point individuals of both sexes will more easily become androgynous, whole persons instead of "half-humans" trapped in female or male gender roles.

Conclusion

It is important to note what links these two arenas of feminist thought. Feminism as scholarly method is critical of the androcentric mind-set. Feminism as social vision is critical of patriarchal culture. Androcentrism and patriarchy share the same attitude toward women. In both cases, women are objectified as nonhuman, are spoken about as if they were objects but not subjects, and are manipulated by others. In both cases, the end result is silence about women and the silencing of women. Androcentric scholarship proceeds as if women do not exist, or as if they are objects rather than subjects. Patriarchal culture discourages women from naming reality, and patriarchal scholarship then ignores the namings of reality that women create nevertheless. But women studies scholarship takes seriously women's namings of reality, even in patriarchal contexts, and feminism as social philosophy encourages women's authentic, empowered namings of reality and demands that these namings be taken seriously by the whole society.

Feminism's Impact on Religion and Religious Studies: A Brief History

A GREAT VARIETY OF VOICES has spoken out on feminism and religion during the past two centuries, though the nineteenth- and twentieth-century voices are separated by a long period of silence. This chapter will name some of those voices and survey the major issues with which they were concerned. Although nineteenth-century feminism was not *primarily* concerned with religion, it did make some contributions to it. By contrast, beginning in the late 1960s, feminist scholars of religion have challenged and changed the religious landscape considerably. Beginning with Judaism and Christianity, but now extending to all religions, feminist clergy and laypeople have called on their traditions to take the religious aspirations and lives of women more seriously. Twentieth-century religious feminism also includes the voices of those who have left the established religions for feminist reasons and have gone on to advocate religious practices inspired by ancient and contemporary "pagan" traditions.

Origins and Foremothers: The Nineteenth Century

When feminists began to discuss religion in late 1960s, many of us were not aware that we had nineteenth-century foremothers. History books didn't mention them, and we found the 1950s cult of domesticity in which we had grown up so strong and the male

dominance so severe that most of us didn't think other women could possibly have challenged them. We felt that we were the first generation of women to be so self-conscious about our liabilities in male-dominated culture and the first generation of women to call out so strongly for change and transformation. Little did we realize that those who had written history had no stake in preserving the stories of strong, self-defined women of high achievements; they had instead an interest in writing history as if women had always kept to their assigned place in patriarchal culture without protest or analysis. Subjugated classes and ethnic groups are routinely denied their history as part of the dominant culture's attempts to keep them subservient.

This heritage of which we were unaware began in the late eighteenth century, with the writings of Abigail Adams and Mary Wollstonecraft, and lasted into the early twentieth century. During that period, many thinkers wrote on "the woman question," presented in that androcentric fashion. Only after World War I did concern over "the woman question" die down; in many countries women had achieved the vote, superficially the goal of many advocates of women's rights. Gradually, women's levels of professional and political achievement declined, so that by the 1950s, there were many fewer female professionals than there had been several generations earlier. The current women's movement began in the 1960s, at first as if this "century of struggle"[1] had not occurred.

The lesson is grim. If feminist scholarship and thinking do not become part of the academic canon taught to each new generation of aspiring scholars, they are lost to consciousness and must be rediscovered. The mental energy lost in "reinventing the wheel" in each generation is enormous and severely slows down the process of reconceptualizing the world in nonpatriarchal terms. Furthermore, it can be depressing and enraging to discover how little we have progressed, how our ideas that seem so radical and innovative

actually reduplicate ideas that forgotten generations of feminists had already articulated.

Before turning to the nineteenth-century women's movement itself, I want to explore two other nineteenth-century movements that were not overtly feminist but actually bear more resemblance to current feminist transformations of religion. One of them was a scholarly discussion, conducted largely by European men, about early societies and human origins. The other involved women's new modes of participation in religions, especially in evangelical Christian and new religious movements.

Early Matriarchal Theory

Nineteenth-century debates about early society prefigure some of the issues debated today by advocates of the prepatriarchal hypothesis, discussed at length in chapter 5. The nineteenth-century debate, part of a much larger conversation about human origins and evolution, questioned whether society and religion had always been patriarchal, or whether "matriarchy"—a mirror image of patriarchy in which women dominated men—had preceded the current patriarchies. Since nineteenth-century anthropologists argued that all societies passed through the same stages on their way from barbarism to civilization, those who advocated matriarchy believed that all societies had originally been matriarchal.

In 1861, two influential books initiated this debate. In *Das Mutterrecht* (*Matriarchy*), J. J. Bachofen sought to demonstrate that patriarchal civilization had been preceded by a matriarchal period in human society. In the same year, Henry Maine argued in *Ancient Law* that all human societies were originally patriarchal. Debate over this issue continued for over half a century; the same period saw a great deal of debate and social activism regarding women's legal and political rights in patriarchal societies. Thirty years after

the books by Bachofen and Maine, the book most relevant for today was published by Friedrich Engels. This book, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, places the discussion of prepatriarchal society in a socialist context. How did these early advocates of the claim that patriarchy emerged relatively late in human history justify their case?

Das Mutterrecht is a less substantiated and more ideological forerunner of current scholarship on prepatriarchal society. The earliest stage of human society, according to Bachofen, was a female-dominated matriarchy. More than any other scholar, Bachofen saw the prepatriarchal period as a mirror image of patriarchy: Women dominated society, inheritance flowed through the mother rather than the father, and daughters were favored over sons. The religion of the matriarchate involved an earth-centered veneration of the goddess: Bachofen believed that this religious outlook would have predisposed all people, both male and female, to a psychological and spiritual life dominated by the so-called "feminine" pole of cosmic duality—night, moon, earth, darkness, death, and mourning. Additionally, he argued that the "feminine" qualities of unity and brotherhood prevailed over the "masculine" traits of divisiveness and strength.

This early stage of civilization, however, was destined to be overcome by its opposite and superior stage of evolution. Patriarchy succeeded matriarchy as an "ascent from earth to heaven, from matter to immateriality, from mother to father."[2] In patriarchal societies, which Bachofen saw as more civilized because they evolved later, the qualities that fitted women for leadership in early society now won them only "bejeweled servitude."[3] Materiality and immersion in maternity, qualities Bachofen saw as essential to women, had no other utility in civilized patriarchy.

Engels's views on social evolution and matriarchy are somewhat different. Though he also believed in unilinear human evolution, he was less convinced that each successive stage was an improvement. Specifically, Engels saw the evolution of women's position as part of the rise of private property, the monogamous family, and the state—a package that, as a socialist, he did not evaluate positively.

In the earliest human societies, Engels believed, a woman was not economically dependent on her husband, and her labor was socially necessary and useful for the entire tribal group. He thought that this early prepatriarchal period could be divided into two stages. In the first, private property did not exist in any form; the only division of labor was by sex, and every man in the group was a potential mate for every woman. Private, exclusive relations were not the norm. This was followed by a second period in which pair bonds were stronger, but the relationship could be easily ended by either partner, and women were not dependent economically on men. This period, Engels felt, was characterized by warm marital relations. But growth in clan property gradually led to the existence of private property, which, in turn, encouraged monogamy. When the property-owning family became the primary economic unit of society, women's labor, formerly useful and necessary for the whole society, became the private property of their families. Because of this transition, women became economically dependent on their husbands. Their work, according to Engels, came to be performed under conditions of virtual slavery, from that time until the present day.

Women in Nineteenth-Century Religions

Just as the speculations of nineteenth-century European men prefigured twentieth-century feminist discussions of prepatriarchal society, so some nineteenth-century women's involvement in religion provides significant parallels with twentieth-century religious feminism. As Barbara MacHaffie and other historians have shown, the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood reversed traditional Christian stereotypes about women. Rather than viewing

women as inevitably prone to lust and sin (like Eve), nineteenth-century theologians saw them as morally and spiritually superior to men, though also so weak and delicate that they must avoid the rough worlds of politics and business.[4] As a result, women became the mainstays, though not the leaders, of most religious bodies, as men occupied themselves less and less with religion. At least for middle-class women, the combination of education, free time, and a sense of their own moral superiority led many into religious organizations dedicated to charity at home and missionary activity abroad. These various societies, run by and for women, fulfilled rather than violated women's "proper place," but at the same time, they allowed women some activities outside the home, provided companionship, allowed women to develop organizational skills, and gave them activities in which they could experience a sense of accomplishment.[5] Women's missionary societies, dedicated to spreading the Christian message in places where it had been previously unheard, were especially successful and well organized, contributing greatly to the overall success of nineteenth-century missionary movements.

During the nineteenth century, the first controversies over the preaching and ordination of women also occurred. Nineteenth-century Christian evangelical groups were much more open to women preachers than are their twentieth-century counterparts. For example, Charles Finney, an important evangelical preacher, believed that women should preach if they felt deeply moved to do so. The acceptance of women preachers in evangelical circles raised the question in older, more established Protestant denominations, but in them women's preaching was not generally accepted. For those denominations that practiced formal ordination rather than a less formal call to preach, ordination of women to the ministry also first occurred in the nineteenth-century. In 1853 Antoinette Brown, a Congregationalist minister, became the first woman to be ordained. A few Congregationalist churches continued to ordain

women, as did some branches of the Methodist Church, the Unitarians, and the Universalists, but women's ordination was neither common nor easy.[6] Few women were ordained, and many denominations did not begin to consider the question until the 1970s or later.

Finally, women played atypical roles in a number of the sectarian movements found in nineteenth-century America. The Shaker movement and the Oneida community both thoroughly challenged conventional notions of the family, and of men's and women's roles. Neither of them allowed traditional nuclear families; the Shakers were entirely celibate, and the Oneida community considered every man to be married to every woman and discouraged permanent alliances. Both groups also discouraged strict division of labor along sexual lines and involved women in the economic production that made the communities self-sufficient.[7] Other less radical nineteenth-century movements nevertheless deviated significantly from Catholic and mainstream Protestant gender norms. Some of these alternative movements were established by women, most notably the Christian Science movement, founded by Mary Baker Eddy, and the Theosophy movement, founded by Madame Blavatsky. Most of them also offered women greater participation and recognition than was available in mainline Protestant denominations. Many of these sectarian groups, both those that were socially radical and those that were more conventional, challenged the common theological language as well. The Shakers, the Oneida community, and Christian Scientists all assumed and insisted that God had feminine as well as masculine dimensions.[8] Generally speaking, these groups were attractive to women, who joined them in greater numbers than did men. In attempting to explain why, some have concluded, in the words of one scholar, that "by joining sectarian groups . . . women may have . . . been unconsciously rebelling against their status in Protestant churches and American culture."[9]

The Nineteenth-Century Women's Movement

For the most part, overtly religious issues were not central to the nineteenth-century women's movement. Most nineteenth-century feminists wished neither to blame religion for women's position nor to advocate a changed position for women in the church. They simply wanted to gain certain basic rights for women without taking on religion as either ally or foe. Nevertheless, it was impossible for them to ignore religion completely because religious authorities did not ignore them.

The nineteenth-century women's rights movement grew out of women's antislavery activities. Both the hostile reactions of some abolitionists to women who took a public role in the abolition movement and women's comparison of their own lack of rights and self-determination to that of slaves encouraged women to question their place in society.

We can explore the first of these motivations by looking at the issue of women's public speaking about the slavery issue. The norm for women, enforced by centuries of Christian practice, was to be silent at public gatherings, whether religious or political. Through the centuries there had been exceptions to this rule, perhaps most notably Anne Hutchinson in seventeenth-century New England, but the first women to speak in public *regularly* were the Grimké sisters, Angelina and Sarah. They knew slavery firsthand as the daughters of a Southern slave-owning family and, beginning in 1836, spoke eloquently against it. But churches reacted with furor that women would dare to address a mixed public assembly, denouncing their actions as unwomanly and unchristian. Deeply hurt by this opposition, the sisters responded with lectures and pamphlets dealing directly with women's rights. Sarah wrote "that God has made no distinction between men and women as moral beings. . . . To me it is perfectly clear *that whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do.*"[10]

When Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, American women delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London in 1840, were denied seats on the convention floor with the male delegates, they responded by organizing the famous Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, which launched the American women's movement. The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, written by Mott and Stanton and adopted by the convention, was modeled on the American Declaration of Independence, but included women where that famous document had excluded them. Thus, it begins by stating that "all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights."[11] The document goes on to list a history of "repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man towards woman," including men's usurpation of the prerogative of God "himself, claiming it as his right to assign her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God." To correct the situation a number of resolutions were adopted, including one that acknowledged "that woman is man's equal—was intended to be so by the Creator," and another declaring "that woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted interpretation of the Scriptures have marked out for her."[12]

Though the women's rights movement as a whole went no further in exploring links between women's inferior position and religion, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and a committee she recruited went on to compile *The Woman's Bible*, the major nineteenth-century feminist interpretation of religion. Stanton was convinced that women working for equality would not succeed until the spell of the Bible had been broken. *The Woman's Bible*, not an alternative bible but a collection of commentaries on passages dealing with women, attempted to establish that the Bible was the creation of a certain cultural epoch containing *both* divine truth and culturally limited views. This position is very much like those taken by

some contemporary feminist interpreters of the Bible, and many of the specific interpretations are likewise familiar. For example, Stanton's commentary differentiates between the two creation stories in Genesis and emphasizes the egalitarianism of the first account: "Here is the sacred historian's first account of the advent of woman; a simultaneous creation of both sexes, in the image of God. It is evident from the language that there was consultation in the Godhead, and that the masculine and feminine elements were equally represented."[13]

Stanton goes on to elaborate on the importance of the divine feminine implied in the Genesis passage:

> *The first step in the elevation of woman to her true position, as an equal factor in human progress, is the cultivation of the religious sentiment in regard to her dignity and equality, the recognition by the rising generation of an ideal Heavenly Mother, to whom their prayers should be addressed, as well as to a Father.*
>
> *If language has any meaning, we have in these texts a plain declaration of the existence of the feminine element in the Godhead, equal in power and glory with the masculine. The Heavenly Mother and Father!*[14]

These conclusions are familiar to contemporary feminist theologians and scholars. The difference is that Stanton's conclusions, which were presented late in the history of the nineteenth-century women's movement, were not only rejected by most church officials but also by women's organizations (including the one of which Stanton was president, the National American Women Suffrage Movement) almost as soon as they had been published.[15] By contrast, these same conclusions were voiced at the *beginning* of the current women's movement and have already had a great impact, both on Christianity and Judaism and on alternative religions.

Awakening Consciousness: Religion and Feminism in the Twentieth Century

Feminist consciousness waned in the years after women won the right to vote and reached its lowest point during the 1950s. Women's involvement in religious leadership, whether as ordained or lay leaders, was lower than at any point in the previous century. Women's participation in the professions was corresponding low, and girls were largely taught to be economically and emotionally dependent wives and mothers. This was the decade that produced "the problem that has no name"—Betty Friedan's label in *The Feminine Mystique* (the book often credited with launching twentieth-century feminism) for the frustration and boredom that gripped so many "happy homemakers" in the 1950s. For a young woman like myself, who had other dreams and visions, being socialized in this era was a nightmare, and the awakening of feminist consciousness in the late 1960s and early 1970s a welcome relief.

In the euphoric beginnings of this feminist awakening, three closely related and interwoven movements dominated feminist discussions of religion. First, many Christian and Jewish women began the painful process of discovering how sexist their religions could be and the exhilarating process of finding, often in the collegial sisterhood of women, other ways of understanding and practicing their religions. Second, some found that such understandings and practices did not go far enough and began to develop a feminist spirituality movement outside the bounds of Christianity and Judaism. Finally, for the first time ever, significant numbers of feminists received doctorates in religious studies and began a systematic feminist appraisal of religion and religious studies. This movement developed two branches: scholars identified with one of the world's religions, and others who began as feminist Jews or Christians but switched allegiance to the feminist spirituality movement later.

Brave Beginnings: Early Developments in Feminist Christianity, Judaism, and the Feminist Spirituality Movement

At the beginning of the current women's movement in religion, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminists pointed out how women often were completely excluded from the full practice of Judaism and Christianity. The generic masculine language of the liturgy, the monolithically male images used of deity, and the male monopoly on all visible roles beyond singing in the choir, baking, and teaching young children were the objects of satire as well as analysis.[16] Nevertheless, even though largely barred from leadership roles, women formed the bulk of many congregations and did much of the day-to-day work required to keep a religious institution functioning.

In 1971, a major event occurred in each of the three emerging feminist religious movements. Mary Daly, one of the earliest outspoken Christian feminists, was invited to preach the first sermon ever delivered by a woman at Harvard's Memorial Church. Although this invitation signaled a certain success for Christian feminism, it was the end of her Christian feminist efforts for Daly herself: She ended her sermon, "The Women's Movement: An Exodus Community," by walking out of the church and inviting those who were so moved to accompany her.[17] On the other side of the continent, Zsuzsanna Budapest, convinced that the feminist movement needed a spiritual dimension, founded the Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1 on the winter solstice, an event that marked the beginning of the feminist spirituality movement. Finally, the feminist academic study of religion also reached a milestone with the formation of the Women's Caucus of the American Academy of Religion, the professional society for those who teach religion at universities, colleges, and seminaries.

For feminist Jews and Christians, certain events in 1973 and 1974

are crucial watersheds. In March 1973, an emerging Jewish women's movement held its first conference in New York City, an empowering event for many who attended. For Christians, several important events involving the ordination of women took place. Though ordination of women to sacramental (as opposed to preaching) ministry is not the only important indication of whether or not women have genuine membership in their religion, it has become a symbol, almost a shorthand sign, for quickly assessing how women fare in any given denomination. Many major denominations did not ordain women until sometime during the current women's movement; some major denominations, most notably Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Orthodox Judaism still do not.

In 1973, in an emotional, hotly contested decision, the Episcopal Church voted not to ordain women. Some months later, on July 30, 1974, eleven women were ordained priests of the Episcopal Church in Philadelphia by sympathetic bishops, but without the approval or sanction of the church hierarchy. Two years later, the Episcopal Church hierarchy recognized those ordinations and sanctioned the ordination of women to the priesthood, though individual priests were allowed to refuse to regard women as priests or to participate in ordinations. The Episcopal Church has continued to be racked with dissent over the issue, though by 1989, it had already ordained its first woman bishop. Finally, in November 1992, the Church of England voted to ordain women, a move that has also been controversial.[18]

The case narrated above was only the most dramatic. Other denominations went through similar changes. In November 1970, Elizabeth A. Platz was ordained by the Lutheran Church in America, becoming the first woman Lutheran minister. Other Lutheran groups followed, but some conservative Lutheran groups still do not ordain women. Most other mainline Protestant churches now ordain women, as do Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conserva-

tive (but not Orthodox) Judaism. The first woman Jewish rabbi, Sally Preisand, was ordained in 1972 at the Reform Jewish Seminary. The Reconstructionist Jewish movement quickly followed, ordaining Sandy Eisenberg in 1974, but Conservative Judaism, a large and influential movement, ordained Amy Eilberg in 1985 only after more than a decade of difficult debate.[19]

The major but not unexpected disappointment of the mid-1970s regarding women's ordination involved the Roman Catholic Church. Though many American Catholics and some elements in the American hierarchy support women's ordination, the Vatican issued an official statement in 1976 declaring that women could not be admitted to the priesthood. The Vatican argued that the priest is a representative of Jesus before the Christian congregation; since Jesus was a male, only another male could represent him. This argument has been heavily criticized on theological grounds.[20]

In the 1970s and 1980s, the number of women training to become ministers or rabbis increased dramatically. In the 1990s women often make up more than one third of the student body at theological seminaries. However, women ministers and rabbis continue to face employment difficulties. The first appointment is often relatively easy to obtain, but the move to being head pastor or rabbi of a large, influential congregation is difficult. Often women find themselves tracked into jobs that seem to be derived from traditional ideas about woman's "proper place," such as youth minister or hospital chaplain.

In addition to the ordination of women, the other major focus of feminist Jewish and Christian groups was to rewrite traditional liturgies that used masculine language both to describe worshippers and to describe the deity. (This issue will be dealt with more fully in chapters 4 and 6.) Very early in the women's movement, the extent to which such language excluded women was pointed out,

and various solutions were proposed. Already in 1979, the anthology *Womanspirit Rising* contained a theological justification for the use of female imagery to name deity, some concrete examples of liturgies transformed to take those arguments into account, and discussions of how ritual might take better account of women's experiences. For Christianity, such early reforms culminated in *An Inclusive-Language Lectionary*, the first volume of which was published in 1983. This book carefully suggests ways to include women in the people of God and femininity in the Godhead. Theologically conservative, in that it does not challenge the attributes and nature of either God or the people of God, the lectionary has nevertheless drawn a good deal of hostility.

In Judaism, similar experiments have resulted in new translations of the Jewish prayer book issued both by large Jewish denominations and by smaller congregations and communities. Though some translations go further, in most cases the language is made inclusive by naming the foremothers of the faith—Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah—along with the forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and by referring to the daughters as well as the sons of Israel. However, most translations stop short of referring to deity as feminine. Like the inclusive Christian lectionary, the new prayerbooks do not change traditional theology in any way.

Not unsurprisingly, both because these reforms are relatively conservative and because they still are resisted by segments of the Jewish and Christian worlds, others have moved in more radical directions, away from the authorized versions of Judaism and Christianity. These movements can be divided into two groups, depending on the degree of perceived relationship to the Jewish or Christian tradition. The first group encompasses individuals who consider themselves Jews or Christians but who draw on resources outside the Jewish or Christian Bibles, liturgies, and generally recognized theological authorities for their spiritual lives. The second

group includes people who have rejected biblical religions altogether in favor of new, explicitly feminist forms of religious expression.

Among many Christian experiments in the first group, the Women-Church movement is most prominent. Growing directly out of Catholic women's frustrations with the Vatican's intransigence on the issue of women's ordination, the movement was launched with a major conference held in Chicago in 1983. Unwilling to suffer exclusion while waiting for the conventional churches to exorcise their sexist forms, Women-Church practices a distinctly and explicitly feminist form of Christianity. According to one of its major spokespersons, Rosemary Ruether, it reflects "the perspective of religious feminists who seek to reclaim aspects of the biblical tradition, Jewish and Christian, but who also recognize the need both to go back behind biblical religion and to transcend it."[21] Her book *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities*, published in 1985, provides a convenient single resource for learning about this movement and the rituals and liturgies it has developed.

Religious feminists in the second group came to the conclusion that not only were the institutional churches and synagogues too entrenched and too sexist to be tolerable, but also that biblical religions themselves were inherently sexist in their symbolism and theology. Their solution was to abandon biblically based religion entirely, often in favor of spirituality inspired by paganism, an umbrella term for a wide variety of pre- and nonbiblical religions that often include female images of the divine. Collectively, these numerous and various groups are known as the feminist spirituality movement, or as feminist Wicca. Reclaiming the word *witch* to mean "wise woman," the Wiccan movement began almost as soon as the current feminist movement fully emerged into consciousness. By the early and middle 1970s, some of its best-known advocates were already publishing ritual manuals and theology, and its

impact was being felt in the circles of feminist scholarship on religion and feminist theology. The landmark anthology *Womanspirit Rising*, published in 1979, includes essays by Starhawk and by Zsuzsanna Budapest, two of the most widely read practitioners of feminist spirituality, as well as Carol P. Christ's concluding essay, which reflects her growing immersion in the goddess movement. The first feminist spirituality conference, held in Boston in 1975, was attended by eighteen hundred women. In 1974 appeared the first issue of *WomanSpirit*, a widely read feminist magazine, which was published quarterly for ten years by a women's collective in Oregon. By 1979, Starhawk had already published *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess*, a widely used guide to one version of feminist Wicca. Starhawk and many other authors have continued to generate a great volume of literature, so that today, a women's bookstore may well stock more books representing goddess spirituality than any other point of view in its section on religion.

Feminism and Religious Studies

Just as the practice of religion has been transformed by feminists, so has the academic study of religion. All areas within the discipline, from biblical studies to the comparative study of religion, have been affected by feminist methods. Feminist scholars have been quite successful in establishing a well-respected, influential presence in their discipline, despite the fact that it was one of the most male dominated of all academic fields just thirty years ago. When I began graduate studies in 1965, there were just twelve women among the more than four hundred graduate students at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Six of us had entered that year, prompting comments that an "unusually large number" of women were now enrolled in the divinity school. When I returned to address the students and faculty just twelve years later, more than one quarter of the graduate students were women.

The groundwork for this transition was laid in the late 1960s. During those years, a few pioneering publications appeared, including Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* and some of Rosemary Ruether's early articles, but knowledge of them was not yet widespread. A number of female graduate students, myself included, were struggling to develop feminist questions and methods of study. However, our mentors and graduate institutions were usually uninterested in, unsupportive of, or even opposed to our efforts, for feminist scholarship threatened not only the male monopoly of the field, but also its androcentric methodologies, which were even more sacrosanct to the establishment.

Partly because we were few in number, partly because we had no network, and partly because our mentors did not regard feminist issues as relevant to scholarship, we did not know of each other's efforts or of previous feminist writings relevant to our work. For example, even though I was writing a dissertation that critiqued scholarship on women's roles in religion, no one suggested that I read *The Second Sex*, which would have been the single most relevant source for me to have read while I struggled to figure out what was wrong with the scholarly interpretations of women's roles in aboriginal Australian religion. It was one of the first books I read after I completed my dissertation—and I was very frustrated to realize that I had been forced to discover on my own that the problem lay with objectification of women, not so much by aboriginal culture as in the Western mind-set.

In June 1971, Alverno College hosted the first gathering of women theologians and scholars of religion ever held. Out of that conference came plans to meet the following fall during the joint national meetings of our major professional societies, the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society for Biblical Literature (SBL). The agenda was to establish a women's caucus in the field and to demand that program time be allotted to papers and panels on women and religion.

That meeting, which occurred in November in Atlanta, was probably the single most generative event for the feminist transformation of religious studies. Before the meeting, isolated, relatively young and unestablished scholars struggled to define what it meant to study women and religion and to demonstrate why it was so important to do so. After the meeting, a strong network of like minded individuals had been established, and we had begun to make our presence and our agenda known to the AAR and the SBL. Through an unorthodox parliamentary tactic, we even elected Christine Downing as the first woman president of the AAR that year. A women's caucus, which has met every year since then, was formed. This caucus later convinced the entire AAR/SBL not to meet in states that had not ratified the Equal Rights Amendment while that piece of legislation was still before the state legislatures. It now sponsors a task force on the status of women in the profession. We also took the initial steps that led to the formation of the Women and Religion Section of the AAR, which provides a venue for feminist scholars to talk about their work in a supportive atmosphere. Many feminist scholars, including myself, presented their first academic papers for the Women and Religion Section at these meetings. Especially in the early years, these papers were eagerly collected and published, becoming the nucleus of the courses on women and religion that we were beginning to teach. Readings for such courses were then very scarce,[22] a problem we certainly no longer face.

From that time onward, an extremely mutually beneficial relationship developed between the more established women scholars, who began to do feminist theology later in their careers—such as Beverly Harrison, Nelle Morton, and Letty Russell[23]—and the more numerous and younger women just entering the field, who entered as feminists. Christine Downing, the first woman president of the AAR, has written of her own experience of that relationship with "the younger women . . . who were just entering my

field, women who looked to the women of my generation as role models but who really initiated *us* into the challenges of creating a genuinely feminist theology."[24] An essay by Valerie Saiving,[25] written in 1960, was much reprinted and studied as a model of what it means to study religion from a woman's point of view. Saiving suggested that theology is not abstract, but is grounded in the particularities of human experience, which are different for women than for men. Therefore, she argued, that without women's contributions, theology will be incomplete. The work of Mary Daly and Rosemary Ruether was also attracting the attention of the field as a whole. Ruether's early studies in patristics (the thought of the early Christian theologians) led her to formulate her influential theory that the dualistic and otherworldly outlook of early Christianity had fostered negative attitudes toward women.[26] When Daly published *Beyond God the Father*, with its radical and thorough critique of conventional Christianity in 1973, the young feminist theology movement was well launched.

Two important anthologies published at the end of the decade brought to fruition this first developmental phase in feminist scholarship in the academic study of religion. *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, published in 1979 by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, became probably the single most influential and widely used book in the field of feminist studies in religion. A veritable "Who's Who" of many of the leaders in feminist theology, it has not gone out of date, though much more recent work supplements it. In 1980, Nancy Auer Falk and I published the first edition of *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives*, the first book to discuss women's religious lives in a wide variety of cultural contexts in some depth and detail. This book has been influential for many graduate students in the cross-cultural comparative study of religion who wanted to do women studies in their area of specialization.

Several academic journals are critical tools for the feminist

study of religion. In 1985, the major journal *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, edited by Judith Plaskow and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, published its first issue. Published by the Scholars' Press, the publishing agency of the American Academy of Religion, this journal gives prestige and visibility to the new work in feminist studies in religion. It is highly recommended as a resource for anyone seeking the cutting edge of the field. Between 1974 and 1994, *Anima: An Experiential Journal*, first edited by Harry Buck, published many innovative articles of interest to students of women and religion. The latest entry into this field is *The Annual Review of Women in World Religions*, published by SUNY Press and edited by Katherine K. Young and Arvind Sharma. This annual allows "the comparative dimension to appear in bolder relief" and also fosters more dialogue between the humanistic and the social scientific approaches to the study of women and religion.[27]

Maturing into Diversity

In retrospect, it is clear that diversity—of aims, concerns, and perspectives—was always present within feminist ranks, even when feminist gatherings felt unified, exuberant, and triumphant in its stand against patriarchal religions and androcentric scholarship. It has also become clear that some of the earlier feeling of exuberant unity was based on limited representation *within* the feminist movement in religion, that many constituencies had not yet been heard. In the early 1980s, significant differences in approach and agenda began to surface among religious feminists. These disagreements were disorienting and painful as feminists discovered that they disagreed deeply over things about which they cared intensely. The fact that affirming diversity had been part of the feminist vision from the beginning made these disagreements even more painful. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow had written in their introduction to *Womanspirit Rising* that "the diversity within feminist theology and spirituality is its strength."[28] Nevertheless, ten

years later, in the introduction to its sequel, *Weaving the Visions*, Plaskow and Christ discussed at length the anger, pain, and frustration that had erupted over disagreements among those who worked in feminist theology and scholarship.

For the feminist movement, actually *manifesting* diversity, rather than simply applauding it, turned out to be quite difficult. Although all women share the experience of being female, differences of class, race, culture, religion, and sexual orientation separate them. Just as early feminists complained that women's experience had been omitted by androcentric theology and scholarship, feminists who were not white, middle-class, heterosexual Christians pointed out that the phrase "women's experience" often excluded them and that their experiences were taken no more seriously by the dominant white, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian feminist perspective than androcentric theology and scholarship had taken women in general. Furthermore, not only had the experiences of such women been overlooked; to many, it seemed that white, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian feminists had assumed that they could speak for all women. During the 1980s, many diverse voices spoke much more loudly and clearly, sometimes with frank frustration, so that today feminist theology more accurately reflects the diversity of women.

In addition to difficulties caused by different social locations, feminists have also found ideological differences difficult to handle. In particular, disagreements between feminists who choose to retain ties with a traditional religion and those who join post-Christian or post-Jewish feminist spirituality movements have sometimes become acrimonious. Some feminists began to fight with each other, not only critiquing each other's work, but attacking each other, which is quite different. In one way or another, some began to say, "Unless you're my kind of feminist, you've been co-opted by patriarchy," a claim that obviously does not promote a diverse sisterhood. In my view, such conflict is an inappropriate

throwback to patriarchal monotheism—a perhaps unconscious or unstated feeling that ultimately, there is one best way to do things. Another factor has been the emotional difficulty, perhaps born of female socialization and women's tendency to prefer harmony to conflict, in dealing with the disagreements and criticisms that push forward the thinking of any mature religious or spiritual position. Disagreement over basic issues has always occurred in all movements for social change, but it has been very hard for feminist theologians of different opinions and commitments to debate without fighting, without hurt feelings and a sense of betrayal.

All of these factors are intertwined with the deeply entrenched tendency in Western thinking to turn differences into a hierarchy. We were ill prepared to deal with genuine diversity because of cultural values in which we had all been trained. If we are different, then one of us must be better—the classic scripts of patriarchy, monotheism, and Western thought in general assume this. No wonder real, as opposed to theoretically affirmed diversity, is difficult to handle.

I believe that some simple guidelines may help us deal better with the difficulties brought up by diversity. The first is to realize that no one person can speak for all genders, races, classes, or sexual orientations, and no one should try to do so. Therefore, since no one can speak for all perspectives, many voices are required to articulate feminist theology and scholarship about religion. Second, since no one can speak for all perspectives, every position, every scholar, will overlook or underemphasize something vital. That is not a failing, since it is inevitable. The more diversity is affirmed, the more difficult inclusivity becomes, simply because human diversity is almost infinite. How can anyone include or understand infinite diversity? The question is not whether a scholar has included every possible perspective, but whether she speaks authentically and nonimperialistically from her own standpoint. That we all take responsibility for articulating our own voices is

the only way we can both appreciate diversity and affirm inclusiveness—two tasks fundamental to feminism that often seem to be on a collision course with each other.

"Breaking Up Is Hard to Do": The Great Divide in Feminist Theology

Almost from the time that feminist theologians began to critique patriarchal religions, it was clear that two major positions were developing. On the one hand, some argued that the most effective feminist strategy was to maintain some links with traditional religions, such as Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam, while also engaging in radical transformations of those religions. Other feminists saw current world religions as hopelessly patriarchal and well beyond the scope of any feminist repair; therefore, the best feminist strategy would be to abandon traditional religions for new religious forms. Clearly, there is much room here for argument about who is the "one true feminist," and about the grave dangers inherent in the other position. In fact, acrimony and divisiveness between these two positions have been severe and painful, and communication between those in each position has often been broken. In particular, Rosemary Ruether and Carol P. Christ have exchanged sharp words about the merits and problems of post-Christian feminist spirituality and radical Christian feminism.[29]

During the 1970s and into the 1980s, this division became ever more pronounced. On the one hand, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Elaine Pagels, and Phyllis Trible wrote radically innovative feminist interpretations of scripture, which could be used by those attempting to reconstruct Christianity or Judaism from a feminist point of view. Rosemary Ruether and others continued to write ever more radical feminist critiques and reconstructions of Christianity, while Judith Plaskow did the same for Judaism with *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (1990).

On the other hand, several important early works clearly delineated non-Christian and post-Christian or Jewish stances. Naomi Goldenberg's *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (1979) was adamant in its assessment that feminism and the traditional religions are incompatible. In 1981 Christine Downing published *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine*, an intensely introspective book that explored ancient Greek goddesses as myth-models for contemporary women. Carol P. Christ found it increasingly impossible to remain within the monotheistic framework, chronicling her journey in *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess*, published in 1987. As is clear in her title, the issue of feminine imagery of deity, already raised by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, became an increasingly important concern during the 1980s, though two major essays in *Womanspirit Rising* had already raised the issue. Though she did not take up the cause of feminine imagery of the divine, Mary Daly continued to publish increasingly radical and anti-Christian feminist theology throughout the decade, at times making it quite clear that, in her view, no self-respecting feminist could maintain connections with any of the traditional religions.

Expanding the Circle: Diversity of Race, Class, Sexual Orientation, and Culture

Through the 1980s and into the 1990s, scholars writing from a tremendous variety of Christian perspectives have enhanced the meaning of the term "Christian feminist." Womanist, *mujerista*, Latin American, Asian, and lesbian voices have all articulated visions and versions of Christian feminism. They have shown that factors beyond sexism must be taken into account to explain and understand their situations because not only male dominance but also classism, racism, and homophobia affect the religious lives of women in these groups. In all of these movements, understanding of patriarchy and male dominance is nuanced by dynamics of class, race, culture, and sexual orientation that white, middle-class, het-

erosexual women have often not taken into account. Class and race analyses are especially important to womanist, *mujerista*, and Latin American perspectives. Asian Christians practice Christianity in cultures that are vastly different from the Christian West, and sometimes they must deal with a heritage of colonial domination. Lesbians identify heterosexism as a major defect of conventional religions. A convenient and helpful anthology that brings together all these perspectives except for lesbian Christianity is Ursula King's *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, published in 1994. These discussions also continue in several newer program units of the American Academy of Religion: the Womanist Theology Section, which sometimes holds joint sessions with the Women and Religion Section and the Lesbian Issues Section. Several issues of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* have also dealt with these topics. (Interestingly, the AAR has recently also included the Gay Men's Issues group.)

The womanist perspective developed in the 1980s as black feminists sought to articulate their own experience and the ways it differs from that of other feminists. The term "womanist" itself was coined by novelist Alice Walker, who writes that "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." Womanist theologian Toinette Eugene explains that "womanist theology agrees with black theology in its critique of white racism and the need for black unity, and it agrees with feminist theology in its criticism of sexism and the need for the unity of women."[30] Among the most frequently read books in this growing body of literature are Katie Cannon's *Black Womanist Ethics*, Delores Williams's *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Jacquelyn Grant's *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus*, and Emilie Townes's *Womanist Justice, Womanist Hope*. In addition, a white feminist, Susan Thistlethwaite, has surveyed this literature and sought to address the issue of how racism and sexism intertwine in *Sex, Race, and God* (1989).

Feminist theology has also grown to include women of Latin

American heritage, both those living in the United States and those living in Latin America. *Mujerista* is the word Hispanic religious feminists living the United States have coined for themselves as theologians. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango explain: "A *mujerista* is a Hispanic woman who struggles to liberate herself not as an individual but as a member of a community."[31] Their book *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* is perhaps the best-known work in this field. Because theology in Latin America so often consists of liberation theology written by men, who may not especially take sexism into account, Elsa Tamez and other Latin American feminists have tried to correct this one-sided view, starting with *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America*.

Asian Christian feminists have also added their voices to the chorus of feminist Christianity. The first Asian feminist theology was Marianne Katoppo's *Compassionate and Free: An Asian Woman's Theology*, published in 1979. The anthologies *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women* (1989) and *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (1988) draw together much of the discussion by Asian Christian feminists, who also have maintained a lively feminist theological journal, *In God's Image*.[32] A particularly complete Asian feminist theology is Chung Hyun Kyung's *Struggle to Be the Sun Again* (1990). Its Korean author is also famous for her 1991 plenary address to the World Council of Churches, in which she invoked the Holy Spirit through the ancestral spirits of her people and stated that, for her, the image of the Holy Spirit in part comes from the image of the Buddhist figure Kwan-Yin, venerated as goddess of compassion and wisdom in East Asian women's popular religion. She adds, "Perhaps this might also be a feminine image of the Christ . . . who goes before and brings others with her."[33]

During the 1980s a number of religious feminists, both Christian and non-Christian, began to write explicitly of the issues most relevant to them as lesbians. They coined the term *heterosexism* to

connote compulsory heterosexuality, the fears directed by a homophobic society toward lesbians and gay men, and the belief that men must, at all costs, control female sexuality. Books such as Carter Heyward's *Touching Our Strength* (1989) also speak passionately of the connections between unalienated erotic experience and spiritual growth. Christine Downing's *Myths and Mysteries of Same-Sex Love* (1989) and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott's *Sensuous Spirituality: Out from Fundamentalism* (1992) are also important contributions to this voice.

Feminism and Religious Diversity

Today diversities of race, class, culture, and sexual orientation are being taken seriously by feminist scholars of religion. Nevertheless, one fundamental element of diversity has not been taken into account by most feminist scholars and theologians—religious diversity itself! Feminist theology and religious studies scholarship remains a profoundly *Western* movement, both conceptually and in terms of its subject matter. Nothing illustrates this limitation better than Plaskow and Christ's *Weaving the Visions.* The book struggles with and includes all the other diversities that surfaced in the 1980s, but remains completely within a Western context, despite the fact that serious feminist movements had developed in non-Western religions by then. In my view, the single greatest weakness of feminist thinking about religion at the beginning of its third decade is that so much of it is primarily Western, and even primarily Christian.

I believe that feminist scholarship and theology should be genuinely cross-cultural, not limited to familiar Western religions and their precursors in the Ancient Near East or pre-Christian Europe. Understanding diversity *among* religions is at least as important as understanding diversity *within* religions. Nor is such knowledge always only knowledge of another. Images and symbols from other cultures can be taken seriously by feminist theologians trying to re-

flect upon and reenvision their own religious and spiritual positions, whether as Christians, Jews, or spiritual feminists. Of all the calls to affirm and appreciate diversity, the call for genuine, serious cross-cultural interreligious study and thinking in feminist theology and scholarship has been the least heeded.

In the late 1980s, however, several anthologies were published that presented information about women and religion globally and in cross-cultural perspective. Of particular note are four volumes edited by Arvind Sharma: *Women in World Religions* (1987), which describes the roles of women in each of the major world religions; *Today's Woman in World Religions* (1994), which presents information about the current situation in each of the religions discussed in the earlier book; *Religion and Women* (1994), which presents information about the smaller religions not included in the first volume; and a forthcoming volume on feminist transformations of those religions. Another helpful resource is Serinity Young's painstaking collection of primary texts, *An Anthology of Sacred Texts by and about Women* (1993).

In addition to such women studies scholarship, feminist analyses and reconstructions of the world's religions are also beginning to appear. More recent anthologies on women and world religions are more likely to be feminist analyses than to be information-gathering exercises. Leonard Grob, Riffat Hassan, and Haim Gordon's *Women's and Men's Liberation* (1991) and Paula Cooey, William Eakin, and Jay McDaniel's *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions* (1991) were the first such feminist anthologies. More important, feminist analysts from major religions, such as Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, are beginning to publish and become better known. Fatima Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, published in 1987 and translated into English in 1991, discusses how to argue for women's rights in a Muslim context. Another Muslim feminist is Riffat Hassan, who has taken up the topic

of reinterpreting the Qur'an from a feminist point of view.[34] Lina Gupta and Vasuda Narayan have emerged as feminist interpreters of Hinduism.[35] In the case of Buddhism, my book *Buddhism after Patriarchy* (1993) is the first book-length feminist discussion of the religion as a whole, and Anne Klein's *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen* (1994) brings Buddhism and poststructuralist feminist theory into conversation with one another. Little feminist analysis of the East Asian religions—Confucianism, Taoism, or Shinto—has been done in English to date.

This literature is framed somewhat by Western definitions of feminist concerns and orientations. However, women's movements, which are far less well known and much more difficult to document, are found in other major world religions. They are smaller and less well defined than those found in Christianity and Judaism. Though they are quite varied, they tend to differ from the Western women's movements in some significant ways.

First, most want to create their own feminism rather than simply imitate the Western varieties, which many feel are inappropriate for their specific situations. For example, Muslim and many other Asian feminists do not see the Western tendency toward separatism—some women's desire to separate themselves from men as much as possible—as at all desirable and want to promote a kind of feminism that will not be detrimental to their relationships with men or encourage what they see as the destructive breakdown of family life in the Western world. Instead, they tend to emphasize education and the ability to work outside the home. But many Western scholars who have studied the effects of these changes note a problem familiar to Western women: As women move into the workforce, they still are expected to do all the tasks of housekeeping and child rearing that constituted their traditional work.

A second difference from Western feminism is that in some countries, especially India, men were early leaders in a movement to improve the lives of women.[36] Finally, women's movements in

other major religions are closely intertwined with secular women's movements, and often the women's movement appears superficially to have more to do with secular than with religious issues. Therefore, one does not usually find the same kind of religious work, such as feminist reenvisioning of the major religious doctrines, in Asian traditions.

Because Buddhism has become a religion of choice for many Westerners, its women's movement has developed differently from those in many other non-Western religions. Beginning with the conference on women and Buddhism held at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado, in 1981, Buddhist women have gathered regularly both in North America and in Asia. A historic gathering of Buddhist nuns from all over the world was held in 1987 in Bodh Gaya, India, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment; it was followed by an equally historic worldwide gathering of Buddhist women, both monastic and lay, in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1991. Since then such international Buddhist women's conferences have been held every two years.

Out of these conferences has come an international organization for Buddhist women, Sakyadhita, which publishes a quarterly newsletter. Two other important newsletters of the Buddhist women's movement have emerged: *Kahawaii: A Journal of Women and Zen* was published in Hawaii from 1979 through 1988, and the *Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities* has been edited by Chatsumarn Kabilsingh in Bangkok since 1984. In the Buddhist women's movement, restoring ordination of nuns in those segments of Buddhism in which it has been lost as well as upgrading the status and treatment of nuns have been important issues; Buddhist women, especially in the Western world, are also concerned with the full range of feminist issues.

In India, as in almost every other part of the world, the nineteenth century saw the beginnings of a women's movement. During the colonial era, the British often justified their rule of India by

claiming that Indian men oppressed Indian women. A vigorous Hindu reform movement, led by men, responded by improving the status of women; child marriage and suttee (a widow's suicide on her husband's funeral pyre) were abolished, and women were educated in basic literacy.[37] During the Indian independence movement of the 1930s and 1940s, women were quite visible, and the Indian constitution and laws are quite liberal (though they are not always enforced today). Women's issues receive significant attention in some circles in India today. The magazine *Manushi: A Journal about Women and Society*, which has been published since 1978, is especially important. Its editor rejects the label "feminist," but that label is still often applied to the magazine. Currently, Hindu society is in upheaval, and the growing Hindu fundamentalist movement could have negative implications for women.

In the more specifically religious sphere in India, women's roles have been changing dramatically in some ways. For the first time, women are functioning as religious gurus and initiating disciples. Although Hinduism has not traditionally encouraged women to become world renouncers, today, according to some analysts, women ascetics are seen as the bearers and proclaimers of Hindu spirituality.[38] A significant number of male gurus and teachers have passed their spiritual lineage and authority on to women, something which would not have occurred in the past. Katherine K. Young also points out that the key to religious expertise has traditionally resided in knowledge of Sanskrit, which was once guarded as a male (and upper-caste) privilege. But today many women study Sanskrit in universities as men abandon it for more lucrative fields. "When the current generation of Sanskrit male priests and ritual experts dies, the next generation may have to be women if they alone possess the expertise."[39]

Islamic societies have likewise known women's movements for some decades, beginning with strong secular feminist movements in the 1920s. Today, however, as fundamentalism becomes an ever-

stronger force in Islamic societies, there is mounting pressure to retain or return to traditional gender relationships. Islamic critics of feminism see women's rights movements as inappropriate incursions of Western influence, even when such movements seek only to restore rights that women have under Islamic law, but which they have not been exercising. In Islamic societies, religious law derived from the Qur'an (the Muslim sacred revealed text) is the basis for treatment of women and for relationships between men and women. Those who defend Islamic feminism generally agree that the problem is not with Islam as a religion or with Qur'anic teachings, but with "a patriarchy that is reinforced and perpetuated through the fundamentalist brand of Islam."[40]

In Jane Smith's survey of the Muslim world today, she finds that dress codes for women are important feminist issues almost everywhere, though whether women are pressured to wear traditional modest Muslim dress or forbidden to do so differs from country to country.[41] Education for women is also a major feminist concern. But since traditional Muslim cultures segregate men and women, there is no consensus over what kinds of jobs women can have, or even whether they can be educated with men. (Saudi Arabia has separate university systems for women and men.) Regarding specifically religious issues, it does not appear that there is any great move for women to seek traditional religious educations, or for women to take the public religious roles usually filled by men.

The strongest cultural force in East Asia, Confucianism is generally thought to be quite patriarchal. But today Confucianism has been challenged on many fronts, not the least of which is the Communist movement of modern China. One of the stated goals of the Communist Party in China was to end "the oppression and suffering which economic and social systems sustained by the traditional 'Confucian' ideology caused women."[42] The title of Margery Wolf's book *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* expresses well the conclusions of most analyses as to how well the

Communist Party succeeded in these goals.[43] Add to this the fact that from 1949 to 1980, religious groups were "simply unable to foster the religious lives of their members,"[44] and it will come as no surprise that there is not a large women's movement in religion in contemporary China. However, two of China's classic religions, Buddhism and Taoism, included monastic orders for women that gave women significant autonomy and respect. Elderly monastics of both groups did manage to survive and today are allowed to initiate some novices and pay more attention to their spiritual practices than formerly. Today, many more young women are asking to become monastics than the institutions can accommodate.[45]

Taiwan has changed in very different ways during this same period, since traditional religion, especially Confucianism, has been encouraged at the same time that rapid economic growth has fostered the kinds of changes in women's lives that are often brought about by modernization—education, wage labor, and fewer children. Some Taiwanese feminist intellectuals have written vigorous critiques of Confucianism.[46] Buddhist temples and monasteries are flourishing, and large numbers of well-educated young women are becoming nuns. In addition, Chinese folk religion or popular religion is flourishing in Taiwan; these folk religions have always offered women some leadership roles and continue to do so.[47]

In Japan, the Confucian value system is much less overt, though no less pervasive. The traditional religions, Buddhism and Shinto, have not offered women roles of religious leadership for centuries, though some scholars think that in prehistoric Japan, women held positions of authority. Japanese Buddhism did not develop the strong nuns' orders that were found in China and Korea, and both Shinto and Buddhist priesthoods were largely closed to women. The twentieth century has seen some changes in all these areas. During World War II, while many Shinto and Buddhist priests were in the army, their wives took over most or all of their duties at their family-owned temples. After the war ended, some wives

continued these duties, so that quietly and somewhat informally, women became priests in both religions. On the other hand, the more formally trained nuns of the Soto Zen sect of Japanese Buddhism waged a long and difficult battle with the Soto Zen hierarchy for the right to study and teach in the traditional Soto Zen style. It took them many years of struggle to achieve their aims—and when they did, ironically, they found that the priests' wives now could also carry on many of the same leadership roles with far less training.[48] A final avenue for women's religious leadership is in the new religions that have been so successful in Japan, particularly since the end of World War II. In fact, many of these movements, such as Tenri-Kyo, the oldest and most successful, were founded by women. Though they usually teach a somewhat traditional message concerning women's status and roles, many women derive a great deal of satisfaction from their participation and leadership in these movements.

I will conclude this survey of the impact of feminism on religion with the immense topic of the various indigenous traditions around the world. Since they are not patriarchal, at least not in the same way that the major world religions are, the question of a women's movement is complex. The complexity is increased by the fact that many native traditions are in a fragile state of recovery after centuries of colonialist persecution and missionary activities. It is very difficult to recover and to reform a tradition at the same time; many of those most involved in recovery of these traditions do not feel at liberty to advocate changes to include women if they were formerly excluded. Nevertheless, changes do occur. For example, among a Lakota group with which I am familiar, women now routinely participate in the sweat ceremony and in the Sun Dance, though their participation in the past was rare. However, the menstrual taboos are also stringently enforced, so that, although women may participate in the Sun Dance, and even pierce their skin as men do (though in the upper arms, not the chest),[49]

a menstruating woman cannot even camp in the Sun Dance grounds.

Other women in indigenous traditions, such as Native American feminist Paula Gunn Allen, claim that the native traditions were and are matrifocal, and that women's leadership was one of the aspects of native culture that European colonizers most abhorred and sought to exterminate. She describes "woman-centered tribal societies in which matrilocality, matrifocality, matrilinearity, maternal control of household goods and resources, and female deities of the magnitude of the Christian God were and are present and active features of traditional tribal life."[50] For native societies in which such conditions prevail, a women's movement would obviously be more involved in recovering the tradition than reforming it.

In any case, the lives of indigenous peoples are often made more complex by a strained relationship between the native religions and the dominant cultures. For example, in the United States, native traditions have been immensely inspiring both to some feminist spirituality groups and to the New Age movement. But many native peoples regard this appropriation as theft or misrepresentation of their spiritual traditions. Other teachers disagree, feeling a responsibility to share their wisdom with all seekers and even to encourage sincere non-native people to adopt tribal ways. Some native women have particularly encouraged women of European ancestry to take seriously the ways and the wisdom of aboriginal American traditions regarding women's unique physiology and lifeways.[51]

skip chapter

Where Have All the Women Been? The Challenge of Feminist Study of Religion

RELIGION IS NOT ONLY an abstract set of ideas but also something *practiced* by people, half of whom are women. But, given that all cultures have gender roles, religion affects women differently than men. What have women's religious lives, roles, and images been like? Until recently, that subject matter was *terra incognita* in textbooks and was rarely discussed even in academic settings. But, as we have seen, if scholarship is to be accurate, such practices are clearly unacceptable. The remedy seems obvious—add information about women to the already existing information about men. But the solution is not really that simple. What information about women should be added? Is it really possible to treat knowledge about women as a simple add-on? When we say we want to know about women and religion, what are we seeking to know? What else changes when we know about women and religion?

This chapter will explore some of the barriers, challenges, and conclusions that arise when one attempts to study women and religion in global perspective. In most discussions of feminism and religion, such topics are relatively underdeveloped because, on the one hand, few feminists study religion globally in cross-cultural perspective, and, on the other hand, few scholars of comparative religion use feminist methods.