
G O D D E S S G A I A A N D A N E A R T H H E A L I N G S P I R I T U A L I T Y O F P E A C E

N a d j a F u r l a n Š t a n t e

She changes everything She touches and everything She touches changes. The world is in Her body. The world is in Her and She is in the world. She surrounds us like the air we breathe. She is as close to us as our own breath. She is energy, movement, life, and change. She is the ground of freedom, creativity, sympathy, understanding, and love. ... She sets before us life and death. We can choose life. Change is. Touch is. Everything we touch can change.¹

He is an old white man with a long white beard, dressed in blue, white, or lavender robes, sitting on a golden throne in heaven, surrounded by clouds. He created the world out of nothing. He rules it with His laws and could wipe it out at a moment's notice, if He chose.

This description of *She who changes* (originally written by Starhawk and revised by Carol P. Christ) is created in contrast to the picture of God as an old white man with a long white beard, the widespread and well-known western cultural myth or stereotype of the masculine image of God. This Christian God is referred to using such invocations as Lord, King and Father. Each of these images is exclusively masculine. Until recently, the only kind of legitimate public authority most western people could imagine was that of an adult man. Goddess feminism reverses the judgmental dualism that sets the Judeo-Christian tradition against pagan religions according to which the Biblical religions are seen as entirely patriarchal, existing only to affirm male superiority, while paganism is seen as supporting a feminist religion based on ancient matriarchy.²

¹ P. C. Christ, *She who changes*. Palgrave, New York 2003, p. 200.

² R. Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Bacon Press, Boston 1983, p. 39.

However, in this paper I will not refer to so-called Goddess feminism, or pagan-feminist spirituality or the Wicca movement. I have employed the term Goddess Gaia in the title of this presentation because all the issues that I wish to explore pose questions concerning the relationship between man and woman, human and nature, the living planet, earth, and the concept of God as it has been shaped in the Western religious traditions with the stress on Christianity. Gaia is the word for the Greek Earth Goddess; it is also a term adopted by a group of planetary biologists, such as James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, to refer to their thesis that the entire planet is a living system, behaving as a unified organism.³ The term Gaia has caught on among those seeking a new ecological spirituality as a religious vision. Gaia is seen as a personified being, an immanent diversity. Some see the Jewish and Christian male monotheistic God as a hostile concept that rationalises alienation from and neglect of the earth. In these terms, Gaia should replace God as the focus for our worship.⁴ I agree with much of this critique; nevertheless, I believe, as Rosmary Radford Ruether has put it, that merely replacing a male transcendent deity with an immanent female one is an insufficient answer to the “god-problem”⁵.

This requires a transformation of the mental paradigm and a change in the overall consciousness of the individual and, consequently, the entire collective memory of the Western society. Namely, regarding the issue of God’s image and understanding of the man – nature relation, the collective memory of the past (western man’s collective memory) is characterised by the weight of the discriminatory (man) God model, which rules everything and all human and inhuman beings on Earth – even the Earth itself. And consequently *the human community itself was fissured into controlling subjects and exploited objects*⁶.

³ See J. Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at the Life on Earth*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 1979.

⁴ C. Spretnak, *The Politics of Women’s Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*. Anchor Press, New York 1982, p. 33.

⁵ R. Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God*. HarperOne, New York 1992, p. 4.

⁶ Radford Ruether, op. cit., 1992, p. 257.

Masculine God Image: Relations of Domination and Victim-blaming Theologies

Our power of imagining does not in the first place involve abstract ideas but instead tends to incline towards language, imagery, human experience, symbolism and art, and thus simultaneously involve the intellect, will and emotions. Our religious power of imagining should be healed firstly with regard to God.

It is important to be aware that we can only speak about God and God's revelation in human language, which is coloured and limited by the time and culture in which it develops. In a patriarchal culture, in which men are expected to possess the strength, authority and power, God, who is thought to possess all these attributes, can only be a man. Or, in the words of feminist critic Mary Daly: *If God is male, then male is God.*⁷ Characteristics traditionally attributed to God, such as strength, wisdom, immutability, dependability, and righteousness are similar to values stereotypically attributed to men, whereas the corollary values applied to humanity, such as weakness, ignorance, vacillation and sinfulness, are stereotypically applied to women. Thus the concept of God as male serves to define men and masculine roles and to reinforce the inferior definition and roles of women.

Consequently, we can realise not only that God the Father is a common name for the divine, but also that the entire web of divine-human relations, inter-human relations and relations between man and nature are understood in a patriarchal context.⁸ Elizabeth Johnson, for instance, in her criticism of the "outmoded language about God", which she defines as "oppressive and religiously idolatrous," develops an approach that establishes tension concerning the secret of God and the promise of human and cosmic liberation:

Only if the full reality of women as well as men enters into the symbolisation of God along with symbols from the natural world, can the idolatrous fixation on one image be broken and the truth of the mystery of God, in

⁷ M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*. Beacon Press, Boston 1973, p. 19.

⁸ S. McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1982, p. 8.

tandem with the liberation of all human beings and the whole earth, emerge for our time.⁹

Since gods always reflect the styles of behaviour we see as possible, as our range of the possible expands, so must our pantheon. As Noomi R. Goldenberg points it out: “Feminism is pushing us into an age of experimentation with new personifications of authority. We can picture public power held by a woman or group of women, shared by both sexes or rotated between the sexes. These more fluid concepts of hierarchy are certain to affect our view of God.”¹⁰

Theological tradition has emphasised analogous talk about God and showed that the limitations of human language are recognised. Therefore, to take the image of one sex and exclusively use it and its social features to describe God is an inherently incorrect and unwise act. Consequently, the society in question reflects the mutual interaction between the patriarchal image of God and the display of male power. On the other side, theological tradition has completely underestimated the power of symbolic talk about God. Feminist theologians have, therefore, sought the answer in symbolic language, the power of which was traditionally overlooked.

The question of patriarchal language was radically problematised with the publication of Mary Daly’s book entitled *Beyond God the Father*. In it Daly maintained that God cannot be expressed by a noun and that a verb would be more suitable, since it expresses constant activity.¹¹ This problem was also tackled by Rosemary Radford Ruether in the fifth chapter of her book *Sexism and God-Talk*,¹² which bears the provocative and challenging title: *Can a Male Saviour Save Women?* In her opinion, patriarchally-tinted theological language represents a kind of sacrilege due to being idolatrously projected into the nature of the deity, who is ascribed male traits. And if God’s attitude towards the world is the same as the attitude of human despots towards their oppressed subjects, such language calls into question the very authority

⁹ E. Johnson, *Ich bin, die ich bin. Wenn Frauen Gott sagen*. Düsseldorf 1994, p. 86.

¹⁰ N. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods*. Beacon Press, Boston 1979, p. 9.

¹¹ Johnson, op. cit., p. 33.

¹² Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*. Beacon Press, Boston, pp. 116–134.

of the Biblical revelation. If such language is, in fact, based on symbolism reflecting the victory of man over woman, then the authority of the divine revelation is dangerously poisoned by the ruling male ideology. And if that is so, then even the images of God, creation, salvation and the life to come are marked by the oppression of half of the human race: these images are thus twisted and sacrilegious signs legalising and condoning evil in the name of a deity. If the patriarchal language and the patriarchy legitimating and sacralising this language are really something that bad or even the source of all evil, like some sort of original sin, then the feminists have the right and even the obligation to find a solution and an alternative.

Rosemary Radford Ruether continues the thought as to what needs to be done. She looks for an answer in new sources of religiosity – new in the sense of rediscovering the lost popular religiosity of women. Ruether rejects the androgyny model with which some feminists would like to solve the problem. She prefers to talk about “a process of double conversion.” At the end she writes that humanity can only achieve reconciliation with God if the latter stops being a male God and instead becomes the basis of reciprocity in all creation: God/Goddess. Not only in terminology but also paradigmatically. It is therefore a change in the footprint of consciousness, the consciousness that talks about the female image of God as the Goddess and delivers liberation to all of mankind from the shackles of one-way captivity in the discriminatory practice of Christianity. It makes a change to be able to worship the Christian God as the Goddess and for this not to result in excommunication or accusations of heresy. But if we ask symbolically: What happens when father-gods die for an entire culture?

The death of God the Father would then destroy the alienated images of male selfishness in the sky, which sacralise any domination and servitude in the world. Namely, for the past two millennia God has been described as the concept of the Father surrounded by man's characteristics and culturally conditioned attributes. Is it then even possible to talk about God using female descriptive symbolism, thus defining God

as a *She* and not a *He*, without falling into heresy?¹³ Some feminist theologians have demanded the introduction of so-called inclusive language: Our Father and Mother, Jesus Christ and Jesa Christa, God/dess.¹⁴

As far as the feminist polemics about a suitable theological language are concerned, the research by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who professes the God of the Biblical tradition anew, is of utmost importance. Schüssler is complementing the discoveries made by Phyllis Tribble in connection to the findings about *rahamim*¹⁵, *the womb of compassion* and God's eros. Schüssler revives the religious image of the past, which in the Biblical heritage of wisdom literature and evangelists used to denote the female image of God as Sophia – or wisdom – and as Jesus' Sophia deity.¹⁶ The renewal of the Sophia tradition has considerably enriched the female *professing* of God, since Sophia-wisdom is transcendent and immanent. According to the wisdom tradition, she was with the Lord before he began to create the earth (Pr 8, 22–30),¹⁷ she was pleased with his world and pleased with its people (Pr 8, 31); she set her tent up among the descendants of Jacob (Sir 24, 8–12) and encouraged them to love justice, to do what is right and to keep the Lord in mind (Wis 1.1). The Biblical tradition regarding Sophia-wisdom to which Schüssler called attention was complemented by numerous women scientists who studied its roots in the early female figures of deity, its appearance in Jewish and Christian and other wisdom traditions, as well as its influence on the lives of women. Sophia language and imagery

¹³ This reminds me of an interesting joke on this topic told by missionaries in Zambia: two priests talk and ponder about what the face of God looks like. They promise each other that the one who first passes to the other side will return to tell the other what God looks like. When the first dies, he comes back and tells the other, bewildered: "He is a She and She is black!"

¹⁴ A. M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Orbis Books, New York 2001, p. 93.

¹⁵ The Slovenian philosopher Lenart Škof also calls attention to the meaning of *rahamim*: "The Hebrew language knows for God's compassion the root 'rhm,' which in the singular (*raham*, *reham*) carries the meaning of (female) womb, while in the plural, as *rahamim*, it conveys the meaning of motherly sentiment, compassion. This means that a mother's body was originally understood as the seat of compassionate feelings." (See L. Škof, *Sočutje med religijo in filozofijo*. Acta Theologica Sloveniae, Družina, Ljubljana 2002, p. 54).

¹⁶ E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology*. SCM Press, London 1995, pp. 198–243.

¹⁷ Sophia/Hokhmah thus assumed the status of goddess or of the female pole of 'God,' who is together with YHWH the co-creator of all creation. In this case Sophia represents 'Lady Wisdom' or 'Woman Wisdom.' (See Clifford, op. cit., p. 105).

have enabled women to profess God in a way that vitalises their souls, sharpens their vision and gives new meaning to their ecstasies. What we should not forget, though, in this process of restoration, is that much of the Sophia lore was formed as part of androcentric traditions and should therefore be studied critically.¹⁸

The Feminine Face of God and the Formation of a New Collective Awareness

The times of an authoritarian God ruling the Earth and the Universe have long passed. (...) Finally the moment has come to meet the female face of God, which can be called Goddess without associations with so-called “polytheism”. If God, why not (as an alternation) Goddess? If God is everything in everything, then God is Goddess, too.¹⁹

The contemporary awareness and observance of the theory of gender differences has thus opened up new dimensions for spiritual expression and spiritual practices, promoting the development of new forms of women’s spirituality. The traditional forms of spirituality are in their core markedly dualistic, with the material world, corporeality and femininity on the one side, and transcendence, spirituality and masculinity on the other. The tendency of modern forms of spirituality, however, is to search for holiness by and through solidary interconnectedness, interdependence and integrity.

The formation of new religious representations from a women’s perspective is facing numerous prejudices and negative gender stereotypes that stand in the way of the change we strive for. The modification and transformation of an exclusively unilateral patriarchal image of God as male and the accompanying patriarchal theological language into a symbolic understanding of God as a woman, Goddess, may seem simple, but it is anything but that. The integration of the female element into religious language and the image of God/Goddess in the process of transformation face numerous fears and legalised historical notions of the past. The unilateral patriarchal theological language and the de-

¹⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *op.cit.*, pp. 232–243.

¹⁹ M. Pogačnik, *Ko se Boginja vrne*. Bird Publisher, Mengeš 2009, p. 5.

inition and representation of God as exclusively male are a powerful heritage of our collective memory, with the latter representing a source of man's social connectedness.²⁰

Our understanding of God, of ultimate reality and of ourselves as persons, is deeply interconnected. As embodied selves we are patterned by different genders. The findings and the presence of Christian feminist theology, the Goddess Movement, the revival of the lost folk religiosity of women and female pagan cults, thealogy²¹ and various other movements of women's spirituality are of key importance in the reconstruction of the past from a female perspective, as well as in the very process of the transformation of the collective memory and current religious conceptualisation.

The call for the formation of a new collective consciousness and for reviving the feminine principle can be understood as a sign of activity of the spirit in modern culture that may lead to radical transformations and perhaps new beginnings.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza pointed out that the Goddess of radical feminist spirituality is not so very different from the God whom Jesus preached and whom he called care, peace, service, and community. In her opinion, traditions about the Goddess and those of the New Testament are conflated in the Catholic community's cult of Mary. The more the Christian understanding of God was patriarchalised and the more God became the majestic ruler and the stern judge, the more people turned to the figure and cult of Mary. One could almost say that thro-

²⁰ This is for man a source of social connectedness. The collective memory can, in fact, be understood as a mechanism of intertwining the present and the past. Social beliefs are at the same time collective traditions and memories of the past, but also ideas and agreements of the present. In this sense, there is no social idea that is not also society's memory. Social thought is therefore memory, and the whole social context consists of collective memories or perceptions, but the only ones that matter are those we can reconstruct in any period. This is why man has to bring along some of the past to be able to shape their present and identity. Similarly, the community wants to awaken some of the past to be able to shape the current situation and discover the true foundations of the present.

²¹ Thealogy can roughly be described as a term referring to studies of the female dimensions of divinity, also implying criticism of androcentric historical theologies. The term was first used by Neo pagan author Isaac Bonewitz in his article published in the American magazine *Gnostica* in 1974 (See T. Ban, "New age in ženska duhovnost", in: Furlan N., Zalta, A. (eds.): *Ženske in religija*. Poligrafi, Ljubljana 2007, p. 148.)

ugh the dynamics of this development of the gradual patriarchalisation of the God image, Mary became the other face – the Christian face – of God. All the New Testament images and attributes which characterise God as loving, life giving, compassionate and caring, as being with people of God are now transferred to the mother of God, who is accessible as was the nonpatriarchal God whom Jesus preached.

The cult of Mary thus grew in proportion to the gradual repatriarchalisation of the Christian God and of Jesus Christ. The Catholic tradition thus provides us with the opportunity to experience the divine reality in the figure of a woman. The Catholic cult of Mary also provides us with a tradition of feminine language and imagery with which to speak of the divine; this is also true of the theological language that speaks of the divine reality in feminine terms and symbols. This tradition encompasses the myth and symbols of the Goddess religion and demonstrates that feminine language and symbols have a transparency towards God.²²

Feminine Face of God - Goddess and the need to redefine the Earth and the Self

Feminism's paradigmatic transformation of God's/Goddess's image is implicitly directed towards questioning, re-defining and re-evaluating the relationship between man and the earth or nature. Anne Primavesi uses these terms to presuppose that the question of defining the self in relation to the earth becomes problematic for men and women alike when (personalised female) earth is seen as the archetypal Cartesian body without mind: that is, without rationality.²³ Therefore, we may suppose, without a self or, by implication, without self-worth? It is in these terms that we need to ask ourselves an important question: how are we to relate to the earth?

²² E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision*, in: Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (ed.), *Womanspirit Rising*, HarperOne, New York, 1979, pp. 137–139.

²³ A. Primavesi, *Gaia's Gift: Earth, Ourselves and God after Copernicus*. Routledge, New York 2003, p. 78.

When China announced its programme to install a settlement of the Moon and the exploitation of its minerals and natural resources, this consequently provoked a primal response that reveals a strong-rooted stereotype, the concept of possession. Man, as the crown of creation, who is the master and the owner of the entire universe, is able to state: "The Moon belongs to us!"

If the concept of the logic of domination and a man as the crown of creation is so strongly rooted in our culture, it is a logical consequence that the conceptualisation of the Earth as our property is a part of the collective memory of consumer society. The logic of possession and consumerism is supported by the myth of a human superior nature that rules nature according to a theology of exclusion. The latter is, consequently, unable to understand the earth as a gift that is given to all by itself.

In *Gaia's Gift*, Anne Primavesi promotes the thesis that any religious perception of earth's givenness as intended for any being other than us, is ignored, indeed lost. In her opinion, no real sense of gratitude for this earthly gift is either felt or expressed. Instead Gaia's gift is seen as earned: either directly from human suppliers or religiously, as a reward from God for good conduct, for pleasing God. In these terms the gratitude for what earth freely gives is transferred onto other people or on to God. In this context, earth is overlooked to the extent that its givenness effectively disappears from view. The possibility of seeing Gaia's gift as freely given, without thought or expectation of return, is lost.²⁴

Jean-Luc Marion Caputo warns us that "givenness", as the prior condition for and cause of our receiving gifts, should not be immediately or directly attributed to God.²⁵ Anne Primavessi elaborates Caputo's warning, in terms that the concept of God should not be reduced to that of a source or dispenser of gifts.²⁶

Understanding Gaia's gift as taken for granted in today's consumer society is fundamentally rooted in the understanding of the biblical

²⁴ Primavesi, op. cit., pp. 143–135.

²⁵ J. D. Caputo, Introduction: Apology for the Impossible: Religion and Postmodernism, in: Caputo, J. D. and Scanlon, M. J. (eds.): *God the Gift, and Postmodernism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1999, p. 70.

²⁶ A. Primavesi, op.cit., p.133.

story of creation, from which we can derive the basic model, which God gave to humans, animals and plants. Adam, the first man, is the collective administrator of God's image, the character of God's reign on earth who dominates all living beings. In the background, it is once again possible to see the problem of conceptualising the image of God.

It is not just, as Marion Caputo says, that we lack intuitions concerning God. We lack concepts fitting God.²⁷

Earth healing Spirituality of Peace

During the last decade of the 20th century, all major world religions started to contend with the possible damage that their traditions had caused to the understanding of the environment, of nature and nonhuman beings, and began searching in their traditions for positive elements of an ecologically validating spirituality and everyday practice. In their third development phase, feminist theologies also expanded their criticism of determinate theologies in relation to their attitudes towards nature and nonhuman beings. Thus the various ecofeminisms or ecofeminist theologies critically question the correlation between gender hierarchies in an individual religion and culture and the hierarchical establishment of the value of man to be above that of nature. All types of theological ecofeminism thus strive for a deconstruction of the patriarchal paradigm, its hierarchical structure, methodology and thought. They try to deconstruct the entire paradigm of man's supremacy over woman, of mind over body, Heaven over Earth, of the transcendent over the immanent, of the male God, alienated and ruling over all Creation, and to replace all this with new alternatives. All major world religions are in this sense challenged to self-questioning and self-criticism in their judgement of the possible negative patterns that contribute to the destruction of the environment, and to restoring environmentally-friendly traditions. From an ecofeminist and environmentally just perspective, it is essential that religions do away with the negative stereotyped prejudices that strengthen man's domination over

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

nature at the same time as exercising social domination.²⁸ The Christian tradition, for instance, has (from an ecofeminist point of view) contributed several problematic images and symbols that have consolidated and survived in form of stereotypes and prejudices and taken root in the legacy of western philosophical-religious thought. Ecofeminist Christian theologies thus seek to revive the lost images and the symbol of understanding the universe as the body of God (Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie McFague). This metaphor, formerly widespread (albeit present in various forms), and the focal image of the sensibility of the western (Mediterranean) world, was replaced by a mechanistic worldview model in the 17th century (Carol Merchant and Vandana Shiva). In 1972, the radical feminist theologian Mary Daly drew a link between the ecological crisis, social domination and the Christian doctrine. As an antithesis to the Christian ethics of missionary work in the sense of uncompromising Christianising (converting at any cost all pagans, who were considered barbarians), she offered a vision of a cosmic commitment to sisterhood that envelops our sister Earth and all its human and nonhuman inhabitants and elements. This would, in Daly's opinion, potentially enable a positive change in ecological awareness and environmental ethics and lead us from a culture of predators and desecrators into a culture of reciprocity and hospitality, from which we would be able to look upon the earth and other planets as individual parts of a whole, as being with us, not for us.²⁹

In their criticism of patriarchal hierarchical subordination of women and nature, some ecofeminist theologians have worked within Christianity and offered a vision of a woman- and nature-friendly Christian theology that acts as a determined co-shaper of better quality relations in the interdependent web of life. Other ecofeminist theologians, on the other hand, have come to the realisation that the Christian doctrine is incurably patriarchal and as such incapable of the radical reform necessary for an inclusive ethics of responsibility towards all living beings. These latter have turned towards radical feminism or neo-pagan ecofeminism.

²⁸ Radford Ruether, *op. cit.*, p. XI.

²⁹ Primavesi, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

In 1972, the theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether became one of the first ecofeminist voices within Christianity. Through the eyes of liberation theology – or, more precisely, from a feminist somatic and ecological perspective – she called attention to the basic dualisms, the origin of which she ascribed to the apocalyptic-Platonic regional legacy of classical Christianity. These include the alienation of the mind from the body, of the subjective self from the objective world; the subjective withdrawal and alienation of the individual from the wider human and social network; and the domination of the spirit over nature. For Ruether, in order to transcend these dualisms, we should first shape a new self-understanding of our own identity in relation to all other relationships within the web of life. In *New Woman, New Earth* Ruether strongly opposes the model of relations based on the logic of domination, stating:

(Wo)men must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination of one over another.³⁰

We need a foundation for an ethical theory that is not based on a dualistic negation of the “other”, whether women, or animal or body, pagans ... as the bearers of our shadow.

The connection between God/Goddess and the world is represented by various symbols. Some resort to female personifications of nature and the divine (particularly the representatives of pagan ecofeminism or eco-theology), recognising the divine principle in the term Gaia and therefore naming it Goddess, Mother Earth. They see the Creation as one body incorporating different ecosystems; a multitude of diversity united and connected in coexistence and oneness. In such a Creation, each woman and each man is first a human; the beauty and greatness of this community that ecofeminists define as biotic are seen in the light of equal humanity and interdependent connectedness.³¹

From this standpoint, ecofeminism promotes global movement based on common interests and respect towards diversity as opposed to all

³⁰ R. Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth*. Seabury Press, New York 1975, p. 204.

³¹ M. Franzmann, *Women and Religion*, Oxford University Press. New York 2000, pp. 156–157.

forms of domination and violence. From an ecofeminist point of view, the continuation of life on this planet requires a new understanding of our attitude towards ourselves, our bodies, towards the other, towards nature and towards nonhuman beings. For the majority of representatives of theological (Christian) ecofeminism, this implies a thorough study, deconstruction and criticism of androcentric models of theology, particularly in relation to the image of God and his relationship with the entire cosmos. Merely including a female element into the existing theological agenda is not enough. According to ecofeminists, it is necessary to radically deconstruct the patriarchal theological frame of mind and the hierarchical structure. Ivone Gebara thus says:

Changing the patriarchal paradigm for an ecofeminist, one starts with epistemology, with transforming the way one thinks. Patriarchal epistemology bases itself on eternal unchangeable 'truths' that are the presuppositions for knowing what truly 'is.' In the Platonic-Aristotelian epistemology that shaped Catholic Christianity, this epistemology takes the form of eternal ideas that exist a priori, of which physical things are pale and partial reflections. Catholicism added to this the hierarchy of revelation over reason; revealed ideas come directly from God and thus are unchangeable and unquestionable in comparison to ideas derived from reason.³²

In light of the discrimination and subordination of women and nature by the patriarchal system, ecofeminism critically points out the hierarchical evaluation and construction of certain dualities: culture/nature; male/female; self/other; reason/emotion; human/animal. In line with ecofeminist theory, the hierarchical structure of relationships in which nature is dominated by culture, woman and animals by man, emotion by reason, is ordered and created by the patriarchal system.

One of the common characteristics of the various forms of ecofeminism is that they all perceive the patriarchal system as a conflictive system building on a hierarchical relationship and unaware of the unity and connectedness of living beings. From an ecofeminist point of view, the patriarchal system destroys the harmonic connectedness between man and woman, man and nature. It is therefore a pest, having an

³² I. Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1999, p. 29.

injurious effect both on nature and women. Ecofeminism thus fights for a new awareness that could teach both sexes to live and operate in coexistence with each other and with nature. Members of Christian theological ecofeminism (Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie McFague, Cynthia Eller etc.) draw from the Christian tradition, of which they are convinced that it includes the mentioned concept of the oneness and interconnectedness of all God's creations. The interrelationship between woman and man, humans and nature, should be freed from all forms of violence and subordination, as only in the light of mutual respect and respect for nature can the harmony of God's love fully come to life. The world is in this sense the body of God/Goddess, whose limbs function in harmony and health.³³

Fundamentally, feminist eco-theology brings the ethics of ecological egalitarianism, which is based on the theology of peace and non-violence. In place of patriarchal androcentrism and matriarchal utopianism, a cosmic ecological equality is placed at the centre of the cosmic order. Unlike androcentric patriarchal theology, which consequently spreads the relations of domination and exclusion, the feminist eco-theology that places a cosmic ecologic egalitarianism at the centre is an inclusive theology of nonviolence, peace and hospitality. As such, it calls on all institutionalised religions and spiritual practices to replace the discriminatory paradigm of the masculine God image and consequent relationships that are based on the logic of domination (relations of domination and victim-blaming theologies) with the logic of hospitality and the theology of nonviolence and peace and peace and healing or the earth healing spirituality of peace. The transformation of patriarchal victim-blaming theologies into earth-healing theologies of peace is the key to the transformation of the new ethical consciousness of peace. In other words:

To create a new society, we will need men and women with new psyches. Or as Rosemary Radford Ruether states:

A healed relation to each other and to the earth than calls for a new consciousness, a new symbolic culture and spirituality. We need to transform our inner psyches and the way we symbolise the interrelations of men and women,

³³ Gebara, *op. cit.*, pp. 76–78.

humans and earth, humans and the divine and divine and the earth. Ecological healing is a theological and psychic-spiritual process.³⁴

We must start by recognising that metanoia, or change of consciousness, begins with us.

Conclusion

Theology that is based on the discriminatory principle of male-centred hierarchical domination of God's masculinity, as the almighty lord who has conquered all human and nonhuman beings, women and nature, is the theology of violence, which helps to create and spread relationships of domination and inhospitality. Relations of domination and victim-blaming theologies do not accompany an ethics of peace and harmony.

Therefore it is high time we found positive answers to the question of how to pray to Goddess and still remain within the framework of Christianity. Or, better, how to achieve the awareness that the female and the male principles have equivalent effects and power both within and outside the range of institutional religion. In my opinion, the transformation of theological language and the exclusively unilateral patriarchal image of God is therefore crucial to the process of the evolution of Christianity and of any other institutionalised religion and an urgent step in the process of evolution of humanity. As long as the understanding of God as She, as Goddess, carries a hint of heresy, fear and prejudice, we cannot speak about harmony, synthesis, equality and egalitarianism or peace. Only when a woman can freely, without fear of accusations of heresy and other prejudices, choose her own desired form of prayer to Mother Goddess and look at an image of God in the form of woman, Mother, and not exclusively Father, while remaining within Christianity, can we say that the old patriarchal patterns and

³⁴ Radford Ruether, *op. cit.* 1992, p. 4.

our religious imaginative and representational faculty have attained a complete transformation.

The ecofeminist ethics of fundamental interconnectedness of all beings in the web of life represents a (new) theology of peace and non-violence. The awareness of fundamental interconnectedness, of the consequent interdependence and joint responsibility in the ethical-moral sense therefore represents the next step in the evolution of interpersonal relationships and all relations within the web of life. The conceptualisation of women's self and the self of earth, through the perspective of theological ecofeminism, establishes, above all, an ethical imperative of responsibility that an awareness of the fundamental interconnection presupposes. Ecocentric egalitarianism includes all humans as well as nonhumans. The awareness of this fundamental interconnectedness and of the consequent interdependence and joint responsibility in the ethical-moral sense, therefore represents the next step in the evolution of interpersonal relationships and all relations within the web of life.

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