



Beyond God the Father
Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation

by Mary Daly

With an Original Reintroduction by the Author

Beacon Press Boston



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Introduction

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

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 putting things has ever occurred to them.

—ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

The basic presuppositions of this book have been proposed in detail elsewhere.¹ 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.²

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.³ 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 Freema 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.⁴

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 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.⁵ 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."⁶

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.

To a large extent in recent times the role of religion in supporting the sexual caste system has been transferred to the professions of psychiatry and psychology. Feminists have pointed out that it is by no accident that Freudian theory emerged as the first wave of feminism was cresting. This was part of the counterrevolution, the male backlash. Psychiatry and psychology have their own creeds, priesthood, spiritual counseling, rules, anathemas, and jargon. Their power of psychological intimidation is enormous. Millions who might smile at being labeled "heretic" or "sinful" for refusing to conform to the norms of sexist society can be cowed and kept in line by the labels "sick," "neurotic," or "unfeminine." Together these professions function as "Mother" Church of contemporary secular patriarchal religion, and they send missionaries everywhere.

It isn't "prudent" for women to see all of this. Seeing means that everything changes: the old identifications and the old securities are gone. Therefore the ethic emerging in the women's movement is not an ethic of prudence but one whose dominant theme is existential courage. This is the courage to see and to be in the face of the nameless anxieties that surface when a woman begins to see through the masks of sexist society and to confront the horrifying fact of her own alienation from her authentic self.

There are many devices available both to women and to men for

refusing to see the problem of sexual caste. One way is *trivialization*. One is asked: "Are you on that subject of women again when there are so many important problems—like war, racism, pollution of the environment?" One would think, to hear this, that there is no connection between sexism and the rape of the Third World, the rape of the blacks, or the rape of land and water. Another way of refusing to see the oppression of women is *particularization*. For instance, one hears: "Oh, that's a Catholic problem. The Catholic Church is so medieval." One would imagine, to listen to this, that there is no patriarchy anywhere else. Particularization is not uncommon among scholars, who frequently miss the point of the movement's critique of patriarchy itself as a system of social arrangements, and become fixated upon one element or pseudo-element of feminist theory as a target for rebuttal. That is, they spend energy answering questions that women are not really asking. An example of this is the labored defense of Paul by Scripture scholars who would have us know that "the real Paul" was not the author of the objectionable passages against women and was *not* the all time male chauvinist.⁷ From the point of view of scriptural scholarship the distinction between the deuterio-Pauline authors and "the real Paul" is important, no doubt. However, the discussion is hardly central to women's concern with the oppressiveness of patriarchal religion. The point is that for nearly two thousand years the passages have been used to enforce sexual hierarchy. They represent an established point of view. It is rather obscene to be more concerned with justifying an author long dead and with berating women for an alleged lack of scholarship than with the deep injustice itself that is being perpetrated by religion. The women's critique is not of a few passages but of a universe of sexist suppositions.

Another related method of refusing to see is *spiritualization*, that is, refusal to look at concrete oppressive facts. For example, would-be pacifiers of women seem to be fond of quoting the Pauline text which proclaims that "in Christ there is neither male nor female." This invites the response that *even if* this were true, the fact is that everywhere else there certainly is. Moreover, given the concrete facts of social reality and given the fact that the Christ-image is male, one has to ask what meaning-content the passage possibly can have.

Finally, some people, especially academics, attempt to make the problem disappear by *universalization*. One frequently hears: "But isn't the real problem *human* liberation?" The difficulty with this approach

is that the words used may be "true," but when used to avoid confronting the specific problems of sexism they are radically untruthful.

The Purpose of This Book

It is easy, then, simply not to see. So overwhelming and insidious are the dynamics that function to support the sexist world view that women are constantly tempted to wear blinders—even in the very process of confronting sexism. Then the result is cooptable reformism that nourishes the oppressive system. In the process of writing this book, I have tried to be constantly aware of this dynamic. Asked if this work is intended to be a "new theology," I must point out that the expression is misleading. To describe one's work as "theology" or even as "new theology" usually means that the basic assumptions of patriarchal religion will be unchallenged and that they constitute a hidden agenda of the work. I am concerned precisely with questioning this hidden agenda that is operative even in so-called radical theology. I do *not* intend to apply "doctrine" to women's liberation. Rather, my task is to study the potential of the women's revolution to transform human consciousness and its externalizations, that is, to generate human becoming. If one must use traditional labels, my work can at least as accurately be called philosophy. Paul Tillich described himself as working "on the boundary" between philosophy and theology. The work of this book is not merely on the boundary *between* these (male-created) disciplines, but on the boundary of both, because it speaks out of the experience of that half of the human species which has been represented in neither discipline.

But if the word "theology" can be torn free from its usual limited and limiting context, if it can be torn free from its function of legitimating patriarchy, then my book can be called an effort to create theology as well as philosophy. For my purpose is to show that the women's revolution, insofar as it is true to its own essential dynamics, is an ontological, spiritual revolution, pointing beyond the idolatries of sexist society and sparking creative action in and toward transcendence. The becoming of women implies universal human becoming. It has everything to do with the search for ultimate meaning and reality, which some would call God.

Women have been extra-environmentals in human society. We have been foreigners not only to the fortresses of political power but also to those citadels in which thought processes have been spun out,

creating a net of meaning to capture reality. In a sexist world, symbol systems and conceptual apparatuses have been male creations. These do not reflect the experience of women, but rather function to falsify our own self-image and experiences. Women have often resolved the problems this situation raises by simply not seeing the situation. That is, we have screened out experience and responded only to the questions considered meaningful and licit within the boundaries of prevailing thought structures, which reflect sexist social structures.

As Simone de Beauvoir sadly notes, women who have perceived the reality of sexual oppression usually have exhausted themselves in breaking through to discovery of their own humanity, with little energy left for constructing their own interpretation of the universe. Therefore, the various ideological constructs cannot be imagined to reflect a balanced or adequate vision. Instead, they distort reality and destroy human potential, female and male. What is required of women at this point in history is a firm and deep refusal to limit our perspectives, questioning, and creativity to any of the preconceived patterns of male-dominated culture. When the positive products of our emerging awareness and creativity express dimensions of the search for ultimate meaning, they can indeed be called both philosophical and theological, but in the sense of pointing beyond the God of patriarchal philosophy and religion.

The Problem of "Method"

The question arises, therefore, of the method I propose to use in this book in dealing with questions of religious symbols and concepts, and with ethical problems. I will begin my description with some indications of what my method is *not*. First of all it obviously is not that of a "kerygmatic theology," which supposes some unique and changeless revelation peculiar to Christianity or to *any* religion.⁸ Neither is my approach that of a disinterested observer who claims to have an "objective knowledge about" reality.⁹ Nor is it an attempt to correlate with the existing cultural situation certain "eternal truths" which are presumed to have been captured as adequately as possible in a fixed and limited set of symbols.¹⁰ None of these approaches can express the revolutionary potential of women's liberation for challenging the forms in which consciousness incarnates itself and for changing consciousness.

The method that is required is not one of correlation but of *liberation*. Even the term "method" must be reinterpreted and in fact wrenched out of its usual semantic field, for the emerging creativity in women is by no means a merely cerebral process. In order to understand the implications of this process it is necessary to grasp the fundamental fact that women have had the power of *naming* stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world, or God. The old naming was not the product of dialogue—a fact inadvertently admitted in the Genesis story of Adam's naming the animals and the woman. Women are now realizing that the universal imposing of names by men has been false because partial. That is, inadequate words have been taken as adequate. In this respect—though with a different slant—the new woman-consciousness is in accord with the view of Josiah Royce that it is impossible to consider any term apart from its relations to the whole. ¹¹

To exist humanly is to name the self, the world, and God.¹² The "method" of the evolving spiritual consciousness of women is nothing less than this beginning to speak humanly—a reclaiming of the right to name. The liberation of language is rooted in the liberation of ourselves.

It would be a mistake to imagine that the new speech of women can be equated simply with women speaking men's words. What is happening is that women are really *hearing ourselves* and each other, and out of this supportive hearing emerge *new words*.¹³ This is not to say necessarily that an entirely different set of words is coming into being full blown in a *material* sense—that is, different sounds or combinations of letters on paper. Rather, words which, materially speaking, are identical with the old become new in a semantic context that arises from qualitatively new experience. The word *exodus* as applied to the community of women that is now emerging exemplifies this phenomenon.¹⁴ The word's meaning is stripped of its patriarchal, biblical context, while at the same time speaking *to* and *beyond* that context. So also the word *sisterhood* no longer means a subordinate mini-brotherhood, but an authentic bonding of women on a wide scale for our own liberation.

Moreover, this liberation of language from its old context implies a breakthrough to new semantic fields. The new context has its source and its verification in the rising consciousness women have of ourselves and of our situation. Since this consciousness contradicts the established

sense of reality which is reflected in the prevailing social and linguistic structures, its verbal expressions sometimes involve apparent contradictions. The words of women's becoming function in such a way that they raise questions and problems and at the same time give clues to the resolution of those problems. A number of examples of this naming process can be found in this book.

Occasionally such expressions may be deliberately transitional. When, for example, I have spoken of "the sisterhood of man" the result has been a sense of contradiction and a jarring of images. "Intellectually" everyone "knows" that "man" is a generic term. However, in view of the fact that we live in a world in which full humanity is attributed only to males, and in view of the significant fact that "man" also means male, the term does not come through as truly generic. For this reason many feminists would like to erase the specious generic term "man" from the language, and rightly so. What "sisterhood of man" does is to give a generic weight to "sisterhood" which the term has never before been called upon to bear. At the same time it emasculates the pseudo-generic "man." The expression, then, raises the problem of a sexually oppressive world and it signals other possibilities. I would not use the pseudo-generic "man" in any other kind of context than in this contradictory and problematic setting. The point is not to legitimate the use of "man" for the human species, but to point to the necessity of the death of this false word, its elimination from our language.

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 phallogentric value system imposed by patriarchy, in its subtle as well as in its more manifest expressions. As aliens in a man's world who are now rising up to name—that is, to create—our own world, women are beginning to recognize that the value system that has been thrust upon us by the various cultural institutions of patriarchy has amounted to a kind of gang rape of minds as well as of bodies.

Feminists are accustomed to enduring such labels as "castrating females." Some have rightly retorted that if "to castrate" essentially means to deprive of power, potency, creativity, ability to communicate, then indeed it is women who have been castrated by a sexist society. However, I would push the analysis a bit further. It is also true that men are castrated by such a social system in which destructive competi-

tiveness treats men who are low on the totem pole (e.g., black males, poor males, noncompetitive males, Third World males, etc.) *like women*. Yet all of these can still look down upon the primordially castrated beings—women. Now these primordial eunuchs are rising up to castrate not people but *the system* that castrates—that great "God-Father" of us all which indulges senselessly and universally in the politics of rape.

The cutting away of this phallocentric value system in its various incarnations amounts also to a kind of *exorcism* that essentially must be done by women, who are in a position to experience the demonic destructiveness of the super-phallic society in our own being. The *machismo* ethos that has the human psyche in its grip creates a web of projections, introjections, and self-fulfilling prophecies. It fosters a basic alienation within the psyche—a failure to lay claim to that part of the psyche that is then projected onto "the Other." It is essentially demonic in that it cuts off the power of human becoming.

The method of *liberation-castration-exorcism*, then, is a becoming process of "the Other"—women—in which we hear and speak our own words. The development of this hearing faculty and power of speech involves the dislodging of images that reflect and reinforce the prevailing social arrangements. This happens in one way when women assume active, creative roles. I am not referring to women as "role models" in the commonly accepted sense of patriarchy's "models." Rather, I mean to call attention to the emergence of free persons whose lives communicate a kind of contagious freedom.

This dislodging process requires a refusal of the false identity of tokenism. This refusal sometimes is expressed by dramatic action, which is multidimensional in meaning. There is no single prescription for such symbolic acts. They grow organically out of particular situations. They are revelatory, since they not only unmask the fact of sexism but also give signals and clues of transcendence. Generally they involve rejection of tokenism, breaking with the past, dramatic action, the living out of something really new—which gives the impetus for further action. ¹⁵

Women may judge that in some cases the names imposed upon reality by male-dominated society and sanctified by religion are basically oppressive and must be rejected. In other instances, it may be that partial truth has been taken for the whole in the past, and that the symbols and conceptualizations that are biased have to be liberated from their

partiality. Women will free traditions, thought, and customs only by hearing each other and thus making it possible to speak our word. This involves interaction between insight and praxis, not in the sense of "reflection" upon "social action" (a false dualism), but rather in the sense of a continual growth, flexibility, and emergence of new perceptions of reality—perceptions that come from being where one is. ¹⁶

The becoming of women in sisterhood is the countercultural phenomenon *par excellence* which can indicate the future course of human spiritual evolution. As I have pointed out, none of the methods acceptable to male philosophers and theologians can begin to speak to this task. Women are not merely "re-thinking" philosophy and theology but are participating in new creation. The process implies beautiful, self-actualizing anger, love, and hope.

Overcoming Methodolatry

One of the false gods of theologians, philosophers, and other academics is called Method. It commonly happens that the choice of a problem is determined by method, instead of method being determined by the problem. This means that thought is subjected to an invisible tyranny. Suzanne Langer wrote:

The limits of thought are not so much set from outside, by the fullness or poverty of experiences that meet the mind, as from within, by the power of conception, the wealth of formulative notions with which the mind meets experiences. Most new discoveries are suddenly-seen things that were always there. ¹⁷

The tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries. It prevents us from raising questions never asked before and from being illumined by ideas that do not fit into pre-established boxes and forms. The worshippers of Method have an effective way of handling data that does not fit into the Respectable Categories of Questions and Answers. They simply classify it as nondata, thereby rendering it invisible.

It should be noted that the god Method is in fact a subordinate deity, serving Higher Powers. These are social and cultural institutions whose survival depends upon the classification of disruptive and disturbing information as nondata. Under patriarchy, Method has wiped out

women's questions so totally that even women have not been able to hear and formulate our own questions to meet our own experiences. Women have been unable even to experience our own experience.

This book is an effort to begin asking nonquestions and to start discovering, reporting, and analyzing nondata. It is therefore an exercise in Methodicide, a form of deicide. The servants of Method must therefore unacknowledge its nonexistence (a technique in which they are highly skilled). By the grace of this double negative may they bless its existence in the best way they know. High treason merits a double cross.

The order of nonquestions to be treated in this book is as follows: I have begun by bringing into focus the phenomenon of the death of God the Father in the rising woman-consciousness and the consequent breakthrough to conscious, communal participation in God the Verb. This is followed by an exercise in exorcising evil from Eve, which involves a Fall into freedom. Since this Fall is redemptive and healing, it signals the arrival of New Being. Therefore, the next problem to be confronted is Christolatry, which hinders this arrival. Next comes an effort to look beyond phallocentric morality. The last three chapters focus upon the community of sisterhood under three aspects: as Antichurch, as Cosmic Covenant, and as Final Cause.

This writing has been done in hope. Hopefully it represents not merely a continuation but a new beginning. Certainly it is not The Last Word. But insofar as it brings forth the right word it will be heard, for the right word will have the power of reality in it.