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Feminist Spiritualities: A Brief Overview

BY MARILYN R. PUKKILA

The literature of feminist spirituality is vast, diverse, and multifaceted, as one might expect of a topic that deals with power imbalances in personal religious expression. As feminist scholars in the US in the 1960s began to criticize culture and government in the realms of politics, sociology, history, and economics, spiritual feminists expressed their dissatisfaction with religious practices that ignored, overlooked, or openly demeaned women and their experiences. This questioning took place for the most part in the academy, as women in PhD and MDiv programs challenged their instructors and their texts. Feminists outside the academy were also taking up the theme, as women searched for religious expressions that would affirm they too were made in the divine image, full members of their religious communities.

Spiritual feminists learned that such questions were often unwelcome not only to those in authority but to many of their fellow feminists who had no use for religious expression of any sort. To them, religion was one tool of acculturation, inherently sexist and therefore beyond redemption; to attempt to change such a flawed and unnecessary part of society was a waste of time and energy. But to those who recognized the centrality of religious experience, it was precisely because religion has such a pervasive effect on everyone that it could

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not be left in the hands of the fathers alone. As Carol Christ put it, "Symbol systems cannot simply be rejected, they must be replaced."¹ Feminist spirituality seeks to redress a serious power imbalance: the privileging of maleness and male experience in religious imagery, liturgy, theology, and practice.

Since women in US academies were for the most part white, middle class, heterosexual, and either Christian or Jewish, it is not surprising that the early literature of feminist spiritualities largely reflected these viewpoints. It needed the cogent criticisms of women of color, lesbians, bisexual women, nonacademic women, women of other classes, and women of other cultures and countries to point out the omissions. Fortunately, since their voices attracted respect, the discipline grew and flourished as it diversified.

This essay will review the various branches of feminist spiritualities that have developed over the past 30 years. Any of the nine sections that follow could be the subject of a separate essay, but viewing them together presents a truer picture. The focus on the rich diversity of feminist spiritualities limits the selection of titles; many authors cited have published more titles than are mentioned here. It must also be noted that the application of feminist scholarship to different religions and religious expressions varies. In the early days, simply to note the presence of women in sacred texts would be a mark of feminist scholarship. Later, feminist criticism of religious practices often led to new forms of expression, worship, and practice. This uneven development is a

sign that the work of feminist spiritualities is ongoing, and marks this essay as a preliminary study.

Beginnings

One must begin by citing Mary Daly, the first mover and shaker in feminist spiritualities, whose writings distill the shape of the discipline and the directions in which it grew. In 1968, when she wrote her critique within the Catholic church, *The Church and the Second Sex*, she believed, despite the rejection of Christianity by such feminists as Simone de Beauvoir, that it was possible for the church to be transformed through the radical actions of those within it who would no longer accept its oppression of women. By 1973, the year of *Beyond God the Father*, Daly had, as she put it, graduated from the Catholic church, arriving at the conclusion that feminism is antithetical to Christianity, and that it was time for women to stage a new exodus out of the churches and into a new spiritual communion. In that book, Daly begins to show the humor, love of wordplay, and rejection of academe (preferring intuition and conversation) that informed her subsequent writings. She also proposes several concepts that became central to feminist spiritual scholarship and expression, including the idea of God as Verb and the assertion that "... if God is male, then male is God." In *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), Daly presents another theme of enormous significance to spiritual feminist communities, analyzing the ways patriarchal religions appropriated and transformed goddess

symbolology into patriarchal myth. She claims that "Patriarchy is itself the prevailing religion of the entire planet," citing examples of the oppression of women in the name of religion in such diverse cultures as India, China, medieval Europe, parts of Africa, and the US. From Catholic scholar to web-spinning hag, Daly's life and writings demonstrate the full range of feminist critiques of patriarchal religions. One must read all her writings, including her own commentaries on later editions, to fully appreciate her contributions to the field.

Others joined the challenges to patriarchal religions from a variety of perspectives. Phyllis Trible, one of the early reformist voices in feminist spiritualities, examined closely the texts of Christianity to see to what extent patriarchy was inherent in the religion, and to what extent it was a cultural overlay. In *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978) she uses "feminist hermeneutics ... to recover old treasures and discover new ones in the house of faith." Trible seeks out female imagery for God in Old Testament texts and offers new interpretations, based on the original language, of Adam and Eve, the Song of Songs, and Naomi and Ruth. She concludes that "Clearly the patriarchal stamp of scripture is permanent. But just as clearly, interpretation of its content is forever changing, since new occasions teach new duties and contexts alter texts, liberating them from frozen constructions."

Naomi Goldenberg came to a different conclusion in *The Changing of the Gods* (1979), finding Christianity and Judaism inherently sexist because of the centrality of the divine masculine imagery in both religions. Goldenberg coined the term "thealogy" to emphasize the differences that result when a religion values women's experiences and centers on divine feminine imagery. Goldenberg expects spiritual feminists to seek out religions of Goddess rather than God; she represents the revolutionary point of view in early feminist spiritualities.

Both revolutionaries and reformists are well represented in *Womanspirit Rising* (1979), a collection of essays edited by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow. This first anthology of its kind is required reading for understanding this field, even 20 years after its first publication. Its essays, from inside and outside the academy, outline the lack of women's experiences in patriarchal religions and find in the past, in present reconstructions, and in altogether new traditions a variety of responses to the challenges of feminism to traditional religions. Ten years later in *Weaving the Visions* (1989), the same editors acknowledged the biases of the first anthology, which did not recognize the diverse experiences of women of color, lesbians and bisexual women, and women

Patriarchal religions appropriated and transformed goddess symbolology into patriarchal myth.

outside the US upper-middle class. They also included fiction, autobiographical accounts, nonlinear discourse, and nonacademic authors. The two anthologies provide an excellent map of feminist spiritualities and point to the ways the discipline would branch out in future writings.

Christ also wrote several texts that reflect her revolutionary stance. *Laughter of Aphrodite* (1987), a collection of scholarly essays woven together with autobiographical material, chronicles her journey from Christian scholar to Goddess scholar. More recently, *Rebirth of the Goddess* (1997) demonstrates her belief that thealogy begins with experience. Christ describes the ways in which worshiping the Goddess can result in profound changes in all one's ways of thinking and acting.

A few of the early spiritual feminists in these two anthologies deserve special

mention for their contributions to the development of the field. A staunch reformer whose writings focus on Christian texts and their origins, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's influential *In Memory of Her* (1983), a feminist reconstruction of women's early Christian history, provides a basis from which Christian women may form their own *ekklesia*, reject the idolatry of maleness, and articulate a vision of divine feminine from within their tradition. Carter Heyward likewise calls for reformation from within the Christian churches. Her collection of essays, addresses, sermons, and poetry, *Our Passion for Justice* (1984), uses a feminist analysis of justice and injustice to make theological connections among a variety of women's experiences. Several of these writings are concerned with Heyward's experiences as a lesbian, a theme she later developed in detail. Rita Nakashima Brock's *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (1988), seeking to reinterpret Christianity as nonpatriarchal, offers the image of Christ as community rather than solitary savior and emphasizes intimacy rather than self-sacrifice as the fullest form of love. Brock acknowledges she was empowered by Goddess spirituality but found she needed to return to the Christianity that both nurtured and wounded her—a common theme for the early reformers.

Early revolutionaries were also well represented in the Christ and Plaskow anthologies. Nelle Morton, a respected writer, named the experience crucial to many women's groups "being heard into speech." The metaphor of journey, central to her spiritual experience, describes in her collection *The Journey is Home* (1985) her progression from Christianity to Goddess worship. Charlene Spretnak, one of the first authors to speak of the intersection of spirituality and political activism, edited the collection *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* (1982), which describes the ways feminist spirituality can empower women to work politically. She includes an interesting discussion by several authors of the myth and meaning of

matriarchy and goddess imagery. This theme wove another thread, ecofeminism, into the tapestry of feminist spirituality (see below). No discussion of the beginnings of feminist spiritualities can ignore Merlin Stone, without doubt a founding mother of the Goddess Spirituality movement, whose *When God Was a Woman* (1976) predates all the previous works save Mary Daly's. Exasperated by the lack in the US of popular knowledge about ancient Goddess religions and the prevailing belief that divine had always been male, Stone set out to document the existence of Goddess religions in the Near and Middle East prior to the advent of the three Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. She offers her own theory about the meaning of the story of Adam and Eve and traces its effects on Western women today. Stone touched the minds and hearts of countless women who might never have read a theologian's writings but who hungered for alternatives to the patriarchal religions in which they were reared.

These early writings made evident the diversity in today's feminist spiritualities, though the articulation of the various streams was only beginning in the late 1970s. There are three approaches into which the streams could be said to flow: reforming present traditions, looking to the past for prepatriarchal practices, and creating new spiritualities based on personal experience.

Feminist Expressions in World Traditions

Varying levels of feminist analysis have examined the religions of the world. In Christianity and Judaism, the abundance of scholarship makes it possible to focus more on writings that address women's spiritual experiences and less on strictly thea/ological studies, while with Islam, feminist analysis is only beginning and hence focuses primarily on women in religious texts. Rita Gross's *Feminism*

and *Religion* (1996) examines ways in which a feminist social vision has transformed Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, and also produced the Goddess Spirituality movement. Gross takes care to consider religions both descriptively and normatively—what they do as well as what they say—and deliberately avoids Eurocentrism. She coedited with Nancy Auer Falk another useful work, *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures* (1980), whose 17 essays, mostly case studies, explore the diversity of women's religious lives within non-Western countries and traditions. *Feminism and World Religions* (1999), a more recent collection edited by Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young, contains feminist analyses of their religions by women who practice Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Some of the most meaningful work for spiritual feminists in Judaism has been the recovery of feminine imagery. Raphael Patai's *The Hebrew Goddess* (1967; 3rd enlarged ed. 1990), remarkable because it appeared so early, describes evidence of ancient Goddess figures in pre-Israelite Canaan and shows how these Goddesses continued among the Hebrews and were woven into Judaic thought. Barbara Black Koltuv chose a single figure for *The Book of Lilith* (1986), which examines the myths of Lilith and posits her as a neglected feminine shadow figure who cannot be suppressed or cast out, and therefore must be integrated into the divine imagery to provide what Shekhina lacks: lunar consciousness, body knowledge, and God as mother.

For other Jewish feminists, recovering a Goddess was too far removed from the monotheism they found central to their experience. This did not prevent them from seeking other names for "You-Know-Who," nor from creating midrashim, rituals, and practices intended for all Jews, women as well as men. *Standing Again at Sinai* (1990) is the result of 20 years of Judith Plaskow's

rethinking of key Jewish ideas and experiences in the face of her belief that Judaism is deeply patriarchal and will require a profound revolution to change. Plaskow believes "If we are Jews not despite being feminists but *as feminists*, then Judaism will have to change—we will have to work to change it—to make

With Islam, feminist analysis is only beginning.

a whole identity possible." E. M. Broner writes from a similar desire to restore women to Judaism. *The Telling* (1993) recounts the evolution of "The Woman's Haggadah," written for a series of feminist Seders by a group of Jewish feminists. Bronner's and Plaskow's works rose from their experience of Jewish feminist communities, the B'not Esh spirituality collective Bronner helped to found in 1981, and the group of Jewish feminists who met together year after year to restore themselves and their experiences to their religion. Rachel Adler's *Engendering Judaism* (1998) goes further, addressing the ways women's full inclusion in Jewish tradition will transform its laws, liturgies, and sexual and relational ethics. A final notable volume is Tamar Frankiel's *The Voice of Sarah* (1990), which describes her own spiritual experience and enrichment within the Orthodox Jewish tradition, which many feminists reject as hopelessly sexist. Frankiel thinks her work feminist because it describes her own experience in her own voice, and gives her own understanding of that experience.

In Christianity, some have regarded the Virgin Mary as having much potential for an expression of divine feminine. Marina Warner's *Alone of All Her Sex* (1976) explores the cult of the Virgin (not simply scriptural references), finding in Mary one of the few Western female figures to attain mythical status. Many other authors began by seeking divine feminine in Christian scripture,

thus inspiring others' spiritual feminist practices. Dorothee Soelle's essays, sermons, and reflections collected in *The Strength of the Weak* (1984) demonstrate that to recover its original intent, Christianity needs feminism. Her work doubtless influenced Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, who has written extensively on gender and the Bible; her *The Divine Feminine* (1983) explores scriptural representations of God as nursing mother, midwife, mother hen, and Dame Wisdom, to name a few. Another prolific Christian feminist is Rosemary Radford Ruether, whose *Sexism and God Talk* (1983) offers feminist analysis of Christology, Mariology, evil, and eschatology, and emphasizes the need for a Christian community free of sexism. Grace M. Jantzen uses feminism to uncover new ways of understanding Anglo-American philosophy of religion in *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (1999). Mary Jo Weaver addresses the Catholic community in *New Catholic Women* (1985), presenting a synthesis of interpretations and opinions on the lives and work of Catholic women, religious and lay, as they seek through their anguish to build a new US Catholic Church. Her chapter on spirituality, medieval mystics, and contemporary feminists is especially relevant. Eve C. Topping offers articles and essays on her experiences as a feminist in the Orthodox Church in *Holy Mothers of Orthodoxy* (1987), which calls on Orthodox women to form grassroots networks, speak their needs, and reclaim their history within their tradition.

While works cited so far consider text and tradition, in many other writings women reflect on their spiritual lives within Christianity. Carol Ochs's *Women and Spirituality* (1983) outlines the spirituality of a wife and mother, and its lessons of compassion and connection. She points out that "if religion is insight into experience, a religion developed out of partial experience cannot be adequate to meet the needs of a full humanity." Fourteen years later, with the additional experiences of a mother whose children

have grown and gone, Ochs wrote a second edition using the same title (1997), adding chapters on mourning and new spirituality. Among many autobiographical writings by Christian women responding to feminism and the re-creation of Goddess traditions, Sue Monk Kidd's *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (1996) is an excellent example of how spiritual feminists can find a both/and response that enhances their spirituality within their tradition. By way of contrast, Joan D. Chittister's *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men* (1998) makes no use of Goddess traditions to demonstrate the healing that feminism brings Christianity.

Most of the present writings about women and Islam focus on social, economic, and legal issues, but a few look at religion and spirituality. One of the best is *Women and Islam* (1982), a collection edited by Azizah al-Hibri, first printed as a special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* (v.5 no. 2). Most of the nine essays were written by Arab women either raised as Muslims or very familiar with the traditions of Islam. Through a variety of viewpoints (sometimes contradictory) they present the common theme that the *hadith* (sayings of the prophets), not the Qur'an, condemn Eve and women. The point is also made that feminist Muslims have every right to interpret, since in Islam there is no clergy, but each person responds to God directly. Amina Wadud-Muhsin would agree; her *Qur'an and Woman* (1992), offering an analysis of the concept of woman taken directly from the Qur'an, points out that it is the literature that the Qur'an inspired (eventually overshadowing the text itself) that offers a negative view of women. Wadud-Muhsin believes the Qur'an must be continually reinterpreted, and that it can serve as a source for women's empowerment. Savina J. Teubal also returns to the Qur'an and to Genesis to offer a new view of the Desert Matriarch story. *Hagar the Egyptian* (1990) sees Hagar as a woman who seeks power in community and forges her own destiny.

Buddhism has gained particular interest in the US in the past few decades. Many US women seeking alternatives to the traditions of their birth have found Buddhist teachings a welcome change from the sexism they experienced in other religions. Nonetheless, many instances both here and in its countries of origin can be cited in which Buddhism has been practiced and used in sexist and oppressive ways. Questions also exist concerning what happens to a spiritual practice when it is transplanted into a culture very different from its culture of origin. Add to this the several types of Buddhism, and feminists who practice this religion, whether from birth or from conviction, clearly face some complexities. Not surprisingly, a healthy body of writings exist about women, feminism, and Buddhism. Many books focus on individual Buddhist women; Tsultrim Allione's *Women of Wisdom* (1984) offers biographies of six Tibetan Buddhist women of the fourth to sixth centuries, commenting on their lives and spiritual experiences. Sandy Boucher looks at contemporary US Buddhist women in *Turning the Wheel* (1993), which uses essays and interviews to explore questions of male teachers and the problems they pose for women, links of Buddhism and political activism, issues of family and community, and women teachers and women-led centers. She also explores the impact Kwan Yin exerts over the lives of contemporary European American women in *Discovering Kwan Yin, Buddhist Goddess of Compassion* (1999). In *Buddhist Women on the Edge* (1996), Marianne Dresser has collected 30 essays that bring the benefit of diversity to these and other issues. Her authors use their experiences as women of color, lesbians, bisexual women, and working-class women to examine their own experiences and question the ways Buddhism as practiced in this country demeans or exploits women. With regard to cross-cultural appropriation, Dresser, a lesbian feminist, writes: "As an American woman trying to forge an authentic spiritual life within an adopted

Eastern religious tradition ... I have had many sometimes conflicting experiences ... the very human tendency to silence the dissenting—and disturbing—voice, as in any other social institution, exists in sometimes insidiously subtle forms in Buddhist institutions.”

Several feminist scholars have offered critiques of the religion. The most thorough is Rita M. Gross's *Buddhism after Patriarchy* (1993), which describes the basics of Buddhism and its history, provides a feminist analysis of key Buddhist concepts, and offers a feminist reconstruction of Buddhism that encompasses both genders instead of denying gender altogether, leaving a conceptual vacuum into which the dominant male gender model can flow. She calls this new approach “Dharma as both/and, not neither.” Gross's collection of essays *Soaring and Settling* (1998) was written in response to reactions to that earlier work. In *Thai Women in Buddhism* (1991), Chatsumarn Kabilsingh uses feminist analysis to describe the circumstances of Buddhist women in Thailand. Another collection, *Not Mixing Up Buddhism* (1986), edited by Deborah Hopkinson, Michele Hill, and Eileen Kiera, gives a view of the intersections of Zen Buddhism and feminism. Originally published in *Kahawai: A Journal of Women and Zen*, the 18 essays address issues of early Buddhist women, authority, sexual abuse by teachers, home life, birth, abortion, intimacy, and women teachers in the context of Zen and feminism. Anne C. Klein's *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen* (1995), a more general look at feminism and Buddhism, explores Tibetan Buddhist theories and practices and considers their relevance for feminist theory and for Western cultural constructions of selfhood. She points out the seeming disparities between feminism, with its emphasis on political power and psychological well-being, and Buddhism, which seeks spiritual insight and inner discipline, finding that each approach has insights to offer with regard to questions of selfhood and identity.

Although little feminist analysis of Taoism is available, Thomas Cleary has edited *Immortal Sisters* (1989), a collection of writings by Taoist women from the fourth to the 12th centuries, with biographical sketches and explanatory notes. Cleary sees the importing of Confucianism as the source of much suppression of women in East Asia, and he maintains that the older Taoism emphasizes feminine symbols and values, and has had many important women teachers.

Hindu goddesses have also attracted the notice of Western feminists, though less attention has been paid to Hinduism itself and the ways women are treated in that tradition. David Kinsley's *Hindu Goddesses* (1986) is probably the best-known example of a Western writer's discussion of the ancient, continuous, and popular goddess traditions in Hinduism. He is selective, relying on literary and iconographic sources, so his material is slanted towards the high-caste, educated, male perspective on the goddesses, though he does include a chapter on village goddesses. He probably did so in part because of the research of Lynn E. Gatwood, whose *Devi and the Spouse Goddess* (1985) uses feminist theory to analyze goddesses in Indian culture. She finds that the independent, fertile, and erotic feminine principal, expressed in the village goddesses and named by her Devi, has been overlooked and replaced in the urban centers by a male-controlled, marginal, morally ambiguous goddess, whom she names the Spouse Goddess. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff's collection of essays *Devi: Goddesses of India* (1996) raises questions about sexism, racism, and cultural appropriation. One of the most interesting pieces examines how Kali has been represented in the West, particularly in feminist and New Age literature, and how contemporary Indian Hindus have begun to use Kali in Western ways, with resulting reductionism, superficiality, and inaccuracy.

An excellent example of feminist analysis of an Eastern religious tradition by a practitioner from its country of

origin is Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh's *The Feminine Principle in the Sikh Vision of the Transcendent* (1993). Singh's desire to analyze the Sikh vision of Transcendent Reality has several sources: her childhood experiences of the ambivalent characterization of girls and women in Sikh society; the flowering of feminist scholarship in religion in the 1980s; and recognition that most Western feminists were inspired by but excluded Eastern, Third World, and bi- and multicultural womens' experiences. Singh finds in Sikh literature a rich source of divine feminine imagery and of affirmation of female bodies and gender equality, which was dominated and suppressed by cultural traditions of male scholarship, male teachers, and inability of Sikhs to read their own literature.

Womanist and Mujerista Theologies: Race Before Gender

Issues of race, class, and orientation were addressed with greater frequency as feminist spiritualities developed over time, but in the early days in the academy this was not the case. Women of color soon realized that even as “human” meant “male,” “woman” in early feminist terms meant “white middle-class women.” The same generalizations that denied women their experiences in a patriarchal society were denying women of color their particular experiences in feminist circles.

Womanist theology rose from African-American women's need to tell their own experiences, in which race was a greater oppressor than gender. Womanists took their name from Alice Walker, whose *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) relates African-American women's particularity to their history of slavery, community, endurance, and commitment to justice. Katie G. Cannon, one of the early voices in the Womanist community, in *Black Womanist Ethics* (1988) draws a Christian Womanist ethic from the lives

and writings of Zora Neale Hurston, Howard Thurman, and Martin Luther King, Jr. In the same year, Renita J. Weems's *Just a Sister Away* (1988) retold Bible stories aimed at black women's experiences, in contrast to the many

Many white feminists looked to their Indo- European roots.

white feminist retellings that appeared about the same time. Jacquelyn Grant articulated the differences between feminist and Womanist in *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (1989). This work first proposed the term "Womanist" for black women's theology, rooted in black women's experiences and focused on ending oppression based on race, sex, and class. Grant maintains that feminist theology at that time was both white and racist, since it was vested exclusively in white sources and white women's experiences but claimed to speak for all women. She also states that, unlike white feminists who have problems with a male savior, Womanists can find liberation in Christology because they have historically refused to accept any oppressive interpretations of scripture by religious authorities. Grant edited *Perspectives on Womanist Theology* (1995), a collection of essays that examine the historical bases of Womanist theology (including an interesting essay on the influences of Conjure, Hoodoo, and Voodoo on African American women's religious expressions), the contemporary perspective (strongly influenced by literature), the ministerial experiences, and the personal stories of various African American Christian women.

In *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope* (1993), Emilie M. Townes, another major Womanist scholar, finds in the life of Ida B. Wells-Barnett a source for contemporary Womanist Christian

spirituality and social ethics. Townes also edited the collection *A Troubling in My Soul* (1993), whose authors express Womanist perspectives on evil and suffering. Townes maintains that Womanist thought is intentionally biased because it deliberately challenges the notion of universals and absolutes. The authors come from a variety of Christian traditions; each starts with her own experience, then moves beyond it to analyze and create alternative visions. In *a Blaze of Glory* (1995) is Townes' analysis of the history and roots of Womanist spirituality in the African American experiences of slavery, lynching, and social reform. For Townes, Womanist spirituality grows out of social witness and the search for justice and compassion. Because of the Womanist commitment to justice for all, she is unafraid to call the African American community to account over its own forms of internalized oppression, heterosexism, colorism, and classism. Townes' most recent work is another collection, *Embracing the Spirit* (1997). It presents Womanist perspectives, both theoretical and practical, on hope, salvation, and transformation. The authors offer Womanist responses to some of the thorniest issues of our time (racism, AIDS, hate groups, health care, heterosexism) and reiterate the Womanist practice of finding inspiration in literature and music.

Delores Williams's *Sisters in the Wilderness* (1993) relates the story of Hagar to black women's experience and to the African American community in general. She contrasts Womanist theology with black liberation theology, offers dialogues between Womanist and feminist viewpoints (African, Asian, white, Hispanic, and other), and critiques the sexist oppression of black women in churches.

More recently, collections offer feminist and Womanist approaches side by side for the sake of contrast rather than critique. In *The Arts of Ministry* (1996), edited by Christie Cozad Neuger, seven women ministers offer

views of the practical ministry (pastoral care, preaching, education, counseling, ethics, and mentoring) that needs to emerge from both feminist and Womanist theories.

Hispanic and Latina women also recognized a need to articulate a spirituality based on their own experiences. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, the most published *mujerista* theologian, wrote with Yolanda Tarango *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (1992), which identifies the theological motivations, understandings, and actions of Hispanic women. The authors bring together theologies of feminism, culture, and liberation, seeking not simply equal rights but a change in the basic structures of society, especially economic. They recognize the plurality of their community (Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Cuban) and believe *mujerista* theology must begin from women's experiences and must include women of all classes. They tell stories, analyze them, liturgize them, and strategize for liberation. Isasi-Díaz includes Spanish summaries of each chapter, a reflection of her commitment to her community and to the importance of hearing Hispanic women's words in their own language. In *En La Lucha=In the Struggle* (1993) Isasi-Díaz writes in company with the voices of the many women whose stories she tells. She finds Hispanic and Latina ethnicity important in *mujerista* theology, and she emphasizes the importance of Latinas as independent moral agents. She also values difference within the community, specifically the differences which arise between *mestizajae* and Hispanic women. *Mujerista Theology* (1996) reprints ten essays Isasi-Díaz wrote over as many years. Her goals are to provide a forum for Latina grassroots women, to develop a theology that uses Latina religious practices and understandings, and to challenge Latina-oppressive theology, teachings, and practices, exposing the absence of Latinas in the women's movement, in the academy, in the churches, and in society.

Other groups are developing their own approaches. *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens* (1988), a collection edited by Letty M. Russell, gives scope for African, Asian, Anglo, and Latin American women to write feminist, Womanist, and *mujerista* theologies from a Third World perspective.

Re/visioning the Past: Indo-European Mythology and Archaeology

While some feminists were content with, even insisted on, remaining within their religious traditions and working to reform or revolutionize them, others felt that patriarchal spiritualities were too flawed to save and sought other solutions. Many white feminists looked to their Indo-European roots, seeking inspiration from the cultures that existed prior to patriarchy. If Merlin Stone were right, for a long time God was Goddess, and spiritual feminists both inside and outside the academy were eager to find evidence of that time. Although seldom welcomed by traditional scholars, writings on such topics have become important to several feminist spiritualities.

No one denies the profound influence of Greek culture on the development of Western European culture. In the US, many people's first exposure to Goddess imagery comes through the Greek myths as derived from Homer and Hesiod. Jane Ellen Harrison first proposed the notion that ritual, rather than literature, was a more appropriate source for information on religious practices. In *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (3rd ed., 1955), first published in 1903, Harrison uncovers evidence of chthonic as well as Olympian ritual, an association of women with agriculture, the important diads of mother/maid and mother/daughter, and a Dionysian origin to ritual later spiritualized by Orphic traditions. In *Epilegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, and Themis* (1962), originally published in 1921, Harrison extends her

theme, maintaining that the mystery traditions were the religious practices of the ancient Greeks, while the Olympian material is purely literary and therefore not an accurate reflection of the religion. Although Harrison's work was not well received in her lifetime, to feminist religious scholars of the late 20th century it serves as a model of ways in which mythic material can be revisited and reinterpreted.

James Mellaart contributed to contemporary feminist spiritualities with his report of excavations of a site in what is now Turkey. *Catal Huyuk* (1967) describes a society that had a goddess as the central deity, little social stratification, and scant evidence of warfare. Many archaeologists have questioned Mellaart's conclusions, but his work has become important for spiritual feminists seeking evidence that society has not always been patriarchal and war-based. The statues, carvings, and images of goddesses and powerful feminine figures giving birth and seated in splendor that Mellaart documented have become important icons for present day Goddess Spirituality.

Another important work from the 1960s, Karl Kerényi's *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (1967), examined the Sanctuary of Eleusis, where a mystery cult based on the story of Demeter and Persephone flourished for 2,000 years, with initiates from all the known world. Kerényi equated Demeter's anguished search for her ravished daughter with a woman's quest for completion, and with every individual's search for wholeness. For spiritual feminists, the knowledge of a pancultural religion based on the relationship of mother and daughter was powerful proof that divine could be feminine and spirituality need not be the exclusive property of the fathers.

One of the best-loved names in feminist spirituality circles is Marija Gimbutas. Her lifelong pursuit of the Neolithic culture of Eastern Europe (7,000 to 3,500 BCE), which she named

Old Europe to distinguish it from Indo-European cultures, resulted in a number of publications, notably *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1982, 1989; first published 1974), *The Language of the Goddess* (1989), *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991), and *The Living Goddesses* (1999, published posthumously, ed. by Miriam Robbins Dexter). These works present a dazzling array of pottery, imagery, and symbols of a culture characterized by worship of Goddess and by the preeminence of women. Gimbutas posited that Old Europe was matrifocal, probably matrilineal, agricultural, sedentary, egalitarian, and peaceful, all in marked contrast to the proto-Indo-European cultures that invaded Old Europe from 4,500 to 2,500 BCE, and which were patriarchal, stratified, pastoral, mobile, and warrior-based. Goddess feminists still draw heavily from Gimbutas's research; in 1997, Joan Marker edited a collection of essays in her honor, *From the Realm of the Ancestors* (1997), written by archaeologists, linguists, and scholars of folklore, mythology, religion, spirituality, art, and psychology. Gimbutas's contributions to the symbology of earth-based spiritualities, to spiritual feminists, and to all those working to envision and create an egalitarian, nonviolent society cannot be overestimated, although some still criticize her work harshly.

Other authors looked to ancient Near Eastern cultures for inspiration and insight into our culture's beliefs about gender. Judith Ochshorn's *The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine* (1981) finds no evidence for matriarchy or an overarching Great Goddess, but it offers a cogent exploration of some of the origins of present beliefs about sex and women. Inspired by Samuel Noah Kramer's work on Sumerian texts, Diane Wolkstein wrote a storyteller's version of the myths of Inanna that became the basis for her performance art. *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* (1983) is an important collaboration between these two specialists, the first modern literary form of the tales of one of the most

powerful figures in ancient mythology. Besides texts, the work contains useful background on the culture of Sumer, but its greatest contribution is its stories of a powerful female figure who rules her own destiny, makes her own choices, rejoices in her sexuality, and endures a descent and return that predates Persephone and Jesus.

Joanna Hubbs's more general approach to the feminine divine in *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (1988) draws from archaeology, anthropology, and ethnography to explore the image and role of feminine divinity among the Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians. She finds the impact of female figures Rusalki, Baba Yaga, and Mother Earth and the clash between their agrarian mythologies and the masculine warrior ethos to be far-reaching, stretching as far as Pushkin's 19th-century concept of nationality.

Other works take a broader view and explore the idea of a cross-cultural Goddess from the ancient past. Despite criticism of this reductionist approach by many scholars (feminist and otherwise), it remains a potent icon for many. One of the earliest studies of this type, Buffie Johnson's *Lady of the Beasts* (1988), reports research begun in 1943 that collects from all continents images of creatures linked with Goddess worship from the Paleolithic era to the present. Her collection organized itself by creature, with sections on bird, lion, dog, serpent, butterfly, ewe and ram, spider, deer, fish, pig, cow and bull, scorpion, and bear. Elinor W. Gadon embraces the generalist label in *The Once and Future Goddess* (1989), since she proposes a broad synthesis to convey concepts she feels are absent from Euro-American culture today. She accepts the idea of the Goddess as "ultimately one supreme reality" that was fractured by patriarchal Indo-European invading cultures, whose eventual monotheistic approach rejected the earth-centered, immanent, sensual, erotic qualities the Goddess embodied. Gadon uses archaeological evidence from

European sites to support her image of the Goddess and then describes the patriarchal takeover and its effects. She describes the reemergence of the Goddess, from 19th-century European Romantics who depicted the Great Mother archetype to contemporary earth-based spiritualities, creation spirituality, re-created images of Shekhinah (the female spirit of wisdom in Jewish and Christian traditions), the women's spirituality movement, and the work of present-day women artists and performers. Miriam Robbins Dexter's *Whence the Goddesses* (1990) also looks for common threads among European Neolithic iconography and ancient Near Eastern myths and images to describe Goddess motifs. She describes the ways in which Indo-European Goddesses assimilated those motifs, and points out that the functions given to the Goddesses by the patriarchs were intended to convey power to male gods and humans. Dexter writes, "We must remember that myth is political: it represents not only the worldview as it is, but the world-view as the mythopoeists wish it to be viewed," a concept most spiritual feminists embrace.

Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor adopt the generalist approach in *The Great Cosmic Mother* (1991). After a brief analysis of how Western European culture constructed ideas about women, they explore early religions of women, using the same sources and time periods as the previous authors, with a focus on Mother as both womb and tomb. They offer examples of some Mexican, Hindu, and African deities for comparative purposes. They examine the ways patriarchal cultures and religions have demonized women and women's power, resulting in a mechanized, dehumanized world much in need of resacralizing. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford posit a return of Goddess Spirituality as a reunion of nature and spirit in *The Myth of the Goddess* (1991). Reviewing Goddess images from various Western European cultures from the Paleolithic to the Virgin Mary, they describe an underlying vision of life as a unity which

they call the myth of the Goddess. They see this vision returning in a disguised form in quantum physics, which describes the universe as a pattern of relationships—another image of the web of life, the connectedness that is a central icon for many spiritual feminists.

This idea of synthesis to find underlying commonalities is popular in much Western research, but it has its critics. The womanist and *mujerista* theologians tag the dangers of this kind of generalizing as racist and classist, while many scholars in archaeology, mythology, ancient history, and folklore reject the revisioning in which spiritual feminists engage, calling it sloppy at best. For their part, feminists remind us of the political implications of myth and the power of choosing one's own symbols. The concepts of matriarchy and a universal Great Mother continue to be challenged and debated as in Lotte Motz's *The Faces of the Goddess* (1997), which tries to see particular Euroasian Goddesses associated with mothering and birthing through the eyes of their own cultures of origin. Motz concludes that these Goddesses did not originate from one archetype that reflected the power of the womb but grew from the disparate survival needs of very different cultures; their stories reflect this difference.

Other Primal Voices: Americas, Africa, Pacific

If many Western feminists hoping to find divine feminine images and concepts that predated patriarchy looked to the ancient histories of their own countries, many also examined the primal cultures of other continents, often ignoring the problems associated with cultural appropriation. As Western feminists rejected all forms of oppression—race, class, and orientation as well as gender—they listened to those who felt colonized and commodified by the Euro-American search for spiritual growth. In the US, various American Indian tribes suffered this spiritual

invasion. In response, feminists from different tribes began to describe divine feminine in their religions and criticize the ways white feminists seized on and distorted tribal spiritual heritage. At the same time, some American Indians shared their teachings with all who were interested, believing the world needs the wisdom they offer. The result is a body of literature that is uneven and often contradictory, but is an important thread in the tapestry of feminist spiritualities.

Brooke Medicine Eagle, a Crow descendant who calls herself a rainbow medicine woman, intends in *Buffalo Woman Comes Singing* (1991) to share the teachings of White Buffalo Woman with all who seek spiritual growth. She combines autobiography with story and exercises to convey what this powerful divine feminine image offers our world. Paula Gunn Allen prefers to convey the reality of American Indian women's lives and spirituality to Western readers, rather than invite them to practice American Indian traditions. *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986) studies intertribal American Indian literature that describes the effects of colonization on the tribes and demonstrates the ways spirituality is taught through story. Allen points out that Indians and spirits are always found together, that Indians endure, and that traditional tribal lifestyles were usually gynocratic until Europeans conducted genocide on the tribes out of their patriarchal fear of gynocracy.² She notes that the sacred ways of American Indian peoples are not dissimilar to those of other primal cultures in Tibet, the Mediterranean, Brittany, Normandy, England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland. In *Grandmothers of the Light* (Beacon, 1991), Allen focuses on stories depicting "information central to a woman's spiritual traditions," all centering on Goddesses from various tribal traditions. The first section offers creation stories ("cosmogyny"), the second tales of ritual magic and various aspects of Goddess, and the third the relevance today for ways of power and

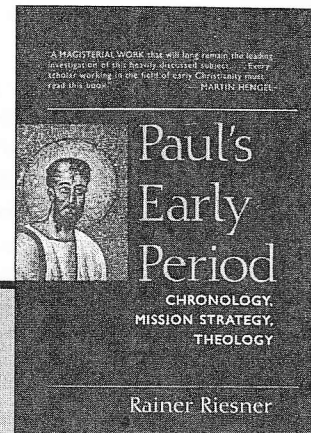
relations between humans and supernaturals. In telling the stories, Allen expands and adds background to the traditional versions to allow understanding by those outside the traditions.

From Central America, Alvaro Estrada's autobiography and chants of a Mazatec shaman, *Maria Sabina: Her Life and Chants* (1981), transcribes Maria's first-person accounts of her life and many of her chants. Estrada hopes to encourage younger Indians to study and preserve their customs and traditions, in danger of destruction by white mystical seekers; he presents a wonderful account of a Mazatec wise woman, poet, and shaman. Steve Wall records the reflections of women elders of various American Indian traditions on spirituality as a way of living. *Wisdom's Daughters* (1993) contains teachings from ten tribal traditions in the women's own voices. In the Arctic, Emily Ivanoff Brown Ticasuk worked for decades to preserve the stories and traditions of her Unalut mother in *Tales of Ticasuk* (1987), and although these stories are not consciously woman-centered, they act as containers of spirituality for her people.

Many spiritual traditions from African nations were forcibly imported to the US during the years of slavery. Some Womanist scholars reflect on the influence these traditions had on contemporary African American Christianity; others describe the ways the traditions survived in other forms. Luisah Teish discusses the Afro-diasporic spiritual tradition in *Jambalaya* (1985), which examines both New Orleans Voodoo and bits of Christian occultism. She describes her own experience as a priestess, interspersing it with charms, stories, and tables showing relations of African deities and Christian saints, all with a strong feminist stance dedicated to eliminating racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. In *Oya: In Praise of the Goddess* (1987), Judith Gleason provided a detailed account of the Yoruban goddess through sacred texts and various commentaries. She portrays a strong

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image of divine feminine dedicated to the power of women, especially in the marketplace.

The literature covering divine feminine imagery and women's spirituality in the varied cultures of the Pacific is scant. Herb Kawainui Kane's *Pele: Goddess of Hawaii's Volcanoes* (2d ed., 1987) is usually considered a children's book, but it contains solid information and beautiful artwork depicting Pele and her ancient and contemporary interactions with her people. Artwork is the starting point for Robyn Kahukiwa's *Wahine Toa: Women of Maori Myth* (1991), with text by Patricia Grace. Kahukiwa is a bicultural artist who worked with elders and friends to give new strength to the women in various Maori myths. The paintings are not intended as illustrations but are myths in painted form that highlight the roles and importance of women. Diane Bell gives a glimpse of Aboriginal women's ritual life in Central Australia in *Daughters of the Dreaming* (1983), which shows women who are their own bosses and demonstrates how the rituals provide for their autonomy, though only material open and acceptable to men as well as women was included.

Goddess Spirituality: Inventing New Traditions

Many spiritual feminists found both the effort to reform religion from within and the examination of prepatriarchal pasts inadequate, instead following the advice of Monique Wittig: "There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that.... Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent."³ The creation of a woman-centered spiritual practice has many names—Goddess Spirituality, the women's spirituality movement, Womanspirit—and has followed many paths. One of the most widely known is Wicca (contemporary witchcraft), which has an extensive literature all its own (CH, Mar'99). This section will focus on the

works that have inspired and been inspired by the broader feminist spirituality movement, here called Goddess Spirituality.

By way of general introduction, Cynthia Eller's excellent overview *Living in the Lap of the Goddess* (1993) discusses the differences between feminist spirituality and Wicca and other neopagan practices, and offers a sociological profile of the movement and the women in it. Eller describes rituals and other practices, analyzes issues of politics and power, and clearly pictures the benefits its practitioners derive from Goddess Spirituality. Sheila Ruth offers an account of a feminist reclamation of spiritual practice in *Take Back the Light* (1994). A feminist social philosopher, a mystic Pagan Quaker, and a child of orthodox Jewish American parents, Ruth takes a multifaceted approach to the radical transformation of spirituality. She notes the hostility with which most feminists regard any religious practice and counters it with the recognition that liberation must include self-definition, to her the essence of spiritual life. She describes her search for a religion that serves life, and she maintains that patriarchal religions are doomed unless they can reincorporate women's values and experiences, and women themselves. In *At the Root of This Longing: Reconciling a Spiritual Hunger and a Feminist Thirst* (1998), Carol Lee Flinders addresses the seeming conflict of spirituality and feminism, demonstrating that, far from being in conflict, they are mutually necessary for the aims of either to be accomplished. Gloria F. Orenstein's *The Reflowering of the Goddess* (1990) celebrates the work of feminist-matristic artists and writers, and shows how this manifestation of Goddess Spirituality will result in an eventual earth-based spirituality that will reclaim a matristic heritage, individuals' connections to nature, and the reality and viability of intuition, magic, and spirit.

Spiritual feminists draw on a variety of sources, both scholarly and visionary, to create their rituals and affirm their

beliefs. Writings on Goddesses are certainly a major component of the literature of Goddess Spirituality; Merlin Stone's *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood* (1990), a collection of Goddess and heroine lore, set the pattern for many that followed. Christine Downing, another major voice, in *The Goddess* (1981) offers personal reflections on the myths and meanings of seven of the Greek Goddesses. Carl Olson edited the collection *The Book of the Goddess, Past and Present* (1983), in which Downing and 16 others write about Goddesses from the Near East, Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, China, Japan, Africa, and the Americas.

Another important genre in the Goddess Spirituality movement is ritual handbooks. Diane Stein's *The Women's Spirituality Book* (1986), one of the first and best loved, originated in a Dianic Wiccan matrix, but spiritual feminists were happy to adopt it. Stein's work influenced others, including Jill Fairchild and Regina Schaare's *The Goddess Workbook* (1993), which contains their own rituals centering on the Goddess as creator, sustainer, manifest, transformer, releaser, and renewer, with each attribute linked to a specific (usually Greek) Goddess. Barbara Ardinger offers more suggestion and less direction in *A Woman's Book of Rituals and Celebrations* (rev. ed., 1995), which begins by discussing various elements of ritual, including practicing the presence of the Goddess, creating altars, and the meanings of ritual, faith, worship, and mysticism. Ardinger also discusses important elements such as ritual tools and the seasons and cycles, and gives examples of rituals she uses. Kimberly Snow's *Keys to the Open Gate* (1994), even less prescriptive, is more a sourcebook of readings, reflections, poetry, interviews, and bibliographies designed to help women create their own paths to spiritual expression.

Goddess Spirituality emphasizes the sacredness of women's bodies, sexuality, and biological life experiences. The

image of Goddess as Maiden, Woman, and Crone is a case in point, the three phases being reflective of a woman's life before, during, and after menstruation. The spiritual feminists often write of these body experiences as embodiments of sacrality and use them as starting points for reflections on theology. Though not intended as a work of spirituality, Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove's *The Wise Wound* (1988) explores the science and folklore surrounding menstruation, providing a thorough study that recovers some of the older wisdom that surrounds the experience and suggests a connection with the Divine. In *Motherself* (1988) and *Mother with Child* (1994), Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi offers mythic analyses of motherhood and childbirth, using Goddess imagery and women's stories to reframe, ritualize, and reinterpret these experiences in a spiritual context. Christine Downing's *Journey through Menopause* (1987) gives an account of menopause as a spiritual rite of passage and draws on literature, dreams, Greek mythology, and her experiences to envision menopause as a return to one's self. Barbara Walker gives older women a powerful icon in *The Crone* (1985), which reclaims the wise woman image from Greek and pre-Christian European myths and stories.

Sexual expression is probably among the most rigorously suppressed of women's experiences, inside religion and out. By reclaiming their bodies and their sexuality, spiritual feminists hope to reclaim the connection between sexuality and spirituality and to restore themselves to wholeness. They do this in a variety of ways. Winifred Milius Lubell's *The Metamorphosis of Baubo* (1994) is a mythic study of women's sexual energy in imagery from the Paleolithic through the Middle Ages in Europe, Egypt, and the Americas. Lubell examines the goddess Baubo from Greek mythology, frog goddesses, and the Celtic Sheila-na-gigs as sacred images of women's sexuality, both honored and demonized; she points out that these images are not

pornographic but express awe of female sexuality and procreativity, and that their focus was on women's sexuality from a female, not a male, point of view. Nancy Qualls-Corbett addresses the virgin/whore split in *The Sacred Prostitute* (1988), tracing the history of the sacred prostitute, her demise, and the resulting cultural and psychological changes in the West. She demonstrates how sexuality and spirituality are interrelated and can bring life to each other. Nan

Goddess Spirituality emphasizes the sacredness of women's bodies.

Hawthorne's *Loving the Goddess Within* (1991) describes the Goddess inside each woman as the sensual expression of the body's pleasure. She believes women can recover the Goddess by reclaiming and affirming their bodies and their sexuality whether alone or partnered with women or with men. She offers suggestions for rituals around sex, menarche, and the seasons of nature's year. L.J. Tessier's *Dancing after the Whirlwind* (1997) explores the relationship between sexuality and spirituality in women whose sexual expression has been denied by themselves and by society: lesbians, survivors of childhood sexual abuse, and carriers of HIV. She describes the creative and destructive aspects of various Goddesses' sexual expressions and shows the need to move beyond denial to a celebration of our capacity for spiritual connection. Tessier writes: "I still think orgasm is the best metaphor we have for God [sic]. That place where letting go brings life and death together and transforms all that is into ecstasy. And if that is not divinity, then why not? What else is more than that?"

Sooner or later, most Goddess Spirituality writings speak of the need to transform society. Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987) depicts the prepatriarchal, gylanic⁴ cultures found in

archaeological remains of Old Europe and Minoan Crete as neither patriarchal nor matriarchal, but what she terms "partnership societies." Eisler rejects matriarchy, seeing it as only another form of dominator society, and insists that we need to move beyond domination into partnership, in which women are equal with men. Lucy Goodison also looks to ancient Crete for models of a culture free of the dualistic splits she thinks are at the heart of patriarchal culture's problems. Her *Moving Heaven and Earth* (1992), the result of 15 years of research about ancient Crete, found no evidence of matriarchy but plenty for a society that honored the connections of body and soul, spirituality and sexuality, thought and intuition. Goodison criticizes the spiritual/political split in the women's movement and finds in quantum physics support for a spiritual view of the universe. She describes an immanent spirituality and rejects cultural imperialism in individuals' searches for new symbols and spiritual systems. Starhawk, well known for her writings on Wicca, is also a spiritual feminist of the first order. In *Dreaming the Dark* (1982), she applies Goddess theology to socioeconomic issues (poverty, ecology, and political power), showing that an immanent divinity results in a new power-from-within model to replace the old power-over model. She continues these themes in *Truth Or Dare* (1987), which offers theory and practice of power-from-within approaches in both society and personal relationships. Starhawk provides poetry, rituals, and group exercises to help readers free themselves from patriarchal self-oppression (in the form of such creations as the Censor and the Self-Hater) in order to create a new paradigm of compassionate, responsible relationships between individuals and in society at large.

Queer Spiritualities: Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgendered

Sooner or later, gender oppression expands, becoming sexual oppression. Feminist scholars learned early that if any forms of oppression are to be eliminated,

all must be, so the issue of spiritual expression for sexual minorities is an important thread in feminist spiritualities. Today's major religions have always balked at any sexual expressions that vary from heterosexuality. Among spiritual

The ways patriarchy treats both nature and women are interrelated.

feminists who demanded a religion that reflected their experiences were many lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered folk, and a few gay men who recognized the importance of a spirituality which allowed their full identities. Many books treat issues of lesbians, bisexuals, gays, and transgendered folk within majority religions; Jane Adams Spahr's *Called Out: The Voices and Gifts of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Presbyterians* (1995) deserves special note because it contains writings by members of all four groups. Most works emphasize lesbians or gay men, with an occasional nod to bisexuals, and ignore transgendered and transsexual folks, like the otherwise excellent anthology *Que(e)rying Religion* (1997), whose 39 essays trace the shape of queer studies in religion today. It covers the history, culture, and scriptural referents to religion and queer sexualities from the full range of possibilities: staying within established religions, leaving, creating queer churches and synagogues, finding historical evidence of queer spiritual traditions, etc. Here, the focus will be on writings that consider a spirituality derived from and influenced by queer experience. Sometimes that spirituality appears within the context of the traditional churches, but more often it flourishes outside the mainstream. Although some might object to the term "queer," it is the most inclusive word available to name the varieties of nonheterosexual experience; it is becoming more widely used in the academy and has become a name of pride for many.

Craig O'Neill's *Coming Out Within* (1992), intended to help lesbians and gay men recover a sense of their own spirituality, identifies an eight-stage process they can use to work through their losses and restore their sense of themselves as spiritual beings. Although O'Neill specified no religion or denomination, his ideas of God seem largely derived from Jewish and Christian perspectives. Carter Heyward is more specific, writing in a nondenominational Christian context about the importance of sexualities as liberating resources which can strengthen one in the struggle for justice. *Touching Our Strength* (1989) presents a theology of the erotic in which sexuality is a "primary wellspring of our capacity to be creative together," and thus requires all of us to be out, to affirm sexual expression. She writes "to serve the interests of lesbians and gaymen, especially those who are coming into a sense of pride and delight in an embodied spirituality that, as yet, they may only intuit as a resource of empowerment and liberation." J. Michael Clark, a theologian who has developed a queer theology from his own and other queer people's experiences, in *A Defiant Celebration* (1990) affirms the goodness of gay and lesbian being as he examines the obstacles that patriarchy has created to full and healthy sexual expression. In *Beyond Our Ghettos* (1993), Clark argues that lesbian and gay experiences of expendability and exclusion, plus their unique spiritual experiences, give them a special perspective on issues of connectedness and the need for justice as applied to ecotheology. More recently, Clark has applied his perspective as a post-Christian, profeminist gay theologian to the issues of suffering and the search for meaning in *Defying the Darkness* (1997), which uses his experiences with AIDS, homophobia, and heterosexism to answer ancient questions about the divine and the nature of humanity. Clark concludes that everything is sacred and nothing will save us, and he affirms questioning as a religious practice and as a form of resistance to all that is unjust in our culture.

Other queer writers prefer to look beyond traditional religions for ways to live and express their unique spiritual perspectives. Christine Downing wrote *Myths and Mysteries of Same-Sex Love* (1989) to attain a deeper understanding of same-sex love in her own life. She revisits Freud to find a much more supportive view of homosexuality than is usually credited to him, then moves to the myths of ancient Greece to find divine and human myths that reflect her experience. She notes that most Greek myths involving homosexuality concern gay men, so she is required to follow Monique Wittig's suggestion to invent from the meager sources available to her. Annette Joy Van Dyke's *The Search for a Woman-Centered Spirituality* (1992) relies on contemporary literature to find a spiritual tradition for lesbians and other women-centered women in the writings of Leslie Marmon Silko, Paula Gunn Allen, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Starhawk, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Sonia Johnson, and Mary Daly. Many lesbians also find space for their spiritual expression in the women-only Goddess Spirituality and Dianic Wiccan traditions.

Gay men have sought a spiritual expression that affirmed their unique sexuality apart from lesbians. Many were inspired by Walter L. Williams's *The Spirit and the Flesh* (1992), which discusses the spiritual basis for transgendered and homosexual behavior of women and men among many American Indian tribes. Williams presents instances in which such people had a sacred role within their communities and shows the ways Western colonization affected those attitudes, often destroying them. Mitch Walker uses the image of the shaman in his own ways in *Visionary Love* (1980), a singular view of gayness as a spiritual path that allows its followers to challenge the established order. Walker emphasizes spiritual ecstasy and trance journeying as ways to envision coming changes.

Mark Thompson's anthology *Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning* (1987) helps nontraditional, nonmainstream gay men

explore issues of spirit and faith. Its 24 essays provide a multiplicity of perspectives on ways gay people can establish a unique role in human culture. The first section explores gay culture and the ways it functions in society; the second examines the definition of religion and offers ideas for magickal gay spirit-power and soul-making. The third shows ways gay men make their own myths and meanings in essays on the Radical Faerie movement as well as other ways that gay men are defining themselves as a separate people. Randy P. Conner's *Blossom of Bone* (1993), written for all gender-variant men (bisexual, gay, and transgendered), offers a definition of the Gay Spirituality movement that includes mysticism, a reverence for the divine, healing, divination, magick, and sacred art. Conner also discusses the Radical Faeries and describes a variety of spiritual traditions that have historically embraced gender variance and same-sex desire. Roger C. Lanphear offers his own vision of "spirexuality" in *Gay Spirituality* (1990), an autobiographical work describing techniques he has developed for growth and wholeness that, while they derive from his experience as a gay man, can be used by everyone. Many of his concepts derive from classic New Age techniques and ideas, including channeling, mediation, and theories of why we are here and how we can help the enlightenment that the world will soon undergo.

Ecofeminism: A Spirituality of Ecology

Concerns for the health of the planet have been written about for many years from a variety of approaches. Ecofeminism stems from a recognition that the ways patriarchy treats both nature and women are interrelated. Within the ecofeminist community many ascribe a specifically spiritual meaning to their work; for them, it is not simply survival that dictates their actions but a spiritual conviction, which makes recycling a

religious as well as a civic duty. This approach offends some ecofeminists, who see it as a return to the essentialist views of gender, the source of women's oppression by patriarchy. These ecofeminists also usually find any forms of religious expression deeply suspect. Spiritual ecofeminists maintain that by focusing on qualities traditionally assigned to women and nature, they can refocus on what it means to be human and change the current paradigm of nature as a commodity to be exploited. Ecofeminist spirituality empowers them to engage in the political and social activism needed to bring about change.

Susan Griffin first articulated the connections between patriarchy's domination of nature and of women in *Woman and Nature: The Roaring inside Her* (1978). Using deliberately subjective and emotional prose, Griffin outlines the ways that patriarchal separation from women and nature created the fears that produce patriarchal violence against and exploitation of women and nature, resulting in the ecological disasters we now face.

Some years after Griffin, several collections of essays on ecofeminism appeared, among them *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. by Judith Plant (1989), which contains 24 essays, poems, and interviews, nine in a section on ecofeminist spirituality, with other writings treating the meaning of ecofeminism, its politics, and its community. Ten of the 26 essays in *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, ed. by Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein (1990), deal with spiritual aspects of the topic. This compilation takes note of some of the varieties of feminist spiritualities by including Womanist and American Indian writers. Carol J. Adams did the same in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (1993), in which all the essays deal with some aspect of spirituality. Many also address the differing viewpoints between industrial nations and countries where economic survival contends with ecofeminist goals.

Many feminists within the Christian traditions embraced ecofeminism as well. Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre's collection *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology* (1995), intended as an introduction to contemporary issues in ecology and theology, is a retrospective collection that reprints material from a 35-year period, so it is useful as a historical overview. Rosemary Radford Ruether's compilation of essays *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* (1996) examines ways religions have contributed to domination, and how they might also be liberating. An extremely important collection, it focuses on women in countries other than the US and includes religions other than Christianity and Judaism. It also addresses the failure of Northern ecofeminists to address issues of privilege, class, race, and poverty in their analyses and in their actions.

Many authors who contributed to or edited anthologies on ecofeminist spirituality also wrote their own books on the topic. Charlene Spretnak was one of the first to see the need for spirituality in ecological (and other) political groups; *The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics* (1986) discusses some of the reasons the Green Party, whose platform is both ecological and feminist, avoids religion. Spretnak's definition of spirituality explains why a spiritual infrastructure is needed to help transform society in Green, ecofeminist directions. Joanna Macy's *World as Lover, World as Self* (1991) explains how Buddhist teachings, with their concept of dependent coarising, inform and fuel her work in empowerment and ecology. Rosemary Radford Ruether looks at similar issues from a Christian perspective in *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (1992). She gives an excellent definition of ecofeminist thought and shows how domination was sacralized in the West through Judaism and Christianity. She also shows that both

traditions contain elements of a biophilic, transformative approach to nature and spirit, and she offers approaches to reshaping society along those lines. In *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (1993), Sallie McFague writes deliberately from and to a white, middle-class, American Christian, first world, privileged, mainstream perspective to convey the message that bodies matter, and that we need to begin to think and act from that reality. She calls for a reinterpretation of Christian doctrine that sees humans as part of nature rather than separate from it; she draws on science, feminism, and Creation Spirituality. Eleanor Rae, allied with Goddess Spirituality, in *Women, the Earth, the Divine* (1994) urges a reclamation of the feminine in women, the earth, and the divine in responding to the ecological crisis. She defines ecofeminism; explains the values, ethics, and politics of an earth-centered approach to life; offers a contemporary cosmology that connects myth, mysticism, and science; and looks at the ways Divine Feminine can be developed in Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam. Irene Diamond points out the importance of language in influencing our choices in *Fertile Ground: Women, Earth, and the Limits of Control* (1994). She criticizes the feminist movement's search for control, which she feels leads to misuse of the Third World and women's bodies and to a rejection of the spiritual; she affirms instead the importance of spiritual visions to inform ecofeminist practices. For Diamond, the primary ecofeminist insight is that all oppressions are interconnected.

Reference Books

Difficult as it may be to believe, this essay touches only lightly on the many threads of feminist spiritualities. At present three bibliographies are devoted to these topics: Anne Carson's *Feminist Spirituality and the Feminine Divine* (1986) and *Goddesses and Wise Women* (1992), and Clare B. Fischer's *Of Spirituality: A Feminist Perspective* (1995). Shelley Davis Finson has compiled a bibliography on Christian feminism, *Women and Religion* (1991). An excellent work devoted to this topic is *Encyclopedia of Women and World Religion*, ed. by Serinity Young (1999). Most general encyclopedias of religion have some coverage of these topics; *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Mircea Eliade (1987), offers the best range. Subject encyclopedias offer a more specific focus; Barbara Walker has written two, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (1983) and *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects* (1988). Martha Ann and Dorothy Myers Imel give admirable geographic coverage to Goddesses around the world in *Goddesses in World Mythology* (1993). Among Patricia Monaghan's contributions are *The Book of Goddesses and Heroines* (1990) and *The New Book of Goddesses and Heroines* (1997). A popular handbook and source for a variety of information about the Goddess Spirituality movement is *The Woman-spirit Sourcebook*, ed. by Patrice Wynne (1988). There are also two dictionaries, Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson's *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* (1996) and Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan's *An A to Z of Feminist Theology* (1996).

A Call for Further Research

This essay gives only a preliminary view of a vast topic. Any of its sections could support its own essay, discussing journals as well as books. Perhaps this will inspire others to add new threads to the tapestry of feminist spiritualities.

End Notes

1. Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," in *Womanspirit Rising*, ed. by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (Harper San Francisco), 1992, p. 275.
2. According to Allen, gynocracies are "... woman-centered tribal societies in which matrilocality, matrifocality, matrilinearity, maternal control of household goods and resources, and female deities of the magnitude of the Christian God were and are present and active features of traditional tribal life." Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Beacon), 1986, pp. 3-4.
3. Monique Wittig, *Le Guerilleres*, trans. by David Le Vay (Avon Books, 1971), p. 89: Cited in Carol P. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite* (Harper & Row, 1987), p. 121.
4. Eisler coined the term "gylany" from the Greek terms for woman (gyne) and man (aner), with "1" to link the two (from the Greek *lyein* or *lyo*, meaning both to solve/resolve and to dissolve/set free), to designate a social system in which neither women (matriarchy) nor men (patriarchy) were dominant, but where both recognized their need for the other in a balanced partnership.

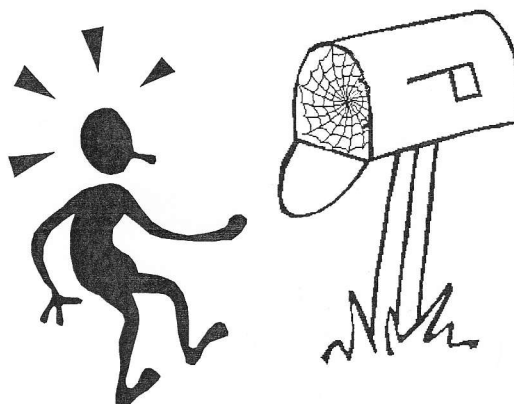
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