

CHAPTER ONE

After the Death of God the Father

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

—ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

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

Within this context a mystification of roles takes place: the husband dominating his wife represents God "himself." The images and values of a given society have been projected into the realm of dogmas and "Articles of Faith," and these in turn justify the social structures which have given rise to them and which sustain their plausibility. The belief system becomes hardened and objectified, seeming to have an unchangeable independent existence and validity of its own. It resists social change that would rob it of its plausibility. Despite the vicious circle, however, change can occur in society, and ideologies can die, though they die hard.

As the women's movement begins to have its effect upon the fabric of society, transforming it from patriarchy into something that never existed before—into a diarchal situation that is radically new—it can become the greatest single challenge to the major religions of the world, Western and Eastern. Beliefs and values that have held sway for thousands of years will be questioned as never before. This revolution may well be also the greatest single hope for survival of spiritual consciousness on this planet.

The Challenge: Emergence of Whole Human Beings

There are some who persist in claiming that the liberation of women will only mean that new characters will assume the same old roles, and that nothing will change essentially in structures, ideologies, and values. This supposition is often based on the observation that the very few women in "masculine" occupations often behave much as men do. This kind of reasoning is not at all to the point, for it fails to take into account the fact that tokenism does not change stereotypes or social systems but works to preserve them, since it dulls the revolutionary impulse. The minute proportion of women in the United States who occupy such roles (such as senators, judges, business executives, doctors, etc.) have been trained by men in institutions defined and designed by men, and they have been pressured subtly to operate according to male rules. There are no alternate models. As sociologist

Alice Rossi has suggested, this is not what the women's movement in its most revolutionary potential is all about.¹

What *is* to the point is an emergence of woman-consciousness such as has never before taken place. It is unimaginative and out of touch with what is happening in the women's movement to assume that the becoming of women will simply mean uncritical acceptance of structures, beliefs, symbols, norms, and patterns of behavior that have been given priority by society under male domination. Rather, this becoming will act as catalyst for radical change in our culture. It has been argued cogently by Piaget that structure is maintained by an interplay of transformation laws that never yield results beyond the system and never tend to employ elements external to the system.² This is indicative of what *can* effect basic alteration in the system, that is, a potent influence *from without*. Women who reject patriarchy have this power and indeed *are* this power of transformation that is ultimately threatening to things as they are.

The roles and structures of patriarchy have been developed and sustained in accordance with an artificial polarization of human qualities into the traditional sexual stereotypes. The image of the person in authority and the accepted understanding of "his" role has corresponded to the eternal masculine stereotype, which implies hyper-rationality (in reality, frequently reducible to pseudo-rationality), "objectivity," aggressivity, the possession of dominating and manipulative attitudes toward persons and the environment, and the tendency to construct boundaries between the self (and those identified with the self) and "the Other." The caricature of human being which is represented by this stereotype depends for its existence upon the opposite caricature—the eternal feminine. This implies hyper-emotionalism, passivity, self-abnegation, etc. By becoming whole persons women can generate a counterforce to the stereotype of the leader, challenging the artificial polarization of human characteristics into sex-role identification. There is no reason to assume that women who have the support of each other to criticize not only the feminine stereotype but the masculine stereotype as well will simply adopt the latter as a model for ourselves. On the contrary, what is happening is that women are developing a wider range of qualities and skills. This is beginning to encourage and in fact demand a comparably liberating process in men—a phenomenon which has begun in men's liberation groups and which is taking place every day within the context of personal relationships. The becoming of androgynous human persons implies a radical change in the fabric of human consciousness and in styles of human behavior.

This change is already threatening the credibility of the religious symbols of our culture. Since many of these have been used to justify oppression, such a challenge should be seen as redemptive. Religious symbols fade and die when the cultural situation that gave rise to them and supported them ceases to give them plausibility. Such an event generates anxiety, but it is part of the risk involved in a faith which accepts the relativity of all symbols and recognizes that clinging to these as fixed and ultimate is self-destructive and idolatrous.

The becoming of new symbols is not a matter that can be decided arbitrarily around a conference table. Rather, symbols grow out of a changing communal situation and experience. This does not mean that we are confined to the role of passive spectators. The experience of the becoming of women cannot be understood merely conceptually and abstractly but through active participation in the overcoming of servitude. Both

activism and creative thought flow from and feed into the evolving woman-consciousness. The cumulative effect is a surge of awareness beyond the symbols and doctrines of patriarchal religion.

The Inadequate God of Popular Preaching

The image of the divine Father in heaven has not always been conducive to humane behavior, as any perceptive reader of history knows. The often cruel behavior of Christians toward unbelievers and toward dissenters among themselves suggests a great deal not only about the values of the society dominated by that image, but also about how that image itself functions in relation to behavior. There has been a basic ambivalence in the image of the heavenly patriarch—a split between the God of love and the jealous God who represents the collective power of "his" chosen people. As historian Arnold Toynbee has indicated, this has reflected and perpetuated a double standard of behavior.³ Without debating the details of his historical analysis, the insight is available on an experiential level. The character of Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* is a vivid illustration of the marriage of tenderness and violence so intricately blended in the patriarchal ideal. The worshippers of the loving Father may in a sense love their neighbors, but in fact the term applies only to those within a restricted and unstable circumference, and these worshippers can "justifiably" be intolerant and fanatic persecutors of those outside the sacred circle.

How this God operates is illustrated in contemporary American civil religion.⁴ In one of the White House sermons given during the first term of Richard Nixon, Rabbi Louis Finkelstein expressed the hope that a future historian may say "that in the period of great trials and great tribulations, the finger of God pointed to Richard Milhous Nixon, giving the vision and the wisdom to save the world and civilization; and also to open the way for our country to realize the good that the twentieth century offers mankind."⁵ Within this context, as Charles Henderson has shown, God is an American and Nixon is "his" anointed one.⁶ The preachers carefully selected for the White House sermons stress that this nation is "under God." The logical conclusion is that its policies are right. Under God, the President becomes a Christ figure. In 1969, the day the astronauts would set foot on the moon, and when the President was preparing to cross the Pacific "in search of peace," one of these preachers proclaimed:

*And my hope for mankind is strengthened in the knowledge that our intrepid President himself will soon go into orbit, reaching boldly for the moon of peace. God grant that he, too, may return in glory and that countless millions of prayers that follow him shall not have been in vain.*⁷

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

*Selection of a President has to be an act of faith. . . . This faith isn't achieved by reason: it's achieved by charisma, by a feeling of trust. . . .*⁸

Price also argued that the campaign would be effective only "if we can get people to make the *emotional* leap, or what theologians call 'leap of faith.'"⁹ This is, of course, precisely the inauthentic leap that Camus labeled as philosophical suicide. It is the suicide demanded by a civil religion in which "God," the Savior-President, and "our nation" more or less merge. When the "leap" is made, it is possible simply not to see what the great God-Father and his anointed one are actually doing. Among the chosen ones are scientists and professors who design perverse methods of torture and death such as flechette pellets that shred the internal organs of "the enemy" and other comparable inhumane "anti-personnel" weapons. Also among the elect are politicians and priests who justify and bestow their blessing upon the system that perpetrates such atrocities. "Under God" are included the powerful industrialists who are making the planet uninhabitable.

Sophisticated thinkers, of course, have never intellectually identified God with a Superfather in heaven. Nevertheless it is important to recognize that even when very abstract conceptualizations of God are formulated in the mind, images survive in the imagination in such a way that a person can function on two different and even apparently contradictory levels at the same time. Thus one can speak of God as spirit and at the same time imagine "him" as belonging to the male sex.¹⁰ Such primitive images can profoundly affect conceptualizations which appear to be very refined and abstract. So too the Yahweh of the future, so cherished by the theology of hope, comes through on an imaginative level as exclusively a He-God, and it is consistent with this that theologians of hope have attempted to develop a political theology which takes no explicit cognizance of the devastation wrought by sexual politics.

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

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

relationship to God which have been oppressive in their connotations, and the kind of language that is spoken from and to the rising woman-consciousness.

Castrating "God"

I have already suggested that if God is male, then the male is God. The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live on in the human imagination. The process of cutting away the Supreme Phallus can hardly be a merely "rational" affair. The problem is one of transforming the collective imagination so that this distortion of the human aspiration to transcendence loses its credibility.

Some religious leaders, notably Mary Baker Eddy and Ann Lee, showed insight into the problem to some extent and tried to stress the "maternal" aspect of what they called "God."¹¹ A number of feminists have referred to "God" as "she." While all of this has a point, the analysis has to reach a deeper level. The most basic change has to take place in women—in our being and self-image. Otherwise there is danger of settling for mere reform, reflected in the phenomenon of "crossing," that is, of attempting to use the oppressor's weapons against him. Black theology's image of the Black God illustrates this. It can legitimately be argued that a transsexual operation upon "God," changing "him" to "her," would be a far more profound alteration than a mere pigmentation change. However, to stop at this level of discourse would be a trivialization of the deep problem of human becoming in women.

Beyond the Inadequate God

The various theologies that hypostatize transcendence, that is, those which in one way or another objectify "God" as a *being*, thereby attempt in a self-contradictory way to envisage transcendent reality as finite. "God" then functions to legitimate the existing social, economic, and political status quo, in which women and other victimized groups are subordinate.

"God" can be used oppressively against women in a number of ways. First, it occurs in an overt manner when theologians proclaim women's subordination to be God's will. This of course has been done throughout the centuries, and residues remain in varying degrees of subtlety and explicitness in the writings of twentieth century thinkers such as Barth, Bonhoeffer, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Teilhard de Chardin.¹²

Second, even in the absence of such explicitly oppressive justification, the phenomenon is present when one-sex symbolism for God and for the human relationship to God is used. The following passage illustrates the point:

To believe that God is Father is to become aware of oneself not as a stranger, not as an outsider or an alienated person, but as a son who belongs or a person appointed to a marvelous destiny, which he shares with the whole community. To believe that God is Father means to be able to say "we" in regard to all men.¹³

A woman whose consciousness has been aroused can say that such language makes her aware of herself as a stranger, as an outsider, as an alienated person, not as a daughter

who belongs or who is appointed to a marvelous destiny. She cannot belong to *this* without assenting to her own lobotomy.

Third, even when the basic assumptions of God-language appear to be nonsexist, and when language is somewhat purified of fixation upon maleness, it is damaging and implicitly compatible with sexism if it encourages detachment from the reality of the human struggle against oppression in its concrete manifestations. That is, the lack of explicit relevance of intellection to the fact of oppression in its precise forms, such as sexual hierarchy, is itself oppressive. This is the case when theologians write long treatises on creative hope, political theology, or revolution without any specific acknowledgment of or application to the problem of sexism or other specific forms of injustice. Such irrelevance is conspicuous in the major works of "theologians of hope" such as Moltmann, Pannenberg, and Metz. This is not to say that the vision of creative eschatology is completely irrelevant, but that it lacks specific grounding in the concrete experiences of the oppressed. The theorizing then has a quality of unreality. Perhaps an obvious reason for this is that the theologians themselves have not shared in the experience of oppression and therefore write from the privileged distance of those who have at best a "knowledge about" the subject.

Tillich's ontological theology, too, even though it is potentially liberating in a very radical sense, fails to be adequate in this regard. It is true that Tillich *tries* to avoid hypostatization of "God" (though the effort is not completely successful) and that his manner of speaking about the ground and power of being would be difficult to use for the legitimation of any sort of oppression.¹⁴ However, the specific relevance of "power of being" to the fact of sexual oppression is not indicated. Moreover, just as his discussion of God is "detached," so is the rest of his theology—a point that I will pursue later on. This detachment from the problem of relevance of God-language to the struggle against demonic power structures characterizes not only Tillich but also other male theoreticians who have developed a relatively nonsexist language for transcendence. Thinkers such as Whitehead, James, and Jaspers employ God-language that soars beyond sexual hierarchy as a specific problem to be confronted in the process of human becoming.

The new insight of women is bringing us to a point beyond such direct and indirect theological oppressiveness that traditionally has centered around discussions of "God." It is becoming clear that if God-language is even implicitly compatible with oppressiveness, failing to make clear the relation between intellection and liberation, then it will either have to be developed in such a way that it becomes explicitly relevant to the problem of sexism or else dismissed. In asserting this I am employing a pragmatic yardstick or verification process to God-language in a manner not totally dissimilar to that of William James. In my thinking, the specific criterion which implies a mandate to reject certain forms of God-talk is expressed in the question: Does this language hinder human becoming by reinforcing sex-role socialization? Expressed positively—a point to be developed later on—the question is: Does it *encourage* human becoming toward psychological and social fulfillment, toward an androgynous mode of living, toward transcendence?

It is probable that the movement will eventually generate a new language of transcendence. There is no reason to assume that the term "God" will always be necessary, as if the three-letter word, materially speaking, could capture and encapsulate transcendent being. At this point in history, however, it is probable that the new God-

word's essential newness will be conveyed more genuinely by its being placed in a different semantic field than by a mere material alteration in sound or appearance of the word. Since the women's revolution implies the liberation of all human beings, it is impossible to believe that during the course of its realization the religious imagination and intelligence will simply lie dormant. Part of the challenge is to recognize the poverty of all words and symbols and the fact of our past idolatry regarding them, and then to turn to our own resources for bringing about the radically new in our own lives. It is this living that is generating the new meaning context for God, some elements of which can now be examined.

Women's Liberation and Revelatory Courage

I have already indicated that it would be unrealistic to dismiss the fact that the symbolic and linguistic instruments for communication—which include essentially the whole theological tradition in world religions—have been formulated by males under the conditions of patriarchy. It is therefore inherent in these symbolic and linguistic structures that they serve the purposes of patriarchal social arrangements. Even the usual and accepted means of theological dissent have been restricted in such a way that only some questions have been allowed to arise. Many questions that are of burning importance to women now simply have not occurred in the past (and to a large extent in the present) to those with "credentials" to do theology. Others may have been voiced timidly but quickly squelched as stupid, irrelevant, or naive. Therefore, attempts by women theologians now merely to "up-date" or to reform theology within acceptable patterns of question-asking are not likely to get very far.

Moreover, within the context of the prevailing social climate it has been possible for scholars to be aware of the most crudely dehumanizing texts concerning women in the writings of religious "authorities" and theologians—from Augustine to Aquinas, to Luther, to Knox, to Barth—and at the same time to treat their unverified opinions on far more imponderable matters with utmost reverence and respect. That is, the blatant misogynism of these men has not been the occasion of a serious credibility gap even for those who have disagreed on this "point." It has simply been ignored or dismissed as trivial. By contrast, in the emerging consciousness of women this context is beginning to be perceived in its full significance and as deeply relevant to the worldview in which such "authorities" have seen other seemingly unrelated subjects, such as the problem of God. Hence the present awakening of the hitherto powerless sex demands an explosion of creative imagination that can withstand the disapproval of orthodoxy and overreach the boundaries cherished by conventional minds.

The driving revelatory force that is making it possible for women to speak—and to *hear* each other speak—more authentically about God is courage in the face of the risks that attend the liberation process. Since the projections of patriarchal religion have been blocking the dynamics of existential courage by offering the false security of alienation, that is, of self-reduction in sex roles, there is reason to hope for the emergence of a new religious consciousness in the confrontation with sexism that is now in its initial stages. The becoming of women may be not only the doorway to deliverance which secular humanism has passionately fought for—but also a doorway to something, that is, a new phase in the human spirit's quest for God.

This becoming who we really are requires existential courage to confront the experience of nothingness. All human beings are threatened by nonbeing. In Tillich's analysis, the resultant anxiety surfaces in relation to the threat of fate and death, guilt and condemnation, and meaninglessness.¹⁵ While Tillich analyzes courage in universalist, humanist categories, he does not betray any awareness of the relevance of this to women's confrontation with the structured evil of patriarchy. I am suggesting that at this point in history women are in a unique sense called to be the bearers of existential courage in society.

People attempt to overcome the threat of nonbeing by denying the self. The outcome of this is ironic: that which is dreaded triumphs, for we are caught in the self-contradictory bind of shrinking our being to avoid nonbeing. The only alternative is self-actualization in spite of the ever-present nothingness. Part of the problem is that people, women in particular, who are seemingly incapable of a high degree of self-actualization have been made such by societal structures that are products of human attempts to create security. Those who are alienated from their own deepest identity do receive a kind of security in return for accepting very limited and undifferentiated identities. The woman who single-mindedly accepts the role of "housewife," for example, may to some extent avoid the experience of nothingness but she also avoids a fuller participation in being, which would be her only real security and source of community. Submerged in such a role, she cannot achieve a breakthrough to creativity. Many strong women are worn out in the struggle to break out of these limits before reaching the higher levels of intellectual discovery or of creativity.

The beginning of a breakthrough means a realization that there is an existential conflict between the self and structures that have given such crippling security. This requires confronting the shock of nonbeing with the courage to be. It means facing the nameless anxieties of fate, which become concretized in loss of jobs, friends, social approval, health, and even life itself. Also involved is anxiety of guilt over refusing to do what society demands, a guilt which can hold one in its grip long after it has been recognized as false. Finally, there is the anxiety of meaninglessness, which can be overwhelming at times when the old simple meanings, role definitions, and life expectations have been rooted out and rejected openly and one emerges into a world without models.

This confrontation with the anxiety of nonbeing is revelatory, making possible the relativization of structures that are seen as human products, and therefore not absolute and ultimate. It drives consciousness beyond fixation upon "things as they are." Courage to be is the key to the revelatory power of the feminist revolution.

The Struggle Toward Self-Transcendence

The drive toward transcendence can be envisaged mythically in different but interrelated ways. This point has been made in an original way by Herbert Richardson, whose typology I am relating to sex role socialization in the following analysis.¹⁶ The myth of separation and return (going away and coming home again—like Ulysses) is obviously a cyclic vision and it is often bound up with parental images. Birth means separation from the mother, but the child immediately returns to its parents in its dependency for the necessities of life. Popular Christianity envisages human life in these terms, looking

forward to a return to the Father in heaven. The theme of *exitus-reditus* (exit and return) was commonly used in medieval theology to describe the human relationship to God. Although this theme was developed in a subtle and intricate way and although the journey did involve transformation through grace, the imagery of "return" that was attached to it lent itself easily to an attitude of detachment from social injustice. Taken on the imaginative level the myth of separation and return reflects quite well the limited sort of transcendence that has been the only possibility for most women in the course of history—separation from the home of parents only to return to paternalistic domination in the home of a husband. The eternal circle of separation from and return to infantile dependence has been the story of the feminine mode of existence.

Another kind of transcendence myth has been dramatization of human life in terms of conflict and vindication. This focuses upon the situation of oppression and the struggle for liberation. It is a short-circuited transcendence when the struggle against oppression becomes an end in itself, the focal point of all meaning. There is an inherent contradiction in the idea that those devoted to a cause have found their whole meaning in the struggle, so that the desired victory becomes implicitly an undesirable meaninglessness. Such a truncated vision is one of the pitfalls of theologies of the oppressed. Sometimes black theology, for example that of James Cone, resounds with a cry for vengeance and is fiercely biblical and patriarchal. It transcends religion as a crutch (the separation and return of much old-fashioned Negro spirituality) but tends to settle for being religion as a gun. Tailored to fit only the situation of racial oppression, it inspires a will to vindication but leaves unexplored other dimensions of liberation. It does not get beyond the sexist models internalized by the self and controlling society—models that are at the root of racism and that perpetuate it. The Black God and Black Messiah apparently are merely the same patriarchs after a pigmentation operation—their behavior unaltered.¹⁷

Fortunately, the danger that the new spiritual consciousness of women will be truncated in a similar way is greatly reduced by the fact that the stereotypically male symbols of Christianity do not lend themselves to this kind of easy adaptation by feminism. There is less "opportunity" for us to fall into facile repetition of the same mistakes. With the rise of feminism, women have indeed come to see the necessity of conflict, of letting rage surface and of calling forth a will to liberation. Yet—partially because there is such an essential contrast between feminism and patriarchal religion's destructive symbols and values, and partially because women's lives are intricately bound up with those of men—biologically, emotionally, socially, and professionally—it is quite clear that women's liberation is essentially linked with full human liberation. Women generally can see very well that the movement will self-destruct if we settle for vengeance. The more imminent danger, then, is that some women will seek premature reconciliation, not allowing themselves to see the depth and implications of feminism's essential opposition to sexist society. It can be easy to leap on the bandwagon of "human liberation" without paying the price in terms of polarization, tensions, risk, and pain that the ultimate objective of real human liberation demands.

A third myth of transcendence (still using Richardson's typology) is integrity and transformation. Within this perspective, the individual seeks self-transformation and spiritual rebirth. This involves the becoming of psychic unity, which means that one does not have to depend upon another for "complementarity" but can love independently.

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Nonbeing, Power of Being, and Hope

The striving toward psychic wholeness, or androgyny, incorporates the insights and clues in the less adequate modes of envisaging transcendence. The separation and return motif, at its best, pointed to the dimension of depth in human existence. Its basis lay in intimations of the holiness of what *is*. The vision that it entailed, however, often tended to be nonsocial and abstracted from history, or—to borrow (somewhat out of context) a phrase from Moltmann—the nonhistorical mysticism of the solitary soul. At its best, this ontological sacramental faith gave a kind of interior freedom. A high point of cyclic theological expression was the Thomistic synthesis. The conflict and vindication motif rests more upon a kind of moral faith, an intimation of the holiness of what *ought to be*. It too has tended to be individualistic and, with the help of Kant, has bred a kind of split-level consciousness in which personal struggles for transcendence can exist side by side with social conformity. In the recently developed theology of hope, the conflict and vindication motif is brought to a level of social concern that transcends some of the limitations of the Protestant ethic. Yet the ontological dimension of the holiness of what *is* generally rejected as Hellenic and unbiblical I am suggesting that the vision of human becoming as a process of integration and transformation, *as this vision is emerging in the women's revolution*, potentially includes both the individualistic ontological dimension of depth and revolutionary participation in history. It does this precisely because it strikes at the externalized structures and internalized images of patriarchy that have cut us off from realizing psychic wholeness in ourselves and consequently have cut down our capacity for genuine participation in history.

The seeds of such a synthesis were present to some extent in Tillich's vision, especially as expressed in *The Courage to Be*, even though this was not developed as a political theology. As he explains, existential courage is dynamic and it has two sides: the courage to be as a self and the courage to be as a part. I suggest that such courage makes creative, communal, revolutionary hope possible to the extent that the courage is expressed in confrontation with earthly powers and principalities that embody nonbeing

in our patriarchal culture. It is this dimension of confrontation that makes courage give rise to creative hope.

This synthesis of hope and courage, potentially in the dynamics of the feminist revolution, includes separation and return since by breaking from the past and consciously creating our own history we change the past, that is, change and expand our understanding of it. This separation and return happens, for example, when we establish the significance of events that historians have disregarded, such as the achievements of great women and major landmarks in the history of the oppression of women. The synthesis also includes conflict and vindication, not in the sense of attempting to reduce those in power to objects, but in the sense of breaking down the masculine/feminine models thrust upon us by the powers and principalities that shrink the human potential of women and men.

If one were to judge by theological writings of the past several years, from Gogarten to Harvey Cox to Leslie Dewart to Pannenberg, it would appear that the sense of being is disappearing from the contemporary consciousness. Before jumping to such conclusions, however, it would be well to consider at least two points. In the first place, existential questions have never been expressed explicitly in ontological terms most of the time by most people, who indeed seem to have spent most of their energy evading such questions. The question of being and nonbeing (to be or not to be) in all of its poignancy, arises in times of great distress, that is, in "marginal situations" (Berger) such as proximity to death, and occasionally in times of extremely positive "peak experiences."¹⁸ In the second place, it is become increasingly evident that among disaffected members of the younger generation—younger in years and/or in spirit—there is a resurgence of ontological awareness which theologians recently have tended to overlook.¹⁹ It appears that there has been a loss of the sense of being in our culture, and that this is essentially what the alienated are experiencing and communicating—an awareness of depth of reality that liberates from false consciousness. As I have indicated, the liberation of women involves susceptibility to the experience of nonbeing in a most dramatic way, for women have been the most radically alienated of all segments of society.

I am proposing that all authentic human hope is ontological, that is, that it requires facing nothingness. This experience gives a sense of distance and relativity in relation to the symbols prevailing in one's culture. Without it, the mind tends to perceive these as literally "true" or at least as permanently adequate for all cultural situations, which means the human mind becomes paralyzed by its own products. This is, I think, the essential inadequacy of non-ontological "theology of hope," which obstinately stays within the terrain of biblical language.²⁰ When women reach the point of recognizing that we are aliens in this terrain, the sense of transcendence and the surge of hope can be seen as rooted in the power of being, which, perhaps for lack a better word, some would still call "God."

Why Speak about "God"?

It might seem that the women's revolution should just go about its business of generating a new consciousness, without worrying about God. I suggest that the fallacy involved in

this would be an overlooking of a basic question that is implied in human existence and that the pitfall in such an oversight is cutting off the radical potential of the movement.

It is reasonable to take the position that sustained effort toward self-transcendence requires keeping alive in one's consciousness the question of ultimate transcendence, that is, of God. It implies recognition of the fact that we have no power *over* the ultimately real, and that whatever authentic power we have is derived from *participation in* ultimate reality. This awareness, always hard to sustain, makes it possible to be free of idolatry even in regard to one's own cause, since it tells us that all presently envisaged goals, lifestyles, symbols, and societal structures may be transitory. This is the meaning that the question of God should have for liberation, sustaining a concern that is really open to the future, in other words, that is really ultimate. Such a concern will not become fixated upon limited objectives. Feminists in the past have in a way been idolatrous about such objectives as the right to vote. Indeed, this right is due to women in justice and it is entirely understandable that feminists' energies were drained by the efforts needed to achieve even such a modicum of justice. But from the experience of such struggles we are in a position now to distrust token victories within a societal and structural framework that renders them almost meaningless. The new wave of feminism desperately needs to be not only many-faceted but cosmic and ultimately religious in its vision. This means reaching outward and inward toward the God beyond and beneath the gods who have stolen our identity.

The idea that human beings are "to the image of God" is an intuition whose implications could hardly be worked through under patriarchal conditions. If it is true that human beings have projected "God" in their own image, it is also true that we can evolve beyond the projections of earlier stages of consciousness. It is the creative potential itself in human beings that is the image of God.²¹ As the essential victims of the archaic God-projections, women can bring this process of creativity into a new phase. This involves iconoclasm—the breaking of idols. Even—and perhaps especially—through the activity of its most militantly atheistic and a-religious members, the movement is smashing images that obstruct the becoming of the image of God. The basic idol-breaking will be done on the level of internalized images of male superiority, on the plane of exorcising them from consciousness and from the cultural institutions that breed them.

One aspect of this expurgation is dethronement of false Gods—ideas and symbols of God that religion has foisted upon the human spirit (granted that the human spirit has created the religions that do this). I have already discussed this to some extent, but it might be well to focus specifically upon three false deities who still haunt the prayers, hymns, sermons, and religious education of Christianity. The three usurpers I have in mind have already been detected and made the targets of attack by liberal male theologians, but the point in mentioning them here is to indicate the specific relevance of feminism to their demise.

One of the false deities to be dethroned is the God of explanation, or "God as a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge," as Bonhoeffer called him.²² This serves sometimes as the legitimation of anomalous occurrences such as the suffering of a child, a legitimation process which Peter Berger lucidly analyzes in discussing the problem of theodicy.²³ Such phenomena are "explained" as being God's will. So also are socially prevailing inequalities of power and privilege, by a justifying process which easily encourages masochistic attitudes. Clearly, this deity does not encourage

commitment to the task of analyzing and eradicating the social, economic, and psychological roots of suffering. As marginal beings who are coming into awareness, women are in a situation to see that "God's plan" is often a front for men's plans and a cover for inadequacy, ignorance, and evil. Our vantage point offers opportunities for dislodging this deity from its revered position on the scale of human delusions.

Another idol is the God of otherworldliness. The most obvious face of this deity in the past has been that of the Judge whose chief activity consists in rewarding and punishing after death. As de Beauvoir indicated, women have been the major consumers of this religious product. Since there has been so little self-realization possible by the female sex "in this life," it was natural to focus attention on the next. As mass consumers of this image, women have the power to remove it from the market, mainly by living full lives here and now. I do not mean to advocate a mere re-utterance of the "secularization" theology that was so popular in the sixties. This obvious shape of the God of otherworldliness has after all been the target of male theologians for some time, and the result has often been a kind of translation of religion into humanism to such an extent that there is a kind of "self-liquidation of theology."²⁴ What I see beginning to happen with women coming into their own goes beyond this secularization. The rejection of the simplistic God of otherworldliness does not mean necessarily reduction to banal secularism. If women can sustain the courage essential to liberation this can give rise to a deeper "otherworldliness"—an awareness that the process of creating a counterworld to the counterfeit "this world" presented to consciousness by the societal structures that oppress us is participation in eternal life.

It should be noted that the God lurking behind some forms of Protestant piety has functioned similarly to the otherworldly God of popular Roman Catholic piety. In his analysis of the effects of Luther's doctrine of salvation by faith alone, Max Weber uncovers serious problems of ethical motivation, involving a complicated series of phenomena: "Every rational and planned procedure for achieving salvation, every reliance on good works, and above all every effort to surpass normal ethical behavior by ascetic achievement is regarded by religion based on faith as a wicked preoccupation with purely human powers."²⁵ Trans-worldly asceticism and monasticism tend to be rejected when salvation by faith is stressed, and as a result there may be an increased emphasis upon vocational activity within the world. However, as Weber explains, emphasis upon personal religious relationship to God tends to be accompanied by an attitude of individualism in pursuit of such worldly vocational activity. One consequence is an attitude of patient resignation regarding institutional structures, both worldly and churchly.²⁶ It is precisely this schizophrenic attitude that combines personal vocational ambition within the prevailing set of social arrangements and passive acceptance of the system that radical feminism recognizes as destructive.

A third idol, intimately related to those described above, is the God who is the Judge of "sin," who confirms the rightness of the rules and roles of the reigning system, maintaining false consciences and self-destructive guilt feelings. Women have suffered both mentally and physically from this deity, in whose name they have been informed that birth control and abortion are unequivocally wrong, that they should be subordinate to their husbands, that they must be present at rituals and services in which men have all the leadership roles and in which they are degraded not only by enforced passivity but also verbally and symbolically. Although this is most blatant in the arch-conservative

religions, the God who imposes false guilt is hardly absent from liberal Protestantism and Judaism, where his presence is more subtle. Women's growth in self-respect will deal the death blow to this as well as to the other demons dressed as Gods.

Women's Liberation as Spiritual Revolution

I have indicated that because the becoming of women involves a radical encounter with nothingness, it bears with it a new surge of ontological hope. This hope is essentially active. The passive hope that has been so prevalent in the history of religious attitudes corresponds to the objectified God from whom one may anticipate favors. Within that frame of reference human beings have tried to relate to ultimate reality as an object to be known, cajoled, manipulated. The tables are turned, however, for the objectified "God" has a way of reducing his producers to objects who lack capacity for autonomous action. In contrast to this, the God who is power of being acts as a moral power summoning women and men to act out of our deepest hope and to become who we can be. I am therefore in agreement with Johannes Metz that authentic hope will be active and creative.²⁷ The difference is that I see the specific experiential basis for this as an ontological experience. This experience in its first phase is one of nonbeing. In its second phase it is an intuition of being which, as Jacques Maritain described it, is a *dynamic* intuition.²⁸ Clearly, from what has preceded in this chapter, I see this ontological basis of hope to be particularly available to women at this point in history because of the marginal situation of females in an androcentric world.

This hope is communal rather than merely individualistic, because it is grounded in the two-edged courage to be. That is, it is hope coming from the experience of individuation *and* participation. It drives beyond the objectified God that is imagined as limited in benevolence, bestowing blessings upon "his" favorites. The power of being is that in which all finite beings participate, but not on a "one-to-one" basis, since this power is in all while transcending all. Communal hope involves in some manner a profound interrelationship with other finite beings, human and nonhuman. Ontological communal hope, then, is cosmic. Its essential dynamic is directed to the universal community.

Finally, ontological hope is revolutionary. Since the insight in which it is grounded is the double-edged intuition of nonbeing and of being, it extends beyond the superstitious fixations of technical reason. The latter, as Tillich has shown, when it is cut off from the intuitive knowledge of ontological reason, cannot get beyond superstition.²⁹ The rising consciousness that women are experiencing of our dehumanized situation has the power to turn attention around from the projections of our culture to the radically threatened human condition. Insofar as women are true to this consciousness, we have to be the most radical of revolutionaries, since the superstition revealed to us is omnipresent and plagues even the other major revolutionary movements of our time. Knowing that a Black or White, Marxist or Capitalist, countercultural or bourgeois male chauvinist deity (human or divine) will not differ essentially from his opposite, women will be forced in a dramatic way to confront the most haunting of human questions, the question of God. This confrontation may not find its major locus within the theological academy or the institutional churches and it may not always express itself in recognizable theological or philosophical language. However, there is a dynamism in the ontological affirmation of

self that reaches out toward the nameless God.³⁰ In hearing and naming ourselves out of the depths, women are naming *toward* God, which is what theology always should have been about. Unfortunately it tended to stop at fixing names *upon* God, which deafened us to our own potential for self-naming.

The Unfolding of God

It has sometimes been argued that anthropomorphic symbols for "God" are important and even necessary because the fundamental powers of the cosmos otherwise are seen as impersonal. One of the insights characteristic of the rising woman consciousness is that this kind of dichotomizing between cosmic power and the personal need not be. That is, it is not necessary to anthropomorphize or to reify transcendence in order to relate to this personally. In fact, the process is demonic in some of its consequences.³¹ The dichotomizing-reifying-projecting syndrome has been characteristic of patriarchal consciousness, making "the Other" the repository of the contents of the lost self. Since women are now beginning to recognize in ourselves the victims of such dichotomizing processes, the insight extends to other manifestations of the pathological splitting off of reality into falsely conceived opposites. Why indeed must "God" be a noun? Why not a verb—the most active and dynamic of all? Hasn't the naming of "God" as a noun been an act of murdering that dynamic Verb? And isn't the Verb infinitely more personal than a mere static noun? The anthropomorphic symbols for God may be intended to convey personality, but they fail to convey that God is Be-ing. Women now who are experiencing the shock of nonbeing and the surge of self-affirmation against this are inclined to perceive transcendence as the Verb in which we participate—live, move, and have our being.

This Verb—the Verb of Verbs—is intransitive.³² It need not be conceived as having an object that limits its dynamism.³³ That which it is over against is nonbeing. Women in the process of liberation are enabled to perceive this because our liberation consists in refusing to be "the Other" and asserting instead "I am"—without making another "the Other." Unlike Sartre's "us versus a third" (the closest approximation to love possible in his world) the new sisterhood is saying "us versus nonbeing." When Sartre wrote that "man [sic] fundamentally is the desire to be God," he was saying that the most radical passion of human life is to be a God who does not and cannot exist. The ontological hope of which I am speaking is neither this self-deification nor the simplistic reified images often lurking behind such terms as "Creator," "Lord," "Judge," that Sartre rightly rejects.³⁴ It transcends these because its experiential basis is courageous *participation* in being. This ontological hope also has little in common with the self-enclosed "ontological arguments" of Anselm or Descartes. It enables us to break out of this prison of subjectivity because it implies commitment together.

The idea that breakthrough to awareness of transcendence comes through some sort of commitment is not new, of course. It has not been absent from existential philosophy. Karl Jaspers, for example, writing of the problem of getting beyond the subject-object split (which, of itself, without awareness of the Encompassing, yields nothing but dead husks of words), affirms that this happens when people live in commitment, but it is not too clear what sort of commitment he had in mind—a not uncommon unclarity among existentialist philosophers.³⁵ The commitment of which I am

speaking has a locus. It is a "mysticism of sorority." I hasten to put this phrase in quotes even though it is my own, since it is a re-baptism of Metz's "mysticism of fraternity"—a correction I deem necessary since—as by now is obvious—a basic thesis of this book is that creative eschatology must come by way of the disenfranchised sex.³⁶

What I am proposing is that the emergence of the communal vocational self-awareness of women is a *creative political ontophany*. It is a manifestation of the sacred (*hierophany*) precisely because it is an experience of participation in being, and therefore a manifestation of being (*ontophany*). A historian of religions such as Eliade insists that there was a sort of qualitative leap made by the biblical religions in the realm of hierophany.³⁷ Whether or not this is historically true is not my concern at this point. What I do suggest is that the potential for ontological hierophany that is already beginning to be realized in the participatory vocational self-consciousness of women does involve a leap, bridging the apparent gap between being and history. In other words, women conscious of the vocation to raise up this half of humanity to the stature of acting subjects in history constitute an ontological locus of history. In the very process of becoming actual persons, of confronting the non-being of our situation, women are bearers of history.

In his analysis of history-bearing groups, Tillich saw vocational consciousness as a decisive element.³⁸ He did not believe that humanity as a whole can become the bearer of history instead of particular groups. There is a particular *eros* or sense of belonging which provides the identity of a group to the exclusion of others.³⁹ This much is true of the women's movement as existing essentially in polarity with the predominantly androcentric society and its institutions. However, there is an essential way in which the women's movement does *not* meet Tillich's specifications for a history-bearing group. I am suggesting that this "non-qualification" arises precisely from the fact that our transformation is so deeply rooted in being. Tillich insists that a history-bearing group's ability to act in a centered way requires that the group have a "central, law-giving, administering, and enforcing authority."⁴⁰ In contrast to this, our movement is *not* centrally administered—although it includes organizations such as NOW and WEAL⁴¹—and many (perhaps most) radicalized women resist attempts to bring this about because their outlook is nonhierarchical and multidimensional.

I am suggesting that the women's movement is *more than* a group governed by central authority in conflict with other such hierarchical groups. If it were only this it would be only one more subgroup within the all-embracing patriarchal "family." What we are about is the human becoming of that half of the human race that has been excluded from humanity by sexual definition. This phenomenon, which is mushrooming "up from under" (to use Nelle Morton's phrase) in women from various "classes," races, and geographical areas, can hardly be described as a group. What is at stake is a real leap in human evolution, initiated by women. The ground of its creative hope is an intuition of being which, as Janice Raymond has suggested, *is* an intuition of human integrity or of androgynous being.⁴²

When this kind of sororal community-consciousness is present—this "us versus nonbeing"—there are clues and intimations of the God who is without an over-against—who is Be-ing. The unfolding of the woman-consciousness is an intimation of the endless unfolding of God. The route to be followed by theoreticians of the women's revolution, then, need not be contiguous with that followed by Marxist theoreticians such as Roger Garaudy and Ernst Bloch, even though we share their concern to maintain an absolutely

open future, and even though in some sense we must share also in their insistence upon atheism. We agree with their atheism insofar as this means rejection of hypostatized God-projections and the use of these to justify exploitation and oppression.⁴³ However, there is a difference which I believe arises from the fact that Marxism does not fully confront patriarchy itself. Roger Garoudy wrote:

*If we reject the very name of God, it is because the name implies a presence, a reality, whereas it is only an exigency which we live, a never-satisfied exigency of totality and absoluteness, of omnipotence as to nature and of perfect loving reciprocity of consciousness.*⁴⁴

In effect, Garoudy distinguishes his position from that of even the most progressive Christian theologians by asserting that the exigency of the Christian for the infinite is experienced and/or expressed as presence, whereas for him it is absence. What I am suggesting is that women who are confronting the nothingness which emerges when one turns one's back upon the pseudo-reality offered by patriarchy are by that very act saying "I am," that is, confronting our own depth of *being*. What we are experiencing, therefore, is not *only* the sense of absence of the old Gods—a sense which we fully share with Garoudy and Bloch. Our exclusion from identity within patriarchy has had a totality about it which, when faced, calls forth an ontological self-affirmation. Beyond the absence, therefore, women are in a situation to experience presence. This is not the presence of a super-reified Something, but of a power of being which both is, and is not yet.

One could hasten to point out that various theories of a developing God have been expounded in modern philosophy. Some women might find it helpful to relate their perception of the spiritual dynamics of feminism to ideas developed by such a thinker as William James, who offers the possibility of seeing the perfecting of God as achieved through our active belief, which can be understood as an enrichment of the divine being itself.⁴⁵ Others might find it helpful to correlate this experience with Alfred North Whitehead's functional approach to the problem of God, who is seen as a factor implicated in the world and philosophically relevant.⁴⁶ Other helpful insights on the problem of the developing God can be found in the work of such thinkers as Max Scheler, Samuel Alexander, E. S. Brightman, and Charles Hartshorne. In my opinion it would not be the most fruitful expenditure of energy at this point to attempt to fit our thoughts concerning the spiritual implications of radical feminism into theories that might appear tempting as prefabricated molds. Rather, it seems to me far more important to listen to women's experiences to discover the spiritual dynamics of this revolution and to speak these dynamics in our own lives and words.

I have already said that this does not mean that an entirely new language for God, materially speaking, will emerge, *ex nihilo*, but rather that a new meaning context is coming into being as we re-create our lives in a new experiential context. Because the feminist experience is radically a coming out of nothing into a vocational/communal participation in being, I have suggested that it can be perceived in terms of ontological hope. Paradoxical though it may seem, this being-consciousness may mean that our new self-understanding *toward God* may be in some Ways more in affinity with medieval thought than with some modern theological and philosophical language about God. It is

fascinating to observe that in beginning to come to grips with the problem of our own self-naming in a world in which women are nameless, feminism is implicitly working out a naming toward God that is comparable to, though different from, the famous three "ways" the medieval theologians employed in speaking of God.⁴⁷

There was first of all the *negative way*, variously described, but meaning essentially that we can show "what God is not" by systematically denying of God the imperfections of creatures. A prominent scholar has suggested that current epistemology, influenced by recent developments in science, holds resources for a comparable "negative way," but with a different slant. That is, science itself, by constantly opening up more and more unpredicted aspects of reality, is making us aware that there *is* an unknown, aspects of which may be transcendent. This doesn't "prove" Transcendence, but makes room for it.⁴⁸ I am suggesting that a new *via negativa* is coming not just from science but from the experience of liberation. Women are living out this negative way by discovering more and more the androcentrism of God-language and being compelled to reject this, and, beyond this, by discovering the malecenteredness of the entire society which this legitimates. Since women are excluded from the in-group of the male intellectual community, and since in fact we begin actively to *choose* self-exclusion as we become more conscious of the limitations on thought and creativity that the in-breeding of the power-holding group involves (witness the deadness of meetings and journals of the "learned societies"), we may be less trapped in the old delusions—such as word games about God that pass for knowledge among those who play them. This discovery, followed by active choice of "not belonging" on the part of creative women, can lead to our finding previously untapped resources within ourselves, and the process yields clues to further possibilities of becoming. The realization of our exclusion from the world-building process is a *neo-negative way*, in that we are discovering our previously unknown being, which points our consciousness outward and inward toward as yet unknown Being, that some would call the hidden God.

Second, there was the traditional *affirmative way*, which presupposed that God prepossesses all the perfections of creatures and that therefore any perfection found in a creature which does not by definition include limitation can be predicated of God. Thus it was considered legitimate to say that God is good, wise, etc.⁴⁹ I am suggesting that feminism is giving rise also to the beginnings of a *neo-affirmative way*. This is a *living* "analogy of being" (*analogia entis*), and the particular aspect of our existence from which we are enabled to draw the analogy is the courage that is experienced in the liberation process. The *analogia entis* of Aquinas involved an extremely complex reasoning, based upon certain premises, including the notion that God is the first cause of all finite reality and the idea that there is some kind of resemblance between effects and their causes.⁵⁰ By contrast, what I am pointing to by the use of the expression "analogy of being" is an experience of the dynamic content of the intuition of being as experienced in existential courage. Women now have a special opportunity to create an *affirmative way* that is not simply in the arena of speculation, but especially in the realm of active self-affirmation. Since through the existential courage now demanded of us we can have consciousness of *being toward* the image of God, this process can give us intimations of the Be-ing in and toward which we are participating. That is, it can be in some sense a theophany, or manifestation of God.

A third way of naming God, the traditional *way of eminence*, was not totally distinct from the other two "ways" but rather included both. Medieval theologians, including the so-called Denis the Areopagite and Thomas Aquinas, believed that even names said affirmatively of God fall far short of saying *what* God is: "So when we say 'God is good,' the meaning is not, [merely] 'God is the cause of goodness,' or 'God is not evil,' but the meaning is, 'Whatever good we attribute to creatures pre-exists in God' and in a more excellent and higher way."⁵¹

I propose that the becoming of women is potentially a new and very different *way of eminence*. The positive and unique element in our speaking toward God has to do with what Buber called "the primary word I-Thou [which] establishes the world of relation."⁵² By refusing to be objectified and by affirming being, the feminist revolution is creating new possibilities of I-Thou. Therefore, the new *way of eminence* can be understood as follows:

In modern society, technical controlling knowledge has reached the point of violating the privacy and rights of individuals and destroying the natural environment. In reaction against this, social critics sometimes call for the awakening of interpersonal consciousness, that is, of intersubjectivity. But this cannot happen without communal and creative refusal of victimization by sexual stereotypes. This creative refusal involves conscious and frequently painful efforts to develop new lifestyles in which I-Thou becomes the dominant motif, replacing insofar as possible the often blind and semi-conscious mechanisms of I-It, which use the Other as object. In the realm of knowledge, this means removing the impediments to that realm of knowing which is subjective, affective, intuitive, or what the Scholastics called "connatural." It means breaking down the barriers between technical knowledge and that deep realm of intuitive knowledge which some theologians call ontological reason.⁵³

Objective or technical knowledge is necessary for human survival and progress. It is the capacity for "reasoning." Clarity of thinking and the construction of language require its use. So also does the ability to control nature and society. However, by itself, cut off from the intuitive knowledge of ontological reason, technical knowledge is directionless and ultimately meaningless. When it dominates, life is deprived of an experience of depth, and it tends toward despair.

Technical knowledge of itself is detached. It depends upon a subject-object split between the thinker and that which is perceived. It is calculative, stripping that which is perceived of subjectivity. Technical knowledge, cut off from ontological reason, degrades its object and dehumanizes the knowing subject. Because it reduces both to less than their true reality, at a certain point it even ceases to be knowledge in any authentic sense. When it is thus separated from ontological reason, the psychological and social sciences which it dominates become dogmatic, manipulative, and destructive. Under its dominion, philosophy, theology, and all of religion deteriorate.

Widening of experience so pathologically reduced can come through encounter with another subject, an I who refuses to be an It. If, however, the encounter is simply a struggle over who will be forced into the position of It, this will not be ultimately redemptive. It is only when the subject is brought to a recognition of the other's damaged but never totally destroyed subjectivity as equal to his/her own, having basically the same potential and aspiration to transcendence, that a qualitatively new way of being in the world and toward God can emerge. What is perceived in this new way of being is the

Eternal Thou, the creative divine word that always has *more* to say to us. This is the meaning of the women's movement as the new *way of eminence*.

New Space: New Time

The unfolding of God, then, is an event in which women participate as we participate in our own revolution. The process involves the creation of new space, in which women are free to become who we are, in which there are real and significant alternatives to the prefabricated identities provided within the enclosed spaces of patriarchal institutions. As opposed to the foreclosed identity allotted to us within those spaces, there is a diffused identity—an open road to discovery of the self and of each other. The new space is located always "on the boundary." Its center is on the boundary of patriarchal institutions, such as churches, universities, national and international politics, families. Its center is the lives of women, whose experience of becoming changes the very meaning of center for us by putting it on the boundary of all that has been considered central. In universities and seminaries, for example, the phenomenon of women's studies is becoming widespread, and for many women involved this is the very heart of thought and action. It is perceived as the core of intellectual and personal vitality, often as the only part of the "curriculum" which is not dead. By contrast, many male administrators and faculty view "women's studies" as peripheral, even trivial, perhaps hardly more serious than the "ladies' page" of the daily newspaper. Most "good" administrators do sense that there is something of vitality there, of course, and therefore tolerate or even encourage women's studies—but it remains "on the boundary." So too, the coming together of women on the boundary of "the church" is the center of spiritual community, unrecognized by institutional religion.

The new space, then, has a kind of invisibility to those who have not entered it. It is therefore inviolable. At the same time it communicates power which, paradoxically, is experienced both as power of presence and power of absence. It is not political power in the usual sense but rather a flow of healing energy which is participation in the power of being. For women who are becoming conscious, that participation is made possible initially by casting off the role of "the Other" which is the nothingness imposed by a sexist world. The burst of anger and creativity made possible in the presence of one's sisters is an experience of becoming whole, of overcoming the division within the self that makes nothingness block the dynamism of being. Instead of settling for being a warped half of a person, which is equivalent to a self-destructive non-person, the emerging woman is casting off role definitions and moving toward androgynous being. This is not a mere "becoming equal to men in a man's world"—which would mean settling for footing within the patriarchal space. It is, rather, something like God speaking forth God-self in the new identity of women.⁵⁴ While life in the new space may be "dangerous" in that it means living without the securities offered by the patriarchal system for docility to its rules, it offers a deeper security that can absorb the risks that such living demands. This safety is participation in *being*, as opposed to inauthenticity, alienation, nonidentity—in a word, nonbeing.

The power of presence that is experienced by those who have begun to live in the new space radiates outward, attracting others. For those who are fixated upon patriarchal space it apparently is threatening. Indeed this sense of threat is frequently expressed. For

those who are thus threatened, the presence of women to each other is experienced as an absence. Such women are no longer empty receptacles to be used as "the Other," and are no longer internalizing the projections that cut off the flow of being. Men who need such projection screens experience the power of absence of such "objects" and are thrown into the situation of perceiving nothingness. Sometimes the absence of women that elicits this anxiety is in fact physical. For example, when women deliberately stay away from meetings, social gatherings, etc., in order to be free to do what is important to ourselves, there is sometimes an inordinate response of protest. Sometimes the absence is simply non-cooperation, refusal to "play the game" of sex roles, refusal to flatter and agree, etc. This too hints at presence of another space that women have gone off to, and the would-be users are left with no one to use. Sometimes, of course, the absence of women takes the form of active resistance. Again, it throws those who would assume the role of exploiters back into their sense of nothingness.

In this way then, women's confrontation with the experience of nothingness invites men to confront it also. Many of course respond with hostility. The hostility may be open or, in some cases, partially disguised both from the men who are exercising it and from the women to whom it is directed. When disguised, it often takes seductive forms, such as invitations to "dialogue" under conditions psychologically loaded against the woman, or invitations to a quick and easy "reconciliation" without taking seriously the problems raised. Other men react with disguised hostility in the form of being "the feminist's friend," not in the sense of really hearing women but as paternalistic supervisors, analysts, or "spokesmen" for the movement. Despite the many avenues of nonauthentic response to the threat of women's power of absence, some men do accept the invitation to confront the experience of nothingness that offers itself when "the Other" ceases to be "the Other" and stands back to say "I am." In so doing men begin to liberate themselves toward wholeness, toward androgynous being. This new participation in the power of being becomes possible for men when women move into the new space.

Entry into the new space whose center is on the boundary of the institutions of patriarchy also involves entry into new time. To be caught up in these institutions is to be living in time past. This is strikingly evident in the liturgies and rituals that legitimate them. By contrast, when women live on the boundary, we are vividly aware of living in time present/future. Participation in the unfolding of God means also this time breakthrough, which is a continuing (but not ritually "repeated") process. The center of the new time is on the boundary of patriarchal time. What it is, in fact, is women's *own* time. It is our *life-time*. It is whenever we are living out of our own sense of reality, refusing to be possessed, conquered, and alienated by the linear, measured-out, quantitative time of the patriarchal system. Women, in becoming who we are, are living in a qualitative, organic time that escapes the measurements of the system. For example, women who sit in institutional committee meetings without surrendering to the purposes and goals set forth by the male-dominated structure, are literally working on our own time while perhaps appearing to be working "on company time." The center of our activities is organic, in such a way that events are more significant than clocks. This boundary living is a way of being in and out of "the system." It entails a refusal of false clarity. Essentially it is being alive now, which in its deepest dimension is participation in the unfolding of God.

It should be apparent, then, that for women entrance into our own space and time is another way of expressing integrity and transformation. To stay in patriarchal space is to remain in time past. The appearance of change is basically only separation and return—cyclic movement. Breaking out of the circle requires anger, the "wrath of God" speaking God-self in an organic surge toward life.⁵⁵ Since women are dealing with demonic power relationships, that is, with structured evil, rage is required as a positive creative force, making possible a breakthrough, encountering the blockages of inauthentic structures. It rises as a reaction to the shock of recognizing what has been lost—before it had even been discovered—one's own identity. Out of this shock can come intimations of what human being (as opposed to half being) can be. Anger, then, can trigger and sustain movement from the experience of nothingness to recognition of participation in being. When this happens, the past is changed, that is, its significance for us is changed. Then the past is no longer static: it too is on the boundary. When women take positive steps to move out of patriarchal space and time, there is a surge of new life. I would analyze this as participation in God the Verb who cannot be broken down simply into past, present, and future time, since God is form-destroying, form-creating, transforming power that makes all things new.

¹ Alice Rossi, "Sex Equality: The Beginning of Ideology," *Masculine/Feminine*, edited by Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 173-86.

Rossi points out some inadequacies of assimilation into male models.

² See Jean Piaget, *Structuralism* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1970).

³ Arnold Toynbee, *Christianity among the Religions of the World* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 19.

⁴ See Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus*, XCVI (Winter 1967), pp. 1-21. Bellah points out that the inauguration of a president is an important ceremonial event in American civil religion. It involves religious legitimation of the highest political authority. At Nixon's inauguration in 1973, Cardinal Cooke of New York was reported to have used the expression "heavenly Father" approximately seven times (conversation with Janice Raymond, who counted, January 20, 1973).

⁵ Rabbi Louis Finkelstein, in *White House Sermons*, edited by Ben Hibbs (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 68. This sermon was delivered June 29, 1969. Similar sentiments have been expressed by the Rev. John McLaughlin, S.J., "the Catholic Billy Graham." See *National Catholic Reporter*, October 6, 1972, p. 9.

⁶ Charles Henderson, *The Nixon Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). See also Henderson's article "The (Social) Gospel according to 1) Richard Nixon 2) George McGovern," *Commonweal*, XCVI (September 29, 1972), pp. 518-25.

⁷ Dr. Paul S. Smith, in *White House Sermons*, pp. 82-83.

⁸ Cited in Henderson, *The Nixon Theology*, p. 175.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁰ This is exemplified in a statement of John L. McKenzie, S.J., in *The Two Edged Sword* (New York: Bruce, 1956), pp. 93-94: "God is of course masculine, but not in the sense of sexual distinction. . . ."

¹¹ See Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health* (Boston: Published by the Trustees under the Will of Mary Baker G. Eddy, 1934). Eddy wrote what she believed to be the "spiritual

sense" of "The Lord's Prayer." It begins: "Our Father-Mother God, all-harmonious . . ." (p. 16). In the same work she uses the image of God's motherhood a number of times. Ann Lee's ideas have been studied by sociologist Henri Desroches. See, for example, *The American Shakers: From Neo-Christianity to Presocialism*, translated and edited by John K. Savocool (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971).

¹² See Karl BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & C. Clark, 1956-1962), III/4, pp. 116-240. Barth does on and on about woman's subordination to man, ordained by God. Although he goes through a quasi-infinite number of qualifications, using such jargon as "mutual subordination," he warns that we must not overlook the "concrete subordination of woman to man" (p. 175). He writes: "Properly speaking, the business of woman, her task and function, is to actualize the fellowship in which man can only precede her, stimulating, leading, and inspiring. . . . To wish to replace him in this, or to do it with him, would be to wish not to be a woman." In case the point is not clear, he adds the rhetorical question: "What other choice has she [than to be second] seeing she can be nothing at all apart from this sequence and her place within it?" (p. 171). This is justified as being the divine order, according to Barth. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, edited by Eberhard Bethge, translated by Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan Paperback, 1966), p. 47: "You may order your home as you like, save in one particular: the woman must be subject to her husband, and the husband must love his wife." See also Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 282. Niebuhr writes: "A rationalistic feminism is undoubtedly inclined to transgress inexorable bounds set by nature. On the other hand, any premature fixation of certain historical standards in regard to the family will inevitably tend to reinforce male arrogance and to retard *justified efforts* [italics mine] on the part of the female to achieve such freedom as is not incompatible with the *primary function of motherhood* [italics mine]." As for Teilhard de Chardin, his writings are replete with spiritualized androcentrism. For examples, see Henri de Lubac, S.J., *The Eternal Feminine: A Study on the Text of Teilhard de Chardin*, translated by René Hague (New York: Harper and Row, 1971). The sexism is of course unrecognized by de Lubac. See also André A. Devaux, *Teilhard et la vocation de la femme* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1963).

¹³ Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 195.

¹⁴ I would agree with Gordon Kaufman that Tillich himself does not completely escape hypostatization in his God language. The "Unconditioned" and the "Ground" are almost reified. See Gordon D. Kaufman, "On the Meaning of 'God,'" in *Transcendence*, edited by Herbert W. Richardson and Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 114-42.

¹⁵ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pp. 32-63. See also Michael Novak, *The Experience of Nothingness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

¹⁶ See Richardson's essay "Three Myths of Transcendence," in *Transcendence*, edited by Richardson and Cutler, pp. 98-113. Richardson is more explicit on the problem of sex roles in his recent book *Nun, Witch, Playmate* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

¹⁷ See James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970).

¹⁸ Enlightening on this point of positive ontological experiences is the work of Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand, 1962).

¹⁹ This was illustrated a few years ago in Michael Novak's book, *The Experience of Nothingness*. In various ways it has been expressed in writings and music of the counterculture.

²⁰ This problem is acute in the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg. See, for example, his *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969). It is evident also in Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, translated by James W. Leitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1967). These theologians, of course, handle philosophical questions in a sophisticated and knowledgeable fashion, but the perspective is so biblical that it alienates "nonbelievers."

²¹ Unfortunately, in the Christian theological tradition this "image" was recognized as existing unambiguously only in the male. While Augustine saw the male as being to the image of God, he conceded that woman is restored to the image only where there is no sex, that is, in the spirit (*De Trinitate*, XII, 7). Aquinas was a little more generous, granting that the image of God is in both man and woman, but adding that is a special sense it is only in the male, who is "the beginning and end of woman, as God is the beginning and end of every creature" (*Summa theologiae* I, 93, 4 ad 1).

²² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 190.

²³ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 53-80. Berger, however, does not recognize implications of this form the standpoint of radical feminism.

²⁴ Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (New York: Doubleday-Anchor Books, 1970), p. 12. Unfortunately, however, Berger goes rather far in "liquidating" the work of theologians whose views are less orthodox than his own.

²⁵ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, translated by Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), p. 198.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-99.

²⁷ Johannes Metz, "Creative Hope," *New Theology No. 5*, edited by Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 130-41. See also Metz, *Theology of the World*, translated by William Glen-Doepel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

²⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, translated by Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Doubleday-Image Books, 1956). Although he was hardly a feminist or social revolutionary, Maritain had an exceedingly fine sensitivity to the power of this intuition, which, if it were carried through to social consciousness, would challenge the world. See also *Distinguish to Unite: The Degrees of Knowledge*, translated from the fourth French edition under the supervision of G.B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959).

²⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 74: Whenever technical reason dominates, religion is superstition and is either foolishly supported by reason or rightly removed by it."

³⁰ Maritain, in *Existence and the Existent*, p. 76, remarks: "When a man [sic] is awake to the intuition of being he is awake at the same time to the intuition of subjectivity. . . . The

force of such a perception may be so great as to sweep him [sic] along to that heroic ascetism of the void and of annihilation in which he will achieve ecstasy in the substantial existence of the *self* and the 'presence of immensity' of the divine Self at one and the same time. . . ."

³¹ Max Weber, in *The Sociology of Religion*, p. 25, points out that "a power conceived by analogy to living persons may be coerced into the service of man." This means that whoever has the requisite charisma "is stronger even than the god." He also indicates that such a god can be conveniently blamed when things go wrong (p. 32).

³² Conversations with Linda Barufaldi, Boston, August 1972. Buckminster Fuller has referred to God as a verb.

³³ It is clear that from such an experiential context there is not likely to come much rapport with language about God as "ultimate Limit" or Limiter.

³⁴ Some of Sartre's thinking consequent to this rejection is in Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

³⁵ Karl Jaspers and Rudolf Bultmann, *Myth and Christianity* (New York: Noonday Press, 1958), p. 14.

³⁶ Johannes Metz, *Theology of the World*, p. 104.

³⁷ See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, translated by Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958). See Jay J. Kim, "Hierophany and History," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, September 1972, pp. 334-48.

³⁸ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* III (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 310.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 309-10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 308-9.

⁴¹ The *National Organization for Women*, the *Women's Equity Action League*, and the *Saint Joan's International Alliance* (Catholic feminists) are organizations with dues-paying members. While these have important functions, the movement as I use the term is not reducible to membership in these organizations. It is far more widespread, complex, and immeasurable than the concept of organizational membership can encompass.

⁴² Janice Raymond, "Beyond Male Morality," a paper delivered at the International Congress of Learned Societies in the Field of Religion, Los Angeles, September 1-5, 1972. Published by the American Academy of Religion (University of Montana) in *Proceedings of the Working Group on Women and Religion, 1972*, edited by Judith Plaskow Goldenberg, pp. 83-93.

⁴³ Leslie Dewart made the point that relative atheism is probably more indicative of an open consciousness than absolute theism. See *The Future of Belief* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), pp. 52-76.

⁴⁴ Roger Garoudy, *From Anathema to Dialogue*, translated by L. O'Neill (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 94.

⁴⁵ See William James, *The Will to Believe* (New York: Dover Publications reprint, 1956). See also *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans Green, 1909).

⁴⁶ See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929).

⁴⁷ Well-known sources for these are treatises attributed to Denis the Areopagite, including *On the Divine Names* (*De divinis nominibus*) and a short treatise *On Mystical Theology* (*De mystica theologia*). Thomas Aquinas used the "three ways" for deriving the divine attributes in his *Summa theologiae*.

⁴⁸ See Huston Smith, "The Reach and the Grasp: Transcendence Today," in *Transcendence*, edited by Richardson and Cutler, pp. 1-17.

⁴⁹ See for example Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q.6.

⁵⁰ For a brief discussion of this see Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 368-72. See also Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite: The Degrees of Knowledge*.

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I,13,2.

⁵² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 6.

⁵³ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* I, especially pp. 71-81.

⁵⁴ Conversation with Emily Culpepper, Boston, November 1972.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*