that goes, it has been a little like reinventing the wheel; another restatement of women's history within a patriarchal structure.

It did, however, occur to me that it was necessary to do more than merely *describe* the process of such events. It seemed important to take a careful and consistent look at exactly how the domination process itself operates. If power is ultimate control, as this thesis postulates, then it is essential to look at the *process* of power: what constitutes power, and how it controls its ends. It is not sufficient to simply describe what went 'wrong'; it is also necessary to describe why it went wrong, and how that wrong is maintained. Only when the *modus operandi* of the oppressor is known, can effective counter-strategy take place.

One of the oldest tactics used against expressions of dis-ease among oppressed people has been to point out that complaints are in the minority. This implies that if the majority are not complaining, then they must be satisfied; silence implies consent. The flaw in this argument is that it needs special skills to speak, to be able to articulate the concern of the conscientized; moreover, it needs special powers of information and observation in order to become conscientized at all. Those dominated are precisely the ones who have been denied access to the development of such skills. Disempowerment includes a stripping away of a collective history, and in addition, controlling education and other societal institutions in such a way as to ensure that the ruling group cannot be challenged in a persuasive way.

The key to all this, it seemed to me, was to investigate how women have been controlled. How has control been effected in what is after all the single largest 'group' (51%) of people in the world? What *mechanisms* have been used, and how is it that they have apparently been so successful? By what process has half the population of the world, a group which after all does not lack in intelligence or ability, been dominated by the other half? Are there grounds for establishing that

this is not a 'natural order' nor 'ordained by God', but rather a human enterprise based on human need and greed? It seemed to me that only if there was substantive evidence to prove this last point, could women successfully press claims for the transformation not only of religion but also of society itself.

With this in mind, the three categories I chose to work with in each of the chapters were

POWER, PLACE and CONTROL

Chapter One uses these categories to describe the macro-world in which we all live. In society generally, East as well as West, urban as well as rural, power devolved in a way which *excludes* all those who do not have access to the resources of a society, be it wealth, education, privilege or armed might. The principle *values* of a society are then determined by those who hold power, and access to powersharing is strictly limited to those who share those values or can be educated into them, sometimes by conversion but most frequently by birth. The lack of access to resources thus ensures that those values are maintained by the ruling classes/castes from one generation to the next.

This effectively *places* the excluded classes/castes in an intractable way. The master class determines correct ethical *place* for the excluded, and wields the power to enforce that *place*. *Place* itself is determined by the needs of the master class; economic, reproductive and ideological.

The manner in which the master group stays in power, and the excluded group remains in place, is determined by a system of controls. I have used three sub-categories to describe these controls:

COERCIÓN, CO-OPTION and COMPLICITY

These seem to be the three classic ways in which any society is controlled. The most immediately effective method, but the most costly in the long term, is **coercion**. The thesis attempts to describe how this category encompasses not only direct physical violence, but also structural violence, including economic violence.

Co-option is a useful interim measure which guarantees co-operation among a segment of the excluded group, and is based on a 'divide and rule' policy. Put in its simplest terms, co-option means that the benefits of a society may be placed at the disposal of those who agree to live by its values for gain, even though they will never become a *de facto* part of the ruling group. Co-optees also frequently act as scape-goats in place of the class/ caste they represent, and bear the responsibility for events which go wrong. It is an uncomfortable place to be.

Complicity is most effective in the long term. This is an evolutionary mechanism, effective after both coercion and co-option have proved successful. As the word suggests, it involved accomplices knowingly removing the means to legitimate and authoritative claims from the excluded group by suppressing information. This can be done in a variety of ways; it is frequently effected by destroying or suppressing documentation which will authenticate those claims, or which show up the ruling group in an unfavourable light. I have described one of these sub-categories as 'historical hostility', when the recorded past is manipulated to indicate a favourable view of the rulers, and which gives either an unfavourable view of the dominated, or simply no view at all — so-called 'invisible history'.

Furthermore, it seemed evident that control of the very words used in recording human history would be of advantage to the ruling class. Words create a mind-

I am not a theologian, and this work is not designed to be an exercise in theology. Quite the opposite; it attempts to investigate the place of women in religion as part of a human, rather than a divine enterprise. It notes derivative and influences in the secular world as overlaid on religion, and also recognises the attempts of women who have claimed ownership of religion 'beyond theology'.

set whereby the world in which we live becomes 'fixed'; for the verbal symbols we use are loaded with prescribed and proscribed images.

This leads into the contentious debate of the neutrality or otherwise of language; the central question is whether language is value-free? As a person whose position lies with those who hold that *no* human construct is value-free, I side with sociolinguists who demonstrate that, far from being neutral, language is a powerful instrument which reflects, as well as programmes, human attitudes.

The three categories of **power, place and control** were applied to language generally in Chapter Two, as a method of showing that the institution of language can be investigated in a precisely similar way to the overall institution of society.

The third and last chapter looks at a product of human language — religious texts — and investigates the extent to which those same three categories could be applied, with similar results.

Convinced then that Judaeo-Christian religious texts reflect the broad attitude towards women by society, I felt it necessary to place this work within that broader context. Therefore this work draws widely from a range of disciplines, which include sociology, social anthropology, medical anthropology, medical science, archaeology, statistics and sociolinguistics.*

The final category in each of the three chapters is entitled 'Resistance'. This is not meant to be simply a description of feminist response within the religious traditions of the West, but if possible, a prescription, even if only partial, for treatment of the problem. If words have been used as instruments of oppression, they can also be used as instruments of liberation. Only by breaking the silence of complicity can any oppressed group be empowered to resist. We must constantly be reminded, however, that deviancy can be dangerous. This is not a game. Not only

are women challenging the powerful *status quo*; by doing so they lay claim to the resources of society and thereby challenge the economic and institutional structures of society. This massive enterprise should not be under-estimated, nor should we underestimate the determination of those who seek to defeat this task. Examples have been given as an indication of the powerful blocs women must face.

Resistance is further weakened by divisions within the Women's Movement itself, and within the field of feminist theology. Real differences do exist, and are often bitterly defended. It must be impressed on both observers and participants, however, that feminists share more in common with each other than that which divides them. It is imperative to continually restate this before any debate takes place. Divisions otherwise can be used to weaken the movement. It does not lie in the interests of the women's struggle to have such divisions exploited; nor does it take too much imagination to realise in whose interests that lies.

My own point of view within the debate on feminist religion has less to do with position than with strategy, possibly because of a personal inclination towards the practical ^{and the secular.} ^{studies, including feminist} The anger and despair which has led Mary Daly and her supporters to conclude that separatism — between men and women — is the only political answer to the problem of oppression is understandable. Daly arrived at her separatist conclusion only after attempts to reform the church from within had, in her view, failed. This conclusion is now debatable; many would hold that the Lambeth Conference of 1988, to choose just one visible example, is proof that the reformist approach has had profound impact within conventional church structures.

That apart, however, one needs to ask whether separatism is in any way practical or advisable? My own view is that, from a purely practical viewpoint, it is not. The call for separatism not only falls on stony ground, it is intrinsically divisive in that it not only excludes half of humanity, not all of whom, after all, can fairly be

described as the 'enemy', but it divides feminists themselves, many of whom remember that it is not *men* who are the transgressors, but the *patriarchy*, some of whose adherents are women.

Whether men as a class/caste must bear collective guilt, and whether women who support the patriarchy are in full possession of all the facts, let alone their senses, is not the issue when one views the sheer impracticality of the suggestion of separatism. The simple fact is that it will not work, whether desirable or not. Therefore an alternative strategy is needed.

Having said that, we should not underestimate the power of the separatist call, nor its usefulness to the movement.

Chapter Three indicates the value of a polarising position which demonstrates the outer edge of radical rage. It is infinitely useful in clarifying the continuum of positions, from reactionary to radical, which are possible. And, quite bluntly, it makes many feminist demands, which might otherwise have been viewed as too radical, seem quite tame by comparison.

On the other hand, it is possible to take a too accommodating point of view. Women ^{who are engaged in feminist studies tend} to be wary to the tendency of many women to feel comfortable in adopting a forgiving attitude, and in forgetting too quickly the harm which has been done to them. This goodwill, a commendable attribute in itself, assumes that it is necessary for women to 'save men from themselves': feminists need constantly to remind themselves that they are not in the business of saving men, but of saving women. While the majority of women may shy away from the violent or overly aggressive approach, they must be reminded that aggression and confrontation are not necessarily the same thing. Indeed, many feminists are concerned

about this confusion, as the 'male-aggressive world' is precisely what we are trying to avoid.

Confrontation, in its original sense, means to 'face head on'. Women need to seriously confront, to face head on, their aggressors, and to refuse to be deflected from this mission. This needs determination, information, courage and, above all, patience. Not patience in the passive sense, but in a active, strategic sense; the patience to continue implacably, to tolerate and overcome divisions, and to work unswervingly toward true co-humanity, no matter how long that takes.



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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The field of feminist studies calls for new developments in language. Words are therefore sometimes used in ways which are not analogous to their common usage. I have listed some of the terms used in this thesis, with descriptions of their meanings ^{limited to} the context of this work.

PATRIARCHY	a perverted mode of rule, in which males are dominant through the manipulation of power
POWER	ultimate control. Always implies violence
PLACE	the carefully prescribed and involuntary position each person is allocated in society
CONTROL	the way in which power is secured and maintained
AUTHORITY	in the sense of references to divine or historical legitimation
ANDROCENTRIC	centred around the dominant male group
'MYTH MASTERS'	a term coined by Mary Daly to described the way in which the patriarchy controls verbal symbols and images
INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE	systematic harm caused to oppressed groups by societal institutions devised to protect the interests of the master class
INCLUDED	applied to the group which wields power; those who are <i>included</i> in the power principle have rights to privilege and position, usually by virtue of their birthright
EXCLUDED	applied to those groups who do not have automatic access to power, privilege or sources

OTHER THEM	terms used to describe the alienated perceptions of the master group toward those <i>excluded</i>
VICTIM MENTALITY	a method of control whereby the oppressed group taken on the image impressed upon it by the master class
CARYATIDS	women who support the patriarchal system through fear or feelings of inadequacy
DELILAH COMPLEX	a belief that women weaken or betray
HORIZONTAL HOSTILITY	a term used to describe a method of co-optive control; forcing those in the excluded group to compete for favours and privileges
HISTORICAL HOSTILITY	a category devised for this thesis to describe patriarchal control of women by ignoring or suppressing records which affirm their universal capabilities
PURITY	a state of being prescribed and endorsed by the group in power; there are strong bodily connotations and sanctions
POLLUTION	a 'dangerous' state of being, in which the required state is not met. Also: 'Out of Place'
SEXUAL SEMANTICS	the control of language in a way which places women in separate categories to men, ensuring male dominance
'MINUS MALES'	the negative space assigned to females in language where all the positive space is taken up by male-dominant forms
God/god	'God' is capitalized when referring to the patriarchal divinity. In all other instances, the concept of divinity is indicated by using the lower case, 'god'

- CHAOS** used in the cosmic sense; the destruction of order and harmony
- EXODUS** a movement away from patriarchal oppression, towards a redemptive co-humanity
- WOMEN'S LIBERATION** a movement mainly of the 1960s and 1970s, primarily in North America, which aggressively promoted female 'equality'. Its strength lay in conscientizing women; its weakness in trying to persuade women that success in the patriarchal world lay in the adoption of male norms, codes and behaviour
- WOMEN'S MOVEMENT** An international, informally structured movement which affirms womanhood and demands equal recognition of female needs, norms and aspirations, along with the rejection of male-exclusive standards

Chapter One:

The Mechanics of Control in Society and Religion

1. Introduction: Task of Thesis

After one hundred years of struggle, the *place* of women in religion is still a critical issue, and an unsolved problem. In spite of the fact that the first Woman's Bible was issued in the 1880's under the leadership of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, there is little acknowledgement from the patriarchal institutions of both church and state of their inadequacy in reflecting women's experiences and aspirations, and of the need for these to be incorporated in a shared humanity. The issue of feminist religion is a major debate in the West today, as evidenced by the stack of journals, books, university courses and articles on this subject. Yet it is an issue still marginalized, especially by those who reject its authenticity as the key to unlocking *other* debates about minority participation and experience.

During this one hundred year period, other sensitive issues in the institution of religion, such as fascism, racism and liberation theology have arisen to take centre stage. Yet, deeply worthy as those issues are, none of them has involved the sheer volume of people which the 'women's debate' touches; simply put, between 51-52% of the world's population is female. Feminists identify this lack of concern as a male-for-male problem; that the patriarchy is more concerned with the status of their black/Latin American/Iron Curtain brothers than they are about the people

in their own back yard. It is this anxiety which has led, for instance, to black feminists in South Africa viewing with alarm the tendency of placing 'Africanization before Feminisation'. This, they fear, will lead to all *men* being equal — and all women too; only in the latter case, it will mean all women being equally subordinated to the patriarchy.

It is a singularly depressing scenario for those women and men who understand that the feminist quest is not simply *remedial*. It does not seek to rectify, or reinterpret the past, or offer alternative visions of religion for women. It means *drastically altering the landscape* of human history, not only in the past, but more vitally, in what lies ahead. It means challenging the standards, normative values, assumptions and legitimations of authority, which strikes at the heart of power and control. Feminist consciousness does not wish merely to stretch the horizons of knowledge; it wishes to alter the whole landscape by the removal of the old patriarchal buildings, and the construction of a new, equal and participatory environment.

Yet the century of struggle goes on. If women's experience is important, as God's creatures alongside men, then the response to attempts to share that experience has been most depressing.

The root of the problem lies in tradition and in history, but the effects are felt to this day. Women are part of the *male* story. As women, they remain invisible. Indeed, until the early part of the nineteenth century, most intellectual and theological work was undertaken without conscious awareness that women's experience, *as women's experience*, was relevant¹. It was acknowledged that women's lives did have some unique aspects, but that the differences were unimportant.

It is not for nothing that formative periods in both Judaism and Christianity are named for their masculine style and content. The Patriarchs of Judaism and the

Church Fathers of Christianity, determined both guide-lines and attitudes which have lasted until the present. As Western societies remain almost exclusively dominated and controlled by men, very few have thought to challenge this one-sidedness of portraying and ordering religious experience.

That the 'male-ness' of religion was taken for granted for almost two millennia seems to be a curious phenomena in the decade of the 1980's, given the debates on the *place* of women in religion. Why have women, let alone men, been prepared to accept for so long the undervalued and ambivalent status and role of women in Judaeo-Christian traditions? On the one hand, it can be argued that no fair trial is possible given that the judge, jury and the Law itself, all come from 'the other side'. On the other hand, one has equally to accept that there have been very few voices clamouring for an equitable dispensation. Much of this failure to adequately address the problems, this thesis will attempt to show, lies in the way in which the institutions, and society itself, is *controlled*. A major part of this chapter will investigate the way in which control operates; through *coercion*, *co-option* and *complicity*.

It is unfortunately not within the scope of this work to chart why the change towards a greater equality for women has occurred, fascinating though such a study would be. It must be sufficient to note that such changes are occurring against the challenge within the framework of the broader reaches of society. The real event of women playing increasingly prominent roles in public, corporate and institutional life has important implications, not least of all for religion. It is the task of this work to investigate the nature and scope of that challenge against what modern women perceive to be the exclusiveness of the male-dominated religious orthodoxy within a patriarchal society.

It will therefore be necessary to examine a number of theoretical issues: that of *CONTROL* within the religious systems, and by what *AUTHORITY* and *POWER*

that control is exerted. Integral to this is the *PLACE* that women occupy, and its implications. *VALUES* play an important role in determining the direction of these issues, and will be discussed in context. This will form the background to the responses of modern women theologians, and, in particular, three theologians who have significantly contributed to the debate: **Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Daly.**

Beyond this, we need to examine the assertion made by many feminists that the history of Patriarchy — which is the history of the world as we are taught it — is a *history of power*. The central focus of this work will be the way in which that power is operated (control), and its effects; the rich over the poor, the educated over the illiterate, the master class over the oppressed, men over women. This is not a revelation. It is the history of all institutions. What is new, what is different, is how the control is being challenged. This has naturally caused tension between the *status quo*, on one side, and the challengers on the other. Whether or not the challenge will succeed or fail, the reactions to it will alter our landscape, perhaps dramatically. Either way, it is a play for power.

The sacred world of religion draws heavily on symbols to sustain that power, whereas it is assumed that in the profane world, power is supported in the 'traditional' ways:

1. **Control** of who makes the decisions.
2. **Control** of what decisions are made.
3. **Control** of what people want (manipulation).

In both the sacred and profane worlds, the central pivot of power is *control*. It is useful to look at how that power is legitimated; who decides what symbols are legitimate, what authority the decision rests on, and how people are persuaded that

the result fulfills their needs. Although we are expected to believe that the two worlds are indeed separate (and thereby, no doubt, admit to theological poverty), it must readily be argued that control of power is handled in the identical way.

2. Power

What is the significance of **power**, at its deeper human level? Power is ultimate control. It reflects the human need to imitate God in ordering and controlling the environment. Religion, at its most reduced, is to do with the human perception of the cosmos and in finding ways of explaining and ordering that perception. Attempts to find 'a pattern' is linked to all intellectual reasoning. Finding such a pattern means that the perception or experience can be shared by the community; it is not unique. It is the basis of all logical thought, and the foundation on which human knowledge is built. This desire to identify and decipher patterns appears to be basic to the human condition. Einstein, in his *Evolution of Physics*, was led to observe that 'Physical concepts are creations of the human mind and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world'.²

Patterns imply an aggregation of human experience. They imply something about human nature too. People have not used them simply for explanatory purposes. Identifying a pattern implies prediction and opens up the possibility of manipulation. At its crudest, this is true of 'science'. There is a case to be made out for suggesting the same thing about religion. Power involves all the processes of identification, deciphering, prediction and manipulation. Conglomerately, this spells out control, whether of the atom or of human behaviour. Mary Daly's famous comment, 'When God is male, the male is God' is an interesting one in the context of the way in which the images of patriarchy are patterned in Western religious experience. All the theoretical issues of power, place, control and values are involved.

The focus of this work on power, and its consequences, lies in the assertion that in a patriarchal world, power is not just the highest value, but in a real sense, the *only* value.³ This is a strong statement, but it may be justified at least in part. It is a common truth that people and events are judged to be either important or fascinating according to the degree of power they possessed. It is the impact of those lives and deeds which are judged, and written up as history. Note that this single standard omits almost everything that is important to the individual; the pursuit of happiness, personal fulfillment, and the values of love, satisfaction and pleasure are engaged almost exclusively in the way in which the *use* of power, that is, control, impedes them.

The reasons for the high value of power may well derive from the human need for security; it can be interpreted as an imitation of divine control. It is the *consequences* of power which are so troublesome. Power is not a value in a vacuum. It exists only in its application, or at least in its recognised potential. For many religious women, the concentration of power in the hands of a minority group (the patriarchy) has resulted not only in disempowerment but in direct and indirect violence, physical and institutional enslavement.

Sociologically speaking, although direct physical violence is immediately successful in control, it is not cost-effective in terms of human resources. Well-used techniques of oppression are not just *coercion* (although that must exist), but also *co-optation* and *complicity*. The last relies heavily on *authority* which is recognised by the majority. Although this is dealt with in more detail later in this chapter (**Historical hostility**), it is worth noting here that it is an effective way in which power controls. Even oppressors can feel vulnerable. A. Geoffrey Woodhead, in his study of Thucydides and the nature of power, observes that 'there remains a need for spiritual and moral support, a need to say that an action is "right" ... whatever the

realpolitik behind the action'.⁴ Detractors might suggest that this reflects not only an urge to control in imitation of divinity, but also a divinely 'correct' self-image; the appointed and anointed of the gods. It smacks of the imperial, Roman and otherwise.

A kinder interpretation is that humans are not necessarily keen to engage in action unless they are convinced that their behaviour is legitimate, and that the urge for legitimation is therefore both a necessary part of control, and also the very spot at which it is most vulnerable. Break through that weak link in the chain of power, and one has the most effective lever to transform society.

3. Ethical Place

The importance of ethical place should not be underestimated. Few feminists are, indeed, likely to do so, given their history. In a perfect picture of the world, each object has its 'place' in the sacred order of things. It seems that it is only in this manner that humans are able to imagine, let alone achieve, an harmonious orderly world. Harmony, stability, orderliness, the right place; all these add up to *security*, a paramount need. Enormous lengths will be taken to maintain the security of the social system, no matter how despised. The threat of change is even more alarming than the maintenance of a seemingly indefensible order; incipient chaos out there has always terrorized the human mind.

Peter Berger writes that to be in a 'right' relationship with the sacred cosmos is to be protected against the nightmare threats of chaos. 'To fall out of such a "right" relationship is to be abandoned on the edge of the abyss of meaninglessness'.⁵

This is all very well. One would have to be completely ignorant of human behaviour to deny it. But it is a frequently used and abused justification of unac-

ceptable practices. To use an apt phrase, there is more than one way to skin a cat. Lasting security is not bought by coercing collectives of people into ritually right places, but rather by transforming that society into a co-operative, that is, one in which each person has an equal stake in making it work, and which relies on that shared co-operation in order to make it work. I expect this is one way of describing a democracy. This does not mean at all that people will desire to be, or to do, the same thing; but rather that each person's choice will be respected and protected, and validated. In such a way can the values and standards of a society reflect not only one set of experience, but all. In this way, a myriad of roles and functions are protected. It seems the only way to prevent *groups*, or classifications of people, from becoming the 'Other', an anonymous, collective *Them*.

The perverse habit of society in doing precisely this, in deliberately dividing the world and its people into compartments, seems to be not so much a characteristic of people, as is often alleged, but rather a *strategy* for following what *is* a characteristic, the quest for power. Scholars as different as Thomas Szasz and Erich Neumann have suggested that society creates the *Other* as an object of condemnation so that those who condemn can contrast themselves as 'good'. It seems that only by doing this, by adopting a 'we-are-better-than-you' position, that people can brace themselves into legitimizing their belief that they are entitled to suppress, oppress or destroy others. This is a successful, and therefore popular, technique for maintaining the **Power Principle**. Put another way, those who belong to the 'Us' group, are in a powerful and privileged *Place* while 'They' are subclassifications of the Primary Place, and by definition are inferior. In this attitude and strategy lies the characteristics of colonization. It takes little imagination to apply it to women.

From birth, a sexual caste system ensures a hierarchy in which men are entitled to an ethical place which also provides them with greater access to goods, ser-

vices and prestige, and to mental and emotional well-being which includes self-worth, challenge and fulfillment. This system *excludes* women from power positions in patriarchal society and religion, and conditions them to accept their place of subjection as an irremedial fact. Because patriarchal standards are the *only* standards, women are taught that their needs and functions are secondary, and that this is furthermore a natural state of being. It is also saying that the sexual differentiation is — for one sex — a handicap so crippling that no personal qualities of intelligence, virtue or leadership can overcome it.

There is little point in denying the biological differences between men and women, nor should there be any reason to do so. But the point must be made that organically evolved role-playing, by general consensus, is quite a different matter to contrived or prescribed roles, or *Places*, into which categories of people *must* fit. The act of childbearing and rearing does not by definition exclude women from being in powerful positions. Many anthropologists believe it was their *source* of powerful place, and hence the reason for matriarchal and matrilineal societies.⁶ Children are, after all, the primary economic unit of society although the West tries to conveniently evade this. The great failure of the Women's Liberation movements of the Sixties was to attempt to deny the biological and to have encouraged women to act 'as men' in order to occupy important and powerful places in society. Treating the progenerative abilities of women as a liability played right into the hands of the prevailing patriarchy. Women were finally admitting that to be wives and mothers *was* an inferior position, and that male standards and functions were superior. Strategically speaking, the policy of broaching the 'enemy' where it is strongest is always a mistake.

By the mid-seventies,^{the} Women's Movement had recognised this flaw, and attempted to rectify the error. Women were not going to be co-opted. The affirma-

tion of being a woman, the recognition of the value of mothering and nurturing, and the insistence that women's behaviour, standards, desires and aspirations are not the same as men's, and are no less worthy, set the agenda. A popular slogan quipped that 'women who want to be equal to men lack ambition'; this reflected the ambitiousness of the task ahead — a complete transforming of society into a post-discriminatory one, in which women and men would recognize the legitimacy of each other's differences and similarities, and in which all would participate and share fully.

Only at this point, it is believed, can the 'dissonance' in our societies be resolved. This will bring about the restoration of harmony.

This would also redress the problem that Mary Douglas identified when she wrote that women's place in the public structure of roles 'is clearly defined in relation to one or two points of reference, say in relation to husbands and fathers'.⁷ She noted that the social division of labour involves women less deeply than their menfolk in the central institutions — political, legal, administrative, etc. — of their society. The decisions they take do not have repercussions on a very wide range of institutions and their social relations certainly carry less weighty pressure than those which are also institutional in range. *This is the social condition they share with slaves and serfs.*

This seems an obvious point then, to examine the ethic of obedience.

3.1 Prescribed Place: the Ethic of Obedience

Ethically, the single historical obligation of women has been that of obedience. This is not to deny that, in many religions, there are ethics of obedience for both sexes. Islam, for example, means just that: obedience, or submission, to

Allah. But for women, the ethics of obedience have not stopped at obeying sacred authority. They have generally included obeying all men, and this has been legitimized by way of calling on 'sacred authority'.

Since the era of Greek civilization, at least, women have fallen into a sub-classification similar to children and servants. Whatever their rank or status, or caste, the primary obligation for women is that they ought to be obedient to men.

This insistence of female *place* (and therefore, *control*), has been principal in all patriarchies, and the threat to patriarchies of its demise is a real one. Chinese historians of the Ming dynasty refer to an entire period as the rise of the 'fearsome wives'.⁸ This must be seen largely as male projection, resulting from their conflict over the role of women as deeply respected and influential mothers, and as totally subdued wives. Between them lay their conception of women as imprisoned dolls with dwarfed feet, the embodiment of the neo-Confucian ideal of fidelity and obedience, and their ideal of the sexy, intelligent and aggressive concubine. (The confusion in women caused by the conflict between these two ideals will be discussed under the heading **Problems of Purity: the Virgin and Eve.**) In an early Chinese book of poetry:

'A woman with a long tongue
is a stepping-stone to disorder.
Disorder does not come from Heaven
It is produced by women.
Those from whom come no lessons, no instructions,
Are women and eunuchs'.⁹

The ethics of obedience as an obligation for women is a direct result of male power. It is not a 'natural' occurrence, although that is implicit in the social myth which perpetuates it. It is legitimated by a full range of scriptural and historical writings, to give it authority. There is blinding insensitivity to the male control

which exists *behind* the authority, and which throws into question every attempt at legitimation.

No wonder there is such an insistence on co-opting women into adopting patriarchal versions of religion. The fifteenth century witchhunters Henry Kramer and James Sprenger, authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, could 'confidently' locate the etymology of the word 'femina' as 'lacking in faith'. They pictured women as inherently subversive to constituted religious authority.¹⁰ Dissonance occurred as women began to reject male authority from the High Middle Ages (Eleanor of Aquitaine *et al*). The use of violence, witchburning among other punishments, was sanctioned. The use of coercion — some scholars estimate that more than a million women were burnt between the 15-17th centuries — is a costly one, and creates dissonance in itself. Co-option is a cleaner and more satisfying method, when most seem to agree on the legitimation. It is a lesson to women, however, that violence can and will be used when they break the ethics of obedience.

In some societies, the exclusion of women further underscored their ethical place. Women who were forcibly excluded from public places were also excluded from formal religion, and from participating in important public rituals. The reason given was that women 'are distracting to men'; both this, and the pursuit of their traditional female roles in private which included healing rites, were sold to them as 'natural'.

~~It is to be hoped that modern people recognize such attempts at control as transparent.~~

3.2 Out of Place: the Delilah Complex

Wherein lies the origins of men's squeamishness about female 'nature'? Women are frequently told that they need to be 'protected' from 'men's nature', and are exhorted to be virgins and good women, yet they are also viewed as carnal, closer to nature, and sexually threatening. This confusion over female sexuality is discussed in detail under the heading **Pollution and Purity**. Whatever the case, women are believed, at the very least, to have different sexual natures to men.

The viewing of women as *Other* in the Judaeo-Christian West is at least in part due to the legitimacy given that view by the stories of Eve and Lilith, and by the early Church Fathers who saw women as having natures 'lower' than men. This view is not, however distorted, unique to this specific religious tradition. The story of Eve may be the Judaeo-Christian manifestation of the mythic women who are closer to the chaos of the Cosmos, and less afraid of it, than their male counterparts. Anthropologist Mary Douglas has called this the '*Delilah complex*';¹¹ a belief that *women weaken or betray*. This complex appears to be very wide-spread, ^{she notes} from the New Guinean **Mae Enga** to the **Yuork Indians** of California. It betrays a cast of mind which portrays women not only as *Other*, but more specifically as '*the enemy*'. So it is not only necessary to keep women in their *place*, but also to deal violently with them, if necessary; and the two are not mutually exclusive.

It is worth noting here that women do not need to be reminded that they are the victims of 'men's natures'; but they have for too long been duped into believing this was to do with sexuality. Rape is not about sex, but about domination.

Where the Delilah complex occurs, cautions Douglas, 'We find that ... the situation of male/female relations is so biased that women are cast as betrayers from the start'.¹²

Addicts of this complex were the previously-mentioned authors of the *Mal-leus Maleficarum*, two Dominican priests who in the fifteenth century reflected the prevailing theological view that 'women are chiefly addicted to evil superstitions ... (because) all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable'.¹³ Men are protected from such horrible crimes because Jesus was a man, they reasoned. The sinister implications of such a view caused terrible harm to women, not just in the sense of direct violence, but in the way women continue to be oppressed by the institutional violence of society and the church; not least because 'Jesus was a man'.

3.3 Pollution and Purity: preserving the patriarchy

Why is *control* over women's place so important? It is a situation so universal, with such a long history, that not even a deeply-rooted 'Delilah complex' can explain it, although it begins to impinge on the real reason by portraying the fear men have of being betrayed by women.

Mary Douglas gives the reason succinctly, and thereby sums up what has been said so frequently — and wordily — by other writers:

'The mother is the decisive parent for establishing caste membership. Through women the blood and purity of the caste is perpetuated. Therefore their sexual purity is all-important, and every possible whisper of threat to it is anticipated and barred against. This should lead us to expect an intolerable life of restriction for women. Indeed this is what we find for the highest and purest caste of all'.¹⁴

Control of women is fundamentally about sexual control (although not exclusively so; see under the heading **Coercion: Control of Capital**), but not just sexual control *per se*. It is, more specifically, about *control over the procreating of the next generation*, about the continuance of the gene pool. Put more bluntly, every

mother knows she is the mother of her own child; but no father does. No wonder the Delilah complex of betrayal is so strong. These are the politics of reproduction.

This is not just a clinical observation. It has enormous social ramifications. The 'danger' that is released when control is lost over the procreation process affects not only the individual male but all of society. For society operates on the assumption of a child's bloodright; economically, socially, religiously. It is the oldest of all human rights and is universally recognised even today. Once society is patriarchal, the bloodline calculated primarily through the father and his status conferred on the child, then sexual control becomes mandatory. When societies were truly matriarchal then this was not as significant a problem.

Claims of matriarchal lineage today are nothing but diversionary. All that has happened, in Judaism for example, is that it has been realistically assessed that descent through the mother is the only 'known' quantity. Nevertheless Judaism is firmly patriarchal, and although no Jewish child can be considered 'illegitimate' if born to a Jewish mother, this is a secondary consideration; the rank and status of the father will play a major role in determining that of the child. Furthermore, he assumes a privileged place which Jewish Law ^{will} discriminate in favour of, over the place of women (eg in suing for divorce)

So much of power and place, with all the social and economic advantages and disadvantages, is invested in the control of bloodlines that the breaking of that control has serious repercussions in society.

3.3.1 Purity

For obvious reasons then, virginity is highly prized, for control as demonstrably not been broken. Virginity among women is promoted as being in

their own interests. Especially in pre-birth control days (and it must be remembered even now that no form of birth control, not even sterilization, is a hundred percent reliable), women were threatened to preserve their virginity, otherwise they would be left literally holding the baby. But if society was post-patriarchal and supportive, this would not be a problem, as it is today. Women were, and are, also told that virginity is a passport to male respect and marriage. This is true. Women with wide sexual experiences are 'unreliable' in terms of procreational control, and perhaps less inclined to provide cheap household labour. Men *think* they are demanding sexual exclusivity, whereas they are really creating a deeply-rooted mechanism for controlling the genetic pool. This would explain why there are sexual double standards for men and women; sexual experience, while not necessarily condoned, is expected of men and has never been considered an impediment to marriage. Youths are encouraged to 'sow their wild oats' before settling down. The question is, with whom? Sexually available women, and especially prostitutes, are considered to be the worst kind of *pollutant*.

3.3.2 Pollution

Women are ripe subjects for pollutant behaviour if one operates within Douglas' findings that 'the human body is a major source of symbolism for notions of pollution'.¹⁵ Society's perception of the female physical body is, correctly, that it is more linked to the cycles and rhythms of nature than the male's. But it is not as simple as just labelling the menstrual discharge and the birthing process as messy or even dirty. According to Douglas, *pollution notions* focus on the entry and exit points of the body. 'The tendency to protect what enters and leaves the body by means of strong taboos on food and feces increases the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body'.¹⁶ The strong taboo for women of the male

genital organ, with the sole exception of one which has been purified through religious ritual (marriage) is neatly described in this explanation.

It is worth pausing to wonder why menstruation and post-partum bleeding are considered 'pollution'? Normally, they are sterile body fluids. During these times, however, women are unlikely to conceive, and therefore it is only during these short periods that women control conception. If this thesis seems rather stretched, which is a fair allegation, then consider that when female animals come on heat, they are certainly not taboo to males, even though bleeding occurs; if women bled during the times of their greatest fertility, would they be considered 'taboo'?

What, exactly, is pollution? Douglas' ideas are well captured by Patterson's paraphrase: the polluting person is always someone who has crossed some line that should never have been crossed, or who brings together what should have remained wholly separate.¹⁷ Polluting dangers occur where *ethical place* is threatened. 'A polluting person is always in the wrong. He (sic) has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this *displacement* unleashes danger for someone ... Pollution can be committed intentionally, but intention is irrelevant to its effect'.¹⁸ Douglas also claims that pollution behaviour is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.

Women who are *out of place* are polluting the system. They are bouncing against ethical norms which govern society and one of two things must inevitable happen: they will either be forced into submission again, or they will triumph and the ethical norms will change. At present, these challenging women are 'matter out of place'.

3.3.3 Problems of Purity: the Virgin and Eve

The search for purity is an insoluble problem, writes Douglas.¹⁹ The truth is that life is amorphous and there are no clear-cut categories. Meantime, women in the Judaeo-Christian system are locked into a situation in which not only clear-cut divisions between pollution and purity are described, but are held up as role-models, even though they are inimitable. Religious literature is full of references to the 'two types of women': the temptress and the virgin, the betraying Eve and the immaculately pure Mother. The latter is a model of absolute purity for women in the Christian tradition but, as Daly points out, Mary presents a model which is inimitable, a woman who 'conceived without sin'. Daly believes that this ensures that all women are, as women, in the same caste with Eve. In the language we have been using, they are powerful pollutants.

Women are continually confused by the dual message they received from the patriarchy, a message from not only men but also women who have been co-opted. The 'ideal' state of sexual purity is, firstly, virginal, and then monogamous. For this they will receive 'respect'. It is implied that this is a big reward.

On the other hand, women are also told that they should be eager and creative sexual partners. This creates practical difficulties. Firstly, many women feel uncomfortable in portraying one woman in two separate *places*. She must, metaphorically speaking, be the Queen Mother during the day, and Mata Hari at night. The strain of maintaining absolute separation between the two mutually exclusive *places* is too much for most women to attempt.

Secondly, as all sexual experience outside a single marital relationship is theoretically denied to the woman, she has no way of measuring the sexual activity inside her marriage. The traps here are many; accusations of inadequacy cannot be countered; her own sexual release may not be considered necessary, and sexual

proficiency or appetite may be regarded with suspicion. The assumption that men are sexually experienced protects them from much of this. Also, it is assumed that men are easily tempted, and forgiveness for a fall from purity is more forthcoming. It is more than difficult to imagine trust and status being restored to a woman under similar circumstances.

There is one exception to the rules of sexual activity, and that is rape. It is an area of 'sexual activity' which is absolutely proscribed and severely punished. This can easily be explained within the theory of pollution and purity. Rape is not primarily seen by the public as a crime of violence against women, but rather a crime of pollution against *mothers, daughters, sisters and wives*. In other words, the major crime is that of sexual pollution against women or girls *in relation to the men in their family*. Rape of a young girl, or a virgin, is more heinous because her purity is greater. She is polluted for her future husband. Rape of a sexually experienced woman or prostitute is considered less of a crime because of her previous 'sexual pollution'. Her own feelings of violation will have little to do with the criminal sentencing.

It is also interesting to note that the rape of men, i.e. a 'homosexual' act (although it may be nothing of the sort, but, rather, an act of dominance) is seen as horrible but somehow less threatening a crime against society. This is perhaps to do with the fact that men are not expected to be in a state of sexual purity. The sole exception to this attitude is the rape of young boys, who are still in such a state.

4. Control

The historical marginality of women can be understood in terms of the **power principle**. What is less understandable is why women have put up with it.

Power is never 'given' to a group of people, point out strategists. Rather, power is there for the taking. It is possible that women could hide behind the excuse — a real one — which excluded groups take refuge in, which is that they did not realise they were being disempowered, that their natural rights were being stripped, until it was too late. Once the process of *exclusion* is completed, and there is reason to believe that this process involving women was a very slow one, it is a mammoth task for that group to organise and strike back. They are subject to the handicap of economic and educational inferiority, quite apart from the distortion of historical and contemporary information. The social myth that people don't reempower themselves because they 'don't really want to' fails to take into consideration a host of factors, not least of which is the fear of insecurity and chaos. This enables people to be co-opted into a system which they don't particularly support. The alternative goal may be ultimately desirable, but it is too risky in the immediate term. It also fails to understand the fear of alienation, of *exclusion*. The prescribed ethical place they are in is, if inadequate, at least better than to be stripped of any recognisable place at all.

It also quite fails to take into consideration the threat of *coercion*, as opposed to *co-option*. Ethical rules about place have led to extraordinary brutality. And although women are by no means the only recipients of direct physical violence, their situation is different to that of men in that they are always at least part of the victim group, if not the sole targets. Some sociologists have attempted to use a divisive strategy in this regard, by pointing out that women in the 'wealthier' white group in Western countries enjoy superior place to black men. They fail to perceive the deeper lesson. In each group, women are always marginalized into inferior place in the context of their male 'peers'. In this they share a common sisterhood, and a common life experience. And no group, economic or otherwise, is exempt from male-on-female violence. It is worth remembering, notes Daly, that any attempt to

change *place*, any attempt at deviation, involves 'ultimate risking'²⁰ and the social and material penalties can be severe. *Deviancy can be dangerous.*

4.1 Control by Coercion: Violence

Fear of male brutality is a real fear for women. Women have been kept in place not only through the various forms of co-optation and complicity, but more specifically through *coercion*.

Daly speaks of the violence she sees in patriarchal systems as **Gynocide**: a deliberate and often literal sacrificing of women in order to preserve male domination and control. The sacrificing of women requires the silencing of women, which takes place in a myriad of ways.

Attempts to challenge orthodox *place* are often shortlived, and usually only temporarily successful; and then only if they benefit the patriarchy in some way. Thousands of women were massacred after the revolutions in Russia, China and Cuba because of their refusal to return to traditional female roles. *

Those countries had to struggle to abolish wife-beating, and to establish the 'wife' as person with a right to the integrity of her own self. The enthusiasm and courage with which women have embraced and supported 'revolution' has inevitably ended in disillusionment and bitterness, and alert feminists caution their constituency to beware of deception and false hopes.

A recent example is the revolution in Iran. The story of how women participated in the overthrow of the Shah's regime and were, for their pains, subsequently tortured, restricted and excluded into traditional *place* makes sober reading. Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh documented this abuse in their book *In the Shadow of Islam*²¹, as well as forms of control; specifically, form of *coercion*, co-

option and *complicity*. Women who refused to comply with the post-1979 codes of dress and behaviour were treated as deviants and suffered imprisonment, torture and sometimes death. Nurseries were closed and co-educational schools shut within 18 months of the Khomeini's return. The minimum age for marriage was lowered to 13, and married women were banned from attending high schools. Sexual segregation of beaches was initiated and women were flogged during the summer of 1979 on charges of swimming in the men's section.²² Compulsory veiling was enforced, and unveiled women were refused goods by shopkeepers, fired from their jobs, and even knifed. Far from being a symbol of solidarity, Iranian feminists^{found} the veil to be really a symbol of the Islamic patriarchy which was implemented on society as a whole. The 'cruel deception' of women who had initially (and thoughtlessly) adopted the veil was now clear. Control was complete.

It seems that nothing has changed. In sixteenth century England, sexual interest in a man other than one's husband was considered 'revolt'.²³ This is hardly different from the present position of Iranian women for example, who 'should surrender herself for any pleasure that he (her husband) demands ... if she does not obey her husband in the tasks mentioned, she is a sinner.' According to Mr Banisadr, a 'respectable' member of the Iranian Assembly of Experts, the 'only case' that physical punishment of a women is allowed 'is when she is disobedient'.²⁴

In the West, the 'proper attitude' of women was often portrayed in the many tales of '*patient Griselda*' who accepts her husband's verbal and physical abuse with fortitude and love, and thereby wins his love. The proper place, not to mention the easiest to control, for women is marriage. Daly has noted how the witchcraze focussed predominately upon women who had rejected marriage ('Spinsters') and women who had survived it (widows). She suggests that the witch-hunters sought

to purify their society of this 'indigestible' element — women whose physical, intellectual, economic, moral and spiritual independence and activity profoundly threatened the male monopoly.²⁵ Women who presented options of *place* were simply disposed of.

The close relationship between *purity* and *place* is found in African genital mutilation on women. The clitoris is by nature 'impure' and its excision encourages fidelity, that is, sexual purity. Its removal is — bizarrely — seen as making women purely female. The result is to make women purely servile. 'These women are 100% pure because they are 100% enslaved', writes Daly.²⁶ In other words, they are 100% *in place*. No wonder, remarked Bianchi²⁷, 'most women hold the view that unchecked, the tough qualities of aggressive competition and manipulative technological rationality in men leads to **wargasm**'.

Violence to women is so much part of our history that it has also formed part of our religious mythology. Zeus was an habitual rapist, and the violation of goddesses is an almost universal theme in patriarchal myths. Daly alleges that Christianity is not exempt. 'In refined religious rapism, the victim is impregnated with the Supreme Seminal Idea, who becomes "the Word made flesh". Mary thus becomes the Total Rape Victim'.²⁸

Although much of violence is overt, it has also achieved some extraordinarily subtle manifestations. 'Hobbling about on spiked heels or platform shoes, painfully smiling, women feel physically and emotionally unsteady. In such attire they are vulnerable physically, since it is at least difficult, if not impossible, to run from an attacker or participate in many ordinary — not to mention athletic — activities. The mutilated female foot then, is a triumph of patriarchal transcendence'.²⁹ To be fair, one has to ask why women participate in inflicting physical pain on themselves. The answer appears to lie in controlling their self-image; co-opting them into

agreeing with the masculine view of the 'right' look, which is part of place, and by excluding them, when they refuse to be manipulated. Derisory remarks about 'sensible' shoes are familiar to all, and become derogatory when applied to women's footwear. Being 'sensible' is de-sexualising in the eyes of men.

Women are frequently told that they will be 'safe', or out of danger, if only they conform to accepted behaviour. Precisely the opposite is true. Women who have little or no control of their place, are the most vulnerable and the most subject to physical abuse. It is true that men use violence to force women to return to their proper place, but in most Western societies women have the means to fight back, through the legal system, if they are determined enough. In the final analysis, the only safe place for women is control over their own lives. Only then can they ensure that there is no hidden agenda to secure someone else's interests rather than their own.

4.1.1 Coercion: Control of Capital

Men who support the anti-feminist position do indeed have their own agenda. In a fully equal world, women and black persons will no longer provide the pool of cheap labour. Not only will these previously excluded people want a share of profits, but they will also demand a part in decision-making. *Women are the largest economically-disadvantaged group in the world and their position is getting worse, not better.* The violence of poverty on women is coercive because women are in fact prevented from altering their disadvantaged state. All the affirmative action in the world will not alter a situation in which women are placed at an economic disadvantage because of the very way in which society is perceived and structured. Among other things, this decides how certain categories of work will be financially rewarded, or whether they will be rewarded at all. The way in which conven-

tional working hours, and meetings, are structured often precludes female participation, and women with familial responsibilities are assured that it is *they* who do not 'fit in'.

On the other hand, can we really talk about all women being 'oppressed' when at least a proportion of them are economically advantaged? Eisenstein says we can: 'Exploitation speaks to the economic reality of capitalist class relations for men and women, whereas *oppression* refers to women and minorities defined within patriarchal, racist and capitalist relations'.³⁰

But let us not be sidetracked. Even in the West, where women are often presumed to be at an economic advantage, women are fundamentally poorer than men. In the United States in 1980, the median adjusted income for men was \$12,530; for women it was \$4,920. Of the thirty million Americans who live beneath the poverty level, two-thirds are women and children. The depressing projection is that the gap is growing. In the year after divorce, women's incomes decline by 73% while men's incomes increase by 42%.³¹ **Women do two-thirds of the world's work, provide 45% of its food, earn 10% of its income and own 1% of its property.**³² Many societies are so arranged that women are required to perform nearly all the work. Many African countries fall into this category, as well as those not considered 'third world' — such as Greece. 'In the realm of economics, women as a caste comprise a lower class', writes French.³³

The poor of the world are women.

It cannot be ignored in whose interest this lies. Whether working inside or outside the home, women form the world's largest single pool of cheap or unpaid labour. Not only are women paid less in the market place³⁴ but they are frequently excluded from the family's income on the grounds that the money, which has

been earned by the man, is 'his'. Women are expected to be the *enablers*. Their support system, however, is absolutely vital if men wish to be parents as well as careerists. If required, men are generally able to devote all their time to their careers, or at least as much time as is needed. Women on the other hand, are penalised in the work force on the assumptions which are made about her (menstruation, motherhood, menopause). Is it assumed that men never have detractions or distractions? Yet men are more prone to absenteeism due to heart disease, alcoholism and hypertension than women, and they also die younger³⁵ all of which affects the marketplace. Men are in fact considered to be more fragile than women; it is an interesting fact that a famished woman is more likely to abort a male foetus, than a female.³⁶ Women over the age of 45 have better work records, and a history of greater loyalty to the company/organization, than men — and they still have two decades of working life to go.

In a celebrated exchange with the United States Representative, Patsy Mink, Hubert Humphrey's physician declared that women ought to be barred from positions of serious responsibility because of the 'raging hormonal influences that overwhelm them at menopause'.³⁷

On the other hand, women who do not have children and who pursue only their careers are regarded by the patriarchy as somehow having 'failed'. Strictly speaking, they are women out of place and are always under suspicion about their motives and aspirations. Women who attempt to be both complete mothers and complete careerists fall into a terrible trap. They strive for the impossible. When they inevitably fail, they are criticized to having allowed the family and/or the career to suffer. Little concern is paid to her own suffering, as she is considered to be behaving incorrectly.

The workforce's *primary* assumption is that children will be cared for by 'someone else'; the reality of the working mother is not catered to, in spite of the increasing numbers of mothers who are single parents.

Men frequently confess that they would be 'relieved' if their wives were more independent, socially and financially. This sounds rather like the Southern slave-owning woman who, on hearing about the Emancipation Proclamation of slaves in the US, cried out 'Free at last!'³⁸ The realities of making the beds and minding the babies was still to come. The point is that when men calculate exactly what they would have to give up in terms of power, position and privilege, they are less than enthusiastic. The Equal Rights Amendment Bill in the US was defeated by male-controlled corporations who realised only too well what its passage would mean, economically and socially. The anti-ERA campaign was provided with financial backing funnelled from the 'New Right', which is backed by such corporations as Ford, General Motors, Coca-Cola, Pepsico, Reader's Digest, IBM and others. It also includes fundamentalist groups like H.L. Hunt's Christian Crusade.³⁹ ERA was defeated in spite of polls consistently showing that it was supported by the majority of women in the US.

4.1.2 The Caryatids: Preying on Female Fears

Detractors of the ERA campaign quickly point out that it was women who were its greatest critics. This is to hide behind two features of the patriarchy: the creation of a 'victim mentality', which is the way in which any oppressed group is co-opted to work for the master class; and secondly, the way in which women are used as 'fronts' for their husbands and/or patriarchal institutions.

The term used for these women is *Caryatid*. It means in its literal sense, a female figure used as a column of support. Caryatids 'buy into' institutional values

in return for the security this offers, even though their place, and share of the burden, is from beneath.

This reward comes in a package called *'family values'*, the very institution which keeps them in a state of diminished responsibility and economic deprivation. We should not, however, accuse them of being blind. They see how things are; how women who are mothers of young children struggle to hold down jobs. They see the impoverishment of women without men, and the battle women have in building the skills, experience and network which men are heirs to at birth. They have realistically calculated the social and economic vulnerability of themselves as women, and their equation tells them that only strong family norms will protect them from poverty, the rough male world, and the hardships of bringing up children on their own.

The problem is that an important part of the equation is missing: **Men leave women.** Women thus buy into a false form of security, although it is attractive in the short term. Oddly enough, the Caryatids often think less of men than do progressive women. It is clear that the only interests they are thinking about is their own individual ones. The trap they have fallen into, writes French⁴⁰, is that of a 'colonized people who continue to believe the colonizers will protect them better than those who are rebelling against colonization'.

Sexual liberation in the Sixties was frequently understood, not as liberation from sexism, but as freedom in male terms to use women outside the confining structures of the 'bourgeois family'. Radical women received a painful shock when they were told, in the words of Stokely Carmichael, that the 'only position of women in the Movement is prone'.⁴¹

4.2 Control by Co-option

Although the Caryatids could fall into the category of co-opted control, their response is shaped more by the threat of *coercion*; either physical harm, or the violence of poverty. In both cases, they react from fear of the Patriarchy's power, rather than from conviction. A more insidious, and effective form of control is to persuade people that the system which oppresses them is actually a good one. It is plain that the sexual caste system could not be maintained without the consent and even approval of the victims. It explains to a large extent why women in greater numbers do not rise up against sexism society. **Women who have been co-opted form a non-sexist decoration to a sexist society.**

Sex role socialization is a conditioning process which begins at birth. 'The Myth Masters are able to penetrate their victims' minds/imaginations only by seeing to it that their deceptive myths are acted out over and over again in performances that draw the participants into emotional complicity'⁴², writes Daly. John Stuart Mill observed that it is not sufficient for women to be slaves. They must be *willing* slaves.

It is useful to explain this form of control in terms of the *process* of power.

Power by its very nature implies action: it does not exist in a vacuum. It is the ability to enforce a system, whether attractive or offensive, and it relies on the human ability to act together. 'All power is consensual', writes Arendt⁴³, and occurs whenever people get together and act in concert. In order for power to manifest itself, it is first necessary for people to agree on position and strategy. An essential component of power is also the ability to enforce its position, whether it is individual or corporate. Otherwise it cannot be described as '*power*', but only as *position*. It is clear, then what Arendt means when she says that 'to speak of non-violent power is actually redundant'.⁴⁴

The greater the number of people who are prepared to act together, the less energy and resources are needed to implement power. It is thus in the interest of the power structure to incorporate as many as possible into its fold, if it is to have long-term survival. For this reason, the development of a 'victim mentality' is a useful method of control, especially when the category of people who adopt it is one which is *excluded* by nature. But how to both *include* and exclude people simultaneously?

4.2.1 Victim mentality

A victim mentality occurs when the oppressed group takes on the image impressed upon it by the master class; it internalizes the standards of the oppressor, and the images of unworthiness and inferiority. Moreover, it eventually comes to believe that the image is the reality, and takes on the characteristics of a self-fulfilling prophecy. This is a form of social engineering. When a self-image of inferiority and/or subordination has genuinely been internalized by a group, whether women, or colonized tribes-people, they share the same standards and perceptions of the power base; they include, and are included in, its views. Yet they are forever marginalized, and therefore are excluded from the real centre of power. The creation of a victim mentality is necessary in order to persuade a group of people that it legitimately must suffer, and do so with docility, for that is its prescribed *Place*. The sufferings are 'deserved'.

4.2.2 Horizontal Hostility

A consequence of 'victim mentality' is the development of a contempt for the self and for those who are like the self in relation to the master class. This is what Florynce Kennedy has described as *HORIZONTAL HOSTILITY*.⁴⁵ It leads to hatred, competition, and denial of others who share the social Place.

It is a *pathetic* strategy used by those who have deeply internalized their roles as victims. They believe (and it may be true) that they will never be *included* by worth alone. Their strategy is, then to *exclude* others in their class/caste by derogating them, by fierce competition and sometimes by using unscrupulous methods.

Those who are guilty of horizontal hostility are eminently co-optable because of their contempt for their own *place*. Encouraging horizontal hostility is an effective way to weaken the opposition without giving up any power. The *Capos* of the concentration camps, the token women and blacks in patriarchal administrations who are there because of their derisive remarks about their sisters and brothers, are useful propaganda tools.

In South Africa, the issue of horizontal hostility is as much at work as anywhere else. Why should a community which invented apartheid embrace ideologies of 'mutuality' and 'oneness'? Ackermann writes that 'for those who have perfected the human system of separateness, feminism is no welcome prospect. It is therefore not surprising that many white South Africans who support apartheid and enjoy its "fruits", resist a feminist liberation perspective which advocates equality and togetherness'.⁴⁶

The problem with co-option is that the only thing one shares is responsibility, not power. The co-opted person is blamed for what goes wrong, and is therefore at pains to prevent an uprising in the *excluded* ranks. Co-optees carry the blame for

dominated class; they are almost always products of horizontal hostility, in that they distance themselves from the collective out of which they have climbed, justifying their own behaviour as 'different' and 'responsible', thereby ensuring that the social myth of the unreliability and irresponsibility of those whom they claim to represent is further entrenched.

The real question is: are co-optees capable of making decisions which cannot be tampered with? Are they able to initiate, and carry through that initiative without interference? Or will they end up going 'cap in hand' to the master class in order to transform their actions into Acts?

On the other hand, is it realistic to believe that no improvement in the place of people is worth having, unless it is a radical improvement? Is it charitable, let alone ethical, to take the high moral ground and condemn someone who has consciously grovelled in order to lessen hardship and humiliation of others? Such people have historically been called martyrs.

Daly advocates strict separatism, and suggests that any attempt to participate in society as it is structured at present, is not only doomed to failure but a sell-out. The problem with this approach is that one is left with the uneasy suspicion that this position condemns all men as irredeemably corrupt and evil, and that there is no way in which society can be transformed (as opposed to reformed), with their assistance. Other feminists, Ruether among them, believe that the struggle will be doomed, let alone discredited, without the pledged commitment of men.

The point is that oppression does not 'belong' to a single group, not even the oppressed. It is an obvious fact, and one which society ignores, that the dominator always belongs to the dominated. Says French, the dominator 'must spend his life devising controls, silencing mechanisms, and motivations to keep the dominated in

line, that he is never free from the demand of the dark murmuring oppressed mass he controls'.⁴⁷

4.3 Control by Complicity

Great value is placed on history in the sense that it provides the knowledge for future generations in a manner which they will understand to be the truth. The Greek word for truth, *ALETHIA*, means 'that which is not forgotten'. History is a 'chart' of power, or the loss of it and, in truth, histories are monuments to the betrayal and loss of the power of women.

The combination of victim mentality and horizontal hostility is potent and has been used by the 'Myth Masters' to control large majorities of people. Along with the attitude that the oppressed class is somehow generically 'useless and bad', the educational and economic deprivation it suffers often leads to behaviour which seems to support this image; it becomes a self-perpetuating mechanism. There are few role-models from this class for people to use as inspiration, and even those who exist are treated as 'exceptions to the rule'. The impression is created that unless the person is almost superhumanly gifted, their (lower) *place* is ordained. Not infrequently, too, those who have 'succeeded' have done so at the cost of rejecting their own class/caste.

Steve Biko was moved to observe that 'as long as blacks are suffering from inferiority complex as a result of 300 years of deliberate denigration and derision, they will be useless as co-architects of a normal society'.⁴⁸ He added to that comment two years later, in 1972, when he said that the rise of Black Consciousness 'shifts the emphasis from petty sins to major sins in a society, thereby ceasing to teach the people to "suffer peacefully"'.⁴⁹ It is this shift of mind-set which is sought by feminists.

Has the case for victim mentality been overstated? In 1946, just after WWII during which time women had worked in industry and the open marketplace as never before, over a quarter of the women responding in a poll taken in the US revealed that they wished they had been born men.⁵⁰ Perhaps a taste of freedom and economic independence, if not wealth, had given them insight into the way in which society places and controls them.

4.3.1 Historical Hostility

Although women have experienced as much history as men, their history has not been considered worth recording. Not only are women *not* just part of the male story. Their history has actually been suppressed.

Using fragments of surviving historical evidence, we see that women have been, and are, strong, influential and active. The 'conspiracy of silence' surrounding them has required skilful and determined control. For example, a widely-used text in the US manages to discuss the Montgomery bus system boycott without mentioning Rosa Parks.⁵¹ In 1982, the history department of the University of California at Berkeley refused to permit a course on 'Women in American Politics', claiming that women had been active for only a few periods, and that their work did not engage 'major themes and developments in the United States'.⁵²

A dig was made at this type of attitude by the Wall Street Journal. In reporting a remark made by a member of the US congress that "Every man on this subcommittee is for public works", the Journal added a comment: 'There are two women on the subcommittee, and they are for public works too'.⁵³

HISTORICAL HOSTILITY plays a major part in the control of a suppressed class. It disabuses them of their belief that they have historical rights and legitimacy,

or achievement. If knowledge is power, then suppression of history dismembers that power. For the writer Memmi, the most serious blow suffered by oppressed people is "being removed from history and from the community".⁵⁴

In the face of this silence by complicity, it is not surprising that, until recently, the question 'Where have women been?' has not seriously been asked. The assumption is that there is no interesting answer. But for the past two decades, feminist historians, men as well as women, have been engaged in a task not unlike that of the Humanists of the Renaissance. They have toiled through libraries and documents in their quest to reconstruct a more accurate history of the past. This work has been important to theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who believes that a 'postbiblical feminist stance ... too quickly concedes that women have no authentic history within biblical religion and too easily relinquishes women's feminist biblical heritage'.⁵⁵ Her aim is a discipleship of equals; and she holds that an a-historical or anti-historical stance which deprives people is oppressive.

In support she draws heavily on the theme of artist Judy Chicago whose eloquent statement in her exhibition 'The Dinner Party' (1979) was: 'All the institutions of our culture tell us through words, deeds, and, even worse, silence, that we are insignificant. But our heritage is our power'.^{56*} The underlined words have become an unofficial rallying-call for many feminists. It is reminiscent of Biko's call to 'rewrite our history and describe in it the heroes that formed the core of resistance to the white invaders'.⁵⁷

The disposition to obliterate history leaves open the control of legitimating and standardizing societal and religious demands from a single perspective. And what has been the result? Aristotle: 'Whenever possible and so far as possible, the male is separate from the female, since he is something better and more divine ... We should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one

which occurs in the ordinary course of nature'.⁵⁸ This is the man students have been taught to revere as the epitome of Greek knowledge, and whose work profoundly affected the Medieval universities, ancestors of our own.

He was not alone. Cato observed in the second century BCE that women must be *strictly controlled* or they would rise up and dominate men. Tertullian put women firmly in their place. 'You are the Devil's gateway ... you destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die'.⁵⁹ His attitude toward women was influential in the early Church, and approximately shared by the men who shaped the Christian Code, Creed and Church.

Thomas Aquinas argued that women should be subject to men because 'in man the discretion of reason predominates'.⁶⁰ Christian theologians have used this to justify confining women to the condition of moral imbecility. Inconsistently, women have been blamed for most of the evil in the world, while at the same time denied the full capacity for moral responsibility. This in spite of the belief that diminished responsibility is a mitigating circumstance.

Martin Luther's remark that God created Adam lord over all living creatures but Eve spoiled it all, has been seen by women theologians as a typical one.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, insists that women should be subject to their husbands. Karl Barth, who was such a courageous defender of human rights in the face of Nazi oppression, could not shake himself free from his conservatism on the subject of women. He confirmed that woman is ontologically subordinate to man as her 'head'. 'What other choice has she, seeing she can be nothing at all apart from this sequence and her place in it? And why should she desire anything else?'⁶¹ He points out that man, as well as woman, is

also sub-ordinate to the 'order' which God has created. Yet the feminist is quick to see that this 'order' emphasizes all that she fears. Apart from anything else, it displays a stunning ignorance of prehistory by presuming that this 'order' is a universal truth.

At no time in human history have all women passively agreed (disobeying, often, to their cost). In 1739, 'Sophia' declared that 'so bold a tenent as that of male superiority ought to have better proofs to support it than the bare word of males.'



The question, 'Where have women been?' is one which has peculiar poignancy for those who finally ask it. Seldom has there been a better example of the importance of asking the right questions. Joan Ohanneson wonders 'how different my self-image as a Christian woman would have been, if the stories of these (historical) women had been told to me when I needed them. I needed to know how vital women were to Jesus in his ministry; how he chose to reveal his identity to the Samaritan woman, rather than to the apostles, by telling her of his mission as the Messiah; how he appeared to women first with the news, the reality of his resurrection, the central truth of Christianity'.⁶² Instead, she recalls that she never questioned the 'scanty legacy' of women's place in the church over twenty centuries. Now she asks, not only on behalf of her daughters, why is this truth, this dignity, not proclaimed from the pulpits?

When she remembers the support and courage of women who surrounded Jesus in his personal life, she is empowered. 'When I feel diminished and humiliated by others, I need to remember that he never would have said : "You can't trust a

woman" because women are under suspicion of not keeping confidences. Nor would Jesus have referred to women as "dumb blondes"'.⁶³ She recalls listening, Easter after Easter, to the words "But because they were women, no-one believed them" (Luke 24:11), and wonders how much that contributed to her self-definition as a woman in the church.

The history of women's place in religion is impressive, if overlooked. In the twelfth century, women were not only convoked and presided at church synods but also emerged as the main leaders in discussions and as outstanding promoters of liturgical reform. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, the abbesses of Quedlinburg and Gandersheim, the chief houses in Germany, were able under Otto I to strike their own coins bearing their portraits.⁶⁴ The Abbess of Quedlinburg had both a seat and a vote on the Imperial Diet, while the English abbesses were called to Parliament during the twelfth century. Ohanneson reminds us that when 'women sit separated on the other side of the altar, they should remember that it was not always so, that abbesses were once ordained, replete with the symbols of episcopal office. They received and wore the mitre, crozier, ring, stole, alb, gloves and pectoral cross'.⁶⁵

St Teresa of Avila, with St Catherine of Siena, was granted the official title of Doctor of the Church. And yet her value as a woman was still diminished. 'That woman', sighed her bishop 'should have been a man'.⁶⁶

Now that feminists have asked where women were, they also need to ask why the world is not hearing about them? All the efforts, and outright abolitions, of church historians could not snuff out their illustrious contribution. Historian Joan Morris writes that women's leadership in the church, once enjoyed by all, is today 'hidden history, hardly believed and not understood'.⁶⁷ In spite of all this,

women's history is being recovered and resurrected, although resistance to it is strong.

Not content with this, feminist theologians have also felt the need to expose how anti-Christ the sexist argument is. The focus of work by Fiorenza and Russell, among others, has been to demonstrate that *Jesus was the proto-feminist*. He loved his followers, women and men, equally. He not only taught women, but acknowledged their strength and support. Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus make a single derogatory or diminishing statement about women. Yet his example was not followed.

Female leadership among the Gnostics was vilified by Christians. Tertullian captured this in his outcry: 'How bold these heretical women are! They have no modesty; they are bold enough to teach, to argue, to perform exorcisms, to undertake cares, and maybe even to baptize!'⁶⁸

The dualistic beliefs held by the many sects which made up Gnosticism rejected the world as evil. This includes the fleshly body, and tainted casing which, however, houses a heavenly spirit (pneuma) of holy origins. The aim of these sects was, through *gnosis*, to reunite human destiny with its sacred source. The strategy of how to achieve this could vary from extreme asceticism to libertinism but in general, Gnostics were more comfortable with the male/female duality of the sacred and human spirit, and there are many references in Gnostic literature to the female aspects of divinity.

The rather confused position of women among the Gnostics is voiced on the one hand, in the Gospel of Thomas, who has Jesus say: 'Lo, I shall lead her, and make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven'

(Logion 114). Thomas probably thought he was doing women a favour, vindicating their inclusion in redemption. If so, it is a pity it is voiced in such an unambiguously sexist way. One should not expect *not* to find strong traces of sexism in the Gnostic writings; they were living in an extremely patriarchal era. On the other hand, the **Gospel of Mary** appears to have confronted that sexism in a very direct way.

The reproof of Mary by Peter and Andrew, in **The Gospel of Mary**, suggests that the writer was aware that the church fathers did not share the high estimation of women's abilities held by his sect, and may have been an attempt to put this right. This Gnostic extension of women's place may well have been among its attractions for them.

The Gospel of Mary was written by an unidentified Coptic sect, probably in the second century.⁶⁹ In it, the disciples are perplexed about a future program after the risen Christ has departed. Mary Magdalene (a favourite character in Gnostic literature) comforts them, and reveals the teachings of Jesus given to her. Some of the male disciples, especially Peter, refuse to accept the notion that Jesus gave such revelations to a woman, rather than to 'one of them'.

Andrew said to his colleagues, 'say what you think concerning what she said. For I do not believe that the Saviour said this'. Peter also opposed her, remarking 'Did He then speak secretly with a woman in preference to us, and not openly? Are we to turn back and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?' Levi answered and said to Peter, 'You are always irate. Now I see that you are contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Saviour made her worthy, who are you to reject her? Surely the Saviour knew her very well. For this reason he loved her more than us. And we should rather be ashamed'.⁷⁰ After Levi's intervention, all the disciples agreed to accept Mary's revelations, and they commenced on their task.

This exchange is examined here in some detail, as it is rich in material for the feminist. Firstly, there is a lack of surprise at the response by Peter and Andrew to Mary's revelation. Peter's chief concern is androcentric, not spiritual. Could Jesus *really* have preferred a mere woman to them, his male followers? Would he, should he, have entrusted a female with his special mission for the ministry? Peter's outburst is the early echo of male chauvinism in the church. The unthinkable has happened. The 'old boys' network has been debunked.

Secondly, the fact that the exchange was carefully recorded illustrates an urgent need to legitimize the teachings and ministries of women. Jesus himself was the authority, and it seems that only someone as highly placed as he was able to push it through. By choosing to reveal himself and his message to Mary, he was rejecting the traditional, secondary role women played in his Jewish background. This is not a random act by Jesus, but a radical one, and a transforming one. The new order which he has brought about includes the authority of women, and their place in the forefront of the mission.

Thirdly, Peter's attack on Mary failed, and was a warning to those who tried to repeat it. By consensus, the disciples agreed that Mary's revelation was genuine. They agreed to live and work in equality, as Jesus by example had decreed. It would be heresy to deviate from this position.

By an ironic twist of fate, the very charge of heresy came to be laid at the door of Gnostics by, not inappropriated nor without coincidence, the Church Fathers. If they had accepted the Gospel of Mary then would, *de facto*, have had to accept the authority of women. This, given their bilious attitude, was out of the question. The Gospel of Mary was one of several writings which empowered women, and which were suppressed by the male editors of the Christian Canon.

The very way in which language is structured can cause violence. 'Women are silenced/split by the babble of grammatical usage ... by the very pronouns we are trained to use to designate our Selves',⁷³ writes Daly. An example is the use of the pronoun 'she', introduced into Middle English as a late development. This resulted in claims that 'he' is generic, and includes women, while 'she' refers only to females. The scope of maleness was thereby extended to include all humanity, while femaleness was restricted. This, suggests Julia Stanley and Susan Robbins, results in the speaker who has internalized such a language, unconsciously internalizing such a social system, that of the all-embracing 'male story'. So the institution of language perpetuates the cultural and social assumptions, and continues to support the patriarchal power structure.⁷⁴

There is a current aversion to the use of 'woman' in compounds like chairwoman and spokeswoman. This cannot be attributed to lack of precedence; for example, gentleman/gentlewoman.

Miller and Swift have proposed⁷⁵ that 'chairwoman' sounds less important, and 'spokeswoman' less authoritative, than their masculine-gender counterparts. This is a classic case of *horizontal hostility*. It explains why some women who achieve positions of leadership still prefer to use the term 'chairman', one already invested with prestige and power by generations of male incumbents. They are co-opted into a system which keeps terms like alderman, congressman, and houseman 'official', and therefore masculine-orientated. The terms are loaded with centuries of discriminatory practice, in which women were not allowed to hold the positions those terms describe. It is precisely for the reason that they are now held by people of either sex (though not in equal numbers), that they need to be changed, to reflect an egalitarian, rather than elite social system.

Those who accuse such arguments of being trivial, suggest that institutional violence is not real, and that other issues are 'more important'. But who decides what is important? Why should there be a hierarchy of importance on the issues of oppression and deprivation? Trivialising such concerns is not only in the worst possible taste, it also reflects a paternal mindset cast in concrete.

The problem of patriarchal language, and the use of male symbols, is the theme of the next chapter.

5. Resistance: Giving Voice

"The Church's credibility is at stake when it calls for liberation and democracy in society and yet continues to practice domination and discrimination within its own domain".

— Denise Ackermann⁷⁶

The argument so far has been that the collective which controls the ethics and institutions of society is the broker of power, as well as the legitimation, or authority, of that power. Power is used to control those who are not part of the master class, and to keep them in place. In the case of the oppression of women, the institutions of religion have both reflected patriarchal domination, and supported it. Some feminist theologians, such as Daly, have regarded their society as so irrevocably androcentric as to effectively exclude women from power forever.

Others, such as Rosemary Ruether, have advocated an *exodus*: a rebellion against the bondage of male definition and use. It is not a movement in the direction of separatism, however, but rather toward 'the possibility of cohumanity for the first time'.⁷⁷

In the latter instance, the problem, which is that of transforming society, raises the related issue of resistance. When an entire caste is denied access to real power, then resistance tends to be piecemeal and therefore more vulnerable. One of the central dangers involved is that any failure to gain ground can result not only in setbacks, but in far tougher opposition next time round. 'Women, serfs and slaves are inevitably pinned only weakly into the central structure of their society. A small setback can harm them more irrevocably than those whose more complex links give them a better chance of recovery', writes Douglas.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, the strategies of coercion and co-option have not succeeded in silencing women. Tribute must be paid to those who have fought oppression and not remained submissive. In South Africa, the anti-Pass campaigns of the 50's and 60's, the formation and actions of such organisations as FEDSAW (Federation of S A Women), the Black Sash, Women for Peace and the United Women's Congress, among others, are staffed by women about whom courage has a special significance in the face of the double oppression of racism and sexism.

Women can recover their lost dignity, assert feminists, only by decisive action. They need to affirm their own identity, and *give voice* to their experiences. This is perhaps the only point of strategy on which all feminists, including those working in the field of religion, agree. To be a feminist is to be active in the world. No one else is going to change the world for them. This may sound almost too basic to need stating. Yet for women who have been socialised into believing that the world will be shaped *for* them, and not *by* them, who have been brought up to believe that men are 'responsible' for their wellbeing, it is a giant leap.

'Feminist theology starts with the naming of women's experience. The act of naming is public, exposing the evil of patriarchal structures to the world. This immediately makes it a political act', writes Ackermann.⁷⁹ ^{She concludes that}
 ^ this can include

recounting women's stories to each other (resisting historical hostility), by listening one to the other and by manifesting sincere respect for the humanity of the other in the exchange (resisting horizontal hostility).⁴ Consciousness-raising is a subversive activity because it is not satisfied with the mere subjective exorcising of hurt and twisted images. It seeks to liberate and restore, by examining the social praxis.⁴

Such consciousness-raising is not painless. It makes women aware of themselves as strangers, as outsiders, as alienated people, not as daughters who belong to a marvelous destiny. She can no longer belong to an androcentric society without consenting to her own lobotomy. She stands on the dangerous edge of exclusion. Her need for support is all the greater, not just because of the immediate dangers of coercion, but because of the humiliation of ridicule.

The real heart of darkness for many conscientized women is knowing that in their lifetimes, they will never participate in a world which adequately reflects who women are, and which endorses the aspiring and desiring of women as women, and *not as men*. This means exclusion from the legitimation of femaleness, that place where women are *because* they are women, and therefore a place where men have never been or acknowledged. It means that women who are out of place never enjoy the comfort of inclusion as a given right, and even further, that they need always to be in a state of mobilization. Women so placed are permanently at war.



Chapter Two:

Man Made Language

1. Language: The Semantics of Sex

The issues of *power, place* and *control* of women were discussed in Chapter One in the broader context of society. There are more specific instances which describe how those issues operate on a smaller scale; if not quite micro-cosmic, they do at least provide a way of measuring such instances. **Language** is one of the more important.

We are all aware in some part of our minds, that language is a human construct even though, as we grow up, it appears to be just 'there', with an integrity and a set of rules all its own. Language is the greatest and most powerful institution we have; certainly it is the most far-reaching, all-embracing human device.

The allegation that *man made language* is therefore a sober one. It implies that men, and not women, participated in the formation and legitimation of naming the world, and, by naming it, described the boundaries of what they were seeing, and how things were placed in that vision. There is no suggestion that women cannot, or did not, initiate naming processes; rather, that in the process of codifying the language, women's words and the naming of their experiences were left out as men conferred with men and validated their own images and experiences.

There is an underlying implication that this was, and is, a *deliberate* effort to control the world. Although this is difficult to prove, this chapter intends to explore the possibilities of such an allegation, as well as the consequences of any such action, intended or accidental.

In order to do so, it is necessary to recognise that language is not simply a group of descriptive words, nor is it neutral. It is not merely a vehicle which carries ideas, it is *the* programme for mental activity. In this context, say Spender, it is nothing short of ludicrous to conceive of human beings as capable of grasping things as they 'really are', of being impartial recorders of their world. For they themselves, or some of them, have created or constructed that world and they have reflected themselves within it.¹

The objects and events of the world do not present themselves to us ready classified, points out James Britton.² 'The categories into which they are divided are the categories into which we divide them'. Human beings cannot impartially describe the universe, because in order to describe it, they must first have a classification system. The problem is that once they have that, once they have a language, they can only see certain arbitrary things.

Fundamental to the theory of language is that it is not neutral, not value free. We ourselves are part of that pattern. This is because of an obvious, if often-ignored, fact: **the brain cannot see or hear**. All experience is interpreted, filtered through a highly selective programme of collecting, rejecting and calculating. The programme for encoding that is, to a large extent, set up by the language we possess. What we see in the world depends in part on the principles we have encoded in our language: 'Each of us has to learn to see ... The information that we receive through our senses from the material world around us has to be interpreted accord-

ing to certain human rules, before that we ordinarily call "reality", forms', writes Williams.³ In truth, there is no such thing as objectivity.

Far from being neutral, language is a powerful instrument which reflects human attitudes. The very way in which the same word is used can influence human perception. An instance of this is the word: 'professional'. The way in which it is used can give at least two radically different interpretations of the same event. Robin Lakoff has noted that whereas metaphors and labels are more likely to have a wide frame of reference when applied to men, the same metaphors and labels are likely to narrow and assume sexual connotations where applied to women.⁴ 'He's a professional' is assumed to mean that his attitude to his deeds, whether business or golf, is serious and dedicated. 'She's a professional' implies that she works as a prostitute. Lakoff's extensive documentation shows that when the sex changes, so too does the meaning, indicating the *sex dimension of semantics*. This has the effect of placing women in separate categories to men.

In commenting on the social significance of language structure, Richard Gilman said that 'The nature of most languages tells us more about the hierarchical structure of male-female relationships than all the physical horror stories that could be compiled'.⁵ He continues that the *idea* of masculine superiority is perennial, institutional and rooted at the deepest level of our historical experience. This is clearly reflected in the way in which our language employs the words 'man' and 'mankind'.

The semantics of sex not only reflects the culture which uses words highly charged with emotion, taboo or distaste; it teaches and perpetuates the attitudes which created them, writes Muriel Schulz.⁶ Like Schulz, Douglas believes that speech forms, along with ritual forms, are transmitters of culture; speech systems can transform the experience of speakers.⁷ She draws on the work of Basil Bernstein,

whose special concern was to investigate both the subtlety and the power of the controlling influence of language on culture. 'It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group ... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.'⁸ Douglas adds that utterances therefore 'have a double purpose: they convey information, yes, but they also express the social structure, embellish and reinforce it.'⁹

Language is a sort of 'second skin', enclosing and containing our held perceptions and presumptions of the exterior world. It is the membrane between our minds and our capacity for experiencing. And, like other things human, it is sexually defined.

2. Power

Humans have always accepted that language is a powerful tool. The belief, however, that language can be an instrument of oppression is a relatively new one, though sociolinguists have worked in this field for some decades. There is only recent understanding of language as verbal symbol: a mirror reflection of how societies sees, and names, the world in which it lives.

2.1 Man Made Language

That the English language has literally been *man made* and that it is still under male control is the substance of Dale Spender's work. After exhaustive research, Spender contends that the 'monopoly over language is one of the means by

which males have ensured their own primacy, and consequently have ensured the invisibility of "other" nature of females, and this primacy is perpetuated while women continue to use, unchanged, the language which we have inherited'.¹⁰

An argument has even been made by male linguists for the 'ownership' of language. Some have been quite explicit in their assertion that the language (or parts of it) *belong* to males. Stuart Flexner studied the use of vernacular words coined by men and concluded that it was *males* who were the makers and innovators of language.¹¹ As he made no attempt to study women, there was little likelihood of his being challenged.

Brian Foster talked about women 'stealing' the names of men's clothing.¹² As one can only steal from an owner, this was a revealing comment.

Male bias in language is so pronounced that it is quite logical to think of it as male-owned. A patriarchal society is based on the belief that the male is the superior sex and many of the social institutions and practices are arranged to reflect this belief; a patriarchal society is organised so that the belief in male supremacy 'comes true', in much the same way as a colonized society vindicates the worth of the colonizers. Society simply sees it as sensible to provide those who are superior and more worthy with more resources. In this way, the system is perpetuated. Because they are in a position of power, and control the resources, it is not surprising that their views and values should be invested with authority. It is not surprising either, that views and values which do not support the patriarchy are dismissed by them as invalid, even though women know that the male view of the world, and his value system, is only partial.

As males have primarily controlled the production of cultural forms and images, it would be surprising if language was an exception. It is precisely this *ap-*

appropriation of language which needs to be exposed, along with a reminder that it is in the interests of male supremacist society to promote prejudice in support of their appropriation.

Men believe that only what men say, as well as do, is significant. They listen to each other, and pay attention to historical and contemporary records of what men have said and done. The circle is enclosed and includes men, and excludes women, except when they are verbally 'lumped in' like men. On the other hand, women have been locked out of language formation and validation, and therefore have no adequate means of expressing themselves and their own experiences. There is a 'circle effect'. Few have asked whether sexism in language is a result of women's exclusion from the production of cultural forms.

Not only women, but all of society suffers, because the 'circle effect' produces a one-sided picture of the world. Men, in fact, have a more limited view of the world than women, who have to take into account the 'official' view, as well as their own, unrecognized view, usually described as unfathomable, mystifying, unintelligible.

This form of control produces a skewed world for women. As language does not take into account their point of view, the words used to describe it are often inaccurate. Take the sexual term, 'penetration'. This describes what a man does. Barbara Mehrhof has suggested that if women were in control of sex and the language, the same sexual act could well be called 'enclosure'.¹³

The fear of rape is a fundamental one among women, yet it is a remarkably innocuous term, and not listed among the 'taboo' words. We have no 'four-letter word' to describe the vicious sexual act of taking a woman by force.

2.2 'Man': The Pseudo-generic

Nowhere is the argument about the sexual semantics of language more heated than over the use of the term 'man', and its derivatives, as a generic. In spite of protestations that 'man' and 'he' include women, slips constantly give the real situation away.

Alma Graham, whose research is in this area, says that usage reveals quite the opposite: 'In practice, the sexist assumption that "man" is a species of males becomes the fact. Erich Fromm seemed to think so when he wrote that man's "vital interests" were "life, food, access to females, etc" '. Loren Eiseley implied it when he wrote of 'man' that "his back aches, he ruptures easily, his women have difficulties in childbirth". If these writers had been using 'man' in the sense of the human species, rather than males, they would have written that "man's vital interests are life, food and access to the opposite sex", and that "man suffers backaches, ruptures easily and has difficulties in giving birth".¹⁴

It is precisely because the phrase 'man has difficulties in giving birth' strikes us as odd, that we are able to see the male imagery which the use of 'man' conjures up. That is why people think it odd to talk about God as 'her', or our communal ancestor as 'she'. If 'man' *really* encompassed female imagery, there would be no clash of images.

This clash of images appears all over. When we say that 'man makes wars' and 'man plays rugby', it does not actually exclude women, even though it strains the imagination. But when we continue, 'man occasionally suffers cracked nipples when feeding his young', it begs credibility. In the same vein, to suggest that women are included 'generically' in the phrase 'man is the only primate that commits rape', is to deny the female half of human experience. Such examples are frequently dismissed as 'jokes'. If women condone this, then the 'joke' is on them.

Far from male terms being inclusive, there is much evidence to suggest that when the term 'man' is used, people think 'male'. Allen Nilsen found that young children thought that 'man' meant male people in sentences such as 'man needs food'.¹⁵ Linda Harrison recorded that science students thought male when discussing the evolution of 'man'. Schneider and Hacker found that college students also thought male when confronted with such titles as 'Political Man' and 'Urban Man'.¹⁶ It should be unsurprising that the use of the symbol 'man' is accompanied by the image of the male in our patriarchal society.

If man really was a genuine generic, then there would be no hesitation in saying that 'man, being a mammal, breastfeeds his young', or in referring to the systematic studies of the uterus in 'rats, dogs and man'. The point is that *man is a pseudo-generic*. It is the product of male control, and historical hostility, and has been used to place women firmly within the ambit of the male-ordered world.

When Mary Daly writes, 'When God is male, the male is god', it indicates also the scope of the huge social canvas she has painted. Religious educators continue to insist, in the teeth of the evidence, that to use literal images in teaching children about religious faith does not limit a child's ability to reach a more mature understanding. But a child would have to be a religious prodigy not to visualize some kind of human male figure out of all the masculine pronouns and the imagery of father, lord and king used to describe the deity.

This is pertinently illustrated in a small book called *Children's letters to God*. Sylvia writes " 'Dear God, Are boys better than girls? I know you are one, but try to be fair'.¹⁷

Insistence of the use of male-biased language sometimes reaches ludicrous levels; a good indication, incidentally, of how important continued control of lan-

guage is to the 'ordering' of society. The term 'fisherman' has been hotly defended on the grounds of its 'long and proud history dating back thousands of years'. In fact, fisherman entered the English language only in the sixteenth century, whereas 'fisher' was used in the ninth century to mean 'a person who fishes' and appears many times in the King H James Version of the Bible.¹⁸

It is conveniently forgotten, too, that in the realm of public and professional life the term 'man' meant precisely that: males only. When John Adams used the word 'man' in the American Constitution, he meant men. Women were neither decision-makers, nor legislators, nor voters. In May 1776, in response to a call from his wife, Abigail, for legal rights for women, he replied: 'We know better than to repeal our masculine systems'.¹⁹

The challenge to include women in the Constitution was little short of heroic. Carrie Chapman Catt, an initiator of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, wrote after the Amendment for Woman Suffrage had finally been ratified by Congress (1918):

'To get the word "male" in effect out of the Constitution cost the women of the country 52 years of pauseless campaign ... During that time they were forced to conduct 56 campaigns of referenda to male voters; 480 campaigns to get Legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters; 47 campaigns to get State constitutions; 277 campaigns to get State party conventions to include women suffrage planks; 30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt woman suffrage planks in party platforms, and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses'.

From the beginning of the battle in 1848, woman suffrage took 72 years to be achieved. Remarks French, it may take the same amount of time for women to get inserted into the Constitution a statement declaring them equal to men.²⁰

The consequence of all this is that women are **excluded**; they become invisible. What standard English usage says about males is that they are *the* species. What is said about females is that they are a subspecies, writes Swift.²¹ We are told that 'she' represents a woman, but 'he' represents mankind. The problem is that when 'she' linguistically enters mankind, 'she' is lost in 'he'. For some reason, women are not meant to mind this. Yet, in studies done by Miller and Swift, when *men* were linguistically excluded from references 'they protested vigorously'. As was expected, they invoked the argument invented and used by their forefathers, that it was grammatically incorrect to leave men out.²² This leads to the kind of contortion whereby a group can be referred to in the masculine even if it consists of thirty women and one man.

There is also a subtler, underside of the linguistic debate. When people can be identified with the positive, male imagery, they choose to do so, over negative, female imagery (see Chapter One — 'Horizontal Hostility'). The dice is loaded against women. Almost every protest they register is countered by referring to the authority of *man made* rules.

2.3 Man Made Rules: Historical Hostility

The common assertion, '*everyone knows that "man" includes everybody*' is soaked in ignorance. It is useful to chart just how thin the basis for that sweeping assumption is.

The practice of using the term 'man' to embrace women too, was practically unknown before the fifteenth century. In Old English, the terms for 'adult male person' and 'adult female person' were 'waepman' and 'wifman' respectively. From the latter we derived the word 'wife'. As most generalisations about people were made by men describing men, eventually the prefix 'waep' was dropped, and

the suffix 'man' was used to describe 'everybody', a purpose for which it had not originally been used. The ambiguity remained until the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, the groundwork for the forthcoming coup d'état was being laid. In 1746, John Kirkby devised his '**Eighty Grammatical Rules**', a product of his own imagination. Rule number Twenty-One stated that the 'male gender was more comprehensive' than the female.²³ Another self-styled grammarian, Joshua Poole, bolstered this view with 'It is not only natural that the male should take pride of place, it is also proper because the male gender is the worthier gender'.²⁴ He could offer no evidence for this claim, but his male colleagues do not seem to have questioned it.

Even then, usage was not legitimated until the 1859 Act of Parliament in England, which insisted that 'he' stood for 'she'. As there were no female parliamentarians, there was no one to visibly complain. Although this Act was officially a *grammatical* edict, that fact was often conveniently ignored. In 1879 it was used to support a decision by the Massachusetts Medical Society to refuse to admit female physicians on the grounds that the society's by-laws described membership using the pronoun 'he'. Society had come full circle.

Sexist language was devised by men, and legitimated by men. When people defend it as innocuous and 'correct', they are appealing merely to the authority of men who have gone before.

Arguments that a certain style and use of language is 'correct' in any case belies the fact the one cannot separate the language as a system from the people using it, and their experiences. It is worth noting that only ten to fifteen years ago, there was a widespread belief that there was something 'wrong' with the language of blacks, and of the working class. Explanations have shifted so that there is now

general consensus that the 'deficiency' lies not with blacks, or the working class, but in society. When language becomes a code which is alien, when it consistently denies and deprives a collective, it cannot be described as 'correct'. Spender writes that 'correct English is nothing more than the blatant legitimation of the white middle-class code'.²⁵

3. Place

It is not difficult to draw the distinction between language and the place of women. It is not women who have appropriated language, devised its parameters, legislated its form, and excluded half the human species from its usage. To the largest possible degree, women are either invisible or derogated.

3.1 The Invisible Women: 'Minus Males'

Since males are the standard of comparison for the entire species, females are defined traditionally as 'non males', or, to use Geoffrey Leech's definition, the world can be divided into *male and minus male*. The term *minus male* has been justified on the grounds of simplicity, because almost all animate nouns in English are masculine.²⁶ When the word is specifically NOT meant to include men, it is specifically so marked. Otherwise all unmarked forms include men; thus men occupy all the positive space in the language. Negative space is occupied by women, as '*minus males*', thus identifying her as '*other*'.

It is difficult to suggest that this has all been 'accidental', given evidence to the contrary. '*Minus male*' is the price women have had to pay for security. For women, economic survival within a job, a marriage, in prostitution and all analogous occupations depends directly on 'keeping a civil tongue in her head'. Muteness and invisibility suit male purpose; they establish the primacy of the male.

Visible women serve to challenge the authenticity of a worldview in which women are silent and docile.

3.2 Witch/Bitch: Women Out of Place

Women who insist on being heard, who 'take the floor', are defined by society, including other women, as 'out of place'. If the primary ethic for women is obedience, then women who unsettle the neat way in which the world works are guilty of dissonance and, literally, 'disruptive' behaviour.

'It is no coincidence', writes Spender,²⁷ 'that language encompasses many meanings — for which there is no male equivalent — which are designed to quickly put us in our place: embittered, hysterical, nagging or shrill, spinsterish, strident. These are precisely the responses which we can expect under patriarchy and which we must be prepared to dispute'.

The allegation that the English language is sexist insofar as it relegates women to a secondary and inferior place in society is met by the simplest exercises. All that is needed, for example, is a list of terms which place women in a subordinate position. Julia Stanley's research showed that not only are there more words for males, but that there are more positive ones. Also, many of the words for women had sexual overtones and, despite the fact that there were more words for men, there were 220 words for a sexually promiscuous female and only 20 for a sexually promiscuous male.²⁸ This indicates that language, as a system, embodies sexual inequality and that it is not women who enjoy the advantage.

Why, exactly, are women so linguistically abused? As 'minus males', women are defined as 'other'. As such, it is easier to be used as scapegoats, to be responsible for that which goes wrong, as their very place is outside the norm.

In Chapter One it was asserted that the patriarchy seeks to order and control the environment; as 'the image of God', they are ideologically the controllers of chaos. But in order to be in that place, they must be in the 'right' to dominate the world. By definition, men are precluded from being wrong, from being in wrong place. The 'other', the place outside control, is occupied by women, who have been assigned to those areas where things are capricious and inexplicable, where 'things go wrong'. Such a definition has made women the 'carriers' of society for certain murky aspects of total human experience; 'those aspects which remain unsolved', writes Jean Miller.²⁹ *Women have become synonymous with chaos.* By controlling women, the *illusion* of male control over the world remains intact.

As if the chaos of the universe was not enough to bear, women are also presented with a structural conundrum in confronting the male-as-norm syndrome. 'We are damned if we go along with it, and damned if we do not', writes Spender.³⁰ 'When we learn the rules of how to fit into the male world, we authenticate our own "inferiority". If we refuse, we are listed as failures; there is "something wrong" with us. We are abnormal, frigid, hysterical, neurotic, and even bitter and twisted. We are man-haters. Most of all, we lack a sense of humour'. It does not seem to strike people as bizarre that an oppressed group is required to make jokes at their own expense. Women ask to be excused from believing that there is hilarity in a system which had led to brutality, atrocities and economic enslavement, as well as structural and institutional violence.

Women have attempted to counter oppressive language by recapturing such words as 'bitch', 'witch' and 'spinster'. Mary Daly has been prominent among those writers who have redefined such terms. The problem is that the message has reached only a few progressive women and men. Carrying the message further

means 'taking the floor' to an even greater extent, and thereby being even more firmly 'out of place'.

3.3 A Label of Convenience

Women are further placed by language in a way that men are not, by the use of titles. Although all men are referred to as 'Mr', women are divided into married and non-married groups, 'Mrs' and 'Miss'. The reason? This neatly describes the place of women in *relation to men*. As 'Mrs', she has a husband to answer to. As 'Miss', she is 'available' to other men, as she is not 'owned' by a husband. Men do not have a distinguishing term for the married and unmarried male, as they do not see themselves primarily as 'property', nor have they ever been legally considered so — unlike women.

Some of the most heated arguments about the use of language have been about the use of the title 'Ms'. What it does, say feminists, is identify woman in her *own* right. It is not even a new word; secretarial handbooks have listed it since the 1940's. What it does, say men, is limit the amount of information about women; what they *mean*, is that it does not label a woman for the convenience of men, nor does it label those whom men do not want. To be over thirty, and 'Miss Jones', tells men a story.

The real problem is that the term 'Ms' is of no assistance in maintaining the patriarchal order, and even causes problems for men who want more information than they are prepared to give about themselves. The insistence on clinging to 'Mrs' and 'Miss' cannot be legitimized by long usage either, as they are both abbreviations of the social term 'Mistress'. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, 'Mrs' was used by adult women, *whether married or single*, before the given family name. In the late eighteenth century, the social title 'Miss' began to distinguish single

women from married women. In the nineteenth century, even more alarmingly, women who were married were called by their husband's names only, with the prefix of Mrs; eg. Mrs John Brown.

Miller and Swift suggest that the timeous use of such terms to designate marital status was a response to the Industrial Revolution, which disrupted the pattern of small communities where relationships were readily known.³¹ Once women left the home and went into the workforce where she was unknown, she had to be clearly labelled as belonging to someone else.

Nor was it a coincidence that the 1850 Act of Parliament on grammar was passed at a time when the first mass-based women's organisations were struggling for recognition and equality. Up till then, it had not been necessary to legislate about the linguistic primacy of the male.

Why did women not protest? It would have been an understandable reaction, especially when they lost all identity of their own and became 'Mrs John Smith' instead of 'Mistress Jane Jones'. So recent is such usage that George Washington would have been puzzled by a letter addressed to 'Mrs George Washington'. The answer lies in *control*: The patriarchy ensured the co-option of women in return for security. Those who refused were placed beyond the pale; in any case, by all standards of a male society, a woman has 'succeeded' when she marries. Those who refuse to adopt the married title are defined as having failed their main task.

On the other hand, insistence on the use of 'Ms' as a courtesy title is seen as a challenge to patriarchal practice, which may explain the hostility with which such simple request is usually greeted. One versifier wrote:³²

When you call me Miss or Mrs
 You invade my private life;
 For it's not the public's business
 If I am, or was, a wife.

4. Control

4.1 The Politics of Naming

Nowhere are the issues of male control, and language, more clearly linked than in the public arena. For years, women were not permitted to enter this realm; at no time has control been more blatant than when early feminists had to have their speeches read by men. This meant that only men were influential; that is, capable of swaying public opinion and of taking people along with them by means of public discourse.

Sally Gearhart has described this *an act of violence*, alleging that it is no less an assault on someone's existence to make them change their beliefs by oratory than it is by the sword. She sees persuasion as an inherent part of the patriarchal order, where there is a demand for leaders and followers.³³ That this accusation can be levelled at any group of oppressors does not detract from its essential charge that those who are disempowered have few resources with which to resist the powerful mechanisms of the existing order. Also, women have been excluded as a caste, something men have not experienced.

Women who have become forceful public speakers are frequently criticised for being 'too aggressive'. On the other hand, steps to modify public speaking without losing forcefulness, so-called 'assertiveness training', have been rejected by some feminists as operating on the premise that the 'successful speakers' are men, and women need to learn to talk like them. They point out that women will always be judged as women, no matter how they speak. The training of women's vocal

skills should concentrate on communicating real differences as valid, rather than in trying to hide or disguise them.

Women have also begun to rebel at translating their experiences into the male code. Adrienne Rich writes, 'In denying the validity of women's experience ... masculine subjectivity tries to force us to name our truths in an alien language; to dilute them. We are constantly told that the "real" problems, the ones worth working on, are those men have defined and that the problems we need to examine are trivial, unscholarly, nonexistent. We are urged to separate the "personal" from the scholarly or professional'.³⁴ Women who have tried to do just that have found that there is no readily available conceptual space to accommodate them. Even Copernicus, Galileo and Darwin discovered that those who try to introduce meanings for which there is no conceptual space are not always welcomed and accepted.

4.2 Co-option: The Victim is always Wrong

Women who do attempt to encode women's experience, who attempt to develop new linguistic and conceptual space (such as Daly) have been called irrational, emotional and aggressive. This is a convenient put-down, because the argument can be dismissed without paying attention to the content. Most women are familiar with this tactic. Valid complaints are met with counter-complaints about 'moaning' or 'nagging'. In this way the ground is shifted from grievances which can be justified, to 'women's weakness'; in the end, the female is in the wrong, and must adjust.

Co-option of women is attained by the way in which their behaviour is discredited. Trivializing, marginalizing and above all, humiliating, are excellent methods of squeezing the victims back into the system. It is not surprising that there are no male equivalents for the terms chatter, natter, prattle, nag, bitch, whine and,

of course, gossip (except in 'he gossips like an old woman'). Women are not so naive as to believe that men don't engage in these activities. When they do, it is given a more flattering description; men confront problems, they don't nag, bitch or whine. And the few that do are described as hen-pecked.

4.3 Masquerading

The cherished patriarchal belief that women are 'naturally' unaggressive and docile is hard to support when there is so much evidence to the contrary. Yet the illusion, the *masquerade* must be maintained if the male picture of the world is to be validated. The result is that there is frequently a gap between the image and the reality.

The dominant control mechanism here is that of the victim mentality; if there is something wrong with this picture, then there is something wrong with *us*. Women, for example, maintain the pretence of docile femininity for the benefit of males, while being individually aware that it is a masquerade. When faced with the gap between their own experience and the male version of reality, women have reconciled the difference in terms of their own 'deficiency'. The cover stories of so-called normal femininity are never blown. Women can't change car tires, childbirth is never too painful, and all little girls want to be princesses, rather than train drivers.

Take the example of the never-admitted hairiness of females. The feminine counterpart of the male has no facial hair, no hair under arms or on legs, and none on her breasts. Women conforming to this definition of feminine will present themselves to males without a hint of hair. Men can be forgiven for believing that their definition is accurate, as they see no evidence to the contrary. Women who preserve the male illusion cannot claim the same; they know this is a falsehood.

The appeal of the hairless women to men is an interesting one. Some psychologists have suggested that the hairless woman mimics the condition of the naturally hairless child, a being who is vulnerable, easy to control and dominate. As there is limited documentation, this remains speculation.

When women take the risk of exposing the lie, many men are totally unprepared for the results. In describing her experience, one woman revealed how great the gap is: 'I'm a female, and I reckon whatever I am, I'm feminine. I don't have to DO anything to be feminine. It's a shock my husband can't take ... He says he doesn't understand why I wilfully want to be unfeminine — you know, why I won't shave my legs, go to the hairdresser, diet — a whole pile of things I've stopped doing. He thinks I should see a psychiatrist. I think *he* should'.³⁵

There are two social dynamics at work here. A man does not have to do a thing to be 'masculine'. Hair, sweat and all, he is by definition a man. Only men who tamper with the original product are regarded with suspicion; men who wear make-up, pluck their eyebrows and smell fragrant are not regarded as the epitome of the masculine. Women, on the other hand, are not feminine if they appear in the world in a similar '*au naturel*' state. A great investment in time, energy, money and ornamentation is necessary to fulfil their definition. While men don't have to do anything to be masculine, women have to do a very great deal to be feminine. The male-as-norm society further distances women from the normative. Most men regard female body-builders with abhorrence; although those women have changed their natural body image, they have made a 'wrong' change.

Women are taught to be 'agreeable' to men. This pattern of behaviour helps to perpetuate the patriarchy. On the other hand, being 'disagreeable', refusing to pander to the patriarchy, is to be accused of 'biting the hand that feeds you' by employer, father, husband. For women, this is not a safe place to be.

'Ladylike' behaviour is the training that has stemmed from the ethics of obedience. We are taught to speak 'like a woman', act like a lady, dress in a 'feminine' way. The problem with ladylike behaviour is that no one takes it seriously. If the little girl has learnt her lesson well, her behaviour, including her way of speaking, will be used to keep her in a subordinate position and she will not be treated seriously as a human being. She is doomed if she speaks 'like a lady', and damned if she doesn't. Nothing is more ironic to feminists than to be told that they should act 'more like ladies', when it is the very concept of ladylike that they oppose, a form of behaviour which has been decreed acceptable to men. This behaviour is often condoned by women who act as accomplices in protecting males from the false nature of their beliefs, and who reinforce male blindness.

The way in which women are *expected* to speak carries its own consequences. This is borne out by the penalties for men who 'talk like women'. Men who have high-pitched voices are often ridiculed, as they fall into an undefined gender role. Women who have very gruff voices report similar reactions. It is true that shrill, high-pitched voices are difficult to listen to for a long time; men use it as an excuse for refusing to pay attention to women. Yet, like so many other sex differences in language, investigation shows that all is not what it may seem. Recent studies suggest that pitch is not solely the product of physiology. After intensive investigation, Mattingly concluded that sex differences in pitch, 'though doubtless related to typical male and female vocal tract size, is probably a linguistic convention'.³⁶ Sachs et. al. reached a similar conclusion and contended that anatomical differences alone are insufficient to account for pitch differences between men and women.³⁷

Congenitally deaf males, those who are born deaf and never hear sex differences in pitch, have voices which do not break at puberty (Luchsinger and Arnold).³⁸ This raises interesting questions about the role of voice-breaking in

adolescent males, and the 'visible' (or audible) entry into manhood. It also raises questions about females learning, or choosing to use, high pitch.

While men do have the capacity to engage in high-pitched utterances, they refrain from doing so as 'incriminating' behaviour. Women, on the other hand, are encouraged to develop high pitch, and end up with voices which are rejected as unsuitable for the 'serious' world. This world damns women and men who have naturally high-pitched voices, which says a lot about the way in which the so-called natural attributes of women are perceived. Either way, whether vocal behaviour is learned or inherited, women are between a rock and a hard place.

The behaviour *about* language is also sexually designated. Society believes firmly that women talk more than men; yet every study ever done indicates that men talk more, interrupt more and talk for longer.³⁹ Zimmerman and West found that 98% of interruptions in mixed sex conversations were made by men; and that females tended to be silent after being interrupted by a male, rather than protest.⁴⁰

For reasons of their own, women tend to obscure evidence which does not show them in the 'correct' light, the prescribed feminine role. In collating evidence about this Spender reports that in a gathering of ten couples who had adult children, each woman was aware of 'irregularities' in their children's lives, while no male was so aware. One male did not even know that his son was divorced because it was assumed that he would find this difficult to cope with.⁴¹ Yet it is women who are supposed not to cope.

The limitations of languages and the masquerades played out ensure that when men declare that they do not know what women want, it is likely to be a true statement. The way in which the patriarchal world is constructed leads to 'tunnel vision'. 'Women may have been deprived of the full use of their voices, but men

may have denied themselves the full use of their vision', writes Spender.⁴² Joan Roberts expressed it in this way: 'Because of female exclusion from thought systems, the hardest thing for a man to know is what a woman wants. But it is harder still for him to listen and to accept her thoughts because they are certain to shake the foundations of his beliefs'.⁴³

It has been obvious that women have suffered disadvantage by virtue of their membership of the muted group. What has often not been appreciated is that males too have suffered disadvantage.

5. Resistance

The issue of language as an instrument of oppression over women cannot be seen in isolation. Broadly speaking, feminists tend to fall into two positions over this; one side represents those who believe it is important to change the language, and the other reflects the views of those who think it is more important to change society. Is it necessary to have an either/or position? Both tasks are important; neither will lead to success without the other.

The issue of economic independence of women was the hallmark of the nineteenth and early twentieth century women's movements. Given the huge imbalance between male and female economic wealth (see Chapter One), that holds true for today. Yet there needs to be recognition that even if all women were liberated financially, male supremacy might well remain. 'The colonization of our minds is not necessarily overthrown by an increase in material resources', reminds Spender.⁴⁴ Nor, conversely, will a redefining of language, including new forms and meanings, lead directly to the economic equality of women. It would be arrogant to suggest that women who are involved directly in a struggle to feed themselves

and their families, and to ward off physical violence, spend their energies on sociolinguistics and the way which patriarchal language enslaves them.

There needs to be recognition that both language and material resources have been used by the master class to dominate women, and that *they are interconnected*. One cannot be transformed without the other.

'Feminism means finally that we renounce our obedience to our fathers and recognize that the world they have described is not the whole world', writes Rich.⁴⁵ The reclaiming of the right to name, and the end of silence; the redistribution of power, are frankly, political activities, though not more so than masculanism. Resistance is about regaining control.

Any attempt to trivialize this activity, or to suggest it is not legitimate because of its 'emotional' content, should be resisted. Rich summed this up succinctly when she wrote that 'objectivity' is nothing other than male 'subjectivity'.⁴⁶ The patriarchal order is the product of male subjectivity and there are important question marks about its conceptualization as 'objective'.

A reassurance is also needed that society is rich and flexible enough to meet demands wherever they are insistently made. The US Department of Labour attempted to overcome the exclusion of women from job categories and revised the titles of almost 3 500 jobs so that they were no longer male-designated but were sexually neutral, report Berger and Kachuk.⁴⁷ It can be done.

It is certainly absurd to suggest that all men are insensitive, intransigent and power-hungry. Yet women tend to have very little evidence to the contrary. Appeals for support have met with amazingly little response, even from so-called progressive men. It should be remembered that they have much to lose. All too typical was the paternalistic reaction from a Member of Parliament from the Cape

whose reply to a plea to support women candidates was, 'but why do you need women in Parliament? We'll take care of you'.⁴⁸

This kind of response framed the women's suffrage movement and, in the process, cost women their lives.



Chapter Three:

Womenspeak and God: Sexual Semantics and Religious Language

1. Sexism is Sin

Feminist theologians and scholars ^{working in fields which engage religion} have claimed that religion is a repository rich in false naming, partial naming and naming which has simply been ignored. The examples of theological language, and its consequence, which are described in this chapter are not isolated ones. It has been alleged that they form part of a systematic process of the manipulation of language as a form of male domination.

The consequence of this is to structure thought and reality so that men are seen in superior *place*, while women are marginalized into inferior *place*. Male supremacy is at the core of language, as it is of society, and is therefore central to religious language.

This has had profound effects on the way in which women are placed in religious structures, and in the way in which certain authority has systematically been denied them. At the very heart of the debate about religious language is the perceived 'maleness' of God, and the 'necessary' maleness of priests representing 'him'.

Formal religion teaches that god is not male; nevertheless, attempts by women to challenge what they perceive as the male supremacy of organised

religion, has been met with dismissal, denial, rejection and, occasionally, outright violence. If, indeed, god is not 'male', then male supremacy in the institutional structures of organised religion seems even more indefensible. Yet earnest guardianship against female inclusion continues.

2. Power

The way in which power has persisted in patriarchal religions has been to *place and control* women, using methods described in Chapters One and Two. This is frequently done in the teeth of the evidence. In spite of frequent attempts to point out that 'god is not male', that 'male and female' were created equally in god's image (Genesis 1:27), and that oppression itself is insupportable in terms of the spirit of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the oppression of women continues to operate 'in god's name'. Authorities (male) are invoked to 'prove' that women's place is ordained.

The naked manipulation of power by men within religious structures has amazed women for centuries, and female resistance had been active for as long as the traditions themselves. Yet strong attachment to that primal authority, the (patriarchal) Bible, has proved a real stumbling-block in attempting to equalize the social order.

2.1 The Men's Bible

Elizabeth Cady Stanton believed that the Men's Bible, as she called it, was a male feat which denies positive symbolism and imagery to women. She held that it was this male bible which had given to Western civilisation its values and worldview, and which had contributed both to the suppression of women and their own low self-image. Her publication of the **Women's Bible**, in the 1840's, was a

pioneering attack on the domination of women, and the modern women's movement owes much to her belief that oppression cannot be overcome while women hold a false consciousness about their own potential and place.

In spite of this, the early Women's Movement paid little attention to the church, or the 'Men's Bible', except to analyse its historical record and declare that 'the church is the enemy — the perfect tool of oppression and subjugation of women'. In Europe in particular, this suited the strongly socialist bias of the movement, but in the USA, where the Movements tended to stress individual and cultural aspirations, it was noted that even Marxism itself had never come to terms with patriarchy. Rather than decry religion itself as an opiate, women began stating openly that the problem was not religion, but sexism.

The turning point in the challenge to the 'Men's Bible' came with the publication of Mary Daly's book, *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968), which outlined the grim history of women in Roman Catholicism and optimistically called for basic improvements in the light of the Second Vatican Council. Subsequently Daly (then a respected Catholic theologian) was to see her hopes vanishing, and was to reject any allegiance to a male messiah and a masculine church structure. What she had done, though, was to describe sexism for the first time in a thoroughly coherent and detailed way, not picking on individual discriminations, but showing the underlying anti-woman bias of Christian theology in a sexist world.

Her contribution, essentially, was to show that sexism was not random and accidental, but that it was built in to the very structures of religion and society, and that the resultant violence done to women in the preservation of patriarchal power was not isolated, but *structural* violence.

One of the primary ways in which this is done, wrote Daly, is throughout theological language. 'From the day that God brought the animals to Adam in the garden of Eden to see what *he* would call them, it has been through the words of men that we have known and addressed the world', she wrote¹ in an article which was appropriately titled (considering the subject) '**After the Demise of God the Father: A Call for the Castration of Sexist Religion**'.

The effect of using male language to identify god, as well as the world, should not be underestimated, warn feminists. It establishes one of the primary categories of our world as a male category. While there was no basis for naming the deity as God the Father, there was every reason for deciding in its favour. Men made god in their own image, 'a clever political move which helped to ensure their own supremacy', writes Spender.²

It must be asked what role this plays in maintaining and perpetuating existing social structures, and what contribution it makes to a hierarchically ordered classist, racist and sexist world view. Does it, indeed, enforce and perpetuate sex-role stereotypes and the power of men over women? How have women perceived and responded to the deity which has been perceived by many to represent the structural sexism of society?

At the heart of the problem is the unequivocal male orientation of the God-symbol, clearly reflected in ecclesiastical writings and structures. Whereas visualising a 'Father' may be of comfort to some, 'he' is also 'authoritarian' and fearsome to others. Nor can women internalize Jesus' special relationship with, and as, God. This involves a masculine orientation which women have not shared; moreover, Jesus as god-symbol has been used to legitimate the androcentric structures of Christianity in such a way as to have excluded women. The 'parent' language of god as father has a negative resonance as well. God becomes a neurotic parent who does

not want us to grow up; patriarchal theology is accused of promoting spiritual infantilism as a virtue, and making autonomy and assertion of free will a sin.

'Father', of course, does not have to symbolize fear and authority. He can also be a symbol of love. Some theologians have suggested that Jesus's unusual and frequent insistence of using the appellation, *Abba*, was contrary to Jewish tradition and an attack on the patriarchal system itself, showing the caring, rather than quelling, nature of god. If so, one wishes that Jesus had chosen a less sexist symbol.

2.2 When God is Male

The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing, had dominated the human imagination. This image has also sustained the mechanism of society for the oppression of women; if god in 'his' heaven is a father ruling the people, then it is in the nature of things, women have been told, that the divine plan for, and order of, the universe be literally male-dominated.

What it means in a nutshell, says Daly, is that *if God is male, then the male is God.*³ Husbands and fathers come to represent god in households and in churches, as the 'head'; implicit in this is the assumption that somehow men are closer to god's image and nature, than women. This assumption becomes entrenched into articles of faith, and then are impossible to shift without charges of revolution and heresy. In turn, females become less god-like, less perfect, more 'other'.

Sophisticated thinkers have never intellectually identified God with a Superfather in heaven. Yet even when very abstract conceptualizations of god are formulated in the mind, images survive in the imagination in such a way that a person can function on two different, and even apparently contradictory levels at the same

time. Thus one can speak of God as spirit, and at the same time imagine 'him' as a male figure; the image of an old man on a heavenly throne is an archetype, and can profoundly affect what appear to be refined and abstract conceptualizations.

Since the major Western religions all originated in patriarchal societies, and continue to defend a patriarchal world-view, the metaphors used to express their insights are by tradition and habit overwhelmingly male-oriented. And although many insist that 'god has no sex', we do think male when we use he/she language (see *Chapter Two*), and not least when we use god-language. Elaine Pagels has indicated that the actual language which is used daily in worship and prayer, 'gives the distinct impression that God is thought of in exclusively male terms'.⁴

Women, in point of fact, do not consider themselves encompassed in the current image of God. This may come as a surprise to many men.

Judith Plaskow noted, in connection with the male imagery of God, that 'nothing arouses the ire of male theologians and churchmen so much as the charge that traditional language about God is sexist ... Women were told that God transcends sexuality and were advised not to bother with trivial questions of language'.⁵ As men cannot really believe that women are an oppressed group, the first stage of their response to complaints is trivialization and ridicule. They are convinced of their own benevolence to women, and 'individualize the issue, and abstract and universalize the situation of relatively privilege wives', claiming that the women they know are 'well taken care of' and ought to be happy. They are unable to see the stress and vulnerabilities of even this situation, much less the total system of sexism.⁶

As the feminist critique of religion developed, scholars began to recognise that the issues of God-language, exclusion of women in leadership and ritual, and

teachings on marriage and family were systematically related to the theological world view of the biblical faith.

'God' can be used oppressively against women in a number of ways. It occurs when theologians proclaim women's subordination to be God's will. This has been done throughout the centuries, and remains in varying degrees of subtlety and explicitness in the writing of twentieth century thinkers such as Barth, Niebuhr, Bonhoeffer and de Chardin. Even when not explicit, the phenomenon is present when one-sex symbolism is used for God, and for human relationships with God. Consider the passage:

To believe that God is Father is to become aware of oneself not as a stranger, not as an outsider or an alienated person, but as a son who belongs or a person appointed to a marvellous destiny, which he shares with the whole community. To believe that God is Father means to be able to say 'we' in regard to all men.

A woman whose consciousness is aroused can say that such language makes her aware of herself as a stranger, as an outsider, as an alienated person, not as a daughter who belongs to a marvellous destiny. 'She cannot belong to this (the male world) without assenting to her own lobotomy', writes Daly.⁷

This is how Mary Daly characterises 'the male take-over': ' "The Processions of Divine Persons" is the most sensational one-act play of the centuries, performed by the Supreme All Male Cast. It is the sublime (and therefore disguised) erotic male homosexual mythos, the perfect all-male marriage, the ideal all-male family ... To the timid objections voiced by christian women, the classic answer has been: You're included under the Holy Spirit. He's feminine. The point is, of course, that male made-up femininity has nothing to do with women. Drag queens, whether divine or human, belong to the Men's Association'.⁸

Activists have occasionally been moved to call the bible a 'dangerous book', which has been used to teach slaves and women to be subservient to masters and to provide God's blessing for warfare. It is not surprising to note that some black Christians refuse to read sections of Paul's Letters, or that some women have added the subtitle: *'This book may be dangerous to your health'*.⁹

Paul was demonstrably a misogynist, and it was his tradition that became dominant as the doctrine of the Church was slowly compiled, in spite of the fact that the recorded legend of Jesus suggests that *he* was progressive towards women. Although the central doctrines of the Christian religion remained teachings of love, mercy, compassion and charity, the expressions of those doctrines as well as the superstructure of the institution increasingly placed power and strict code in the foreground. The thinking of the early Christian patriarchs was anti-nature and anti-sex ... by the time of Iranaeus, the primary requirements of Christians were that they should fear God and obey the priests: standard patriarchal values.

'That a male god should be able to open his mouth and speak a word, which became flesh, and his son; that the father and son should, through their mutual love, be able to create a third entity, known as the holy spirit; and that, in all of this, a woman should function rather as an oven in which the bread is baked, a mere vessel for its maturation, comprises an extraordinary myth of creation. What is even more extraordinary is that millions of people have believed it, not as a symbolic truth for a patriarchal age, but as literal truth', writes French.¹⁰

Given this, we should not be surprised that 'Mother Church' is controlled by a hierarchy of ordained males, even though the Church itself symbolizes much that is powerful about women; embracing, supporting, nurturing, teaching, loving, discipline. Why should the church be any different to the society in which it operates?

The image of god is illustrated in American civil religion, among others; the mask of the sublime 'heavenly father' is trotted out whenever males need to pretend to be what they are not — which is most of the time, writes Daly.¹¹ Ronald Reagan constantly used the mask of 'heavenly father'; Richard Nixon was referred to by Rabbi Louis Finkelstein as having been pointed to by the finger of God, 'giving the vision and the wisdom to save the world and civilization'; within this context, as Charles Henderson showed, God is an American and Nixon 'his' anointed one. As the nation is 'under God the Father', the conclusion is that the president becomes a messianic figure.¹²

The grave problem about all this in religious terms lies in the allegation of *idolatry*. Surely the proscription of idolatry must include verbal pictures? When the words Father and Son are taken to literally exclude women from religious structures, then these words are idolatrous. Part of the challenge is to recognise the poverty of all words and symbols, and to use resources to bring in a radically new understanding of divinity. Idolatry, in this instance, is a 'sexist sin'. Must one think of God as something/one static? Mary Daly suggests that we think of god as a dynamic process, and advocates the use of 'god the Verb'.

It has become popular to speak of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes of God. But this is a case of out of the frying pan into the fire, because no words are more slippery or given to stereotyping than these. And, while a 'genderless' god has been proposed, many people find difficulty in relating personally to a symbol which bears no definition in reality; even a eunuch has a kind of identity.

At the same time, an androgynous god is just as hard to relate to. The difficulties of this has been described by Daly as 'conveying something like John Travolta and Farrah Fawcett-Majors scotch-taped together'.¹³ The *real* problem, she suggests, is not one of cutting away the Supreme Phallus, but of transforming the

collective imagination so that this distortion of the human aspiration to transcendence loses its credibility.¹⁴

After all, she asks, does god-talk encourage human 'becoming' toward psychological and social fulfillment, or does it hinder human 'becoming' by reinforcing sex-role socialization? For her, the latter is true, and her sentiments, on this issue at least, are shared by the great majority of women theologians. Language is an issue; to exist humanly is to name the self, the world, and god. The method of self-liberation, she suggests, involves a castrating of language and images that reflect and perpetuate the structures of a sexist world.¹⁵

2.3 God the W.A.S.P.

That the image of God is so frequently seen as white, Anglo-Saxon and patriarchal can be attested to by not only women, but oppressed men as well. Yet Daly dismisses black theology as liberating theology because it does not get beyond the sexist models internalized by the self and controlling society. The black god and black messiah may be symbols of liberation for black men, but not for black women, and 'are merely the same patriarchs after a pigmentation operation'.¹⁶

Solving the problem of 'whiteness' does not solve the problem of 'maleness'. The vision of a W.A.S.P. god was shared by the poor, black and ugly woman called Celie, whom Alice Walker created in *The Color Purple*, and who symbolized her caste. When asked what her God looked like, she replies:

'I'm too shame. Nobody ever ast me this before ... but it all I got. He big and old and tall and graybearded and white. He wears white robes and go barefoot'.

Shug, Celie's friend, points out her problem: Celie has a white folk's god; 'The last thing niggers want to think about they God is that his hair is kinky'.¹⁷ God is not he or she, says Shug.

'You have to git man off your eyeball, before you can see anything a'tall ... you think he God. But he ain't. Whenever your trying to pray, and man plop hisself on the other end of it tell him to git lost'.

But, say Celie:

'This hard work, let me tell you. He been there so long, he don't want to budge'.

Celie's problems are exacerbated by the fact that she is a poor black. But her fundamental problem is that she is a disempowered woman, raped, sexually abused by her 'father', kept as servant by her husband, beaten and ignored. This, too, is how Celie sees God; in her letters she writes:

'The God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown ... If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a difference place, I can tell you.'

Her experience of men has rendered her incapable of an intimate relationship with a 'male' God.

Her triumph is not just to overcome her oppression by sexism and racism, but to be transformed into a new world, in which she sees god even in the colour purple, and is able to forgive her abusers. For Celie, god is no longer a male W.A.S.P. but 'everything ... not separate at all ...'¹⁸

3. Place

'Celie' transcended her given place, which as a poor black woman was the lowest possible rung on society's ladder — and survived. Many in reality do not.

What lay, for example, behind the largest organised episode of female genocide, the torturing and burning of women condemned as witches, which reached a peak in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries? Scholars variously estimate the number of victims from a 'low' of 'only' 30 000, to several million. The most important document written during the period, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, written by Sprenger and Kramer, two Dominican priests, proclaimed that men were safe from the horrible crime of witchcraft because Jesus was a man. It was to be expected that women were the witches, because of their 'carnal lust, which is in women insatiable'.¹⁹

The long drive to stamp out pagan religions finally succeeded with a full-scale massacre. Although there were undoubtedly male adherents of paganism, they were relatively easy to absorb into the superstructures or hierarchies of Christianity. But there was no similar place for women, who became the special target of the attack. Midwives, in particular, were endangered. They had special status in the community and threatened the supremacy of the clerics. It was to the midwives that people turned during the moments of crisis in child-birth, for they knew of the special curative powers of herbs. But the patriarchal religions had themselves hijacked birthing, and according to them, only god could kill or cure. The struggle was for control, and specifically control over procreation.

3.1 Penispriests: False Fathers

The 'maleness' of god had placed women in religion not just symbolically but literally as well. *The Vatican Declaration against the Ordination of Women, 1976*,^{*} summed up the position: there must be a 'physical resemblance' between the priest and Christ.

Since the imitation of Christ's physical appearance does not exclude a Negro, a Dutchman nor a Chinese from replacing the first-century Jew, or a wealthy aristocrat from replacing a carpenter's son, we must assume this imitation of Christ has now been reduced to one essential element, namely the male sex, writes Rosemary Radford Ruether.²⁰

Colour, cultural background, wealth, language, previous religion, a criminal record and even, presumably, misidentified sex at birth (which rarely, but occasionally does happen) do not preclude men from becoming priests. Women, no matter how gifted, motivated or intelligent, cannot overcome the crippling handicap of their sex in order to fulfil the priestly mission. To put it bluntly, women lack the one thing that Jesus presumably had — a penis.

In a remarkable forgetfulness of their own traditions of analogy and the *via negativa*, images such as 'father' and 'son' for God are not regarded as partial images drawn from limited male experience, but are taken literally, points out Ruether.²¹ A 'typical' argument against the ordination of women, says Plaskow, is that, like it or not, the minister is a God figure, and that since in the Bible, God is imaged in exclusively male terms, it is inappropriate for women to take this role. 'Just think what a statement like that says about the author's attitude toward women — and toward men!' ²²

A priest is a God-symbol, whether he likes it or not, wrote the Episcopal bishop of California, the Right Rev. C. Kilmer Myers, falling straight into this trap. He argues that although the male image of God must be imperfect, nevertheless, 'it pertains to the divine initiative in creation. Initiative is, in itself, a male rather than a female attribute. The generative function is plainly a masculine kind of imagery, making priesthood a masculine conception'.²³ It is plain that he has thoroughly in-

ternalized the procreative function of the divine male as superior to the human female.

Some theologians have based their opposition to women priests on the stories about only men being called to be apostles of Jesus. The weakness in this argument is that we do not know if that was his choice. He also chose only Jews. And it ignores many early Church accounts which specifically report the full missionary status of preaching, healing and ministering women.

The Dean of the Harvard Divinity school, Krister Stendahl, dismisses all this as nonsense. 'The masculinity of God and of God-language is a cultural and linguistic accident and I think one should also argue that the masculinity of Christ is of the same order ... Jesus was male, but that may be no more significant to his being than the fact that presumably his eyes were brown. Incarnation is a great thing. But it strikes me as odd to argue that when the Word became flesh, it was to re-enforce male superiority ...'²⁴ Though some feminists would argue over whether the masculinity of the divinity was an 'accident', they would endorse her sentiments.

Christology has been the doctrine of the Christian tradition most frequently used against women. Its clearest formulation was in the high scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas, who argued that the male is the normative or generic sex of the human species, and therefore represents the fullness of human potential, whereas woman by nature is defective, physically, morally and mentally. It follows that she cannot represent headship either in society or in the church. Her inability to be ordained follows from her defective, her 'misbegotten' nature. Just as Christ had to be incarnated in the male, so only the male can represent Christ.

As women can never directly represent divine, redemptive action, they are placed in the passive, enabling roles. Joan Ohanneson recalls the 'hundred of hours'

she and other women spent in meetings of the altar guild where 'tasks were parcelled out to women or the cheques were handed over by them to the pastor without a thought that, having earned the money, members should be consulted about how it should be spent'.²⁵

The Church victimizes women who rebel against their subordinate place as troublemakers, and accuses women who speak out against their felt oppression of 'inciting' their sisters. But like any other oppressed group, women who do not need to be assisted in recognising their poor place. Hope Maitland, a national vice-president of the Church of Scotland's Women's Guild, wrote to her daughter, feminist Sara Maitland:

'Dad said that under your influence I have become much more women's lib. in my attitudes. Certainly you have made me more aware of the difficulties faced by women, but Church of Scotland ministers have really taught me what discrimination is all about'.²⁶

The Resurrection is the central event in Christianity. But priests must 'represent Christ', and as such, must be male. If Christ really only becomes 'Christ' at his Resurrection, are we to assume that Jesus retained his male genital organs after his death as an essential component of his Divine equipment? If not, then why do women need penises to become priests?

3.2 Assume the Position

If women cannot take their places as priests, then what is their religious place? The Church Fathers saw the possibility for three basic positions (as defined by themselves): woman as whore, woman as wife, and woman as virgin. It should

be noted here that women were not seen as individuals, but only in relationship to men.

Woman could not, in fact, be incorporated into the image of God, and modern theologians who argue that the theological language has not dominated women tend to forget this. Augustine reminds us that woman, by herself, is not the full image of God, but only when taken together with the male, who is her 'head'. 'When she is referred to separately in her quality as a helpmeet, which regards the woman alone, then she is not the image of God, but, as regards the man alone, he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one'.²⁷

This fact, which trailblazers the way in which the use of language developed (in that 'he' incorporates 'she'), effectively restricts women from achieving anything in their own right in either society or church. Some women of course managed to overcome this. But this should not be used as an excuse for the overall structural violence such a position caused women. That some women should be exceptions to the rule is no more significant than the fact that Muhammad Ali became world heavy-weight boxing champion; his doing so does not prove that blacks are not oppressed.

3.2.1 Woman as Whore

The first of these places prescribed for women by the Church, was woman as whore. After using her body to gratify sexual desires, they then victimized her for 'tempting' them into doing so. Female prostitutes embody that which is most 'pollutant' in women. They symbolize carnal lusts (whose?), and that which has been described man's lower nature. Prostitutes are doubly abused by society; they are women who have no chance of proper place in society, and who are then vic-

timized for ending up in a place that the majority may well not have chosen, had there been other options available. Both in antiquity and today, most prostitutes were impoverished, unskilled workers. In any case, the majority of the poor were women who had no male agencies to enable them to share in the wealth of the patriarchal system.

In antiquity, widows and orphans were the prime paradigms of the poor and exploited, and frequently women had no form of income other than selling sex. In the days when the opinions of the Church Fathers were being formulated, prostitutes were usually slaves, daughters who had been sold or rented out by their parents, wives who were rented out by their husbands, poor women, exposed girls, the divorced and widowed, single mothers, captives of war and piracy, women bought for soldiers — in short, women who could not derive a livelihood from their position in the patriarchal family or those who had to work for a living but were barred from engaging in ‘middle’- or ‘upper’-class professions.²⁸ It seems particularly heartless to despise women who were already victims of society.

It seems indefensible not to despise men who create the need for female prostitutes just as much as those who fulfil the need. Seldom is the male bias of society so clearly seen.

3.2.2 Woman as Wife

The most appropriate place for women, according to patriarchal society, was and is as wives. Theologically speaking too, this is the only way women can be considered to be part of the ‘full image of god’, as has been noted. Many women indeed, find great fulfilment as wives. Given the number of single mothers, combined with the divorce rate, we must assume, however, that many women have found less than supreme happiness with a man.

Nevertheless, our society still operates with the image of the nuclear family; working husband, domestic wife and two children, as the 'norm' of society, in spite of the fact that the Equal Opportunities Commission has found that, in the US, less than 5% of families fit that description.²⁹

The view of Pope Pius XI was that 'if woman descends from her truly regal throne to which she has been raised within the walls of the home by means of the Gospel, she will soon be reduced to the old state of slavery', whatever that means. Its intention is clear though: women need to be in a state of marriage 'for their own protection', a constant patriarchal theme and predictable if one considers the urge to control procreation. Women, incidentally, had not been canvassed by the Pope for their views on the subject.

In his famous 1931 encyclical on marriage, the *CASTRI CONNUBII*, Pope Pius reminded women that they are to be in 'ready subjugation' to the chief of the family, the husband. Husbands and children are to be the centre of their existence. God is the architect of 'the structure of the family and its fundamental law, established and confirmed by god, must always and everywhere be maintained intact'. He warned against 'false teachers' who wished to do away with the 'honourable and trusting obedience which the woman owes to the man'. Anyone asserting that such subjection 'is unworthy of human dignity', is describing emancipation; and to suggest that is a 'crime'. Women cannot be allowed to follow their own inclinations, and devote themselves to business and even public affairs, without the knowledge and will of her husband. Thus she would be at liberty to manage her own affairs, giving her attention to that and not him.

It is worth noting that the Roman Catholic Church is not more sexist than other denominations, which have occasionally laid this charge. 'It just has that unique and valuable talent for making visible what other denominations attempt to

deny. The prejudices of Christianity are made plainest in the Catholic Church. The logical and theological inconsistencies at the heart of their position are only a clear statement of what all the denominations actually practice', points out Sara Maitland.³⁰

The Catholic Church has not changed its position; the present Pope, John Paul II, attacked the Women's liberation movement as contrary to women's vocation to motherhood in November, 1980.³¹

In marriage, which, in the eyes of society and the church is the ideal state for women, her economic disadvantage is now compounded by being subordinate to the 'head', her husband. This, in the now-familiar words of the patriarchy, is to women's own advantage. If they become suspicious about exactly to whose advantage this really is, they are further sanctioned with the 'divine plan'. Karl Barth gently explained that it wasn't really that women were inferior, just that the pecking order was God first, man second, woman third. Man was also subordinate — to God. Also, 'Christ in his glorious divinity is like the male, in his humble servitude is like the female'. Barth meant that Christ represented both sexes; if the language he used was supposed to make women feel better, he chose a curious way of doing it. But there should be no surprise; Barth spent a lot of time telling women what they think and feel.

Why have women put up with it? The answer may well lie in a further question — what choice do they have, given the control of place, position and prestige by the patriarchy? The cruel fact, too, is that many women have no skills nor income to support themselves and their children at a reasonable economic level. They are 'one man away from welfare'.

3.2.3 Woman as Virgin

There is an alternative to the potential perils of marriage for women, according to the patriarchal church. Again setting the rules, there is one totally acceptable — indeed, laudable — place for unmarried women, and that is as virgins.

Although the role model for this within the Christian tradition was of course the so-called virgin Mary, the *inimitability* of her condition was to place the single greatest burden upon women in the history of religion. Women who never married, either through choice or coercion, were forced to give up their power of motherhood. Women who were seduced by the patriarchal exultation of virginity or who saw this as a way out of an unwanted marriage or a life of social degradation, seemed unconscious of the way in which they were once again having their procreational powers manipulated by the patriarchy.

Ironically, this did not 'free' women from subordination. In choosing religious virginity over the state of wedlock, she had simply exchanged one bridegroom for another. Typical of this mindset and, indeed, partial architect of it, was Jerome, fourth-century writer of Latin Christendom, who strongly advocated the celibate life over the married one: 'I praise wedlock, but it is because they produce me virgins', he wrote. Viewing women's lot as an endless travail of painful and dangerous childbirth (which it was), Jerome pointed to the 'gift of virginity' as sanctioned by Mary, and told mothers to allow their daughters to 'wed the King' of heaven, rather than an earthly male. This 'high service' would render the parent 'the mother by marriage of God'. The virgin daughter would not be lonely but would have her divine Bridegroom to 'sport with'.³²

There is no woman further away from a state of pollution in the Christian world than a virgin. She is a woman who has married the patriarchal church and patriarchal norms. She is a woman whose procreational powers are utterly control-

led, and she has 'bought into' the servitude of women to the male religious structures. No wonder she is so highly thought of. Virgins were given an even higher 'rating' than mothers on a scale of one to 100 in the days of the Church fathers. Even today, women who live celibate lives have a special place of honour. They have no children, and cannot be distracted from their role of serving the world.

Some male priests, too, are celibate, but they do not lose their patriarchal power, whereas women lose whatever matriarchal power they might have possessed. Also, the 'virginity' of male priests has never greatly influenced the secular world of single men, whereas single women have remained under the same sanction of virginity as their religious sisters — and for the same reason; control.

To suggest, as the Church does, that religious virgins are imitating the virgin mother is ridiculous, as this is clearly impossible. Either the Church got it wrong, and Mary was simply a 'young woman', and not a virgin at all; or else she was an innocent victim of the raping tendencies of male divinities, which has a sound locus in the Greek myths. Daly wrote that the catholic Mary is not the Goddess creating parthenogenetically of her own, but rather she is portrayed/betrayed as Total Rape Victim.³³ No one asked Mary whether she wanted to become the 'mother of God'. In a similar way, married women, not virgins, are expected to accept gratefully the role of containers for the *sons of the sons of the Son of God*. 'Sincerely moved by the fervour of their own words, the priests educate women to accept this privilege with awe-struck humility'.³⁴

Another problem related to Mary is her uniqueness of prestige, and therefore place. Individual women who have risen 'above' their place, do not change the evaluation of the entire female sex, as can be seen, for example, in the cases of Margaret Thatcher or Golda Meir. 'A particular woman might have been regarded as

sacred, yet the entire female sex would still be considered vessels of sin', writes Daly.³⁵

The image of Mary has been used by the Catholic church as an example of the 'reverence' due to women, and also as a woman with whom other women can identify. In view of the alienation felt by many women in Christianity, the last is an important point, and has frequently been used by Catholics against the Protestant churches, who have no role models for women at all. But is this accurate?

It is true that Mary was an enormously powerful symbol in the High Middle Ages; no matter how strong the theological warnings were about overestimating her power, it is obvious that she outranked male images of divinity. The great cathedrals were built almost exclusively to 'notre Dame', and the cult of Mary was quite simply the most important religious phenomenon of medieval Europe. It must be remembered, however, that Christianity, while nominally in control, was still under siege from the old pagan religions which had by no means disappeared, and were still celebrated, or 'incorporated' into the newer, Christian traditions. 'Easter', celebrating *Oestrus*, or female fertility, is one of them. St Patrick had found that heathens would accept Christianity only if they were given the goddess Mary, too.

Scholars have frequently puzzled over the 'rising popularity' of Mary in the Middle Ages. Their premise is wrong. The image of the goddess was *always* popular; in Mary, it found a way to appear 'legitimately' in Christianity. The cult of Mary was a thinly-disguised restoration of the goddess cult; and she held divine powers of healing and intercession.

This, as Daly has pointed out, was insufferable in a phallic society. She had originally been set up by the patriarchy as a dethroned and sapped goddess, a ves-

sel chosen to be filled with an allegedly divine offspring. Next thing they knew, she had taken over.

This was not part of the patriarchal plan. It is no coincidence that the rise of the witchhunts and the ensuing massacre of women, was a response by the Inquisition to the pagan cults, and their powerful women. At the very height of the Cult of Mary, the first stirrings of the Inquisition began. Although male pagans were victims too, their numbers were negligible compared with the massacre of tens of thousands of women.

3.2.4 Perched on a Pedestal

In truth, there is only one safe place for women in society to be, and that is perched on a pedestal. Women who have won the 'respect' of men, as Barth pointed out³⁶, can at least enjoy temporary security and well-being.

Women are told that they are protected for their own good. They are also told, by the same ingenious souls, that men don't hate women; on the contrary, men honour and respect them. But the respect has to be 'earned' by women from men.

But are pedestals for people? French suggests readers stand on a chair and decide for themselves.³⁷ In the guise of 'honouring and protecting', women can be conveniently confined, tracked, and even pushed aside. Women who try to climb off the pedestal are treated as heretics or aliens, without sanctioned place.

3.3 Eve: The Bad Apple

Why are women both put on pedestals, and 'put down' by men?

'Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor'.

Timothy 2:11-14

Patriarchy was authenticated by the story of the Fall. In the version priests usually preach, Eve was born from Adam's rib, making man first in creation, and setting out the woman's place as auxiliary and derivative. To revolt against this status is to revolt against God.

Although various creation stories were available at the time of the compilation of Genesis, most seem to have been ignored in favour of the one which was by all accounts least popular at the time, the story of Eve being made from Adam's rib, a peculiar distortion of the birthing process. It apparently enjoyed little vogue, documents Edward Chiera;³⁸ that is easy to sympathise with, because it is indeed a puzzling and even bizarre story.

It is not, however, as story without purpose. By attributing the First Birth to a man, woman's progenerative power is relegated to second place. The more probable version, that of God creating both male and female in the divine image does nothing to uphold the patriarchy and also implies that God can be visualized as Mother, as well as Father. It is interesting to speculate how religion in the West would have developed, had this been the version which was promoted.

The asymmetry of the sexes was further reinforced in the Biblical version of the Fall, a highly-coloured story in which the woman is the instigator and go-be-

tween of evil. Implicit is the innocence of Adam, who would not have been lured out of his pure state had it not been for the seduction by Eve. This transparent and threadbare tale is told in every generation to reinforce the place of women; but to challenge the heart of the Sacred Story is rebellion. Once again, women are damned if they do, and damned if they don't.

Eve's role in the Fall personifies in terrifying clarity the way in which men have traditionally seen women. Adam's strength and nobility is sapped by Eve's weakness and tendency toward degeneracy. Adam is helpless against the temptress Eve. Adam obeys God's order, while Eve is closer to earthly/earthy things, and moves out of control. Eve is additionally cursed, in that she is to bear children in sorrow, and to be under the power of her husband (Genesis 3:16). All women thus share the sinful caste of Eve.

Given the way in which this story has been used to place women, it is amazing that more people do not see how strange and sinister it is. Daly writes: 'The myth of the Fall can be seen as a prototypic case of false naming ... the myth takes on cosmic proportions since the male's viewpoint is metamorphosed into God's viewpoint. It amounts to a cosmic false naming. It misnames the mystery of evil, casting it in the distorted world of feminine evil ... implied in this colossal misnaming of evil is the misnaming of women, of men, of God'.³⁹

She goes on to demonstrate that women have been the primordial scapegoats of a patriarchal religion in which *only* males do the naming. Women, she says, must realise that we have had the power of naming *stolen* from us; only when we recover that, will we recover ourselves.

Women's most powerful natural function, birthing, was handed over as a mythic function to men, a triumph of male mind over matter. Graciously, they lifted

from women the onerous power of childbirth, christening it baptism, writes Daly.⁴⁰ The lowly material function of birth, incompetently and often grudgingly performed by women, has been elevated to a higher and more spiritual level. The Church later usurped other female functions in a similar way. Feeding was elevated to become Holy Communion. Washing achieved dignity in baptism and penance. The function of consolation was raised to the spiritual level and called Extreme Unction.

'In order to stress the obvious fact that all females are innately disqualified from joining the Sacred Men's Club, the priests made a rule that their members should wear skirts. These necessary accoutrements included delicate white lace tops and millinery of prescribed shapes and colours.'⁴¹

The exclusion of women from the formal rituals of the Church was further compounded by their separation from the men during the service. The excuses were that women might be in a state of 'pollution', or that they might be distracting to men. This was in clear contradiction to the practice of the early Church.

Without the story of the Fall, there would have been no need for a messiah, nor would the story of the Resurrection have any significance. Given the role of Eve in the Fall, one is forced to submit that it would never have been possible for there to be a female messiah. The 'necessary' maleness of god is inherent from the very beginning.

4. Control

Despite the need to masculinize the deity, the process has not been quite that easy. In order to really control the structures of patriarchal religion, it has been necessary for males to 'massage the evidence'.

4.1 Historical Hostility: Massaging the Evidence

Words to describe God in the historical tradition of the West were often unisexual, androgynous or female. Elaine Pagel's work showed that these versions by far outnumbered those in which God was named male.⁴² By the time these versions were edited by men, which was probably as late as the year AD 200, virtually all the feminine imagery for God (along with suggestions for an androgynous creation), had disappeared from the 'orthodox' Christian tradition. Males selected the names, and they checked with other males to verify their selection. Then they cited 'divine inspiration'. This in itself is heretical; it implies that God is on the side of male bias.

Early Christians were exhorted to destroy all pagan idols. Most of them, like the many prehistoric mother figurines, had breasts. The destruction of female deities was matched with the destruction of female names for deity. Merlin Stone remembers that during all the years she spent in Sunday School, she never learnt that Astoreth, the pagan deity of the Old Testament, was female, as she is referred to as 'he'.⁴³

The sexually active goddess had been given her marching orders; Constantine ordered the destruction of all goddess temples throughout the empire and sternly forbade the worship of Mary.⁴⁴ In the meantime, male deities continued to do as they pleased. Women who refused to accept this, and continued to perform rituals which they felt were holy, to the Goddess, were described as 'ritual prostitutes'.⁴⁵ This 'massaging of the evidence', by male naming, reinforced the male view of the world with themselves as central, and, in the process, banned women to the periphery. The 'Men's Bible' glorified and centered around men, and women's activities were dismissed as 'cult'.

Some feminists have argued that this makes the biblical tradition too sexist to be retrievable, and also legitimizes women's subordinate position of powerlessness, while promoting male dominance and violence. Feminists, they say, need to move beyond the boundaries of the biblical tradition altogether.

But, argues Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, is this not giving up too easily? Believing, as Judy Chicago does, that 'our heritage is our power', she thinks that the historical hostility of Christian scholarly tradition, while androcentric to the core, does not necessarily mean that the historical tradition is not recoverable for women. Indeed, she argues, in the face of such hostility, it is vital to go back in there and prove such assumptions wrong. 'The attempt to write women back into early Christian history should not only restore early Christian history to women but also lead to a richer and more accurate perception of early Christian beginnings', she writes.⁴⁶

She rejects complaints about 'the women question' as being trivial: if the women's questions seems trivial, it is because masculine arrogance has made it a 'quarrel', and when quarrelling one no longer reasons well, she suggested. Yet this is to dismiss her own, excellent reasoning. She regards as questionable the historical marginality of women in the early Church, citing the methodic insights of form, source and redaction criticism which have shown that the early Christian writings are not all objective factual transcripts but pastorally engaged writings.⁴⁷

Her most famous example is the story of the woman who annointed Jesus, described by Mark (14:9) as 'Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what she had done will be told in memory of her'. Yet, as Fiorenza points out in her feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins, *In Memory of Her*, the women's name is not even known to us. Stories about the disciples, which are not always flattering, are told using names. But the recorders of the woman who publicly named Jesus in a prophetic sign-action, (and who was sanctimoniously

reprimanded by the male disciples for doing so), did not bother to list *her* name, in spite of Jesus' command to remember her prophetic action.

The nameless woman identified Jesus to the world as the messianic inaugurator of the *basileia*, the community which remembers that the God of Jesus is on the side of the poor.⁴⁸ By the time Luke got around to recording it, the story is no longer understood as the story of a woman prophet, the only person in Jesus' lifetime to publically confirm this messianic role, but rather as a story of a 'repentant sinner'. Nor has the church celebrated her vision; nor has it ritualized this story; it has instead used it to assert, *as God's will*, that poverty cannot be eliminated.

'It must be asked', questions Fiorenza, 'whether the reluctance of scholars to investigate the ^{present} topic might be sustained by an unconscious or conscious refusal to modify our androcentric grasp of reality and religion rather than by a legitimate concern for the integrity of biblical-historical scholarship?'⁴⁹

4.2 Keeping Women Quiet

Such sharp questioning from such an informed source is not comfortable for the patriarchy. It indicates that co-option and complicity is not necessarily working. One of the most effective techniques of control is to render invisible such attempts to reset the agenda by women. This has become much more difficult, now that women have more (although not unqualified) access to media and publications.

Still, keeping women quiet has been a traditional method of male control. It is an interesting phenomenon that women have tended to emerge as leaders only in times of conflict. During the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, the early Christian church, and the fight to abolish slavery, women with strong voices were

highly visible. But in the main, *authority in women is suppressed as soon as the group is sufficiently established to start exercising its own authority*. This is true of politics as of religion, as women have found out to their cost. Women in Iran were used to overthrow the Shah, and then veiled and silenced. In Russia, China and Cuba, wife-beating continued after the communist revolutions; large numbers of women were brutally murdered by their male relatives during the early years of those new orders, as women endeavoured to establish women's groups and to break with traditional patterns of female oppression.⁵⁰ Women preachers were eliminated almost as soon as Methodism was able to create an organised structure. George Eliot made this point clearly in *Adam Bede*.

Abolitionist sisters Sarah and Angeline Grimké, both popular speakers, were rebuked in 1837 by the New England Council of Congregationalist Ministers, which became alarmed by women publically addressing audiences which included men, and championing controversial causes. It drew up a pastoral letter, outlining the 'deleterious effects' of women assuming the place of public reformers and moral leaders, roles reserved for the male clergy.

Sarah Grimké was not cowed. At the age of seventy-nine, she was still travelling the countryside dishing out copies of John Stuart Mills' feminist writings. As a Quaker, she felt free of male authority, and said so in a spirited reply.

The real problem about the Grimké sisters, however, was articulated in a letter to them by John Whittier: 'Is it not forgetting the great and dreadful wrongs of the slave in a selfish crusade against some paltry grievance of your own?'⁵¹ The sisters had committed the unpardonable offense of calling attention to their own grievances as women. Male abolitionists expressed 'concern' that the anti-slavery campaign would suffer if it got embroiled in such issues, which says a great deal

about their opinion of 'such issues'. It is a constant curiosity to see how many people believe that one form of oppression is not nearly as bad as another.

4.3 From Religion to Rape

The simple silencing of women, however, has not always been sufficient, for women have not always proved co-optible. The final form of control is violence, and women have suffered both structurally and physically in order that their voices be heard. The leading feminist in the French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges, was guillotined, and her pleas for the inclusion of women in the 'rights of man' were disregarded, in a new Napoleonic code of laws which reinforced female subordination, points out Rosemary Ruether.⁵² This reinforced the claim that women's voices are heard during periods of transition, but not of consolidation.

Feminists doubt, though, that men need such an excuse. Emerson and Russell Dobash have written on the relationship between biblical material and the problem of spouse abuse, in which they call women the 'appropriate victim':

'The seeds of wife beating lie in the subordination of females and in their subjection to male authority and control. This relationship between women and men has been institutionalized in the structure of the patriarchal family and is supported by the economic and political institutions and by a belief system, including a religious one, that makes such relationships seem natural, morally just, sacred.'⁵³

Why is the female so frequently accused of the 'guilt of sexuality', as the Church put it, when at the same time it justifies controlling women, in the guise of protecting them, from the uncontrollable desires of men? On the one hand, women need to be removed from the public because men will prey on them; on the other hand, it is women who are the 'temptresses'. Clear cases of contradiction really are

irrelevant. Any convenient excuse at hand is sufficient to justify control. Women are forced into the mentality of the victim because of the internalization of 'authoritative stories', no matter how conflicting. They can live neither with freedom, nor without it, because of fear. 'They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized', writes Paolo Friere.⁵⁴

Women have suffered directly as women because of their attachment to the church. In 1977, Maria Cueto and Raisa Nemikin, two social workers employed by the National Episcopal Church Centre to minister to Hispanic Americans, were sentenced by a US Grand Jury when they pleaded a priest-penitent relationship on matters they had been told in confidence as ministers. Because the church refused to ordain them, the judge ruled that they could not make such a claim. Although unsupported by their episcopal bishops, the women went to prison rather than break their 'sacred' vow of confidentiality.

A survey conducted within the United Methodist Church in 1980-81 listed the following: one in every 27 United Methodist women had been raped; one in every 13 had been physically abused by her husband. One in every four had been emotionally or verbally abused. Nearly all reported having a close relation or friend who had been abused. This is the tip of the iceberg of the daily presence of violence to women.

For Daly, the oppression of women knows no ethnic, national or religious boundaries: 'the phenomenon is planetary', she writes.⁵⁵ Research appears to bear out her accusation. Her own documentation in this area displayed the 'Sad-Rituals', as she calls them, of female abuse, including Suttee, genital mutilation, foot-binding, and witch burning. Patriarch is itself, she asserts, the prevailing religion of the entire planet, and its essential message is necrophilia ... consequently, women

* Susan Thistlethwaite, 'Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation' in Letty Russell, Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, pg 96.

are the objects of male terror, the projected personifications of 'The Enemy', the real objects under attack in all wars of patriarchy.⁵⁶

While her accusations may be uncomfortably aggressive, there is little doubt that violence to women *is* worldwide. Control over women, especially man over wife, has led to unspeakable horrors. Katherine Mayo, in her pioneering work *Mother India* (1927), was vilified by apologists for making such examples public:

(Cases of child-wives brought to Indian hospitals; medical evidence laid before the Indian Legislative Assembly Debates of 1922)

'Aged 9. Day after marriage. Left femur dislocated, pelvis crushed out of shape, flesh hanging in shreds ...

'Aged 11 ... will be cripple for life. No use of her lower extremities.

'Aged about 10. Crawled to hospital on her hands and knees. Has never been able to stand erect since her marriage.'

The list goes on. Mayo saw a small child in a purdah hospital, now mentally unbalanced, who had been a bright pupil in a government school before she was sent to the home of the fifty-year-old man to whom her family had married her. 'I have never seen a creature so fouled. Her internal wounds were alive with maggots ... meantime her husband is suing her to recover his marital rights and force her back into his possession', wrote Mayo.

Mayo was violently attacked for her injustice to India, and her 'lack of understanding' of its culture, although it was conceded reluctantly that her facts were true. How an injustice can be done to a country by exposing its atrocities? Was exposing slavery in the US an atrocity, or Nazism in Germany, or apartheid in South Africa? Why should abuse of women fall under a different heading, i.e. 'traditional'?

Daly reports a conversation with Roman Catholic Archbishop Roberts (one of the 'radicals' at the Second Vatican Council), who had lived for years in India, and informed her that *suttee* is the 'logical conclusion' of female nature.⁵⁷

The more 'logical' explanation of suttee is enshrined in a frank admission to Mayo by a Hindu: 'We husbands so often make our wives unhappy that we might well fear they would poison us. Therefore did our wise ancestors make the penalty of widowhood so frightful — in order that the women may not be tempted'.⁵⁸

Such horrors have not ceased, or are they restricted to Third World countries. In April 1977, *Time* carried a story exposing a billion-dollar pornography industry in the US specializing in children as subjects. Since then, frequent reports of 'kiddie porn' rings in the UK, Europe, Northern America and South Africa have been reported.

Some women are 'well-treated'. But the evidence of overwhelming structural and structured violence done to women, as well as children, is irrefutable.

The Judaeo-Christian tradition of the West has not broken the pattern but perpetuated it. Traditional law codes enshrined the authority of husband over wife, man over women, as outlined in the bible. Medieval Christian societies sanctioned wife-beating as a proper punishment for resistance to the authority of males; although not quite as prevalent, it still exists, and not just among the 'lower classes'. In Russian (Christian) peasant society, it was common for the father-in-law to give the groom a new whip to be hung over the bed as a symbol of his authority.⁵⁹ To give examples seems almost pointless for the list is without end; it is being added to each day.

Rosemary Ruether believes that the division between men and women, which allowed female subordination to develop and ultimately lead to atrocities,

was due to the breakdown in the holistic perspective which characterized earlier societies; goddess and god, body and spirit, woman and man, once bound together within a single worldview, became split, and women were identified with the material 'earthly' realm, while men were linked with the 'transcendent spirit'. Women was thus identified with a carnal nature, and became the embodier of all temptation, and evil. As polluters, society is 'purified' when they (women) are punished.

This sometimes assumes unimaginable aberrations. 'Yorkshire Ripper', Peter Sutcliffe, convicted of brutally murdering 13 women (including stabbing a seven-inch screwdriver into their vaginas), having pleaded guilty to the attempted murder of seven others, admitted having fantasies which depicted his wife Sonia, a 'good girl', as a prostitute and sexually indiscriminant; and prostitutes, he pointed out confidently, were responsible for all the trouble (*The Guardian*, 12 May, 1981). 'I just wanted to kill a woman', he admitted in his trial.

This does not suggest that all men condone the atrocities of Sutcliffe, of Theodore Bundy, currently on Florida's death row, directly linked to the murder, with staggering brutality and acts of mutilation, to over 30 women (but by his own admission, maybe a hundred more); and of all the murderers, rapists and wife-beaters who continue to haunt the lives of women; indeed, the lives of such criminals have been threatened by fellow-inmates. Nor are women incapable of acts of violence, although more than 90% of violent crimes and close to 100% of acts of sexual violence are committed by men. Daly concedes, for example, that she does not think that 'when/if the patriarchal sadosociety is exorcised, the mystery of evil will disappear'.⁶⁰ But she is saying, that 'Phallocracy is the most basic, radical, and universal societal manifestation of evil, underlying not only gynocide but also

genocide, not only rapism, but also racism, not only nuclear and chemical contamination but also spiritual pollution'.

This is what patriarchy has done; and patriarchy asserts its power over others in the name of the male god. Far from being unrelated, religion and violence share a common purpose; control over the world, control over women. Until society is aware of what Daly described as the 'lethal intent' of the patriarchy, it cannot face the problems which beset women, in society and in religion.

5. Resistance

'Feminist theology starts with the naming of women's experience. The act of naming is public, exposing the evil of patriarchal structures to the world. This immediately makes it a political act. Feminist theology cannot view redemption as exclusively private or exclusively social and systematic: self and society are bound together in close dialectic.'

Denise Ackermann⁶¹

This naming needs to be on a variety of levels; to identify the problems, to expose them to others, to query the structures which support them, and to display the dehumanization of women in society and religion. Only in this way can the patriarchal liturgies and androcentric god-language inflicted on women be shown to cause pain, anguish, alienation and ultimately violence.

Women are not asking men to do the naming; they are asking them to *listen*. And to stop.

5.1 'Take your feet off our necks'

The hundred years of struggle in this phase of the women's movement has been preceded by thousands of years of resistance from women who have '*named*'

and who have often been punished for it. This has not stopped the process. The irrepressible Sarah Grimké, Quaker and Abolitionist, is famous for her retort:

‘I ask no favours for my sex. I surrender not our claim to equality. All I ask of our brethern is, that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on the ground which God designed us to occupy’.⁶²

Grimké believed that the premise that woman should be dependent on man was monstrous and anti-Christian. In return for paltry privileges, woman had surrendered her rights and ended up a ‘plaything’, adorned with baubles and gewgaws.

The insistence on the rights of women, and the idea of a need for a new religious dispensation in female form, appear to be long rooted in history, as does the rejection of exclusively male priests.

5.2 MotherGod and WomanPriest

The need for a female expression of divinity has assumed various forms. Some medieval followers of Joachim of Fiore split to form their own version of the ‘third age of the Spirit’. Under their leader, Guglielma, they vowed that, just as the second person of the Trinity had appeared as a male, so the new dispensation of the Spirit will appear as female.⁶³ Though such ideas were regarded as heretical by the church, to be stamped out immediately (and the Joachimites were exterminated in the Middle Ages), this is a notion more radical than a feminine element within a male-centered symbol; here the female in deity comes into her own, an event not really articulated again until recent years.

Mother Ann Lee of the Shakers, was believed by them to be the long-awaited female Messiah, the manifestation of divine wisdom. Though not as explicit as the Shakers, the female element of deity was to be found in such sources as the French

utopian socialists, the St Simonians, and the New England Transcendentalists.⁶⁴ It is constantly hinted at in Mary Baker Eddy's Church of Christian Science. Although Eddy scarcely figures in feminist writings, she was deeply concerned with the issue of the language of religion, and was at odds with the sole use of 'father' as a designation for God. While no language could reflect God's greatness, she thought that naming a father/mother god might begin to remove obvious stumbling blocks.

Dame Julian of Norwich,^{*} in writing of the *motherhood* of God, believed this was justified because of the deity's properties of nature, love, wisdom and knowledge. 'We know that all our mothers bear us for pain and for death ... but our true Mother Jesus, he alone bears us for you and for endless life'.

The search for the female-in-God has also taken hold in the insistence of the need for women priests. 'I know now that men, as well as women, need models of women ministers. Men in the church, as well as women, suffer from this deprivation of the female witness in ministry', writes Joan Ohanneson.⁶⁵ Agreeing with her, Alla Bozarth-Campbell, who as a minister herself, talks of the 'unrealistic and impossible pressure on the male priest to be "all things to all people"'.⁶⁶

Whereas it might be strategically useful to persuade patriarchal society that 'men need women priests too', women proponents of this idea need not be too concerned. It is women's welfare that is at stake, and this should not be fudged over. Bozarth-Campbell admitted that 'I need the ministry of priestly persons who are women, to be an outward symbol to me of the part of divinity that is female, the part in whose image I am made'.⁶⁷ It is not the business of women to concern themselves with the tender feelings of male priests who believe their role has been usurped. The business of women who are *ordained by God* to preach the riches of Christ to a lost and perishing world, wrote Grimké, is to lead souls to Christ, and not to male pastors for instruction.⁶⁸

* Quoted in Women and Religion: A Feminist Sourcebook
ed. E. Clark and H. Richardson; pg 110 ff.

Accusations that people 'will never accept women as priests' has a ring of truth in it, given the patriarchal nature of society. That is hardly an excuse, however, not to do the morally correct and Christian thing. No doubt similar fears were expressed when churches were attempting to integrate black ministers into non-racial congregations. It simply is not the church's problem; it is, or should be, the problem of those who are resisting progress.

The Church has accepted far stranger things than the mere fact of women becoming priests. To suggest that women do not have the wherewithal to be priests 'is to demean both the people to whom they minister, and the One in whose name they minister and to whose call they respond',⁶⁹ writes Bozarth-Campbell.

Nor should women be intimidated into believing that only positions of prestige as defined by the patriarchy, are important. Ohanneson reminds us that no women's ministry is menial. Each contribution is vital to the well-being and functioning of the church, embracing and dignifying the woman who washes, starches and irons the miles of altar linen, as well as the woman who is president of a Catholic college in a large city.⁷⁰

This is a necessary step in setting up new parameters and constructs which are not solely male-chosen. The need to see humble work in its true worth is a step in the right direction, but not if the humble work remains solely the task of women. Sharing means both participating equally in the priestly and prestigious functions, as well as the lowly ones. Perhaps that is what the patriarchy is avoiding.

5.3 Breaking Through: The 'Strasbourg Shift'

Religious women who wish to reform or transform their tradition, rather than reject it like Daly, face the problem that Daly herself came up against; break-

ing into the sexist system. Women in this situation frequently speak of having to be 'better than the guys', of having to 'prove' themselves — yet men don't have to 'prove' themselves, merely their skills. All people from oppressed groups who are trailblazers face this difficulty; of having to 'buy into' the set of norms and values, no matter how skewed, in order to be accepted. People who perceive the system as too skewed, the rejectionists, face permanent ostracization. Those who work within the system in order to reform or transform it, pay the sacrifice of life-long alienation within the master class. Even if a degree of comfort is reached, in times of conflict they are inevitably perceived as 'other'.

Women in theological faculties and ministerial training colleges, for example, were perceived, even in the 1970's, to be a 'problem' no matter how good their grades. The only woman at her college in Oxford in the 1960's, Rev. Ruth Matthews recalls being the butt of jokes and discrimination — a familiar tale. She was told that she did not 'fit in' and was going to be a problem. It does not seem to have occurred to her colleagues, reflects Matthews, that *she* was not the problem; it was the sexist church.⁷¹

There sometimes is a breakthrough, a new focus in understanding. Letty Russell recalls how reluctant she was to attend a 1979 WCC meeting in Strasbourg on 'Women and the Ministry'. She anticipated 'the same old thing; women asked to justify themselves by proving that they are capable of representing Christ at the altar',⁷² and her resentment was shared by the many women who reflected on just how inadequate many *men* are in performing that task.

Instead, she reports, the meeting with 18 women and 12 men broke new ground. For the first time, women ceased to be 'the problem' and the 'objects' to be studied in relation to ordination. As women and men joined together, *theology became the problem*; women did not have to prove themselves — *theologians* did!

This became known as the *Strasbourg Shift*, the shift in perspective and theological discussion that comes about when women and other outsiders are no longer a problem to be studied, but rather are participants in a common journey.

5.4 Tensions: Reformation, Transformation or Rejection/Revolution?

There is a tendency, even among those who have sympathy with the women's struggle, to veer away from the expressions of anger and alienation, and to hurry women on to another stage where they become 'reasonable' and 'gain perspective'. But, as Anne Wilson Shaef points out in her book *Women's Reality*, one cannot do that with integrity until one has genuinely faced up to sexism as a massive historical system of victimization of women and allowed oneself to enter into that anger and alienation. To skip over this experience, she suggests, is to become 'reconciling' in a way that is basically timid and accommodating, and not really an expression of personal freedom.⁷³ The advantage of such eventual freedom is to be able to keep in touch, non-prejudicially, with the human face of men; and to avoid imagining that only women are capable of good, and that males are by definition evil and defective. Feminist Ruether condones this view; if women are to grow up and take responsibility for the world they must recognise that they too are capable of sin, not just as victims but as aggressors as well; any other view is 'pre-moral': unlike the original rise of male consciousness, the rise of women's consciousness must not translate the 'other' — man — into an object that makes him alien territory to be spurned or dominated.⁷⁴

Separatism cannot be presented as the goal of the women's movement, agree most feminists (though not Daly). But the problem is not a simple one; embodied here is the expression of real tensions within the women's movement. Some women can't decide whether they want to 'get into the man's world', i.e. the 'real' world,

or hold out for a better but non-existent (utopian) world represented by the still unempowered 'feminine' principles.

That tension is carried over into the sisterhood of religious feminists. The split is roughly as follows: those, e.g. Daly, Maitland, who insist that society needs to be 'cured' before theology, which is in any case so hopelessly androcentric that women cannot become liberated through it. Others, including Fiorenza, accept that their religion as currently expressed is sexist, but claim that their traditional, cultural links with religious experience hold much that is also rich and liberating; that a new way of looking at 'old' religion (reformism) can lead to a more perfect understanding of the traditions. Still others, Ruether among them, see that great importance of a feminist radical, like Daly, is 'precisely that she insists on taking herself further and further into that journey and insisting that others who wish to be honest follow her. She lays before our eyes' the 'passion drama' of female crucifixion on the cross of male sexism.⁷⁵ Ruether holds that while an 'exodus', up and out of the church as it is currently understood, is a necessary step, separatism is an indefensible position; unless women and men work together with a thorough understanding of the problems, there can be no possibility of co-humanity, which is what the goal of religious experience should be; thus transformation of religion is essential. Ruether is sensitive to questions such as whether a male saviour can save women; this is not merely a provocative theoretical question, she reports, but one on which many thousands of women have already voted with their feet by leaving the church and seeking alternative feminist communities.⁷⁶ These issues, of male-language liturgy and sexist stories about religious orthodoxy, are prime bones of contention among the split community of religious women.

While some women believe that the maleness of Christ is so fundamental to Christianity that women cannot be liberated through him, others believe that a

'postbiblical stance too quickly concedes that women have no authentic history within biblical religion and too easily relinquishes women's feminist biblical heritage', writes Fiorenza.⁷⁷ She points out that Western women are not able to discard completely and forget their personal, cultural, or religious Christian history. The bottom line: transform it, or continue to be subject to its tyranny.

If, points out Fiorenza, the self-understanding of those early Christians was to do away with all religious, class, social and patriarchal relationships of dominance, then surely this is possible to achieve again, within the Christian tradition; indeed, it is mandatory. Women were, after all, not marginal figures in the early church, but genuine leaders. She holds that it is proper for women to group together as an *ekklesia*, to feed, heal and liberate 'our own people who are women' in the 'angry power of the Spirit'. The task is to reject the idolatrous worship of maleness and to articulate the divine image in female human experience and language.⁷⁸ This reforms the traditionally religious background of the participating women.

Ruether agrees with Fiorenza that Western religion is not totally irredeemable, so long as sexism is rooted out. As regards the 'male Christ', she believes this is not an insurmountable obstacle: 'He speaks especially to outcast women, not as representatives of the "feminine", but because they are at the bottom of this network of oppression. His ability to be liberator does not reside in his maleness, but, on the contrary, in the fact that he has renounced this system of domination, embodying the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment'.⁷⁹ Ruether derives this from her religious understanding that the poor, the downcast, those who hunger and thirst, have a certain priority of God's work of redemption, and notes that Christ goes particularly to the outcasts. The aim of this partiality is to create a new whole, 'to elevate the valleys and make the high places low, so that

all may come into a new place of God's reign'.⁸⁰ This is a transforming view of traditional Christianity. It is not sufficient to reform the structures, to resurrect the status of women. Christianity itself has been inaccurately applied in its structures and intentions, and therefore must itself be reformed.

Nonsense, replies Daly. The spiritual colonization of women has led to the impossibility of their liberation through the colonizer and his structures. She dismisses the ordination of female priests as an 'imitative, derivative phenomenon', which would be seen in the unfortunate condition of serving up 'dead symbols ... to starving congregations of bamboozled believers who are doubly tricked by this incorporation of females into the processions of priestly predators'.⁸¹ Daly has never minced her words.

She is supported by Sara Maitland, who believes that too much emphasis and energy is placed on the issue of ordination of women, well suited to the job as they are. Her anxiety is that of co-option: 'the very act of obtaining constitutional ordination is an inevitable act of co-option into the clerical caste'. Though she admits it may be beneficial to women's self-esteem and their general rise in status, she questions whether it is worth the enormous efforts involved in the face of the 'larger' issues which face women: racism, classism and the abuse of female nature.

'I find myself in agreement with Mary Daly's statement that for women to seek ordination in the Christian Church is as destructive as it would be for black people to seek to become leaders in the Klu Klux Klan'.⁸²

Here is the classic conflict of the purists versus the pragmatists, which tend to split all liberation movements. *But*: it is possible that they are indispensable to each other; the purist/prophet to keep polishing the principles of the movement, whether religious or political, in a relentless and unremitting way, and the prag-

matist/priests who accept the slowness of change, and who through principled compromise continue to keep the movement alive through incremental and gradual gains.

An example of this division is the flat refusal of Daly to accept 'feminist liturgy', because, as she sees it, of its 'legitimizing function ^{of liturgy} in patriarchy to support sexism and consequently its offshoots: war, racism and all the destructive hierarchies of economic oppression. It is an attempt to put new wine, women's awareness, into the old skins of forms that kill female self-affirmation'. For her, it would reinforce false memory.⁸³

But is the memory completely false? Fiorenza's work in *In Memory of Her* would argue that there is much to be gained from an insistence on female inclusion in the Church. Letty Russell ^{points out that} each time we try to make language of worship more inclusive we find out the depth of resistance to any disruption of the 'domination pyramid'; ^{in spite of this,} yet sometimes simple things such as reading the story of the Prodigal Son and Father as the Prodigal Daughter and Mother may open people's eyes to the wealth of insight they are missing by retaining a narrow perspective on God and the world.⁸⁴

The real tension between the two positions should not be dismissed as trivial nor as dangerous. Religious feminists share more in terms of goals than differences. All thoroughly reject sexism, as well as male control, standards and power. They all affirm female place as equal in the world of women and men. They all recognise the need for a new understanding of the world, and of religion. They all identify and mourn the oppression of women and the violence, in all its forms, which is their heritage. They share far more in common, as activists the Movement, than they do with outsiders.

They differ on *strategy* — a common enough phenomenon among people whose consciousness has been raised. Their internal dialectic, although potentially divisive, can also lead to creativity and dynamic flow. Many worthy movements, however, have collapsed because their members failed to capitalise on their overall cohesion. It is worth pondering on whether it is better to temporarily compromise, rather than give an easy victory to the aggressor.

5.5 Womanspeak: Mother Thunder and Lilith

In spite of the real concern by such activist/rejectionists as Daly and Maitland that such events as feminist liturgy and re-creating significant biblical stories serve to support an abhorrent sexist ideology, many women who have experimented in such religious activities have recorded their joy and empowerment in doing so.

The 'Mother Thunder Liturgy', for example, is a service prepared for Holy Communion by an all-women group which used only non-sexist language. In 1979, the Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, licenced it for experimental use, the first official recognition of this kind.⁸⁵ The 'Feminist Liturgical Art Project' was built onto this concept, creating a way of *seeing* the liturgical environment in a joint venture of women's ministries at the Episcopal Church of St John in the Village, New York.

The church was transformed into a 'feminist witness', an experiment in expressing a Christian understanding of the world in which women live. The major artefact was a huge cross made out of old cardboard boxes (highly symbolic! thought some women), many of them still with bottle-sized cardboard dividers. These created a series of little frames, held in unity at first by the boxes themselves and then by the symbol of the Cross in which all things are united. Each frame contained its own image; some from the natural world — shells, rocks, flowers; some from

human skills — jewellery, crafts; some from the history of women in Christianity — pictures, photographs, and pictures of women in struggle throughout the world.⁸⁶

Participants commented on the companionship, energy and generative spirit such a project can hold for the sisterhood; delicately and also powerfully weaving together a complex web of their inner space, their inner lives and meaning, and exposing those as a gift to the world outside. It is also challenging, creating a new way of seeing the world. Pews, which are 'divisive', were upended and grouped together to form hollows, or 'wombs' in which congregants, men and women, sat.

The idea that each person has the potential to reveal yet one more aspect of God, is deeply rooted in the Christian ideal. When women name the holy, not just in themselves but in all those different elements that the historical fact of being female gives them a chance to confront and understand, they are not just making themselves feel better; 'they are giving the Christian community a god-gift', writes Maitland.⁸⁷

Womenspeak is a new way of naming the world. It may also be a way to heal the divides. This is, to an astonishing extent, what the *new* story of *Lilith* created by Judith Plaskow and friends, has managed to achieve. It has blended a powerful feminist consciousness with a traditional, biblical story, and incorporated the rabbinic story of Lilith as a leit-motif — with a difference. As a useful example it is included here:

Applesource

In the beginning, the Lord God formed Adam and Lilith from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. Created from the same source, they were equal in all ways. Adam, being a man, didn't like this situa-

tion, and he looked for ways to change it. He said, "I'll have my figs now, Lilith," ordering her to wait on him, and he tried to leave to her the daily tasks of life in the garden. But Lilith wasn't one to take any nonsense; she picked herself up, uttered God's holy name, and flew away. "Well now, Lord," complained Adam, "that uppity women you sent me has gone and deserted me." The Lord, inclined to be sympathetic, sent his messengers after Lilith, telling her to shape up and return to Adam or face dire punishment. She, however, preferring anything to living with Adam, decided to stay right where she was. And so God, after more careful consideration this time, caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and out of one of his ribs created for him a second companion, Eve.

For a time, Eve and Adam had quite a good thing going. Adam was happy now, and Eve, though she occasionally sensed capacities within herself which remained undeveloped, was basically satisfied with the role of Adam's wife and helper. The only thing that really disturbed her was the excluding closeness of the relationship between Adam and God. Adam and God just seemed to have more in common, both being men, and Adam came to identify with God more and more. After a while, that made God a bit uncomfortable too, and he started going over in his mind whether he may not have made a mistake letting Adam talk him into banishing Lilith and creating Eve, seeing the power that gave Adam.

Meanwhile Lilith, all alone, attempted from time to time to rejoin the human community in the garden. After her first fruitless attempt to breach its walls, Adam worked hard to build them stronger, even getting Eve to help him. He told her fearsome stories of the demon Lilith who threatens women in

childbirth and steals children from their cradles in the middle of the night.

The second time Lilith came, she stormed the garden's main gate, and a great battle between her and Adam ensued in which she was finally defeated. This time, however, before Lilith got away, Eve got a glimpse of her and saw she was a woman like herself.

After this encounter, seeds of curiosity and doubt began to grow in Eve's mind. Was Lilith indeed just another woman? Adam had said she was a demon. Another women! The very idea attracted Eve. She had never seen another creature like herself before. And how beautiful and strong Lilith had looked! How bravely she had fought! Slowly, slowly Eve began to think about the limits of her own life within the garden.

One day, after many months of strange and disturbing thoughts, Eve, wandering around the edge of the garden, noticed a young apple tree she and Adam had planted and saw that one of its branches stretched over the garden wall. Spontaneously, she tried to climb it, and, struggling to the top, swung herself over the wall.

She did not wander long on the other side before she met the one she had come to find, for Lilith was waiting. At first sight of her, Eve remembered the tales of Adam and was frightened — but Lilith understood and greeted her kindly. "Who are you?" they asked each other. "What is your story" And they sat and spoke together, of the past and then of the future. They talked for many hours, not once, but many times. They taught each other many things, and told each other stories, and laughed together, and cried, over and over, till the bond of

sisterhood grew between them.

Meanwhile, back in the garden, Adam was puzzled by Eve's comings and goings and disturbed by what he sensed to be her new attitude toward him. He talked to God about it, and God, having his own problems with Adam and a somewhat broader perspective, was able to help him out a little — but he was confused too. Something had failed to go according to plan. As in the days of Abraham, he needed counsel from his children. "I am who I am," thought God, "but I must become who I will become."

And God and Adam were expectant and afraid the day Eve and Lilith returned to the garden, bursting with possibilities, ready to rebuild it together.⁸⁸



Women who have spoken out are sometimes unaware of the positive as well as negative response with which they are received. The chief danger is that they will begin to feel isolated, helpless, failures. There is a real problem of patriarchal control to face; unless the messages are put across powerfully enough, and circulated widely, they are likely to vanish. Women then become doomed to repeat themselves over and over again, generation upon generation, without a sense of having progressed.

Women are sometimes surprised when they read material from decades and even centuries ago; surprised that this is their own, invisible history, and dismayed that so little heed has been taken. Early black activist Anna Cooper wrote:

'The colored woman feels that women's cause is one and universal; and that not till the image of God, whether in parian or ebony, is sacred and inviolable; not till race, color, sex and condition are seen as accidents ... not till then is

woman's cause won — not the white woman's, nor the black woman's, nor the red woman's, but the cause of every man and woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong'.⁸⁹

It is hard for feminists to comprehend and forgive the silencing of such womenspeak. Many strong women are worn out in the struggle to break free from social limits, before they ever reach a point of creativity. The problem, as Sara Maitland articulates it, is that 'we do not know where other women have been, or where they are ... we blunder into old traps which previous women thought they had identified and learned to avoid. We waste time and repeat errors ... we too easily fall prey both to the arrogance of believing that we are splendidly solitary and to the threat that we are crazy. We need more maps'.⁹⁰

Maitland characterizes the frustration by way of a satirical version of the hymn, 'Onward Christian Soldiers':

'Like a mighty tortoise, moves the Church of God,
Brothers, we are treading where we've always trod.'

Feminists know this to be true; they also realise it is not good enough. One of the most encouraging aspects of the modern women's movement is the wealth of material and data now published and available. This is at least one monument to the theory that economic independence (eg. The Women's Press) bears its own rewards.

The only way for the debate to succeed, is to keep it alive. For that, it is necessary for women to go on speaking, and for humanity to hear.

THE END

CHAPTER ONE: NOTES

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