

## Toward an Inclusive Theology: The Systematic Implications of the Feminist Critique

By Randy L. Maddox

Those of us in the evangelical stream of Christianity who have been sensitized by the feminist critique of the injustice and oppressiveness of our male-dominated and male-normative society soon find ourselves in a dilemma. On the one hand, we are convinced that our concern to seek justice and resist oppression is grounded in our commitment to the biblical revelation—most evident in the prophets and the life and teachings of Christ—of God's identification with the poor, the outcast, etc. On the other hand, we are all-too-painfully aware of how Christian scripture has often been used (abused?!) to justify our oppressive patriarchal society and how Christian theology and Christian social systems—church, academy, etc.—have, with too few exceptions, conformed to and served to perpetuate this patriarchal system.

There would appear to be three possible responses in the face of this dilemma. In the first place, we could decide that patriarchal society and church are part of the essential Christian position, and therefore a position we as evangelicals must accept and defend. At most, we would try to eliminate abuses of the patriarchal system.<sup>1</sup> As a second option, making the same assumption that patriarchalism is essential to Christianity, we might reject Christianity in favor of egalitarianism—surely an unevangelical response.<sup>2</sup> Finally, we might become convinced that the patriarchal forms of Christian life and proclamation are a distortion of Christian revelation, rather than the essence of it.<sup>3</sup> In this case, our

<sup>1</sup>This appears to be the answer of Donald Bloesch in *Is the Bible Sexist?* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1982), see especially pp. 86ff.

<sup>2</sup>The most extreme example of this is, of course, Mary Daly.

<sup>3</sup>The classical evangelical example of this response is Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1974).

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**Randy L. Maddox.** Christian belief and practice have often come under attack by feminists who see the Church as a bastion of chauvinism and male superiority. Christians who are sympathetic to the women's movement have replied that such criticisms, while perhaps justified as regards some forms of Christian practice, do not touch the heart of Christian faith; often such Christians suggest revisions in particular biblical or theological interpretations which reinforce male dominance. In this essay Randy L. Maddox draws together many of these suggestions and presents a sketch of a systematic feminist—or "inclusive"—theology. Mr. Maddox teaches religion at Sioux Falls College.

evangelical commitments would motivate us to liberate the Gospel from its patriarchal bondage and transform our life and proclamation into an inclusive form that might more effectively summon our sinful world to conversion.

It is not the purpose of this essay to argue directly for one of these possible responses. Numerous such direct arguments are already available. We find a careful consideration of these arguments to lean decisively in favor of the third option. At the same time, most arguments for the third position which have been advanced to date seem incomplete. While calling clearly for a transformed and inclusive understanding of the Christian message, they have not outlined in any detail what such an understanding would involve. Lacking such an outline, one is tempted to suggest that the transformation called for is impossible. More importantly, for evangelicals, the lack of such an outline makes it impossible to determine whether such an inclusive approach can be demonstrated as drawing its essential perspective and teachings from Scripture.

The primary purpose of this essay, then, is to develop an outline of an inclusive theology based on an analysis of contemporary feminist theologians who continue to align themselves with the Christian tradition.<sup>4</sup> A secondary purpose, assuming the outline is judged cogent, is to provide further indirect warrant for the third alternative response to our present dilemma.

### I. The Comprehensive Task of an Inclusive Theology

The precise task of this essay can be further defined by reference to a 1981 article on "The Feminist Critique in Religious Studies" by Rosemary Ruether.<sup>5</sup> In this article Ruether called for an advance to a new stage in the development of feminist studies in the religion curriculum. This call was clarified by contrast to three typical prior stages for dealing with such issues in religion courses. The first stage is a grudging allowance of a generalized course on "Women's Studies in Religion" that is taught outside the structure of the curriculum and usually by a person who is marginal to the faculty. A second stage arrives as the faculty begins to acquire women (or feminists) in regular fields who initiate ad hoc women's studies courses in their areas—however, usually as occasional electives (for example, an elective in feminist theology after taking "regular" systematic theology). The third stage involves initial attempts at integrating women's studies and/or the feminist perspective into the core curriculum of a religion program. Typically, these initial attempts turn out to be courses taught as usual except for an occasional "ladies' day" when women's concerns are addressed. While each of these three stages is an improvement on the preexisting alter-

<sup>4</sup>The basic criterion utilized in this paper for distinguishing "Christian" feminist theologians is whether they allow their expressions of feminism to be tested by the critically-assessed central teachings of Scripture. For example, Daly is ruled out of consideration by her clear assertion that Christ's stance for or against feminist concerns has no authority for her philosophical (!) affirmations. (See *Beyond God the Father*, Boston: Beacon, 1973, p. 73). The purpose of this criterion is not so much to judge a position such as Daly's false, as to focus on those theologians who are arguing that feminist concerns are normatively Christian concerns.

<sup>5</sup>In *A Feminist Perspective in the Academy*, edited by E. Langland and W. Grove (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 52–66.

native, Ruether argues that they are all ultimately inadequate and deflect some of the most important insights that the feminist critique has to offer to religious studies. What is desperately needed, she claims, is a fourth stage which would engage in rethinking the basic presuppositions, categories, and structures of the whole foundational curriculum in light of the feminist critique.

The implications of Ruether's argument for developing an inclusive theology are quite clear, and equally intimidating. The changes called for involve far more than the mere addition of occasional subsections to our lectures or texts which advocate such issues as women's rights or the ordination of women. Rather, those of us who are becoming sensitive to the feminist perspective must begin a fundamental rethinking of the basic categories, paradigms, and received wisdoms of our traditions, seeking to overcome their predominant "male" orientation. Obviously, this is a long-term task and the present essay can be seen as only a progress report.

### II. The Shape of an Inclusive Theology

The task of this essay, then, is to summarize the points of emerging consensus in contemporary Christian feminist theology about the form that the transformation of theology called for above would take.<sup>6</sup> In other words, it will provide a survey of the fundamental concepts and orientations necessary for a theology that would be truly inclusive of the whole of *Adam*—male and female.<sup>7</sup> For purposes of clarity, the discussion will be organized around the traditional loci of a systematic theology.

#### A. *The Nature of Theology*

The most fundamental place to start in developing an inclusive approach to theology is with our understanding of the nature of theology itself. It may not be immediately clear to some why such consideration is necessary. They may wonder how such "abstract" reflection can affect the inclusive nature of theology. And yet, the most subtle obstacle to a fundamental rethinking of one's received theological tradition is typically an unwarranted and uncritical deductive model of theological reflection. Whether in its conservative form—theology simply organizes the plain teachings of Scripture and draws implications from them—or its liberal form—theology is the systematic reflection on and explication of the universal truths of reason or human experience—this model of theological reflection tends to operate with a narrow scientific view of truth and to overlook

<sup>6</sup>This explains our practice of typically referring to "the feminists'" views rather than to the positions of individual feminist theologians. Admittedly, there are several significant differences between the various theologians we treat. However, we have tried to deal primarily with those areas where there is either a present consensus or, at least, a move in that direction.

<sup>7</sup>Of course, a truly inclusive theology must be more than just gender-inclusive. It must also be sensitive to the distorting biases of race, class, culture, etc. Obviously, these various biases interweave to some degree. Accordingly, the considerations given here would be of benefit in more areas than gender. Moreover, we do not believe these proposals increase exclusiveness in any of these other areas beyond what is currently the case. As such, they are steps "toward an inclusive theology."

the constructive nature of theological formulations. It does not take seriously enough that, whatever one might claim about revelation, Christian theology is clearly a human and thus fallible enterprise.

By contrast, if the human, fallible, constructive nature of all theological reflection were admitted, then the authoritative status of traditional theological formulations (including Scripture as the Divine Word in human words!) would be redefined from that of an "archetype"—an ideal form that sets an unchanging timeless pattern—to that of a "prototype"—a form critically open to the possibility of its own transformation.<sup>8</sup> Such a redefinition would imply two consequences which are essential to developing an inclusive theology.<sup>9</sup> First, the way is cleared for a critical dialogue with traditional theological formulations that seeks to distinguish between their authoritative (inclusive) truths and their inadequate (patriarchal) expressions. Second, one is encouraged to engage in new creative theological formulations that may more faithfully express the essential Christian revelation found in Scripture, tradition, etc.

#### B. The Sources of Theology

Regarding the sources or authorities for theology, the feminist critique has focused on two major points. First, feminist theologians have unmasked the inadequacy of any "Scripture only" position. Operating under a caricature of the Reformers' actual position, too many contemporary theologians (especially conservative and evangelical Protestant theologians) have been inadequately sensitive to the role that male-oriented tradition and experience play in their theological reflection, including the shaping of their understanding of the "clear" meaning of Scripture. Feminist theologians have drawn on recent hermeneutical reflections to shatter such uncritical pretensions.<sup>10</sup> As an alternative, feminists have argued for a *self-conscious* utilization of tradition and experience, along with Scripture, in the process of theological reflection.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, they have argued that the neglected areas of *women's* experience and *women's* tradition are essential sources for an inclusive theology. However, as they are quick to note, these resources are not always immediately accessible to theologians, having been hidden or distorted by centuries of "male" remembrance and interpretation.

This leads directly to the second focus of the feminist critique of the traditional understanding of the sources of theology: namely, the need to read all theological sources—including Scripture—from a critical perspective (a her-

<sup>8</sup>Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 33.

<sup>9</sup>For a development of these and other points in explicit dialogue with the feminist critique, see Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon, 1983), pp. 12–16. This book is the most systematic treatment of the Christian feminist positions currently available.

<sup>11</sup>See Ruether's defense of the need for tradition in *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 16–18, 21–22. On the role of experience, see Letty Russell's description of "Inductive Theology" in *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), pp. 53–55. The use of reason as a source of norm for theology is also implicit in feminist reflection but, unfortunately, is seldom made explicit.

meneutics of suspicion and retrieval).<sup>12</sup> The goal of such a critical reading would be to distinguish between that which is of abiding authority in the source—the Word of God—and that which is an inadequate and/or distorting expression of the Christian message—the words of men (*sic*)—and, hence, must be debunked or transformed. The criterion by which feminists would make such a judgment is quite clear. To quote Ruether, "Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is appraised as not redemptive."<sup>13</sup>

At this point critics of feminist theology are quick to raise charges of ideological bias. The feminist response is quite direct: "Everyone approaches Scripture, etc., with preunderstood interpretive principles. We are simply honest enough to make ours explicit." It is important to note that this response is not necessarily an avowal of total relativism in interpretation. Rather, most feminists would want to argue that some interpretive principles are more legitimate than others.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, some would assert that the test for legitimacy is simply a matter of the degree to which a position takes an advocacy stance for feminist concerns; as if the Christian nature of such an advocacy stance were self-evident.<sup>15</sup> However, those feminists concerned about demonstrating the biblical basis for their position will devote considerable time to arguing that their feminist hermeneutic more adequately captures the central concerns of the biblical message than does the patriarchal position—a judgment which they admit must ultimately be made on the basis of historical-critical exegesis and scholarly dialogue within the Christian community.<sup>16</sup>

To summarize: The feminist critique would suggest that an inclusive theology must draw on the widest possible range of legitimate sources for theological reflection. At the very least these would include Scripture, experience, tradition and reason. In addition, feminists have made us conscious of the need—if we are truly to be inclusive—to uncover the neglected, hidden and distorted aspects of these sources through a self-critical process of interpretation. Neither of these major points need be an undue threat to evangelical theologians. Accepting the legitimacy of other sources than Scripture for theological reflection becomes problematic only if any of these other sources is taken as a norm to dictate what we are to accept from the critically determined teachings of Scripture, rather than as an aid in interpreting and applying Scrip-

<sup>12</sup>No one makes this point more strongly than Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. See especially several of the essays in *Bread not Stone: Introduction to a Feminist Interpretation of Scripture* (Boston: Beacon, 1985). For a brief survey of the variety of ways feminist scholars critically approach Scripture, see Donald McKim, *What Christians Believe about the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), pp. 147–51.

<sup>13</sup>Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>14</sup>For a further development of this problem of the "hermeneutic circle" and an argument that it does not imply total relativism in biblical authority, see Randy L. Maddox, "Hermeneutic Circle—Vicious or Victorious?" *Philosophy Today* 27 (1983): 66–76; and *idem*, "The Necessity of Interpretation and Biblical Authority," *TSF Bulletin* 8:1 (Sept. 1984): 5–8.

<sup>15</sup>Both Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza speak all too often in this manner.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Letty Russell's discussion of the biblical notions of *Shalom*, liberation, and universality in *Human Liberation*, pp. 56–58, 106–9.

ture.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, working within a hermeneutical perspective is inescapable and becomes problematic only if one never seeks to test the appropriateness of that perspective to the central concerns of Scripture.

### C. The Doctrine of the Trinity

It is no accident that we begin our doctrinal survey with the doctrine of the Trinity. While by no means unanimous, there is an emerging conviction among feminist theologians that the medieval shift, seen clearly in Thomas Aquinas, from trinitarian understandings of God to the focus on God as a unitary supreme being was a disastrous detour for theology.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, they call for a return to a more authentically trinitarian understanding of God. Implicit in such a call is the claim that discussion of God as Trinity is foundational to, and hence prior to, discussion of the traditional "persons" of the Godhead.

Feminist theologians have developed two major points about a trinitarian understanding of God, *vis a vis* the understanding which prevails in modern monotheism, which they see as integral to an inclusive theology. In the first place, they note that modern monotheism has characteristically understood the One God in male terms, whereas trinitarian theology has been more gender-inclusive.<sup>19</sup> While this is a historical, and hence logically inconclusive, observation, it suggests that there may be something inherent in a trinitarian understanding of God which favors an inclusive form of Christian life and thought. The feminists' second point attempts to uncover this inherent feature. Drawing on a suggestion of Jürgen Moltmann, they argue that the modern monotheistic understanding of God is the theological expression of an (unbiblical) hierarchical monistic understanding of reality—monarchism.<sup>20</sup> They then suggest that, because of its inherent individualism and elitism, this monarchical understanding of reality is a significant contributing factor to modern exclusive and oppressive social structures. By contrast, it is argued that the trinitarian understanding of God is rooted in a (biblical) relational understanding of reality. Within a trinitarian framework interrelatedness and mutuality are seen as essential to the nature of God. By corollary, interrelatedness and mutuality are also seen as

<sup>17</sup>It is at this point that evangelicals will have the most serious questions for feminists like Ruether (cf. *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 12) and Schüssler Fiorenza (cf. "The Will to Choose or to Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work," p. 128, in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty Russell, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985).

<sup>18</sup>This shift was pointed out by Karl Rahner in *The Trinity* (New York: Seabury, 1974). It has been perceptively chronicled and critiqued in Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Beyond Theism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). For a feminist critique of modern monotheism and a call for a return to a trinitarian understanding of God see Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors for the Contemporary Church* (New York: Pilgrim, 1983), pp. 110–11, 119; and Patricia Wilson-Kastner, *Faith, Feminism and the Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), pp. 121–37.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Wilson-Kastner, *Faith*, p. 123, where she notes the frequent use of feminine images of the Spirit, etc.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 191–202.

central to the created order and to the relationship between God and the created order.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, such an understanding would be more amenable to an egalitarian and inclusive understanding of Christian life and thought.

The implications of this theme of relationality and mutuality will be developed at several points in our further doctrinal reflection. At this juncture we would simply note that there is nothing necessarily unevangelical about this emphasis, despite the fact that much evangelical theory and practice operate in a monarchical mode. If the feminists are correct in their claim that the relational approach is more biblically and theologically sound, then the only appropriate evangelical response to this or any of the following points is to undertake the theological reconstruction called for.

### D. The Doctrine of God (Father/Creator)

Feminist formulations of the doctrine of God share a fundamental ambiguity with the rest of Christian tradition and, indeed, with the New Testament itself,<sup>22</sup> namely, the use of "God" to refer to both the first "person" of the Trinity and the common divinity of all three persons. However, like the rest of Christian tradition, the predominant use of "God" in feminist theology is to refer to the first person, traditionally known as Father or Creator. Accordingly, we will focus our discussion in this direction, while realizing that the major points made will be true as well for the other two persons, inasmuch as they are also divine.

The various implications of the feminist critique for developing an inclusive doctrine of the first person of the Trinity are less obvious than it might appear. One set of these implications deals with the issue of attributing gender to God. While a few extreme feminists are calling for a religion which replaces the male God (Father) with the Goddess (Mother), this is by no means the goal or orientation of the majority. Neither is it their concern merely to recover a few feminine attributes which are biblically attested that can be used to balance the numerous masculine attributes assigned to the Christian God. Ultimately, the major implication of the feminist critique is a reaffirmation of the classical theological doctrine of the analogical status of *all* language about God, including "Father."<sup>23</sup> As they point out, this doctrine logically involves the denial of the ascription of *either* gender to God in any literal sense. God, as divine, transcends the distinction between male and female. At the same time, *both* masculine and feminine

<sup>21</sup>Cf. Wilson-Kastner, *Faith*, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Karl Rahner, "Theos in the New Testament," *Theological Investigations* (New York: Seabury, 1974), 1:79–148.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. especially McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, pp. 125, 166. Lest it be assumed that all responsible theologians already realize God-talk is analogical and never assume that God is "masculine," see Vernard Eller, *The Language of Canaan and the Grammar of Feminism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 37ff. For a feminist critique of the Goddess movement see Denise Lardner Carmody, *Feminism and Christianity: A Two-Way Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), pp. 33–5.

analogies for God have biblical warrant and provide instructive disclosures of truth about God and God's relationship to humanity.<sup>24</sup>

The second set of implications of the feminist critique for developing an inclusive doctrine of the first person of the Trinity moves beyond the question of the mere ascription of maleness to God. Focus is placed instead on the predominance in traditional theological formulations of heirarchical and abstract philosophical models of God like "First Cause," "Unmoved Mover" and "World Governor." It is argued that such models are more an expression of Greek philosophy and patriarchal presuppositions than an adequate representation of the God revealed and experienced in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In place of such abstract and heirarchical models, feminists have called for more personal, relational categories or models for describing God and God's relationship to humanity.<sup>25</sup> Such a shift is argued to be more biblical. At the same time, it is recognized to be more inclusive of women's experience since, as Carol Gilligan has argued, one of the defining characteristics of the "female" perspective on life is a focus on relationship as more crucial than authority or independence—the typical emphases of the "male" perspective.<sup>26</sup>

The final set of implications of the feminist critique for developing an inclusive doctrine of the first person of the Trinity is a direct corollary of the move to a more relational view of God. These implications center on the understanding of "power" when ascribed to God. Essentially, feminists reject the heirarchical understanding of omnipotence or power as *power over* in favor of a more egalitarian understanding of power as *power for* or enabling power.<sup>27</sup> They argue strongly that the latter understanding of power is more in keeping with the nature of the God experienced in and through Christ.<sup>28</sup> In reality this argument, which seems persuasive, will probably entail more radical changes in traditional understandings of God than the previous points mentioned. In particular, it would call into question the Protestant tendency to emphasize the transcendence of God at the expense of God's immanence.<sup>29</sup>

### E. Doctrine of Christ

The feminist proposals for an inclusive doctrine of Christ basically develop the relevant corollaries of their analysis of the doctrine of God. One set of these corollaries focuses on the appropriate model for understanding the nature and work of the second person of the Godhead. Central to this discussion is the

<sup>24</sup>For a collection of the biblical feminine analogies for God, see Virginia Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine* (New York: Crossroad, 1983). We believe that the basic stance which accepts female analogies for a transsexual God would satisfy the valid concerns expressed in Carol Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Practical Reasons," in *Womanspirit Rising*, pp. 273–87.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, pp. 21, 111, 125, 166–7, 177ff.

<sup>26</sup>Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>27</sup>See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision," p. 137, *Womanspirit Rising*, edited by C. Christ and J. Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Ruether's "midrash" entitled "The Kenosis of the Father" in *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 1–11.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, p. 176.

critique of all abstract and/or absolutist models of Christ in relation to creation and history.<sup>30</sup> In place of such traditional understandings of Christ as First Principle or King, feminists show a marked preference for a model of Christ as Representative—*both* Representative of God to humanity and Representative of True Humanity.<sup>31</sup> Obviously, such a model is more in keeping with their concern for relational categories and a non-monarchal view of God than the traditional alternatives. Beyond these apparent benefits, feminists claim that such a model more adequately portrays the genuine union of divinity and humanity in Christ, thereby helping to overcome the remaining traces of dualism in Chalcedonian Christology and the widespread docetism of popular piety.<sup>32</sup> A final strength that feminists see in the model of Christ as Representative is the solid emphasis it places on the role of Christ as mediator *without*, at the same time, undercutting our human responsibility to become re-presentations of true humanity. That is, Christ is seen as a representative, not a replacement.<sup>33</sup>

The second set of corollaries of the doctrine of God evident in the feminist discussion of Christology deals with the feminist version of the "scandal of particularity"—i.e., is Jesus' maleness an essential aspect of Jesus being the Christ? This question has been the focus of much feminist reflection and has received a variety of answers. For a few feminists the scandal of Jesus' maleness—and indeed all his other particularities (Jewishness, etc.)—has led to a denial of the doctrine of the incarnation *per se*; they argue that the development of this doctrine was more a matter of oppressive political struggles than of theological sensitivities.<sup>34</sup> Other feminists, equally scandalized by the idea of worshipping or serving an exclusively male Christ, have argued either that there have been both male and female incarnations of Christ or that Jesus was actually androgynous.<sup>35</sup> However, most Christian feminists find all such attempts to escape the scandal of Jesus' maleness unacceptable.<sup>36</sup> Rather than denying the claim that Jesus was the Christ or the historical fact that Jesus was male, these feminists deny the theological significance of Jesus' maleness. Drawing an analogy with such aspects of Jesus' historical existence as height and race, they argue that while Jesus' maleness may have been a historical fact, indeed even a histor-

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Thistlethwaite's critique of the various "exclusive christologies," *Metaphors*, pp. 67–85.

<sup>31</sup>See especially Dorothee Sölle, *Christ the Representative* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967). Cf. Russell, *Human Liberation*, pp. 135–39; and McFague's description of Jesus as the "parable of God" in *Metaphorical Theology*, p. 185.

<sup>32</sup>See Wilson-Kastner, *Faith*, pp. 83–4.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Russell, *Human Liberation*, pp. 136–37; and Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors*, p. 81.

<sup>34</sup>A good example is Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice* (New York: Pilgrims, 1984), pp. 214–17.

<sup>35</sup>The idea of a balancing female incarnation can be found in groups like the Shakers and Christian Science. Summaries of such groups are available in Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 127–30; and Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors*, pp. 85–8. For an argument that Jesus was androgynous (at least in the sense of having both "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics), see Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "The Androgyny of Jesus," *Daughters of Sarah*, March 1976, pp. 1ff.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Russell's affirmation that to be a Christian theologian is to accept the particularity of Jesus (*Human Liberation*, p. 138). In particular, most Christian feminists are critical of androgyny because it implicitly accepts oppressive caricatures of what it means to be "masculine" and "feminine." Cf. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 130; and Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors*, p. 88.

ical necessity, it was certainly not a theological necessity.<sup>37</sup> The only way to argue the contrary would be to claim that God per se is more properly male than female—a claim they have already shown to be unbiblical. In light of such a distinction, Jesus' maleness need not be a theological problem for women. Indeed, the fact that Jesus was male can even take on a positive significance in that it was precisely as a male that God transcended and judged patriarchalism.<sup>38</sup>

#### F. Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

In the history of Christian doctrine, the Holy Spirit has often been conceived as female—both analogically and literally.<sup>39</sup> On first consideration, this would appear to have positive significance for the feminist critique of an exclusively male understanding of God. However, most Christian feminists are extremely cautious in dealing with this tradition. In general, they are appreciative of the female imagery of the Spirit as long as it is understood *analogically*. However, they reject any *literal* identification of the Spirit as female. Their reasons for this rejection are cogent.<sup>40</sup> In the first place, there seems to be little equality in a Godhead composed of two males and one subordinate (remember the *Filioque!*) female. More importantly, to attribute gender to the Spirit—and by extension to the other persons of the Godhead—would serve to ratify at the divine level the dualism and hierarchy of male and female that feminists are so busy contesting at the human level. Thus, to attribute female gender to the Spirit would actually work against the feminist case. It is far better, for a truly inclusive theology, to affirm that the *entire* Godhead transcends gender per se, but not gender-related analogies.

At the same time, one must be careful even in the use of female analogies when dealing with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the most significant point that has emerged in the feminist discussion of the Holy Spirit is the claim that female imagery of the Spirit has been used to "feminize" and, thereby, subordinate the person and work of the Spirit.<sup>41</sup> Feminists argue that the Spirit has all-too-often been construed through the patriarchally-distorted image of the "feminine" as quiet, recessive, and dependent—both in relation to the other persons of the Godhead and in relation to creation. By contrast, they find in Scripture a model of the Spirit as the Power of the very Presence of God; a Presence as fully divine and authoritative as Christ, and a Power that instills in believers a spirit of resistance to evil and commitment to justice.<sup>42</sup> If taken seriously, such a model of the Spirit would lead to a more balanced view of the Trinity and a more reformist view of Christian life than has characterized much of Christianity.

<sup>37</sup>See Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 137; and Wilson-Kastner, *Faith*, p. 90.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Diane Tennis, *Is God the Only Reliable Father?* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), pp. 103–4; and Rosemary Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 54–5.

<sup>39</sup>For examples see Elaine Pagels, "What Became of God the Mother?" in *Womanspirit Rising*, pp. 107–19; and Warren Lewis, *Witnesses to the Holy Spirit* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson, 1978), pp. 20–30.

<sup>40</sup>See especially Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 60–1.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors*, pp. 101–12.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 120, 122–29.

A final point feminists make in relation to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is that the Spirit's work is inclusive of both male and female. In particular, the Spirit gives *both* the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit to *both* women and men.<sup>43</sup> That is, a truly inclusive theology of the Holy Spirit would necessarily imply an inclusive understanding of Christian life and ministry.

#### G. Doctrine of Creation

Feminists have repeatedly made the claim that the struggle for the liberation of women is closely tied to the struggle for an ecologically sensitive relationship to the created order. The reason for this, they argue, is that both cases of exploitation are consequences of the same "male" hierarchical and dualistic worldviews.<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, the primary goal of Christian feminist reflection on the nature of the created order has been to expose and overcome the residual elements of such hierarchical and dualistic thinking in the traditional Christian worldview.

In cosmic terms, feminists argue that traditional theology has tended to adopt a God/World dualism which emphasizes God's transcendence from and dominance over the world at the expense of God's intimate relationship to the world.<sup>45</sup> Inherent in this charge is the desire to reaffirm the created order as a valued expression of God, rather than an antithetical counterpart to God. Such a desire is consonant with much of contemporary theology. However, the feminist proposals for a worldview that would sustain such concerns raise significant theological questions. Put briefly, they tend to find the biblical metaphors and the theistic model of the God-World relationship *inherently* dualistic. They argue that these one-sided, alienated models should be counterbalanced by the more "primal" imagery of the Earth Goddess.<sup>46</sup> The resulting worldview construes God and World as "the inside and outside of the same thing"<sup>47</sup>—clearly a type of pantheism, if not panentheism. However, such a view raises as many problems as it solves; e.g., do patriarchalism and other evils then become a necessary expression of the One? If so, why resist them? All in all, one is left wondering if there is not a more adequate way to address the feminists' legitimate concern.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup>Marianne Sawicki, *Faith and Sexism: Guidelines for Religious Educators* (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 38.

<sup>44</sup>See especially, Rosemary Ruether, *New Woman: New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury, 1975); and Rosemary Ruether, "Motherearth and the Megamachine: A Theology of Liberation in a Feminine, Somatic, and Ecological Perspective," in *Womanspirit Rising*, pp. 43–52.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Ruether, "Motherearth," p. 49; and *idem*, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 76–7.

<sup>46</sup>Ruether suggests Scripture and later Christian tradition unconsciously adopted a one-sided, alienated view of nature that was a degeneration from a pre-biblical wholistic view. The solution, then, is a return to the wholistic view (Cf. "Motherearth," pp. 46–9, 52).

<sup>47</sup>Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 85. Note also the references to Teilhard de Chardin in *ibid.*, pp. 86–7.

<sup>48</sup>It could be argued that the alienated worldview that feminists are rejecting is actually *deism*, not theism. If so, then a properly formulated understanding of theism could provide an authentic relationship between God and world without the problems of pantheism. For a development of this point in the context of ecological concerns, see Wesley Grandberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), esp. pp. 68–71.

A second unacceptable hierarchical dualism which feminists detect in traditional theological formulations is that of humanity/world. In its extreme, such a dualism construes humanity as something totally distinct from, more valuable than, and dominant over the rest of creation. The potential negative implications of such a dualism are obvious: The rest of creation is seen as something to be owned, plundered, or neglected as humanity sees fit.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, these negative implications have all too often found expression in the "Christian" West. Fortunately, feminists are part of a growing scholarly consensus which argues that Scripture, far from endorsing such a dualism, strongly stresses humanity's relationship to and responsibility for the rest of the created order.<sup>50</sup>

The other major dualism in much traditional Christian theology which feminists critique is that of culture/nature<sup>51</sup>—a derivative of the humanity/world dualism. At issue here is the tendency to value human intellectual and cultural creations as more significant and "god-like" than natural phenomena and processes. Feminists point out that such devaluation of the natural overlooks the scriptural affirmation of the value of creation *prior* to the appearance of humanity. Moreover, it appears to be predicated on an overly intellectualized view of God. Finally, it has served frequently as an analogical argument for the devaluation of females to males.<sup>52</sup> The obvious alternative is a reaffirmation of the value of the "natural," both in human life (female *and* male) and in the rest of creation.

To summarize: A truly inclusive doctrine of creation must resist all undue dualisms and develop an understanding of God, humanity, and the rest of creation which properly values each and stresses their interrelatedness.

#### H. Doctrine of Humanity

The feminist critique of hierarchical dualism takes on specific focus in the pursuit of an inclusive doctrine of humanity. In the first place, theirs is one of the many voices in contemporary theology criticizing the unbiblical spirit/body dualism present in much traditional theology and popular piety. Their unique contribution to this critique is to suggest the connections between this dualism and male/female hierarchy.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, the male/female hierarchical dualism itself is a major focus of the feminist critique. It is undeniable that most of Christian tradition has operated on a dualistic assumption of male/female hierarchy—both in terms of social

<sup>49</sup>See Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 85; and *idem*, "Motherearth," p. 47.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. George Hendry, *Theology of Nature* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982); and Grandberg-Michaelson, *Spirituality*, pp. 60–66. Note: Grandberg-Michaelson locates the source of humanity's alienation from creation in the Enlightenment rather than in Scripture. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup>See Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 72–6. For a reminder that the theological understanding of human cultural creations is part of the doctrine of creation see Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 21–4.

<sup>52</sup>See Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture, and Society*, ed. M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 67–87.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Ruether, "Motherearth," p. 51.

roles and of intrinsic worth.<sup>54</sup> However, there is a significant debate over whether this practice was in keeping with the central teachings of Scripture. At the heart of this debate is the question whether the patriarchalism present, indeed predominant, in Scripture is being put forward as an essential part of the Word of God or rather as a description of the *sinful* human situation to which the (egalitarian) Word of God is addressed.<sup>55</sup> Most Christian feminists argue for the latter alternative.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, they have presented careful exegetical studies to support their case that Scripture portrays patriarchalism as a sinful corruption of an original egalitarian situation and that it calls on Christians to help overcome this corruption.<sup>57</sup> By implication, a truly biblical doctrine of humanity must consistently propound and defend the intrinsic equality of male and female, both in original intention and in the fallen world.<sup>58</sup>

We have still not reached the most foundational level of the feminist critique of traditional theological anthropology. This foundational level deals with how one conceives what it means to be human. Feminists charge that, due to the predominant influence of "male" experience, traditional theological conceptions of humanity have tended to be individualistic, abstract, and alienating.<sup>59</sup> They argue that a truly inclusive and biblical anthropology would focus instead on humans as intrinsically social and relational beings.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, they shun definitions of the *Imago Dei* which isolate capabilities like self-consciousness, reason, or freedom. As an alternative, they suggest that the essence of humanity is best seen as the ability to form (or reject) loving relationships with God, others, self, and the created order. While such an ability would involve reason, will, conscience, etc., it "humanizes" these isolated capabilities by placing them in the service of relationality.

In brief, a truly inclusive doctrine of humanity would not only defend the

<sup>54</sup>For surveys of the frequent misogyny in Christian tradition, see Elizabeth Clark and Herbert Richardson, *Women and Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977); Rosemary Ruether, *Religion and Sexism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974); and George Tavard, *Women in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973). These volumes also contain a few notes of egalitarian alternatives.

<sup>55</sup>Helpful discussions of this debate can be found in Robert Johnston, *Evangelicals at an Impasse* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979), pp. 48–76; and Willard Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1983), pp. 150–91.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. Rosemary Ruether, "Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation," in *Feminist Interpretation*, pp. 111–24, esp. p. 117. For a more revisionist position that is somewhat critical of Ruether, see Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose," esp. p. 132.

<sup>57</sup>See especially, Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Human Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); and Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985).

<sup>58</sup>See especially Wilson-Kastner, *Faith*, pp. 55–60. Note: This affirmation of equality is not necessarily a denial of differences in nature—i.e., androgyny. Indeed, most Christian feminists are justifiably critical of the concept of androgyny. See Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 110–11.

<sup>59</sup>Remember Gilligan's distinctions between "male" and "female" experience.

<sup>60</sup>See Margaret Farley, "Feminist Consciousness and the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Feminist Interpretation*, p. 47; and Marianne Micks, *Our Search for Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), pp. 3–31. The critique of individualistic understandings of humanity and formulation of relational alternatives can also be found in such prominent contemporary theologians as Barth and Brunner. Cf. Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 35–40.

equality of humanity as male and female, it would emphasize the social-relational nature of humanity as created in the Image of God—male *and* female.

### I. Doctrine of Sin

The feminist commitment to a social understanding of human nature is clearly evident in their discussion of sin. They carefully resist the privatistic, dualistic, and individualistic definitions of sin that are so common in Christian tradition and piety. Drawing on classical discussions of original sin, they emphasize that sin is not just a matter of individual acts. Rather, such acts flow from and result in a state of being—broken relationships with God, others, self, and world. Seen in this way, sin becomes a perversion of our very essence. It dehumanizes us and leads us to dehumanize others. Moreover, it affects our entire human being, not just our "physical" nature or our "spirit." Thus, *any* human act which is destructive of persons or relationships is recognized as sinful.<sup>61</sup>

This is not to suggest that feminists confine sin to human acts alone. Rather, they are among a growing group of theologians who are becoming sensitive to the structural and systemic forms evil can take.<sup>62</sup> Sin can become institutionalized and otherwise socially embodied. Consider, for example, the numerous social, political, and economic institutions that serve to perpetuate racism. Such a consideration will soon reveal not only the destructiveness of such socially-embodied sinfulness but also the subtleness with which it is able to corrupt even the most well-intentioned acts. Of course, the major type of systemic sinfulness that feminists highlight is sexism, particularly in the forms of patriarchalism and misogyny.<sup>63</sup> Their treatment of this subject often sparks piercing realizations of the way *both* men and women contribute to the continuing oppression of sexism, be it through assertion, denial, neglect or acquiescence.<sup>64</sup>

The detailing of the variety of ways in which individuals contribute to sexism hints at the other major point feminists stress in relation to the doctrine of sin; namely, the contextuality of sin. In one of the earliest expressions of feminist theology Valerie Saiving argued that the traditional identification of pride as the essence of sin is male-oriented and does not speak to the situation of women. Rather, she claimed, the temptations which threaten to destroy women's personhood are more in the realm of an undervaluing and underdevelopment of the self.<sup>65</sup> Her major point was that sin cannot be distilled to a single essence. Its particular forms of destructiveness to relationship vary in regards to

<sup>61</sup>Cf. the discussion of sin in Letty Russell, *Becoming Human* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), pp. 76ff; and *idem*, *Human Liberation*, pp. 112–13.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–4; Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 164; and Dorothee Sölle, "The Gospel and Liberation," *Commonweal*, Dec. 22, 1972, pp. 273–4.

<sup>63</sup>Perhaps the most biting feminist exposé on misogyny is Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology* (Boston: Beacon, 1978). For a brief systematic treatment in relation to the doctrine of sin, see Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 165–83.

<sup>64</sup>On the contributions of women to sexism, see Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 162, 180, 185–86.

<sup>65</sup>Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," in *Womanspirit Rising*, pp. 25–42. The theme of this article is further substantiated and developed in Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin, and Grace* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980).

male and female experience. If contemporary Christian feminists take issue with Saiving, it is only to suggest that the forms of sin are even more contextual than she suggests; e.g., it also varies between the situation of white middle-class American women and that of women in the third world.<sup>66</sup>

In brief, in light of the feminist critique, an inclusive doctrine of sin must stress sin's social, systemic, and contextual nature.

### J. Doctrine of Redemption

As one should expect, the feminist discussion of the doctrine of redemption closely parallels their discussion of sin. To begin with, Christian feminists consistently reject any attempt to construe redemption primarily in futuristic and other-worldly terms. While admitting that the full and final expression of salvation may be an eschatological event, they focus on the biblical affirmations that Christ has already conquered evil and that deliverance from evil is available in a real, albeit preliminary, sense in *this* world. Though sin is subtle and pervasive, it is not inescapable.<sup>67</sup> If Christian history has too seldom witnessed such overcoming of the corruptions of sin, the explanation is not to be found in the inescapability of sin or the inscrutability of God's will. Rather, feminists lay the blame squarely on the human propensity to deny our responsibility as God's co-workers in the battle against evil.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to stressing the present aspect of salvation, feminists also underline its wholistic and social dimensions. For them, conversion is never simply an inner "spiritual" affair. Rather, it is a turning of the entire person from a dehumanizing way of life to a liberating and serving way of life. Such a turning will involve the reorienting of one's self-understanding and one's relationship to God. However, it will also involve a reorienting of one's relationship to other persons (justice) and to nature (care).<sup>69</sup> The ethics of the redeemed life will not be simply personal, they will be social and ecological.<sup>70</sup>

To put the two preceding points in a traditional framework, feminists see salvation as embracing *both* justification and sanctification—i.e., both our acceptance while yet sinners and the gracious transformation of our sinful lives. If anything, their emphasis is on sanctification. They consistently portray the goal of salvation as the development of confident and mature persons who strive to exemplify the lifestyle of true humanity and *Shalom* incarnated in Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup>See esp., Anne Carr, "Theological Anthropology and the Experience of Women," *Chicago Studies* 19 (1980): 113–28, esp. 115. Of course, the contextuality of sin is paralleled by the contextuality of redemption. Cf. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 183–92.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. Russell, *Human Liberation*, pp. 109–11; and *idem*, *Becoming Human*, p. 82.

<sup>68</sup>As this might suggest, Christian feminists tend to be critical of any understanding of predestination that undercuts human responsibility. Cf. Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors*, p. 81.

<sup>69</sup>See the discussion of salvation as *Shalom* in Russell, *Human Liberation*, pp. 61–2, 107–9. Cf. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 163; and *idem*, "Motherearth," pp. 47–8.

<sup>70</sup>Cf. Ruether, "Motherearth," p. 51; and Wilson-Kastner, *Faith*, pp. 65–7.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, pp. 182–4.

It should be apparent how each of these emphases is a necessary foundation for the feminist call to transform the evils of patriarchy, and thus why these emphases are essential to an inclusive theology.

#### K. Doctrine of the Church and Ministry

In relation to ecclesiology, the most obvious feminist concern is to justify the participation of women in all areas of Church and ministry, including the ministry of Word and sacrament.<sup>72</sup> However, it would be misleading to see this as their primary concern. In reality, feminists are ultimately interested in a fundamental transformation of the traditional understandings and structures of Church and ministry. If they focus on the issue of women's ordination, it is because this issue is a revealing test case of underlying problems.<sup>73</sup>

Feminists see the exclusion of women from ministry as simply one of the many destructive and self-crippling effects of traditional hierarchical and clerical conceptions of Church and ministry. Here, as in the other areas of Christian life and thought, feminists argue that such hierarchical and dualistic thinking is unbiblical and dehumanizing. They reject any type of clergy/laity distinction which overlooks the variety of ministries present in the whole community and which makes laity dependent upon clergy. As such, their real question is not "Why not ordain women?" but "Why ordain anyone?"<sup>74</sup> Such questioning need not imply that there can be no place for authority or authoritative roles in a feminist understanding of Church and ministry. However, such authority would have to be conceived and exercised in a way that empowered others and summoned their cooperation as opposed to overpowering or coercing them. It would have to be an authority of partnership rather than domination.<sup>75</sup>

The emphasis on empowering and partnership is evident in feminist reflections on the nature of ministry as well. They have drawn attention to the exclusivist and contextual nature of many of the traditional models of ministry.<sup>76</sup> As more inclusive alternatives they have elaborated models such as Liberation Community and Servant.<sup>77</sup> Throughout, they have emphasized that ministry is ultimately a function of the whole People of God in partnership.

#### L. Doctrine of Eschatology

The major ramifications of the preceding discussions for an inclusive understanding of the doctrine of eschatology are self-evident. In the first place, the

<sup>72</sup>The issue of ordination of women has been the focus of many treatments. See especially: Emily Hewitt and Suzanne Hiatt, *Women Priests: Yes or No?* (New York: Seabury, 1973); and David Scholer, "Women in Ministry" (eight part series) *Covenant Companion* 1983-4.

<sup>73</sup>Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors*, p. 15.

<sup>74</sup>See Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 206-13; and Russell, *Human Liberation*, p. 173.

<sup>75</sup>Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors*, pp. 155, 162; and Letty Russell, "Authority and the Challenge of Feminist Interpretation," in *Feminist Interpretation*, p. 143.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Thistlethwaite, *Metaphors*; and Russell, *Human Liberation*, pp. 178-80.

<sup>77</sup>Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 201-13; and Russell, *Human Liberation*, pp. 140-2.

ultimate eschatological hope must include a just and egalitarian transformation of the entire created order.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, the feminist conviction of both the need for and possibility of such a transformation of the present sinful world would incline one toward an inaugurated eschatology which preserved the tension between the *already* and the *not yet* status of the hoped-for transformation. Both one-sided futurist eschatologies and "spiritualized" realized eschatologies would undercut the reformist nerve that is central to the feminist critique.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to these obvious ramifications, it should be noted that a few Christian feminists have called for a rejection of the doctrine of personal immortality.<sup>80</sup> However, they have not yet given sufficient demonstration of either the biblical warrant or the inclusive necessity for such a stand.

### III. Conclusion

In closing, what general conclusions might we draw from our analysis of the systematic implications of contemporary Christian feminist reflection?

In the first place, we have seen that the feminist critique is indeed a systematic critique of Christian theology. It addresses every major area of doctrine. More importantly, it evidences a significant consistency of theme and perspective in these various areas.

Secondly, we have noted that several of the major points of the feminist critique have also found expression and support in other movements in biblical and theological scholarship. Such consensus among pluriform dialogue partners is a strong warrant for the legitimacy of those feminist claims.

And yet, we have also frequently been reminded of the tensions between the feminist perspective and traditional convictions and assumptions of Christian theology. Indeed, every major Christian tradition will find particular points of challenge in the feminist critique. For example, Calvinists will struggle with the feminists' questioning of divine omnipotence and predestination while the Roman Catholic tradition will find more problem with their critique of hierarchy in the Church. Or again, the Lutherans will be suspicious of their strong focus on sanctification. Ironically, if feminist theologians are able to convince many others of the validity of their major points, then this "divisive" issue may become another of God's means for overcoming some of the long-standing divisions that so cripple the ministry of Christ's Church.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. Russell, *Human Liberation*, pp. 106-9.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 41-9, 135; and Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 244-45, 252-55.

<sup>80</sup>Especially Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 236, 256-58.