

AMERICAN WOMEN IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY: WHERE ARE WE?

JEAN MILLER SCHMIDT

It should hardly come as news to anyone here that "a new women's movement is abroad in the land." "Women's lib." has become a new term in the American English language. What began as International Women's Year has been proclaimed the start of International Women's Decade. Just last week Indiana became the 35th state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. Affirmative Action, Women's Studies, and Commissions on the Status and Role of Women have proliferated and become acceptable. Writing about women has reached the point of constituting a new literary genre.¹

In this new feminist movement of the last decade, "nothing short of full emancipation of and total equality for women has been demanded;" that is, a complete transformation of American society. Predictably, backlash has occurred of which we all could give examples.²

In a recent book entitled *What Women Want*, Gayle Graham Yates has made a significant contribution to an understanding of this women's movement by relating its history and, what is more important, by suggesting an ordering framework in which this new feminism can be analyzed. She points to three basic informing ideologies within the new feminism, which she calls: the feminist, the women's liberationist, and the androgynous paradigms.

The *feminist ideology* has a women-equal-to-men orientation. It asserts that women should have full and equal participation in the existing structures of society; that is, in the values, rights, opportunities, and organizations that men have established as good. (Although this is often regarded as conservative feminism, the realization of its goals for society would require a radical reorganization of American life.)³

The *women's liberationist paradigm* is a pro-woman, anti-masculinist model. These feminists assert that the values for women's freedom should be arrived at by women. Theirs is a women-over-against-men or women-separate-from-men stance. This is the old masculinist model turned upside down.⁴

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¹Gayle Graham Yates cites a number of these developments as evidence of the new feminism in *What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 1-3.

²*Ibid.*, p. 2.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 18, 35.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 19.

The *androgynous paradigm* represents a women-and-men-equal-to-each-other view. The word "androgynous" suggests "having some characteristics of both male and female." This is the most revolutionary of the concepts informing the new wave of feminism, for it implies the affirmation and cultivation of formerly sex-linked psychological and social characteristics in both men and women. The androgynous position offers a model of cooperation; it asserts that equality can and must be achieved through a process of reshaping social attitudes and institutions by women and men together.⁵

At the present time, these three ideologies are competing for dominance in American life.

Ms. Yales' interpretive framework helps me put into perspective a position I have articulated in my classes on "Women and the Church." Both ministers and lay people frequently ask me what alternatives there are for those in the church who don't want to be either "libbers" or "Total Women." In response, I have begun to define a position I would call "Christian Feminism."

Briefly, a Christian feminist is a Christian woman (or man) committed to the full and equal humanness of all persons. Such humanness includes at least the following: 1) being accepted as subject, not as Other, 2) taking responsibility for one's own life choices, 3) direct participation in the leadership of church and society (that means having real power as distinguished from influence), 4) political, economic, and social equality in the sense of equal rights.⁶

The purpose of this lecture is to sketch out the ramifications of this position under the following headings:

1. Christian Feminism: A Place to Begin
2. The Search for a Usable Past
3. The Nature of Woman
4. The Church and Human Relationships
5. The Liberation of Women and the Church

(While most of my remarks will be addressed to the church, it follows that the seminary which trains leadership for the church, and those who are being trained for that leadership, should also be concerned about these things. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear!)

CHRISTIAN FEMINISM: A PLACE TO BEGIN

Gayle Yates includes a section on Women and Religion in her

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 19, 117.

⁶This working definition, while my own, has been influenced by the work of Letty Russell, Leonard Swidler, Rena Karefa-Smart, and others.

discussion of the feminist perspective. She pinpoints three main foci of Christian feminists:

- 1) the theological and doctrinal interpretation of women
- 2) the ordination of women to the ministry
- 3) the status and role of women in the churches⁷

As she indicates, the manner and rhetoric used to confront the practical issues of ordination of women and participation of women in religious institutions is almost entirely that of the women-equal-to-men orientation. Yet some women question whether seeking ordination means perpetuating a hierarchical structure that needs to be changed. I tend to agree with Rosemary Ruether that the entrance of women into the ministry in significant numbers cannot help but bring about a revolution in the way we relate to God, to leadership, to each other, to the world, and to nature.⁸ Rather than giving women nothing more than "an equal piece of the patriarchal pie,"⁹ the regular ordination of women to the ministry may well give rise to new models of ministry that are radical in their implications.

Although theological work has thus far concerned itself primarily with identifying the doctrinal and historical underpinnings of religious discrimination against women, religious feminists have begun to sketch out a new theological model for humanity. Many of these pioneering attempts have centered around the concept of wholeness suggested by the Hebrew word *shalom*. Thus Margaret Wold's book of 1975 is entitled *The Shalom Woman*, and Penelope Washbourn's new book *Becoming Woman* is subtitled: "The Quest for Wholeness in Female Experience."¹⁰ We shall return to this question of woman's humanness and wholeness later in the lecture.

Closely related to this theological interpretation of human nature is what some feminists have called "renaming God." Since both female and male were created in God's image, we must begin to incorporate feminine imagery for God along with the predominant masculine imagery so long prevalent in patriarchal religion. Or we must talk about God in language that transcends sexual stereotypes. Part of eliminating sexism from church life will also involve removing sexist and noninclusive language from the liturgy and hymns used in worship. Women

⁷Yates, *What Women Want*, p. 66.

⁸Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 79.

⁹Mary Daly, new Feminist Postchristian Introduction to *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Colophon Books, 1975), p. 41.

¹⁰Margaret Wold, *The Shalom Woman* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975); Penelope Washbourn, *Becoming Woman: The Quest for Wholeness in Female Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

as well as men are being encouraged to "theologize out of our own experience." The implication of this feminist theology would seem to be to call for an end to authoritarian models of truth.

Thus Christian Feminism is a good place to begin. It speaks from within the church and the Christian tradition. It is an orientation open to both women and men. It is a position which can be presented to lay people within the churches as a viable alternative to the more threatening and perhaps alienating women's liberationist perspective. It seems to me to be the very least that ought to be expected of the church in terms of its commitment to the full and equal humanness of all persons. Although moderate in its egalitarian stance, its thrust is inevitably toward androgyny or wholeness. I dare say, if all women and men were *really* treated as this perspective requires, we would be well on the way toward liberation for all humanity!

THE SEARCH FOR A USABLE PAST

Christian feminists generally find their liberation rooted in the Christian gospel. Back in 1896, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the famous feminist leader, put it this way: "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."¹¹

Mary Daly's first major book *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968) was hopeful about the possibilities for women in Christianity as rooted in the contradiction between the church's and the theologians' definition of women as inferior, and the ultimate message of Christianity that all human beings have "equal dignity and rights."¹² Letty Russell's discussions of liberation theology have urged theologians to discern the "liberating core of the Christian faith" so they can witness to this faith in particular and concrete circumstances of oppression.¹³

Both women and men scholars have recently begun to struggle with the Bible in their conviction that human beings need to find identity and strength from the images of past history which can help to guide them in shaping their present and future. These scholars point particularly to those biblical passages which break with their cultural setting, that is patriarchy, or as Letty Russell puts it, to those places

¹¹Elizabeth Cady Stanton, quoted in Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p. 13.

¹²Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 41.

¹³Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective—A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 79.

where "the Tradition of God seems to have broken through the traditions of men."¹⁴

The real issue, as those of you who have been at Iliff for awhile have either heard or know, is that of *interpretation*, the relationship between the so-called "biblical view" and our contemporary situation. We might put it this way: how can the Bible inform our decision-making, rather than serve as a blueprint or a rule book, or merely a collection of prooftexts which we use to rationalize *our* answers? What is involved here is a dialogue between the Bible and the interpreter (or the contemporary Christian community as interpreter). Both reside in cultural contexts. The process of interpretation is influenced by the interpreter's presuppositions, including one's own view of the Bible, and the images which have shaped how we see ourselves and others, and how we interpret our situation. The point of this is partly to stress the importance of listening to the text, and partly to indicate the importance of the *interpreter's* responsibility.

"As Scripture moves through history, it is appropriated for new settings."¹⁵ Realizing this, contemporary interpreters should be aware of the presence of contradictory images in Scripture. The variety of images in the Old and New Testaments of God, human personhood, and God's activity in the world can be liberating for those who seek guidance and insight from the Bible for our own situation.

There are a number of Biblical texts which have come to be regarded as particularly important by Christian feminists. These fall into several major categories:

1) *The Creation stories*. "God created mankind (Adam) in his own image; male and female created he them." Genesis 1:27 affirms that women and men were created equally in the image of God. Or, to put it another way, to be made in the image of God no longer means (as it has often been interpreted to mean) to be a male!

Feminist biblical scholars like Phyllis Trible (in an article called "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation") have re-examined the Yahwist account of creation and the fall in Genesis 2-3, and find that it does *not* show that the subordination of women to men was divinely ordained in the order of creation. On the contrary, the subjugation of the female to the male is a result of their shared sin. Whereas in creation man and woman knew harmony and equality, in the fall they know alienation and discord. As Trible puts it, "the suffering and

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁵Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (March 1973), p. 48.

oppression we women and men know now are the marks of our fall, not of our creation."¹⁶

2) *The Gospel accounts of Jesus' treatment of women.* On the basis of these accounts, Leonard Swidler claims that "Jesus was a feminist."¹⁷ So far as we can tell, Jesus neither said nor did anything which would indicate that he advocated treating women as intrinsically inferior to men. On the contrary, he said and did things which indicated that he thought of women as equals of men, and in the process he willingly violated pertinent social mores. Since whatever Jesus said or did comes to us only through the lens of the first Christians, it is particularly significant that the strongly negative attitude toward women in Palestine did not come through in the accounts of the Gospels. This fact underscores the great religious importance Jesus must have attached to his positive attitude toward women.

For example, according to most rabbinic customs of Jesus' time, women were not allowed to study the Torah. Yet in the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), Jesus defended Mary's call to the intellectual, spiritual life as opposed to the typical woman's role, and in fact said that in listening to his teaching she "had chosen the better part."

On another occasion, Jesus deliberately violated the common code concerning men's relationship to women by speaking to the Samaritan woman in public (John 4:7-30). The text relates that the disciples (when they returned from getting food) were "surprised to find him speaking to a woman." Yet in the conversation Jesus revealed himself to be the Messiah. The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming." Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

Women clearly were Jesus' disciples. Both Luke 8 and Mark 15 mention women, married and unmarried, who followed Jesus from town to town along with the Twelve, learning from him and ministering to him. Although according to Judaic law, women were not allowed to bear legal witness, all four Gospels record Jesus' resurrection appearances to women, and his commissioning them to bear witness to the others.

The story of Jesus' healing of the woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years demonstrates his rejection of the blood taboo. He, a religious teacher, made a point of her having touched him, as if to call attention to the fact that he did not shrink from the ritual uncleanness incurred by being touched by the "unclean" woman.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁷Leonard Swidler, "Jesus Was A Feminist," *The Catholic World*, January 1971, pp. 177-183.

3) *The Consequences of the New Life in Christ, as described particularly in Acts and the Pauline epistles.* Women and men both become new creatures. They are baptized; they receive spiritual gifts on the basis of which they serve the new Christian community. In what clearly seems to have been a fragment of a baptismal formula, Paul says (Galatians 3:28): "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Thus the church proclaimed the complete equality and mutuality within the community of all human beings.

Much has been made of other texts in the Pauline literature which appear to teach the subordination of women. I prefer to agree with scholars like Krister Stendahl who admit to the tension between Paul's vision of the new and his occasional defense of the old in the cultural setting of possible social disorder.¹⁸ Texts like Galatians 3:28 may well point beyond what was actually implemented in the New Testament church. Our problem is to allow these texts their freedom and to discern where the accent should lie *now*.

Phyllis Trible sums up her understanding of the relationship between biblical faith and Christian feminism in this way:

If the Bible and the Women's Movement are enemies, I am of all women most miserable. I face a terrible dilemma: Choose ye this day whom you will serve: the God of the fathers or the God of sisterhood. If the God of the fathers, then the Bible supplies models for your slavery. If the God of sisterhood, then you must reject patriarchal religion and go forth without models to claim your freedom. Yet I myself perceive neither war nor neutrality between faith and Women's Liberation. The more I participate in the Movement, the more I discover my freedom through the appropriation of biblical symbols. Let me not be misunderstood: I know that Hebrew literature comes from a male dominated society. I know that biblical religion is patriarchal, and I understand the adverse effects of that religion for women. Nevertheless, I affirm that the intentionality of biblical faith, as distinguished from a general description of biblical religion, is neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy but to function as salvation for both women and men. . . . The hermeneutical challenge is to translate biblical faith without sexism.¹⁹

Some women are quite willing to "go forth without models to claim their freedom." They see no need to look to the past for the legiti-

¹⁸Krister Stendahl, *The Bible and the Role of Women* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, Facet Books, 1966), pp. 35-37.

¹⁹Trible, "Depatriarchalizing," p. 31.

zation of what they find valid in their own experience. As Mary Daly put it, "Even if Jesus wasn't a feminist, *I am!*"²⁰ And Peggy Way claimed that the authority for her ministry did not rest on biblical nor historical tradition, nor on the present structures of the church, but on its validation by those to whom she ministers, and on the authority of a God of possibility.

'Neither life nor death, nor powers nor principalities, nor things in the heavens above or the earth beneath . . . nor Scripture, nor history, nor denominations, nor culture, nor the pervasiveness of the masculine consciousness . . . shall keep *me* from the love of God who is Christ Jesus our Lord and who is the only One who can authorize my ministry.'²¹

Yet I suspect that Phyllis Tribble speaks for many women who have grown up in the church and for whom a usable past which affirms the full and equal humanness of women and provides us with positive models for participation in the leadership of the church is important.

THE NATURE OF WOMAN

A dimension of the contemporary feminist movement which may well be shared in some way by all three feminist ideologies is an exploration of woman's identity and experience. For far too long woman has been the second sex, the Other, in a world where the definition of human personhood has been virtually indistinguishable from that of man. According to St. Augustine, woman by herself is not the image of God, but only when taken together with her husband, who is her "head."²² "The female is a female by virtue of a certain *lack* of qualities," said Aristotle; "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness."²³ Women have been defined in relation to men: as temptress, as saint, as passive vehicle, but rarely, have they been defined as whole human beings in their own right. This was the situation which prompted Dorothy Sayers to ask, in an article published in 1938, "Are Women Human?"²⁴ Thus we return to a discussion of *shalom* or wholeness, for both women and men.

Being a female human being, I will suggest, must surely involve

²⁰Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 73.

²¹Peggy Ann Way, "An Authority of Possibility for Women in the Church," in *Women's Liberation and the Church*, ed. by Sarah Bentley Doely (New York: Association Press, 1970), p. 94.

²²Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. by Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 156.

²³Daly, *Church and the Second Sex*, p. 49.

²⁴Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 17-36.

at least the following: identity, wholeness, sexuality, autonomy. These seem self-evident perhaps, but their recognition has yet to be incorporated into our myths and actualized in the majority of our private and public relationships. It is for this reason that I particularly herald the arrival of books like Penelope Washbourn's *Becoming Woman* (1977), which is concerned with the development of woman's identity, self-understanding, and spiritual journey toward wholeness.

IDENTITY. "Who am I" is a question that must be asked by women as well as men. The quest for identity is a spiritual quest in which one seeks to know the meaning of life as a whole and how one's life relates to it.²⁵ The sense of one's identity and self-worth must not depend upon one's relationships to others, such as one's husband or one's children, but on an intrinsic trust in one's own unique personhood. Women are learning to say their own names as a simple statement of who they are.

WHOLENESS. Many women do not feel themselves to be whole. That is the experience behind Anne Bennett's moving and eloquent poem, "A Part of Me Is Missing."²⁶ According to Penelope Washbourn, the desire to "fall in love" is often the cry of the "empty female soul that knows not itself, trusts not itself, and finds no strength in its own potency." It is not news even within the Christian tradition that self-love is the basis for the ability truly to love others, but loving oneself has not been easy for women in particular. Loving oneself, as Washbourn puts it, "implies an act of faith and trust in one's potential wholeness."²⁷ "The Shalom Woman," says Margaret Wold, "is any woman who will not settle for being less than God has called her to be."²⁸

SEXUALITY. Through most of its history the Christian Church has been guilty of a kind of mind/body dualism that has tended to disparage the body and to associate female nature particularly with the body and sexuality. We need an understanding of human personhood in which our bodily nature, both female and male, is owned as good, and accepted as part of the ongoing life-process which has its own rhythms. As Ms. Washbourn suggests, it is a failure of our culture (as well as many before it) that we have no image of female identity that includes and yet does not exclusively identify woman with any potential expressions of her sexuality.²⁹

²⁵Washbourn, *Becoming Woman*, pp. 26, 33.

²⁶Anne McGrew Bennett, "A Part of Me Is Missing," in *Women in a Strange Land*, ed. by Clare Benedicks Fischer, Betsy Brenneman, and Anne McGrew Bennett (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 7-8.

²⁷Washbourn, *Becoming Woman*, pp. 60-61.

²⁸Wold, *Shalom Woman*, p. 31.

²⁹Washbourn, *Becoming Woman*, p. 46.

AUTONOMY. "Leaving home" is an acknowledged aspect of the male's journey in search of his identity; it was recognized as such even by early cultures. We have not encouraged young women to leave home in the same way; for example, to reject their mother's definition of female identity in order to formulate their own. (For most primitive societies, a woman's identity was perceived to be given with her sexual identity and her biological role.) It is important that women as well as men test their limits and capabilities vis-a-vis the world; that they become self-actualizing individuals who take responsibility for their own lives and decisions, including that of their vocation or calling; and that of their own sexuality and how it may be integrated into a whole self-image.³⁰

A responsible Christian feminism will be committed to this kind of full and equal humanness for women, and will aid individual women to discover their own *shalom* or wholeness.

THE CHURCH AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS: CHANGING LIFESTYLES

Elizabeth Janeway, in her extensive 1971 study of the mythology of sex roles entitled, *Man's World, Woman's Place*, attempts to present a reasonable analysis of the cultural belief system that dictates the roles and spheres of influence of male and female in our society. The prevailing myth (which is prescriptive not descriptive) is defined in terms of the old adages, "It's a man's world" and "Woman's place is in the home." She describes the rise of what we might call "the cult of the nuclear family" consequent upon industrialization and the rise of the middle class. The predicament of women at home is made clear: the loss of the extended family, the loss of a sense of oneself as producer of economically valuable goods (with the shift from domestic production to factory production), the increasing isolation of mother and children from the world of work, the increasing burden placed on women for success in the personal world of the emotions, the consequences of vicarious living and a fragmented way of life.³¹

This myth of women's place is in turn based on the twin beliefs that she calls the myth of female weakness and the myth of female power. The myth of female weakness suggests that women belong at home because they bear and raise children and must be protected while they do this. The myth of female power has to do with the woman's primordial power of nurturing, first of the helpless infant, then of the man.³² In focusing her power in the private sphere, the

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 21.

³¹Elizabeth Janeway, *Man's World, Woman's Place* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., a Delta Book, 1971), ch. 1, pp. 7-26

³²*Ibid.*, pp. 279, 53-56.

woman provides emotional gratification for the man. She can "save a man's soul and sanity."³³ These positive roles of wife and mother have their negative aspects as bitch and witch. For example, the mother is the loving, giving nurturer; the witch carries the myth of female power to a point of destruction—domineering, manipulating, contriving in the private sphere.³⁴

The point is that we still have this mythology in our culture, that it is harmful for women's lives and for society as well. Women are already beginning to break out of these roles, to refuse to put up with vicarious living any longer, but the criticism of the new feminism that its advocates may not please men is evidence of the continuing presence of the social mythology.³⁵

A time of social change affects not only the large social structure, but the individual within it who must try to cope, and that individual's personal relationships with other individuals. Such change can be frightening for both men and women. As Janeway recognizes, if masculinity and motherhood are all men and women have to cling to, they will prize it highly.³⁶ In such a period of social change, I believe it is the responsibility of the church to be with people in their real human struggles. Perhaps the church needs to take leadership in helping couples redefine themselves and their marriage. Who else is in a position to do it for many of the people who are church members?

The fact that 3 million copies of *Total Woman*³⁷ have sold, and that a significant number of church women have taken the Total Woman course, indicates a widespread dissatisfaction with marriage as it presently works in our society (or at least a widespread desire for its improvement!). Unfortunately, *The Total Woman* is based on an acceptance of the very social mythology which Janeway describes. The woman lives for her husband and children. She puts their needs first and manipulates them to find some kind of emotional reward for herself. Behind it all is the religious validation that the subordination of woman to man is divinely ordained. I think it essential that the church begin to articulate an alternative view of marriage that starts from the point of the kind of Christian feminism I have attempted to describe. Such a view affirms that marriage should be between two *whole* people, and that it should be characterized by equality and mutuality between the marriage partners.

³³Page Smith, quoted in Yates, *What Women Want*, p. 120.

³⁴Janeway, *Man's World*, pp. 126-27.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 282.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 305.

³⁷Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973).

There are beginning to be excellent and readily accessible resources for exploring with men and women in our churches the possibilities for what we might call "a liberated marriage." One such resource is the book by Charlotte Holt Clinebell entitled *Meet Me in the Middle*.³⁸ It is particularly helpful because it is written from the point of view of her own struggle with her husband toward the goal of becoming human together.

At the conclusion of Elizabeth Janeway's book she said, "What can prevail against these myths? Not logic alone, and not compulsion, but an answer *in reality* to those needs which the myth answers in fantasy," i.e., the human yearning for joy and meaning in life.³⁹ The church has certainly not fulfilled its responsibility for aiding people in this quest for joy and meaning in life if it stops with the question of marriage. A variety of lifestyles is developing today that includes the single life (including single parenthood, whether chosen or the result of divorce or death of one's partner), communal living, new understandings of the family, and homosexual relationships on a permanent or at least long-lasting basis. The church needs to encourage tolerance of a diversity of lifestyles and open discussion of new ways of living and new cultural beliefs that will be economically, ecologically, and humanly more satisfying.

This means that while beginning from a position of advocating Christian feminism, in the sense of full and equal humanness for all persons, the church should not only understand and support women's liberationists who need separateness from men at this point in their journeys, but also move in the direction of an androgynous perspective that advocates a new world in which men and women are equal to each other.

THE LIBERATION OF WOMEN AND THE CHURCH

There is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus—but in the Church?⁴⁰ What is the hope for the church in terms of the women's movement? In Mary Daly's second and much more "radical" book *Beyond God the Father* (1973), she questions whether Christianity can any longer speak to women. Sisterhood is anti-church; the women's movement is itself a spiritual revolution, fundamentally at war with sexist religion.⁴¹

Mary Daly is one of the most articulate voices cautioning the

³⁸Charlotte Holt Clinebell, *Meet Me in the Middle: On Becoming Human Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

³⁹Janeway, *Man's World*, p. 307.

⁴⁰Paraphrase of a chapter title in Elizabeth Howell Verdesi, *In But Still Out: Women in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 160.

⁴¹Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, pp. 133, 6.

women's movement against the dangers of co-optation. "What is required of women at this point in history," she says, "is a radical refusal to limit our perspectives, our questioning, our creativity to any of the preconceived patterns of a male-dominated culture."⁴² *Beyond God the Father* is then a frontal assault on the old patriarchal order. It calls for the construction of a different world, complete with new language, new imagery, and new symbol structures.

It is hard to predict at this point in history what will be the ultimate response of the church to the women's movement. Can the "faith of our fathers" become the hope of a new humanity? There are still women and men who believe that the church should be that eschatological community which lives *now* within the horizon of the New Age and testifies to what Letty Russell calls "*God's* future which is already breaking into our midst."⁴³

Women are celebrating our new creation as full human beings and rejoicing in God's Spirit which has brought us from death to life. We believe that Spirit cannot ultimately be constrained. Can the church discern the signs of the times and begin demonstrating in its behavior the wholeness of the Body of Christ? We have seen a vision of a new heaven and earth in which there shall be justice, equality, and *shalom* for all people—with the church's help if possible, without it if necessary.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴³Russell, *Human Liberation*, p. 47.

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