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**The Understanding of History in English-Speaking Western Christian Feminist Theology**

*In januari 1989 promoveerde Julie Hopkins aan de Universiteit van Bristol op het bovenstaande proefschrift. Onderstaande fragmenten zijn de inleiding op haar proefschrift en de conclusie, respectievelijk p.i en pp. 270-285.*

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This dissertation offers an attempt to collate, analyse and systematise the new thinking on the nature of herstory, historicity and eschatology emerging with the development of Christian-Feminist Theology. My thesis is that it is possible to delineate a new model of history behind the critique and construction of contemporary feminist writings. This model, which rejects a dualistic distinction between transcendence and immanence, the sacred and the profane, constitutes a profound paradigm shift in epistemology and theology. Nature and history, matter and energy, women and men are understood as integral constituents of the cosmic Matrix of God/ess.

In the first chapter I summarise and critique from a Christian-feminist perspective, the Twentieth Century discussion on the theology of history and the historical-critical method. There follow two chapters which describe Feminist Theory, the methodology of Women's History and the discussion between Christian-feminist and Postchristian-feminist theologians on the problems connected with the nature of Christianity as an historical religion.

Chapter Four examines the nature of historical consciousness, historicity and revelation in Feminist-Liberation Theology with particular reference to the work of Mary Hunt, Letty Russell and Sharon Welch. The following chapter is a detailed analysis of the problems of hermeneutics raised by the new feminist epistemology, Biblical criticism and reconstruction of Early Christian women's history. Here, I refer to the work of Phyllis Trible, Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.

The last two chapters are an attempt to offer a systematic approach to a theology of history. Chapter Six explores the thinking of Rosemary Radford Ruether with particular reference to anthropology, christology and eschatology. My conclusion suggests some further steps towards a more constructive approach. I propose an understanding of Christ as the transpersonal power of oppressed communities to overcome injustice through messianic praxis and prophetic passion. God/ess has a vulnerable and suffering dimension which constitutes the transformative processes of the cosmic Matrix and the struggles of women to birth their power-in-relation.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE CONCLUSION: HISTORY, SEX AND ESCHATOLOGY

In this dissertation I have attempted to tease out the understanding of history, which is often only implicit, in the contemporary debate over methodology and construction amongst Christian-feminist theologians. We have seen that far from there being a clearly defined model in their writings, they tend to allude to the subject as a cluster of ideas and working hypotheses, particularly in the areas of epistemology, hermeneutics, christology and eschatology.

I would suggest that the lack of conceptual unity to the understanding of history at present, is due to several inter-related reasons. Firstly, since the 1960's, feminists have concentrated upon an ideology critique of Christianity as the sacred canopy of the Western form of patriarchy. As a serious epistemological and political activity, this project has been deeply suspicious of the legacy of Christian history and tradition and the forms of historiography and historical-critical method which idolize it. Secondly, feminist epistemology prides itself on a holistic approach to reality, as such it abjures systems of metaphysical or rationalistic theology which stress logic, objective reason or dogma. Feminists seek to think and work within a communal, open-ended, transformative, praxis-centred political spirituality. Finally, if systematic theology is considered as a series of building blocks, christology constitutes the foundation stone. However, at present an adequate Christian-feminist christology has not been constructed, the issue stands as a complex problem and barrier to a thoroughgoing alternative anthropology, ecclesiology and theology.

These qualifications preclude the possibility of writing a systematic theology of history for feminists at present. However, in this brief conclusion, I shall attempt to try and move the discussion further. I propose to do this by delineating the main points examined in this dissertation, and on the basis of the observations and criticisms of them which I have made in each chapter, suggesting some tentative pointers towards a future constructive theology. For the sake of clarity, I shall subdivide the sphere of history into three aspects; personal, communal and planetary. However, I understand these three dimensions to constitute a unity. This unity is not immediately recognisable because of the complex dialectical tension between the particular/contextual and the universal in each aspect. Women sense this dialectic acutely existentially and politically in their experience as both a gender, socially and culturally constructed, and as a sex with a universal biology, made in the image of God/ess.

The dialectical nature of historical processes does not in itself, however, constitute the basis for the unity of history in Christian-Feminist Theology. We have seen that this unity is understood to be guaranteed by the feminist intuition of God/ess as the Ground of being or the cosmic Matrix of energy/matter. History is an organic process, however inchoate and differentiated it appears. Revelation therefore, is not understood in the Lutheran/Barthian sense

as the unveiling of the totally Other, hidden God through Jesus Christ, but as the personal, communal and ecological dynamic toward transcendence over alienation, injustice and stultification. Movement from fragmentation, through creative change, to transformation and harmony, is the recognisable locus of God/ess-in-relation to the living Body of energy/matter. The Christian symbol for this labour of passion and love is the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, the prophet of the messianic humanity-with God/ess.

### **Personal History; The Quest for Historicity**

The feminist understands herself as a psycho-physical being engaged in a quest for identity and existential authenticity. We have seen that this search for wholeness involves a personal-political struggle because Western "Woman" is an artificial gender construction of historic Christianity and culture. Consciousness-raising is thus an essential element in feminist praxis, the first stage in liberation towards integrity and historical subjectivity.

To answer the existential question, "Who am I as a woman?", feminist theorists have proffered two different answers. Those who stress "nature" maintain that women are essentially different from men. Once separated from the suffocating domination of male culture and society, women will discover a new episteme, life-paradigm, culture and spirituality. In contrast, those who stress "nurture" claim that the differences between the sexes, except for reproductive biology, are socially and psychologically created. Equal opportunity, responsibility and power would restore to women their essential humanity. Taken to extremes, both of these answers appear unsatisfactory to me, indeed they contradict each other. In my opinion, the reason why such discussions reach an impasse is because they commit the ontological fallacy. They describe women as an essence, either essential body/spirit or essential reason/will. This type of dualistic thinking is the very thing women are seeking to free themselves from. In my view, a better way to answer the question is for each woman to commit herself to the praxis of liberation. Through historical agency, in solidarity with other women and male feminists, each woman discovers the truth about herself as a constantly evolving being of unique value and as a constitutive element of an historically oppressed sex.

Once women turn from metaphysical speculation to political action to seek their existential authenticity, the significance of Women's History becomes apparent. The identification of "Woman" with nature, the body, moral culpability, passivity and the private sphere, which every woman experiences daily as she tries to live and work in both the private and the public spheres, is not her private obsession. Women historians and theologians have now demonstrated clearly that hierarchical symbolic dualism has a trajectory in Western history. Ruether maintains that this correlates with a trajectory of the historic alienation of the Western male consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 3-35. Cf. my Chapter Six, 216-223.

I would maintain that the study of herstory is a fundamental constituent of consciousness-raising. Not only does it help women to make the connections between Western symbols and discourses and their everyday struggle for authenticity, but it also provides them with a rich alternative tradition of roles, relationships, spirituality, modes of production, culture and even consciousness. The reclaiming by contemporary women of their silenced herstory grounds their present struggles, offering a sense of historical continuity and authenticity to their quest for identity. Further, the researching and reconstruction of herstory is itself an emancipatory existential action, shattering the illusion that history for women is a fate, a sphere over which they have no influence from the cradle to the grave. It is only when women discover a sense of historical consciousness and begin to regard themselves as historical agents of change, that it becomes possible for them to look towards the future as an arena for potential social redemption and personal transcendence.

How is this quest for female historicity to be expressed theologically? In my opinion, the Bible rather than credal christology offers a possible answer. In her book, "God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality", Phyllis Trible offered a detailed examination of the Hebrew text of the Genesis account of the creation and fall of humanity.<sup>2</sup> Her research demonstrates, that in Hebrew thought the original "man" was believed to be an "earth-creature", ha'adam.<sup>3</sup> The creature only became image of Elohim (plural), when sexually differentiated into male and female. When the man and woman together chose autonomy, rather than child-like dependence upon their Creator, they were afflicted with finitude, alienation, conflict between the sexes, procreation and labour. The myth holds the differentiation of the sexes, the image of God/ess and the birth of human history in an organic unity. As a theodicy, suffering and sin are understood as an inevitable dimension of the fragmentation of the power/knowledge of God/ess by human beings to liberate themselves consciously and sexually from dormancy in the cosmic Matrix.

The Genesis myth is, in my opinion, a more useful account of the reality and intuitions of women than the myth of the Incarnation. This neo-Platonic myth, with its dualistic vertical imagery, stresses the transcendence of the Divine Seminal Principle above the cosmos. The Logos comes down, penetrates the woman and "tabernacles" in human flesh<sup>4</sup> in order to artificially bond the divine and human natures in an hypostatic union. In contrast, the Genesis myth asserts that men and women are born in the Divine Image and indeed, share the life-giving breath/spirit (ruach-feminine) of God/ess. Even at the price of the passion of labour (child-birth and praxis), Eve chose to express her will to know and create because she shared in the erotic desire of God/ess to birth life in all its fecundity and pluriformity. In my view, the Christian symbol of the Cross reasserts that this creative passion is indeed the shared praxis of God/ess-with-

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2. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 72-143.

3. *Ibidem*, 79-82.

4. John v14 reads, "and he tabernacled (Greek-eskainosen) amongst us, full of grace and truth". (RSV)

humanity. The suffering God/ess, the woman in labour and the cosmos in travail,<sup>5</sup> co-operate in the birth of the future of the cosmic Matrix. The struggle of each woman to be an autonomous human being, giving birth to a new history and creating her future-with-God/ess, is a microcosm of existence.

### **Communal History: The Struggle for Justice and Peace**

All forms of Feminist-Liberation Theology understand feminism as a contemporary manifestation of an egalitarian trajectory within Christianity. This trajectory has at certain periods, only been represented by one prophet or prophetess, but it is essentially a social movement. The sectarian Jesus Movement reconstructed by Fiorenza was a new kind of community, the discipleship of equals.<sup>6</sup> As we have seen, she believes it to have been inspired by an emancipatory praxis, a pneumatological Sophia theology and the political expectations of the basilea of God. The message that the first shall be last and the last first, prompted a role-revolt of women and slaves during the early Greco-Roman mission. Ruether extends the revolutionary meaning of the Jewish messianic concept even further, claiming that Jesus expected not only social redemption but also the ecological renewal of Israel within the divine economy of shalom.<sup>7</sup>

The use of the model of an egalitarian trajectory tends to imply a certain continuity to Western political history but this is misleading. All feminist theologians with perhaps the exception of Letty Russell, stress the defeat and submergence of charismatic, emancipatory and minority visionary trends within Christianity. With Welch, the revolutionary subject sometimes disappears from history altogether.<sup>8</sup> There is a chaotic, even anarchic dimension to Western culture. Epistemes and hegemonies are not monolithic structures, clearly defined, but complex mixtures of ideologies, power/knowledge discourses and institutional allegiances. These constantly shifting configurations are under threat from within (internal contradictions) and from beneath (the subjugated memories and knowledge of silenced groups). In this sense, it is impossible to talk of metaphysical, rational or economic "laws" which govern historical development.

However, within the flux of history as the conflicting interests of different groups (religions, classes, sexes, races), it is possible to delineate specific trends or dimensions which correlate to the structures of human existence *per se*. In my view, the two aspects of communal history to which Feminist Theology applies itself specifically are the ethical and strategic dimensions.

Ethically, feminist theologians are concerned with justice and peace-making for and by women. In practice, such a humanitarian project requires the gai-

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5. Roman 8 v22 reads, "the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now". (RSV)

6. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, (London, SCM Press, 1983), 105-159. Cf. my Chapter Five, 281-283.

7. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk; Towards a Feminist Theology*, (London, SCM Press, 1983), 119-122.

8. Sharon Welch, *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation*, (New York, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1985), 40.

ning of moral, spiritual and political power by women. The study of history has demonstrated that the issue of power between the sexes is intimately related to the changing teaching of the Church on the morality of sexual relations. Feminist Theology generally works with the negative presupposition that the incidence of oppression against women intensified at periods when Christianity abhorred, rigorously controlled or sublimated sexuality. The connection between the moral teaching and symbolism of the Church and patriarchy has been explored with tools developed by sociology, psychology and Women's History. We have seen how Fiorenza used the heuristic model of the Greco-Roman household to map out shifts in the relations of power in the early Church.<sup>9</sup> Marxist-feminist analysis has added a further dimension to this research on sexual politics by examining historical changes in the mode of reproduction in the light of changes in the mode of production and *vice versa*.

Strategically, feminist theologians are seeking a liberating praxis for women within, or on the prophetic edge, of Christianity. They hold the positive epistemological and ethical moral that that which liberates is true. Welch named this "the political economy of truth".<sup>10</sup> Effective praxis requires political experience and strategic tools which have been partly accrued from the study of herstory. As women have been effectively silenced throughout Western history, it is logical to assume that there must be some basic patterns or structures, reproduced in each generation, which have neutralised women as a distinct social and political force.

An example of a pattern of subjugation is the trajectory of patriarchalization in Christian sextarian and reform movements. Women were often the enthusiastic leaders and/or bulk of such movements during their initial phase. Within two generations however, as structures, beliefs and rituals became institutionalised, a process which involved adaptation in some form to the dominant patriarchal ethos, the status of women changed from active spiritual authorities to passified wives and mothers. Examples of this process in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century England would include the Baptists, the Quakers and the Methodists. Sects which resisted the patriarchal ethos and retained women leaders were finally declared "heretic", for example the Montanists, the Beguines and the Cathars.

The study of these historic patterns has convinced contemporary Christian-feminists that the only way to prevent co-option, passification or exclusion of their spiritual-political power by the institutional churches, is to organise separately on the edge of Christianity as Women-Church, whilst simultaneously seeking to penetrate and undermine the oppressive structures of the churches from within. Ruether discusses this strategy in detail in her book, "Women-Church".<sup>11</sup>

I would suggest that Christian-Feminist Theology is moving towards an

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9. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 68-95, 245-284.

10. Sharon Welch, *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity*, 13-14.

11. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice*, (London, Harper and Row, 1985).

understanding of "Christ" as the communal symbol for the messianic and pneumatic activity of groups struggling for liberation. Christ is not a cosmic or meta-physical principle, but rather the transpersonal power released through creative and emancipatory solidarity. Transcendence is thus the dimension of life of individuals and groups who in faith, reach beyond their socially restricted environments towards a greater freedom and justice in relationships. This collective understanding of Christ may be exegetically linked to the Biblical collective nouns, Son of Man, Suffering Servant and Body of Christ.

The link between the messianic prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, and the Christ of collective faith and praxis, is thus fundamentally historical. For Christian communities, Jesus is the first exemplar of what Isabel Carter Heyward named, "the power in relation".<sup>12</sup> As founder of the Jesus Movement, his praxis and vision offered a foundational religious-social-political sign of the basilea of God/ess. His martyrdom demonstrated the price of the struggle and exposed the nature of systemic evil in absolutist hegemonies. For his followers, belief in the Resurrection is an act of faith in the power of God/ess-with-humanity to effect social redemption within the cosmic Matrix, however great the passion and risks required. Jesus is named "Christ" by contemporary Christian women because historically he birthed the collective struggle for transcendence in which they are engaged as a messianic community.

If my hypothesis, that Christ is implicitly a communal symbol for Christian-feminist theologians is correct, the significance of the reconstruction of early Christian women's history becomes apparent. The emancipatory praxis and creative suffering of the earliest Christian women in their effort to continue the trajectory of the Christ might be regarded as a manifestation of the God/ess-with-humanity. Androcentric exegetical, dogmatic and historical-critical scholarship has concentrated upon the person and/or function of Jesus the Christ, as the axis of world and cosmic history, or upon the historical witness of his male disciples. The motivation of the female disciples and their exercise of spiritual authority has been ignored or overlooked. The past is seen through the perspectival androcentric lens of the canon, the creeds and the final form of ecclesiastic structures of the patriarchal Church.

The fundamental question Fiorenza and Brooten are raising is whether the women followers of Jesus had a more authentic grasp of the nature of the Christ. They imply that the meaning of the Christ was lost to the Church as it adapted to the dominant patriarchal ethos of the Greco-Roman world. Ruether traced the corruption of christology to a combination of the adoption of pessimistic late-Jewish apocalyptic eschatology and a neo-Platonic dualistic and alienated anthropology. In her view, the struggle to live for a concept of power as voluntary servanthood and prophetic shalom was finally abandoned by the Church when it accepted the model of Christ as the Pantocrator at the Council

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12. Isabel Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation*, (London, University Press of America, 1982), 25-57.

of Nicea.<sup>13</sup>

The issue of the veracity of Fiorenza's method of reconstructing early Christian women's lives, is a vexed subject. As we have seen, her account attempts to use both contemporary scientific research (the historical-critical method, sociological data, linguistic analysis) and imagination and consciously chosen heuristic models, simultaneously. The combination of German *wissenschaft* and the feminist paradigm is an uncomfortable and incongruous method. It is interesting to note that Fiorenza, who is German, cannot agree with her translators upon an extant German version of "In Memory of Her". In my opinion, the most significant aspect of her research is not its ingenious feminist appropriation of the historical-critical method, but the emphasis upon the nature of First Century generic language and the presupposition that women may be found behind the Biblical text in "the mode of absence, or distortion or of prolepsis" (Lambert).<sup>14</sup> Since women have been silenced historically, it is perhaps to this silence that feminist historians must address their questions. This method inevitably requires imagination and intellectual recreation, the problem still to be solved is how to do this legitimately and what criteria should be used to judge what is necessary historical imagination and what is indulgent fantasy.

A belief in a communal Christ, manifested as the transpersonal power of groups such as women, struggling for power, justice and mutuality, requires an understanding of salvation as a social rather than a cosmic or personal goal. Ruether has maintained that in the ancient Hebrew prophetic tradition which Jesus reasserted, salvation was conceived of in relation to two models of history that were believed simultaneously. The linear model looks forward to the Messianic Age when all political, social and ecological processes will be in harmony. This period will last for a thousand years after which God will reign directly as King of Israel. The cyclic model emphasises a generational conversion of the people to the agenda of shalom. This Jubilee tradition understands the community-with-God to be responsible for creating the conditions for social redemption.<sup>15</sup>

I suggested that Ruether's Jubilee utopianism, however pragmatic, founders when it is concretised into a specific 'Fifty Year Plan'. In my opinion, feminist theologians should avoid the temptation to design feminist paradises, their task is to discuss the ethical requirements for such projects to be good and spiritually authentic. However, I would suggest that Ruether's general attempt to ground eschatology in the living cosmic Matrix and in the daily lives of women and men is an important contribution to the redressing of the imbalance in androcentric theology. In many cases, the mid-Century emphases on personal eschatology, eternity, the supernaturally transcendent and the vertical intervention of Grace/the Word, alienated women from their embodied relationships.

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13. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 122-126.

14. Jean C. Lambert, "An 'F' Factor? The New Testament in some White, Feminist, Christian Theological Constructions", *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Fall, 1 (1985) 2, 109.

15. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 254-256.



### **Planetary History: The Life of the Cosmic Matrix**

With the exception of the book, "Faith, Feminism and the Christ" by Patricia Wilson-Kastner,<sup>16</sup> English-speaking Feminist Theology has not accepted the belief in a consummation and/or judgment at the end of world-history. The view that our planet is moving toward an evolutionary Omega-point or an eschatological New Heaven and New Earth, is considered to be contrary to created existence and the intuitions of women in relation to their sense of the cosmic Matrix. Indeed, the experience of the cosmic Matrix as the Body of God/ess, logically requires a belief that our planet is vulnerable and constantly changing, along with all the forms of sentient life and physical matter/energy within it. The future is thus not an absolute End, or a "metachronical reality" (Russell),<sup>17</sup> but rather an open invitation to new experience and cultural transformation.

The transformative processes of energy and matter inevitably require decay and death to bring forth new configurations of life. Contemporary Christians tend to regard death, particularly untimely death, as a theodicy problem. However in Ruether's view, fear of death and anomie is a social product of the historic alienation of the male psyche. Christian eschatology, in emphasising the escape of the (male) spirit/ego from its material ground, fails to acknowledge the presence of God/ess within the natural and social spheres, labelling these "profane" and "secular".

The project to move beyond the subject-object dichotomy by feminist theologians, raises important ethical and theological issues which are beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss in detail. I shall mention two of these points briefly.

Ethically, if each human being has only one (finite) life in the configuration of character traits, body and family/social relations which we call "the individual", and to whom we give a name, then that life becomes of absolute significance and is of ultimate value. Morally, it follows that everything which distorts, abuses, oppresses or corrupts that life, must be challenged as evil. Since evil is fundamentally a social and structural phenomenon, political, socio-economic and cultural change becomes a moral imperative and of salvific significance.

Secondly, the problem of unmerited suffering. Theodicies have been traditionally constructed using the symbols of the Resurrection and the Last Judgment. I would propose that the understanding of the nature of God/ess in Feminist Theology, opens the way for a renewed focus upon the Cross as the symbol of the suffering God/ess. The belief that God suffers was an original contribution by Christianity to world spirituality and constituted the centre of the original kerygma. With the absorption of neo-Platonic and particularly Manichean ideas, the reality of the passion of God was spiritualised and/or sublimated into sado-masochistic practices. In this sense, Daly's original observation

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16. Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism and the Christ*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1983).

17. Letty Russell borrows the term "metachronical" reality from Jürgen Moltmann in her book, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective - A Theology*, (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1974), 41-46., my Chapter Four, 98 and n49.

that credal christology is predicated on "necrophilia" was an acute observation upon the patriarchal distortion of theology.<sup>18</sup>

In her doctoral dissertation, "The Redemption of God", Isabel Carter Heyward began to tentatively explore a renewed passion christology which acknowledges the vulnerability of God/ess-with-humanity in the creative and redemptive processes of power-in-relation.<sup>19</sup> In my opinion, if we are to move beyond the mythological understanding of the suffering Christ which one finds in the trinitarian constructions of theologians such as Moltmann and Kastner-Wilson, it is necessary for feminist theologians to assert that God/ess has chosen to be as vulnerable as humanity within the cosmic Matrix. In practice this means that those sins perpetrated against humans affect the well-being of God/ess. For example, the holocaust of six million Jews by the Nazis radically disfigured an aspect of God/ess, damaging the internal coherence and integrity of the cosmic Matrix, which is subsequently in a painful process of recovery and healing. Logically, such a belief regards a nuclear holocaust or global pollution as a fundamental threat to the configurations of matter and energy which we know as life-within-God/ess. Finally, Feminist Theology is a struggle for the ecological well-being of our planet and her survival within the cosmic Matrix.

In Chapter One, I offered a brief description of the theological context out of which the contents of this dissertation have emerged. That context is the intense debate concerning the nature of history amongst Twentieth Century theologians, particularly since the collapse of the Liberal consensus after the First World War. I demonstrated how slowly the emphasis on the transcendence and sovereignty of God and the absolute and vertical nature of the Christ-event which characterised the mid-war years, itself gave way to a renewed search for an immanentist and anthropocentric theology. This spiral development reached a climax in the late 1960's with the collapse of the Augustinian "two-kingdoms" theology in Political and Liberation Theology. A totally Other God and a static or functional eschatological Christ could not answer to the complex needs of post-colonial, secular, technological and secular societies.

Feminist Theology, because of its peculiar hermeneutical and epistemological problems however, finds itself unable to share the optimism of the new radical theologies which have sprung out of the Hegel-Marx-Bloch tradition of the New Left. If revelation is only to be located within the world in the achievements of those who through political and economic praxis, transcend their socially constructed chains, how can women denied of power to effect this process find God within history? Further, since women have been identified within patriarchy with nature, the parasitic draining of the resources and energies of nature to fuel male social transcendence affects them existentially and politically.

Part of my conclusion, therefore, is negative, in the sense that I would sug-

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18. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, (London, Women's Press, 1986), 75-77.

19. Isabel Carter Heyward, *The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation*, (London, University Press of America, 1982), 221-228.

gest that women, because of their historic oppression, hold a deeply relativist view of historical dialectics and the science of historiography. Their epistemological quest to think in a multi-faceted, open-ended, dialogical, pattern is based on a rejection of the absolutization of theological and historical answers to questions of existence. Patterns of correlation are set within contextual horizons. I would suggest that this hermeneutical suspicion towards historical theorizing is finally not absolute relativism but a fundamentally religious stance towards Life itself as a complex and interdependent reality. We have seen clearly that women now wish to become agents of historical change and as histori-ficators they are seeking to develop their historical consciousness. Their historically conditioned "apolitical" stance is beginning to change. However, perhaps one of the aspects which makes their perception of history and theology so radical is their heritage as the bearers of the exigences of history, as the sex who through war, famine, revolution and class struggle, sought to retain a commitment to Life holistically. Finally, Feminist Theology is a challenge to both neo-orthodox and liberation theologies because it questions any definition of revelation which locates the salvific activity of God/ess uniquely in dogmatic beliefs, specific structures, religious communities or political programmes.

This year, 1988, has witnessed the launch of the World Council of Churches, "Decade in Solidarity with Women". The next ten years has as its theme, "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation". There is a sense of Christian women, world-wide, beginning to consciously participate in solidarity, in a new historical epoch in which their praxis and visions will contribute to the global effort to redeem our planet at the eleventh hour". I would suggest that at present, the patriarchal Church institutions and androcentric theological scholarship are unaware of the radical and potentially transformative feminist theology of history that underlies this new historical consciousness and political spirituality of women. I hope that this dissertation has helped to demonstrate that, although there is no official recognition of the scholarship of Feminist Theology at most British universities, the praxis and method of women "doing theology" has profound implications for both the development of Christian theology and the future role of the Christian religion in the global search of redemption.