

♀ Gender and theology ♀

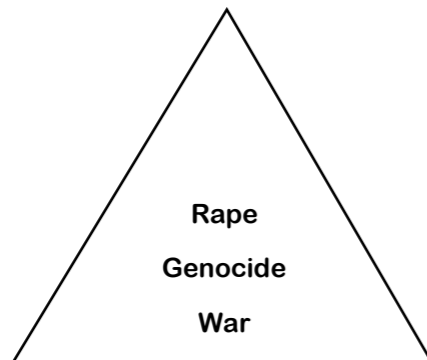
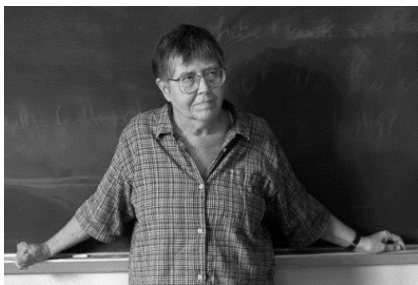
- ✓ **Post Christian Theology:** religious thinking that abandons traditional Christian thought.
- ✓ **Reform feminist theology:** religious thinking that seeks to change traditional Christian thought.
- ✓ **Davidic Messiah:** a messiah figure based on the kingly and military images of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- ✓ **Servant King:** an understanding of the Messiah that focuses on service rather than overlordship.
- ✓ **Sophia:** Greek word for wisdom.
- ✓ **Theology:** Studying God around the goddess.

“...As women come into their own, theology will take a different shape.”

Daphne Hampson

Mary Daly

Post Christian Theology and the “Unholy Trinity”



- Women need to get *beyond* religion because female oppression is a product of the cultural and historical Christianity's unholy trinity.
- Rape, genocide and war are all impregnated in Christianity, so to change this culture means to leave Christianity.
 - Women need a new spirituality.
 - God is taught to be the great patriarch in heaven (rewards, punishes, dominates).
 - This spawns the mechanism for female oppression because if God is male, then male is God and the universe itself becomes male dominated.
 - For Daly the maleness of God (God the Father) is inadequate and the maleness of God should be removed.
 - Religion fuels female oppression and women are depicted as weak, faulty and worthy of blame.

Rape

Rapism= a culture of rape.

- A symbol of all violent oppression utilized by the leaders of society erase female power.
- Women are patriarchally possessed and have forgotten/ cannot see the reality of the gross inequality in society.
- Not just theoretical but also refers to the systematic use of violence to oppress women (not limited to rape ...FGM, foot binding, widow burning).
- Daly states there is a link between the mentality of rape and war. There are many accounts of rape being a product of war.
- ❖ **Eg. Bangladesh Liberation War 1970s- 200,000-400,00 women raped (many also killed as a result). Soldiers were told that women were “war booty” and there was a systematic campaign of genocidal rape.**

Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, ¹⁸but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man.” (Numbers 31: 17-18)

Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But as for this man, don't do such an outrageous thing.” (Judges 19:24)

- Rape is the cultural manifestation of a sexual caste/ hierarchy. Daly states in this global caste system male and female are unequal. Sex role socialization is learnt from childhood and female are to be dominated by men
- Arm chair rapists: men who metaphorically rape by vicariously enjoying stories of rape through porn. It reinforces and enhances their sense of power over women.

Genocide

-the deliberate killing of a large group of people

The psychology of genocide links to rape:

- A victim of rape is an object, rather than an individual. The victim can then be categorised in the group of “raped people”, again losing all sense of individuality.
- Rape is an act of male sexual violence and this forms the basis of military interests.
- It is primordial act of violation of one group (male) against another and expresses the dominant thinking of the group perpetrating the rape

- Genocide is an act of violation of one group to another.
- In the Holocaust there was “groupthink” by the Nazis in which those who the subjugated (dominated/ controlled) were considered “other”. There would have a collective loss of identity of the victims, they were just different.
- Daly goes on to make a controversial claim, connecting the otherness of Jewish identity to the holocaust.
- The Jews are the “chosen people” of God. This special identity or “otherness” is particularly evident looking at Israel as the Jewish homeland. But could this distinct Jewish identity and corresponding “difference” been a casual factor in the holocaust?

Daly also suggests there is a “groupthink” found in Christianity (presumably between men and women) which is responsible for the patriarchal and male dominated culture she opposes. So, when using the concept of genocide to highlight the oppression of women make it clear it is linked to the categorization of women as “other” that justifies this oppression and abuse.

War

- The horrors of war are associated with masculine “virtues” of courage & power and according to Daly are therefore an inevitable result of male dominated politics of 19th and 20th century.
- The language of violence is skillfully hidden in technical language justifying the acts of war in which innocent suffer.
- A war in which atrocities occur can still be called “just” through the just war theory. A “Just War” is fought for the right reasons and in the right way. These conditions were originally put forward by St Augustine – a Christian.
- In order to be liberated from the moral hypocrisy women must be “radically deviant”, rejecting all moral standards constructed by men- such a Just War Theory.

“The beginning of liberation comes when women refuse to be “good” and/ or “healthy” by prevailing standards. **To be female is to be deviant by definition in the prevailing culture. To be female and defiant is to be intolerably deviant.**

Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father; Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.*

- As Christianity is a tool for sustaining and shaping these moral and social standards **it must be left behind.**

Spirituality experienced through nature.



- For Daly the maleness of God needs to be overturned, and the limitations of spirituality need to be shattered.
- Spiritual moments in life are controlled by men (priests-referred to by Daly as the scared men's club of male mothers) and holy buildings are also controlled by men, so are not suitable spaces for spirituality.
- Sacred space is (and should be) a moving thing.
- Quintessence= the being in which we live, love and create.
- It is the spirit that permeates all nature and gives life and vitality. It can be damaged through violence, porn and poverty. But can be rediscovered in nature.



Challenging Daly



- Simon Chan: There is more to the description of "God the father" than God is simply male. God is a heavenly Father for all-universal Fatherhood. God has a relationship with all. God is the creator of all. This description goes beyond the "maleness" of God and emphasises God's relationship with humanity.
- Male language may be the 'norm' but God is still depicted as having non-masculine traits – Isaiah 54:5- 7 –“ but with deep compassion I will bring you back.”
- Elisabeth Fiorenza: we need an alternative reading of Biblical texts. We need to recognise that Jesus challenged sexist customs and that Daly's reading of the Bible is mistakenly narrow. Jesus spoke to touches, speaks to and heals women.

¹⁰ Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.... Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

(Mathew 26:6-13)

Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (Mark 5:25-34)

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (John 4:1-26)

Rosemary Radford Ruether.



Reform feminist theologian: Christianity has become distorted by patriarchal traditions and this must be changed!

Jesus himself challenged the idea of the expected "ultra-masculine" WARRIOR MESSIAH. Jesus was a self-sacrificing, redeeming, servant Messiah is who connected to the female notion of wisdom (Sophia). We should be mindful of the true Messiah, not have our faith distorted by the expectation.

Davidic Messiah	Jesus
Conquering warrior who liberates people from their enemies.	Servant king- attends to the poor rather than those highest in social hierarchy.
Military victor	Self sacrificing
"Expected to win, not suffer and die"	Critical of those in power and religious authorities
Will deliver the people from bondage through battle.	People are freed not through battle, but by serving God.

Sophia= wisdom and was personified as a female Goddess.

God is wisdom- God is female, but the connection to the Messiah has led a female vision to be obscured behind a patriarchal veil.

1 Corinthians 1: 23-24 shows a link between Jesus and wisdom so for Ruether the Messiah should not be considered as only male.

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God



Challenging Ruether



Simon Chan: You cannot rewrite the Christianity to give women more prominence because the story itself shapes Christian identity. The male identity of God features in central liturgy and prayer, so to downplay this "maleness" is wrong".

Christianity should not abandon the male language used for God. We can see in other culture where Goddesses feature heavily that society is not less patriarchal, so this will not create the change Ruether is hoping for.

"Many societies devoted to goddess worship remain oppressive toward women"- Chan

Comparing Daly and Reuther

It could be argued that Daly's account that Christianity is irretrievably patriarchal and must be abandoned is correct. In some churches women are prohibited from entering the area around the altar and some churches insist on an exclusively male priesthood. Men are higher than women in the hierarchy of the church and are closer to god.

Post Christian theologians (like Daly) are therefore free of the authorities of Christianity and can create new traditions of their own perceptions and the role of women. It remains to be seen whether this will translate into lasting religious traditions.

Ruether maintains that Christianity is not intrinsically patriarchal and Christianity can and should be "saved" from this male centric view of the religion. Jesus did not embody the patriarchal culture of his time, there's evidence of him breaking sexist custody and it was women he first spoke to after his resurrection.

There has been a "patriarchalization of Christology", due in part to the establishment of the Christian Church as the religion of the Roman Empire, but it can be undone. There is evidence that churches are working to break away from the dominant patriarchal ideology, indicating Ruether may be right- change is possible. (eg. Church of England now ordains female priests and bishops).

This will be possible, Ruether argues, if we have theologies that link Christ and the Spirit (Spirit theologies), which see Jesus as continually present in the community and is continuously revealed through the prophetic words of men AND WOMEN of every age.

However, despite some protestant churches have made developments with regard to the transformation of the church, Catholicism and conservative evangelical forms of Christianity hold fast to the centrality of male ministries and are reluctant to use female language for God.

Is Christianity sexist?

- Daphne Hempson (a post Christian theologian) states Christianity and feminism are incompatible. She believes patriarchal religion must be overcome. We should interpret the love of God in ways that do not carry the sexism found in Christianity.

³ But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, ^[a] and the head of Christ is God. but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. (1 Corinthians 11:3-9)



- Some Christian feminist theologians, however, would argue that perspective influences how you interpret the Bible .
- After all St. Paul also said “**nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus**” (Galatians 3:28)

Fiorenza: we read the Bible through different lenses.

1. For some the Bible is divine revelation of timeless truth. If the Bible is read in this way it seems to be sexist.
 2. Others seek a historical framework to understand what the historical facts were and therefore read the sexism in a historical way.
 3. The Bible is both divine revelation and a historical framework. The Bible reflects aspects of the sexist culture of the time, but also contains moral messages that challenge the sexism of the time.
 4. **We should liberate the power of interpretation from those in society who have the power and give it to those traditionally silenced. Different people should read and make sense of the Bible, not just male members of the clergy or male theologians.**
- Women need to understand how the Bible supports women’s struggles against patriarchal biblical sexism. Look at examples from last lesson of Jesus breaking sexist traditions.
 - Fiorenza remains a Catholic. She states we do not need to reject Christianity but work better to understand the Christian message.

Luke 24:9-12

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Further evidence of Jesus not embodying the patriarchal society in which he lived- he first revealed himself to women after the resurrection.

Can a male saviour save a woman?

- Traditional Christian belief holds that the death of Christ and his descent to hell shows that the divine experienced all aspects of death, thus making salvation possible for all, assuring female salvation.
- However, some early Church Fathers claimed that as women are descendants of Eve they could not be saved.
- For Daly, the idea of a uniquely male savior is another way to legitimize male superiority and instead of a savior, Jesus can be viewed as a figure of male domination and enslavement.
- Fiorenza, however, argues that women living in patriarchal societies should take strength from depictions of Christ engaging with women in the same way he would engage with men. His voice against the patriarchy can be viewed as more potent as he is male. Jesus is a figure of prophecy, promoting change and justice, including greater equality for women.

Can women have genuine spirituality?

- Christianity and the image of the divine has been dominated by the patriarchy so has it been made impossible for women to be spiritual beings?
- **Daly**: in order for women to have genuine spirituality they need to move beyond the constraints of Christianity. There needs to be a resurgence of “gynergy”- women’s spirituality.
- The word Goddess demands action, movement and change. It requires a profound social change and a recovery of old words/ taking back ownership. Eg. Spinster, hag, witch, muse.
- However, women themselves will play a significant role in making these changes.

- Daly states there must be transformation through self realization. Women have to realise their own power and potential and break free from the “patriarchal propaganda” eg. Fairy tales. Pop songs. Etc.



“The source of authentic hope are to be found within Wild women”- Daly

- Christianity is devoid of spirituality as it is so patriarchal and only women are actually capable of genuine spirituality once they have broken away from traditional Christianity.

Others will argue women can be spiritual beings within Christianity.

- Teresa of Avila (1515-82) was a Catholic mystic who experienced God.

“It pleased our Lord that I should see the following vision a number of times. I saw an angel near me...”

- Female spirituality can also be seen in art work...The Coronation of the Virgin.
- **Reuther**: woman bring a new perspective to spirituality which complements that which men can offer.

Can the Christian God be presented in female terms?

- The vast majority of depictions of God are male and Reuther suggests that as it is the norm, we don’t question it.
- However, in 20th Century, the Catholic Church have emphasized that God is neither male or female.

“In no way is God in man’s image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes.” Catechism of the Catholic

- Tribble (Southern Baptist) thinks that the Bible has been misinterpreted in a patriarchal way, and a better understanding shows that God can be depicted in female terms because female qualities are referred to in the Bible, alongside male qualities. In fact in the Old Testament God is referred to in feminine ways more often than thought.

Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors?

Numbers 11:12