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Mary Daly Beyond God the Father

Toward a Philosophy
of Women's Liberation



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Emily Adlman

CHAPTER FIVE

The Bonds of Freedom: Sisterhood as Antichurch

A woman must never be free of subjugation.

—THE HINDU CODE OF MANU, V

I thank thee, O Lord, that thou has not created me a woman.

—DAILY ORTHODOX JEWISH PRAYER

Creator of the heavens and the earth, He has given you wives from among yourselves to multiply you, and cattle male and female. Nothing can be compared with Him.

—HOLY KORAN OF ISLAM

Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands . . . for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.

—EPHESIANS 5:23-24

Religion legitimates so effectively because it relates the precarious reality constructions of empirical societies with ultimate reality.

—PETER BERGER, IN THE SACRED CANOPY

As the victims of a planetary caste system whose very existence has been made invisible to us, women have been divided from each other by pseudo-identification with groupings which are androcentric and male-dominated. Among these are the

various religions whose ideologies degrade and mystify women to such an extent that even the fact of this degradation is not perceived by its victims.

Despite deception, women are breaking through to awareness of sexual caste as a universal phenomenon. As women revolt against this, a new sense of reality is emerging. That is, a counterworld to patriarchy is coming into being which is by the same token counter to religion as *patriarchal*. Sisterhood, then, by being the unique bonding of women against our reduction to low caste is Antichurch. It is the evolution of a social reality that undercuts the credibility of sexist religion to the degree that it undermines sexism itself. Even without conscious attention to the church, sisterhood is in conflict with it. There are, of course, other movements in contemporary society that threaten organized religion. In the case of other movements, however, it is not sexism that is directly under attack. The development of sisterhood is a unique threat, for it is directed against the basic social and psychic model of hierarchy and domination upon which authoritarian religion as *authoritarian* depends for survival. This conflict arises directly from the fact that women are beginning to overcome the divided self and divisions from each other.

Aside from the general way in which the movement, simply by its own dynamics, conflicts with sexist religion by setting up a counterworld to it, there is also a more specific and direct opposition developing to the sexism of the churches. This is related to the fact that some of the movement's leading figures as well as an increasing number of its adherents are women who know personally the experience of authoritarian religious conditioning and the experience of breaking through this. Many now recall in amazement their past acceptance of the exclusion of half the human race from priesthood and ministry as if this were "natural." As long as the mask of role segregation was effective, it was possible to believe firmly that no inequality was involved: men and women were just "different." Women were able to accept the fact that any boy was allowed to serve Mass, whereas a woman with a Ph.D. was absolutely excluded from such a function. They could go through marriage ceremonies in which they promised to "obey" their husbands without reciprocal promises from men, and still think that no inequality was involved: they were "subordinate but not inferior." Now that the implications of role segregation in the wider society have

received exposure in the media, however, inevitably more women, even the unradicalized, are seeing through the mystifications of religious sexism and our own resistance to consciousness. These women—whatever may be their relationship now to organized religion—are spiritual expatriates, and they bring to the movement intimate and precise knowledge of religion's role in reinforcing sexual caste, focusing criticism precisely upon it. In a particular way, they constitute sisterhood as Antichurch.

The Prevailing Sense of Reality and the Nonbeing of Women

The history of our foremothers has not been recorded. I have already pointed to the fact that women have been wiped out of history. It is important to reinforce our consciousness of this fact, because the prevailing usages of political power are working in every way to blot out such consciousness. Sometimes the existence of this blotting-out mechanism is blatantly admitted. The very fact that men can do this with impunity—as they can with pride assert "I am a male chauvinist" but not "I am a racist"—indicates certitude of male power and female powerlessness.¹ An example of the twofold phenomenon of both reducing women's achievements and publicizing the admission of reducing these can be seen in relation to an undersea study of endurance of aquanauts. It was reported that the observers—all males—had some thoughts about why the women aquanauts outperformed their male counterparts. One excuse given was that screening procedures were more rigorous for the women. In giving this "reason," Dr. William G. Prescott even exposed the built-in bias of the general situation further by adding that this rigor was due to the fact that there were only a few positions available for women. One might ask *why* there were not as many positions open to women as to men. Another excuse that was given for female success on the mission was that there was more publicity about them. "They were really on the spot."² Again, this invites the question: Why were they alone on the spot? What does it say about our society that only a small quota of women are allowed to compete in such an experiment, that they are then "on the spot," and that their very success is then attributed to, that is, blamed on, these limitations?

Another example on an entirely different level of this "blotting-out" phenomenon was what was for decades the best kept secret in the history of biology—the fact that initially all mammalian embryos are females. No conscious efforts were made to conceal this finding, yet it has been stubbornly ignored. Since the androcentric theory of women's origin from the male reigns over the popular consciousness, no data really make any difference. The data and their implications are in effect erased, so that, as Lester Frank Ward stated, "scarcely any number of facts opposed to such a world view can shake it."

On the level of scholarship, erasing women is the name of the game. I have already referred to the trivialization of the work of proponents of the matriarchal theory. Ludovici comments upon this:

Scholars imprisoned in the patriarchal prejudices of the Zeitgeist used the oldest trick in the game to repel invasion by the revolutionary theories of both Bachofen and of Morgan. They simply ignored the two protagonists of matriarchy.³

The same treatment was accorded to Robert Briffaut's *The Mothers*, a work of a million and a half words published in 1927. To quote Ludovici again:

Scholars resented passionately a theory which would encourage the deracination of our patriarchal culture and the depreciation of its religious values.⁴

What is the most effective response that women, recognizing this process of erasure, can make to the structures that function in such a way? The sociologists of patriarchy have given us a clue, unwittingly: Peter Berger speaks of three processes involved in world-building: *Externalization* is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of "men" [sic]. *Objectivation* is the attainment by the products of this activity of a facticity that then confronts the original producers as realities outside themselves. *Internalization* is the reappropriation by "men" [sic] of this same reality. Thus transforming it into structures of the subjective consciousness.⁵ Thus spake Peter Berger. The fact is, as one woman acutely pointed out, that under the conditions of patriarchy, it is indeed men who do the

The experience itself of battling political power with political non-power—which is all we have in that realm—is revelatory. The techniques of men who have worked themselves into positions of power—whether in civil government, churches, businesses, educational institutions, or in any of the cultural analogues of these—are multifaceted, but by and large they are reducible to the mechanism of "divide and conquer." One of the elements in the "divide and conquer" syndrome is paternalism. Since women have been conditioned to distrust each other and rely upon men with power for support, there is a susceptibility to paternalistic affective tyranny that is omnipresent and subtle. While younger men are also vulnerable in this way, the bonding phenomenon among males promises future deliverance. Recognition of this difference—perhaps not fully conscious—is reflected in behavior on the part of both sexes. In women, one notices "accommodation attitudes," that is, a self-abnegating and flattering manner that is almost "second nature."⁷ Conditioning to such accommodation attitudes is intensified by such customs as nonreciprocal first naming, common even when the boss (Mr. Jones, Father Jones, Professor Jones, or Doctor Jones) is thirty years of age and the secretary, who is sixty, is called "Sally." A similar custom is reference by "the boss" to "Sally" as "the girl" in the office. A young male "executive assistant" doing essentially the same work as Sally, for a much higher salary, is of course not referred to as a "boy." Another behavioral difference between men and women, whether the former are in the position of boss or subordinate to each other, is body language. Men assume the initiation of personal touch, the prerogative of undignified postures. Men give nonverbal cues signaling status above women, even when the former still occupy junior or lowly situations on the totem pole. Paternalism toward males—unless

Since, then, the experience of women against each other, many are coming to reexamine the problem of where to focus energy. I have just pointed out that there is a species of delusion involved in battling the objectified products of male externalization processes as if these were solid realities—not products, but immutable "nature." A central problem is to get to recognition of our own internalization of such soul-shrinking products and move toward externalizing our own being in objective social reality. This is another way of saying that the creation of new space involves facing nothingness and discovering power of being.

Does this mean that there is no value in struggling on the level of political power? Such a conclusion would be simplistic. I would suggest that the point is to *avoid unrealistic expectations* concerning the outcome. The point is not to negate the value of the tremendous efforts made by women to obtain justice for women within sexist institutions. An outstanding example of such a concerted effort has been the work of the St. Joan's International Alliance, the organization of Catholic feminists that for decades has struggled to obtain justice for women in the wider society as well as within the Church. The courageous efforts of religious activists such as Frances McGillicuddy (President of the American branch of Saint Joan's) and of Dr. Elizabeth Farians (founder of several organizations, including NOW's National Task Force on Women and Religion) have not transformed structures but they have

not been wasted. The consciousness of women has been changed immeasurably because of their work.⁸

The process of "fighting," then, has value as an educative and radicalizing activity, but there is a healthy cynicism that comes with recognition that a place in sexist space is not the goal. Women who have repeatedly gone through such processes as struggling to obtain a woman faculty member only to discover that the fruit of endless efforts is the selection of a docile token by male administrators, chosen mainly because of her nonfeminist consciousness and "safe" behavior, have learned something about the need to create being on the boundary of patriarchal space. In fighting "within" such space, we should allow it only the minimal degree of power over our expenditure of energies that will serve our own purposes. As a cognitive minority, our war is on a deeper level. It is with the prevailing sense of reality, according to which we must be relegated to nonbeing. Our self-recovery, in part, depends upon our refusal to take this "reality" too seriously. To put this in another way, we have to learn to live now the future we are fighting for, rather than compromising in vain hope of a future that is always deferred, always unreal. This creative leap implies a kind of recklessness born out of the death of false hope.

Antiworld: Antichurch

To live in this new world is to be creating an Antiworld, by renaming the cosmos. To some it might appear to be a sort of trivialization to call this Antichurch, reducing the phenomenon to contradiction of only one cultural institution. However, this is to forget the power that religion has over the human psyche, linking the unsteady reality of social constructs (objectifications) to ultimate reality through myth. It would be naïve to think that religion in this sense has lost all of its power. The use of religion by both presidential candidates in the 1972 United States election bordered on the grotesque, suggesting that American civil religion has been carried through to the ultimate caricature of the battle between principalities and powers. To affirm that sisterhood is Antichurch is not to speak on the level of denominational quarrels but on the level of a profound struggle within the human psyche trying to free itself from destructive social forces. It is to say we are dealing with powerful symbols that invade our beings from all sides, from the most

banal television commercial or textbook, to the doctor's office, to a billboard with a three-dimensional figure of a local political candidate, telling voters to "put your faith in him." All say one thing: that to be human is to be male is to be the Son of God.

What is involved, then, is a religious struggle, and this is so because the conflict is on the level of being versus nonbeing. The affirmation of being by women is a religious affirmation, confronting the archaic heritage of projections that deny our humanity. However, since the conflict is more on the level of creation than of struggle for equal ground in sexist space, the term Antichurch must be understood in a positive way. It is the bringing forth into the world of New Being, which by its very coming annihilates the credibility of myths contrived to support the structures of alienation.

Antichurch and Antichrist

Analyzing medieval Catholicism, Troeltsch wrote:

The Church means the eternal existence of the God-Man: it is the extension of the Incarnation, the objective organization of miraculous power, from which . . . subjective results will appear quite naturally.⁹

Moreover, "in spite of all individual inadequacy the institution remains holy and divine."¹⁰ Just as the incompetencies of the ascendent group count for nothing as evidence that the system is wrong, so too the brilliant "exceptions" within the subordinate group offer no substantial challenge. The system has been closed to new information.

The image of the church as the "bride of Christ" is another way of conveying that it is "the extension of the Incarnation," since a bride or wife in patriarchy is merely an extension of her husband. The potency of this image derives from the notion of the divinity of Jesus, for authority figures can derive credibility from the belief that they are representing the God-Man. The pope, who has been called "the vicar of Christ on earth," and the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Catholicism as distinguished from the laity, participate in this identification.

It has been argued, of course, that unlike the harsh patriarchates of pre-Christian culture, this system was construed as a patriarchy of love. In regard to the family, for example, Troeltsch claims that "in

this respect all that Christianity did was to modify from within this idea of male domination by its teaching about love and good will." It stressed *voluntary* submission. Authority and subordination were to continue as before, he maintains, "although with important and increasing security for the individual personality of women, children, and servants." "Such claims are so common that we tend to accept them as 'true' without question. However, they leave out of account certain disturbing facts such as the barbarities of 'good' Christians toward women, children, and servants that have been sanctioned by the church."¹² Such claims also leave out of account the fact that under Christianity the will to autonomy in women and other "lesser beings" has been stifled in a double way: feelings of fear have been reinforced by feelings of guilt. The alleged "voluntariness" of the imposed submission in Christian patriarchy has turned women against ourselves more deeply than ever, disguising and reinforcing the internalization process. As the Virgin-Mother Mary was alleged to have said: "Let it be done unto me according to Thy word."

There is a bond, then, between the significance of the women's revolution as Antichrist and its import as Antichurch. Seen in the positive perspective in which I have presented it, as a spiritual uprising that can bring us beyond sexist myths, the Antichrist has a natural correlative in the coming of the Antichurch, which is a communal uprising against the social extensions of the male Incarnation myth, as this has been objectified in the structures of political power. In order to see the relationship between the Second Coming of female presence not only as Antichrist but also as Antichurch, it will be helpful to consider some aspects of the relationship between myth and ritual.

Reinforcement of Myth Through Cult

Sociologists have perceived well enough the connections between myths and ritual. Durkheim observed:

*If the myth were withdrawn from religion, it would be necessary to withdraw the rite also; for the rites are generally addressed to definite personalities . . . and they vary according to the manner in which these personalities are conceived.*¹³

Durkheim points out that the cult rendered to a divinity depends upon the character attributed to him [sic], and the myth determines this character. He adds that "very frequently, the rite is nothing more than the myth put into action."¹⁴ If this is the case, then clearly a rejection of Christolatry symbols in the rising woman-consciousness has an organic consequence in the rejection of sexist rituals. Although one might be tempted to see this as a simple logical consequence, a reduction of the process to "logic" would be utterly naïve. Berger has pointed out that the sacred cosmos provides the "ultimate shield against the terror of anomaly."¹⁵ To be in the position of confronting the Christocentric cosmos that shields many from facing "the terror of anomaly" is to be exposed to the wrath of those who fear their own latent madness and therefore will inflict madness upon those who threaten their fragile "sanity." To assert this is not to be hyperbolic but rather to make an understatement. Robin Morgan expressed this realization in her poem "Monster":

*Oh, mother I am tired and sick.
One sister, new to this pain called feminist consciousness
For want of a scream to name it, asked me last week
"But how do you stop from going crazy?"
No way, my sister.
No way.
This is a pore war, I thought once, on acid.*¹⁶

Berger, quite unaware that he is describing precisely the spiritual dimension of feminist consciousness as it converges to form Antichurch, writes:

*To be in a "right" relationship with the sacred cosmos is to be protected against the nightmare threats of chaos. To fall out of such a "right" relationship is to be abandoned on the edge of the abyss of meaninglessness.*¹⁷

Berger continues to describe powerfully the horrible danger that one may lose all connection with the sacred and be swallowed up by chaos. "All the nomic constructions are designed to keep this terror at bay."¹⁸ Mircea Eliade graphically records human efforts to ward off this terror:

The women's revolution as Antichurch represents this terror of chaos and says it will no longer be kept at bay. It rejects not only the myths of patriarchy but their externalization in ritual. This makes it more threatening than an abstract "intellectual" discussion about "myth and all that." One reason why it is threatening is that religious ritual maintains a continuum between the present and the religious tradition. It is essentially a memory. Sexist ritual is a false memory, placing present experience in the context of a history that is in fact a deadly fiction, a pernicious lie. The Antichurch dimension of women's liberation reveals that this expression of social memory is a lie. To use Berger again:

Men [sic] forget. They must, therefore, be reminded over and over again. . . . Religious ritual has been a crucial instrument of this process of "reminding."¹⁹

Nietzsche said more than he realized when he wrote of this process:

Whenever man [sic] has thought it necessary to create a memory for himself [sic] his effort has been attended with torture, blood, sacrifice.²⁰

Antichurch means saying "No" to these "reminders."

The import of this "No" to the rituals that externalize the machismo myth may be gleaned from facing the fact that males have always marched to war amid blessings and prayers. The presence of military chaplains saying Mass and holding other religious services for "the boys" engaged in the business of killing those on "the other side" speaks for itself.²¹ Females and males have been put to death amid rites and incantations. Thus violence is made to appear "sane." It is legitimated and made part of the social reality that is considered part of the normal scheme of things. To persons in whom the effects of socialization so overwhelm critical judgment that their sense of reality is co-extensive with the world legitimated by religious myth and ritual, the "reasonableness" of even the most bizarre and violent events thus legitimated seems unquestionable. Such persons will fearfully resist the "No" of the women's movement as Antichurch to such legitimations. Others, who wield ideological and political power and understand how to manipulate such fears will also resist this "No" by using religion and other instruments of social control. Such instruments include the myth and institutions of "mental illness."

In the past, this control was exercised by the execution of heretics. In the present, well, as Robin Morgan puts it in her poem "Monster":

*I gripped the arms of my seat more than once
to stop my getting up and screaming to the entire planeload
of human beings what was torturing us all—stopped
because I knew they'd take me for a crazy, an incipient
hijacker perhaps, and wrestle me down until Bellevue
Hospital
could receive me at our landing in New York.²²*

The worshippers of the Yahweh of patriarchy, as they come to realize the potential of this Antichurch to bring about the transference of consciousness into another world, can be expected to use all the tools of violence at their command. For the social reality that they attempt to link with "Ultimate Reality" is precarious, and the danger of anomy or "conversion" is a threat that lurks always behind the irrational dogmatism of the High Priests of war. The need for ritual "reminders" itself betrays the precariousness of the shields against anomy which these High Priests, both ecclesiastical and civil, wish to keep erect.

Ritual and Repressive Satisfaction

Marcuse wrote:

All liberation depends on the consciousness of servitude, and the emergence of this consciousness is always hampered by the predominance of needs and satisfactions which, to a great extent, have become the individual's own.²³

Marcuse is here writing of false needs, that is, those "which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice."²⁴ Although his intent and context clearly were not precisely the same as those reflected in this book, there is a coincidence of insights. The rituals of patriarchy do create false needs, such as the need to lean on father-figures instead of finding strength in the self, or the need for compulsive "self-sacrifice" because one is brainwashed into thinking that one is sinful and "unworthy."

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They then respond to these needs by granting a transitory euphoria of unhappiness. This is repressive satisfaction. To let Marcuse speak again:

The most effective and enduring form of warfare against liberation is the implanting of material and intellectual needs that perpetuate obsolete forms of the struggle for existence.²⁵

The women's revolution, just by being ourselves, declares that such needs are not our true needs and such satisfaction is not satisfying. Saying this comes from the depths of feminists' new awareness. Once it is seen and said, we do not need "reminders" because it is the word of our very being that is spoken. We may become confused, lonely, despairing, or mad, but we cannot really "forget." This is because our revolution means life against death. It is not "losing oneself" for a cause, but living for oneself and therefore also living a cause. Because our consciousness is not contrived, its dawning marks a change and the mark is indelible. One of the women who walked out of Harvard Memorial Church in the 1971 Exodus wrote:

What made the Memorial Church Exodus different [from skulking out the side door and feeling guilty for leaving] what made it possible, experience is the realization that the Church that does belong to me and to my peers is the exodus community of women and men who are pre-living in relationship, living creatively.²⁶

As the same woman remarked over one year later: "It was once and for all. We don't need to walk out of churches over and over again." That is the point. The satisfaction of actively participating in being is real and not repressive. As another woman wrote of the same experience:

As I left, I looked at the different faces in the pews—and kept on smiling. I saw leaving women I knew, old women, middle-aged women, their children, husbands, young women, all kinds and sorts of people. I knew that we were leaving to do whatever we had to do to become persons.²⁷

Because this nonrepressive satisfaction is rooted in being, it in itself is not fragile but enduring. Not needing the inane "reminding" by ritual

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that reinforces false consciousness, it is creative and spontaneous. Women have not walked out of Memorial Church again, but have found other expressions suitable to new situations that arise. Feminist consciousness of being, then, is anti-ritual, because it is so deep.

"Feminist Liturgy": A Square Circle?

A woman who proposed as her project for a course on "The Women's Revolution and Theological Development" an attempt to create a "Women's Liturgy," wrote a twelve-page journal recording her thought process as she tried to work this out. The description of the thought process is in the form of a day by day diary and shows her increasing skepticism of the possibility of a "Women's Liturgy." The problems as they evolved in her consciousness included distrust of anything rigidly structured; unwillingness to do research on "liturgies," which would suggest a mold into which to cast women's experience; dislike of appealing to the old liturgies of patriarchy for legitimation, since these reek of hierarchy; fear of failure in trying to do something completely new, which would be a vehicle rather than a product, so that women would be carried forward.²⁸

All of these problems strike deep chords in women who are struggling with the tensions between remembrance of the past and experience of the present which contradicts our old beliefs. Probably the most striking reflection in this woman's journal was that just as antiracist, anti-war services never really seemed to change the racist and warlike beliefs of the participating Christians, so a feminist liturgy would change nothing, for "the form was theirs." It was the "form" that counted, no matter what the "content." The form was a dead shell, and the growth of the consciousness of women is an attempt to live without such shells. The result of her efforts was the creation of an event, a combination of readings and songs expressing anger, change, self-assertion and sisterhood—an event not to be repeated, but the story of which could be told repeatedly. It was called "Something of, by, and for Women."

A "feminist liturgy" is a contradiction in terms, given the legitimating function of liturgy in patriarchy to support sexism and consequently its offshoots: war, racism and all the destructive hierarchies of economic oppression. It is an attempt to put new wine, women's awareness, into the old skins of forms that kill female self-affirmation and turn female consciousness against itself. This is not to say that the impulse behind

the desire to have something like a "women's liturgy" is not healthy and alive. There is every reason for women to celebrate our becoming and the discovery of our history, but in ever new ways, not enclaved in stagnant, repetitious ritual. The urge to celebrate is part of a precious new beginning. It springs from an ovarian insight.²⁹ But the impulse can be twisted against itself if we look for support and legitimation in the forms of patriarchal ritual, whether Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Moslem, Hindu, or whatever. To know this, one needs only to open one's eyes to the "sacred" symbols and one's ears to the "sacred" words of the "sacred" cosmos that excludes our humanity. To straighten out the thought of Nietzsche: "What are these churches now if they are not the sepulchres of women?" In his confusion, Nietzsche wrote "sepulchres of God," but the real problem is that the churches have been the murderers of women. The corpse of "God" they contain is unfulfilled human being.

To put the matter in psychological terms, one might ask the question: "What is a self-actualizing person?" To this question Abraham Maslow has excellent answers in his list of qualities such people exhibit. They tend to have or better exhibit "boldness, courage, freedom, spontaneity, perspicuity, integration, and self-acceptance."³⁰ These healthy human specimens tend also to have clearer, more efficient perception of reality, more openness to experience, autonomy, detachment, recovery of creativeness, ability to fuse concreteness and abstractness, democratic character structure.³¹ Such persons seem to have resolved "the civil war . . . between the forces of the inner depths and the forces of defense and control."³² We need only to think of such qualities and then to think of what religion in our society has done to wipe them out in women. A "feminist liturgy," despite the healthy impulse behind it, would contribute to the legitimation of this "wiping out" process, because it would be contained to some extent in a traditional form (the admission of this is implicit in the word "liturgy"). It would reinforce—though in an ambivalent manner—false memory.

Non-Saint Joan and the Witch Within

Characteristically, the church burned Joan of Arc as a heretic and, when she was safely dead, canonized her as a Christian saint. But what if Joan was really a "heretic"—a member of the Dianic cult—as the well-

known scholar Margaret Murray maintains? Murray proposes that the questions asked at Joan's trial reveal her accusers' suspicions that she represented an underlying organization which they dreaded—the Old Religion, whose roots go back to a pre-agricultural period. This was an ancient religion of Western Europe which still survives underground. It had "beliefs, ritual, and organization as highly developed as that of any other cult in the world."³³ Murray marshals historical evidence to support her thesis that Joan's accusers were aware of her connection with the ancient religion. She points to the incredible exchange of letters after her execution which reveal that Joan was no ordinary heretic:

After the execution, the judges and counsellors who had sat in judgment on Joan received letters of indemnity from the Great Council; the Chancellor of England sent letters to the Emperor, to the kings and princes of Christendom, to all the nobles and towns of France, explaining that King Henry and his Counsellors had put Joan to death through zeal for the Christian faith; and the University of Paris sent similar letters to the Pope, the Emperor, and the College of Cardinals.³⁴

Moreover, Murray's research indicates that there was widespread belief that Joan was God Incarnate. It was a belief of the Old Religion that God could appear as a woman, a man, or an animal. Such a God is found in Italy, Southern France, and the English Midlands, and is commonly called Janus or Dianus. The feminine form of the name, Diana, is found throughout Western Europe. It is the name of the female deity or leader of the so-called Witches. For this reason, the Old Religion is also referred to as the Dianic Cult.³⁵ The fact that the French never lifted a finger to save Joan—difficult to explain—might be accounted for by their belief that as God Incarnate she was doomed to suffer as the sacrifice for the people.

Joan's trial, then, could be seen as part of the war between Christianity and the Old Religion, or Ritual Witchcraft—an ancient religion of pre-Christian origins, which should not be confused with "Black Magic."³⁶ Christian writers, of course, have wanted to claim Joan as a true Christian. However, Murray's contention is that these have been misled by such phenomena as Joan's "Voices," to whom Joan gave the names of saints, for "the questions showered upon her show that the judges had shrewd suspicions as to the identity of these persons,"

that is, that the "Voices" were human beings, persons of a different religion than Christianity.³⁷ I should like to point out another item that might be significant. Joan's questioners were constantly asking whether she marked her letters with the sign "Jesus Maria" and a cross. On March 1, 1431, she gave an interesting answer: "On some letters, Yes, on others, No!" She added: "At times I used the cross to warn those who understood [what it meant] not to do what I had written in that letter."³⁸ Why would a Christian symbol be chosen to bear this negative message?

The issue that Joan's accusers made of her insistence upon wearing male clothing is significant. On this the judges laid most stress. "Though Joan had recanted and been received into the Church, the moment she put on male attire she was doomed on that account only."³⁹ Murray points out that the simple fact of resuming male garments was a signal for her death without further trial, and suggests that for Joan, as a member of the Dianic cult, the wearing of male attire must have been an outward sign of that faith, and the resuming of it must have meant the relapse.

It may be that future historians, prodded on by the work of scholars like Murray and burning to discover the truth about Joan and about the Old Religion rather than with zeal to entomb her within Christianity, will find more evidence that supports this interpretation of Joan's life and death. Yet even abstracting from this not yet fully explored question, it is clear that there is something deeply significant about the connection between Joan's resuming of male attire (a "mortal sin") and her execution. Phyllis Chesler points out that Joan begins to step completely outside the realm of patriarchal culture:

For this, she is killed in her own lifetime—and re-experienced by those women who are mad enough to wish to "step outside" but who do not wish to be crucified for doing so.⁴⁰

The essential reason why Joan was killed was that she signaled to some extent an escape from patriarchy.

In some ways it was an ambiguous escape. Joan's fate involved the sacrifice of The Maid. This is a proud title, for traditionally in the Old Religion The Maid was one holding a high position in the Coven

Yet, as Chesler points out, Joan's sacrifice was used for purposes of male renewal.

In the Madonna's case the renewal is achieved through classic patriarchal rape-incest; in Joan's case, first through military victories and then through patriarchal crucifixion, guilt, and expiation.⁴¹

The final indignity, not stressed by Chesler, was the fact that having killed her, the Church made her a saint. It should be noted that she was killed in the most horrible way—burned alive—whereas her lieutenant, Gilles de Rais, was granted the mercy of strangulation before burning.

As Antichurch, the women's revolution is an affirmation of Joan's escape from patriarchy. It says "No" to whatever there was of cooption and ambivalence imposed upon her fate. Above all it says "No" to her imposed "sainthood" and "Yes" to her real sainthood—her transparency to the power of being which made her life a sign-event, expressing the witch that burns within our own true selves. Joan's potential stature was reduced by the patriarchal imagination into that of the Virgin-Warrior who aids men to fulfill men's goals. The witch that burns within our being will have to bring out that potential stature, repudiating ambivalence and servitude, refusing the tortures and degrading honors which are their only rewards.

Mothers, Daughters, Comrades

The religions of patriarchy—especially the Judeo-Christian tradition and its hideous blossom, Freudian theory—have stolen daughters from their mothers and mothers from their daughters. Chesler reminds us that Demeter, the goddess of Life, and Persephone, her maiden daughter, were for a long time celebrated in elaborate ceremonies. "But somehow—no one really knows why—such celebrations of mothers and daughters certainly ceased."⁴² Christian women go to church and sing of themselves as sons of God. The Virgin Mary was allowed only a son, but no daughter. Mothers in our culture are cajoled into killing off the self-actualization of their daughters, and daughters learn to hate them for it, instead of seeing the real enemy. If they begin to see, the

pain drives them to their paternal analysts, who help them to understand that they must hate their mothers for not having destroyed them enough to erase the pain. Still, the destruction has not been complete, enough women are beginning to dream again of a time and space in which Mother and Daughter look with pride into each other's faces and know that they both have been victims and now are sisters and comrades.

By the time of Joan of Arc, within the Dianic cult the worship of the male deity seems to have superseded that of the female. Murray holds that only on rare occasions does God appear in a female form and that as a general rule the woman's position, when divine, is that of the "familiar" or substitute for the male God. Yet this ambivalence was probably a late development, and it was still possible to see in her autonomous power.⁴³ The Old Religion was not "pure," but its women could still be powerful figures not yet reduced to the condition of the bovine Madonnas adored by the artists of Christianity. The New Being of Antichurch is a rising up of Mother and Daughter together, beyond the Madonna's image and beyond the ambivalent Warrior Maiden's image. The togetherness comes from nonimmersion in either role, and it comes from our desperation which has made us remember and look forward to the Golden Age. This remembering/looking-forward already colors our existence in the boundary space and time where some women are beginning really to live.

Antichurch and the Sounds of Silence

Male religion entombs women in sepulchres of silence in order to chant its own eternal and dreary dirge to a past that never was. The silence imposed upon women echoes the structures of male hierarchies. It is important to listen to the structures of this imposed silence in order to hear the flow of the new sounds of free silence that are the voice of sisterhood as Antichurch.

Durkheim wrote of the Warramunga tribe in Australia which imposed absolute silence upon women for long mourning periods (as long as two years). As a result, he claimed, the women developed communication through gestures. Some preferred to remain silent even for years after the imposed period of silence.⁴⁴ One woman was said to have

been silent for twenty-four years. One wonders if the continuation of silence is because the women discover a better means of communication, an underground language of silence that men cannot understand. The Pauline text screamed (it doesn't matter at all whether this was

written by Paul or some pseudo-Paul): "I permit no woman to teach . . . she is to keep silent." The point, it seems, was that women cannot "officially" speak—a claim still shrilly proclaimed by Roman Catholicism and orthodox Judaism and affirmed only a bit more subtly by Reformed and Protestant Christianity. For the "sacred" words were all written by men and can only be repeated and echoed. In religions that cling to the past, whether by Bibliolatry or by tradition or both, no woman can break out of imposed silence.

In modern times academia and the printed secular word have partially moved in on the territory of the sacred church and its sacred word. Here too women have been entombed in imposed silence, in the gross and obvious way of simply being excluded and in the more subtle way of only being allowed to echo male words. One may not dare to think out loud women's words—at least, not too much. We know the penalties for that.

As a result the new sounds of free silence may be hard for many to understand. They are many-faceted. We speak forth shapes and colors, utter textures, flash forth to each other in a flow of understanding, what is too awesome to be understood: our own self-birth in sisterhood. Robin Morgan paints the silence:

*And I will speak less and less to you
And more and more in crazy gibberish you cannot understand:
witches' incantations, poetry, old women's mutterings. . . .*⁴⁵

This multi-faced communication that is being born among women in the modern technological jungle of America is nonspeech in the terms of our culture, just as truly as the gestures of the "primitive" Warramunga women were nonspeech to their men. Multi-leveled communication is of course not unknown to all men, but the rules of patriarchy try to write it out as much as possible. What is new when it happens with women

is that it is the interflow of our own being, our affirmation of process that is our own process over and against sepulchral forms that almost but never quite did quench our fire.

Women are starting to know now the defects of language because it is not ours. It reflects the structures blessed by male religion. In order to say that women's speech breaks out of these bounds I have called it silence. It is silence in the sense of going beyond inauthentic speech, but to those who know only inauthentic speech it is meaningless. "Logical positivists" have claimed that one can ask only whatever questions language clearly expresses. To go outside this pre-established box is, supposedly, to use "pseudo-propositions," to say the unthinkable, the meaningless. What the logical positivists did not point out was that the pre-established box is patriarchal, which would mean that our new anti-patriarchal questions are *a priori* pseudo-questions. Other academicians, and non-academicians, though they would not call themselves logical positivists, share this view. To such persons, who crush thought and language into patriarchal space and time past, the new sounds are unheard. A sexist language-bound world is dead to these.

Suzanne Langer wrote of the restriction on discourse that sets bounds to the complexity of speakable ideas. She saw this as an inherent defect of language, which is a poor medium for expressing emotions, ever-moving patterns, the ambivalences and intricacies of inner experience, the interplay of feelings and thought, memories and echoes of memories. The fine arts compensate for this built-in defect of language, she maintained.⁴⁶ But I would point out that poetry and the fine arts have been *individual* expressions of ontological reason—granting that in the case of great art many people can resonate to such expressions. They have remained by and large within patriarchy, which has neatly labeled them "fine arts," and entombed them in its museums and universities. Contained, they have not made a planetary rebellion. Indeed most art and poetry in our culture expresses patriarchal feelings. (Look at the flabby, unathletic bodies of Renaissance Madonnas; read the diarrhetic outpourings of misogyny in Milton, Kipling, Claudel.) By contrast, the new sounds of silence, sparking forth a network of boundary communication, is the dawning of communal New Being. This is neither "public" nor "private," neither "objective" nor "subjective." It is intersub-

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jective silence, the vibrations of which are too high for the patriarchal hearing mechanism. It is, then, ultrasonic.

Beyond the Antichurch

I have already indicated that the merging of feeling and thought, of the personal and the political in the new space being created by the second wave of feminism is a widespread spiritual event. It implies conflict with sexist religion as such, but it also portends transcendence, not only of the sexism, but also of the conflict. This is partially due to the paradoxical fact that there is an *élan* toward transcendence discernible in the women I have called spiritual expatriates, which is at least in part traceable to the influence of religion upon their lives. This influence has been both direct and indirect, that is, by way of direct participation in organized religion and by way of a general cultural climate that has in large measure been shaped by the Judeo-Christian heritage.

A purely negative evaluation of the effects of religion would be inaccurate. It cannot be denied that many people, women and men, have achieved with the help of religion a kind of autonomy, charity, and peace. I have pointed out that these qualities, and particularly this peace, have been attained at too high a price, that is, by leaping over inequities instead of working through these. Certainly, there is something deficient in harmony bought at the expense of insight, in solving problems by not seeing them. Yet it is the human condition always to have only partial insight, and it would be foolish and insensitive to deny all authenticity to the deep experience, the values, and the commitment of those whose religious conditioning rendered them opaque to its own negative aspects. Those who have abandoned institutional religion—or to be more accurate, *been abandoned by institutional religion*—because of these negative elements have often retained a fundamentally spiritual insight, although in many cases they would be reluctant and even hostile to the idea of calling it "religious."⁴⁷ At any rate, there is a remarkable radicalization of consciousness among these spiritual exiles, which often manifests itself in refusal to stop short at limited goals and particular issues, however valid and important—such as legalization of abortion, free day care centers, or the equal rights amendment—and constantly seek to understand the deep implications of liberation.

This deeply radicalized consciousness is by no means the unique property of those who at some time have been personally related to the churches, however. It is one of the developing dimensions of sisterhood—a dynamic toward spiritualization of consciousness and communal incarnation of that consciousness. To call this reality Antichurch is good, but we should not stop with this name alone. To say this word and to stop here is to be caught in a mode of expression that leaves us with an "opposition of opposites." "Opposites" are open to seductive advances, to offers of cooptation, as radical women know. This is illustrated by the many incidences of being invited to speak to obviously nonfeminist gatherings, or to be on panels that are carefully "balanced to represent both extreme points of view" (the assumption being that "truth" must lie in between somewhere). "Opposites" are open to seduction not because they are perceived as radical, but because they are perceived as similar to, in the same category with, the "opponent." To recognize this is not to renounce our identity as Antichurch, nor, on the pragmatic level, does it mean that we must always renounce such offers of a forum. It does mean that we have to be wary and that we have to reach toward something *beyond* opposition.

CHAPTER SIX

Sisterhood as Cosmic Covenant

My friends, do we realize for what purpose we are convened? Do we fully understand that we aim at nothing less than an entire subversion of the present order of society, a dissolution of the whole existing social compact?

—ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH, 1852

*Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?*

—WILLIAM BLAKE

It was a temptation to call this chapter "Sisterhood as Cosmic Church," in order to express some of the movement's elements that are in dialectical tension with its mode of being as Antichurch. However, the negative reactions of feminists to the term are warning enough. Betty Friedan expressed this gut feeling by remarking simply that "the church is the enemy." The word is freighted with an archaic heritage in a specifically Christian way, and this may never be shaken off. Yet certain functions that the church claimed to fulfill and never could, essentially because of its sexism, are being more than fulfilled in the new space of feminism. Or, to be somewhat more accurate, something *beyond* the claims of Christianity is coming into being, for the formulation itself of churchly claims has been anemic, couched in a language reflecting the limits of the patriarchal imagination and perpetuating those limits. The church's actualizations of even such shriveled formulations fall far short of what the advertisements have promised. Still, in order to help our new words—our sounds of silence—to emerge, it may be useful to look at some prevalent concepts of "church." The use of these to express analogies can be worthwhile in envisaging sisterhood as beyond "church."