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THE CHRISTOLOGY OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY:
EXPLORATION AND CRITIQUE

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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May 1995

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INTRODUCTION

The primary focus of this thesis is feminist Christology. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to begin with a general introduction to feminist theology and an exploration of its fundamental teachings. The general introduction will first explore the historical roots of feminist theology in America, briefly tracing both its nineteenth century roots and its more contemporary roots. Second, it will explore and set forth the situation from which feminist theologians have written feminist theology. Finally, the general introduction will explore the basic goal of feminist theology.

This will be followed by an exploration and critique of the theology espoused by prominent feminist theologians, focusing particularly on four areas of fundamental Christian doctrine. The first area of exploration will be the feminist view of Scripture and feminist hermeneutics. This exploration will treat three categories of feminist theologians: 1. "radical" feminists--those who completely reject Scripture and the Christian Church, 2. "Christian" feminists--those who have remained within traditional churches and consider Scripture to be a "resource" for feminist theology, and 3. "biblical" feminists--those who believe

Scripture supports the central tenets of feminism. These respective views of Scripture advocated by various feminist theologians will necessarily affect the rest of their theology, and thus these three categories will prove useful throughout this thesis. Following this exploration of feminist hermeneutics will be an examination of feminist views concerning God and God-language, man, and sin. This introductory study will provide necessary background information as this thesis turns to its primary focus--an exploration and critique of feminist Christology.

While there are countless feminist theologians whose Christologies could be explored, this thesis will explore what three prominent feminist theologians teach regarding the person and work of Christ. Three feminist theologians have been selected to correspond to the three general categories of feminists noted above: 1. Mary Daly will represent the Radical feminists, 2. Rosemary Radford Ruether will represent the Christian feminists, and 3. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott will represent the Biblical feminists. Thus, by exploring the respective Christologies of these three women, this thesis will present a representative picture of what feminist theologians are teaching concerning the person and work of Christ.

Finally, this thesis will offer analysis and critique in the light of Scripture and Confessional Lutheran theology. Ultimately, it will be determined whether or not the

Christ of feminist theology is the Christ of Scripture.

CHAPTER I

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO FEMINIST THEOLOGY

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned. (2 Peter 2:1-2)¹

These words of Saint Peter have been proven true over and over again, for ever since the dawn of the Christian Church, orthodox Christianity has been confronted by countless challenges from within and without. Every new generation of Christians is faced with challenges to the one true faith--some of these challenges are new, while others are merely old ones wearing new masks. In our present day and age, one of the most significant challenges to the Christian faith is that posed by feminist theology. Unfortunately, far too many Christians do not have a sufficient understanding of the nature of feminist theology, for they consider it to be concerned only with the quest for the ordination of women. Certainly there are many feminist theologians who are concerned with the issue of women's ordination, but this

¹All Bible quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New American Standard Bible.

issue is only a very small part of a much larger whole. If orthodox Christianity is to stand up and face the challenges of feminist theology, it must: 1. explore the theological positions advocated by feminist theologians, and 2. critically analyze and evaluate these positions in the light of Scripture. This thesis will seek to do both of these things.

When one sets out to explore feminist theology, he or she immediately discovers that there are nearly as many feminist theologies as there are writers of feminist theology. Thus it is somewhat difficult to present a synthesized, representative picture of feminist theology. Rosemary Radford Ruether, a noted feminist theologian, readily admits the fact that there are numerous feminist theologies when she writes:

First we must say that there is no final and definitive feminist theology, no final synthesis that encompasses all human experience, criticizes what is sexist, and appropriates what is usable in all historic traditions.²

Another noted feminist theologian, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, readily concurs with Ruether:

There exists not one feminist theology or *the* feminist theology but many different expressions and articulations of feminist theology. These articulations not only share in the diverse presuppositions and perspectives of feminist studies but also function within the frameworks of divergent theological perspectives, such as neo-orthodoxy, evangelical theology, liberal theology, liberation theology, and various confessional

²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 20.

theological perspectives.³

Because of the obvious difficulties resulting from the great divergence amongst feminist theologians, it becomes necessary to divide feminist theologians into workable categories. Such categorization will prove helpful throughout this thesis.

Three Categories of Feminist Theologians

Though Schussler Fiorenza noted above that there are at least six divergent theological perspectives from which feminist theologians write, for the purposes of this exploration feminist theologians shall be divided into three broad categories. This will certainly make the task somewhat easier, helping to overcome the great amount of diversity amongst feminist theologians. Recognizing that a certain amount of diversity exists even within the respective categories, feminist theologians shall be divided into the following three categories: 1. "radical" feminists, 2. "Christian" feminists, and 3. "biblical" feminists.

Radical Feminists

A radical feminist is one who wants absolutely nothing to do with Christianity, for she deems it to be so corrupt that nothing can be done to redeem it. Among radical femi-

³Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 3.

nists one finds both those who were never affiliated with Christianity and those who were once members of Christian churches but have since completely severed any ties with Christianity. Describing the position of radical feminists, Ruether, who is not a radical feminist, writes:

Others regard the change as so fundamental that it must bury all patriarchal religions forever in the scrapheap of history as outworn and even demonic world views. For them Judaism and Christianity equal patriarchy and only patriarchy. No one who is truly a feminist can find any authentic meaning for herself within the context of these traditions. To do so is sheer masochism and dependency. Feminists must purge themselves of all traces of adherence to these religions and turn to alternate woman's religions.⁴

Because of its radical separation from all that is male, this category is perhaps the least popular of the three, for it does not appeal to a majority of women. Neither does it appeal to men who are feminists. Since radical feminists' primary concern with Christianity is the condemnation and rejection of it, the present exploration will be limited to only one representative of this position. Perhaps the most widely known representative is Mary Daly. Daly is a former Roman Catholic who has completely separated herself from the church, and thus she proves to be an excellent resource for this exploration.

⁴Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 22 (1982), 54.

Christian Feminists

The second category, Christian feminists, includes those theologians who have opted to remain within existing Christian churches. The label "Christian" does not so much reflect their teachings or theological positions; rather, it points to the fact that they seek to promote their theological ideas within the bounds of their respective church bodies. Christian feminists identify numerous problems within the basic structure of the Christian Church, but they believe that it serves their own best interests to remain within the church. Ruether writes:

It is my view that the feminist option will be able to develop much more powerfully at the present time if it secures footholds in existing Christian churches and uses them to communicate its option to far larger groups of people than it could possibly do if it had to manufacture these institutional resources on its own.⁵

Christian feminism, therefore, uses the established church to gain credibility for its views--to serve as an institutional base lest it be ignored as just some "crackpot" ideology. Rather than separating and creating their own church, these feminists seek sweeping changes in the fundamental doctrines and practices of already existing Christian churches. This option has a much wider appeal among women and men, and it seems that a majority of the most noted feminist theologians fall under this category. This

⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women-Church (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 39.

exploration will include the following Christian feminists: Denise Lardner Carmody, Ruether, Letty Russell, Schussler Fiorenza, Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, and Phyllis Trible.

Biblical Feminists

The final category is the biblical feminists. As the label certainly implies, biblical feminists are much more dependent on Scripture for their views than are Christian feminists. Whereas a Christian feminist might justify a feminist interpretation of the Bible solely on the basis of women's experience, a biblical feminist would find the justification within the Bible text itself.⁶ Biblical feminists believe that "when properly understood, the Bible supports the central tenets of feminism."⁷ Though it shall be determined later whether or not this is true, biblical feminists at least believe their views are biblical. Like Christian feminism, biblical feminism appeals to a large number of women and men. However, it seems that the number of noted theologians writing from a biblical feminist perspective is not as high. For the purposes of this thesis, the teachings of Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and Patricia

⁶Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation," in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 97.

⁷Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "A Challenge to Male Interpretation: Women and the Bible," The Sojourners, 5:2 (1976), 21.

Wilson-Kastner will be explored.

As this thesis proceeds, and especially when the respective hermeneutics of these feminist theologians are explored, the distinctions between radical, Christian, and biblical feminists shall become very clear. However, despite their differences, these three groups of feminists do have much in common: 1. they share the same roots, 2. they write from the same basic situation, and 3. they share the same basic goal.

Roots of Feminist Theology

Although feminist theology is largely a phenomenon of the past twenty-five years, its roots can be traced back to the nineteenth century. The feminists of the late nineteenth century sought to win for themselves autonomous recognition as public persons. Their primary concerns were in the socio-economic sphere, for they sought to support the role of women in a number of different areas of society. Among the rights they sought to achieve were the right to vote, the right to inherit and manage property, the right to represent themselves and control their own earnings, and the right to attend institutions of higher education.⁸

Although most of these nineteenth century feminists were merely concerned with gaining these rights, there were

⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), p. 117.

some who blamed the Christian church for the low status of women. In 1895 Elizabeth Cady Stanton edited The Women's Bible, a "biblical commentary documenting the deep religious roots of the economic and social oppression of women."⁹

Attacking the authority of the Bible, Cady Stanton wrote:

We have made a fetich of the Bible long enough. The time has come to read it as we do all other books, accepting the good and rejecting the evil it teaches.¹⁰

Though Cady Stanton did not gain a wide following, she set an important precedent.

Despite its popularity among women, the feminism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was somewhat short-lived. Deane W. Ferm writes:

However, the major drive for women's rights came to a virtual standstill in the 1920's with the ratification of the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote and it was not until the 1960's that the feminist movement reasserted itself to any significant degree.¹¹

However, as was the case with Cady Stanton's The Women's Bible, the early feminist movement set an important precedent and provided inspiration for the contemporary feminist movement.

The contemporary roots of feminist theology are found in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. During this

⁹Deane W. Ferm, "Feminist Theology in America," Scottish Journal of Theology, 34:2 (1981), 158.

¹⁰Elizabeth Cady Stanton, The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible (The Women's Bible), part 2 (New York: Arno Press, 1974), p. 8.

¹¹Ferm, p. 158.

decade there arose a feminist counter-culture, and again the primary concerns were in the socio-economic sphere. Credited with being the most important catalyst in the revival of feminism was a book written by Betty Friedan titled, The Feminist Mystique (1963). The year 1966 witnessed the birth of NOW, the National Organization for Women, and Friedan was named the first president. The intent of NOW was to overthrow the traditional stereotypes of the role of women so that women might gain full participation in the mainstream of American society.¹²

As the women's movement gained momentum in the late 1960s, feminist ideas began to spill over into the realm of theology, and feminist theology emerged. Although feminist theology was merely a trickle in the late 1960s, it became a raging stream in the 1970s. Ferm writes:

For it was not until the 1970's that women began in large numbers to question male-dominated theological assumptions including the belief that the subordination of woman has been ordained by God, that woman is evil by nature, and that God is male.¹³

Thus in the 1970s, a large number of women and men began writing on the subject of feminist theology. The trend has continued through the 1980s, as countless books and articles have been written by feminist theologians. Furthermore, the trend shows no signs of slowing. It is these writings which

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 159.

the Christian church must explore so that it will be able to critically evaluate feminist theology.

Context of Feminist Theology

Despite fundamental differences amongst the three categories of feminist theologians, there is general agreement as to the context from which feminist theology is written. Stated very simply, feminist theologians assert that society oppresses women simply because they are women. In other words, we live in a male-dominated world. Daly describes the situation as that of a sexual caste system--a situation in which women are oppressed. She writes:

. . . there exists a worldwide phenomenon of sexual caste, basically the same whether one lives in Saudi Arabia or Sweden. This planetary caste system involves birth-ascribed hierarchically ordered groups, whose members have unequal access to goods, services, and prestige and to physical and mental well-being.¹⁴

Although women are essentially the victims in this system, they have contributed to the perpetuation of the system through sex role socialization. Still, men must receive the primary blame.

Similar sentiments are voiced by Carmody, Schussler Fiorenza, and Ruether. Carmody writes:

By modern standards of equality, women are oppressed--held below parity--in most of today's societies, and women have been oppressed throughout recorded history. If one uses such criteria as equal economic opportunity, equal access to political power, and prestige or status according to society's definitions of success and wis-

¹⁴Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 2.

dom, women come out the underlings.¹⁵

Schussler Fiorenza labels this caste system or oppressive structure as "patriarchy" or "patriarchalism." She understands patriarchy as "a social system maintaining male dominance and privilege based on female submission and marginality."¹⁶

While Ruether is in basic agreement with the others, she expands the definition of patriarchy somewhat. She writes:

By patriarchy we mean not only the subordination of females to males, but the whole structure of Father-ruled society: aristocracy over serfs, masters over slaves, king over subjects, racial overlords over colonized people.¹⁷

Thus, Ruether defines patriarchy as a dualistic system which places superordinates over subordinates. Ruether includes those other than women as victims of patriarchal oppression, yet she contends that "women are the first and oldest oppressed, subjugated people."¹⁸ On this point Russell¹⁹

¹⁵Denise Lardner Carmody, The Double Cross: Ordination, Abortion, and Catholic Feminism (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986), pp. 100-101.

¹⁶Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "The Biblical Roots for the Discipleship of Equals," The Journal of Pastoral Counseling, 14:1 (1979), 15.

¹⁷Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 61.

¹⁸Ruether, Liberation Theology, p. 124.

¹⁹Letty M. Russell, Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective--A Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 29.

readily concurs with Ruether, but Daly²⁰ and Schussler Fior-
enza²¹ carry it one step further in stating that women are
the most oppressed of all oppressed peoples.

Patriarchal oppression or a sexual caste system, then,
is the situation from which feminist theology is written.
While patriarchy is said to permeate all the societies and
cultures of the world, the church is especially criticized
for the role it has played in the building of a sexist
society. Christianity, with its exclusively male symbolism
for God and its male-dominated hierarchy and clergy, is
blamed for having contributed a great deal to the secondary
status accorded to women both in the church and in society.
Daly writes:

To summarize briefly the situation: the entire concep-
tual systems of theology and ethics, developed under the
conditions of patriarchy, have been the products of
males and tend to serve the interests of sexist soci-
ety.²²

Schussler Fiorenza points a finger directly at the
Bible, for it is used to justify the subordination of women
as the will of God. She writes:

. . . today the Bible is used against the movement for
the equality of women in society and the churches.
Whenever women protest against the political discrimina-
tion and civil degradation of women or whenever we argue
against the inequality in the churches we are referred
to the Bible where the subordination of women was di-

²⁰Daly, Beyond God the Father, p. 28.

²¹Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, p. 44.

²²Daly, Beyond God the Father, p. 4.

vinely revealed and ordained.²³

Schussler Fiorenza further criticizes the church for failing to give serious consideration to the concerns and criticisms of feminist theologians. She suggests that Christian churches respond to feminism in one of three ways: 1. by denying the validity of their concerns, 2. by granting a few trivial concessions in order to silence them, or 3. by outright rejection of their movement.²⁴

Carmody, like Schussler Fiorenza, also criticizes Christianity's response to the concerns of feminism. She writes:

Where women ought to find in the church a championing of their fight for equality and justice, they often find ridicule and neglect, if not re-doubled oppression.²⁵

Carmody finds this situation especially bothersome, for whereas secular society has been granting women more and more rights, the church has lagged far behind. This, she asserts, has greatly damaged the credibility of the church. She writes:

So, the church has dug itself a great credibility gap. You cannot claim to be a light to the Gentiles, lag behind the Gentiles in sexual justice, and have your claim found credible. You cannot lecture the world

²³Fiorenza, "The Biblical Roots for the Discipleship of Equals," p. 7.

²⁴Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation," in Mission Trends No. 4, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York and Grand Rapids: Paulist Press and William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 191.

²⁵Carmody, The Double Cross, p. 9.

about human dignity, deny the full humanity of more than half your own membership, and have your lecturing be found credible. The Christian abuse of women therefore is a major scandal, a great millstone hung round its clerical neck.²⁶

In short, feminists assert that Christianity has played a major role in making our society and culture sexist, for it continues to perpetuate the myth of the inferiority of women.²⁷ The doctrines and traditions of Christianity have been oppressive and sexist, declaring women to be socially, ecclesiastically, and personally inferior to men. The church itself is a sexist institution, and furthermore, it promotes the idea that the status quo in both our world and in the church is God's will. While feminist theologians differ greatly in their responses to patriarchy, they at least agree that patriarchy and its oppression of women is the context out of which feminist theology is written. Furthermore, they agree that the Christian church has served to justify and perpetuate patriarchal oppression.

Basic Goal of Feminist Theology

The primary or basic goal of feminist theology grows out of this perceived situation of oppression. Again, despite their many differences, feminist theologians are in general agreement when it comes to this goal. The basic

²⁶Denise Lardner Carmody, Feminism and Christianity: A Two-Way Reflection (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), p. 89.

²⁷Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation," p. 191.

goal of feminist theology is easily recognized in the following definitions of "feminism":

1. Schussler Fiorenza--Feminism is not just a theoretical world view or perspective but a women's liberation movement for social and ecclesial change.²⁸

Feminism is a liberation movement that seeks to abolish all structures of exploitation and stereotypes based on sex and gender.²⁹

2. Carmody--By *feminism* I mean the advocacy of women's equality with men, sensitivity to the injustices women have suffered, and the resolution that women come into their own without delay.³⁰

3. Mollenkott--Feminism is simply the commitment to work for the political, economic, and social equality of man and woman, boy and girl, in every area of life.³¹

4. Wilson-Kastner--When the word 'feminism' is used here without further qualification, it focuses the reader on shared goals of the movement: the sense that women are equally human beings with men, that they should be regarded as such in all dimensions of private and public life, and that appropriate social changes should be made to ensure that women are so treated if they are not already.³²

On the basis of these brief definitions, one can make three important observations regarding the basic goal of feminist theology.

²⁸Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, p. 5.

²⁹Fiorenza, "The Biblical Roots for the Discipleship of Equals," p. 15.

³⁰Carmody, Feminism and Christianity, p. 21.

³¹Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), p. 2.

³²Patricia Wilson-Kastner, "Contemporary Feminism and the Christian Doctrine of the Human," Word & World, 2:3 (1982), 234.

First, feminist theology is liberation theology. Feminists seek liberation from patriarchal oppression, and thus they have bonded themselves together into a sisterhood working to bring about "the human becoming of that half of the human race that has been excluded from humanity by sexual definition."³³ Liberation means that all patriarchal barriers must be broken down so that all women may become equal and full participants in the church and in society. Liberation for women means the end of sexism and patriarchy. Russell summarizes it when she writes:

Feminist theology today is, by definition, *liberation theology* because it is concerned with the liberation of all people to become full participants in human society. *Liberation theology is an attempt to reflect upon the experience of oppression and our actions for the new creation of a more humane society.*³⁴

Women are engaged in a struggle for liberation, and feminist theology seeks to facilitate this process of liberation. This struggle begins when women have the courage "to see and to be"³⁵ in the face of their marginalization and oppression--"with woman in her own heart, mind, and actions as she learns to be *pro-woman*."³⁶ Women must stand up for themselves, becoming fully aware of the oppressive conditions under which they live. This recognition of both their

³³Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 35.

³⁴Russell, *Human Liberation*, p. 20.

³⁵Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 4.

³⁶Russell, *Human Liberation*, p. 38.

secondary status and the need to do something about it is often referred to as "conscientization." Russell explains conscientization when she writes:

Conscientization is learning to perceive the social, political, economic, racial, and ecclesial contradictions and to take steps with others to change them.³⁷

A second observation, also touched upon in Russell's explanation of conscientization, concerns the changes advocated by feminist theologians. Feminists believe that it is impossible for women to be liberated in the present social system.³⁸ Hence, Schussler Fiorenza writes:

The women's liberation movement demands a restructuring of societal institutions and a redefinition of cultural images and roles of women *and* men, if women are to become autonomous human persons and achieve economic and political equality.³⁹

The same thing can also be said regarding Christianity as it now stands. Russell writes:

Certainly, theology is no exception to the excitement and challenge. Women are voicing their search for liberation by rejecting oppressive and sexist religious traditions that declare that they are socially, ecclesiastically, and personally inferior because of their sex.⁴⁰

The liberation of women, therefore, involves changes in Christian theology. As shall soon be discovered, the

³⁷Letty M. Russell, Growth in Partnership (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), pp. 75-76.

³⁸Ruether, Liberation Theology, p. 116.

³⁹Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation," p. 190.

⁴⁰Russell, Human Liberation, pp. 18-19.

changes advocated vary greatly depending upon which of the three categories a feminist theologian falls under. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that changes are indeed necessary.

Finally, a third observation can be made. Feminist theologians are indeed working toward the liberation of women, but ultimately feminist theology strives to be human and not just feminine.⁴¹ The goal is not a simple reversal of sexism, but it is religious, political, economic, and social equality for both sexes.⁴² The goal is to work toward a new humanity so that all people, male and female, are free to participate equally in the church and in the world. Schussler Fiorenza writes:

In the last analysis, such a project is not just geared toward the liberation of women but also toward the emancipation of the Christian community from patriarchal structures and androcentric mind-sets so that the gospel can become again a 'power for the salvation' of women as well as men. Such a revisioning of Christian community and belief systems is not only a religious but also an important political-cultural task, since biblical patriarchal religion still contributes to the oppression and exploitation of all women in our society.⁴³

With the exception of Daly and other radical feminists who advocate separation, feminists agree that liberation toward a new humanity must be accomplished by working with

⁴¹Ibid., p. 19.

⁴²Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 20.

⁴³Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), p. 31.

the oppressors, not by separation and rejection. "Us versus them" does not lead to true liberation. Mollenkott writes:

Hope lies not in further competition, but in cooperation; not in machismo, but in mutuality; not in autonomy, but in attachment.⁴⁴

The oppressors must also be addressed as a group which has fallen away from its authentic purpose. Liberation is, therefore, for all of humanity--oppressed and oppressor, female and male, must dialogue and work together to accomplish God's will that all people be liberated.

Despite their many differences, feminist theologians are essentially united in a quest to bring about the end of patriarchal oppression. Furthermore, all feminist theologians share the same basic roots and write from the same general context. However, as one begins to explore specific areas of feminist theology, he or she easily recognizes some of the profound differences between radical feminists, Christian feminists, and biblical feminists. Thus, this thesis shall now turn to an exploration of some specific teachings espoused by feminist theologians.

⁴⁴Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "Female God-Imagery and Wholistic Social Consciousness," Studies in Formative Theology, 5:3 (1984), 352.

CHAPTER II
EXPLORATION AND CRITIQUE OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY:
HERMENEUTICS, GOD AND GOD-LANGUAGE,
MAN, AND SIN

If one seeks to gain a sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Christology of feminist theology, he or she must first engage in an exploration of feminist theology's treatment of other specific areas of Christian doctrine. This is especially true of feminist views concerning Scripture, God and God-language, man, and sin, for what feminist theologians teach and believe concerning these areas of doctrine will necessarily affect what they teach concerning Christ. As one moves away from the context and basic goal of feminist theology and explores its treatment of specific areas of Christian doctrine, he or she begins to recognize the profound differences between radical, Christian, and biblical feminists. Perhaps these differences are most easily recognized when one explores the different ways in which feminist theologians approach Scripture. In addition, their respective views of Scripture will obviously have a great influence upon their views of other fundamental Christian doctrines. Thus, this chapter begins with an explora-

tion of the hermeneutics of feminist theology.

Hermeneutics

Radical Feminists

As one might expect, Mary Daly¹ and other radical feminists have an extremely critical view of Scripture. Daly asserts that Scripture is not a unique and changeless revelation, for it is said to merely contain the words of men.² Furthermore, it must be rejected outright because it serves to further the causes of patriarchy in our society. Daly's approach to Scripture and all other perpetuators of patriarchy is summarized in the following statement regarding patriarchal language and images:

The method of liberation, then, involves a *castrating* of language and images that reflect and perpetuate the structures of a sexist world. It castrates precisely in the sense of cutting away the phallogocentric value system imposed by patriarchy, in its subtle as well as in its more manifest expressions.³

Certainly Daly considers Scripture to be among the "more manifest expressions" of patriarchy, and thus she has absolutely no use for it. Daly completely rejects Scripture and

¹Mary Daly is a former Roman Catholic who has since left the church. In 1966 she became the first woman to join the theology faculty at Boston College, and she is currently Associate Professor of Theology at Boston College.

²Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 7.

³Ibid., p. 9.

its myths of patriarchal dominance,⁴ and thus the Bible does not serve as a source and norm for her theology.

Christian Feminists

Because Christian feminists have opted to remain within existing Christian churches, it is only natural that one does not find them totally rejecting Scripture. However, neither does one find them totally accepting Scripture as God's inspired and inerrant Word. Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Phyllis Trible, and Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite are the Christian feminists whose hermeneutics shall now be explored.

Rosemary Radford Ruether⁵

Ruether readily admits that the Bible is patriarchal, and thus it is up to women to judge this patriarchal bias.⁶ She asserts that Scripture is merely a collection of human experience, and thus it is not an objective source of theology. The Bible, then, is not God's Word, but human words

⁴Ibid., p. 142.

⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether is a Roman Catholic, currently serving as Georgia Harkness Professor of Applied Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 116.

based on human experience.⁷

Ruether believes that one can find two opposing religions within the pages of the Bible: 1. a religion which sanctifies the status quo, and 2. a prophetic religion which criticizes patriarchal structures. She explains the former when she writes:

One religion provides what might be called the 'sacred canopy' for the existing social order. This religion models religious law and symbols, including the symbols for God, after a patriarchal, hierarchical, ethnocentric and slave-holding society. It uses the religious symbols to validate this society, to make it appear normative, to make God appear to be the creator and sanctioner of this society and adherence to it to be the divine will and the means of salvation.⁸

Directly opposed to this religion of the "sacred canopy" is the prophetic religion or "faith" which she explains as follows:

The prophetic faith critiques all religious sanctifications of patriarchal, hierarchical and oppressive social relationships. It directs us to an ongoing struggle against these types of relationships both in their ideological and their social expressions in the name of the Reign of God, in the hope of that new era of Shalom where all traces of dehumanization will disappear from creation.⁹

It is in this prophetic religion that Ruether finds a source for feminist theology, and it serves as the basis for her

⁷Rosemary Radford Ruether, The Church Against Itself (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 226.

⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 22 (1982), 55.

⁹Ibid., p. 65.

hermeneutics.

By identifying this prophetic religion within the Bible itself, Ruether has found a biblical norm by which Bible texts themselves can be criticized. She believes that this prophetic norm is central to Biblical faith, and thus patriarchy can no longer be maintained as authoritative.¹⁰ Ruether has labeled this critical principle of feminist interpretation the "prophetic-liberating tradition," and she explains it as follows:

Four themes are essential to the prophetic-liberating tradition of Biblical faith: 1. God's defense and vindication of the oppressed; 2. the critique of the dominant systems of power and their powerholders; 3. the vision of a new age to come in which the present system of injustice is overcome and God's intended reign of peace and justice is installed in history; and 4. finally, the critique of ideology, or of religion, since ideology in this context is primarily religious. Prophetic faith denounces religious ideologies and systems that function to justify and sanctify the dominant, unjust social order.¹¹

While Ruether finds much that is commendable in this biblical tradition, she only considers it to be a paradigm or prototype for feminist theology. This is the case because in the Bible the prophetic-liberating tradition is never explicitly applied to the critique of women's oppression under patriarchy.¹² The prophetic-liberating tradition

¹⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), pp. 23-24.

¹¹Ibid., p. 24.

¹²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women-Church (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 41.

is, therefore, parallel to the critical dynamic of feminism--it is "the usable tradition for feminism in the Bible."¹³ Because the tradition is parallel to the critical dynamic of feminism, it is both useful and helpful in addressing the situation of patriarchy in our church and world.

What Ruether's hermeneutic boils down to is human experience, and more specifically, women's experience of the feminist agenda. Women's experience of the feminist agenda is, therefore, the starting point and ending point of her hermeneutical circle. The Bible and other received symbols are authenticated or not by their ability to illuminate, interpret, and change contemporary experience. If it is found that the Bible or parts of it do not speak to experience or do not promote feminism's agenda, then the text becomes a dead letter and must be either discarded or altered.¹⁴ Ruether does not consider Scripture to be the source and norm of feminist theology, and her view of Scripture is best summarized in the following:

The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or

¹³Rosemary Radford Ruether, "A Religion for Women: Sources and Strategies," Christianity and Crisis, 39:19 (1979), 310.

¹⁴Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation," p. 11.

to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption.

This negative principle also implies the positive principle: what does promote the full humanity of women is the Holy, it does reflect true relation to the divine, it is the true nature of things, the authentic message of redemption and the message of redemptive community.¹⁵

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza¹⁶

Schussler Fiorenza's view and treatment of Scripture is very similar to that of Ruether. Like Ruether, Schussler Fiorenza denies the inspiration of Scripture and asserts that its texts promote patriarchy. She writes:

Biblical texts are not verbally inspired revelation nor doctrinal principles but historical formulations within the context of a religious community. . . . Similarly, feminist theory insists that all texts are products of an androcentric patriarchal culture and history.¹⁷

Thus, opponents of feminist theology can utilize certain biblical texts precisely because the promotion and justification of patriarchy was part of their original function and intention. Just as it has throughout history, the Bible still functions to legitimize patriarchy. However, Schussler Fiorenza asserts that women must recognize that the words of the Bible are not God's words, but rather the words

¹⁵Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, pp. 18-19.

¹⁶Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza is a Roman Catholic who is currently serving as Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana.

¹⁷Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), p. XV.

of men.¹⁸

While naming the Bible as a source of patriarchal subordination, Schussler Fiorenza also recognizes that the Bible is a source of revelatory truth. Because both elements are found within Scripture, she contends that we need "a new paradigm of biblical hermeneutics and theology."¹⁹ The first thing which Schussler Fiorenza wants theologians to recognize is that there is no such thing as objective interpretation of the Bible. She writes:

The various forms of liberation theology have challenged the so-called objectivity and value-neutrality of academic theology. The basic insight of all liberation theologies, including feminist theology, is the recognition that all theology, willingly or not, is by definition always engaged for or against the oppressed. Intellectual neutrality is not possible in a world of exploitation and oppression.²⁰

In the past the Bible has always been interpreted in favor of the oppressors, and Schussler Fiorenza demands that it must now be interpreted in favor of the oppressed. The myth of objectivity must be abandoned, and instead theology must become partisan. Only when theology is on the side of those who are outcast and oppressed can it become a truly Christian theology.

¹⁸Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), pp. x-xi.

¹⁹Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology and New Testament Interpretation," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 22 (1982), 42.

²⁰Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, p. 6.

The hermeneutical paradigm which Schussler Fiorenza has developed "shares the critical impulses of historical-critical scholarship, on the one hand, and the theological goals of liberation theologies on the other hand."²¹ Her feminist critical theology of liberation thus results in what she refers to as a "hermeneutics of critical evaluation." She explains this hermeneutic as follows:

A feminist critical theology of liberation, therefore, must reject all religious texts and traditions that contribute to 'our unfreedom.' In a public critical discourse this theology seeks to evaluate *all* biblical texts, interpretations, and contemporary uses of the Bible for their contribution to the religious legitimization of patriarchy as well as for their stand toward patriarchal oppression.²²

Schussler Fiorenza also advocates the use of a "hermeneutics of suspicion." It is believed that one must be suspicious when reading the Bible since men wrote it to maintain patriarchal structures. Yet despite the fact that Scripture was canonized in a patriarchal context, she nevertheless believes that some of its texts still allow us to catch a glimpse of the egalitarian and inclusive theology and practice of the early Christians. She likens this glimpse to the tip of an iceberg, and asserts that "what is necessary is a systematic interpretation and historical reconstruction able to make the submerged bulk of the ice-

²¹Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology and New Testament Interpretation," p. 33.

²²Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, p. xvi.

berg visible."²³ In short, a hermeneutics of suspicion means that women must reconstruct Christian theology, history, and tradition so that women's story is also told.

When women use this hermeneutics of suspicion with the hermeneutics of critical evaluation, the Bible can become a resource in their liberation struggle. Thus, according to Schussler Fiorenza, the Bible functions as a prototype for feminist theology, not as an archetype. She explains the distinction when she writes:

Both archetype and prototype, according to the dictionary definition, denote original models. However an archetype is an ideal form that establishes an unchanging timeless pattern, whereas a prototype is not a binding timeless pattern or principle. A prototype is thus critically open to the possibility of its own transformation.²⁴

The Bible, therefore, is viewed not as a source of theology but as a resource for theology.

Although Schussler Fiorenza and Ruether use different words and labels to explain their views, when all is said and done they both seem to end up in the same place. Biblical revelation and truth are found only in those texts and interpretations which transcend or condemn patriarchy and promote the full equality of women. Schussler Fiorenza's theology begins with women's experience rather than Scripture, for it is both women's oppression and women's power

²³Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, p. 56.

²⁴Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology and New Testament Interpretation," pp. 43-44.

that are the *loci* of revelation.²⁵ Inspiration and divine truth are located in people, and especially women, who are struggling for liberation.²⁶ Schussler Fiorenza, therefore, takes what she calls an "advocacy stance," and the following explanation of this stance is an apt summary of her views regarding Scripture:

A feminist theological interpretation of the Bible that has as its canon the liberation of women from oppressive sexist structures, institutions, and internalized values must maintain, therefore, that only the nonsexist and nonpatriarchal traditions of the Bible and the nonoppressive traditions of biblical interpretation have the theological authority of revelation if the Bible is not to continue as a tool for the oppression of women. This advocacy stance demands that oppressive and destructive biblical traditions not be granted their claim to truth and authority today.²⁷

And within this "advocacy stance," Schussler Fiorenza *a priori* defines and determines what are oppressive structures and what are not.

Phyllis Trible²⁸

While Trible's hermeneutics may not be nearly as well developed as Ruether's or Schussler Fiorenza's, her view of Scripture is not substantially different from that of her fellow Christian feminists. Trible asserts that the Bible

²⁵Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, p. 35.

²⁶Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone, p. 1.

²⁷Ibid., p. 60.

²⁸Phyllis Trible is Baldwin Professor of Sacred Literature at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

can be used both to support patriarchy and to support liberation from patriarchy. Furthermore, though the patriarchal stamp of Scripture is permanent, the interpretation of its contents is constantly changing. Thus, the hermeneutical task of feminist theology is to liberate biblical texts from frozen, patriarchal constructions.²⁹ Patriarchal constructions are, therefore, said to be false interpretations.

Furthermore, Tribble believes that one can find within Scripture a depatriarchalizing principle which implicitly disavows sexism. The Exodus narrative, with its theme of freedom from oppression, is said to contain this principle. This principle is especially present in Exodus 1:15-2:10, where it is women who take the initiative which leads to deliverance.³⁰ Stressing the need to recognize this principle, Tribble writes:

For our day we need to perceive the depatriarchalizing principle, to recover it in those texts and themes where it is present and to assert it in our own translations.³¹

Tribble asserts that Scripture is changeable and must be appropriated for new settings--its meaning and function must change as human situations change.³² She believes that

²⁹Phyllis Tribble, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 202.

³⁰Phyllis Tribble, "Good Tidings of Great Joy: Biblical Faith Without Sexism," Christianity and Crisis, 34:1 (1974), 12.

³¹Ibid., p. 16.

³²Ibid.

Scripture must be liberated from patriarchal constructions or male interpretations. As was the case with Ruether and Schussler Fiorenza, the Bible is not the sole source and norm for Tribble's theology.

Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite³³

The last Christian feminist hermeneutics to be explored is that of Thistlethwaite. Like the others, she readily admits that patriarchal power structures have colored both the writing of Scripture and the church's interpretation of it. Thus, she asserts, feminists must make some judgments concerning Scripture--judgments which will help women to "determine which elements of Scripture remain normative for our situation here and now."³⁴ This judgment begins with "interpretive suspicion," which she defines as the realization that the Bible was written from the perspective of the powerless. The vindication of the powerless is a constant theme in Scripture, and thus we must realize that the chosen of God are the powerless and the oppressed.³⁵

³³Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ and currently is Assistant Professor of Theology and Culture at Chicago Theological Seminary.

³⁴Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "Battered Women and the Bible: From Subjection to Liberation," Christianity and Crisis, 41:18 (1981), 310.

³⁵Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, "Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation," in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 100.

The center of feminist Biblical interpretation is, therefore, consciousness of the oppressive situation under which women live. Thistlethwaite writes:

The theology of liberation sees itself as a critique of the present historical practice. Its text is our situation and our situation is basic and a primary point of reference for doing biblical interpretation. The Bible, religious traditions and dogma do not in themselves constitute a primary source of truth that is, as it were, unconnected with the historical truth in action.³⁶

Women, then, must take control of the text and liberate it from patriarchy. Biblical texts which do not address women or are even hostile toward women can be reworked to bring out themes that contribute to the liberation of oppressed women.³⁷ Once again, it is women's experience which is considered to be the source and norm of feminist theology, and not Scripture.

Biblical Feminists

Finally, this section shall examine the hermeneutics of biblical feminists, and more specifically, the hermeneutics of Virginia Ramey Mollenkott.³⁸ While both traditional Christianity and Christian feminists claim that the Bible supports male headship in the home and in the church, Mol-

³⁶Thistlethwaite, "Battered Women and the Bible," p. 310.

³⁷Thistlethwaite, "Every Two Minutes," p. 102.

³⁸Virginia Ramey Mollenkott is an English scholar who is also respected as a theologian. She is currently Professor of English and department chairperson at William Patterson College in New Jersey.

lenkott does not agree. Rather, she asserts that those texts which seem to support female submission have not been properly interpreted. Thus, she believes that the Bible must be the central source of feminist theology. Stating her position, Mollenkott writes:

But there is a third category of feminists, men and women who call ourselves biblical feminists, who believe that the Bible is properly interpreted as supporting the central tenets of feminism.³⁹

Mollenkott, therefore, claims that Scripture is the source of feminist theology, but she cannot make this claim without further qualification.

Although Mollenkott believes that the Bible is a divine book, she places strong emphasis on the fact that it has come to us through human channels. Claiming to hold a very high view of biblical inspiration (fully divine), she also insists that the Bible is fully human.⁴⁰ Patriarchy is one such human aspect, for it is the cultural background of the Bible. Thus, Mollenkott qualifies the authority and inspiration of Scripture by insisting that one not absolutize patriarchal culture. She writes:

Because patriarchy is the cultural background of the scriptures, it is absolutely basic to any feminist reading of the Bible that *one cannot absolutize the culture in which the Bible was written. . . . we must make careful distinction between what is 'for an age'*

³⁹Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 90.

⁴⁰Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), p. 110.

and 'what is for all time.' We cannot assume that because the Bible was written against the backdrop of a patriarchal social structure, patriarchy is the will of God for people in all times and all places.⁴¹

While noting that all agree that, in such areas as political government and slavery, biblical culture cannot be absolutized, she is distressed that the same thing has not happened in relation to the role of women. Thus she asks that "in the area of sexual politics as well as in the area of national politics, we de-absolutize the biblical culture."⁴²

Mollenkott does not believe that applying this de-absolutizing principle to Scripture, especially those portions of Paul's epistles which advocate subordination, undercuts in any way the authority of Scripture and the doctrine of divine inspiration. She writes:

Things have come to a bad pass when we have to avoid seeing certain facts of Scripture (or avoid *admitting* we see them) in order to preserve our preconceived notions about inspiration. Rather, we ought to have so much faith in the God of the Bible that we fearlessly study what is written there.⁴³

. . . We must conquer our fear that honest attention to what we see in the Bible will undercut the doctrine of inspiration. We must allow the facts of Scripture to teach us in what way it is inspired, rather than forcing Scripture to conform to our own theories about it.⁴⁴

⁴¹Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 91.

⁴²Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "A Challenge to Male Interpretation: Women and the Bible," The Sojourners, 5:2 (1976), 21.

⁴³Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 103.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 105.

In short, Mollenkott insists that in order for the Bible to be correctly interpreted, the interpreter must be aware of both the cultural background and the limitations of the human channels. Mollenkott, therefore, does not advocate the rejection of Scripture, but rather she calls for a reinterpretation of certain portions of it.

God and God-Language

The second specific area of doctrine to be explored is the feminist view of God and God-language. As one would certainly expect, the hermeneutics of respective feminist theologians necessarily affect their teachings in other areas of Christian doctrine, and the doctrine of God is no exception.

Radical Feminists

In light of her hermeneutics, it should come as no surprise that Daly (along with other radical feminists) finds the biblical conception of God as "Father" to be unacceptable. The fact that one of Daly's books is titled Beyond God the Father certainly indicates that this is so. Daly believes that we must move beyond God the Father because such a conception of God is used to oppress women. If God is a Father ruling from heaven, then it is only natural that society also be male-dominated. In other words, if God

is Father, the subordination of women is His will.⁴⁵ Thus, Daly asserts that women must castrate God the Father. She writes:

The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live on in the human imagination. The process of cutting away the Supreme Phallus can hardly be a merely 'rational' affair. The problem is one of transforming the collective imagination so that this distortion of the human aspiration to transcendence loses its credibility.⁴⁶

The alternate God which Daly presents is a verb--"Be-ing." Daly describes her concept as follows:

Why indeed must 'God' be a noun? Why not a verb--the most active and dynamic of all? Hasn't the naming of 'God' as a noun been an act of murdering that dynamic Verb? And isn't the Verb infinitely more personal than a mere static noun? The anthropomorphic symbols for God may be intended to convey personality, but they fail to convey that God is Be-ing. Women now who are experiencing the shock of nonbeing and the surge of self-affirmation against this are inclined to perceive transcendence as the Verb in which we participate--live, move, and have our being.⁴⁷

Daly has indeed moved far beyond God the Father. She complains that women have had the power of naming stolen from them, and she seeks to reclaim that power.⁴⁸ Included in the power of naming is the power to name God, and quite obviously, Daly has done just that.

⁴⁵Daly, Beyond God the Father, p. 19.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 33-34.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 8.

Christian Feminists

Although the views of Christian feminists are not as radical as those of Daly, they do share some of the same complaints. An examination of the views of Ruether and Carmody will show this to be true.

Rosemary Radford Ruether

As was the case with Daly, Ruether asserts that exclusively male God-language fosters male-dominance and the oppression of women. Thus, she insists that such God-language must lose its privileged place. She particularly criticizes the concept of God as Father, stating that such a concept is not inspired revelation but merely a projection of the Roman social order. She writes:

The God-language we have been discussing does not actually image God in terms of male persons as a whole, but in terms of a particular role played by some males; namely, the exercise of power over others by ruling-class males. Thus the image of God as Father in this tradition is based on a patriarchal concept of the *paterfamilias* in which the Father is lord or master, not only of his wife, but his children and servants as well. . . . These images of God as *paterfamilias*, or Lord, foster many ethical problems in our construction of relationships, not only between men and women, but also between all groups of people divided by class or race into dominant and subservient relations.⁴⁹

Ruether, therefore, insists that we must seek new images for God--images which break down the patriarchal stereotypes associated with God as Father or King.

⁴⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Critique and Re-visioning of God-Language," The Way, 27 (1987), 133.

The search for new images can begin with the Bible, for although Scripture uses predominately male imagery, it also at times uses female imagery. Ruether points to the fact that in certain texts, such as Isaiah 42:14, God "is described as like a mother or like a woman in travail with the birth of a child."⁵⁰ She also points to the Wisdom tradition, where "the female image appears as a secondary persona of God, mediating the work and will of God to creation."⁵¹ While such female imagery is deemed to be helpful, Ruether does not believe that it is enough. She is not interested in merely adding mothering and nurturing images to complement the existing male images. Rather, she wants the church to engage itself in the creation of new images of God.

As the church begins this task, it must recognize that "although all our language for God is necessarily drawn from human experience, since this is the only experience we have directly, its application to God can only be analogical or metaphorical, not literal."⁵² The experience from which our God-language is drawn must no longer be exclusively male, but rather, it must be inclusive. Ruether writes:

God-language, which recognizes the inclusive and metaphorical nature of religious language, should move

⁵⁰Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 56.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 57.

⁵²Ruether, "Feminist Critique and Re-visioning of God-Language," p. 137.

toward a pluralization of images, male and female, images drawn from nature, as well as human society. . . . Thus, while we need to image God in terms of female, as well as male persons, we need to reach for creative images that shatter conventional patriarchal stereotypes and point us to a vision of full and liberated persons, male and female, able to enter into mutual relations with each other. The image of Wisdom as a strong woman, ruler of her own household, who invites others to a banquet that she prepares, is one such image.⁵³

In many of her writings, Ruether uses the term "God/-ess" to refer to God. Explaining this terms, she writes the following:

Finally, when discussing fuller divinity to which this theology points, I use the term God/ess, a written symbol intended to combine both the masculine and feminine forms of the word for the divine while preserving the Judeo-Christian affirmation that divinity is one. This term is unpronounceable and inadequate. It is not intended as language for worship, where one might prefer a more evocative term, such as Holy One or Holy Wisdom. Rather it serves here as an analytic sign to point toward that yet unnameable understanding of the divine that would transcend patriarchal limitations and signal redemptive experience for women as well as men.⁵⁴

God/ess, then, is a term which Ruether advocates for use during the period of transition as the church abandons male-dominated God-language and moves toward the creation of a pluralization of inclusive images.

Concluding this examination of Ruether's views concerning God, one final quotation shall be noted. It is a very appropriate quotation with which to end, for in it Ruether explains her own image of God. She writes:

⁵³Ibid., pp. 140-141.

⁵⁴Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 46.

If you asked me what my image of God was, I would say something like: 'She is the One who is the matrix of all Being, the source of both all that is and all that might be, the font of life and the renewal of life in new and redeeming patterns. This great Matrix is neither male nor female, the foundation of the authentic personhood of both men and women. I prefer to think of Her as She in personal prayer, but I would not dogmatize that preference as universal.'⁵⁵

Particularly in the area of God-language, Ruether's views reflect the views of other Christian feminists. This is especially true in the cases of Schussler Fiorenza, Russell, and Carmody. One example shall be sufficient to demonstrate this point.

Denise Lardner Carmody⁵⁶

Carmody, in her attempt to merge feminism with Christianity, places a great deal of emphasis on maternal and other female imagery. She does not believe that the Christian God has to be conceived in exclusively male terms, and thus she insists that for the benefit of women, Christianity should be open to both female and male imagery. She writes:

So, to achieve *her* golden mean, her love that radiates powerfully from a confident self to both God and neighbor, today's woman perhaps needs maternal rather than paternal imagery for God. . . . When the ultimate power that runs the universe is symbolized in female terms, women gain a tremendous source of self-affirmation. If the Goddess is the way to express women's share in such ultimate power, Christian theology ought to be open to

⁵⁵Ruether, "A Religion for Women," p. 310.

⁵⁶Denise Lardner Carmody is a Roman Catholic who is currently Professor of Religion and chairperson of the Department of Religion at the University of Tulsa.

the Goddess.⁵⁷

Like Ruether and other Christian feminists, Carmody does not advocate exclusive use of female imagery, but rather a pluralization of images, male and female images, which promote full humanity and liberation for women as well as men. This separates them from the radical feminists, such as Daly, who want to strip any and all maleness from the concept of God.

Biblical Feminists

As representatives of the biblical feminists, the views of Mollenkott and Patricia Wilson-Kastner⁵⁸ shall be explored.

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and Patricia Wilson-Kastner

Like the Christian feminists, Mollenkott also has problems with exclusively male symbolism for God. She stresses that the absence of female symbolism is detrimental to the spiritual development of both males and females. The use of female images alongside male images will not only empower women, but it will also empower men to accept and

⁵⁷Denise Lardner Carmody, Feminism and Christianity: A Two-Way Reflection (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), p. 52.

⁵⁸Patricia Wilson-Kastner is an Episcopal Priest and is currently Professor of Homiletics at General Theological Seminary in New York City.

honor feminine traits within their own natures.⁵⁹ If we expand our imagery to include both male and female images, it will help "to correct imbalances and to restore wholeness to the human perspective."⁶⁰

If we are going to expand our imagery, Mollenkott insists that we must first recognize the fact that all biblical language about God is metaphorical. She writes:

It is vital that we remind ourselves constantly that our speech about God, including the biblical metaphors of God as our Father and all the masculine pronouns concerning God, are figures of speech and are not the full truth about God's ultimate nature. But on the other hand we would be no more accurate to assume that God is really our Mother than to assume literal fatherhood. The point is not that God is female, nor that God is literally a combination of male and female (androgynous), but rather that God transcends all human limitations, including the limitations of human sexuality.⁶¹

Thus, if all God-language is merely metaphorical and if God transcends human sexuality, there is nothing wrong or unorthodox about using both male and female language to refer to God.

Furthermore, Mollenkott points to the fact that the biblical authors utilized feminine imagery for God, and she cites several examples. First, in Genesis 3 God made clothing (women's work) for Adam and Eve, and during the wilder-

⁵⁹Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "Female God-Imagery and Wholistic Social Consciousness," Studies in Formative Theology, 5:3 (1984), 352.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 346.

⁶¹Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, pp. 66-67.

ness wanderings God performed a mother's role by providing food and clothing. Second, Isaiah is rich with female imagery. Isaiah 42:14 speaks of God crying like a woman in labor, Isaiah 49:15 compares God to a woman who cannot forget her suckling child, and Isaiah 66:13 speaks of God comforting His people as a mother comforts her son. Finally, the parable of the lost coin pictures God as a woman who is not satisfied until she finds her lost coin.⁶² Commenting on the importance of such female imagery, Wilson-Kastner writes:

The Christian tradition offers a vast and more complex body of language and imagery about God than most of us recognize. The language of the mainline tradition has been dominantly, although not exclusively, male-oriented and as the rich and varied traditions are brought to our awareness again, a far richer language will be at our disposal.⁶³

Thus, biblical feminists, like the Christian feminists, call for the use of both male and female imagery. However, unlike Christian feminists who seek to create new and non-biblical imagery, biblical feminists seek to appropriate female imagery that already exists within the pages of Scripture. If the Bible provides us with female imagery, we must use it regularly in the life of the church. Certainly we may know God as Father, and it is not wrong to use

⁶²Ibid., pp. 56-58.

⁶³Patricia Wilson-Kastner, Faith, Feminism, and the Christ (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 133.

male imagery, but our God-language must not stop there.⁶⁴ We must no longer ignore the female imagery for God, but instead utilize it in our worship. This might include such things as praying "Our Father/Mother who art in heaven" or the use of a non-sexist doxology.⁶⁵ Both our corporate worship life and the lives of individual Christians will, it is said, be greatly enhanced if we utilize both male and female imagery for God.

Man

The feminist view of man is the next area of exploration. Although the distinctions between Christian and biblical feminists were very apparent in the examinations of feminists hermeneutics and feminist views of God, such distinctions seem to disappear when the discussion turns to man. For most feminist theologians, there are three basic points to such a discussion: 1. Galatians 3:28, 2. mankind created in the image of God, and 3. women's subordination, male headship, and the order of creation.

Galatians 3:28

Most feminist theologians seem to begin any discussion of man/humanity with Galatians 3:28, where it is written, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor

⁶⁴Mollenkott, The Divine Feminine, p. 4.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 116.

free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Commenting on the meaning of this verse, Mollenkott writes:

So when Paul says that *in Christ* there is oneness, there is neither male nor female, he is envisioning the breakdown of all stereotypical behavior, including the hierarchical pattern of male dominance and female submission. He is supporting the concept that a healthy personality involves a harmony between the so-called masculine and feminine components in both men and women, while a healthy society involves a harmonious sense of partnership between those who were created biologically male and those who were created biologically female.⁶⁶

Galatians 3:28 does not suggest that biological distinctions between males and females have ceased to exist, but rather that the patriarchal pattern of dominance and submission must be dissolved. What is envisioned is the full equality of men and women, a "discipleship of equals,"⁶⁷ in which both men and women are allowed full participation in both the church and in society. Thus, the vision of Galatians 3:28--the vision and picture of what church and society are supposed to be--is very similar to the picture of the new society of full participation which was referred to in chapter one under the exploration of the basic goal of feminist theology.

While the early church lived out this vision of equality and mutuality, it gradually gave in to patriarchy and began to foster the subordination of women. The vision of

⁶⁶Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 88.

⁶⁷Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, p. 35.

Galatians 3:28 was abandoned not for theological reasons, but for social and political reasons. Feminists assert that this Pauline vision posed a challenge to the Greco-Roman patriarchal system--a challenge which would not be looked upon favorably by the Roman government. Schussler Fiorenza writes:

Like other religions from the East, especially Judaism and the cult of Isis, the early Christians accepted socially powerless people like slaves and women as full members into their religion. Like these religious groups, Christians had to face accusations that they upset the Roman social order by breaking up the patriarchal household. Whenever Christians made converts, especially among slaves and wealthy women, they could be accused of corrupting the Greco-Roman patriarchal structures and thus undermining the social-patriarchal order.⁶⁸

Christianity, therefore, eventually gave in to these social and political pressures, first in the realm of the family and then in the realm of the church. Thus, both the home and the church became patriarchal.

Feminist theologians, then, are calling for a return to the vision of Galatians 3:28. This passage has become a norm for their views of man. Any texts which deny the full equality of man as male and female are judged in its light. On the basis of Galatians 3:28, Letty Russell⁶⁹ rejects Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:34 that women are to

⁶⁸Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology and New Testament Interpretation," p. 39.

⁶⁹Letty Russell is an ordained minister in the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. and is currently Professor of the Practice of Theology at Yale Divinity School.

remain silent in the churches.⁷⁰ Similarly, Thistlethwaite rejects the household code of Ephesians 5:22-33.⁷¹ Thus, Galatians 3:28 has become a critical principle of feminist theology.

Mankind in the Image of God

In Genesis 1:27 it is written, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." In their interpretations of this verse, many feminist theologians state that "male and female" explains the image of God. This interpretation is especially emphasized in the writings of Mollenkott, Ruetter, and Tribble. Mollenkott writes:

What Genesis 1 tells us is that both male and female were created in the image of God. If C. S. Lewis were right that God is masculine, then only the human male would be in the image of God; but such is not the case. . . . if both male and female are made in God's image, then in some mysterious way the nature of God encompasses all the traits which society labels feminine as well as all the traits society labels masculine.⁷²

The image of God, therefore, is equated with "male and female." While such an assertion must necessarily have an effect on their views of God and even seems to contradict earlier assertions that God is neither male nor female, it also affects their views concerning man. If God's image in

⁷⁰Letty M. Russell, Growth in Partnership (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), p. 21.

⁷¹Thistlethwaite, "Every Two Minutes," p. 105.

⁷²Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 56.

man is equated with "male and female," there can be no justification for the subordination of women. Genesis 1:27 envisions the same equality and mutuality envisioned in Galatians 3:28, and thus it too serves as a critical principle.

Subordination, Headship, and the Order of Creation

Finally, this section shall examine the feminist view of women's subordination, male headship, and the order of creation in the writings of Paul. As has already been noted, most feminist theologians simply reject these notions on the basis of Galatians 3:28 and Genesis 1:27. However, in Mollenkott there is a unique emphasis which must be explored. Unlike Christian feminists, she does not simply reject the texts in question. Instead, she formulates an argument in order to demonstrate why such texts are no longer applicable. Mollenkott begins, therefore, by suggesting two reasons why Paul included these texts in his writing. First, she asserts that Paul did not try to change patriarchy overnight because he realized this would alienate people and put up a stumbling block to the Gospel. Paul, therefore, did not want to discredit the Gospel by suddenly overthrowing all social customs.⁷³ Second, Paul was continually experiencing inner conflicts between his rabbinical training and the liberating insights of the Gospel. Thus,

⁷³Ibid., pp. 29-30.

on the basis of his rabbinical training, Paul favored female subordination. However, on the basis of the Gospel, he believed in full equality.⁷⁴ Hence, the different emphases in Paul reflect which side won him over at the time of his writing.

Having explained Paul's reasons for including such texts, Mollenkott then seeks to demonstrate why they are invalid. The primary texts in question are 1 Corinthians 11:7-9, 1 Corinthians 14:34, and 1 Timothy 2:11-15. In these texts, Paul argues for male headship and the subordination of women on the basis of Genesis 2, the order of creation. Mollenkott believes that there is a problem with Paul's argument, for it is based on a literal understanding of Genesis 2. She, however, asserts that Genesis 2 should not be taken literally, but rather that it should be understood as a symbolic and poetic expansion of Genesis 1. Taken literally, she asserts, Genesis 2 contradicts the simultaneous creation of male and female in Genesis 1.⁷⁵ Thus, her understanding is said to be the correct one.

Mollenkott writes:

If we want to presume the unity of Genesis, we must interpret the first two chapters in harmony with each other, rather than in conflict--and then we will be up against a serious problem in trying to make the Pauline argument hold water. On the other hand, if we insist on upholding the validity of Paul's reasoning process, we are going to have serious problems making harmony be-

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 103.

⁷⁵Mollenkott, "A Challenge to Male Interpretation," p. 22.

tween Genesis 1 and 2. And once Paul's argument is recognized as using Genesis 2 in a literal fashion belied by the poetic nature of the narrative, the theological basis of the argument collapses. We are forced to recognize that the famous sections on women in the church are simply *descriptions* of first-century customs applied to specific situations in local churches.⁷⁶

Mollenkott, therefore, is asserting that Paul's limitations crop up in the text. Furthermore, she writes:

It does not seem to me detrimental to the authority of Scripture to recognize that some of Paul's arguments *do* reflect his human limitations.⁷⁷

In the end, then, she is asserting that the culture of the Bible cannot be absolutized. Paul's arguments are culturally conditioned, and thus they are no longer applicable to our situation. The Bible does not teach the subordination of women, but mutual submission and concern--the full equality of man as male and female. Still, she asserts that Paul's arguments were written for our instruction--"to show us a man of God *in process*, and to force us to use our heads and our hearts in working our way through conflicting evidence."⁷⁸

Sin

The final area of exploration in this general introduction to feminist theology is the feminist view of sin. As was the case with their views concerning man, most femi-

⁷⁶Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 102.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 104.

⁷⁸Mollenkott, "A Challenge to Male Interpretation," p. 22.

nists are in general agreement when it comes to the subject of sin. Thus, the three categories shall once again be ignored.

Daly captures the spirit of most feminist theologians when she identifies sexism as the original sin from which all humanity must be liberated.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, she also speaks of an original sin of women. This original sin of women is said to be "women's enforced complicity in oppression."⁸⁰ Daly, however, is careful to point out that women should not be blamed for this original sin because it has been forced upon them by patriarchal society. Building on her ideas regarding sin, she also refers to a "fall." However, this fall is seen as a good thing, for it is a fall into liberation and freedom. It is a fall into a new adulthood and a new society.⁸¹

Thus, according to Daly, sin is systemic--it is found in systems which alienate, marginalize, and oppress. Quite simply, sin is equated with sexism. This concept of sin can also be found within the writings of Ruether, Russell, Tribble, and Mollenkott. Ruether writes:

Not sex, but sexism--the distortion of gender (as well as other differences between human groups) into structures of unjust domination and subordination--is central to the origin and transmission of this alienated, fallen

⁷⁹Daly, Beyond God the Father, p. 72.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 49.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 67.

condition.⁸²

Russell presents a similar view when she writes:

Sin as the opposite of liberation is seen as *oppression*, a situation in which there is no community, no room to live as a whole human being.⁸³

And Tribble writes:

. . . we speak from the shared perspective of feminism as a prophetic movement naming the sin of patriarchy.⁸⁴

Finally, Mollenkott follows Daly in suggesting that sin for men is pride and power-seeking, whereas sin for women is complicity.⁸⁵

Because of their systemic view of sin, feminist theologians place very little emphasis on individual sin. In addition, sin is viewed primarily as a distortion in relationships between humans, and thus there is very little emphasis on the relationship between individuals and God.

Ruether writes:

Sin always has a personal as well as a systemic side. But it is never just 'individual'; there is no evil that is not relational. Sin exists precisely in the distortion of relationality, including relation to oneself.⁸⁶

⁸²Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 37.

⁸³Letty M. Russell, Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective--A Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 62.

⁸⁴Phyllis Tribble, "The Effects of Women's Studies on Biblical Studies: An Introduction," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 22 (1982), 4.

⁸⁵Mollenkott, "Female God-Imagery," p. 353.

⁸⁶Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 181.

Finally, feminists assert that we can turn around the sin of sexism and regain contact with "our potential good."⁸⁷

Humans, therefore, are considered to have within themselves the potential for good.

Critique in the Light of Scripture

Having concluded this initial exploration of feminist theology, this thesis shall now proceed with a critical evaluation of feminist views concerning Scripture, God, man, and sin. The norm for such evaluation shall be the Word of God revealed in Holy Scripture, and thus it is fitting that this critique begin with feminist hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics

The preceding exploration of feminist hermeneutics demonstrated that feminist views of Scripture ranged from outright rejection to a selective use to a de-absolutizing of biblical culture. Though this is indeed a wide range, it is clear that none of the feminist theologians examined believe that all of Scripture is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Both Christian and biblical feminists have exalted human reason above Scripture. Christian feminists are guilty of a selective use of Scripture, rejecting all Bible texts which do not fit their presuppositions and which do not speak to their experience. Biblical feminists use

⁸⁷Ruether, Women-Church, p. 86.

human reason to determine which parts of the Bible apply to us today and which parts applied only to its culture and time--which parts are truly God's Word and which are not. Thus, none of the feminist theologians cited believe the clear Word of God which states:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

And further the Word of God says:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

In light of these two Bible texts, one might ask especially the biblical feminists, "If one cannot believe what the Bible says about itself, how can he or she believe anything else it says?" In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul testifies that all Scripture, without qualification, is the inspired, or "God-breathed" Word of God. And while one must certainly recognize that God has given us His Word through human agents, 2 Peter 1:20-21 eliminates any possibility of human contamination, cultural or otherwise. Scripture is indeed the inspired Word of God, and thus neither women's experience, nor men's experience, nor human reason can serve as the basis for theology. Scripture alone must be the source and norm for faith, life, and doctrine.

Certainly the deculturization principle of biblical feminists needs to be critiqued in greater detail, and such a critique shall be included in the forthcoming evaluation of their views concerning man. For the present, then, this critique of feminist hermeneutics shall conclude with a brief discussion of the inductive method of Christian feminists.

In the preceding exploration, it was demonstrated that Christian feminists use an inductive method of interpretation whereby they draw out the material for reflection from their experience as it relates to the message of the Bible. This was especially the case with Ruether and Schussler Fiorenza, and thus both end up making women's experience the starting point and the ending point of their respective hermeneutical circles. Schussler Fiorenza justifies making women's experience the starting and ending points by asserting that all interpreters of Scripture bring with them their biases and prejudices. One might admit that to an extent, this is true. However, one should not give in to one's biases. Rather, one should resist them. If one attempts to take Scripture on its own terms (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21), such an argument is not valid. J. A. O. Preus III writes:

It is simply not valid to approve of using liberation theology by using the excuse that orthodox theologians also come to Scripture under the influence of an ideology, as liberation theologians claim. The solution to the hermeneutical problem is not found in exchanging one ideology for another, nor in giving in to the idea that

it is impossible for the Bible to speak to us here and now under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, without recourse to the current historical situation.⁸⁸

The solution to the hermeneutical problem is found in Scripture itself--in what the Bible says about itself. Indeed, the interpreter is involved in a hermeneutical circle, but the starting and ending points of this circle are Scripture. Preus writes:

Because we consider Scripture to be the source of all theology, our circle begins with Scripture itself. We attempt to take Scripture on its own terms and to avoid interpreting it on the basis of presuppositions that are at variance with its own self-understanding as the Word of God. Scripture then sheds light on the social, political, and economic context of the interpreter. It convicts the interpreter of his or her sin and offers the forgiveness of sins through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This, in turn, establishes the perspective with which the interpreter continues the task. Scripture is again studied, this time from the perspective of faith in the God whose Word it is. Thus, our hermeneutical circle begins and ends in Scripture and it is Scripture which is determinative of the resultant theology.⁸⁹

Feminist theologians have, in varying degrees, rejected the Bible as the source of all theology. Such a rejection has led to a domino effect of apostasy,⁹⁰ for when one rejects the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, he or she naturally falls into an abundance of errors. The hermeneutics of feminist theologians necessarily affect their views

⁸⁸J. A. O. Preus III, "Liberation Theology: Basic Themes and Methodology," Concordia Journal, 13:1 (1987), 22.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Paul R. Hinlicky, "Grace Alone," Lutheran Forum, 23:1 (1989), 4.

of God, man, and sin, and it is to a critique of these views that this thesis now turns.

God and God-Language

Radical Feminists

The exploration of the various feminist views concerning God revealed a number of errors, and the first to be critiqued are those of Daly. Little need be said to critique Daly's views, for because she has rejected God's Word, she has also rejected the God who has given that Word. Daly ignores the fact that one can only know God through His own self-revelation, and instead she claims for herself the power to name God. Thus, having claimed this power, God can be whatever she wants God to be. Daly has named God as the verb Be-ing, and thus it seems that her God is nothing more than women coming into their own. Daly's God is not the God of Scripture, and thus her views must be rejected.

Christian Feminists

Turning now to the Christian feminists, one can also note that their views of Scripture have affected their views of God. Certainly if Scripture were not inspired, one could agree with Ruether that the language which refers to God as Father is not inspired. However, the simple truth is that Scripture is God's inspired and inerrant Word. Thus, it is improper for us to create our own images of God. Christian feminists seek to name God based on their own experiences

rather than using the language and images which God Himself has revealed to us, and thus they see nothing wrong with speaking of God as Goddess, God/ess, or Mother. But if the church uses the language God Himself has used, it will continue to address and worship Him as Father. If we follow the lead of Christian feminists we will name God in whatever ways seem appropriate to us and our situation, but if we remain true to God's Word, we will name God only as He has already named Himself.

Biblical Feminists

While Christian feminists seek to create female images for God, biblical feminists seek to emphasize the female imagery which is already in the Bible. Biblical feminists, therefore, justify calling God "Mother" on the basis of biblical female imagery. While one certainly cannot deny the presence of female imagery in Scripture, one must not attach more significance to that imagery than Scripture itself does. Susan Foh sheds some light on this matter when she writes:

However, there are different degrees of comparison, and the differences between paternal and maternal imagery is the difference between saying 'God is our Father' (describing the person of God) and 'God comforts His people as a mother comforts her child' (describing an action of God). In the former, God is identified ('is') by a noun, 'our Father.' In the latter, an action of God is compared to ('as') an action performed by mothers.⁹¹

⁹¹Susan T. Foh, Women and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 151.

Mollenkott and other biblical feminists must recognize that there is a significant difference between those texts which state that God is "like" something feminine and those texts which directly refer to God as Father.⁹²

At the same time, one must agree with biblical feminists (and Christian feminists) when they assert that God is neither male nor female. Foh writes:

God is spirit and, as such, is beyond the categories male and female. He created those categories and existed before they did. Nonetheless, he has consistently revealed himself as Father in the God-breathed Scriptures.⁹³

As sinful human beings, we can only know God as He has revealed Himself to us. While it is true that God is neither male nor female, it does not follow that we can address God in whatever language we deem appropriate. If we are to remain true to God's Word, we must continue to worship Him and address Him as He has revealed Himself in that Word. Biblical feminists have not remained true to God's Word, and thus their views concerning God-language and God-imagery are incorrect.

⁹²For example: Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 89:26; Isaiah 9:6, 63:16, 64:8; Jeremiah 31:9; and Matthew 6:9.

⁹³Foh, Women and the Word of God, p. 163.

Man

Galatians 3:28 and the Order of Creation

The feminist view of man is the next area of analysis, and this critique begins with Galatians 3:28. The first mistake which feminist theologians have made is a hermeneutical mistake. As the inspired and inerrant Word of God, Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. Thus, one cannot take a text such as Galatians 3:28 and use it as a norm for judging other portions of Scripture. The second mistake involves their understanding of Galatians 3:28, for properly interpreted, it is not in opposition to the subordination of women. "Women in the Church," a report by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, correctly interprets the relationship between Galatians 3:28 and the order of creation when it states:

However, the oneness of male and female in Christ does not obviate the distinction given in creation. Galatians 3:28 does not mean that the identity of man or woman can be exchanged any more than that Greeks can become Jews or *vice versa*. The individual characteristics of believers are not abolished by the order of redemption. The things ordained by God in His creation and the divisions in *this* world which reflect in some measure the creation of God are not annulled. This text reveals how believers appear before God, but it does not speak to issues pertaining to order in the church, or the specific functions of women in the congregation. To be sure, all redeemed are equal before our gracious God, but equality does not suggest interchangeability of male

and female identities.⁹⁴

Properly understood, the order of creation does not contradict Galatians 3:28 or any other text. But what is the order of creation? "Women in the Church" explains it as follows:

This refers to the particular position which, by the will of God, any created object occupies in relation to others. God has given to that which has been created a certain order which, because it has been created by Him, is the expression of His immutable will. These relationships belong to the very structure of created existence.⁹⁵

On the basis of Genesis 2, Paul argues that under the order of creation, woman is to be subordinate to man. He presents this argument in three different texts:

1. 1 Corinthians 11:7-9. The apostle argues for male 'headship' on the basis of Gen. 2:18-25, which teaches that the man did not come from the woman but the woman from the man and that the woman was created for the sake of the man.

2. 1 Corinthians 14:34. Paul cites the Law (very likely Genesis 2 in this particular context) as the basis for the subordination of woman.

3. 1 Timothy 2:13-14. Paul appeals to the temporal priority of Adam's creation ('Adam was formed first'; cf. Gen. 2:20-22), as well as to Eve's having been deceived in the fall (Gen. 3:6), to show that women should not teach or exercise authority over men in the church.⁹⁶

Under the order of creation, male headship and female

⁹⁴Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, "Women in the Church," (St. Louis: 1985), pp. 26-27.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 22.

subordination is the will of God. However, headship and subordination are misunderstood if they are used to support male superiority and dominance. Mollenkott, for example, equates subordination with dominance.⁹⁷ Subordination, however, does not mean that women are of inferior value or that they should be oppressed. It is not a matter of "superior" and "inferior," but a matter of "over" and "under." "Women in the Church" explains subordination as follows:

*Subordination, when applied to the relationship of women and men in the church, expresses a divinely established relationship in which one looks to the other, but not in a domineering sense. Subordination is for the sake of orderliness and unity.*⁹⁸

Again, headship does not imply that the man is superior or intrinsically better than the woman.⁹⁹ Rather, this relationship is for the sake of orderliness and unity.

While acknowledging that this relationship of subordination is God's will, one must also acknowledge that feminists make a valid point (in some cases) when they say women have been oppressed by men. However, as true as this may be, it does not nullify God's will. The abuse of this relationship between men and women is a result of sin, and such abuses must be recognized as sin. "Women in the Church" sheds some light on this matter when it states:

When the New Testament talks about the origin of the

⁹⁷Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 37.

⁹⁸CTCR, p. 32.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 28.

subordination of woman to man, it does so on the basis of Genesis 2 and not on the basis of Genesis 3. The foundation for this teaching is not the 'curse' of the fall but the original purpose of God in creation. Genesis 3 describes the disruption and distortion of the order of creation brought about by the fall into sin. The 'curse' pronounced in Genesis 3:16 does not institute subordination as such, but it does make this relationship irksome for both parties. Man was woman's head from the first moment of her creation, but after the fall the will to self-assertion distorts this relationship into domination and/or independence. The disruption caused by sin is remedied by Christ's redemption, of course (Rom. 5:12-21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:10), and men and women who are in Christ should perform their respective functions without either oppression or defiance (Eph. 5:21-23).¹⁰⁰

Genesis 1:27 teaches that both Adam and Eve are equal before God and share the same dominion over creation. However, spiritual equality before God does not mean sameness nor does it nullify their relation to each other. Men and women alike are equally members of the priesthood of all believers, but if we are to remain true to God's Word, we must uphold the order of creation in the life and work of the church.

Before moving on to a critique of the image of God as male and female, two points made by Mollenkott regarding the order of creation, male headship, and female subordination must be addressed. First, Mollenkott has asserted that Paul's argument for the order of creation contradicts Genesis 1 and is based on an incorrect (literal) understanding of Genesis 2. As was noted previously, Scripture cannot

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 24.

contradict Scripture. Furthermore, she is mistaken when she insists that Genesis 2 is merely a symbolic and poetic expansion of Genesis 1. Both creation accounts are intended to be taken literally, for each complements the other.

"Women in the Church" states:

While Genesis 1 speaks in summary fashion of the creation of male and female, Genesis 2 gives a more detailed description of the creation of humankind.¹⁰¹

In other words, while Genesis 1 covers all seven days of creation, Genesis 2 focuses exclusively on the sixth day, giving more details of God's activity on that day. Furthermore, one must take note of the different emphases in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. Genesis 1 and Galatians 3 assert that both male and female have the same status before God. However, Genesis 2 and 1 Corinthians 11 assert that male and female do not have the same status with respect to each other. Mollenkott fails to understand and acknowledge this important distinction, and thus her assertion must be rejected.

Second, Mollenkott is in error when she asserts that Paul's argument was culturally conditioned and is, therefore, no longer applicable. Certainly it is true that one cannot absolutize the culture in which the Bible was written on an *a priori* basis. However, neither can one deculturize the Bible in the way Mollenkott has. Foh writes:

It is true that 'one cannot absolutize the culture in

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 20.

which the Bible was written' if by culture, one means that which is only cultural as opposed to that which is commanded by God in his word as well as reflected in the biblical culture. For instance, Christians have no obligation to wear sandals or tend sheep just because such things were done in Christ's day. However, the biblical feminists mean more than this when they employ the hermeneutic of deculturization (or de-absolutization of the biblical culture). Regardless of how the Bible presents a subject, even if it is directly commanded, it could be the result of cultural decontamination if it also appears in the biblical culture, according to the biblical feminist. This concept of deculturization is possible only in conjunction with an incorrect doctrine of Scripture.¹⁰²

Because we have deculturized such things as monarchy and slavery, Mollenkott insists that we also de-absolutize the biblical culture in the area of male and female relationships. However, as has been demonstrated, Paul's argument is not a cultural argument but a theological argument. Paul's argument is based on God's Word in Genesis 2, and furthermore, Paul's argument is itself the very Word of God. Male headship and female subordination cannot be deculturized because they are commanded in God's Word. Contrary to what Mollenkott believes, her assertion that Paul's argument reflects his human limitations does run counter to the doctrine of the authority, inspiration, and inerrancy of Scripture. Again, if one is to remain true to God's Word, one must uphold the order of creation.

Mankind in the Image of God

Finally, this section shall critique the feminist view

¹⁰²Foh, Women and the Word of God, p. 30.

of man in the image of God. As has been discovered, feminists equate the image of God with physicality--the image of God is equated with "male and female." Such an understanding is said to support the fact that female subordination is not the will of God. However, such an understanding of Genesis 1:27 is incorrect. "Women in the Church" states:

According to the Genesis 1 account of creation, male and female were both made in the image and likeness of God. That is, mankind's unique status among all other creatures derives from the relationship to the Creator. Mankind is not a physical replica of God nor an emanation of God; the image has to do with spiritual qualities--features that correspond and relate to the Creator.¹⁰³

The following Scripture verses are especially helpful in understanding the image of God:

. . . and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. (Ephesians 4:24)

. . . and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him. (Colossians 3:10)

Thus, the image of God has nothing to do with maleness or femaleness, but consists rather in spiritual qualities such as knowledge of God, holiness of the will, and true righteousness. Genesis 1 clearly shows that the woman and the man were both created in God's image and both were to rule over animals and nature. One would think that this correct understanding of the image of God would find favor in the eyes of feminists, but such is not the case. Once again,

¹⁰³CTCR, p. 19.

though there is a spiritual equality of man and woman before God, such equality does not nullify the order of creation as it is revealed in God's Word.

Sin

The final area of critique is the feminist view of sin. What feminist theology has failed to recognize is the fact that sin involves much more than a mere flaw in human relationships. Sinful structures are not the cause of human sin, but rather, human sin is the cause of sinful structures. When a person sins, he or she is opposing the will of God. Because of his or her sin, natural man is an enemy of God, deserving nothing less than eternal damnation. Sin is not a mere flaw, but a state of total corruption before God. All people are sinful, men and women alike. And though we certainly sin against each other, ultimately, all sins are sins against God. Furthermore, all are born with original sin, and thus no person, male or female, is born with potential good. St. Paul describes the situation of all humans when he writes:

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil I do not wish. (Romans 7:18-19)

Thus, all humans are prisoners to the sin which rules them. Scripture clearly teaches that all are sinners (Romans 3:23), inclined to all evil and subject to God's wrath.

By failing to recognize Scripture as God's Word, these feminist theologians have also failed to recognize the severity of human sin. Therefore, the feminist view of sin must also be rejected.

Summation

The intent of this chapter has been to introduce the reader to some of the basic teachings of feminist theology. It has been demonstrated that feminist theologians have erroneous views in several areas of fundamental Christian doctrine. Now that the reader is familiar with feminist theology and its teachings, this thesis shall move on to its primary focus--an exploration and critique of the Christology of feminist theology.

CHAPTER III
THE CHRISTOLOGY OF A RADICAL FEMINIST:
MARY DALY

Even prior to her "conversion" to radical feminism, Mary Daly was concerned with the secondary status of women in both the church and society. In 1968, her first book, The Church and the Second Sex, was published, and in it she asserted that there were numerous theological inadequacies which were at the source of Christian patriarchy. She believed that the Christian church should take up the task of "ridding theology of its ancient bias."¹ And she identified certain fundamental Christian doctrines as "inadequate." She writes:

From the point of view of psychological origin, warped notions of sexual relation and of women may be the roots of weak and inadequate conceptions concerning God, Christ, revelation, the Church and the sacraments.²

This chapter shall explore Daly's teaching concerning Christ both prior to and after her conversion to radical feminism.

¹Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), p. 137.

²Ibid., p. 146.

The Church and the Second Sex

Jesus Was a Feminist

In her early writings Daly is troubled by the fact that, in her opinion, much of the New Testament has been tainted by patriarchalism, reflecting the antifeminism of the times. However, she is quick to defend Jesus, asserting that He did not treat women as inferior beings. She writes:

In the New Testament it is significant that the statements which reflect the antifeminism of the times are never those of Christ. There is no recorded speech of Jesus concerning women 'as such'. What is very striking is his behavior toward them. In the passages describing the relationship of Jesus with various women, one characteristic stands out starkly: they emerge as persons, for they are treated as persons, often in such contrast with prevailing custom as to astonish onlookers. The behavior of Jesus toward the Samaritan woman puzzled even his disciples, who were surprised that he would speak to her in public (John 4:27). Then there was his defense of the adulterous woman, who according to the law of Moses should have been stoned (John 8:1-11). There was the case of the prostitute whose many sins he forgave because she had loved much (Luke 7:36-50). In the Gospel narratives the close friendship of Jesus with certain women is manifested in the context of the crucifixion and resurrection. What stands out is the fact that these, his friends, he saw as persons, to whom he gave the supreme yet simple gift of his brotherhood.³

Thus, Daly can take consolation in the fact that Jesus treated women as full persons, as His equals, and thus He has set an example which the church should follow.

Christology Used to Oppress Women

Although Daly seems to have a favorable view of Jesus, she does not approve of some of the ways the Catholic Church

³Ibid., pp. 37-38.

has used Christology against women. Reacting to the argument that women are forbidden from entering the priesthood because Jesus was a male, she writes:

This example illustrates very well the fact that the theological argumentation used against the ordination of women is sometimes rooted in a Christology which tends to see greater significance in the maleness of Jesus than in the central fact of his humanity.⁴

Reacting similarly to the argument that Jesus only chose male disciples, she writes:

How do we know that this was the point of his choice? He also chose only Jews, which hardly can be interpreted to mean that only Jews can be priests. The objection fails to take into account the cultural climate of the time. It reflects a kind of Docetism, which refuses to recognize the implications of the full humanity of Jesus. That is, it simply does not take into account the fact that, being truly human, Jesus lived and thought within the cultural context of his age.⁵

Daly contends that a Christology which stresses Christ's maleness rather than his humanness tends toward Docetism and is therefore inadequate.

Upon reading the second of the two passages just cited, one is inclined to wonder what Daly means when she refers to Docetism. Does she use it to refer to the teaching that denies Jesus' true humanity or does she use it to refer to the teaching that Jesus was/is simultaneously true God and true man? Nowhere in this book does Daly explicitly deny that Jesus is true God, but neither does she explicitly

⁴Ibid., p. 145.

⁵Ibid., p. 157.

affirm it. Perhaps one can find an answer in Daly's discussion of the Incarnation.

The Incarnation

Daly believes that the Christian understanding of original sin has led to an inadequate understanding of the Incarnation. Criticizing the teaching of original sin, she writes:

As long as theology is obsessed with a conception of human nature as fallen from a state of original integrity, and considers that state to have actually existed in the past, it must be pessimistic about the present and the future. It tends to see human life chiefly in terms of reparation and expiation.⁶

Rather than being pessimistic about the present and future, Daly is optimistic. She believes that humanity is evolving toward the betterment of the world, and thus the Incarnation must be envisaged within an evolutionary context. She writes:

In order to create the theological atmosphere which we are seeking, it will also be necessary to develop an understanding of the Incarnation which goes beyond the regressive, sin-obsessed view of human life which colored so much of the theology of the past. Thought about this doctrine must become consonant with evolutionary awareness of modern man, welcoming and encouraging human progress on all levels as continuing the work of the Incarnation. It must encourage active personal commitment to the work of bringing about social justice and to creative work of all kinds.⁷

⁶Ibid., p. 144.

⁷Ibid., p. 143.

Thus, it seems as though Daly does not consider Jesus to be the unique, once for all, Incarnate God. Rather, she believes that the Incarnation continues in all of us as we progress to more just and non-oppressive living conditions in our world. The Incarnation, therefore, takes place again and again when men and women "with God's help mount together toward a higher order of consciousness and being, in which the alienating projections will have been defeated and wholeness, psychic integrity, achieved."⁸ If humanity is not totally depraved, and if humanity is capable of reaching this "higher order of consciousness," there is no need for a unique Incarnation.

Nevertheless, Jesus does play an important role. Daly writes:

Harvey Cox expressed the Christian condition accurately when he said that Jesus Christ comes to his people not primarily through ecclesiastical traditions, but through social change, that he 'goes before' first as a pillar of fire. There is no need, then, to be obsessed with justification of the past. In fact, while it is necessary to watch the rear-view mirror, this does not tell us where we are going, but only where we have been.⁹

Thus, Jesus seems to be viewed as a model or guide who goes before us to help show us how to bring about the necessary social changes. Is this Jesus of which Daly speaks, then, considered to be a mere man or a unique God-man? Although

⁸Ibid., p. 181.

⁹Ibid., p. 180.

Daly does not explicitly answer this question, her view of the Incarnation seems to suggest that she considers Jesus to be a mere man, albeit an extraordinary man.

Conclusion

Whatever Daly's views of Christ were in 1968, those views were to change drastically in the years which followed. In 1975 a second edition of The Church and the Second Sex was published, and in it Daly included a "New Feminist Postchristian Introduction" in which she critiqued her own book. During the seven years which separated the two editions, Daly had "a dramatic/traumatic change of consciousness from 'radical Catholic' to postchristian feminist."¹⁰ Criticizing her former position as though she were writing of a different person, Daly writes:

More than once she writes of her hopes for 'purification' of 'distortions of doctrine' in Christianity, tacitly assuming (1) that there is some true Christian doctrine underlying the 'distortions'; (2) that Christian doctrine is not itself a distortion.¹¹

Consequently, the postchristian Daly has a completely different view of Christ, and it is to this view that this chapter shall now turn.

Beyond God the Father

Beyond God the Father (1973) is Daly's first work

¹⁰Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. 5.

¹¹Ibid., p. 19.

following her conversion to postchristian/radical feminism, and her introduction to the second edition of The Church and the Second Sex (1975) echoes many of the sentiments expressed in this book. Merely reading the title of the third chapter, "Beyond Christolatry: A World Without Models," gives one a good indication of Daly's beliefs concerning the person of Jesus Christ. This section, therefore, shall explore the Christology presented by Daly in Beyond God the Father.

Jesus is Not God

By substituting "Christolatry" for Christology, Daly makes it more than clear that she denies the divinity of Christ. She states this very explicitly when she writes:

A great deal of Christian doctrine has been docetic, that is, it has not seriously accepted the fact that Jesus was a limited human being. A logical consequence of the liberation of women will be a loss of plausibility of Christological formulas which reflect and encourage idolatry in relation to the person of Jesus.

As the idolatry and the dehumanizing effects of reifying and therefore limiting 'God' become more manifest in women's expanded consciousness, it will become less plausible to think of Jesus as the 'Second Person of the Trinity' who 'assumed' a human nature in a unique 'hypostatic union.'¹²

Hence, as far as Daly is concerned, to believe in, worship, and proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, as "very God of very God," is nothing more than idolatry.

¹²Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 69.

Nevertheless, Daly does not deny that there was a charismatic and revelatory power in the personality of Jesus. She writes:

The point is not to deny that a revelatory event took place in the encounter with the person Jesus. Rather, it is to affirm that the creative presence of the Verb can be revealed at every historical moment, in every person and culture.¹³

Thus, although there was such power in the person of Jesus, it was not a unique power. This revelatory power, this manifestation of the Verb or Be-ing, can occur in all people at all times and places. Jesus, therefore, is considered to be the same as any other man or woman who has experienced the power of Be-ing.

Christology Promotes Sexism

One of Daly's primary reasons for denying the divinity of Christ lies in the fact that she believes Christological traditions have been used both to promote and justify sexism. She asserts that "the idea of a unique male savior may be seen as one more legitimation of male superiority."¹⁴ In other words, the message of male superiority is in the medium of God Incarnate as a male. Daly writes:

Once again there is no notice taken of the fact that the medium is the message. Defenders of this method argue that the symbol 'can be used oppressively' or that it 'has been used oppressively' but insist that it need not function in this way. This kind of defense is understandable but it leaves a basic question unanswered: If

¹³Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 71.

the symbol can be 'used' that way and in fact has a long history of being 'used' that way, isn't this an indication of some inherent deficiency in the symbol itself?¹⁵

Daly has concluded that because the symbol of God Incarnate in the male Jesus Christ has been and still is used to oppress women, that symbol is deficient, and therefore it must be rejected.

One of the ways in which the symbol of Jesus is used to oppress women is through what Daly calls the "scapegoat syndrome." Traditional Christology has projected Jesus as the ultimate scapegoat, as the sacrificial victim offered for the sins of humanity. Daly contends that Christian males have experienced guilt because of their failure to imitate Jesus, and thus they have forced women to be the scapegoats.¹⁶ Women, therefore, end up playing the role of victim. She writes:

The qualities that Christianity *idealizes*, especially for women, are also those of a victim: sacrificial love, passive acceptance of suffering, humility, meekness, etc. Since these are the qualities idealized in Jesus 'who died for our sins,' his functioning as a model reinforces the scapegoat syndrome for women.¹⁷

Daly seems to imply that men do not try to mirror Jesus' meekness and humility, but only want women to do so. Daly, therefore, views Jesus as a useless model for women, for such a model serves only to justify and reinforce the op-

¹⁵Ibid., p. 72.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 77.

pressive sexism from which women must be liberated.

No Models From the Past

In The Church and the Second Sex, Daly took consolation in the fact that Jesus seems to have been a feminist. At that time, she was comfortable in viewing Jesus as a model. However, the postchristian Daly asks, "Jesus was a feminist, but so what?"¹⁸ According to Daly, the creation of a community that fosters the human becoming of both women and men means there can be no adequate models from the past, including Jesus. Rather than looking back to Jesus or anyone else, "women have the option of giving priority to what we find valid in our own experience."¹⁹ Thus, Jesus can make no contribution to the becoming of women.

A Male Savior Cannot Save Women

Perhaps the primary reason why Daly rejects Christ stems from her understanding of sin. Sexism is the original sin from which the human race must be rescued, and thus Daly proposes that "Christianity itself should be castrated by cutting away the products of supermale arrogance: the myths of sin and salvation."²⁰ Daly readily admits that the growing consciousness of women is in direct conflict with

¹⁸Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 74.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 71-72.

orthodox doctrines concerning Christ. Because sexism is the sin from which women need to be liberated, Jesus cannot serve as Savior. Daly writes:

So now also the idea of the God-Man (God-Male, on the imaginative level)--the dogma of the hypostatic union--is beginning to be perceived by some women as a kind of cosmic joke. Under the conditions of patriarchy the role of liberating the human race from the original sin of sexism would seem to be precisely the role that a male symbol *cannot* perform. The image itself is one-sided, as far as sexual identity is concerned, and it is precisely on the wrong side, since it fails to counter sexism and functions to glorify maleness.²¹

Jesus is rejected by Daly simply because He is a male, for a male is in no way able to give salvation to women. Under the conditions of patriarchy, freedom from the distortions brought about by sexism is the salvation that is needed. A male savior in a patriarchal culture fails to meet this need of society--fails to be personally or socially redemptive. Thus the idea of "Jesus as Savior" must be rejected, for He offers neither hope nor help. Jesus must "give way in the religious consciousness to an increased awareness of the power of Being in all persons."²²

The Second Coming and the Antichrist

Daly is particularly fond of taking Christian terms and assigning to them new meanings. This is especially evident in her discussion of Christ, where she refers to the

²¹Ibid., p. 72.

²²Ibid., p. 71.

"Antichrist" and the "Second Coming." According to Daly, these two things are one and the same, and it is in the Antichrist/Second Coming that women find the vision of hope and liberation. She writes:

Seen from this perspective the Antichrist and the *Second Coming of women* are synonymous. This Second Coming is not a return of Christ but a new arrival of female presence, once strong and powerful, but enchained since the dawn of patriarchy. Only *this* arrival can liberate the memory of Jesus from enchainment to the role of 'mankind's most illustrious scapegoat.' The arrival of women means the removal of the primordial victim, 'the Other,' because of whom 'the Son of God had to die.' When no longer condemned to the role of 'savior,' perhaps Jesus can be recognizable as a free man. It is only female pride and self-affirmation that can release the memory of Jesus from its destructive uses and can free freedom to be contagious.²³

Conclusion

Jesus is not God Incarnate, and He cannot be a Savior for women. The true Incarnation takes place in the movement of sisters--women who have bonded themselves together to work toward their human becoming.²⁴ The expanded consciousness of women has allowed them to fall into freedom, to experience Being, and thus there is no need for Jesus or any other Savior. Having completely rejected Jesus in Beyond God the Father, Daly does not cease with her criticisms of Christ and orthodox Christology. In fact, she has found many more reasons to criticize orthodox Christology, and she

²³Ibid., p. 96.

²⁴Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, 2nd ed., p. 39.

expresses these in two later books: Gyn/Ecology (1978) and Pure Lust (1984).

Gyn/Ecology and Pure Lust

Christ's Reconciling Work on the Cross Denied

Daly believes that the Christian "myth" of Christ's saving work through His death on the cross is absolute foolishness. She calls women to question how a dead man could possibly give life. Speaking of Christ's life-giving work on the cross, she writes:

Hags should certainly question *why* such 'fruit' of the tree of death is equated to a pledge of the 'promised land,' for the situation hardly looks promising. We should also question how he could be the life at work in the tree, since the 'tree' is obviously dead and he is on his way to the same state.²⁵

Daly denies that sinful men and women have been reconciled to God through Christ's death and resurrection, and furthermore, she denies any need for such reconciliation. She writes:

Radical feminism is not reconciliation with the father. Rather, it is affirming our original birth, our original source, movement, surge of living. This finding of our original integrity is re-membering ourselves. . . . Radical feminism releases the inherent dynamic in the mother-daughter relationship toward friendship, which is strangled in the male-mastered system.²⁶

Daly, therefore, asserts that a woman need only be acceptable to herself. One need not worry about such fool-

²⁵Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 80.

²⁶Ibid., p. 39.

ishness as being acceptable to some Heavenly Father through vicarious satisfaction. What women need is "the courage to be." Daly is critical of Paul Tillich, who described the courage to be as follows: "One could say that the courage to be is the courage to accept oneself as accepted in spite of being unacceptable."²⁷ Responding to this statement, Daly writes:

The problem with this, of course, is that it is precisely not a description of the courage to be in the full sense of accepting responsibility for one's process. Rather, the victim of this masochistic Pauline-Lutheran doctrine is condemned to live in a prison of mirror images, 'knowing' that she is guilty and deserving of condemnation, but believing a loving god forgives her. Through such a belief system she is cut off from her own process, remaining forever worthless and forever accepted as such. There is no reason to change and no possibility of changing, only of wallowing.²⁸

As an alternative to the masochistic doctrine of justification by grace through faith, Daly offers her own definition of the courage to be. The key to the courage to be is that "the Enspiriting Self is acceptable to her Self."²⁹ Every woman must realize that only she can judge her "Self." A woman with the courage to be has a strong sense of her own worth, and thus having accepted her "Self," she need not be self-sacrificing. Furthermore, "having acknowledged the divine Spark in her Self and having ac-

²⁷Paul Tillich, The Courage to Be (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 164.

²⁸Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p. 377.

²⁹Ibid., p. 378.

cepted it as her own, she has no need to demand self-sacrifice of her sisters."³⁰ Women who have this courage to be have no need to hope in a resurrection of the dead, for such hope is merely a "felt necessity of those whose present life *is* dead or 'only not dying.'"³¹ Rather, the hope for women is a hope for the here and now. It is the hope that all women may have the courage to be and thereby break the chains of bondage to patriarchy and its myths of reconciliation and eternal life in Heaven through the vicarious sufferings and death of the resurrected Jesus Christ.

The Elemental Spirits

In Colossians 2:8, Paul wrote:

See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. (R.S.V.)

Daly criticizes Paul for having such a distaste for philosophy which is associated with elemental spirits. However, she agrees with Paul that the antithesis of such "Wild Worldly Wisdom" is Jesus Christ.³² Thus, she rejects Christ in favor of the elemental spirits. In Colossians 2:20, Paul wrote:

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 101.

³²Mary Daly, Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 8.

the world? (R.S.V.)

In response to this verse, Daly writes:

Elemental philosophy *is* of the world. It is for those who love and belong to this world, who experience Be-Longing in this world, who refuse the horror of Self-loss implied in dying 'with Christ' to the Elemental spirits of the universe. . . . In contrast to this, Elemental women experience our Selves, and, therefore, our philosophy, as rooted in love for the earth and for things that naturally are on earth.³³

Elemental women, therefore, have no need for Christ.

What Christ offers is in direct opposition to what Elemental women want and need. Daly writes:

We do not wish to be redeemed by a god, to be adopted as sons, or to have the spirit of a god's son artificially injected into our hearts, crying 'father.' Having seen the horror of such phallogocratic 'spirituality,' we indeed *can* 'turn back again,' re-membering our Selves as strong and proud 'Elemental spirits,' and using this expression as Metaphor to Name our Sources, Sisters, Muses, Friends, as well as our Selves.³⁴

Once again, Christ has been replaced by the "Self," for it is in the re-membering of the Self that women find "redemption" and freedom from patriarchy and its myths.

The Tree of Life

Daly is particularly fond of the rich symbolism of the tree of life. She asserts that this sacred tree represents a cosmic energy source, which she also calls the Goddess. The tree is said to be "the living Source of radiant ener-

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 9.

gy/be-ing."³⁵ However, she contends that Christianity has attempted to destroy the tree of life by replacing it with the "necrophilic symbol of a dead body hanging on dead wood."³⁶ Furthermore, she suggests that this tree of life is "the deep Background of the christian cross, the dead wood rack to which a dying body is fastened with nails."³⁷ Christianity, therefore, is said to have incorporated the symbolism of the tree of life into the person of Christ in order to destroy the Goddess. Daly writes:

The transformations in the Tree of Life symbolism unveil the fact that in christian myth Christ assimilates/devours the Goddess. Whereas the Goddess had been the Tree of Life, Christ becomes this. Moreover, as the 'life at work' in the tree, he becomes its juice/sap. When we consider that the tree had been the body of the Goddess, the violence of this assimilation becomes more perceivable. The 'gentle Jesus' who offers the faithful his body to eat and his blood to drink is playing Mother Goddess. And of course the fetal-identified male behind the Mother Mask is really saying: 'Let me eat and drink you *alive*.' This is no mere crude cannibalism but veiled vampirism.³⁸

Daly even goes so far as to suggest that the figure of Christ on the cross is subliminally female. The crucifixion of Christ, therefore, "is really the crucifixion of female meanings/words."³⁹ It is the crucifixion of female be-ing.

³⁵Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p. 79.

³⁶Ibid., p. 18.

³⁷Ibid., p. 79.

³⁸Ibid., p. 81.

³⁹Daly, Pure Lust, p. 131.

Daly contends that the time has come to re-turn the tables--to destroy the myth of Christ and return to the Goddess, the tree of life, which is female be-ing. Speaking of the current situation, she writes:

Worshippers can stare at the image of a dead body nailed to dead wood without consciousness of the fact that the living tree was/is a symbol of the Goddess.⁴⁰

What is needed to change this situation is the raising of female consciousness. Women must realize the truth hiding behind the mask of Christian myth--the truth that the Goddess, not the cross of Christ, is the tree of life. The raising of female consciousness will mean the end of Christ and the resurrection of the tree of life. The end result, therefore, will be the resurgence of the Goddess/female be-ing.

The Virgin Birth and Incarnation

Daly believes that the Christian myth of the virgin birth of Jesus is merely a male-centered reversal of the ancient myths of parthenogenesis.⁴¹ She explains parthenogenesis as follows:

The word parthenogenesis is derived from the Greek *parthenos*, meaning virgin, and from *genesis*, which means origins, and which stems from the verb *gignesthai*, meaning to be born.⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 74.

⁴¹Daly, Gyn/Ecology, p. 84.

⁴²Daly, Pure Lust, p. 114.

Thus, parthenogenesis refers to birth without the fertilization of an egg by a male. Daly finds the Christian use of the myths of the parthenogenetic goddess to be very peculiar. She writes:

Since parthenogenesis would produce only female offspring, the story of the 'Virgin Birth' of a male savior should be eminently suspect. Or, to put it another way, the birth of Jesus was *indeed* a miracle.⁴³

Thus, Christianity has reversed the ancient myths. Whereas the virgin birth should have resulted in a female child, Christian myth has made the child male. Once again, the Goddess has been incorporated into the person of Christ and thereby destroyed. Uncovering the Christian myth, therefore, allows the Goddess to emerge again.

Furthermore, Daly contends that the Christian myths of the virgin birth and Incarnation portray Mary as a rape victim. She states that the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is nothing less than "mythic Super-Rape."⁴⁴ When the angel Gabriel announces the upcoming birth of Jesus to Mary, "like all rape victims in male myth she submits joyously to this unspeakable degradation."⁴⁵ Speaking of the Incarnation, Daly writes:

In the world of pornographic theological myth this involves an archetypal rape. The christian incarnation myth fulfills this requirement on a grand scale. The transsexed, broken spirit of the Goddess, guised as the

⁴³Ibid., p. 103.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 75.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 74.

holy ghost, rapes the broken and dis-spirited matter of the Goddess (Mary). Thus the myth-molding voyeurs have produced what could be designated the Purest Peep Show of the millennia, a male-identified counterfeit lesbian love scene, issuing in male offspring. The product of this fantastic feat is Jesus. This spectacle of the transsexed, divided goddess raping herself is the ultimate in sadospiritual speculation. It is an idiot's revision of parthenogenesis, converted into rape. The myth of The Incarnation, then, logically implies the usurpation of female power.⁴⁶

Thus, the Christian "myths" of the virgin birth and Incarnation of Jesus are viewed by Daly as still more attempts to crush the Goddess/female being. "Patriarchal religious myths" were created to control women and keep them in submission. Women must reject these myths, recognizing them for what they truly are.

Dionysus and Christ

Daly further suggests that the Christian myth of Christ is merely a purified version of the earlier and more crude Greek myth of Zeus and Dionysus. Comparing Dionysus and Christ, she writes:

Dionysus was in fact (in the fact of myth) his own father. To anyone aware of the meaning of Christ ('the Word incarnate') in christian myth, the parallel is inescapable. Christ is believed by christians to be the incarnation of the 'Second Person of the Trinity,' and thus consubstantial with the father. Therefore, Christ, too, pre-existed himself and was simply a later manifestation of 'Zeus (Father)-Young Man.' Christian theologians who have been reveling in 'Dionysian' theology will, of course, be the first to grant that Christ incorporates elements both of Apollo and of Dionysus.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 130-131.

⁴⁷Daly, Gyn/Ecology, pp. 64-65.

Just as Dionysus was actually "Zeus-Young Man," so also is Jesus actually "Father-Young Man." Like Dionysus, Christ was the son of the Father, but son only in the sense of being the Father in a younger form. Daly finds an additional parallel in the account of Christ's ascension. She writes:

The autogestation of the androgynous Christ was completed by a sort of second 'growing up' (going up) which was his ascension into heaven, where he rejoined his father (himself). Since Dionysus ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of Zeus, it is consistent that the christian Dionysus should have done the same thing.⁴⁸

Thus, because of the parallels and because the myth of Zeus and Dionysus predates the myth of Christ, Daly concludes that the Christian myth is merely a refined version of the Greek myth.

Although the Catholic Church has used the "myth of Christ" to oppress women, Daly asserts that protestantism has gone even further. She writes:

Just as catholicism was an important stage in the refinement of phallogentric myth, protestantism represents a more advanced stage of 'purification.' Having eliminated Mary, the ghost of the Goddess, it sets up a unisex model, whose sex is male. Jesus, androcracy's Absolute Androgyne, is male femininity incarnate. Unlike Dionysus, whom he spiritually incorporates, he is not a member of a pantheon of female and male peers. He is the Supreme Swinging Single, forever freed from challenge by Forceful Furious Females.⁴⁹

Protestantism, by eliminating Mary, has gone even further in

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 88.

patriarchal religion's attempt to crush the Goddess. Daly calls Jesus a transsexed male or "male femininity incarnate" because the power and life-giving force once ascribed to the Goddess has been ascribed to Him. Christianity has refined the myth of Dionysus in order to eliminate the Goddess, and thus women must reject such mythology. Christ must be rejected, and the Goddess/female be-ing must be affirmed.

Summation

This exploration of the Christology of Mary Daly has clearly demonstrated that she has no place for Jesus in her feminist theology/philosophy. According to Daly, "Jesus is the product of male myth-makers, manufactured to serve patriarchal ends."⁵⁰ For many and various reasons, Daly has completely rejected both the divinity of Christ and His work for the redemption of mankind. Radical feminism necessarily entails the rejection of "patriarchal religious myths," and this includes the rejection of the person and work of Christ. Jesus Christ is considered to be a hindrance to female be-ing, and thus He must be rejected. Without a doubt, Daly's views concerning Christ are outside the bounds of orthodox, biblical Christianity.

⁵⁰Daly, Pure Lust, p. 382.

CHAPTER IV
THE CHRISTOLOGY OF A CHRISTIAN FEMINIST:
ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER

Perhaps the best-known and most widely published of all feminist theologians is Rosemary Radford Ruether. Ruether is the author or editor of some twenty books, and she has had numerous articles published in various periodicals. Like her radical counterpart, Mary Daly, Ruether was also a Roman Catholic theologian prior to her "conversion" to feminism. However, unlike Daly, Ruether has maintained her membership in the Catholic Church. Rather than casting off the church as useless, she has chosen to remain within it, hoping to transform the theology and practice of Christianity in the light of feminist principles.

But even before she became a feminist, Ruether was critical of orthodox Christianity and its system of theology. In 1967 she published her first major work, The Church Against Itself, and in it she offers analysis and critique of Christian theology. Despite the fact that Ruether was not yet a "feminist," she nevertheless called for dramatic social change and a rethinking of Christian theology. This chapter shall briefly explore Ruether's teachings concerning

Christ prior to her conversion to feminism and then, in greater detail, what she teaches today.

The Church Against Itself

Historical Criticism

Ruether readily admits her adherence to the principles of critical research, stating that "the problems raised by critical Jesus research were authentic and historically indisputable."¹ One such "problem" or question raised by critical research is whether or not the Gospels should be understood as historically accurate accounts of the life and work of Jesus. Although orthodox Christian theologians affirm their accuracy, Ruether asserts that "good biblical scholars" deny their historicity. She writes:

It is now generally assumed by good biblical scholars that the gospels do not furnish us with materials for a life of Jesus, but they are essentially confessional documents whose *Sitz im Leben* is the faith, worship, and exigencies of the early church. Any tradition about Jesus which survived, survived only because it was relevant to the faith, worship, and needs of the church. Because the church transformed whatever authentic memories it had of the historical Jesus to reflect its present faith, and also continually produced new sayings of Jesus . . . the task of extracting the authentic Jesuan material--that is, the material that has an actual *Sitz im Leben Jesu* behind its *Sitz im Leben der alten Kirche*--is almost impossible, and any attempt to sharply delineate the authentic Jesuan material is conjectural at best.²

Despite the apparent difficulty in doing so, Ruether be-

¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, The Church Against Itself (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), p. 32.

²Ibid., p. 37.

believes that one must apply critical principles to the Gospels in order to distinguish the true Jesus from that which the church has made Him into--the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith.

The Historical Jesus

Ruether suggests that the first search for the historical Jesus, which was brought to a close with the work of Albert Schweitzer, ended in failure. This nineteenth century quest for the historical Jesus was undertaken in order to discover the true human Jesus who was hidden behind the shrouds of church dogma. It was hoped that this historical Jesus "would prove a more credible and authentic object *for faith* than the picture of Jesus presented through church tradition."³ However, Ruether asserts that this search actually produced negative results for faith. The historical Jesus which emerged was an eschatological prophet who proclaimed the imminent inbreaking of the kingdom of God. This inbreaking was understood by Him and His followers to be a literal historical event, expected to occur during His lifetime. Speaking of these results, Ruether writes:

Here was a Jesus who was radically unavailable to faith in either a traditional or a liberal mode and who could only be an offence and stumbling-block to the faith of the church. Thus the quest for the historical Jesus came to an end essentially because it had defeated the theological motives which originally impelled it. Far from revealing a more credible Jesus for faith, it had produced a Jesus of first century Jewish apocalyptic

³Ibid., p. 33.

sectarianism who was less credible to liberal theology than the Jesus of Nicene dogma whom they had sought to displace.⁴

Although this first quest resulted in failure, there was to be a second quest which would prove much more fruitful.

Ruether believes that the twentieth century quest was successful because it did away with the nineteenth century view of the sources. Consequently, the second quest abandoned "the assumption that a historical Jesus available through objective historical methodology can serve as a Jesus for faith."⁵ Because the sources are merely kerygmatic in nature, one is not able to know the historical Jesus or write His biography. Thus, the second quest has a different intention than the first. Ruether writes:

The intention of the new quest is to recover the historical Jesus in the only way possible through the sources; namely, to recover Jesus' historical action as kerygmatic encounter with our own present existence. Such an approach to the historical Jesus is possible through a revolution in the approach to history itself in which the historian no longer assumes that he can recover any 'bare facts' apart from meaning and interpretation.⁶

History, therefore, does not present us with bare facts, but rather it "exists precisely in its meaning and significance for us."⁷ This second quest, then, draws a distinction

⁴Ibid., p. 35.

⁵Ibid., p. 40.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

between *historisch* and *geschichtlich*. Ruether explains:

An event is an historic event, not simply as something that verifiably can be said to have happened, whether it has any meaning or value for us or not, but only in its continuing significance for us. The distinction between the first and second view of an event, in German theological terminology, is made by the contrast of the terms *historisch* and *geschichtlich*.⁸

The second quest, therefore, leads to an encounter with Jesus as *geschichtlich*--in His continuing meaning and significance for us.

The historical Jesus to which this new quest points is not a Jesus who claims Messianic titles for Himself. Rather, it is a Jesus who proclaims the inbreaking of the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, Ruether concedes that this Jesus can be said to have had a Messianic consciousness. She writes:

Insofar as he is said to have a Messianic consciousness, it consists in his perception of himself as standing in the decisive moment for man's acceptance or rejection of God's Kingdom, and thus as standing in principle in the moment of the shift of aeons, anticipating the inbreaking of the Kingdom in the call of the preacher and the response of the believer.⁹

Jesus' preaching, then, was not directed toward Himself, but He pointed beyond Himself "to the inbreaking of the kingdom summed up in the coming Son of Man."¹⁰

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁰Ibid.

To those who hear and believe in His word, this Jesus, who points to One who is to come, becomes in His own person the *kairos*--"the concrete encounter with the Kingdom and the Coming One."¹¹ Nevertheless, this Jesus is not the self-identified Messiah of traditional Christology. It is appropriate to call Him "the Christ," but not in the traditional sense of the term. Ruether writes:

The crucial point of continuity between Jesus' own preaching and the church's christological proclamation lies no longer in Jesus' messianic self-identification but in his messianic, eschatological *action*. It is in his preaching of the Kingdom as a word-event for us that his messianic (i.e, christological: a term which needs to be recalled to its original form as a translation of the word *Messiah*) role consists. He is the *Christus*, not for himself, but *pro nobis*, because in his pointing to the Kingdom and the coming *Christus*, and his call to decision through this encounter, the encounter of the believer with his person becomes identical with the believer's encounter with the Kingdom and the Christ. Thus, according to the new quest, Jesus is available to us only as *geschichte*--that is, only in our faith in him--while his *bios* remains ever unavailable to us.¹²

Ruether does not deny that Jesus is the Christ, but merely asserts that what He was in Himself is unknowable to us. And what He was in Himself is, according to Ruether, not ultimately important for us. Jesus is the Christ *for us* insofar as He points to the kingdom and the coming One.

¹¹Ibid., p. 42.

¹²Ibid.

The Christ of Faith

The twentieth century quest can only encounter the historical Jesus as the Christ of faith. Thus, any "facts" about the historical Jesus that are available are considered "authentic only in terms of their value for a faith-encounter with Jesus qua the *Christus*."¹³ Although there is a certain discontinuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, Ruether believes that these are two modes of knowing the same Jesus. The Jesus of history can be encountered through historical methodology, but this Jesus is not available to faith. Rather, it is only the Christ of faith who is available to faith. Ruether writes:

On the other hand, all knowing of Jesus as the One in whom we encounter something of saving significance for us is a knowing of Jesus as the Christ of faith, whether the locus of this knowledge be his own historical preaching, or the resurrection visions, or present preaching, and this Jesus remains unavailable to the historian and is available only through the church in faith. . . . It is not true that the historical Jesus is unrecoverable through the texts; but it is true that he is unrecoverable through the proper intentionality of the sources, and through the proper intentionality of the church, the intentionality of faith. The historical Jesus is always destroyed by faith which desires to know him only kerygmatically, only as the Risen Lord, only in his saving significance *pro nobis*.¹⁴

It can be said, then, that the historical Jesus and His own self-understanding die to rise as the Christ of faith for us. The Jesus of history has become for us the Christ of

¹³Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 48.

faith, for in Him is embodied our encounter with the kingdom of God and the coming One.

Conclusion

By drawing a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, the pre-feminist Ruether makes it clear that her Christology differs considerably from that of orthodox Christianity which confesses: "I believe in Jesus Christ (Christ of faith) . . . who suffered under Pontius Pilate" (historical Jesus). Following her conversion to feminism, Ruether presents a different view of Christ, and it is to an exploration of the Christology of the feminist Ruether that this chapter shall now turn.

The Feminist Ruether: Christology Critiqued

The fact that Ruether became a feminist theologian did not alter her adherence to the principles of historical criticism. Although she admits that Christology is the pivot of Christian theology, she nevertheless asserts that it is "subject to the constant revisions of historical scholarship."¹⁵ What is new, however, is a critique of Christology in the light of women's experience of the feminist agenda. Such a critique has led Ruether to conclude that Christology is used to oppress women.

¹⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), p. 1.

Christology is Oppressive

Ruether states that traditional Christianity has hailed Christ as the answer to questions concerning human justice and survival. To those who hold such a view, Ruether asks the following:

Is the testimony of scripture and tradition concerning the meaning of Christ a part of the solution or a part of the problem?¹⁶

Ruether clearly believes that the latter has been the case. She even goes so far as to assert that the Christology of traditional Christianity is the doctrine "most frequently used against women."¹⁷ She writes:

Precisely because it is the central symbol in Christianity, it is also the symbol most distorted by patriarchy. All efforts to marginalize women in the Church and Christian society, to deprive them of voice, leadership, and authority, take the form of proclaiming that Christ was male and so only the male can 'image' Christ.¹⁸

Indeed, Ruether is troubled by the many ways in which Christology is used to oppress women.

First, as is alluded to in the preceding quotation, the maleness of Christ has been used to exclude women from the ordained ministry. Because Christ was a male, it has been argued that only males can image or represent Him as priests and pastors. Ruether is extremely critical of this

¹⁶Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 105-106.

idea that there is "some unchangeable sacramental 'mystery' that links the maleness of the priest with the maleness of Christ."¹⁹ She refers to such arguments as blasphemy, and with crude sarcasm she writes:

In turn, only the male can represent Christ. There must be a physical resemblance between the priest and Christ, and this does not mean that the priest should look Jewish. No, it means that the priest should have balls, male genitalia, should stand erect as the monument of phallic power.²⁰

Furthermore, the historical example of Jesus selecting only male disciples is used to strengthen the argument that women should not be ordained.²¹ Thus, the maleness and actions of Jesus are oppressive toward women.

A second way in which Christology is oppressive is that it forces women to deny themselves and become "suffering servants." Whereas men can be Christ-like and still assert power and authority, such is not the case for women. Ruether writes:

Women become 'Christ-like' by having no self of their own. They become the 'suffering servants' by accepting male abuse and exploitation.²²

For women, then, Christ has become a model that forces them into submissive and subservient roles.

¹⁹Ruether, To Change the World, p. 46.

²⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women-Church (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 70.

²¹Ruether, To Change the World, p. 46.

²²Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 186.

Finally, Christology serves to sanctify patriarchal dominance of husbands over wives. The Christian symbolism of Christ as husband and Church as wife has resulted in the oppression of women. Ruether writes:

In the Epistle to the Ephesians this concept of the Church as a sinless community of saints, a 'spotless' bride of Christ, is oddly identified with the submissive wife of patriarchal marriage. Patriarchalizing Christianity reiterates its demands that 'wives obey your husbands; slaves obey your masters; children obey your parents' in an effort to suppress the earlier vision of the Church as a community of revolutionized social relations. It does this by trying to get the subjugated groups in the patriarchal family to internalize their submission to their husband, father, or master by seeing this submission as an expression of their submission and obedience to Christ. Christ becomes the sanction of patriarchal dominance rather than the liberator.²³

According to Ruether, the Christ of traditional Christology indeed represents males and male interests, but He fails to represent women. Consequently, she concludes:

If feminist theology and spirituality decide that Christianity is irredeemable for women, its primary reason is likely to be this insurmountable block of a male Christ who fails to represent women.²⁴

The Patriarchalization of Christology

Although Ruether believes that Christology has been a tool of patriarchal oppression, she also suggests that it did not have to be that way. The concept of Jesus as Lord and King could have been used to undercut and critique the power of the lords of this world, but instead Christianity

²³Ruether, Womanguides, p. 160.

²⁴Ibid., p. 106.

used it reinforce the legitimacy of existing lords and thereby sanctify the status quo.²⁵ Likewise, the uniting of creation and redemption in the person of Christ carried the potential for either harm or good. Ruether writes:

There were two ways of looking at this relationship. If *both* the original and the true beings of things are set over against the oppressive powers of the world, then Christ continues to be a symbol of our authentic selves over against systems of injustice. Resistance to injustice has an even firmer foundation. But if the Logos is seen as the foundation of the powers of the world, then Christology becomes integrated back into a world view that sacralizes the existing systems of sexism, slavery, and imperialism and sees these as the 'order of creation.'

Christianity, in the second and even third centuries, as a religion in conflict with the Roman state, held primarily to the first view. But as it became integrated into Roman society and was finally adopted by Constantine as the state religion, it capitulated to the second view. The Lordship of Christ ceased to liberate women, slaves, and conquered people from their lords and masters.²⁶

Rather than serving as liberator, Christ became the Lord from whom existing lords derived their power and authority.

Ruether suggests that there were three steps which led to the patriarchalization of Christology. The first step, which led to the proclamation of Jesus as Savior over against His own proclamation of the kingdom and the coming One, began with the shock of the crucifixion. Although the disciples were discouraged at first, they later reassembled

²⁵Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion: Principles of Ideological Critique of the Bible," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 22 (1982), 58.

²⁶Ruether, Womanguides, p. 109.

under their collective experiences of the resurrection. Rather than admitting that Jesus' mission had failed, they reinterpreted that mission. Ruether writes:

The Resurrection experience enables the disciples to repudiate the possibility that the Crucifixion signaled the failure of Jesus' mission or his rejection by God. Rather, this mission is to be reinterpreted in terms of a redemptive suffering servant who atones for the sins of Israel and who, in turn, is transmuted to the heavens from which he will return as conquering Messiah.²⁷

The disciples and prophets, then, created sayings of Jesus to correspond with this reinterpretation and preserved them in the Gospels. Although Ruether believes that the Gospels did not preserve the actual sayings of the historical Jesus, she does believe that they preserved "the 'spirit,' the iconoclastic and prophetic vision of Jesus."²⁸

The second step began with the development of an institutional ministry which sought to cut off the ongoing speaking in the name of Jesus. At the close of the first century, the Gospels and other writings of the early Christian prophets became the definitive Christian texts--revelation was said to be closed. This development was the result of another reinterpretation which was needed to counter the fact that Jesus' imminent return did not occur. Thus, the church had to de-eschatologize Christology. Ruether writes:

The Church no longer sees itself as existing in a narrow margin on the edge of final world transformation between the snatching up of the crucified Jesus to the right

²⁷Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 122.

²⁸Ibid., p. 123.

hand of God and Jesus' imminent return as conquering Christ. . . . Rather Christ has become the center of history between two eras of salvation history, the time of Israel and the time of the Church. Christ becomes a timeless revelation of divine perfection located in a past paradigmatic moment. This disclosure of timeless perfection is closed. The Risen Lord does not live on in ecstatic utterances of Christian prophets or prophetesses; rather he ascended into heaven after forty days. Access to Christ is now through the official line of apostolic teaching. Only males can occupy the apostolic teaching office and thus represent Christ. Women are to keep silent.²⁹

The final stage, alluded to earlier, occurred when Christianity became the imperial religion of the Roman Empire. Christ came to be viewed as the ruler of a new world order, and Christology became "the apex of a system of control over all those who in one way or another are 'other' than this new Christian order."³⁰ Women and all powerless people were considered to be "other," and Christology became firmly rooted in a patriarchal system.

Ruether has concluded that Christology serves to legitimate and further the oppression of women and all marginalized people. Although it had the potential to offer liberation to all, Christianity chose the road of patriarchy, and therefore Christology became patriarchalized.

Jesus and Messianic Expectations

Ruether further criticizes orthodox Christianity for asserting that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel. She believes

²⁹Ibid., p. 124.

³⁰Ibid., p. 125.

that the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah runs counter to what Israel meant by "Messiah." She writes:

A Christian assertion that Jesus is the 'Messiah of Israel,' which contradicts the fundamental meaning of what Israel means by 'Messiah,' is and always has been fundamentally questionable.³¹

Ruether contends that orthodox Christology involves the "repudiation of key elements of Jewish messianic hope and their replacement by ideas that Judaism continues to reject as idolatrous."³² Therefore, she suggests that the Christian understanding of Jesus as Messiah is in error.

According to Israel's expectations, the Messiah remained "fundamentally a political figure, a future king of Israel."³³ The idea of a Messiah was a special feature of Israel's hope for the coming reign of God, and it was especially tied to the Davidic kingship. Ruether writes:

The word *Messiah*, or 'God's anointed,' in fact, occurs most often in the Hebrew Bible simply as a reference to the reigning Davidic king. In the Davidic kingship ideology the king is both the elect of God (Son of God) and the paradigmatic representative of the people before God (Son of Man). Through the king's righteousness and special relation to God, the favor of God and the felicity of the people is assured. The king is the instrument of the people's salvation.³⁴

Because actual kings seldom fulfilled these expecta-

³¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), p. 92.

³²Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 116.

³³Ruether, To Change the World, p. 13.

³⁴Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 118.

tions, Israel began to place its hope in a future king who would fulfill them. The exile and the resultant end of the Davidic kingship caused a further transformation, for then the hope was fastened to expectations of a restored Davidic kingship. This Messiah-King would restore Israel to its former glory. Ruether summarizes Israel's hopes and expectations when she writes:

The Davidic King-Messiah is basically a conquering warrior who liberates the people from their enemies and then reigns over a new kingdom. He fulfills the dream of a righteous king through whom God grants complete favor to Israel. He is in no way an incarnation of the Divine or a redeemer, in the Christian sense of one who forgives sins through redemptive self-sacrifice. He is expected to win, not to suffer and die.³⁵

Ruether asserts that one cannot speak of Jesus as having fulfilled the hopes and expectations of Israel because "the kingdom of God has not been established on earth in any final or unambiguous form."³⁶ Not only did orthodox Christology err in regard to Israel's hopes and expectations, but it also erred in that it is not "a faithful rendering of the messianic announcement of Jesus of Nazareth and his views of the coming Reign of God."³⁷ Nevertheless, Ruether believes that Christians can speak of Jesus as Messiah, with the following qualification:

Contextually we can speak of Jesus as the 'messianic experience for us,' but that way of speaking doesn't make

³⁵Ibid., p. 119.

³⁶Ruether, To Change the World, p. 23.

³⁷Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 116.

this experience self-enclosed, but points beyond itself to a liberation still to come. Both the original roots of Christian faith and the dilemma of modern Christology will make it evident that such an affirmation of the messianic event in Jesus in a contextual and open-ended, rather than a 'once for all' and absolutistic way, is demanded by the exigencies of Christian theology itself.³⁸

With a proper understanding, then, Jesus can be considered to be a "messianic experience" for Christians. As messianic experience, He points beyond Himself to the kingdom of God. Such an understanding of Jesus, in contrast to the understanding of orthodox Christology, does not contradict Israel's messianic expectations. Ruether believes that this view of Jesus must replace the traditional view of Jesus as a unique Savior-Messiah.

The Incarnation

Orthodox Christianity has proclaimed Jesus as the unique and once for all Incarnation of God who is, therefore, the only way of salvation. Ruether, however, believes that such a proclamation is false. She writes:

God's presence does not appear just in one time and place 'once for all,' but wherever reconciliation is established and man glimpses his unity and the unity of the world with its transcendent foundation and meaning. A religious culture may pick out a particular place where this appearing is seen 'normatively'; i.e., Jesus or the Torah or Buddha, but this doctrine of 'incarnation' is not just 'about' this one place or person, but this one place or person operates as a norm for discerning the nature of this 'presence' wherever it

³⁸Ruether, Liberation Theology, p. 92.

happens.³⁹

According to Ruether, Jesus is not a unique Incarnation of God, but rather He serves as an "exemplary paradigm of the bodying forth or incarnation of God, not only in all humans, but in the whole cosmos."⁴⁰

For Christians, Jesus is a paradigm of God's presence within them, but He is merely one of many paradigms. Ruether contends that traditional Christianity has failed to acknowledge this paradigmatic nature of Jesus, instead insisting that only it bears the true message of salvation. She writes:

Yet it seems that the last heresy that must be let go of is precisely that 'Christocentrism' that presumes that all that is messianic and revolutionary can be mediated only by the historical Judaeo-Christian tradition. We must perhaps be willing finally to see that God is the God of all men and is revealing himself to all men in their histories.⁴¹

Ruether, therefore, believes that there is no one and final way of salvation that is available only through identification with one religion. Jesus did not consider Himself to be the unique and final Word of God, and thus Christianity should not proclaim Him as such:

To encapsulate Jesus himself as God's 'last word' and 'once-for-all' disclosure of God, located in a remote past and institutionalized in a cast of Christian teachers, is to repudiate the spirit of Jesus and to recapit-

³⁹Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Critique and Re-visioning of God-Language," The Way, 27 (1987), 138.

⁴¹Ruether, Liberation Theology, p. 191.

ulate the position against which he himself protests.⁴² Christianity, therefore, must engage itself in a critique of its own Christology. It "must formulate the faith in Jesus as the Christ in terms which are proleptic and anticipatory, rather than final and fulfilled,"⁴³ and it must view Christology as paradigmatic. Only then will Christianity be able to rid itself of an exclusive understanding of the Incarnation, and of its exclusive claim to the means of salvation.

Conclusion

Ruether has made it more than clear that she finds orthodox Christology to be unacceptable. The Christ of traditional Christianity is indeed problematic for feminist theology. Ruether finds Him so problematic that she asks:

Can christology be liberated from its encapsulation in the structures of patriarchy and really become an expression of liberation of women? Or is it so linked with symbols of male-dominance that it is unredeemable as good news for women?⁴⁴

Ruether answers the first question in the affirmative, suggesting that feminist theology may be able "to affirm the person of Jesus of Nazareth as a positive model of redemptive humanity."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, she qualifies this by stating that such a model is only partial and fragmentary.

⁴²Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 122.

⁴³Ruether, To Change the World, p. 42.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁵Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 114.

The following section shall explore what Ruether finds of value in the person and work of this Jesus of Nazareth.

A Jesus for Feminist Theology

In her quest to find a Christology that is more compatible with feminist theology, Ruether begins with the synoptic Gospels. Her focus is not on the accumulated doctrine about Jesus, but rather on "his message and praxis."⁴⁶ This encounter with the message and praxis of Jesus has led her to adopt a specific perspective on Christology-- a perspective which she refers to as the "prophetic iconoclastic Christ."⁴⁷

The Prophetic Iconoclastic Christ

Ruether contends that the synoptic Gospels provide one with a true picture of Jesus, for in them one sees a Jesus who, like many Old Testament prophets, renounces the status quo and goes particularly to the outcasts of society. She writes:

Here is a Jesus who does not sacralize existing ruling classes. The messianic prophet proclaims his message as an iconoclastic critique of existing elites, particularly religious elites. The gospel drama is one of prolonged conflict between Christ and those religious authorities who gain their social status from systems of ritualized righteousness. Jesus proclaims an iconoclastic reversal of this system of religious status. . . . The gospel turns upside down the present order;

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 135.

⁴⁷Ruether, To Change the World, p. 53.

the first shall be last and the last first.⁴⁸

The "turning upside down" of which this Jesus speaks is not a mere reversal of the present hierarchy, but rather it involves an entirely new order in which there are no hierarchical relationships. Although Jesus shows partiality toward the outcasts, His ultimate goal 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, when God's will is done on earth."⁴⁹

Because women were the oppressed of the oppressed, it is no accident that they were particularly receptive to the iconoclastic proclamations of Jesus. Jesus' many encounters with women, such as that with the Samaritan woman at the well, demonstrate that "in the iconoclastic messianic vision, it is the women of the despised and outcast peoples who are seen as the bottom of the present hierarchy and hence, in a special way, the last who shall be first in the kingdom."⁵⁰ Together, as individuals responding to each other in an authentic way, Jesus and the women He encountered point us to the new humanity of the future.⁵¹

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 54.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 55.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 56.

The prophetic iconoclastic Christ proclaims and works for the liberation of all who are oppressed by the dominant structures of society. This Christ is a messianic person "who represents a new kind of humanity."⁵² Ruether finds this prophetic iconoclastic Christ to be very compatible with feminist theology. She writes:

Once the mythology about Jesus as Messiah or divine *Logos*, with its traditional masculine imagery, is stripped off, the Jesus of the synoptic Gospels can be recognized as a figure remarkably compatible with feminism. This is not to say, in an anachronistic sense, that 'Jesus was a feminist,' but rather that the criticism of religious and social hierarchy characteristic of the early portrait of Jesus is remarkably parallel to feminist criticism.⁵³

Ruether, therefore, finds something of great value in the message and praxis of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God

Ruether is especially fond of Jesus' proclamation of the coming reign of God. She believes that orthodox Christianity has misunderstood the messianic announcement of Jesus and His views concerning the kingdom of God. Ruether asserts that Jesus viewed the coming kingdom as "a time of vindication for the poor and the oppressed"⁵⁴--for all marginalized groups and classes. The kingdom of God is not a time when Israel will defeat all her enemies, nor is it an

⁵²Ibid., p. 54.

⁵³Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 135.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 120.

eschatological kingdom. Rather, Jesus views the kingdom as a time of "radical social iconoclasm"⁵⁵ when all patriarchal structures of ruler and ruled are overcome. Ruether believes that the Lord's Prayer provides a classic expression of Jesus' teaching regarding the coming kingdom of God. She writes:

Jesus' vision of the Kingdom is neither nationalistic nor other-worldly. The coming Reign of God is expected to happen on earth, as the Lord's Prayer makes evident (God's Kingdom come, God's will be done on earth). It is a time when structures of domination and subjugation have been overcome, when the basic human needs are met (daily bread), when all dwell in harmony with God and each other (not led into temptation but delivered from evil).⁵⁶

Thus, Jesus' vision of the kingdom is the vision of a new society where God's will is done on earth. God's will is that all oppressive systems and structures are torn down, resulting in a new society of justice and equality for all, regardless of sex or race.

Ruether contends that Jesus' last trip to Jerusalem was His final attempt to get the elites to listen to Him and His message of the kingdom. In these last days, His disciples pushed messianic temptations upon Him in an effort to get Him to seize power. Jesus, however, was able to resist these temptations. Ruether suggests that orthodox Christianity has perpetuated this mistake of Jesus' disciples,

⁵⁵Ruether, To Change the World, p. 17.

⁵⁶Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 120.

hailing Him as Messianic King. She writes:

Originally Christianity also understood Jesus' messianic role in terms of an imminent occurrence of this coming reign of God. But when this event failed to materialize, Christianity pushed it off into an indefinite future, i.e. the Second Coming, and reinterpreted Jesus' messianic role.⁵⁷

Christianity, therefore spiritualized Jesus' understanding of the kingdom. Feminist theology, on the other hand, has revived the true kingdom-vision of Jesus.

Servanthood

The prophetic iconoclastic Christ, who rejected kingly and chauvinistic understandings of the Messiah, also rejected the prevailing understanding of servanthood. Whereas imperial Christianity used servant language to justify, in Christ's name, existing power structures, Jesus understood servanthood to mean that all are free from bondage to human masters. Ruether writes:

Servanthood language likewise changes its meaning radically in different contexts. In its use by Jesus, appropriated from the prophetic tradition, it means that God alone is father and king. We, therefore, are freed from allegiance to human fathers and kings. As servants of God alone, we are freed from servitude to human hierarchies of power.⁵⁸

God, therefore, is our only master. Furthermore, Jesus preached God's option for the poor, and thus the way of

⁵⁷Ruether, To Change the World, p. 32.

⁵⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 120-121.

redemption is "the way of love and service to others, especially to the humiliated of society."⁵⁹ Because we are servants only of God, we are free to love and build-up one another in a service of mutual empowerment. This is the servanthood of which Jesus spoke, and only this kind of servanthood will raise the oppressed and bring to an end the hierarchical structures of patriarchy. In short, this servanthood will lead to the liberation of all.

Liberation and the Christ

Because Ruether finds favor with this image of the prophetic iconoclastic Christ, she even goes so far as to say that Jesus Himself is a liberator. He is a liberator precisely because He shows us that our relationship to God liberates us from all hierarchical systems, making all of us brothers/sisters of each other. She writes:

Jesus as liberator calls for a renunciation, a dissolution, of the web of status relationships by which societies have defined privilege and deprivation. He protests against the identification of this system with the favor or disfavor of God. His ability to speak as liberator does not reside in his maleness but in the fact that he has renounced this system of domination and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment. He speaks to and is responded to by low-caste women because they represent the bottom of this status network and have the least stake in its perpetuation.

Theologically speaking, then, we might say that the maleness of Jesus has no ultimate significance. It has social symbolic significance in the framework of societies of patriarchal privilege. In this sense Jesus as the Christ, the representative of liberated humanity and

⁵⁹Ruether, Womanquides, p. 108.

the liberating Word of God, manifests the *kenosis of patriarchy*, the announcement of the new humanity through a lifestyle that discards hierarchical caste privilege and speaks on behalf of the lowly.⁶⁰

Jesus, then, is a liberator because He represents the new and liberated humanity which is in conformity with the will of God. He shows us what kind of people God wants us to be. His maleness has nothing significant to contribute to His role as liberator. Rather, it is in His renunciation of patriarchal structures and in the fact that He represents a new and liberated humanity, that His ability to be liberator lies.

Furthermore, Jesus is a liberator because His is the name in which we continue to reaffirm the faith that the kingdom of God is at hand. This faith we affirm not by mere verbal affirmations, "but by following his liberating praxis and by putting ourselves, as much as possible, in the place where he put himself, as ones who make themselves last and servant of all."⁶¹ The crucifixion of Jesus demonstrates that oppressive structures are still very much in place, and that the kingdom has not yet come.⁶² But there is a hope to be found in His death. Rather than serving as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, the death and resurrection of Jesus serves as a "memory stronger than death and gives

⁶⁰Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 137.

⁶¹Ruether, To Change the World, pp. 23-24.

⁶²Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion," p. 65.

people hope that the powers of death can be broken."⁶³ The memory of Jesus, therefore, provides us with a name in which we can affirm our faith and hope in the coming kingdom.

According to Ruether, Jesus the liberator is not Himself the Christ, but rather He serves to point us to the Christ. The Christ of which she speaks is not a person--it is messianic or liberated humanity. Ruether writes:

Christ, as redemptive person and Word of God, is not to be encapsulated 'once-for-all' in the historical Jesus. The Christian community continues Christ's identity. As vine and branches Christic personhood continues in our sisters and brothers. In the language of early Christian prophetism, we can encounter Christ *in the form of our sister*. Christ, the liberated humanity, is not confined to a static perfection of one person two thousand years ago. Rather, redemptive humanity goes ahead of us, calling us to yet incompleated dimensions of human liberation.⁶⁴

Christ, therefore, is a concept rather than a person. The true and full meaning of Christ is not yet available to us, for it is "located in a new future order still to come that transcends the power structures of historical societies, including those erected in the Christian era in 'Christ's name'."⁶⁵

Conclusion

Ruether has found a Jesus who seems to be compatible with feminist theology. According to her, the Jesus of the

⁶³Ruether, To Change the World, p. 28.

⁶⁴Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 138.

⁶⁵Ruether, To Change the World, p. 55.

synoptic Gospels proclaims divine advocacy for the oppressed, and His liberating teachings and praxis are remarkably parallel to those of feminism. This Jesus began an iconoclastic renewal movement within Judaism, criticizing social oppression and making especially the poor and outcasts the objects of His mission. There was no proclamation of hope in a Davidic Messiah in the preaching of this Jesus. Rather, He pointed to the coming kingdom where God's will is done on earth. Even women play an important role in the vision of this prophetic iconoclastic Jesus. This Jesus has value for feminist theology because He is a paradigm or representative of new and liberated humanity. Ruether writes:

He continues to disclose to us, then, the Christ, the messianic humanity, whose fullness of meaning we began to glimpse in him and also in the signs of hope in our times, but whose ultimate arrival is still as much ahead of us in our day as it was ahead of him in his day.⁶⁶

This Jesus, then, has value because He points us to the Christ--messianic/liberated humanity.

Summation

Ruether asserts that "whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is . . . to be appraised as not redemptive."⁶⁷ This exploration of Ruether's Christology has clearly demonstrated that she believes orthodox

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁷Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation," p. 115.

Christology is not redemptive for women. She deems it non-redemptive because it perpetuates the oppression of women. Furthermore, it is considered to be non-redemptive because it has a false understanding of redemption itself. She asserts that the biblical understanding of redemption or salvation is not "other-worldly," but rather a vision of "an alternative future, a new society of peace and justice that will arise when the present systems of injustice have been overthrown."⁶⁸

Because redemption is the overcoming of injustice and oppression for all, "redemption in Christ" takes on a new meaning. Ruether writes:

Redemption in Christ, therefore, means a social struggle to emancipate slaves, Blacks, women from these relations of servitude and restore that equal personhood in the divine image of the true 'order of creation.' . . . Redemption is not an other-worldly flight from creation to heaven which is purchased by enduring unjust relations on earth; rather it is the struggle to create the new heaven and earth where, as Jesus said, 'God's will is done on earth, as it is in heaven.'⁶⁹

With God's help, then, we are to build a redeemed earth.⁷⁰

For women in particular, the experience of "redemption in Christ" is liberation from sexism.

Such an understanding of redemption has led Ruether to

⁶⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, "A Religion for Women: Sources and Strategies," Christianity and Crisis, 39:19 (1979), 309.

⁶⁹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Call of Women in the Church Today," Listening, 15:3 (1980), 246-247.

⁷⁰Ruether, "Feminist Critique and Re-visioning of God-Language," p. 142.

criticize the idea of life after death. When it comes to questions of human resurrection and eternal life, Ruether suggests that "we should not pretend to know what we do not know or to have had 'revealed' to us what is the projection of our wishes."⁷¹ For those who want to know what happens when one dies, Ruether writes:

In effect, our existence ceases as individuated ego/organism and dissolves back into the cosmic matrix of matter/energy, from which new centers of the individuation arise. It is this matrix, rather than our individuated centers of being, that is 'everlasting,' that subsists underneath the coming to be and passing away of individuated beings and even planetary worlds. Acceptance of death, then, is acceptance of the finitude of our individuated centers of being, but also our identification with the larger matrix as our total self that contains us all.⁷²

"Redemption in Christ," therefore, has nothing to do with reconciliation to God and the gift of eternal life in heaven. Ruether contends that such a notion of redemption runs counter to the message of Jesus. Orthodox Christology has distorted the true meaning of redemption, but she claims to have the true "insight into the meaning of prophetic faith and redemption in Christ."⁷³ Ruether writes:

As Women-Church we claim the authentic mission of Christ, the true mission of Church, the real agenda of our Mother-Father God who comes to restore and not to destroy our humanity, who comes to ransom the captives

⁷¹Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk, p. 257.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ruether, "Feminism and Patriarchal Religion," p. 66.

and to reclaim the earth as our Promised Land.⁷⁴

Ruether, therefore, asserts that orthodox Christology must be rejected in favor of a Christology that is "filled with our best visions of the good potential of humans and the world concretely revealed."⁷⁵ Ruether's Christology is indeed such a Christology.

⁷⁴Ruether, Women-Church, p. 72.

⁷⁵Ruether, Womanguides, p. 105.

CHAPTER V
THE CHRISTOLOGY OF A BIBLICAL FEMINIST:
VIRGINIA RAMEY MOLLENKOTT

One of the best-known and most widely published biblical feminists is Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. Although she shares a feminist vision with Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mollenkott's views differ insofar as she attempts to remain true to the words of Scripture. Like Daly and Ruether, Mollenkott believes that orthodox Christology has been used to oppress women. She asserts that "women have long been barred from the ministry through specious reasoning about God's maleness and Christ's incarnation as a male."¹ However, such a belief has not led her to reject Scripture or Christ. Rather, she has concluded that barring women from the ministry is contrary to the teachings of both Scripture and Christ. In fact, Mollenkott even goes so far as to say that Jesus Himself was a feminist.² This chapter,

¹Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "A Challenge to Male Interpretation: Women and the Bible," The Sojourners, 5:2 (1976), 22.

²Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, Rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1988), p. viii.

therefore, shall explore what Mollenkott teaches concerning Jesus "the feminist."

The Teachings and Example of Jesus

Because she seeks to remain true to Scripture, Mollenkott places a great deal of emphasis on the teachings of Jesus. She believes that the teachings and actions of Jesus provide Christians with the primary example of how to live God-pleasing lives. She writes:

It is my assumption that if we are interested in understanding the Christian way of relating to others, the Bible must be our central source, and the teachings and behavior of Jesus must provide our major standard of judgment.³

Although Jesus said very little about relationships between men and women, Mollenkott believes that He did teach some very important principles about how humans should relate to one another. Therefore she concludes:

By studying Christ's principles and observing His behavior against the background of first-century Jewish culture, we can achieve a clear concept of the Christian way of relating.⁴

Mutuality

Although she believes that Christianity has, for centuries, defined the relationship between men and women in terms of dominance and submission, Mollenkott asserts that

³Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), pp. 9-10.

⁴Ibid., p. 10.

this is not the way of relating espoused by Jesus. Rather, it is mutuality--mutual submission and mutual service--which was exemplified by Jesus. Mollenkott writes:

Jesus proposed a solution to patriarchy's male dominance/female submission which is far more radical than Mary Daly's switching of divine roles. Jesus taught and enacted mutuality, in which greatness is demonstrated by voluntary servanthood and hence the empowerment of all those who are lacking in power.⁵

"Dominance and submission are the world's way of relating,"⁶ but this was not Christ's way of relating. Consequently, Mollenkott believes that the idea of mutual submission and mutual servanthood is not a feminist innovation, but a return to the teaching and practice of Christ. She writes:

. . . the fact is that Jesus spent his whole teaching career trying to get across to his disciples that dominance/submission relationships follow a worldly model and that mutuality and cooperative servanthood are the Christian model. Within that model, both persons win.

Ironically, it has taken the Women's Movement to bring mutuality to the attention of the world in the twentieth century. The Christian churches should have been standing over against the patriarchal cultures for centuries, preaching and modeling mutual submission, concern, and servanthood. Instead, Christian institutions have been modeling themselves after the worldly dominance and submission concept and have formed some of the biggest hierarchies of them all.⁷

The Christian church, therefore, is faulted for promoting submission and servanthood only among women. Jesus,

⁵Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Speech, Silence, Action! (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), p. 77.

⁶Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 21.

⁷Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Speech, Silence, Action!, p. 122.

however, did not limit this idea to women. He taught this concept to all of His followers--both male and female.

Mollenkott writes:

Christ taught the concept of service and mutual submission to *all* of his followers, male and female alike. Biblical feminists are returning to Christ's own emphasis by extending voluntary mutual submission to all believers.⁸

Mollenkott even suggests that one of Jesus' missions while here on earth was to establish mutual submission and servanthood as the way males and females are to relate to each other. He sought to accomplish this both by His teaching and by His refusal to give in to the customs which oppressed women. She writes:

. . . Christ's refusal to participate in the first-century taboos that dehumanized women, point toward the probability that one of Christ's missions in the world was to bring healing for the dominance-submission pattern of male-female relating.⁹

In summary, "Christ defined greatness in terms of humility and servanthood."¹⁰ Matthew 20:24-28 is a prime example, for there Jesus teaches that greatness in the kingdom of God rests on the one who is a servant. Such is the pattern taught by Jesus, and such is the pattern which should be followed by the church today.

⁸Mollenkott, "A Challenge to Male Interpretation," p. 25.

⁹Mollenkott, Women, Men, and The Bible, p. 122.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 20.

Jesus and Women

Although male-female relating made up very little of the actual content of Jesus' teaching, He does teach us a great deal about this matter through His example. Scripture mentions several situations in which Jesus treated women with dignity and respect--as equals. Mollenkott believes this to be especially significant because at the time "when Jesus was born into the world, the status of Jewish women had never been lower."¹¹ She concludes that by studying Jesus' "behavior [toward women] against the background of first-century Jewish culture, we can achieve a clear concept of the Christian way of relating."¹²

Several examples have made a profound impact on Mollenkott. She first makes note of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42). Against the backdrop of His culture, it is highly significant that Jesus is even speaking with a woman. Yet even more significant, it is a Samaritan woman--and Jesus is discussing theology with her. Mollenkott concludes that "Jesus was deliberately breaking rabbinic customs that were degrading to the self-concept of women."¹³ Jesus was, therefore, teaching His disciples and us the proper way to relate to women. Women

¹¹Ibid., p. 10.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 13.

are to be treated as equal and full persons, not as those to whom one accords secondary status.

A second example cited by Mollenkott is Jesus' healing of the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years (Matthew 9:20-22). Whereas Jesus could have become angered since this woman's touching Him made Him ritually unclean, He instead treated her with love and compassion. Commenting on this instance, Mollenkott writes:

It seems especially significant that Jesus took pains to locate the healing within the poor despised woman's faith rather than in himself or in the male establishment or even in God the Father. "*Your faith* has healed you"! Surely he was healing her inner feelings about herself as well as her superficial issue of blood! . . .

Symbolically as well as literally, Jesus spent that memorable day raising women from the dead. By the object lesson of his own behavior, he showed that the blood taboos of the Old Testament no longer should operate to make women unclean half their lives; he restored a woman's self-respect; and he again violated the rabbinic taboo against speaking to women in public.¹⁴

A final example to be cited is Mollenkott's evaluation of Luke 11:27-28. In this instance, too, Jesus affirms the full personhood of females. She writes:

Proof of Jesus' concern for full female personhood arises when a well-meaning woman shouts praise for Christ by focusing exclusively on the biological functions of his mother: "Happy the womb that carried you and the breasts that suckled you!" (Luke 11:27 NEB). By this language, Mary is reduced to a womb and two breasts. . . . He immediately redefines blessedness in a way that transcends either male or female biology: "Rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28). Certainly his purpose is not to deny that his mother is blessed. But he says she is blessed because she responded positively to the word of

¹⁴Ibid., p. 14.

God, not simply because she became a mother--even his mother.¹⁵

Once again, Jesus is found both speaking and acting in a way that directly contradicts the cultural norms of His day. Rather than denying the full personhood of the female, He wholeheartedly affirms it.

Based on these, and other, examples, Mollenkott concludes that Jesus accepted women as full persons, equal with men. Furthermore, His example is to serve as the norm and standard for male-female relating in the church today. To Jesus, "women were persons just as fully as men,"¹⁶ and the same thinking should prevail in His church. Mutual submission and mutual service is the example Jesus taught in His relations with women, and mutual submission and service is, therefore, the Christian way of relating.

Jesus and God-Language

Despite His teachings and actions which affirmed mutuality among males and females, Jesus still used predominantly male imagery when referring to God. Mollenkott readily affirms this fact:

Despite all that, I have to face the fact that Jesus not only taught the political model of mutuality but also used and actively taught a God-language that has helped reinforce the patriarchal images of the Old Testament-- the very images that have empowered the male imagination

¹⁵Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁶Ibid.

to identify with divinity.¹⁷

Nevertheless, she does not find Jesus' God-language to be especially problematic. Had Jesus used anything other than predominately male language, He would have been too radical for His own day.

Mollenkott, therefore, excuses Jesus' use of predominantly male God-language as necessitated by the culture of His day. In order to gain any kind of acceptance among the people He taught, Jesus had to speak in terms with which they were familiar. Mollenkott writes:

Jesus was talking to people who were accustomed to thinking about God in almost exclusively masculine terms. Because he was trying to get across to them some radically different ideas about the ordering of society, he tried to modify the imagining process by occasionally speaking of God in nonmasculine images: as a woman seeking her lost coin, as a hen sheltering her chickens, or as the mother of all the twice-born. Most of the time, however, he accommodated his God-language to patterns his audience would feel comfortable with.¹⁸

Furthermore, Mollenkott asserts that other types of God-language might have created other kinds of problems. For instance, what if Jesus had used exclusively female imagery? Then, she suggests, "Christianity might have become the religion that empowered female imaginations and weakened male ones."¹⁹ If Jesus had used exclusively androgynous imagery, this too would have been problematic, for

¹⁷Mollenkott, Speech, Silence, Action!, p. 78.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 79.

"the problem with androgyny is that it is an imaginative construct *only*; so very few people could willingly imagine such a Heavenly Being and identify with it and thus feel empowered by it."²⁰ Or finally, what if Jesus had used exclusively neuter images--images from nature? Then, asserts Mollenkott, "Christianity might have become imbued with neopagan worship of the natural world."²¹

Even though His culture forced Him to use predominantly male imagery for God, Mollenkott finds it especially significant that Jesus nonetheless employed female imagery from time to time. One of these instances is the parable of the woman and the lost coin recorded in Luke 15. Commenting on the importance of this female imagery, Mollenkott writes:

Although women did in Jesus' day and do still in our time make up a majority of those living below the poverty line, Jesus associates women with the possession of money and therefore with the possession of power. To those of Jesus' listeners who had "ears to hear," it must have seemed fresh and stereotype-smashing to hear Jesus talking about God as a woman--and a woman with money of her own!²²

Mollenkott believes that Jesus' use of female imagery has practical implications for the church today. She implies that had Jesus' culture permitted Him to do so, He would have freely spoken of "Our Father and Mother in heav-

²⁰Ibid., p. 80.

²¹Ibid.

²²Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), p. 66.

en." She writes:

Jesus *modelled* the full equality of males and females; to have introduced *directly* a female image of God would at the time have been misunderstood as a reversion to paganism's multiplicity of divinities. Jesus did utilize word-pictures of God as female. . . . Jesus' cultural surroundings made "Our Father and Mother in heaven" an impossibility; our cultural surroundings make it not only possible but necessary.²³

Conclusion

A Jesus who teaches mutuality, whose life is an example of mutuality, who treats women as equals, and whose use of God-language is, understandably, for the most part male, is a Jesus who finds much favor in the eyes of Mollenkott. She, therefore, believes that the Jesus of Scripture supports the tenets of biblical feminism.

The Person of Jesus

In addition to her belief that Jesus Himself was a "feminist," Mollenkott finds within the pages of Scripture evidence that Jesus had female as well as male characteristics. Furthermore, she asserts that the Jesus of Scripture is primarily human and only secondarily male. And it is to these two teachings that this thesis shall now turn.

Feminine Characteristics in Jesus

Mollenkott neither denies that Jesus is God's Son, nor does she desire to call Him God's daughter. Rather, it is

²³Ibid., p. 61.

her desire "that the 'feminine' components in Christ's human nature be recognized *along with* the 'masculine' components."²⁴ Because the Bible presents Jesus as having both stereotypically male and female roles, she even asserts that Jesus was psychologically androgynous.²⁵ Mollenkott, therefore, notes numerous Scriptural examples of the female components in Christ.

Jesus' Submission to Will of First Person

Mollenkott believes that in several New Testament texts, Jesus is pictured "in the stereotypically feminine aspects of submission to the will of the First Person."²⁶ Although she does not agree that submission is an exclusively female trait, she does believe that society and culture have made it so. In passages such as Matthew 26:39, Luke 2:49, John 5:30, and John 12:49, Jesus emphasized that He came not to do His own will, but that of the Father who sent Him. Furthermore, in passages such as John 5:19, Jesus asserts that His power is a derived power--from the Father. Thus Mollenkott concludes:

For centuries women have been trained or socialized to be satellites revolving around the interests of their father, brother, or husband; and in the sense of secondariness, *derived* power, and submission, Jesus in his earthly life certainly exhibited these "female"

²⁴Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 68.

²⁵Ibid., p. 89.

²⁶Mollenkott, "A Challenge to Male Interpretation," p. 23.

traits.²⁷

Jesus Pictured Himself in Feminine Terms

Further evidence of the feminine in Jesus can be found in His own self-references. Mollenkott cites passages such as Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34-35, in which Jesus laments the unbelief of Jerusalem. When Jesus compares Himself to a hen gathering her chicks, He is said to be picturing Himself in female terms.

A second reference is John 7:37, in which Jesus bids the thirsty to come and drink of Him. Commenting on this and the following verse, Mollenkott writes:

And John comments, "As scripture says, from his breast shall flow fountains of living water" (John 7:38). Although a masculine pronoun is utilized, clearly the breast that gives living water is the breast of God, with which Jesus identifies himself by inviting believers to come and drink *from his very body*.²⁸

She believes that her understanding of John 7:37-38 is strengthened by the New Testament references to milk. She writes:

. . . many orthodox Christians interpreted New Testament references to "milk" as the breast milk of God or Christ-as-Mother. That they are correct to do so is indicated by the most explicit of these references, I Peter 2:2-3: "You are newborn, and, like babies, you should be hungry for nothing but milk--the spiritual honesty which will help you to grow up to salvation, now that you have tasted the goodness of [Christ]." Since in biblical times all babies were breast-fed babies, this clearly is an image of Christ as suckling newborn

²⁷Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 59.

²⁸Mollenkott, The Divine Feminine, p. 23.

Christians.²⁹

Thus, not only does Jesus picture Himself in female terms, but the New Testament continues to build on this feminine picture. Mollenkott again concludes that the male Jesus has feminine as well as masculine characteristics.

Jesus' Suffering and Death

Mollenkott finds it especially significant that Jesus pictures the central event of His ministry--namely, His suffering and death--with a feminine metaphor. She explains:

. . . it excites me that when Jesus spoke to his disciples about the future time when they would have to do without his physical presence in the world, he described his own suffering and the history of suffering humanity through a birth-metaphor: "When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born in the world" (John 16:21 RSV). A few minutes later, John tells us, Jesus began his prayer with the words, "The hour has come." Thus he identified the anguish of the cross with the pangs of giving birth, and identified himself with a woman in labor.³⁰

Here again, Jesus pictures Himself as "Christ-the-Mother,"³¹ showing no hesitancy to identify Himself with that which is distinctly feminine.

Mollenkott, then, extends this imagery to Christ on the cross. Referring to God the Father as a midwife, she

²⁹Ibid., pp. 22-23.

³⁰Mollenkott, Speech, Silence, Action!, p. 93.

³¹Mollenkott, The Divine Feminine, p. 17.

asserts that the midwife abandoned the birthing Jesus as He hung on the cross. Examining Christ on the cross in the light of Psalm 22, she writes:

We may imagine that in the hour of his own anguished "birth contractions" on the cross, Jesus tried to comfort himself by remembering that God had been the midwife drawing him out of the womb of his own mother. Since God had been with him "from my mother's womb," Jesus, like the Psalmist, may have felt justified in hoping that God would not "stand aside" now, when "I have no one to help me." Remembering that in John 16:21 and 17:1 Jesus had set up an analogy between his agony and the sufferings of a woman having birth pangs, we may be encouraged to speculate that the desertion Jesus cried out against was the desertion of the very midwife who had brought him to birth.³²

Once again, Jesus does not hesitate to picture Himself in exclusively feminine terms, and this example is found to be especially noteworthy since it is found in the context of the central event in Christ's life and ministry.

The *Shekinah*

Even within the Old Testament, Mollenkott finds evidence of the feminine in Jesus. It was first in the Tabernacle and then in the Jerusalem Temple that the glory of Yahweh--His real presence--dwelt. The Hebrew word often used to express this real presence is *shekinah*. For Mollenkott, the significance lies in the fact that the word *shekinah* is feminine in gender. She concludes that the glory of God in the Old Testament is a "'feminine' Pre-

³²Ibid., pp. 33-34.

sence."³³ Acknowledging that John 1:14 and John 2:21 reveal that Jesus is the true temple and the place where God's glory now dwells, she therefore concludes that this provides further evidence of the feminine in Jesus.

The Logos

Mollenkott finds further Old Testament evidence of the feminine in Jesus by linking the Old Testament concept of wisdom with the New Testament concept of the *Logos*. John 1 clearly identifies Jesus with the *Logos*, the Word of God. But while the New Testament identifies Jesus as the *Logos*, it also identifies Him as the wisdom of God. Mollenkott writes:

First Corinthians 1:24 refers to Christ as "the wisdom of God," while verse 30 indicates that Christ Jesus "is made unto us wisdom." These references as well as the whole concept of Jesus as the *Logos* or Word of God--the speech, expression, or reasoning of God--all of this connects Jesus with the Old Testament concept of Wisdom. And in the Old Testament, Wisdom is always pictured as a woman.³⁴

Making further connection between Old Testament wisdom and Christ, she writes:

According to Proverbs, *Wisdom* is the path, the knowledge, the way that ensures life (4:11, 22, 26), just as to John *Christ* is the way, the truth, and the life (14:6). Like Christ, Wisdom lives at the side of God, is God's "darling," and delights in humankind (Proverbs 8:30, Wisdom 8:3 and 9, Wisdom 9:4 and 10). Like Christ, Wisdom is the Word of God (Ecclesiasticus 24:3, Wisdom 9:1-2). Like Christ, Wisdom makes all things new (Wisdom 7:27). Like Christ, Wisdom is "a reflection of

³³Ibid., p. 40.

³⁴Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 62.

the eternal light,/untarnished mirror of God's active power,/image of [God's] goodness" (7:26; cf. Hebrews 1:3).³⁵

For Mollenkott, the obvious implication is that Jesus is once again pictured in feminine terms. Jesus is the Wisdom of God, and in the Old Testament wisdom is always personified as a woman. She concludes:

All of this would seem to indicate that by thinking of the Christ in exclusively masculine terms, we have been ignoring some very important symbols that the earthly Jesus embodied--not only deity and humanity, not only time and eternity, but also masculine and feminine.³⁶

Consequently, Mollenkott believes that in our thinking about the person of Jesus Christ, we should not exclude the feminine.

Conclusion

Although Mollenkott finds much of what can be called feminine in the person of Jesus, she does not deny that Jesus was incarnated in a male body. Furthermore, even as Jesus is pictured in stereotypically feminine roles, so also is He pictured in "so-called masculine roles of the powerful generator, upholder, and judge of the universe."³⁷ Nevertheless, she excuses the physical maleness of Jesus on the grounds that it was a cultural necessity. She writes:

Since Jesus attempted to teach us that the proper use of power was to serve those who have less power than our-

³⁵Mollenkott, The Divine Feminine, p. 101.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 60.

selves, it seems obvious that Jesus would of necessity have to be in the power group, the free male group.³⁸

Thus, in order to teach and model mutual submission and servanthood within the context of a patriarchal culture, it was necessary that Jesus be male.

According to Mollenkott, Jesus' culturally necessitated maleness, combined with His feminine characteristics, makes Him an acceptable Savior. His submission to the will of the First Person, His picturing of Himself and His suffering and death in feminine terms, and His relation to the *shekinah* and wisdom concepts of the Old Testament present a Jesus that is not exclusively male. Thus, Mollenkott concludes:

The combining of the typical Hebrew masculine and feminine sex-role characteristics in the person of Jesus creates a beautiful picture of him as the embodiment of all humanity, both male and female, who is then perfectly equipped to redeem the sins of us all, both male and female.³⁹

Jesus: Human or Male?

Mollenkott further examines the person of Jesus by asking whether He was primarily human or primarily male. Her conclusion is that Jesus was primarily human and only secondarily male, and she uses Scripture to support this conclusion. Her focus is on two Greek words: *aner* and

³⁸Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Godling: Human Responsibility and the Bible (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), p. 52.

³⁹Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, p. 60.

anthropos. She writes:

. . . when New Testament writers refer to the incarnation of Jesus, they do not speak of his becoming *aner*, "male," but rather of his being *anthropos*, "human." Since in English the one word *man* is used to mean both "male" and "mankind" or "humanity," this important distinction is lost in English translations. That loss makes it easy to associate the Savior of the world with masculinity to the exclusion of the feminine.⁴⁰

To emphasize this important distinction, she offers her own revised translation of Romans 5:12 and 15:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one human being [*anthropos*], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all human beings [plural of *anthropos*], because all sinned-- . . . But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one human being [*anthropos* understood], how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one human being [*anthropos*], Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (Romans 5:12, 15 NIV, with *human being* substituted for *man*)⁴¹

By using the word *anthropos* rather than *aner*, the New Testament authors are said to be stressing the "full *humanity*"⁴² of Jesus rather than His maleness.

Mollenkott believes that the Greek in John 1:14 also supports this conclusion. Here, her focus is on the word *sarx*. John's use of this Greek word is said to "capture the fact that Jesus is God incarnate as a *human being* rather than as a *male*."⁴³ She concludes:

The use of the Greek word for "flesh," *sarx*, made it

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 61.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., p. 68.

⁴³Ibid., p. 62.

absolutely impossible for the translators to say that "the Word became man," which promptly would have become confused with "the Word became male." The glorious truth is that "the Word became a human being," an embodying or tabernacling of the glory of God within the limitations of human nature, with its "male" and "female" components.⁴⁴

Thus, she believes that she is not introducing any new or innovative idea. Rather, she believes that she is merely returning to the truths conveyed by the biblical writers--truths which have, for centuries, been ignored by patriarchal culture.

And Mollenkott identifies some implications to this biblical picture of Jesus as primarily human. She writes:

The implication, of course, is that Christ became a human being, a person, rather than first and foremost a male. He came into the world, not only as Savior of the world, but to provide the image of spiritual perfection, of full physical and mental health, of the human ideal. Emphasis on his maleness would have tended to exclude women from participation in this ideal.⁴⁵

Jesus, being first and foremost human and only secondarily male, is thus enabled to show both women and men the image of complete spiritual and physical wholeness and well-being.

Furthermore, Jesus as human rather than male has implications for how He should be pictured by the church today. The church has traditionally pictured God the Father and Jesus in exclusively male terms. But Mollenkott writes:

As we free ourselves from that assumption, we become able to envision an organic human identity with the divine nature that was previously impossible to think

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 121.

about. The risen Christ, Jesus of Nazareth in a resurrection body that transcends human limitations, is no longer limited by human maleness. Instead, the risen Christ becomes One Body with us all. Christ the Bridegroom is also Christ the Bride, in a flesh-and-bones identification. For this reason, we should not speak of the risen Christ exclusively as *He* any more than we should speak of any other transcendent manifestation of God exclusively as *He*.⁴⁶

She also believes that if Jesus is "the Word made flesh" and God in the human, there is another logical step that must be taken. She asserts that, the above being true, "it makes perfect sense to imagine the Christ as female, black, Indian, Oriental, poor Appalachian white, or indeed as *any form created beings can take*."⁴⁷

Finally, such a picture of Jesus supports mutuality among all peoples, regardless of gender or race, because this picture is able to empower all people. Mollenkott concludes:

The Christ is in no created form *exclusively*, but in all such forms *inclusively* ("in him all things hold together," Col. 1:17). For in the New Creation, "There is one body and one Spirit, . . . who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6 NEB). This kind of imagining, based squarely upon an inclusive reading of Scripture, supports social justice, because it makes available to every human being the empowerment of identifying herself or himself with the divine.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Using Scripture as her source, Mollenkott believes

⁴⁶Mollenkott, The Divine Feminine, pp. 70-71.

⁴⁷Mollenkott, Speech, Silence, Action!, p. 87.

⁴⁸Ibid.

that she has found a biblical Jesus which is fully compatible with her feminist theology. Not only does the Bible present Jesus as having feminine characteristics, but it further shows Him to be first and foremost human and only secondarily male. Based on her belief that Jesus' maleness was necessitated only by His culture, one must conclude that Mollenkott finds no theological reasons which necessitate Jesus being incarnated as a male.

The New Creation/Humanity and Salvation in Christ

Having found within Scripture a Jesus who is compatible with her feminist theology, Mollenkott proceeds to explain the results of what Jesus accomplished in His life and ministry. She places a strong emphasis on the "New Creation" in Jesus and what it means in the practical realm.

The New Creation/Humanity

Mollenkott believes that the context of Genesis 3:16 clearly demonstrates that patriarchal patterns of dominance and submission are a curse resulting from humanity's fall. The New Creation in Christ, however, is to bring such patterns to an end. She asserts:

The Bible teaches that "when anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has already begun" (II Corinthians 5:17 NEB). Even if Genesis 3 *had* been meant as a prescription of what fallen civilization of necessity had to be like, it is clear that uniting with Christ is supposed to move us out of the old order into a completely new order. In this new order, there is no discrimination based upon differences of race, eco-

onomic status, or sex.⁴⁹

In the New Creation, therefore, patriarchal patterns of dominance and submission are to cease. They are to be replaced by mutual submission and mutual service.

Jesus hinted at this vision of a New Creation when, in John 18:36, He told Pilate that His "kingdom is not of this world." Mollenkott believes that Jesus was not referring to an otherworldly kingdom, but to a New Humanity in which the old barriers of patriarchal culture are broken down. She writes:

But I have come to see that Jesus was not telling Pilate that his kingdom was otherworldly in the sense that it was unrelated to the inequities of a fallen world. Rather, Jesus was telling Pilate that his kingdom had nothing to do with national egotism, or with the racial, religious, ethnic, economic, and sexist ego-interests that pit human beings against one another. Jesus was saying: "I am the King of the Jews, all right, but not in the narrow worldly way *you* would define as being King of the Jews. Not in the sense of King of the *Jews* as a nation pitted against the Roman nation and oppressed by the Roman nation. My kingdom is not of this world because it is a kingdom where there is *no oppression at all*--no dominance, no enforced submission, no inequity, no division, no walls of hostility. My kingdom is not of this world, because it is a kingdom in which all the 'others,' all the outcasts, all the poverty-stricken, all the 'Gentiles,' all the people considered to be secondary, become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of God's promise."⁵⁰

Consequently, she believes that "the will of God is the creation of a New Humanity, a New World, a reign of Christ's

⁴⁹Mollenkott, Women, Men, and the Bible, pp. 134-135.

⁵⁰Mollenkott, Speech, Silence, Action!, pp. 113-114.

peace and justice through mutuality on a global scale."⁵¹

With such an understanding, the mission of the church is the establishment of this New Creation and New Humanity. This mission is accomplished as those "in Christ" promote and practice mutuality, justice, and mercy. In this sense, all those "in Christ" or "born of the Spirit" are said to be "co-creators" with God--incarnations of "the continuing divine motion toward the New Creation that is currently springing forth."⁵² The people of God, therefore, are the proclaimers and doers of the Good News, and Mollenkott explains this Good News as follows:

. . . I have become convinced that the *evangelium*, the Good News, is biblically intended to be Good News to all the oppressed and wretched of the earth by turning people of faith into agents of peace and justice.⁵³

Goddess

Mollenkott refers to these "co-creators" striving for mutuality and justice as "goddesses." While acknowledging that traditional Christianity has understood Jesus to be the "servant" of Isaiah 42:1-4, she suggests that such an understanding is too narrow. Furthermore, she believes that this traditional understanding tends to relieve humans of the

⁵¹Ibid., p. 16.

⁵²Ibid., p. 108.

⁵³Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "An Evangelical Perspective on Interreligious Dialogue," in Women of Faith in Dialogue, ed. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), p. 63.

responsibility of establishing justice in the world. She writes:

The traditional Christian interpretation of the righteous servant tends to spotlight Jesus of Nazareth as a one-time-only phenomenon, someone out of the past at whose feet we may happily and lazily grovel, someone who will rescue us single-handedly and who thus relieves us of our contemporary responsibility to struggle to bring forth justice in our world.⁵⁴

Thus, instead of fostering mutuality and justice, such an understanding leads to Christian triumphalism and divisions among humans.

Mollenkott believes that the second chapter of the Epistle of James provides some assistance in properly understanding who the "servant" is. Based on James 2:5-9 and 12-17, she concludes that "God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith."⁵⁵ She then makes the following assessment:

James also reminds us that the sovereign law of Scripture is that we must love our neighbors as we love ourselves. He insists that economic elitism is a sin against this sovereign law, so that there will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy in the use of their material resources. Specifically, James instructs us that it is not enough to wish our sisters and brothers well without actively sharing with them the necessities to meet their bodily needs. If faith does not translate into action, James says, it is simply dead; by contrast, he implies, those whose faith *does* undergird their practical outreach to help their sisters and brothers are those who are rich in faith and chosen of God. In other words, those who love their neighbors as they love themselves are "a covenant to the people, a light to the nations," opening eyes that are blind, bringing captives out of prison, out of the gloomy

⁵⁴Mollenkott, Godding, p. 7.

⁵⁵Ibid.

dungeons. Those who love their neighbors as themselves are corporately the righteous servant of God. They are "goddess."⁵⁶

"Goddess," therefore, are those who follow and practice Jesus' example of love, mercy, mutuality, and justice. "Goddess" are "the righteous servant" who continually strives for the full realization of the New Creation, the New Humanity. "Goddess," then, as defined by Mollenkott is "an embodiment or incarnation of God's love in human flesh, with the goal of cocreating with God a just and loving human society."⁵⁷

In Christ

Having understood the concepts of "goddess" and the "New Humanity," one can then gain a proper understanding of what it means to be "in Christ." According to Mollenkott, to be "in Christ" is not so much a faith and life relationship as it is an attitude. She writes:

And when Saint Paul speaks of being "in Christ," isn't he referring to the new, inclusive, love- and justice-oriented attitude of the New Humanity in the New Creation?⁵⁸

To be in Christ, then, is to be a part of the New Humanity which strives for mutuality, justice, and mercy. It involves "acknowledging" Jesus, which means "living the life

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 48.

of Jesus as members of the New Humanity, as citizens of the New Creation."⁵⁹ Being "in Christ" and acknowledging Jesus, therefore, "does not mean worshiping Jesus so much as worshipping the God whom Jesus worshiped and embodying the God whom Jesus embodied."⁶⁰

To be "in Christ" is to embody and serve the same love, mercy, mutuality, and justice as Jesus. Mollenkott, however, does not believe that such an understanding diminishes the importance and special character of Jesus. She concludes:

So yes, indeed, Jesus of Nazareth was the righteous servant of God, a Hebrew of the Hebrews in whom there was no guile, a liberator of captives and a healer of the blind and a light to the nations. But we are also called to be the righteous servant of God, the one who beacons to the nations the Good News that "mercy triumphs over judgment."⁶¹

Thus, Jesus serves as the one who shows us how to be in and part of the New Humanity, the New Creation. He is not so much a unique, one-time Incarnation of God as He is example.

Salvation in Christ

Mollenkott's views on the New Creation and New Humanity necessarily have an impact on her views regarding salvation. Although she does not explicitly deny the otherworldly aspect of salvation, her primary emphasis is on the

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 10-11.

this-worldly aspect. In other words, salvation almost seems to be equated with the New Humanity in the New Creation. She is critical of those who contend that salvation is "not intended to challenge the current structures of society."⁶² For her, salvation seems to involve "human wholeness" for both the oppressor and the oppressed.⁶³

The message proclaimed by the followers of Christ is not to be a set of dogmas about Jesus. The church should not preach a message of some future salvation through belief in Jesus that does not impact life in the present. Being a part of the Body of Christ in this world involves doing rather than proclaiming a set of beliefs. Mollenkott writes:

Inasmuch as any follower of Christ is called to be a partaker of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4), we also are intended to be in this world "little Christs," Christed or anointed ones, engaged in the messianic process of liberating human potential by bringing sight to the blind, mobility to the cripple, hearing to the deaf, healing to the lepers, new life to dead life-styles, and good news to the poor.⁶⁴

Here again is a picture of the New Humanity in the New Creation--a picture which seems to be equated with her idea of salvation. And insofar as she believes that "faithfully

⁶²Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "New Age Evangelism," International Review of Mission, 72:285 (January, 1983), p. 33.

⁶³Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "Female God-Imagery and Wholistic Social Consciousness," Studies in Formative Theology, 5:3 (1984), 348.

⁶⁴Mollenkott, "New Age Evangelism," p. 33.

attempting to serve truth and justice to the best of one's understanding will lead to salvation,"⁶⁵ so salvation seems to be equated with the ongoing process toward and the realization of the New Humanity in which justice, equality, and mutuality prevail. Salvation is the New Humanity in the New Age. She writes:

The New Age has already arrived and is always arriving--the time when all things will be gathered together into one in the Christ, the New Humanity (Ephesians 1:10).⁶⁶

Not only is salvation pictured as a New Age of justice and mutuality, realized through human "co-creating," but "the Christ" is equated with the New Humanity rather than with the person Jesus.

Furthermore, Mollenkott believes that there is a "*biblical basis*" for teaching the idea of universal salvation or redemption.⁶⁷ Whereas traditional Christianity has been a religion about Jesus, she believes that Christianity is intended to be "the religion of Jesus."⁶⁸ Thus, when Jesus said that "no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6), He meant that no one comes to the Father but those who come in the way He came. Mollenkott writes:

When Jesus says, "Nobody comes to the Father [and Mother] but by me," might he not be referring to an abiding sense of oneness with his divine Source, a sense of

⁶⁵Mollenkott, "An Evangelical Perspective," p. 66.

⁶⁶Mollenkott, "New Age Evangelism," p. 40.

⁶⁷Mollenkott, "An Evangelical Perspective," p. 64.

⁶⁸Mollenkott, Godding, p. 47.

organic union that Jesus never forgot? No one comes to God except by remembering that organic oneness with the Source of us all!⁶⁹

She uses Abraham as a biblical example to support this contention. Even though Abraham never knew the name of Jesus Christ, he was, nevertheless, saved. Mollenkott concludes:

Could it be possible that coming to the Father "by Jesus" might mean coming to the Father *in the same way Jesus came*, with full confidence in loving relationship and unswerving determination to carry out the divine will?⁷⁰

Therefore Mollenkott advocates not a "triumphalist Christology" which alienates others, but an inclusive Christology which affirms the validity of the interpretations of non-Christian religions.⁷¹ She writes:

When we speak of becoming "Christed" we use Christian terminology. But we err whenever we unconsciously assume that the terms of one religion exclude from the experience described all people who would not use the same terminology. The experience of godding, which is a spiritual matter of the attitudes that are expressed in human relationships, is open to people of every religion.⁷²

Having said this, she does not believe that Christians should stop using Christian terminology. Rather, she wants Christians to understand that non-Christian symbols and terms ultimately point to the same vision. She further

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 47-48.

⁷⁰Mollenkott, Speech, Silence, Action!, p. 60.

⁷¹Mollenkott, Godding, p. 46.

⁷²Ibid., p. 8.

writes:

Our primary interest is not in insisting on our own terms, but rather in bringing about the New Creation purged of racism, sexism, and classism. Our common goal is the New Humanity in the New Creation. Much as our hearts may throb with joy to affirm the sovereignty of Jesus the Christ, our task of creating a just and decent society requires that we learn to speak and think more inclusively than we have done.⁷³

Salvation is universal as people of all faiths strive to co-create the New Humanity in the New Creation. Mollenkott advocates an "anonymous Christianity" as she asserts that doing acts of mercy and justice in the names of other gods is in fact doing them in the name of Christ. She concludes:

Assistance to the least prestigious of human beings is assistance to Christ; refusal to help needy human beings is refusal to help Christ. Whether the person who gives assistance thinks the assistance is given in the name of Christ or the Buddha or the Tao or Allah or Jehovah or Tash, the assistance is given to Christ. I, therefore, can recognize my true sisters and brothers more surely by the way they live their lives than by the name they utter. I will not claw at those in whom I see the Spirit, trying to force them into doctrinal conformity with me. Retaining my loyalty to Jesus, I will simply enjoy communion with all those who manifest the fruits of the Spirit, even when they do not agree about external religious forms. Those who live in love live in God, and God in them (I John 4:16). And that's enough for me.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Mollenkott believes that the establishment of a new world is the mission and goal of Christianity. Salvation is

⁷³Ibid., p. 48.

⁷⁴Mollenkott, Speech, Silence, Action!, pp. 103-104.

equated with the movement toward and the establishing of a New Humanity in a New Creation. Jesus is said to show us the way to reach this goal as He Himself embodies this New Humanity. And this salvation in the New Creation is a universal salvation, embracing members of all faiths, as together they embody mercy, justice, and mutuality among all persons.

Summation

Although Mollenkott claims that the picture she paints of Jesus is a biblical one, her Jesus is in fact a product of her own prejudices and biases. She has certainly found a Jesus that is compatible with her feminist theology, but this Jesus is not the Jesus of Scripture. Her Jesus is not the one and only Incarnation of God, sent to earth to save sinners through His suffering, death, and resurrection. Mollenkott's Christology, like the Christologies of Daly and Ruether, is not the biblical Christology of Confessional Lutheranism. Thus, this thesis shall now proceed with an analysis and critique of these Christologies in the light of Scripture and Confessional Lutheran theology.

CHAPTER VI
THE CHRISTOLOGY OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY:
A CRITIQUE

Now when Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:13-16)

The question which Jesus addressed to His twelve disciples is not merely a question asked of them alone. It is, in fact, *the* question of the ages. It is a question which each individual must ultimately answer. Who is Jesus Christ?

The definitive answer to this question of the ages is the Christology revealed in Peter's confession and in the New Testament. This Christology, confessed by the ancient church in its Creeds, set forth by the ancient councils of Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon, and presented in the Lutheran Confessions, is and must be the only norm and standard for measuring any and all teachings concerning the person and work of Christ. Therefore whenever a new

movement or school of thought arises within the Christian Church, one of the central questions which should be asked of its purveyors is: Who do you say that Jesus Christ is?

This thesis has explored the Christologies of three prominent feminist theologians: Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott. It has attempted to allow each of these women to answer this central and defining question for herself. One thing which should be immediately clear from this exploration is that there is no single, definitive feminist Christology. Each of the three women answers the question in a different way. Therefore each woman's Christology must be critiqued separately.

And just as there is no definitive feminist Christology, so also is it acknowledged that this critique is not the definitive word on feminist Christology. Furthermore, this will not be an exhaustive, point-by-point critique. Rather, it will be a more generalized critique which deals in a specific way with only a few selected points. The critique begins, then, with Mary Daly.

Mary Daly

One need not read much of Mary Daly to reach the conclusion that she has indeed moved far "Beyond God the Father" and far beyond God the Son. In fact, to speak of the Christology of Mary Daly could well be termed an oxymoron, for she has no real Christology. Her blatant rejec-

tion of the person and work of Christ is more than evident from the title of the third chapter of her 1973 book, "Beyond Christolatry: A World Without Models."¹

Prior to her "conversion" to radical, post-Christian feminism, Daly already believed that orthodox Christology contributed to the oppression of women. While it is true that the pre-feminist Daly would not have confessed the Jesus of the New Testament and Confessional Lutheran theology, she still defended Jesus as a model or paradigm of what humanity could become. That would change, however, with her conversion.

Jesus of Scripture Rejected

Daly the radical feminist has no use whatsoever for the Jesus of Scripture. Certainly she rejects Him as God Incarnate and Savior, but she also goes far beyond that. One senses in Daly a profound hatred for the Jesus of orthodox Christology, and therefore she goes to great lengths to speak of Him in negative and even crude terms. Most disturbing of all, perhaps, is the fact that Daly has a very good understanding of biblical Christology. Her rejection, therefore, is based not on a misunderstanding of the Gospel but on a complete and total rejection of its truths.

¹Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 69.

Daly, for example, understands that the Bible teaches that all of humanity is lost in sin and therefore in need of a Savior. But her rejection of the truth that all are guilty of personal sin against a just and holy God has led her to reject Jesus as the once-for-all sacrifice to make atonement for that sin. For her, sexism is the original sin, and therefore Jesus cannot be Savior precisely because He is male.

Justification by Grace Rejected

She goes on to suggest that Jesus' saving work on the cross is a foolish myth. With a full understanding of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ, Daly calls it a "masochistic Pauline-Lutheran doctrine"² and therefore rejects it because one is forced to admit that he or she is not worthy to receive the gifts God offers in and through Christ. Her militantly negative view of the cross and its theology is perhaps best summarized when she calls Christ on the cross a "necrophilic symbol of a dead body hanging on dead wood."³

Virgin Birth and Incarnation Rejected

A further example of Daly's blatant and crude negativity toward orthodox Christology is seen in her treatment of

²Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 377.

³Ibid., p. 18.

the virgin birth and Incarnation of Jesus. She believes that this "myth" has been perpetuated to prevent the full becoming of women and crudely says that the "myth" of the virgin birth and Incarnation is nothing short of "mythic Super-Rape."⁴

Conclusion

Clearly, Daly has rejected both the divinity of Jesus and the salvific nature of His death on the cross and His resurrection. There is nothing about her agenda that is hidden or subtle. Her ultimate goal is not to reform or "feminize" Christianity and orthodox Christology but to discredit these and make them invalid as part of one's belief system. A completely human Christ whose death on the cross has no salvific significance is obviously not the Christ of Peter's confession and New Testament Christology, and therefore Daly's "Christology" is to be rejected.

Rosemary Radford Ruether

Like Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether has a history in theology prior to her conversion to feminism. The pre-feminist Ruether readily accepted historical criticism as her method of Bible interpretation, and therefore her Jesus already did not measure up to the Jesus of orthodox Christology. Consequently, the feminist Ruether simply continued

⁴Mary Daly, Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 75.

down the same path of criticism and found further reason for criticizing and attacking the Jesus of the New Testament.

Ruether's starting point is much the same as Daly's-- Christology has been used to oppress women. But unlike Daly, Ruether believes that Christology had the potential to free the world, and especially women, from oppressive systems. She suggests that the Christian Church, however, took Christology in the wrong direction, making Jesus into a Lord rather than a liberator.

Jesus as Paradigm

Ruether, therefore, finds some value for feminism in the person and work of Jesus. Her model of a Jesus for feminist theology is that of the "Prophetic Iconoclastic Christ"--that is, a Jesus who renounces the status quo and works toward the full personhood of all marginalized peoples. In constructing this model, however, Ruether uses only those words and actions of Jesus that fit her own agenda. Her Jesus, then, is not the Jesus of New Testament Christology.

Jesus is Not the Messiah

First, Ruether denies that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. While it is true that the Messiah of popular Jewish expectation was primarily a political savior, it is also true that God had promised a Suffering Servant who would rescue the world from sin and its punish-

ment. Israel's misunderstanding of God's promises does not invalidate them. The entire New Testament, and the Gospels especially, is filled with examples of how Jesus fulfills the entire Old Testament.⁵ To deny that Jesus is the promised Messiah is to ignore the clear testimony of the New Testament.

Jesus is Not the Unique Incarnation of God

Second, Ruether's Jesus is not the Jesus of orthodox Christology because she denies that Jesus is the unique and once for all Incarnation of God. Like so many other feminists, she views Jesus as a mere paradigm of God's presence within an individual--a presence which is potentially available to all people. Furthermore, she asserts that Jesus Himself never considered Himself to be the unique and final Word of God. To make this assertion, however, she must ignore many of Jesus' sayings, among which are the following:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

You know neither Me, nor My Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also. (John 8:19)

I and the Father are one. (John 10:30)

I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes

⁵For example: Matthew 1:22-23, 2:5-6, 4:14-16, 12:15-21, 39-40, 21:4-5, 42, 27:9-10, 34-35; Mark 9:1-13, 14:27, 15:34; Luke 4:17-21, 7:22, 22:37, 23:46; John 4:7-26, 5:39-47, 6:44-51, 12:37-41, 15:25; Acts 2:14-36, 3:11-26, 8:32-39; Romans 1:16-17.

to the Father, but through Me. (John 14:6)

Jesus did in fact proclaim Himself as the only Son of the Father, as the unique and once for all Incarnation of God, and as the one and only way to the Father. Again, Ruether's Jesus is not the Jesus of Scripture, for her Jesus is not God Himself clothed in human flesh.

Jesus the Liberator

Third, the mission of Ruether's "Prophetic Iconoclastic Christ" is the formulation of a new society in which all patriarchal and oppressive structures are overturned. In this way, Jesus can serve as a liberator, for He represents the new liberated humanity which is in conformity with the will of God. But Ruether contends that He is not the only liberator, for there can be many other models which are just as valid and helpful as Jesus.

Furthermore, the liberation of which she speaks is for this world only and has nothing at all to do with a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and the gift of eternal life in heaven. In fact, Ruether denies that there is a true life after death. She further denies that any kind of reconciliation with a just and holy God is needed.

Conclusion

Therefore, like Daly, Ruether fails to see sin as something which is personal and which makes all people

worthy of damnation. For her, sin is restricted to systems of oppression. And rather than saving us from personal sin and giving us life in heaven through a sacrificial death and resurrection, Ruether's Jesus is simply one of many paradigms which can show people how to overcome oppressive systems by their own power.

Ruether has asserted that "whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is . . . to be appraised as not redemptive."⁶ Orthodox Christology has been so appraised by Ruether. A Jesus who is merely human, who is not the unique Incarnation of God, who has not ransomed the world from sin through His death on the cross, and who does not offer eternal life in heaven to all who believe in Him is not the Jesus of Scripture, and therefore Ruether's feminist Christology must also be rejected.

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, unlike either Daly or Ruether, sets forth what she claims is a biblical Christology. She finds Jesus much more praiseworthy than Ruether and is quick to excuse such things as His use of predominantly male God-language, suggesting that His time and culture made such usage necessary. Yet despite her claim to

⁶Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 115.

be biblical, Mollenkott, like Ruether, creates a Jesus to fit her own feminist agenda. And this Jesus is not the Jesus of the New Testament.

Feminine Characteristics of Jesus

Mollenkott places a great deal of emphasis on the person of Jesus, suggesting that Scripture presents Him with both male and female characteristics. Among those characteristics mentioned are His willing submission to "the First Person" and His picturing of Himself in feminine terms. Certainly Jesus did submit to the will of His Father, but such submission, which is said to be a stereotypically female attribute, does not make Jesus or any male less male. And while it is certainly true that Jesus spoke of Himself using the metaphor of a hen and her chicks, that does not make Him any less male.

She further suggests that when Jesus, in John 16:21, refers to birth pains, He is picturing His suffering and death in a feminine metaphor. She finds this especially significant because it involves the central event of His ministry. But Mollenkott errs in her assessment because Jesus is referring not to the pains of His own suffering, but to the pain of separation His disciples will experience. Yet after His resurrection, those pains will go away, even as a woman's pain goes away when she sees her child.

Jesus is Primarily Human

But all of this emphasis on feminine characteristics is part of a larger picture. Mollenkott's assertions that Jesus had male as well as female qualities sets the stage for a further assertion--that Jesus was primarily human, and only secondarily male. She does admit that Jesus was a male, but she excuses this as being culturally necessary. If Jesus was going to be successful in speaking against the wrong uses of power, she says, He had to be a part of the power group.

The first problem with this larger picture is Mollenkott's belief that *only* because Jesus is primarily human and *only* because He has feminine characteristics can He serve as an acceptable Savior for both men and women. There is, however, only one thing that makes Jesus perfectly equipped to be the Savior of all: He is God Incarnate, both true God and true Man. Only the sinless and Incarnate Son of God could live a perfect life under the law and be the acceptable sacrifice for the sins of the world, and this and this alone is what qualifies Jesus alone to be Savior.

The second problem with this larger picture is that Mollenkott seems to come very close to making Jesus androgynous. Jesus' maleness, she contends, is neither theologically necessary nor an important part of who He is. He is first and foremost human. But to be fully human, one must be first and foremost either male or female. There is no

human existence that is not distinctly male or distinctly female.

Furthermore, Mollenkott's belief that Jesus' maleness is not theologically significant is erroneous. Certainly she is correct when she states that Scripture speaks of Jesus being incarnate as "human," but it does not necessarily follow that His maleness has no theological significance. As William C. Weinrich writes:

. . . His incarnation as male can only be theologically indifferent if maleness and femaleness are themselves devoid of theological meaning. The idea, then, that Jesus could have been incarnated as a female without any change of theological significance and that His incarnation as a male was exclusively a cultural accomodation on God's part contains within it a disparagement of the actual created order and finally allows for no positive theological understanding of the sexual differentiation within humankind.⁷

As Weinrich suggests, in the light of the Order of Creation, maleness and femaleness do in fact have theological meaning. Therefore it is also true that Jesus' maleness has theological significance. Speaking of the Order of Creation, Susan T. Foh writes:

If one believes, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent" and its theological justification, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Timothy 2:12-14), to be true, then there is one obvious reason why Christ

⁷William C. Weinrich, "Feminism In The Church: The Issue Of Our Day," Concordia Theological Quarterly, 50:2 (1986), 142.

could not have been a woman.⁸

As Scripture teaches, God created Adam first and established him as the head of the human race, and thus the male is the representative of the human race. This is not so because men are better than women or because God values them more, but it is true simply because God, in the mystery of His Wisdom, has so ordered things. And so Foh concludes:

Since God has given this representative ability to the male, Christ, as the head, source, and representative of the church, had to become incarnate as a man.⁹

Yet while Jesus' maleness does have a theological significance, that significance should not be made to overshadow another truth. Why did Jesus become incarnate as a male? David P. Scaer writes:

God is of such a nature that He could not have become incarnate in a woman and He could not have chosen women to represent Him as apostles and pastors. We were all condemned in Adam's sin and not Eve's, though she sinned first. All are justified in Christ, who is the new Adam and not the new Eve.¹⁰

Scaer's words reiterate what Foh has said, but they also stress that Jesus came as a male to justify all people, male and female alike. In stressing the necessity of Jesus' maleness, the Gospel must not be overlooked. Mollenkott is

⁸Susan T. Foh, Women and the Word of God (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979, pp. 158-159.

⁹Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁰David P. Scaer, "The Validity of the Churchly Acts of Ordained Women," Concordia Theological Quarterly, 53:1-2 (1989), 10.

certainly correct when she states that Jesus was incarnate as a human, but He was incarnate as a male human, and He was incarnate as a male to save all sinners from death and damnation. Therefore Jesus' maleness is to be received in the same way He and all His works are received--as Gospel gift.

The Work of Christ

Mollenkott also errs when she speaks of the work of Christ. Like Ruether and many other feminists, her view of salvation is centered on the formation of a new humanity and a new order in the present world. The creation of this new order, in which barriers are broken down and mutuality, justice and mercy are practiced, is said to be the mission of the church. Therefore Jesus has again been reduced to a paradigm--a model of how people can bring about this new society.

Furthermore, when speaking of those who work toward this new order, Mollenkott refers to them as "an embodiment or incarnation of God's love in human flesh."¹¹ Jesus, therefore, is not unique as the Incarnation of God. And, she says, those working toward this new order should not insist that others practice the Christian faith. For her, Jesus is the model who embodies the new humanity, but other

¹¹Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Goddings: Human Responsibility and the Bible (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), p. 2.

models can be just as valid.

The Christ of orthodox Christology, however, came not merely to serve as a model for a new humanity but to save sinners from the wrath of God and hell through His life, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection. He alone is God Incarnate, and forgiveness and salvation are found in Him and in Him alone. This salvation which He freely offers and gives does impact life in the here and now, but its consummation lies in the hereafter. And precisely because this salvation is found in Him alone, the mission of His Church is to proclaim Him to all peoples.

Conclusion

In the end, Mollenkott's Christology, as a whole, is no more acceptable than that of Daly or Ruether. A "feminized" Jesus who is not the one and only Incarnation of God and who merely serves as a model of what humanity can become is not the Jesus of New Testament Christology. Her Christology, as a whole, must also be rejected.

General Critique

One of the most concise summaries of orthodox Christology is Martin Luther's explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed from *The Small Catechism*:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, delivered me and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with silver and gold but with his holy and precious

blood and with his innocent sufferings and death, in order that I may be his, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.¹²

Neither Daly nor Ruether nor Mollenkott can confess this Jesus, for the Jesus of their feminist Christologies is someone very different.

Divinity Denied

Although their approaches to the question of Jesus are different in many ways, all three women deny the divinity of Jesus. The Jesus they teach is a mere human being, essentially no different than any other human being. All three deny that Jesus is the unique and only Incarnation of the one, true God. They cannot confess, using Luther's words, that Jesus is "true God, begotten of the Father from eternity." Yet this is precisely what Scripture declares Him to be (John 1:1, 14, 8:58, 10:30; Philippians 2:5-6; Colossians 2:9). To deny the divinity of Jesus is to deny the truth of God's inspired Word recorded in the Bible. Therefore any Christology which denies the true divinity of Christ--that He is God incarnate as a man--must be declared a false Christology.

¹²Martin Luther, "The Small Catechism," in The Book of Concord, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 345.

Salvific Work Denied

Consequently, the denial of Jesus as true God has led to a further denial of the salvific nature of His work. Christ's redemptive work is not a mere model for the vision of human liberation, it does not show us what it means to be liberated and united humanity, and it does not merely guide us to an overturning of oppressive structures. Such assertions fail to take the sinful human condition seriously.

Sin cannot be narrowed down to include only sexism and the oppressive structures that divide humans. Sin, as Scripture declares it to be, is nothing less than rebellion against a just and holy God. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and therefore all people, males and females alike, deserve nothing less than death and eternal damnation. What all people need first and foremost is to be restored to a right relationship with the almighty God, and it is Christ who has accomplished this reconciliation by suffering hell and damnation in our stead. In Jesus Christ, and in Him alone, there is forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation. Any Christology which denies this saving work or detracts from it is a denial of the Gospel and is to be rejected as false.

The Kingdom of God

A denial of both the person and the work of Jesus results in an incorrect view of God's kingdom. All three

women have confined God's kingdom to this world, declaring it to be a new society in which all oppressive systems and structures are torn down and in which all humans live in harmony as equals.

While such a society here on earth would certainly be a good thing, it is not the kingdom of heaven which Christ has won. Jesus has promised eternal life in God's heavenly kingdom to all who believe in Him, and this is the blessed future toward which God's redeemed people look. And while there is a degree to which this kingdom, this truly "new society," is already present in and among Christ's Church, this is only a foretaste of the blessed life which lies ahead. Daly, Ruether and Mollenkott, therefore, are also incorrect when it comes to the ultimate result of Christ's saving work.

Conclusion

In an article which appeared in Newsweek, Kenneth L. Woodward states:

Putting more women in the pulpit, however, is no longer the prime goal of Christian feminists. Rather, their aim is a thorough and comprehensive transformation of the language, symbols and sacred texts of the Christian faith--and therefore of the faith itself.¹³

This exploration of the Christology of feminist theologians has demonstrated that Woodward's statement is indeed accu-

¹³Kenneth L. Woodward, "Feminism and the Churches," Newsweek, 113:7 (1989), 60.

rate. Daly, Ruether, and Mollenkott do not merely speak of Jesus and His saving work in terms different from those of orthodox Christology. Rather, the Jesus of which they speak is wholly different from the Jesus of the New Testament. Ruether and Mollenkott seek to change Jesus and make Him fit their own feminist agenda. What is at stake, therefore, is the truth of the Gospel itself. And it is for this reason that their unscriptural Christologies must be rejected.

Summation

When all is said and done, the basic point of contention for feminist theologians, it seems, is the scandal of particularity regarding the maleness of Jesus. In light of their experiences as women, they feel compelled to reject a male Savior. How sad it is that the Jesus and the entire belief system they are left with offers no real salvation or peace or comfort or hope.

What peace does the feminist Jesus give to one who is burdened by his or her sins? What comfort or hope does the feminist Jesus give to one dying in a hospital bed, to one standing at the grave of a departed loved one, or to parents who have learned that their baby is anencephalic? Only the Jesus of the New Testament can heal our hurts in this life, grant us forgiveness for our sins, and give us the blessing of eternal life in heaven. A pastor who ministers in the name of this Jesus can offer peace and hope to those pre-

cious souls entrusted to his care, but one who ministers in the name of the feminist Jesus cannot.

Yet even as the church rejects the Christologies of these feminists, some of their concerns should lead it to reflect on several important questions. Do we take women and their concerns seriously? Too often the church seems to trivialize the concerns of women or respond to them with pious and theological answers. Such responses simply will not do. What is needed is patient, understanding, and loving dialogue. The church needs to lend a careful ear to their questions and concerns so that a God-pleasing resolution can be found.

Does the church sometimes use Christ and His maleness to justify male dominance? Though the church's teachings deny that this should happen, actions influenced by the sinful nature may not always concur. Daly, Ruether, and Mollenkott obviously believe that Christ and His maleness have been used against women, and they are certainly not alone. While the church must maintain and uphold the proper distinction between the Order of Creation and the Order of Redemption, it must also be careful that the maleness of Christ not be used improperly to the advantage of males.

Are women within the church permitted to do all which Scripture allows? Again, the Order of Creation must be upheld, but the church must avoid the extreme of forbidding any and all women's service within the body of Christ. Too

often, in its efforts to uphold the Order of Creation, the church forbids women the opportunity to serve in all of the capacities which God allows. God's church will no doubt prosper and grow if both men and women are permitted to use their God-given talents and abilities in God-pleasing ways.

Does the church in its preaching and teaching use inclusive language when speaking of those whom God loves and for whom Christ died? Certainly when it is proclaimed that "Jesus died for all men," it is meant that He died for all people, male and female alike. However, many women find this offensive. It would be very helpful, therefore, if the church's preaching and teaching would use inclusive language when speaking of those for whom Christ died. For the sake of the Gospel, such unnecessary stumbling blocks should be removed. This does not mean, however, that our God-language or the words of Scripture should be made to be inclusive. The church should continue to speak of God as He has revealed Himself in His Word, but there are many instances when inclusive language can and should be used in reference to God's people.

Should the church not strive to break down, with God's help, the many barriers which separate God's people? While it is certainly wrong to understand redemption in Christ as a liberation toward wholeness and equality for all people, those who are redeemed in Christ should work toward destroying the many walls which divide God's family and people one

from another. Be they walls of race, sexism, economic status, culture, or other prejudices, they must be torn down. Because of sin there will always be walls, but empowered by the Holy Spirit to live sanctified lives, God's people can do much toward breaking down those walls.

There are indeed many legitimate concerns raised by feminist theologians, and the church must listen to them and respond to them. But as the church turns a sympathetic ear toward their concerns, it must never compromise its Christology. The Christologies of Daly, Ruether, and Mollenkott present a false Christ and therefore must be rejected. The Christology of Peter's confession, proclaimed in the New Testament and set forth in the Lutheran Confessions, is the Christology which the church must preach, teach, and confess. It cannot and must not do otherwise. When asked who Jesus is, the church must boldly confess, "He is the Christ, the Son of the living God." In this Jesus Christ, and in Him alone, there is hope, forgiveness, life, and salvation.

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