

attack, led to intense inter- and intrareligious debates about Islam. Religious communities seemed deeply divided by the presence of George W. Bush, a conservative evangelical with an expressed sense of divine mission, in the White House. Conflict over religious diversity and pluralism appeared certain to endure.

MARY DALY

Mary Daly (b. 1928) is a radical feminist theologian. She received three doctorates in religion and philosophy and was the first woman at Switzerland's University of Fribourg to receive the highest degree in Sacred Theology possible, and with highest honors. She accepted a teaching position at Boston College before rejecting Roman Catholicism in favor of a position she terms post-Christian, and despite her controversial views, she remained at the college for thirty-three years. Daly is famous for being the first woman to preach in the pulpit of Harvard's Memorial Church (in 1971) and for ending her so-called antisermmon by leading hundreds out of the building as a protest against patriarchal religion. Beginning with *The Church and the Second Sex* (1969), she has authored numerous works that denounce Christianity's history of sexism. Her analyses have inspired admiration, even among many who have chosen to remain faithful to their religious traditions while working for greater egalitarianism within them. This excerpt is from her 1973 book, *Beyond God the Father*.



From Beyond God the Father

THE PROBLEM, THE PURPOSE, AND THE METHOD

I want a women's revolution like a lover. I lust for it, I want so much this freedom, this end to struggle and fear and lies we all exhale, that I could die just with the passionate uttering of that desire. ~ ROBIN MORGAN

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When you are criticizing the philosophy of an epoch, do not chiefly direct your attention to those intellectual positions which its exponents feel it necessary explicitly to defend. There will be some fundamental assumptions which adherents of all the various systems within the epoch unconsciously presuppose. Such assumptions appear so obvious that people do not know what they are assuming because no other way of pulling things has ever occurred to them. ~ ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

The basic presuppositions of this book have been proposed in detail elsewhere. I shall briefly highlight some of these ideas before proceeding to a discussion of purpose and method.

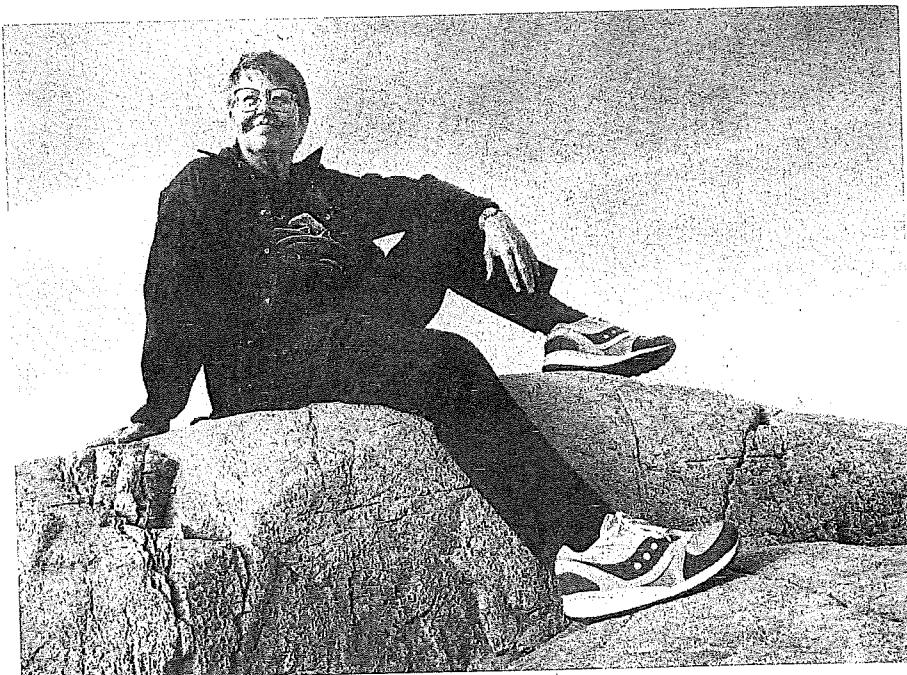
Recent years have witnessed a series of crescendos in the women's movement. Women of all "types," having made the psychic breakthrough to recognition of the basic sameness of our situation as women, have been initiated into the struggle for liberation of our sex from its ancient bondage. The bonding together of women into a sisterhood for liberation is becoming a widespread feature of American culture, and the movement is rapidly taking on worldwide dimensions.

The bonding is born out of shared recognition that there exists a worldwide phenomenon of sexual caste, basically the same whether one lives in Saudi Arabia or in Sweden. This planetary sexual 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. Clearly I am not using the term "caste" in its most rigid sense, which would apply only to Brahmanic Indian society. I am using it in accordance with Berreman's broad description, since our language at present lacks other terms to describe systems of rigid social stratification analogous to the Indian system.

It may be that the psychological root of selective nit-picking about the use of the term "caste" to describe women's situation is a desire *not* to be open to the insights made available by the comparison. Such rigidity overlooks the fact that language develops and changes in the course of history. The term is the most accurate available. Precisely because it is strong and revealing, many feminists have chosen to employ it. As Jo Freeman points out, caste systems are extremely difficult although not impossible to change. Moreover, since they are composed of interdependent units, to alter one unit is to alter all.

The exploitative sexual caste system could not be perpetuated without the consent of the victims as well as of the dominant sex, and such consent is obtained through sex role socialization—a conditioning process which begins to operate from the moment we are born, and which is enforced by most institutions. Parents, friends, teachers, textbook authors and illustrators, advertisers, those who control the mass media, toy and clothes manufacturers, professionals such as doctors and psychologists—all contribute to the socialization process. This happens through dynamics that are largely uncalculated and unconscious, yet which reinforce the assumptions, attitudes, stereotypes, customs, and arrangements of sexually hierarchical society.

The fact of women's low caste status has been—and is—disguised. It is masked, first of all, by *sex role segregation*. This is more subtle than spatial segregation, as in a ghetto, for it makes possible the delusion that women should be "equal but different." Sexual caste is hidden also by the fact that women have



Mary Daly, the post-Christian feminist philosopher and theologian. Photo by Gail Bryan©.

various forms of *derivative status* as a consequence of relationships with men. That is, women have duality of status, and the derivative aspect of this status—for example, as daughters and wives—divides us against each other and encourages identification with patriarchal institutions which serve the interests of men at the expense of women. Finally, sexual caste is hidden by *ideologies* that bestow false identities upon women and men. Patriarchal religion has served to perpetuate all of these dynamics of delusion, naming them “natural” and bestowing its supernatural blessings upon them. The system has been advertised as “according to the divine plan.”

The history of antifeminism in the Judeo-Christian heritage already has been exposed. The infamous passages of the Old and New Testaments are well known. I need not allude to the misogyny of the church Fathers—for example, Tertullian, who informed women in general: “You are the devil’s gateway,” or Augustine, who opined that women are not made to the image of God. I can omit reference to Thomas Aquinas and his numerous commentators and disciples who defined women as misbegotten males. I can overlook Martin Luther’s remark that God created Adam lord over all living creatures but Eve spoiled it all. I can pass over the fact that John Knox composed a “First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.” All of this, after all, is past history.

Perhaps, however, we should take just a cursory glance at more recent history. Pope Pius XII more or less summarized official Catholic views on women when he wrote that “the mother who complains because a new child presses

against her bosom seeking nourishment at her breast is foolish, ignorant of herself, and unhappy." In the early 1970s the Roman church launched all-out warfare against the international movement to repeal anti-abortion laws. In 1972, Pope Paul VI assumed his place as champion of "true women's liberation," asserting that this does not lie in "formalistic or materialistic equality with the other sex, but in the recognition of that specific thing in the feminine personality—the vocation of a woman to become a mother."

Meanwhile in other Christian churches things have not really been that different. Theologian Karl Barth proclaimed that woman is ontologically subordinate to man as her "head." Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his famous *Letters and Papers from Prison*, in which he had proclaimed the attack of Christianity upon the adulthood of the world to be pointless, ignoble, and unchristian—in this very same volume—insists that women should be subject to their husbands. In 1972, Episcopal Bishop C. Kilmer Myers asserted that since Jesus was male, women cannot be ordained. Some Protestant churches pride themselves upon the fact that they do ordain women, yet the percentages are revealing. The United Presbyterian Church, for example, has women ministers, but they constitute less than 1 percent of fully ordained ministers in that church.

Theology and ethics which are overtly and explicitly oppressive to women are by no means confined to the past. Exclusively masculine symbolism for God, for the notion of divine "incarnation" in human nature, and for the human relationship to God reinforce sexual hierarchy. Tremendous damage is done, particularly in ethics, when ethicists construct one-dimensional arguments that fail to take women's experience into account. This is evident, for example, in biased arguments concerning abortion. To summarize briefly the situation: the entire conceptual 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 society. . . .

AFTER THE DEATH OF GOD THE FATHER

The first step in the elevation of women under all systems of religion is to convince them that the great Spirit of the Universe is in no way responsible for any of these absurdities. ~ ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years. The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in "his" heaven is a father ruling "his" people, then it is in the "nature" of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated.

Within this context a mystification of roles takes place: the husband dominating his wife represents God "himself." The images and values of a given society have been projected into the realm of dogmas and "Articles of Faith," and these in turn justify the social structures which have given rise to them and

which sustain their plausibility. The belief system becomes hardened and objectified, seeming to have an unchangeable independent existence and validity of its own. It resists social change that would rob it of its plausibility. Despite the vicious circle, however, change can occur in society, and ideologies can die, though they die hard.

The Inadequate God of Popular Preaching

The image of the divine Father in heaven has not always been conducive to humane behavior, as any perceptive reader of history knows. The often cruel behavior of Christians toward unbelievers and toward dissenters among themselves suggests a great deal not only about the values of the society dominated by that image, but also about how that image itself functions in relation to behavior. There has been a basic ambivalence in the image of the heavenly patriarch—a split between the God of love and the jealous God who represents the collective power of "his" chosen people. As historian Arnold Toynbee has indicated, this has reflected and perpetuated a double standard of behavior. Without debating the details of his historical analysis, the insight is available on an experiential level. The character of Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* is a vivid illustration of the marriage of tenderness and violence so intricately blended in the patriarchal ideal. The worshippers of the loving Father may in a sense love their neighbors, but in fact the term applies only to those within a restricted and unstable circumference, and these worshippers can "justifiably" be intolerant and fanatic persecutors of those outside the sacred circle.

How this God operates is illustrated in contemporary American civil religion. In one of the White House sermons given during the first term of Richard Nixon, Rabbi Louis Finkelstein expressed the hope that a future historian may say "that in the period of great trials and great tribulations, the finger of God pointed to Richard Milhous Nixon, giving the vision and the wisdom to save the world and civilization; and also to open the way for our country to realize the good that the twentieth century offers mankind." Within this context, as Charles Henderson has shown, God is an American and Nixon is "his" anointed one. The preachers carefully selected for the White House sermons stress that this nation is "under God." The logical conclusion is that its policies are right. Under God, the President becomes a Christ figure. In 1969, the day the astronauts would set foot on the moon, and when the President was preparing to cross the Pacific "in search of peace," one of these preachers proclaimed:

And my hope for mankind is strengthened in the knowledge that our intrepid President himself will soon go into orbit, reaching boldly for the moon of peace. God grant that he, too, may return in glory and that countless millions of prayers that follow him shall not have been in vain.

A fundamental dynamic of this "theology" was suggested by one of Nixon's speech writers, Ray Price, who wrote:

Selection of a President has to be an act of faith. . . . This faith isn't achieved by reason: it's achieved by charisma, by a feeling of trust. . . .

Price also argued that the campaign would be effective only "if we can get people to make the *emotional* leap, or what theologians call 'leap of faith.' " This is,

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of course, precisely the inauthentic leap that Camus labeled as philosophical suicide. It is the suicide demanded by a civil religion in which "God," the Savior-President, and "our nation" more or less merge. When the "leap" is made, it is possible simply not to see what the great God-Father and his anointed one are actually doing. Among the chosen ones are scientists and professors who design perverse methods of torture and death such as flechette pellets that shred the internal organs of "the enemy" and other comparable inhumane "anti-personnel" weapons. Also among the elect are politicians and priests who justify and bestow their blessing upon the system that perpetrates such atrocities. "Under God" are included the powerful industrialists who are making the planet uninhabitable.

Sophisticated thinkers, of course, have never intellectually identified God with a Superfather in heaven. Nevertheless it is important to recognize that even when very abstract conceptualizations of God are formulated in the mind, images survive in the imagination in such a way that a person can function on two different and even apparently contradictory levels at the same time. Thus one can speak of God as spirit and at the same time imagine "him" as belonging to the male sex. Such primitive images can profoundly affect conceptualizations which appear to be very refined and abstract. So too the Yahweh of the future, so cherished by the theology of hope, comes through on an imaginative level as exclusively a He-God, and it is consistent with this that theologians of hope have attempted to develop a political theology which takes no explicit cognizance of the devastation wrought by sexual politics.

The widespread conception of the "Supreme Being" as an entity distinct from this world but controlling it according to plan and keeping human beings in a state of infantile subjection has been a not too subtle mask of the divine patriarch. The Supreme Being's plausibility and that of the static worldview which accompanies this projection has of course declined, at least among the more sophisticated, as Nietzsche prophesied. This was a projection grounded in specifically patriarchal societal structures and sustained as subjectivity real by the usual processes of producing plausibility such as preaching, religious indoctrination, and cult. The sustaining power of the social structure has been eroded by a number of developments in recent history, including the general trend toward democratization of society and the emergence of technology. However, it is the women's movement which appears destined to play the key role in the overthrow of such oppressive elements in traditional theism, precisely because it strikes at the source of the societal dualism that is reflected in traditional beliefs. It presents a growing threat to the plausibility of the inadequate popular "God" not so much by attacking "him" as by leaving "him" behind. Few major feminists display great interest in institutional religion. Yet this disinterest can hardly be equated with lack of spiritual consciousness. Rather, in our present experience the woman-consciousness is being wrenched free to find its own religious expression.

It can legitimately be pointed out that the Judeo-Christian tradition is not entirely bereft of elements that can foster intimations of transcendence. Yet the liberating potential of these elements is choked off in the surrounding atmosphere of the images, ideas, values, and structures of patriarchy. The social change coming from radical feminism has the potential to bring about a more

acute and widespread perception of qualitative differences between the conceptualizations of "God" and of the human relationship to God which have been oppressive in their connotations, and the kind of language that is spoken from and to the rising woman-consciousness.

Castrating "God"

I have already suggested that if God is male, then the male is God. 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.

Some religious leaders, notably Mary Baker Eddy and Ann Lee, showed insight into the problem to some extent and tried to stress the "maternal" aspect of what they called "God." A number of feminists have referred to "God" as "she." While all of this has a point, the analysis has to reach a deeper level. The most basic change has to take place in women—in our being and self-image. Otherwise there is danger of settling for mere reform, reflected in the phenomenon of "crossing," that is, of attempting to use the oppressor's weapons against him. Black theology's image of the Black God illustrates this. It can legitimately be argued that a transsexual operation upon "God," changing "him" to "her," would be a far more profound alteration than a mere pigmentation change. However, to stop at this level of discourse would be trivialization of the deep problem of human becoming in women. . . .

THE BONDS OF FREEDOM: SISTERHOOD AS ANTICHURCH

A woman must never be free of subjugation. ~ THE HINDU CODE OF MANU, V

I thank thee, O Lord, that thou has not created me a woman. ~ DAILY ORTHODOX JEWISH PRAYER

Creator of the heavens and the earth, He has given you wives from among yourselves to multiply you, and cattle male and female. Nothing can be compared with Him.
~ HOLY KORAN OF ISLAM

Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands . . . for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church. ~ EPHESIANS 5:23-24

Religion legitimates so effectively because it relates the precarious reality constructions of empirical societies with ultimate reality. ~ PETER BERGER, IN THE SACRED CANOPY

As the victims of a planetary caste system whose very existence has been made invisible to us, women have been divided from each other by pseudo-identification with groupings which are androcentric and male-dominated. Among these are the various religions whose ideologies degrade and mystify women to such an extent that even the fact of this degradation is not perceived by its victims.

Despite deception, women are breaking through to awareness of sexual caste as a universal phenomenon. As women revolt against this, a new sense of

reality is emerging. That is, a counterworld to patriarchy is coming into being which is by the same token counter to religion as *patriarchal*. Sisterhood, then, by being the unique bonding of women against our reduction to low caste is Antichurch. It is the evolution of a social reality that undercuts the credibility of sexist religion to the degree that it undermines sexism itself. Even without conscious attention to the church, sisterhood is in conflict with it. There are, of course, other movements in contemporary society that threaten organized religion. In the case of other movements, however, it is not sexism that is directly under attack. The development of sisterhood is a unique threat, for it is directed against the basic social and psychic model of hierarchy and domination upon which authoritarian religion as *authoritarian* depends for survival. This conflict arises directly from the fact that women are beginning to overcome the divided self and divisions from each other.

Aside from the general way in which the movement, simply by its own dynamics, conflicts with sexist religion by setting up a counterworld to it, there is also a more specific and direct opposition developing to the sexism of the churches. This is related to the fact that some of the movement's leading figures as well as an increasing number of its adherents are women who know personally the experience of authoritarian religious conditioning and the experience of breaking through this. Many now recall in amazement their past acceptance of the exclusion of half the human race from priesthood and ministry as if this were "natural." As long as the mask of role segregation was effective, it was possible to believe firmly that no inequality was involved: men and women were just "different." Women were able to accept the fact that any boy was allowed to serve Mass, whereas a woman with a Ph.D. was absolutely excluded from such a function. They could go through marriage ceremonies in which they promised to "obey" their husbands without reciprocal promises from men, and still think that no inequality was involved: they were "subordinate but not inferior." Now that the implications of role segregation in the wider society have received exposure in the media, however, inevitably more women, even the unradicalized, are seeing through the mystifications of religious sexism and our own resistance to consciousness. These women—whatever may be their relationship now to organized religion—are spiritual expatriates, and they bring to the movement intimate and precise knowledge of religion's role in reinforcing sexual caste, focusing criticism precisely upon it. In a particular way, they constitute sisterhood as Antichurch. . . .

SISTERHOOD AS COSMIC COVENANT

My friends, do we realize for what purpose we are convened? Do we fully understand that we aim at nothing less than an entire subversion of the present order of society, a dissolution of the whole existing social compact? ~ ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH, 1852

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright

In the forests of the night,

What immortal hand or eye,

Dare frame thy fearful symmetry? ~ WILLIAM BLAKE

It was a temptation to call this chapter "Sisterhood as Cosmic Church," in order to express some of the movement's elements that are in dialectical tension with its mode of being as Antichurch. However, the negative reactions of feminists to the term are warning enough. Betty Friedan expressed this gut feeling by remarking simply that "the church is the enemy." The word is freighted with an archaic heritage in a specifically Christian way, and this may never be shaken off. Yet certain functions that the church claimed to fulfill and never could, essentially because of its sexism, are being more than fulfilled in the new space of feminism. Or, to be somewhat more accurate, something *beyond* the claims of Christianity is coming into being, for the formulation itself of churchly claims has been anemic, couched in a language reflecting the limits of the patriarchal imagination and perpetuating those limits. The church's actualizations of even such shriveled formulations fall far short of what the advertisements have promised. Still, in order to help our new words—our sounds of silence—to emerge, it may be useful to look at some prevalent concepts of "church." The use of these to express analogies can be worthwhile in envisaging sisterhood as *beyond* "church."

A Space Set Apart

The church often has been envisaged as *a space set apart* from the rest of the world, having a special meaning for people and functioning as haven and sanctuary. It is still not uncommon for people to experience the physical interior of a church building in the way described by Eliade as an experience of sacred space. Even the frankly nonreligious person in our culture tends to value certain "holy places" of her or his private universe, places associated with happy memories, usually. Often it is a ritualized and superstitious sense of specialness that attaches to "holy shrines" that has nothing to do with individual or communal insight and growth. A church construed as space set apart, then—whether the term is intended to mean a building, an institution, or an ideological "sacred canopy"—has certain propensities for serving as an escape from facing the abyss. It then becomes a place for spinning webs of counterfeit transcendence.

Yet the image of a space set apart is not worthless. I have already suggested that this revolution provides a space—mainly a province of the mind—where it is possible to be oneself, without the contortions of mind, will, feeling, and imagination demanded of women by sexist society. But it is important to note that this space is found not in the effort to hide from the abyss but in the effort to face it, as patriarchy's prefabricated set of meanings, or *nomos*, crumbles in one's mind. Thus it is not "set apart" from reality, but from the contrived nonreality of alienation. Discovered in the deep confrontation between being and nonbeing, the space of liberation is sacred.

When sacred space is discovered, the possibility of deterioration into escapism or of absolutizing the space into a particular form is there. However, the real danger is that women will succumb to *accusations* of escapism or single-mindedness by those who do not see the transcendent dimensions of feminism. Reduction of women's liberation to escapism because of "personal hang-ups" is still a potent weapon, especially when couched in psychological jargon. Women are vulnerable to accusations of absolutizing the movement and we are accus-

tomed to listen only too well to the voices of alienation. Yet there is something to be attended to here, since the accusation is a typical *reversal* of the real problem, which is the constant temptation *not* to face the universality of sexual caste and the awesome demands of living in the new space.

Since the new space is set apart precisely from the nonreality of sexist alienation and since we are *in* it only insofar as we confront nonreality, it is not static space but constantly moving space. I have said that its center is on the boundaries of patriarchy's spaces, that is, it is not *contained*. R. D. Laing wrote something that is of help in understanding this:

The truth I am trying to grasp is the grasp that is trying to grasp it. . . . The Life I am trying to grasp is the me that is trying to grasp it.

Our space is the life source, not the "container" of contrived covers of life. But whereas Laing was writing of an individual leap or journey through inner space that society would call madness, we are engaged in a journey that is not only utterly individual but also ultimately communal. The kind of communal that it has springs from the fact that there is discovery of "the me that is trying to grasp it." Laing, however, while he does perceive the destructiveness of the social setting, remains to some extent caught in an intrapsychic point of view. The problem remains that even if many persons are "cured," this of itself isn't enough. As Chesler remarks, throughout the book *Sanity, Madness, and the Family* "he remains unaware of the universal and objective oppression of women and of its particular relation to madness in women."

Our space set apart does mean individual freedom, but this becomes possible in recognizing and refuting the structures of objective oppression. I have said that our struggle is not on the enemy's terms. It is self-actualization that is communal, that has as a necessary condition deep rejection of the structures of destruction.

The ever moving center of our space—the opposite of "dead" center—moves because it is ourselves and we are moving, becoming, in a "noospheric net" never dreamed of by Teilhard de Chardin or other prophets of male futurism. This center is the Archimedean point of support, the fulcrum from which, if enough women discover it and do not lose courage, it may be possible to move the world.

Exodus Community

Because of this constantly moving center, the space of the women's revolution can be called an *exodus community*. The church has been characterized by this name, but both the formulations and the social and psychic realizations of the meaning of this image have been limited and limiting to human aspiration. The church as exodus community allegedly has gone forth from bondage toward liberation on the basis of a promise made by Yahweh to the fathers of the people of God. The voyage has not been spectacular, and this is in no small measure due to the fact that there is something contrived about promises handed down from on high. Yet, as in the case of *space set apart*, the image has value when taken out of its paralyzing context and allowed to spark forth our own insight. The moving center which is the energy source of the new sisterhood as exodus

community is the promise in ourselves. It is the promise in our foremothers whose history we are beginning to discover, and in our sisters whose voices have been stolen from them. Our journey is the fruit of this promise—a journey into individualization and participation, leaving behind the false self and sexist society. Since one cannot physically leave the planet, however (and extraterrestrial space trips as programmed by the prevailing society will be super-sexist, with the accommodation of space stewardesses, perhaps), our mode of departure has to be appropriate to the situation. We can depart mentally to some extent by refusing to be blinded by society's myths. We can depart physically and socially to a degree also, but simple withdrawal will not change the wider situation. The adequate exodus requires communication, community, and creation. The truly moving space will not be merely unorthodox or reformist, but will be on its way beyond unorthodoxy as well as orthodoxy, discovering and bringing forth the really new.

To those within patriarchal space, and perhaps especially within its religions, it may look as though radical feminists have broken a "promise" by not "living up" to the expectations that have been outgrown. In fact, by living out our own promise, we are breaking the brokenness in human existence that has been effected by means of the constructs of alienation. To put it another way, we are breaking the dam of sex stereotyping that stops the flow of being, that stops women and men from being integrated, androgynous personalities. The admission of the fact of this brokenness into our consciousness brings to light the promise burning within, the potential toward the "fearful symmetry" that the poet glimpsed, and that our culture keeps hidden in the forests of the night. It also puts us in touch with "the flow of the inexhaustible Encompassing" about which the philosopher Jaspers has written, without which there is only "the random swirling of dead husks of words, producing a semblance of external order and meaning in endless, arbitrary variation."

The dawning of this promise within, this rushing of the waters of life that have been dammed and damned by our culture, since it puts us in touch with ourselves and with the "Encompassing," brings us into the deepest possible community. It is the community that is discovered, rather than "formed," when we meet others who are on the same voyage. There is, then, a "covenant" among us, *not* in the sense of an agreement that is *formed* and precisely formulated, but in the sense of profound *agreement that is found*. The word "covenant," then, cannot fully say the reality—it is part of the language that splits, cuts off, divides and tries to paste back together again. If, however, we can get beyond the limits imposed by our inherited nonspeech, we can use the sound to signal something more. The covenant is the deep *agreement* that is present within the self and among selves who are increasingly in harmony with an environment that is beyond, beneath, and all around the nonenvironment of patriarchal splits and barriers. For lack of a better word, this may be called the "cosmos," and the sense of harmony has its source in participation in being, which means being in touch with the deepest forces in the cosmos. Out of this contact comes new speech. "Covenant" has always been bound up with language. Sisterhood as cosmic covenant means beginning to re-name the cosmos.

"Covenant" also has the meaning of a common-law form of action to recover damages for breach of contract. Women's form of action to recover dam-

ages begins with a declaration. Those women were not joking when they claimed that all you have to do to become a witch is to say three times to yourself: "I am a witch; I am a witch; I am a witch." This is something like speaking an unspeakable word. It is an exorcism of the internalized demon that divides the self against the self. It is a way of saying, "I am, I am, I am." With this declaration one joins the new covenant and discovers the covenant.

The moving center of women's new space is on the boundary of the dead circle of archetypes and repetition. Historians of religion, such as Eliade, have made such claims for Christianity. Eliade maintains:

Christian thought tended to transcend, once and for all, the old themes of eternal repetition, just as it had undertaken to transcend all the other archaic viewpoints by revealing the importance of the religious experience of faith and that of the value of the human personality.

The only words that save this from being a preposterous statement are "tended" and "undertaken." Eliade sees the situation through male lenses. He writes further that Christianity is the religion of "fallen man" [sic] "and this to the extent to which modern man is irremediably identified with history and progress, and to which history and progress are a fall. . . ." For Eliade this "fall" means the final abandonment of the paradise of archetypes and repetition. But has there been real movement out of that "paradise"? The experience of feminists reveals that women feel very much trapped in this "Eden" of endless circles and that Christianity is keeping things this way. The poet William Blake described this paradise very well:

In Eden, Females sleep the winter in soft silken veils
woven by their own hands to hide them in the darksome grave.
But Males immortal live renewed by female deaths.
(The Four Zoas, 1797)

Within Christianity, males still live renewed by female deaths, and this renewal at female expense may well be a delusion of history and "progress" to those who feel benefited by it. I have already pointed to the Fall that is on its way, hopefully, and that is the Second Coming of women. Those who have always lived renewed by female deaths have every reason to postpone its arrival.

CORNEL WEST

Cornel West (b. 1953) is a political philosopher and one of the major public intellectuals of our time. He is a professor of religion and African American studies at Princeton University. A Christian and a Marxist, his numerous works of political and cultural criticism have aimed to inspire a liberating vision of the social order that confers dignity on every human being. Besides being a prominent public speaker and commentator, West