THE SEARCH FOR THE DIVINE FEMININE

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To Patricia Lynn Reilly—thank you for the many personal words of encouragement, for leading me through Goddess meditations, and teaching me The Big Mama Dance.

To Debbie and the rest of the Asliomamas—thank you for your support. There is a bit of each of you in this paper.

To Gloria, my older sister, who is a wonderful educational role model and has been a huge source of inspiration and strength to me. There O, I love you.

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To Cindy (C.J.) and Maryana, my lunchtime buddies—thanks for letting me bounce some spiritual ideas off you. I hope that I have helped you as much as you have helped me.

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To Jannifer, Teresa, and Gail—the old Girl’s Night Out crowd—thanks for trying to understand my theological angst. This paper is for you.
Over the last few years, religious conflict in the United States has been high. Many conservative Christians believe that Muslims are radical extremists bent on destroying the American way of life, that the Jews killed their Savior and that both require being “saved” from their lack of belief in Jesus. Muslims and Jews believe that Christians have polluted their belief in monotheism—one god—by adding Jesus and the Holy Spirit with God to create a holy trinity.

However, all three religious groups have a common denominator: the belief in the god of Abraham—YHWH or Yahweh—the jealous and angry god of the ancient Hebrew nation.

The overwhelming consensus of the three major religious bodies of the United States is that there is only one god, he is male, and he has always been and always will be. Judaism defines God in the prayer Shema Yisrael: “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.”¹ Islamic religious text describes God as “Allah. There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-subsisting, Eternal.”² Christians pray the Lord’s Prayer “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”³ Yahweh revealed himself to Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish people and instituted this belief in one god and firmly entrenched a staunch patriarchal society. However, prior to the arrival of Yahweh into the Middle East, the sacred divine was often depicted as feminine as found in rock engravings and small carved figurines. Whether meant to be talismans to ensure a prosperous crop or successful maternity or as depictions of a female deity, at one time, the sacred

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¹ Deuteronomy 6:4 New International Version (NIV)
² Qur’an 2:255
³ Matthew 6:9 NIV
divine was feminine. Feminist philosopher Mary Daly refers to this divinity as “the Great Goddess—later reduced to the Mother of God.”

The implications are immense—if the sacred divine was feminine, then women may have been at a same or higher social status as men. It is important during this time of patriarchal religious conflict for women of today to be aware that before the advent of the masculine gods Yahweh and Allah, goddesses were the standard image of the divine. French feminist Luce Irigaray states, “As long as woman lacks a divine made in her own image, she cannot establish her subjectivity or achieve a goal of her own. She lacks an ideal that would be her goal or path in becoming.”

This is a time for re-schooling. Instead of learning the traditional Three Rs: Reading, writing, and arithmetic, women need to re-discover, re-claim, and re-member the divine feminine. This paper will review the words and writings of nuns, peasants, noblewomen, everyday women, as well as the efforts of two extraordinary men. Starting with a twelfth century nun and ending on a personal note, it will attempt to answer the question: Why was/is it important to these people that the face of God is feminine?

Historical Background

Around 900 B.C.E., the ancient Hebrews grew in strength and numbers and their belief in Yahweh manifested itself in their zeal to eliminate the foreign

4 Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 96-97.
5 Penelope Deutscher. “‘The Only Diabolical Thing About Women...’ Luce Irigaray on Divinity”, Hypatia 9 Fall (1994): 90.
gods and goddesses of the surrounding nations. The Old Testament chronicles their efforts to destroy asherah poles, sacred groves of trees, and entire communities of people who worshipped a god or goddess other than Yahweh. When Moses, chosen to lead the Hebrews into “The Promise Land,” returned from a meeting with Yahweh on the Mount of Sinai, he brought back ten decrees. Known as The Ten Commandments, the first and second required the Hebrews to worship only one god and not to create any image of god. Further, as the Hebrews approached the Promised Land, they were to completely destroy other nations, break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire.

Asherah poles were trees or wooden poles symbolic of trees. These were usually erected in high places as shrines for worship of the Goddess Asherah. A Canaanite goddess, Asherah “was the force of life, experienced as benevolent and enduring, found in flocks of cattle and groves of trees, evoked in childbirth and at planting time.” The prototypical mother of gods and humans and consort of the chief god El, she is also the mistress of the sea and the land, and protector of all living things. An obvious threat to Yahweh’s ‘one god’ dogma, the Hebrews spent a great deal of effort to eliminate her worship. However, as indicated in over forty references in the Old Testament, their efforts were not

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7 Deuteronomy 5:7-8 NIV
8 Deuteronomy 7:2-5 NIV
completely effective. As new kings would come into power, they “erected sacred stones and asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree” and “provoked the LORD to anger by making asherah poles.” Even though Yahweh severely punished the Hebrew nations and their leaders for this idolatrous worship, Asherah remained a prominent deity until monotheism became politically useful as recognized by Amun in Egypt during the New Kingdom (circa 1540-1070 B.C.E) and Marduk in Babylon during the Neo-Babylonian Empire (circa 629-539 B.C.E.). According to Mary Condren, “Worship of the monotheistic God, Yahweh, to whom the king was accountable, ensured that no minor deity could be called upon to challenge the king’s authority.” However, Asherah worship would continue to a lesser degree until 70 C.E.

It has also been suggested that Asherah was a Goddess consort of Yahweh. There are two eighth century B.C.E. inscriptions on storage jars found at Kuntillet Ajrud, in the Sinai between Gaza and Aqabah that read, “I bless you by the Yahweh of Samaria and by his Asherah,” and “I bless you by the Yahweh of Teman and by his Asherah.” Sandra Sham writes that Kuntillet Ajrud is famous for the number of its images that link Yahweh and Asherah as well as the clarity with which their association is depicted...That the storage jars have both words and pictures illuminates the relationship

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12 Scham, 36.
13 1 Kings 14:23 NIV
14 1 Kings 14:15 NIV
15 Scham, 36.
between the male and female deities far better than do a host of other unillustrated inscriptions or illustrations with no text.18

This brief history of the origin of Yahweh introduces the fact that a divine feminine existed prior to and along side the god of Abraham. It is purported that Yahweh, Allah, or the LORD always existed but there is no historical evidence prior to Old Testament writings. However, there is archeological evidence of what is thought to be the divine feminine, dating back to the 30th century B.C.E. According to bible scholar Diana Edelman of the University of Sheffield, “When God said, ‘You shall have no other gods before me,’ what do people think he meant—that there weren’t any other gods? Then why bother to mention them?” 19 Since these artifacts were created prior to written language, their purpose is not clear. And, the efforts of the ancient Hebrews to eliminate all gods and goddesses other than Yahweh may have suppressed the common knowledge of the people until the memories were almost completely forgotten.

Yahweh continued to be the prominent deity of Old Testament writings dating from around 1900 B.C.E. until the coming of the messiah, Jesus Christ. His birth heralded a new era of religious beliefs, effectively splitting the Hebrew nation into those who believed the messiah had arrived—the Christians—and those who were still waiting for scripture to be fulfilled—the Jews. This Jesus spoke out against the social mores of the time—women were an active part of his ministry. Often to the chagrin of his disciples, these women became his closest followers. As the men hid in fear for their own lives, it was the women who

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18 Scham, 36.
19 Scham, 36.
stood at the foot of the crucified Christ and first witnessed his resurrected body.

Christ and his followers acknowledged a divine feminine in the personage of the Holy Spirit. After the crucifixion, John, the brother of James, had a mystical vision of the Trinity:

"...a unity in three forms appeared to me, and I marveled: how can a unity have three forms?" To John's question, the vision answers: It said to me, "John, John, why do you doubt, or why do you fear?...I am the One who is with you always: I am the Father; I am the Mother; I am the Son.

According to Elaine Pagels from the Department of Religion at Barnard College, this interpretation of the Trinity is natural and logical: for there to be a Son, there must be a Father and a Mother. In the Gospel of Thomas, Christ contrasts his earthly parents Mary and Joseph, with his divine Father—the Father of Truth—and his divine Mother, the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Phillip declares that whoever becomes a Christian "gains both a father and a mother." The author of this gospel describes the Holy Spirit as woman—"Some say Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit. They err. They do not know what they say. When did a woman become pregnant by a woman?" From The Wisdom of Jesus Christ are these words: "His male name is designated 'Savior, Begetter of All Things.' His female name is designated 'All Begettress Sophia.'

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20 Mark 15:38-41 NIV
21 John 20:15-18 NIV
23 Pagels, "What Become of God the Mother?" 296.
26 Ehrman, "The Wisdom of Jesus Christ" 106.
words of Christ and his intimate group of followers contrast sharply from the Apostle Paul, the most important person in the New Testament after Jesus.

After the death of Jesus, this new sect called Christianity was in danger of crumbling. The Romans were actively persecuting the Christians, often feeding them to wild animals in public coliseums. Saul of Tarsus was a leader in this effort to eliminate the sect, having personally taken prisoners to Jerusalem.27

On one of his journeys, he experienced a radical conversion to Christianity and became its foremost supporter. The zeal that once persecuted Christians now led the sect through its earliest days. Saul, renamed Paul, then intermixed the good news of Christ with misogynistic teachings, thus relegating women back into pre-Christ subservient roles. 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is a classic Pauline teaching showing how far the divine feminine had fallen—“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.”28

Throughout the early centuries C.E. religious councils met to establish conformity of beliefs for the new Christian church. The dogma of the Trinity as exclusively male and Christ as begotten and thereby human became standards. The gospels of Christ, Thomas, Phillip, and the Apocryphon of John and their views of the Holy Spirit as feminine were rejected. Pagels states:

As these and other writings were sorted and judged by various Christian communities, every one of these texts which Gnostic groups revered and shared was rejected from the canonical collection as “heterodox” by those who called themselves “orthodox” (literally, straight-thinking Christians.) By the time this process was concluded, probably as late as the year A.D. 200, virtually all the feminine imagery for God (along with

27 Acts 9:1-2 NIV
28 1 Timothy 2:11-12 NIV
any suggestion of an androgynous human creation) had disappeared from “orthodox” Christian tradition. 29

Interestingly, like the church councils that eliminated the feminine aspect of God from Christianity, the Jews also saw the final removal of statues of Asherah from their temples by the Fall of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. 30 However, by the end of the third century C.E., God’s feminine aspect re-appeared to the Jewish mystic as Shekhinah, part of the Kabbalah.31 According to Perle Besserman:

The first reference to God’s feminine aspect as Shekhinah appeared around 300 C.E. in the Aramaic biblical commentaries of the sage known as Onkelos...Unlike her transcendent Lord, she could be heard as well as seen, manifesting in the daily life of the Jews as the Divine Presence embodied in the Torah.32

Kabbalah is a reference to doctrines of esoteric knowledge concerning God, the creation of the universe, the laws of nature and the path by which adult religious Jews can learn these secrets. According to Barbara Newman, professor of English and Religion at Northwestern University:

Jewish kabbalists conceive the Godhead as a complex unity of male and female dyads, or syzygies, all emanating from a single transcendent One. Since the material creation is a distorted image of the divine realm, it too is marked by the duality of gender: Adam and Eve are created in the image of God: in a far more literal sense than orthodox commentators were willing to admit.33

29 Pagels. 299.
31 Besserman, 66.
32 Besserman, 68.
Created out of new religious concepts resulting from the oppression of Roman rule, Kabbalah became a rival to Christianity but not a viable threat to its growing power.34

As new Christian councils met and determined that women's salvation lay in their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, women continued to be repressed. Because woman was considered responsible for the fall of mankind as portrayed in the first book of the Old Testament, she was considered unworthy to have direct access to the Bible or other religious texts. The fall of the western Roman empire occurred in 476 C.E., marking the beginning of the Medieval period. In 480 C.E., St. Benedict set out regulations for the establishments of monasteries. It was several hundred more years after the first monasteries were established that the first convents were founded.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw convent life become an option for women who chose to go against the norms of society. Instead of running a household for her husband, giving birth annually at great risk of death for both mother and child, and having her subsequent years devoted to the raising of these children, a woman who entered a convent had the opportunity to read and study the book on which her faith and virginity rested. This was the first time, perhaps since pre-Yahweh times, that women could see the scriptures first hand, instead of hearing them interpreted through the voice of priests, husbands, and fathers. Consequently, new ideas, beliefs, and thealogies35

35 Feminine-based belief system.
evolved as these women revived lost memories and tried to put a human—feminine—face on God.

Finding the Divine Feminine

One of the best known women from convent life is Hildegard von Bingen. She was born in Germany in 1098, the tenth child of a noble family. Because of her birth order as well as the customary biblical tithe of 1/10 of income, Hildegard was dedicated to the church at the time of her birth. She entered the doors of the monastery in Disibodenberg at the age of eight. At that time, it was not uncommon for both priests and nuns to share a facility. Under the tutelage of the resident anchoress, Hildegard learned to read Latin and became versed in the Bible and Psalter. At the time of the death of the anchoress, Hildegard was chosen by the sisters to become the head of the convent.37

Hildegard was a visionary, having her first experience at the age of three. Being too young to understand its significance, she kept these experiences to herself until she was forty-two years old. On that day, a vision of God gave her an instant understanding of religious texts and commanded her to write down everything she observed in her visions.38 Most of her visions were teachings that forced both men and women to wake up, take responsibility, and make choices. Of these, several visions were re-created into illuminations—artistic renderings

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36 A woman recluse who voluntarily is permanently enclosed within a monastery or church.
of her words. It is uncertain who did the actual painting of these illuminations. Some historians suggest that it was the monks of the abbey of St. Eucharius or her own sisters at Rupertsburg. These pictures allowed the common people, predominately illiterate, to also receive God’s messages.

Hildegard’s visions and writings came to the attention of Pope Eugenius III and he sent a commission to investigate. Her works were brought to the pope and his council and they were given papal approval. The pope sent Hildegard a letter encouraging her to keep writing. In her response, she advised him to keep working for reform in the church and in the monasteries. Papal approval and encouragement were rare occurrences during a time when the Catholic Church was flexing its Inquisitorial arm. By the mid-twelfth century, the Catholic Church began to excommunicate free thinkers on the grounds of heresy. Hildegard could have found herself and her convent on the receiving end of such a verdict.

One of her illuminations is entitled “Egg of the Universe.” She wrote, “By this supreme instrument in the figure of an egg, and which is the universe, invisible and eternal things are manifested.” At the time of the illumination, scientific opinion stated the universe was a sphere so it is interesting to consider why Hildegard’s vision was egg shaped. According to Barbara Walker, “the egg is a symbol of the Creatress, whose World Egg contained the universe in embryo. The egg was also a common Oriental image of creation.”

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40 Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, 5.
41 *Scivias*, p. 42. This illumination is the Third Vision of the First Part of *Scivias*, pp. 40-59.
Hildegard's illumination was a deeply feminine image and possibly the first recorded instance of a thealogy. A former Catholic priest, Matthew Fox, writes this commentary on the illumination:

By picturing the cosmos as an egg, Hildegard is distancing herself from Plato and all those who through the ages have envisioned the universe as essentially static. An egg is organic. The universe is in Hildegard's view an egg. Therefore the universe is organic: living, breathing, growing, surprising, renewing, loving, embracing, creating. This unique view of the universe was just one of several instances of Hildegard's use of stereotypical feminine descriptions of a predominately masculine religion.

There are other images within the Egg of the Universe that are portrayals of the feminine face of God. The red crescent shape moon inside a yellow full moon are two aspects of the goddess. The moon has long been associated with the goddess and women. The 28-day cycle of the phases of the moon is the same length of the menstrual cycle for women. The three stars at the top of the egg and the three sets of three heads on the outer edges also are portrayals of the divine feminine. The groupings of three represent the triple aspect of the feminine trinity as Maiden, Mother, and Crone.

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43 Walker, 50.
Another illumination that resulted from a vision is entitled “Sophia: Mother Wisdom, Mother Church.” It is a picture of a formidable woman with “scales” (Hildegard’s own word) adorning the bottom part of her figure and her arms holding people signifying the three orders in a church. Some are apostles, some are lay people, and in the forefront is a maiden in red who symbolizes the virgins and virgin martyrs of the church. Hildegard describes these three orders as “embracing in a wondrous manner.” It is interesting that the number of the

orders of the church as she interpreted them in her day is the same number of the Trinity.45

The scale, formal posture, and stylized crown of this illumination are analogous to goddess figures of the Greeks.46 Additionally, there are a couple of interesting comparisons that can be made between the illumination and goddesses from the bible. First, the woman figure with scales cradling people within her arms resembles the statues and descriptions of Asherah, the goddess from the Old Testament. As described by Scham, “she is the mistress of the sea...and protector of all living things.”47 This could easily describe the illumination of the woman with the scales at the bottom (signifying the sea), cradling people in her arms (signifying protection).

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45 Fox, *Illuminations*, 103-105.
47 Scham, 39.
Second, Sophia is frequently in the Old Testament. Sophia is symbolized by a dove, in line with the Holy Spirit, and once represented God’s female counterpart and in the book of Proverbs, “On the head of the female poles were set up in “high places” and Asherah poles were set up in “high places” and this could be due to Hildegard’s vast knowledge of the Old Testament. According to Anna Stowe-Lambert’s thought in illuminations, Dei, demonstrates female personification of Divine Love, holding the Lamb of God as personification of Christ, while a male godhead endures a woman into the tradition of gnostic gospels held in the hands of the writers of the gnostic gnostic gospels had been directed to Christ and the ungendered male is certainly God. The figure in the center is the Holy Spirit, the personification of Sophia-Wisdom (Dei) combined with a new and

48 Fox, Illuminations, Plate 14
49 “Asherah” www.sacredsource.com
Second, Sophia is the Greek name of Wisdom, spoken of frequently in the Old Testament. Sophia is the canonical adaptation of the Gnostic Great Mother, symbolized by a dove, later transformed into a sign of the Holy Spirit, and once represented God’s female soul, the source of his power. As found in the book of Proverbs, “On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she (Wisdom) takes her stand”. Wisdom also “calls out from the highest point of the city.”

Again, Sophia/Wisdom is very similar to Asherah in that asherah poles were set up in “high places” and “on every high hill.” Asherah is also referred to as “the prototypical mother of gods and humans.” While Hildegard does not mention Asherah in her Sophia illustration, the similarities are striking. This could be due to Hildegard’s vast knowledge of the bible and other mythologies.

According to Ann Story, another of Hildegard’s illuminations, De operatione Dei, demonstrates the “consistency of Hildegard’s thought in creating a female divinity.” This illumination is of the female personification of Divine Love, holding the Lamb of God, treading upon a personification of evil, while a male godhead erupts from her head. In this, Hildegard has boldly inserted a woman into the traditional Trinity, much like the writers of the rejected Gnostic gospels had done. Since the lamb refers to Christ and the bearded male is certainly God the Father, the female figure in the center is the Holy Spirit, the personification of love.

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50 Walker, 951.
51 Proverbs 8:2 NIV
52 Proverbs 9:3 NIV
53 1 Kings 14:23 NIV
54 Scham, 36.
55 Storey, 17.
56 Storey, 17.
Hildegard’s illuminations portrayed women as strong and powerful, yet warm and nurturing. Compared to images created by men that portrayed Mary, the mother of Christ as a meek and mild while vilifying the common woman, Hildegard’s illuminations helped the general populace see women in a new and positive light.

57 Storey, 17.
Hildegard also wrote many songs to Mary, the mother of Christ. Calling her “ground of all being” and “most green, verdant sprout,” Hildegard effectively placed Mary into the role of Mother Earth, the Greek’s Gaia. According to Greek mythology, Gaia was the first divinity, “ancient theological sovereignty,” existing alone before time began. It was from Gaia that all creatures sprouted; from her fertile ground, she populated the entire earth. Hildegard’s songs to Mary reflect the same: “From your womb the seed sprouted forth” and “You have established life!” The second quote is an expression that implies that Mary was not merely a vessel but part of the creation process. By describing Mary through the use of the color green and multiple plant metaphors, Hildegard created a new Mother Earth goddess who became the inspiration of the building of the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe. It is believed that Hildegard von Bingen was the first Christian theorist to appraise the nature of femaleness in a serious and positive light.

In the following century, Meister Eckhart, also known as Eckhart von Hochheim, was born near Erfurt, in Thuringia. He was a German theologian, philosopher and mystic, and near the end of his life was tried as a heretic by Pope John XXII for his views on the feminine aspects of God. Eckhart was not burned but died before his trial was concluded. Matthew Fox, who has written several books on the life and works of Hildegard von Bingen, connects

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58 Fox, One River, 132-3.
59 Monaghan, 131.
60 Fox, One River, 132.
61 Storey, 17.
her to Meister Eckhart, born more than a century later. Fox states, "I have been profoundly moved by the amount of Eckhart in Hildegard, that is to say the themes she pays attention to that later appear in Meister Eckhart's work. Indeed, Hildegard and Eckhart are sister and brother mystic/prophets." Born into a noble family of landowners, little is known about his family and early life. By the age of fifteen, he joined the Dominican Order at Erfurt. He was sent to Paris in 1300 to take academic degrees and returned to Erfurt in 1303. Possibly due to the rivalry between orders, Eckhart was accused of heresy before the pope by the archbishop of Cologne, a Franciscan. However, he was exonerated by Nicholas of Strasburg, to whom the pope had given temporary charge of the Dominican monasteries in Germany.

The Franciscan archbishop was able to find a voice in another court—by February 13, 1327, Eckhart made a formal retraction of his heretical teachings. Pope John XXII issued a bull on March 27, 1329 that characterized a series of Eckhart statements as heretical. At the close, it stated that Eckhart had recanted before his death which is assumed occurred shortly after the 1327 statement. Eckhart's charge was that he used exaggerated language or seemed to stray from the path of orthodoxy. Most reputable scholars today agree he was unjustly condemned.

Instead of writing in the traditional Christian fall/redemption format, Eckhart developed a creation-centered theology. In other words, Eckhart chose

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64 Blakney, xxiii.
65 Blakney, xxiv.
to teach a positive position of humanity and its ability to act divinely instead of humanity's ability to sin and require a divine redeemer.\textsuperscript{67} He writes:

\textit{The seed of God is in us.}
Now the seed of a pear tree
grows into a pear tree;
and a hazel seed
grows into a hazel tree;
a seed of God
grows into God.\textsuperscript{68}

Accordingly, all of humanity is God. He also writes: “It is a joy to God to have poured out the divine nature and being completely into us who are divine images.”\textsuperscript{69} Eckhart does not discriminate between male and female in these teachings. Therefore, at least fifty percent of the divine has feminine aspects based on human population figures.

Eckhart often wrote of the feminine aspects of God: “From all eternity God lies on a maternity bed giving birth. The essence of God is birthing.”\textsuperscript{70} This quote is Matthew Fox’s twentieth century interpretation of the following: “God created the world so that he might keep on creating.”\textsuperscript{71} Birthing and creating are similar actions, often requiring long hours and great pain. The birth experience has long been taught by the Abrahamic faith as being unclean and an act which should be avoided by men yet God does it continuously. Are men of the Abrahamic faith wrong or is God unclean? Since it would be sacrilege to infer that God is dirty, it implies that the men of the Abrahamic faith are wrong.

\textsuperscript{67} Fox, \textit{Meditations with Meister Eckhart}, 3.
\textsuperscript{68} Fox, \textit{Meditations with Meister Eckhart}, 28.
\textsuperscript{69} Fox, \textit{Meditations with Meister Eckhart}, 29.
\textsuperscript{70} Fox, \textit{Meditations with Meister Eckhart}, 88.
\textsuperscript{71} Blankey, 62.
about birth. Regardless, the act of birth or creation is a feminine characteristic frequently ascribed to God throughout Eckhart's writings.

The words of Eckhart cross theological, political, and gender boundaries. Hindus and Buddhists consider his writings to be of Eastern origins. Nazis have learned from him. Feminists consider him as one of their own. Yet, because he was censored by the Catholic Church for his teachings and writings, many Christians hardly know his name or his creation-centered theology.

In the fourteenth century, Julian of Norwich found her place in the convent system. She was the anchoress in the Church of St. Julian of Norwich and the first English woman identified as an author. At the age of thirty, Julian lay close to death when she received a vision that initiated a series of revelations lasting for hours. These, she recounted in her book, Showings. Any writing done by a woman in the Medieval period was considered controversial and subjected to stricter review than that of a male counterpart. Chapters 57-62 of her revelations specifically revolved around the “medieval discourse of a female gender God...at the moment when misogynist discourse and practice were

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73 Blakney, xv.—Blakney connects Eckhart with Nazis through mysticism. He states that the National Socialist movement of Germany was born out of a form of mysticism and that “Eckhart is a member of their party in good standing.” He goes on to claim that Dr. Alfred Rosenberg praised Eckhart, “saying that the springs of National Socialism are to be found in the fourteenth century mystic’s teachings!”
74 Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart*, 3.
76 The 15th century theologian and chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson wrote: “First, every teaching of women...is to be held suspect...Why? Because women are too easily seduced, because they are too obstinately seducers, because it is not fitting that they should be knowers of divine wisdom.” Pauline Stafford and Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, eds., *Gendering the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 139.
becoming more severe." Quoted in Middle English vocabulary and then translated into modern English:

As verely as God is oure Fader, as verely is God oure Moder...And thus is Jhesu oure very Moder...The moder may geve her chylde sucke hyr mylke, but oure precious Moder Jhesu, he may fede us with hym self...but oure tender Mother Jhesu, he may homely lede us in to his blessyd brest. 78

As God is truly our Father, so also is God truly our Mother...And so is Jesus our Mother...The Mother may allow her child to suck her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus will feed us with himself...our tender Mother Jesus will lead us to his blessed breast.

In describing God/Christ as mother, Julian’s intentions were to provide a solution to the problem of evil. She understood “thre manner of beholdeynes of motherhed in God.” The first was the creation of humanity, the second was the motherhood of grace, and the third was the motherhood in working. As Mother in Creation, Jesus maintains the godly wills of the elect intact in his substance. As Mother in re-creation, Jesus atones for the sins of humankind. As mother in working, Jesus bestows the grace needed for salvation. Medievalist Carolyn Walker Bynum describes Julian’s visions “of God as mother...one of the greatest reformulations in the history of theology.”81

Julian’s words clearly describe God and Christ as the archetypical mother of humanity who gathers her children to her breast and sustains them, much similar to the descriptions of the Old Testament goddess Asherah. Julian of

78 Baker, The Showings Chapter 59-60.
79 Baker, Chapter 59.
80 Baker, xvii.
Norwich and Hildegard von Bingen were not the only medieval authors who reclaimed the femininity of God. Other female writers include: Gertrude the Great, Mechtild of Magdeburg, Catherine of Siena, Bridget of Sweden, and Margery Kempe.  

During this period of the re-discovery of the divine feminine, the cult of the Virgin Mary was born. Starting in the twelfth century, great cathedrals were raised to honor the Mother of God. Built in what is described as the Gothic style, the cathedral is “a sacred city, holy mountain, and center of the earth.” One of the greatest of these is the cathedral of Chartres in France. It is believed that Chartres is built on the site of what originally was a pagan temple. According to Laura Spitzer:

> These special associations with Notre-Dame of Chartres may have been assimilated from pre-Christian practices focusing on mother deities. That Chartres’ cult site grew out of pagan pre-Christian culture is a long-standing idea...  

Not only were cathedrals built to honor the Mother of God and often upon the sites of pagan goddess temples, but the buildings also had human characteristics. Peter Fingesten states that “the pointed ribbed vault system suggests the rib-cage of a gigantic mother bending over her son.” He continues, “With the inception of the Gothic style the Virgin has become the church, and the church has become the Virgin.”

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82 Bynum, 140.
85 Fingesten, 18.
86 Fingesten, 20.
While the political and legal status of women deteriorated during the High Middle Ages, these images of the Mother of God were increasing. According to Bynum, "there is evidence, however, that women were less attracted than men to the growing cult of the Virgin." This may be due to the fact that women recognized the cult status of the Virgin Mary as unattainable to them while they experienced the growing devaluation of women first hand. Storey states, "Instead of producing images that glorified the Virgin Mary, they drew from and modified alternative sources, stressing an awe-inspiring rather than sentimentalized feminine spirituality." Because of the impossibility of being ever-virginal yet a mother, these women instead developed a thealogy of woman as a divine being.

The most successful of all women authors of the Medieval period was Christine de Pizan. The daughter of the court physician and astrologer for King Charles V of France, Christine de Pizan and her two brothers passed their childhood in Paris. She was married at the age of fifteen, a happy union that produced three children. In the course of ten years, both her father and her husband died, leaving de Pizan as the sole provider for her household. She worked for several years as a copyist in the manuscript shops of Paris.

In 1399, she began to compose her own books, becoming the first female author of the Medieval period to earn her living exclusively from her pen. She was also the first woman of her time to confront the tradition of literary

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87 Bynum, 142.
88 Storey, 19.
misogyny.\textsuperscript{90} In a series of letters on the subject of \textit{Roman de la Rose}, a narrative text of a young man’s quest for a lady, de Pizan condemned the piece as “the work of an immoral and foul-mouth author.”\textsuperscript{91} She believed it “presented an un-Christian view of relations between the sexes, on based on mutual mistrust and antagonism rather than on love and charity.”\textsuperscript{92}

De Pizan wrote many texts in defense of women, the most important of which is \textit{Le Livre de la Cité des Dames (The Book of the City of Ladies)}.\textsuperscript{93} In this book, de Pizan had a vision in which she is visited by three women, celestial creatures who are the daughters of God known as Reason, Rectitude, and Justice. They tell de Pizan that she has been chosen to construct a building in the shape of a walled city into which only ladies of good reputation and worthy of praise will be admitted. \textsuperscript{94} After listening to their words, de Pizan lay face down in front of them and “adored them as if they were great goddesses.”\textsuperscript{95}

It is interesting that de Pizan chose to describe these three women as goddesses, especially in light of the heightening frenzy of the Inquisition. Also, these women are an appearance of a female Trinity—Reason, Rectitude, and Justice are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Reason is a guide, like the Holy Spirit; Rectitude is a protector as Christ; Justice is the judge, or God. Female trinities are common manifestations of the great goddess. Known as Maiden-Mother-Crone, Hebe-Hera-Hecate, The Three Graces, the Three Fates, the

\textsuperscript{90} Brown-Grant, xvii.  
\textsuperscript{91} Brown-Grant, xxvi.  
\textsuperscript{92} Brown-Grant, xxvi.  
\textsuperscript{93} Brown-Grant, xvii.  
\textsuperscript{94} Brown-Grant, 11.  
\textsuperscript{95} Brown-Grant, 15.
Triple Goddess had hundreds of forms. De Pizan’s response to the three women was that of Mary, the mother of Christ upon receiving the news she was to bear the son of God: “I am your humble servant.” Unlike others of her time who put Mary as the unachievable model of perpetually virginal motherhood, de Pizan highlighted the Marian qualities of meekness and mildness that were attainable.

Another of de Pizan’s books is Letter of Othea to Hector. This consists of one hundred-verse texts describing a mythological figure or moment. Following each text are moral glosses explaining how to read the myth in order to improve human character. These are followed by allegorical explanations with biblical references. Interestingly, de Pizan chose to use a goddess figure of her own creation, Othea, to teach the fifteen-year old Trojan prince, Hector. Othea represents the mythical goddess of prudence, a mother to Hector in spirit if not in fact. According to Jane Chance’s interpretation of de Pizan’s writings, “faith is feminine and begins with prudence, mothering the virtues.” Othea resembles de Pizan, who had a fifteen-year old son at the time the book was written. Additionally, de Pizan is depicted in the accompanying manuscript illumination in the identical pose as Othea when she hands her completed manuscript to Louis of Orleans. These coincidences imply that de Pizan wrote the Letter for her own son.

96 Walker, 1018.
97 Luke 1:38 NIV
98 Brown-Grant, xxviii.
100 Chance, 129.
101 Chance, 25.
Within the *Letter*, de Pizan introduces a female trinity of the goddesses Diana, Ceres, and Isis in texts numbered 23, 24, and 25, respectively. Diana is the Roman moon goddess and represents the Trinity's God the Father. Her text reads:

> Of Diana be mindful,  
> For honesty of your body,  
> For a soiled life does not please her,  
> Nor one dishonest or unclean.  

The allegory following the text reminds Hector that God the Father is without spot and Hector should strive for such perfection.

Ceres is the Roman equivalent of the Greek goddess Demeter, goddess of the productivity of the earth. Ceres represents the Son of God of the Trinity. Her text reads:

> Resemble the goddess Ceres,  
> Who gives them corn, but not sown by anyone;  
> The good knight well-ordered  
> Also ought to be generous.  

Ceres' allegory reminds Hector of the generosity of the Son of God and the gifts he has bestowed on his followers. Hector is encouraged to act in a similarly generous manner.

Isis is the Egyptian goddess of the Nile and one of the most popular goddesses of the Roman Empire. Isis represents the Holy Spirit and her text follows:

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103 Chance, 59.  
104 Husain, 168.  
105 Chance, 60.  
106 Husain, 169.
All high virtues set and plant
In you, as Isis made the plants
And all the grains fructify;
As also you should edify.107

The allegory following Isis' text instructs Hector to plant virtues within his soul with a goal of a fruitful harvest. He is also to remember the holy conception (the planting) of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary.

By creating this feminine version of the Trinity using well-known goddesses of mythology, de Pizan de-mystified this cornerstone of Christian dogma. Her literary liberties free her readers to feminize other standards of the faith as well as elevate their negative self images. In the Letter, de Pizan becomes Othea, goddess of prudence. Her words take on greater authority speaking through various gods and goddesses weaving a tapestry of wisdom with which her son can blanket himself against the perils of society.

From the eleventh century until the sixteenth century, the prestige of women within the church had risen significantly from mere handmaidens of Jesus to living saints and divine mothers. People at all levels of society, simple country folk to the Pope, would seek counsel from nuns and learned women. Their influence was apparent in social, political, and religious realms, at home and abroad.108 When Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517, reformation swept through the Catholic Church. Radical changes and huge rifts shook Christianity to its very foundations. In its wake, women of the church were no longer sought out for their wisdom.

107 Chance, 60.
Instead, they were excluded from public life. From then on, it was considered "men's work" to divine the Lord's design.109

Struggling under this renewed practice of patriarchy, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was born in Mexico about 1648 or 1651. She lived with her mother at her grandfather's home and was exposed to native and imported languages and their cultures, Latin, Spanish, and colloquialisms, including Native American Indian, African, and rural dialects. De la Cruz also had free access to her grandfather's extensive library.110 Knowing that she would not be allowed to attend the university in Mexico City because she was female, de la Cruz entered into the convent at the age of sixteen.

De la Cruz was an extraordinarily intelligent woman who wrote love poems, prose, and theology unbefitting her station as a nun. Her superiors tried to censure her but de la Cruz's friendship with nobility and fame in Spain gave her a freedom that other nuns as well as most women did not experience. After a series of natural events—a solar eclipse, floods, and crop failures—that caused unrest within Mexico, many of her supporters returned to Spain or fell out of favor. Her writings came under more direct fire and her superiors lured her into writing La Respuesta as a response to criticism.111 Within it, she wove a type of thealogy, a feminine-based spirituality.

La Respuesta was de la Cruz's response to the misogynistic teachings of the church. In it, she questioned the authority of men in both the church and society by challenging the notion that women should not be educated beyond

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109 Duby and Perrot, 140.
110 Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell, trans., The Answer/La Respuesta by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1994), 5.
111 Arenal and Powell, 12-13.
that needed to perform the traditional roles of women as daughter, wife, and mother. Throughout the response, she cited evidence of biblical characters and Catholic saints who were not condemned because of their intellect and studies. de la Cruz also included the Greek and Roman goddesses, Sybil and Minerva, as well as references to the Queen of Sheba and Deborah, of the Old Testament.\footnote{Arenal and Powell, 77-79.}

It is de la Cruz’s inclusion of these four ancient women that makes \textit{La Respuesta} interesting. All four—Sybil, Minerva, the Queen of Sheba, and Deborah—were goddesses or rulers known for their gifts of prophecy or wisdom, and vindicators of de la Cruz’s and woman’s intellect. Sybil is the Latin form of Cybele, the Phrygian Great Mother of Gods.\footnote{Walker, 966.} Sybils became oracles and texts of their sayings, the Sybiline Books, were highly respected by both Christians and Jews.\footnote{La Respuesta, 77.}

Minerva is the Roman goddess of wisdom and is identified with the Greek goddess Athena, the daughter of Zeus, the most powerful god in the Greek pantheon.\footnote{Pierre Grimal, \textit{The Dictionary of Classical Mythology}. (Paris: Presses Universitare de France, 1951), 66, 290, 466.} Minerva is totemized as an owl which consequently became known as the bird of wisdom.\footnote{Walker, 658.} De la Cruz refers to the Queen of Sheba as being “so learned she dares to test the wisdom of the wisest of all wise men with riddles.”\footnote{La Respuesta, 77.} The Queen of Sheba was famed for her beauty in Arabic literature\footnote{Michael Grant, \textit{The History of Ancient Israel}. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1984), 88.}
and is said to have married King Solomon. A son from their union is seen as the founder of the Ethiopian royal dynasty. 119

Deborah was a ruler of Israel and held court under the Palm of Deborah. 120 Married to a man named Barak, called “the ignoramus,” Deborah was a high-handed woman who took no commands from her husband. 121 With these wise and powerful women from a cross section of ancient mythologies as her witnesses, de la Cruz developed a case against the Catholic Church’s stance on the subjection of women.

La Respuesta became de la Cruz’s manifesto—to the Catholic Church and for the women of the world. She portrayed women in a light that religion had chosen to extinguish centuries ago. In re-discovering great goddesses and woman leaders of antiquity, she gave women the tools needed to reclaim that which was taken away during the dawning of patriarchal rule. It would have been interesting to see what more she could have written. Unfortunately, near the end of her life, she ceased to write. Even though it was the seventeenth century, the threat of the Inquisition was still an effective tool in silencing dissidents. According to Nina Scott, professor of Latin American Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst:

There have always been two schools of thought on this matter: those who believe that Sor Juana underwent a true conversion experience and rejected her previous life as folly, and those who feel that the church proved to be too powerful an adversary and ultimately succeeded in extinguishing her will and her voice. 122

119 “Queen of Sheba” www.Britannica.com
120 Judges 4:4 NIV
121 Monaghan, 99.
In the centuries that followed, a period of revival occurred in the evangelical religion of the United States. Peaking in the early 1740s, the Great Awakening saw large crowds of people converted and increased church memberships. Opponents of the revival began preaching against orthodox doctrines including original sin and began to advocate a theological liberalism spawning new denominations such as Unitarianism. Nearly one hundred years later, a Second Great Awakening inspired a reform spirit in the North. A series of reforms were designed to eliminate evils in American society. These included women’s rights and the abolition of slavery.

In 1848, two feminist abolitionists, Lucretia Coffin Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the first women’s rights convention in the United States known as the Seneca Falls Convention. From this meeting came the “Declaration of Sentiments,” largely written by Stanton, which started by stating “We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men and women are created equal.” A series of twelve resolutions were voted upon and adopted.

The Declaration of Sentiments was the first formal statement of women’s rights in the U.S. and was signed by sixty-eight women and thirty-two men. Several of the resolutions were directed at woman’s subordinate position within religious society as directed by the teachings of Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11—“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.” They claimed equality with man as it “was intended by the Creator,” the right to “speak and teach in religious assemblies,” freedom of movement within the religious community,

equal time in the pulpit, and the right “to promote every righteous cause by every righteous means.”

The convention resolution that stated “being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility...equally with man,” provided the basis for radical reform. By invoking God as a higher authority than man-made institutions, Stanton sought to legitimize their cause. “We have met to uplift woman's fallen divinity upon an even pedestal with man's,” said Stanton in her convention address. “The world has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation, because in the degradation of woman the very fountains of life are poisoned at their source.” Stanton believed that at one time women had equal or higher religious status as men, a belief that she shared with another reformer, Matilda Joslyn Gage.

Gage was a woman with a heart for the freedom of all people, regardless of race or nationality. As a child in the 1830s, Gage circulated anti-slavery petitions and in 1850, signed another petition stating she would face a prison term rather than obey the Fugitive Slave law. In the 1870's she wrote a series of controversial articles regarding the horrible treatment received by the Native Americans. Gage was adopted by the wolf clan of the Mohawk nation and wrote of its internal form of government in which “the power of between the sexes was

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124 Kerber and De Hart, 207.
125 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, The Woman's Bible (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), xv.
nearly equal.” It was the Mohawks that gave Gage the vision of equal rights for all women.127

Gage is known best within the context of the woman suffrage movement. Along with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Gage fought for women’s right to vote and they were known as the “triumvirate”—mighty threesome—of the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). Not just content to gain the right to vote, Gage searched for the origin of woman’s oppression. As a result of her research, she came to believe in the existence of prehistoric matriarchies in which women ruled fairly and justly. She writes:

The matriarchate existed long before the patriarchate; the mother was ruler in family and tribe, in State and Church, through long centuries where the father was unknown. Mother and children constituted the family, women gave laws to the State, and in all early religions when a goddess and god are mentioned, it was mother and son, the mother ever holding superior position.128

Gage determined the current state of women related directly to the Church and sought to include an attack on organized religion as she fought for the right to vote. Gage felt the Church threatened women’s rights through its bigoted theology. According to Leila Brammer, Gage believed “the central problem was the elimination, by male translators, of all items in the scripture that were feminine, including God.”129 From this point forward, Anthony and Stanton distanced themselves from the controversial Gage.130

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130 Wagner
In 1888, Gage gave an address entitled "Woman in the Early Christian Church," in which she criticized the audience for "ignoring the feminine in the Divinity." She reminded the group that it was not until after the baptism of Jesus when the divine feminine descended from heaven in the form of a dove and united with him, did Jesus begin his ministry. Gage blamed errors in the translation of the scriptures for the interpretation of the names of God reflecting only a masculine deity and says the whole meaning of the divine name which has been lost must be restored.

According to Lucia Patrick, who wrote her dissertation on Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Woman, Church and State* was not a historical investigation of the status of women but "a work of religious history laying out Gage's belief system." Gage explained her theory of a woman-led society that fell to the power of a male-dominated church. It was this church that used its spiritual power to control society. Gage was convinced that until woman was restored to an equal status with man, society would continue to suffer from a spiritual imbalance of power.

Gage was uncompromising on what she discovered in her research and it cost her friendships that had lasted forty years. In re-discovering what she believed to be existences of matriarchal societies, she sought to reclaim a higher status for women by completely disassembling the existing Church. Interested in the idea of a feminist anti-Church organization, Stanton originally was going to team up with Gage but instead became president of Anthony's association,

132 Lucia Patrick, "Religion and Revolution in the Thought of Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826-1898)" PhD. diss., (The Florida State University, 1996), 98.
133 Patrick, 112.
the National American Women Suffrage Association, NAWSA. Stanton decided
to attack the problem of patriarchy differently than Gage and ended up scripting
an extremely controversial book on the eve of the 20th century—*The Woman’s
Bible*.

In the introduction, Stanton cut right to the heart of the matter: it was
the Bible in its current (1895) form that determined “fashions, forms,
ceremonies, and customs of society, church ordinances and discipline” and was
thereby responsible for the subordination of women.134 “Whatever the Bible
may be made to do in Hebrew or Greek, in plain English it does not exalt and
dignify woman.”135 With a revising committee of twenty U.S. and five European
women, it was her goal to review and give egalitarian commentary on large
portions of the Old and New Testament. Stanton wrote:

Those who have the divine insight to translate, transpose, and
transfigure this mournful object of pity (woman) into an exalted,
dignified personage, worthy of our worship as the mother of the race,
are to be congratulated as having a share of the occult mystic power of
the eastern Mahatma.136

Stanton then went on to do exactly that.

Logically, the first portion of the Bible to be reviewed was Genesis and
the creation story of man and woman. According to chapter 1, verse 27, “So, God
created man in his own image, in the image of God, he created him; male and
female he created them.”137 The implication of creating male and female in the
image of God is the masculinity and femininity of God. And, since male and

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137 Genesis 1:27 NIV
female were created in the image of God, they are by lineage, divinity. Stanton even called God “The Heavenly Mother and Father.”

In chapter 2 of Genesis, there is another creation story of man and woman. In this version, man is created first and woman is then ‘born’ of man. While this is the second creation, it is the most widely promoted—implying that woman was an afterthought and created merely as a helper for man. In this version, woman is no longer divinity and becomes a servant to her master, man.

Stanton makes an interesting point in her commentary:

Accepting the view that man was prior in creation, some Scriptural writers say that as the woman was of man, therefore her position should be one of subjection. Grant it, then as the historical fact is reversed in our day, and the man is now of the woman, shall his place be one of subjection?

This reversal is not the case. Stanton states that “fine-spun metaphysical speculations” and “wily” writing has kept woman subordinate to man.

Following the Old Testament are commentaries on the New Testament.

On Timothy, one of the Pauline letters most known for its misogynist attitude toward women, Lucinda B. Chandler of Stanton’s revising committee writes:

Until the feminine is recognized in the Divine Being, and justice is established in the Church by the complete equality of women with man, the Church cannot be thoroughly Christian. “Honor thy father and thy mother” is the commandment. The human race cannot be brought to its highest state until motherhood is equally honored with fatherhood in human institutions.

Paul’s teaching in 1 Timothy stated that a man must manage his family and his children obey him with proper respect, but it said nothing about the respect of

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138 Stanton, The Woman’s Bible, 14.
139 Stanton, The Woman’s Bible, 20.
140 Stanton, The Woman’s Bible, 21.
141 Stanton, The Woman’s Bible, 173.
the mother. The woman was to remain silent and submissive to man which became evident in the lack of civil rights afforded to woman. Paul’s teachings became the basis of laws that gave all property rights of a woman to her father, brother or husband as well as taking away her freedom of speech. Chandler’s commentary indicated that the church was not being Christian by advocating the subjection of women and the human race would suffer because of it.

*The Woman’s Bible* ends with Stanton’s synopsis on the state of women and their hopes for the future:

> The real difficulty in woman’s case is that the whole foundation of the Christian religion rests on her temptation and man’s fall, hence the necessity of a Redeemer and a plan of salvation. As chief cause of this dire calamity, woman’s degradation and subordination were made a necessity. If, however, we accept the Darwinian theory, that the race has been a gradual growth from the lower to a higher form of life, and that the story of the fall is a myth, we can exonerate the snake, emancipate the woman, and reconstruct a more rational religion for the nineteenth century, and thus escape all the perplexities of the Jewish mythology as of no more importance than those of the Greek, Persian and Egyptian.142

Stanton takes a scientific approach on the subject by proposing that the Theory of Evolution and realization that the creation story is an Abrahamic religious myth should change the cultural standings of both the snake and woman. She also did not believe that suffrage would right all the wrongs done to women; she believed the right to vote would be a tool but not a cure. While she was a vital part in the suffrage movement, Stanton became most notorious for a piece of literature still considered controversial one hundred years after it was first published.

Although Stanton had been president of the NAWSA, her controversial arguments against the church had the potential to damage the cause of suffrage. She and Gage were forced into the background as “woman’s rights issues and the theoretical analyses on which they rested” were nearly completely excluded from the Woman’s Suffrage movement. Both Stanton and Gage were victims of the process but Gage was heavily affected. Woman’s Suffrage became a reality in 1920, but Gage was virtually left out of the history books until the feminist movement rediscovered her in the 1960s.143

After the Civil Rights Movement and other rebellions of the 1960s, women were once again becoming vocal about their social status. The 1960s and 1970s saw the second wave of the women’s rights movement, the feminist movement, and renewed interest in religion. Time was ripe for new ideas and reinterpretation of old ideas, his-story into her-story. Marija Gimbutas offered just that. Once a respected archaeologist and cultural historian, Gimbutas is now considered a charlatan by her peers while a trail blazer for the goddess movement that started in the 1970s. Professor of Archeology at U.C.L.A., Gimbutas had participated in major archeological excavations in Yugoslavia, Macedonia, and the Balkans and built a large inventory of Neolithic pieces from southern Europe and the eastern Mediterranean.144 She then wrote books based on her interpretation of the digs and the artifacts. These books are the source of her controversial standings.

143 Brammer, 118.
144 Ruester, Goddesses 22-23.
From her finds and studies, Gimbutas became convinced of a pre-patriarchal society in which women were the dominant gender and the central deity was the Goddess. However, instead of men being subjugated as women are under patriarchal rule, society was more egalitarian. Gimbutas referred to this time period as matrilineal, “that societal structure in which inheritance takes place through the female line.” \(^{146}\) Culture, gender, and personal beliefs have effect on analysis and Gimbutas allowed her belief in the Goddesses to influence the interpretation of her finds. This is not to say that Gimbutas did not make remarkable finds, only that her personal beliefs and resulting interpretations went against the standard academically accepted practices, thus lessening their impact.

In her digs, Gimbutas unearthed hundreds of female figurines, or ‘goddesses’, with pronounced buttocks, hips, and breasts. Similar items uncovered earlier by male archeologists were originally analyzed as sexual in nature and were nicknamed “Venuses” after the Roman goddess Venus. As the field of women’s studies broadened and more women became archeologists, artifacts were often reevaluated in a new light—and from the female perspective. Regarding the bodily exaggeration, Gimbutas wrote “such emphasis enhances the power of that particular part of the body.” \(^{146}\) Thought to be symbolic of fertility, she believed these figurines represented “the eternal cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth.” \(^{147}\) The sheer numbers of these artifacts convinced Gimbutas that the society she was recovering was matrilineal. Once she made this

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\(^{147}\) Gimbutas, 42.
determination, everything else found in the dig was assigned appropriate matrilineal designations. Chevrons and V’s were pubic symbols\textsuperscript{148}, snakes—long associated as phallic—became symbols of the regenerative properties of the goddess\textsuperscript{149} and the bull and horns—anoter traditionally male symbol of virility—became a diagram of the uterus and fallopian tubes\textsuperscript{150}.

Gimbutas’s standing as a respected archeologist gave non-academic authors legitimacy as they quoted her interpretations. From these, Merlin Stone, author of \textit{When God Was A Woman} and Riane Eisler, author of \textit{The Chalice and the Blade} developed new feminine-based mythologies read by thousands of women and accepted as fact. Gimbutas herself re-released earlier written books under new titles highlighting her blossoming goddess beliefs. But, as Philip G. Davis states:

As a result, her later Goddess books must be considered alongside those of other believers like Stone and Eisler, rather than those of more objective archaeologists like Mellaart, Trump, and Hutton. As Hayden noted, faith—faith in the Goddess—is the key to Gimbutas’s final books\textsuperscript{151}

Regarding Gimbutas’s departure from academically acceptable practices, one would wonder why she would damage her credibility in such a way. This could be compared to the lukewarm believer of the Christian faith who makes a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Immersed in the culture and history of the Bible, faith becomes fact. These historical artifacts which by themselves should be interpreted objectively, coupled with a bit of faith become remnants of the sacred divine. It becomes natural then to proselytize the unconverted.

\textsuperscript{148} Gimbutas, 45.
\textsuperscript{149} Gimbutas, 15.
\textsuperscript{150} Gimbutas, 35.
regardless of what the non-religious people think, which Gimbutas attempted to do through her writings. Her finds were remarkable but her interpretation was biased. As Ruether says, “We should give Gimbutas’s work its due, while also recognizing its faults.”  

Conversely, Rosemary Radford Ruether is a well respected expert on feminist religious thought. She is Carpenter Professor of Feminist Theology at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. Ruether has authored or edited numerous books which include Sexism and Godtalk: a Feminist Theology, Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology, and Goddesses and the Divine Feminine. In her autobiography from Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet which she co-authored with Rita M. Gross, Ruether shares her early sense of God:

My intuitive sense from my late teens was that there was no powerful, white, male King in the sky. The real divinity that sustains the world is female and looks more like a collective of older friends. This community of women who sustain the everyday world is my model for my idea of God as the divine sustaining matrix of creation, or what I call Holy Wisdom.

Ruether has taken the stand that, while she believes God has both feminine and masculine characteristics, she does not substitute God with a goddess. On this point, she separates from many other well-known feminists who have embraced a goddess religion as a substitute for their sagging faith in the Christian, Jewish, or Islamic religions. Ruether’s goal is to see these traditional faiths become more inclusive of women through minimizing the use of exclusively male gender

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152 Ruether, Goddess, 22.
specific descriptive language, thereby easing woman’s subjection. Just as Gage
and Stanton did not believe the right to vote would solve all of woman’s woes,
Ruether does not believe a goddess is woman’s savior.

In 1972, Ruether was invited to teach for a year at Harvard Divinity
School. There, she developed a religious history class through the perspective of
women. Her students studied the idea of a Mother Goddess worshipped in the
prehistoric Near East and viewed images of Paleolithic and Neolithic female
figurines.\(^{154}\) Ruether says:

I was surprised and intrigued when my students, almost all feminist
women, were repelled by these images. The large breasts, bellies, and
buttocks of these figures, with truncated hands and feet and a head that
lacked facial features, struck them as exploitative images of the
female.\(^{155}\)

Instead of viewing these images as their primordial mother, the students
thought of them as prehistoric pornography. Ruether says, “Until then, I had

\(^{154}\) Ruether, \textit{Goddesses}, 2.
\(^{155}\) Ruether, \textit{Goddesses}, 3.
\(^{156}\) “Goddess” of Willendorf. Natural History Museum, Vienna, c. 30,000 B.C.E.
\texttt{http://www.sacredsoruce.com/prodinfo} (3/19/2006)
\(^{157}\) “Goddess” of Lespugue. Les Rideaux caves, Garonne, France; c. 20,000 B.C.E.
\texttt{http://www.sacredsoruce.com/prodinfo} (3/19/2006)
assumed that the existence of these ancient female figurines was "proof" that women had been respected and had wielded power in these ancient matriarchal, or at least prepatriarchal, societies." 158 She gradually became aware of how some anthropologists were creating matriarchal societies using the same techniques as did Gimbutas, allowing personal beliefs to affect analysis instead of remaining objective.

While many of her peers embraced this new feminine mythology, Ruether took a more cautious approach. She was concerned at the speed that some women discarded patriarchal beliefs for matriarchal beliefs. She says:

I object to any Christian exclusivism and also to any simplistic reversal of Christian exclusivism that sets a prehistoric goddess religion as the true source of feminist faith, defining Christianity and Judaism as totally worthless. Feminists need to recognize that in whatever tradition we choose to stand, we are reinterpreting from our own context.159 She ends this book with a vision of a "divine energy... imaged as female or male in ways that celebrate our diverse bodies and energies rather than in ways that reinforce traditional gender stereotypes."160 Ruether believes that putting aside religious divisions and embracing this divine energy is the key to the world's survival.

Part of Ruether's latest book has short biographies of women who are seeking a divine feminine. Carol Christ is included in this grouping, a woman who Ruether believes to be the "leading theologian seeking to create a comprehensive account of the religious and ethical worldview implied by

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158 Ruether, Goddesses, 3.
159 Ruether, Goddesses, 5.
160 Ruether, Goddesses, 308.
Goddess thought and practice."161 Growing up in California in a family of mixed religious traditions, Christ went on to complete an undergraduate degree at Stanford University and holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Yale University.

Christ connects her “coming to the Goddess” to the time when she became increasing alienated from God as Father. She says,

> With no new images to replace the ones I could no longer accept, I felt empty...I sobbed in pain and rejection, until my tears were gone. In the silence that followed, a voice said, “In God is a woman like yourself. She shares in your suffering”...A year later, when I heard the name of the Goddess in a workshop led by a woman named Starhawk, I felt the experience of my entire life affirmed. 162

After attending this workshop with Starhawk, Christ began to “articulate her rejection of Christianity” in academic meetings and major articles. One of her well-known and much reprinted articles is entitled “Why Women Need the Goddess.”163 In this, she discusses how “religions centered on the worship of a male God create moods and motivations that keep women in a state of psychological dependence on men and male authority.”164 Christ goes on to say that images of the divine that are exclusively male leave women lacking power. Re-imaging the divine in female characteristics—the Goddess—empowers women. She gives four instances in which this becomes evident:

- Psychological and political—the defeat of the view engendered by patriarchy that woman’s power is inferior and dangerous.165

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161 Ruether, Goddesses, 285.
163 Ruether, Goddesses, 287.
164 Ruether, Goddesses, 287.
166 Christ, Laughter of Aphrodite, 121.
• Physical—affirmation of the female body and the life cycle expressed in it.\textsuperscript{166}

• Positive valuation—of will in Goddess-centered ritual.\textsuperscript{167}

• Bonds and heritage—celebrations of women’s bonds to each other.\textsuperscript{168}

Ending this article, she suggests that because the symbol of the Goddess empowers women in these ways, it “seems natural that the Goddess would reemerge as symbol of the newfound beauty, strength, and power of women.”\textsuperscript{169}

As Christ continued on her journey to the Goddess, many other leading feminist theologians did not follow her, much like what happened with Matilda Joslyn Gage. According to her biography in Ruether’s book, Christ “felt betrayed by this response from feminists in religious studies but took heart at the growing number of ordinary women who were being drawn into the Goddess movement.”\textsuperscript{170} Consequently, many of her books are written with ‘ordinary women’ in mind instead of academic scholars. In 1987, Christ resigned a tenured full professorship at San Jose State University and moved to Greece where she directs the Ariadne Institute for the Study of Myth and Ritual.

Despite the fact she has legitimate credentials as a theologian, Christ does not have the respect in the academic arena that Ruether holds. Christ asks in a book review in the \textit{Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion}.

Finally, I must ask why Goddess feminism, one of the few religions in the world created by and led by women, seems to be the only religion that Christian feminist theologians, gender theorists, and feminist

\textsuperscript{166} Christ, \textit{Laughter of Aphrodite}, 123.
\textsuperscript{167} Christ, \textit{Laughter of Aphrodite}, 126.
\textsuperscript{168} Christ, \textit{Laughter of Aphrodite}, 129.
\textsuperscript{169} Christ, \textit{Laughter of Aphrodite}, 131.
\textsuperscript{170} Ruether, \textit{Goddesses}, 287.
postcolonialists alike feel justified in dismissing out of hand and even treating with contempt?  

Christ posits that since feminist research in religion takes place in traditionally patriarchal academic cultures, any resulting texts and theories should be read with caution. She does offer that these should be afforded the respect that is offered to male theorists and theories thereby building on the strengths of feminist work in religion while imagining ways to move beyond the limitations of all theories.

Christ put together a set of writings by women on a spiritual quest. She begins the book with the bold statement “WOMEN’S STORIES have not been told.” What she means is that history is male dominated. Most the heroes are male, the gods are male, and most the leaders are male. There are few female role models. When women want to make important decisions in their lives, there are no stories to be used as reference points. Much the same way that a divine feminine empowers women, having texts written by women for women empowers women. Christ states that “the telling of women’s stories involves a new naming of the great powers and hence a new naming of the whole women’s experience.”

One of Carol Christ’s contemporaries is a woman named Starhawk. Quoting the words Starhawk uses to introduce herself, she is a “Witch, peace

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172 Christ, “Whose History Are We Writing?”, 82.
174 Christ, Diving Deep and Surfacing, 12.
activist, ecofeminist, author, and lecturer."  
Born Miriam Simos, Starhawk’s books have been translated into eight different languages.

Starhawk’s groundbreaking book *The Spiral Dance*, was originally published in 1979. Written as a guide for those involved in the goddess movement, *The Spiral Dance* has been used as text in many college courses including feminine-based spirituality and alternative religions. Starhawk taught for more than ten years at the Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality under the direction of Matthew Fox at Holy Names College in Oakland, California.

According to Rosemary Ruether,

>This association brought her into contact with new forms of Christian feminist and ecological spirituality remarkably similar to the worldview that she was developing in feminist Wicca. This experience, among others, broadened Starhawk’s worldview ecumenically, leading her to recognize patterns of spirituality in other religions similar to her own perspective. She no longer assumed a simple dichotomy that cast Christianity and other “patriarchal religions” as solely destructive and Wicca as the sole positive religion.

Starhawk is currently teaching EAT, Earth Activist Training and continues to work closely with Reclaiming, an activist branch of modern Pagan religion.

In *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk explains that Witchcraft is a goddess religion and gives a historical background that documents it as the “oldest

179 www.starhawk.org (6/10/06)
religion extant in the West.”180 She states that “according to our legends, Witchcraft began more than thirty-five thousand years ago.”181 She provides a timeline of events explaining the cultural changes of the goddess religion and how its dogma of the Mother and Divine Child found its way into the teachings of “conquering patriarchies.”182

Starhawk admits that the use of the word Witch or Witchcraft “frightens many people and confuses many others.”183 She also states

The word Witch carries so many negative connotations that many people wonder why we use it at all. Yet, to reclaim the word Witch is to reclaim our right, as women, to be powerful; as men, to know the feminine within as divine.184

Starhawk does not promote the goddess as a “parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The Goddess does not rule the world; She is the world.”185 To explain the concept of the Goddess better, Starhawk states:

In the Craft, we do not believe in the Goddess—we connect with Her: through the moon, the stars, the ocean, the earth, through trees, animals, through other human beings, through ourselves. She is here. She is within us all. She is the full circle: earth, air, fire, water and essence—body, mind, spirit, emotions, change...Whether we are eating, sleeping, making love, or eliminating body wastes, we are manifesting the Goddess.186

Instead of elevating the concept of the Goddess to an unattainable level like the medieval view of Mary, Starhawk grounds Her to humanity. We are the Goddess and the Goddess is in us, female and male.

181 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, 27.
182 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, 29.
185 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, 33.
186 Starhawk, The Spiral Dance, 104-105.
Starhawk explains that within Witchcraft, participants recognize both the female and male aspects of deity. The female—Mother Goddess—is the birthgiver; the male—the Horned God—is hunter and hunted.\textsuperscript{187} These roles have been recreated over the centuries as the God or Goddess and consort and the Mother and Divine Child including within the Abrahamic faith. After Christianity became the primary religion in the West, indigenous people generally accepted the new dogma because it often was just a retelling of their own religious stories. The country priests often took part in the pagan festivals and reincorporated the rituals into Christian rites.\textsuperscript{188} However, by the mid-twelfth century, the Catholic Church began policing their dogma by instituting the Inquisition. Over the next several centuries, Witchcraft faced a period of prosecution referred to as "The Burning Times."\textsuperscript{189} In was during this time that "The Craft," as Witchcraft is often referred to by its participants, went underground in both America and Europe. However, like the goddess movement, Witchcraft has seen a resurgence since the 1970s with many Witches 'coming out of the broom closet.'\textsuperscript{190} Starhawk's books, classes, and lectures have been invaluable tools for those choose to follow this spiritual path. A view of the shelves in any secular bookstore will attest to the popularity of Witchcraft, with many of the books geared toward a younger or more open-minded audience.

\textsuperscript{187} Starhawk, \textit{The Spiral Dance}, 27.
\textsuperscript{188} Starhawk, \textit{The Spiral Dance}, 29.
\textsuperscript{189} \url{www.religioustolerance.org}. (6/10/06)
\textsuperscript{190} Starhawk, \textit{The Spiral Dance}, 31.
Starhawk has also formed a film company whose first release was *Signs Out of Time* (2004), a documentary on the life of Marija Gimbutas. In her introduction to the twentieth anniversary edition of *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk writes:

In researching a film on the archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, I've become aware of the controversy that rages in academic circles around the history of the Goddess. When I wrote this book, I was not attempting to do historical scholarship or archaeology...Today I might exhibit more middle-aged caution, but to do so might undercut the real power of this history...

While these comments may not excuse what some may consider a lack of objectivity, it does explain her purpose. Starhawk wants to show us that we have the freedom of choice. We can continue in the status quo, or we can make a change. On this, she states:

A change in symbols, however, is not enough. We must also change the context in which we respond to symbols and the ways in which they are used. If female images are merely plugged into old structures, they too will function as agents of oppression, and this prospect is doubly frightening because they would then be robbed of the liberating power with which they are imbued today.

Starhawk's main concern is that one set of values or traditions may be exchanged with another set, merely changing the gender. The freedom of choice would remain limited to a specific gender, thus alienating men. However, if these symbols are incorporated with those existing and used as a comparison or companion, both women and men can achieve balance.

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191 www.starhawk.org (6/10/06)
These are thoughts that cause the Catholic Church to be frightened of Starhawk’s power and influence over its flock. When she became part of the faculty at the Institute of Culture and Spirituality, Starhawk was one of the deciding factors in the expulsion of Dominican priest, Matthew Fox.

Matthew Fox was a member of the Dominican Order for thirty-four years, joining in 1960. He was ordained seven years later and earned a doctorate in spirituality in Paris. In 1977, he founded the Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality at Holy Names College in Oakland, California. Fox is the author of 28 books, the most recent entitled A New Reformation.

Fox’s parents were Irish/Catholic and Jewish/Anglican, providing him with an eclectic mix of religious ideologies. At the age of thirteen, Fox was stricken with polio and he spent the next two years recovering the strength in his legs that would allow him to walk again. During his recovery, he met a spiritual person who used to be a Dominican monk. Determined not to waste his life, Fox decided to do something interesting. That meeting set him on the spiritual path he continues to walk today.

In the creation of the Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality, Fox was determined to provide an environment friendly to learning all kinds of spirituality. Because of the alternative religions and theology taught and the faculty at the Institute, which included Starhawk, Fox was formally silenced for one year (from 1989 to 1990) by then Cardinal Ratzinger, head of the Roman Catholic Church’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Fox’s official

195 “Counting our Original Blessings—an Interview with Matthew Fox.”
words after the silencing were: “As I was saying...” He was dismissed from the Dominican Order in 1993 and the Catholic Church terminated his program at Holy Names College.\textsuperscript{196}

The principle reasons for his dismissal from the Order were that he is a “feminist theologian," that he calls God “Mother,” that he prefers “Original Blessing” to “Original Sin,” that he calls God “child,” that he associates too closely with Native Americans and people of the Wicca (Witchcraft) tradition, and that he does not condemn homosexuals.\textsuperscript{197} He was not convicted of heresy. Instead, Fox was ordered to return to Chicago from Oakland and he refused. Fox was dismissed for insubordination.

In January, 1996, Fox formed the University of Creation Spirituality, now known as Wisdom University. The tradition is feminist and wisdom centered, caring about ecological, social, and gender justice.\textsuperscript{198} He has created “The Cosmic Mass” “that mixes dance, techno, and live music, dj, vj, rap and contemporary art forms with the western liturgical tradition.”\textsuperscript{199} Instead of allowing himself to be silenced or defeated by the Catholic Church, he did what Martin Luther did in 1517. He penned 95 Theses and nailed them to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany in Spring of 2005, shortly after the election of Cardinal Ratzinger to the office of Pope. Fox has challenged the Catholic Church to a new reformation, to take action against and responsibility

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\item \textsuperscript{196} “Counting our Original Blessings—an Interview with Matthew Fox.”
\item \textsuperscript{197} Matthew Fox, \textit{A New Reformation: Creation Spirituality and the Transformation of Christianity} (Rochester: Inner Traditions. 2006), 132.
\item \textsuperscript{198} “About Matthew Fox” \url{www.matthewfox.org} (6/10/06)
\item \textsuperscript{199} “About Matthew Fox” \url{www.matthewfox.org} (6/10/06)
\end{enumerate}
for the pedophile scandals of their priests, and a reawakening of the Christian spirit.200

One of the reasons Fox was dismissed from the Dominican Order was his belief in the femininity of God. In an interview on the Maverick for the Minds website, Fox states that he believes “the return of the Goddess is one of the most important movements of today’s hope.” He cites examples of how in the eleventh century, the “Goddess came roaring into Christianity” and how the “Chartes Cathedral is a temple to the goddess Mary,” built on the site of the Cathedral to the Goddess of the Grain. He marveled how over five hundred more cathedrals were built in one hundred fifty years all over Europe, dedicated to Mary the goddess. It was during this time that universities were invented. It was a time of creativity and growth, influenced by the belief in the Goddess, the Great Mother of All.201

Fox has devoted chapters of his books to the feminine side of God. In his book *Original Blessing*, he introduces a chapter entitled “God as Mother, God as Child.” In it, he wonders about what would happen if we lived in a nurturing society, a society in which “even men nurtured self, one another, and others.” He believes that were this to happen, there would be a recovery of the tradition of God as Mother.202 He writes:

> When I reflect on the burnings at the stake and the condemnations of persons from Giordano Bruno to Eckhart to thousands of older women who were dismissed as witches, and also on the genocide against Native American peoples, I wonder if such violence can only be understood by grasping the truth of how the repressed mother in male-dominated

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200 Fox, A New Reformation. 6.
201 Maverick for the Minds
Western society and religion is powerful indeed. There lies the dark side to our history.\footnote{Fox, Original Blessing, 224.}

Fox believes in the need for “gender justice in our divinities.”\footnote{Fox, Original Blessing, 224.} When there is a balance—when we no longer refer to God as only male but also embrace a feminine side of God—there will be fewer wars and more creativity. He states that “the Goddess represents the Divine Creativity in everyone which is why she is often depicted as pregnant.” When we only have “a male image of God, it legitimizes the other patriarchal privileges and oppression, including men against men.”\footnote{Maverick for the Minds}

When Fox nailed his Theses to Castle Church doors in the spring of 2005, he included ninety-five articles of faith that he believes to be essential for the survival of Christianity. His first article is “God is both Mother and Father.” The second article is “At this time in history, God is more Mother than Father because the feminine is most missing and it is important to bring back gender balance.” Fox firmly believes that the loss of the feminine aspect of God has caused our ‘souls to shrink.’ With the revival of the divine feminine, we can grow into our potential of well-roundedness. According to Fox, “The motherhood of God is celebrated wherever panentheism is celebrated, wherever images of roundness and encircling take precedence over linear imaging.”\footnote{Fox, Original Blessing, 223.} This roundness and encircling is likened to a divine hug. Fox calls this “motherly talk. It is enveloping, embracing, welcoming, inclusive, cosmic, and
expansive." Instead of fearing the wrath of God the Father of the Abrahamic faiths, we are gathered to the breast of Mother God. Not only is this needed for the survival of the Church, but also for the survival of humanity.

Fox's influence is far reaching. As a feminist theologian, he is well-respected by contemporary women who are searching for the divine feminine. One of these women is Patricia Lynn Reilly. She is another theologian who has collected stories of women and created a woman-affirming spirituality. Reilly holds a Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and post-graduate certification from the Women's Theological Center in Women's Spirituality and Feminist Theology. Founder of Open Window Creations, Reilly facilitates workshops and retreats on women's spirituality, recovery, and the healing ministry.

In the opening words of her book, A God Who Looks Like Me, Reilly openly admits that this work "is not a theological argument nor an intellectual discussion." However, this should not discount the content of the book or the wisdom found within its pages. Coupled with historical aspects of the Hebrew/Christian religion, Reilly has arranged a collection of stories from the women she met in her workshops and retreats: ordinary words from ordinary women. Uncensored or interpreted, these stories are scraps of feminine theology woven together to form a rich spiritual tapestry.

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207 Fox, Original Blessing, 224.
A daughter of alcoholic parents, Reilly spent a good part of her childhood with her sister in a Catholic orphanage. There, she was educated by the nuns, received her First Communion, and met Mary, the Queen of Heaven. She says:

> It was clear to me that Mary was God, or at least equal to the King of heaven. But the nuns and priests kept telling me she wasn’t. She was the mother of God, they said, not Mother God. There was a difference, they assured me.

After her mother recovered from alcoholism, the three were reunited and became removed from the Catholic community. In their new neighborhood, Reilly began to attend the Protestant church of her mother. In this new environment, Mary was rarely mentioned and then only as a part of the annual Christmas pageant. The new main deity in Reilly’s life was God the father.

As Reilly began her studies at Princeton, a professor explained “inclusive language” to the class. He suggested that they “experiment with alternate names and images of God...including ‘Mother God’”. This started her on the first phase of her journey toward the feminine face of God:

> It is an essential journey toward self-love, self-trust, and the indwelling of our power as women. The journey toward a feminine face of God involves the exorcising of the old names and images, and the embracing of women-affirming alternatives. These new images are bearers of healing. As we immerse ourselves within them, healing reaches down into the depths of our self-hatred.

Healing is a necessary part of recovery from years of negative reinforcement by the church as it placed the entire blame for the fall from grace on woman. As a woman puts a feminine face on God and realizes she is of divine heritage, she can then accept that she is good enough just as she is. The overall positive

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changes for women greatly outweigh the possibility of men’s feelings getting hurt over a perceived lower religious status.

Throughout each chapter of the book, Reilly includes words of women gathered from her workshops and retreats along with spiritually-based feminine affirmations. From biblical stories long buried under patriarchy, for example Lilith, Adam’s first wife, to re-written Christian hymns such as “There is Power in the Blood,” Reilly takes what was once considered ‘unclean’ and offers it as holy. In doing this, she gives women the opportunity to change negative self images into positive possibilities. These women then “become the feminine face of God to each other.”

Reilly’s strength in creating a woman-affirming spirituality lays in her ability to get a woman to ‘imagine’ what her life would be like if she had a god who looked like her. In her woman-inspired story of the myth of creation, Reilly introduces the Mother:

In the very beginning was the Mother,
On the first day, she gave birth to light and darkness. They danced together.
On the second day, she gave birth to land and water. They touched.
On the third day, she gave birth to green growing things. They rooted and took a deep breath.
On the fourth day, she gave birth to land, sea, and air creatures. They walked, swam and flew.
On the fifth day, her creation learned balance and cooperation. She thanked her partner for coaching her labor.
On the sixth day, she celebrated the creativity of all living things.
On the seventh day, she left space for the unknown.

Using the phase “In the very beginning,” Reilly indicates that the Mother, the creatress of all living things, preceded the male creator from the Abrahamic

\[\text{213} \text{ Reilly, A God Who Looks Like Me: Discovering A Woman-Affirming Spirituality, 8.}\]
\[\text{214} \text{ Patricia Lynn Reilly. Be Full of Yourself! The Journey from Self-Criticism to Self-Celebration (Gualala: Open Window Creations, 1997), 89-90.}\]
mythology. Reilly writes that since a woman carries new life within her body and subsequently gives it birth, it is scientifically sound and logical that the sacred divine would be female or have feminine attributes.

With the advent of the home computer and Internet access, women have the opportunity to search for the divine feminine at their fingertips. At The Goddess Network (TGN), Charlene Proctor has created a website “for anyone interested in expanding their intellectual and spiritual boundaries.” Proctor holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Michigan and is the founder of TGN. She is a wife and mother, an author, researcher, and educator in the field of women’s empowerment and female work culture.

In an interview about her newly released book, *Let Your Goddess Grow: 7 Spiritual Lessons on Female Power and Positive Thinking*, Proctor explains how belief in the divine feminine is empowering to women. She says:

> I think reviving an image of the Goddess can bridge the conceptual gap for women because they see themselves in the face of the divine. They can relate to it...Embracing the significance of the Mother, the Goddess, who is inherent in our body and the earth, is about respect and honor for the world we manipulate...With conscious awareness, we can become a channel for our spirit power. And THAT is the true state of empowerment.

Proctor, like her twentieth century predecessors, believes that remembering the feminine face of God can empower women to rise above her status in life, both in the private and public sectors.

In what is more of a business than a spiritual program, Proctor offers the tools for the empowerment of women at The Goddess Network. She has written

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215 “Dr. Charlene’s Soul Work.” www.thegoddessnetwork.net
216 “An Interview With Charlene.” www.thegoddessnetwork.net/interviewwithcharlene.
a book entitled *The Woman’s Book of Empowerment: 323 Affirmations That Change Everyday Problems into Moments of Potential*. This book has topics of real-life negative scenarios followed by words to change them into positive experiences. Besides Proctor’s books and lectures, there are ‘live’ programs and discussion groups as well as on-line cyber-circles, chat rooms, and workshops.\

With her background in the corporate world, Proctor realizes the need for women to have strong role models and positive affirmations. Since our culture has not taught of a divine feminine, The Goddess Network provides a listing of goddesses and their characteristics. This allows a woman to choose a goddess with whom she can identify or whose characteristics she wishes to emulate. According to Proctor:

>If revisiting the imagery of the Goddess liberates women from self-deprecating messages of why we can’t achieve success or why we can’t feel good about ourselves, then we need a Goddess revival within. Better yet, we need a cultural Goddess revival, one so big it scoops up the men in our lives and helps them develop their feminine side to have a balanced perspective in the way they are managing the world.\

The idea of gender balance is not a new concept among those who are searching for the divine feminine. It is not a matter of replacing the image of a Father God with a Mother Goddess, although after years of repression, many women have chosen to do just that. It is remembering the biological fact that mammalian creatures do not reproduce asexually. There must be both a Father and a Mother. Proctor says, “until we recognize that the Divine is at work through us, a divine mother as well as a divine father present and at work in our

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217 “About the Goddess Network.” www.thegoddessnetwork.net/aboutus.
218 “An Interview with Charlene.”
lives, humanity will not feel empowered.”\textsuperscript{219} Including the feminine aspect of God in the trinity or pantheon is both logical and liberating to many women and men.

The intention of this thesis has been to trace the footsteps of women and men as they search for the divine feminine. This cannot be complete without including the efforts of the writer. As this paper slips into a first person narrative, consider the following as a personal addendum to an otherwise academic and historical document.

I grew up attending a conservative Mennonite church while living in an agnostic household. Although I was the sixth of seven children, I grew up as a loner—content to spend my time alone, reading or running through the woods beside our house. With an active imagination and a voracious appetite for books, I developed an open-mindedness for religious thought. This was fostered by my Sunday School teacher who answered every question I asked with honesty and integrity. God was like the grandfather I never experienced. Jesus was his son to whom I was grateful for chocolate bunnies and Christmas presents.

By the time I was in high school, I realized there could not be just one path to God. I saw inconsistencies in the Bible, double-standards in the pulpit, and had more than one church telling me “their way was the only way.” Spurred on by the teachings of Mormonism, Catholicism, conservative Protestantism, Native American spirituality, and a naïve form of witchcraft, I performed my

first sacred ritual, sincerely requesting guidance in choosing what was the true religion. I was sixteen years old.

The next fifteen years were spent trying to force a square peg into the round hole of conservative Christianity. While I knew things just did not fit, I was held captive by feelings of unworthiness and submissiveness. However, I still read voraciously and came across a book that set me on a spiritual journey. It was like Pandora’s box—once opened, I could never force everything back inside. The book was entitled *The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, edited by Barbara G. Walker. When I first read that Christianity’s holy days were timed and patterned after ancient pagan seasonal celebrations as part of a church-sanctioned Christianization process, things started to fall into place. As Walker’s writings were often confirmed by academically accepted works which included the words of Pope Gregory I, I realized that even God and Jesus were not the only way to God. There were a lot of gods, saviors, and goddesses and I had in my hand the first key to my personal salvation.

Since then, I have added other keys on my spiritual key ring. I have read scores of books and articles, attended workshops and retreats and sat in cyber-circles and discussion groups on the topic of the divine feminine. I have laughed, cried, hugged, and supported other women on this same spiritual path. We all share a sense of ‘coming home again’ and can only attribute it to the rediscovery a deity with whom we can truly identify: the divine feminine. While the inclusion of a goddess within my personal pantheon does not insure me of

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220 Christianization is the conversion of individuals to Christianity or the conversion of entire peoples at once, also includes the practice of converting pagan cult practices, pagan religious imagery, pagan sites and the pagan calendar to Christian uses.
salvation, she does provide the gender balance spoken of by Matthew Fox and Charlene Proctor. With balance comes peace. I no longer feel less of a person because the image of the god of Abraham is masculine. I, too, have an image of the divine feminine who precedes the masculine god and to whom I can claim direct lineage.

In sum, through the practices and articles of faith issued by the patriarchal Abrahamic church, the divine feminine has been buried, erased, rewritten, and denied. The writings of the Christian church document the efforts of the Hebrew nation to eliminate the worship of all gods except the masculine god, Yahweh. The first and second law issued by Yahweh to Moses reiterates this command. Additionally, monotheism became politically advantageous to men. This left women under the complete subjection of man.

By the early twelfth century C.E., rediscovery of the divine feminine became evident in the writings, drawings, buildings, and visions of nuns, peasants, noblewomen, and everyday women as well as some extraordinary men. Additionally, Gnostic texts from the first centuries C.E. that had been deleted from the canon of the New Testament offer insight into the early Christian's view of a Mother god. This rediscovery continues through today. Restoring the divine feminine to her pre-Yahweh status or even equal status with Yahweh may just save the world from imminent destruction. Feminist philosopher Mary Daly says:

The Second Coming then means that the prophetic dimension in the symbol of the Great Goddess—later reduced to the “Mother of God”—is the key to salvation from servitude to structures that obstruct human becoming...Anthropologically speaking, it is women who must make the
breakthrough that can alter the seemingly doomed course of human evolution.221

In seeing themselves as images of the divine, women are empowered to make life changes, no longer accepting man as their savior or master but rather as their equal. The search for the Divine Feminine may be the catalyst for bringing the feminine and masculine genders back into balance, thereby bringing about the salvation for the human race.

221 Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father, 96-97.
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