

LUCE IRIGARAY

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Equal to Whom?

“*E*qual to Whom?” is ostensibly a review of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s 1983 work, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. In her article, Irigaray makes use of the French translation by Marcelline Brun which appeared in 1986. Her “review” becomes an extension and further development of themes she has previously explored in other Critique articles: “*Femmes divines*” and “*Les femmes, le sacré, l’argent*.” Readers as unacquainted with liberation theology as I was before undertaking to translate the present essay are referred to Schüssler Fiorenza’s *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* as well as to *In Memory of Her*. The former text makes explicit such vital notions as “women-church” (“*ekklesia gynaiikon*”), the “household code,” and “androcentrism” as they relate directly to a “hermeneutics of suspicion.”

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I began reading Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s *In Memory of Her* with astonishment and joy. At last something new on Christianity! Being a Christian (male or female) might no longer relate solely to the doctrines we have been taught most if not all the time and up until the present. This new dimension would stem from the fact – one among others if the phrase “among others” can still be used – that from the beginning of the Church, of the Christian community, women were equal disciples, “ministers” in their own right. They were not mere assistants, allowed to participate at designated moments in religious ceremonies, but actual celebrants, notably of the Eucharist, just as men and Jesus were.

When I think of all the arguments I have heard against the admission of women to the priesthood, Schüssler Fiorenza's views let in a breath of fresh air and a bit of spirit as well. Aren't these rational yokes precisely what brings about the paralysis of the slightest breath of spirit? As Kazantzakis's St. Francis of Assisi put it: the devil must be nowhere more in evidence than in Rome, given the number of religious purges that go on there.

What led Schüssler Fiorenza to this affirmation of the equality among the disciples of Jesus is a feminist critical approach to the establishment and interpretation of fundamental Christian texts and a feminist reconstruction of History. This means that we must interpret what we know of Christian order through a hypothesis of blanks, lacunae, overdeterminations, and persistent blindspots inherent in the patriarchal bias of History. That bias leaves its mark on the discernible historical facts and their practical outcome, as well as on theological truths and imperatives. The bias would be more Greco-Roman than Judeo-Christian. Doubtless Schüssler Fiorenza expresses some reservations concerning such theological expressions, but she speaks of the Jesus movement as "a Jewish movement that is part of Jewish history in the first century" (105). She also writes that "the praxis and vision of Jesus and his movement is best understood as an inner-Jewish renewal movement that presented an alternative option to the dominant [Greco-Roman] patriarchal structures rather than an oppositional formation rejecting the values and praxis of Judaism" (107).

I can find little with which to agree concerning these scissions for different reasons, notably the reduction of several periods in history to a *single* one and the possibility of conjoining and opposing them as a result of this a priori reduction. In reality there is no *one* Judaism and certainly no one Judeo-Christian tradition. As far as Judaism itself is concerned, it is divided into discrete eras, each with its particular characteristics. A re-reading of the Old Testament confirms the differences between Genesis and Exodus. Yet this is but a modest indication! Doesn't reducing Judaism to *one* amount to restricting the Israelites to a definition based on their reversals, limited to the horizon of their extinction, rather than affirming their complex history in which is situated, for example, the link between written law and God's disappearance from the field of human perception? According to that interpretation, Jesus would be the God present to the senses of living mortals, the divine made perceptible again through touch, sight, sound, and smell, possibly even taste mediated by smell and the fruits of the earth.¹ An amalgam of the very different epochs of the theophany runs the risk of falling into a state of fascination, a very ambiguous relationship to the Israelite and Christian peoples that is difficult for me to define. Such a reduction risks a progressive closing-off of

the pathway to an understanding of those religious phenomena on which neither Jew nor Christian holds the monopoly. Moreover, how can one speak of the Judeo-Christian tradition without drawing extremely fine distinctions since the events in the life of Jesus do not generally carry the same meaning for Jews as they do for Christians? Doesn't this either force the hand of Judaism or else abolish Christianity? Doesn't it minimalize the gap between the divine which can be represented and those aspects of it which cannot? Either a *single* God or none? Doesn't it also overlook the difference in the languages used by these traditions and its impact on meaning, beyond the lack of homogeneity in the use to which these languages are put at various stages in their history? And further, doesn't this ignore the fact that Christianity is in principle not attached to an entire people and much more apolitical than Judaism, etc.?

Besides, what does it mean when Jews and Christians – supposedly less patriarchal or non-patriarchal – are set in opposition to the Greeks and Romans who, in their turn, are viewed as more patriarchal? The Greeks above all, but also the Romans, exhibit a non-patriarchal side to their histories; thus the ages of Aphrodite and the cult of Demeter were neither patriarchal nor simply mythical. They had their own institutions and singular laws, especially as concerned the ownership of property, the transmittal of names . . . and the relationship to the religious.² In the beginning divine truth was vouchsafed to women and passed on from mother to daughter. These ages of the divine accompanied the fertility of the earth, its flowers and fruit, and did not dissociate the human and the divine, body and mind, the natural and the spiritual. During those times love was respected in its corporeal manifestations, female fecundity took place both in and outside of marriage, and the public weal was the norm. It is certainly unrealistic to imagine that we could, by an act of determination, bring back the economy of such past eras; but it seems indispensable that we think of them as epochs that do not equate to chaos, to an archaic prehistory of myths and legends. Eras existed when female laws held sway and they possessed their own religions. To proceed to a feminist critical method and reconstruction of History would require close inspection of these women's reigns so as to interpret their qualities and characteristics in order also to come to an understanding of how and why those periods of history were censored by the phallocratic patriarchy, and what is left of them, etc. In any event, this sort of investigation into the nature of gynecocratic ages prohibits the kind of cultural opposition that Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza draws between the Judeo-Christian and the Greco-Roman. Such an investigation also calls on us to question our Indo-European legacy, our links to the Orient, our relations to those areas of our civilization where the status of women, and

men too for that matter, as divine are conceived of in different terms.

From the same perspective, I would question the female genealogy of Jesus, the importance of women in his life and his mysterious relationship with his father. Is Jesus the equivalent of the most radical entrenchment of the patriarchy, upheld by non-figurative writing? Does he represent an attempt at reconciling the Indo-European and Semitic traditions? Or does he claim to appropriate all such traditions to himself or sum them all up in his person? In Hölderlin's phrase, "Christ is the end." What remains is the unresolved problem of woman's divinity. Being a mother is but one possible mode of woman's service to Jesus; he lacks a wife. Defining her as the Church, as Israel is defined as the bride of Yahweh, is tantamount to saying that Christ is wed to his work alone, which is not the fulfillment of humanity but a model of the patriarchal and the phallocratic. And if Jesus is seen as the totality of Mankind understood generically, then he is both man and woman, a kind of androgyne. Mircea Eliade analyzes the myths of androgyny as Mephistophelean myths. Thus representing Christ, and by extension God, as human totality would confuse him with the Evil One or with an epoch that was in league with him.

But Jesus refuted the notion of himself as this totality when he affirmed that, in order for the spirit to come into the world, he must die. The accepted Church interpretation of Jesus often disregards the fact that he is a bridge. The unanswered question remains: A bridge from whom to whom? From what to what? And what becomes of him when he is locked into patriarchal archetypes with their imperatives of belief and their denegation of all mythology? Since both patriarchy and phallocracy represent myths in action, as do all cultures, doesn't denying this fact lead to a perversion of the spirit and to the cutting off of humanity from its most important realization?

Christian patriarchal order seems indeed nearer to gloomy and repressive reason than to a celebration of the joy of a human incarnation of the divine. Even the happy celebration of the Eucharist becomes an obligatory rite under the menace of sin. Nothing could be farther removed from Christ's invitation to share with him the fruits of the earth and to continue with this celebration after he is gone. It is true that Christ attracted the multitude without making demands upon them. Except in the case of those whom he had chosen as his disciples and who had accepted that role? And even from those . . . He demanded that they be available. With that said, those (men and women) who followed him did so of their own volition and not under the onus of a strict discipline. Those men and women who followed him also transgressed the interdictions of their society and culture rather than submit to the existing religious code. Thus Jesus instructed women and pa-

gans, and preached in the open more often than in the temples. In any event, he didn't preach very much, nor did he spend much time poring over sacred texts. However, he did a lot of curing, consoled many, restored both the life of the body and of the spirit, and gave back dignity to those who had lost it, whether they were rich or poor. For Christ isn't just the Lord of the poor as today's preachers rather complacently tell us. He could use strong words to demonstrate his disapproval of the idolatry of the poor: "for you always have the poor with you . . . but me you do not always have." These are the words he offered about a woman who sprinkled perfume over him and whom Jesus's followers reproached for being "wasteful." This is what Schüssler Fiorenza evokes in *In Memory of Her*, sometimes more through her book's title than by virtue of its content. In this instance, Jesus very pointedly chose the woman and not the poor. Did he perhaps single out those (men and women) whom the patriarchy was oppressing?

Having said all that, woman's role in the Gospels really isn't as "central" as Schüssler Fiorenza would have us believe. It is Jesus himself who is at the center, surrounded by women, it's true. But it seems to me naive, demagogical (or maybe a mark of matriarchal acculturation) to say that women were "at the center" of Jesus's life. Yet neither were they excluded from most religious traditions. They took part in public and semi-private relations with Jesus, dinners among friends, festivals and the like. For the most part they were there when he preached and worked miracles; they were present in every aspect of his life: women were privately closer to Jesus than were other pagans. The manner in which women are described in the Bible is more characteristic of the Cult of Aphrodite than of that of Dionisus in which, generally speaking, women are exploited by the god.⁵ Mary Magdalene is an example of this. I am not surprised that Luke's interpretation in the Gospel should confuse the woman Schüssler Fiorenza quotes at the beginning of her book with Mary Magdalene herself. Her anointment strikes me as a loving one. She loves Jesus as she attests in public and quite apart from marriage as in the non-Demeterian gynecocratic traditions. But is it a question of "propheticism" or memory? Does free love in its divine form come before or after Jesus?

In the same vein, can it be said that Jesus takes an interest in women because they are disenfranchised or because they are women? The angle of approach is different here, it seems to me. The fact that women turn out to be the poor in patriarchal and phallocratic regimes doesn't mean they got that way naturally as a result of their sex. That said, in women's time the money poor didn't exist. The only ones disenfranchised were those who had neither fruits nor vegetables and later, grain. Patriarchy and monetary pov-

erty go hand in hand. Gynecocratic cultures succumb to this yoking only where they subsist as part of that patriarchy itself. From this perspective arises the question of Israel's history, fraught with cosmic catastrophes and continual famine through Exodus and Exile, and all the transformations that land has undergone relative to the fruitful earth. What is the significance of men's appropriation of the divine in relation to a respect for the earth, its culture, and world famine?

In this regard, how can we interpret the place of Jesus of Nazareth? His position is complex and contradictory. Attentive to the fruits of the earth to the point of becoming one with them, he nonetheless leads a semi-nomadic life and chooses for his disciples fishers, not gatherers or farmers. One thing is certain: his teachings cannot be reduced to those of one whose generosity toward the little people knows no bounds. Within these parameters, it is short work to classify Christianity as part and parcel of all the rest, a sort of good boy-bad boy socialism depending on the country, region, or culture in question.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's position comes close to such a socio-economic appraisal of the Gospels. I think her interpretation is too reductive when it comes to the question of a possible theology of women's liberation. Women aren't just poor among the poor. As half of the human race, it is their exploitation that makes it possible to exploit others. This exploitation is primarily cultural and only secondarily socio-economic.

But is Christianity a religion based on a love of the poor and the hope of salvation for the ignorant? While far and away preferable to exploitation and disdain, these qualities of Christianity strike me as but one of its aspects or effects. It is the social outcome of the respect for the incarnation of all bodies (men's and women's) as potentially divine; nothing more nor less than each man and each woman being virtually gods. If Christ's redemption of the world lacks this meaning, then I see no other worthy of such historical loyalty.

However, this message, especially as it concerns women, is most often veiled, obscured, covered over. And while the message is certainly not explicit on all these points, that is no reason to pass over it in silence. There are times in the life of Jesus when his relations with women are quite clear. Thus his public following is made up equally of men and women. Aside from the twelve apostles, Jesus speaks to women just as much as to men, and in numerous instances the Gospels relate his public spiritual exchanges with women. He discusses truth with them and occasionally decides in their favor against the existing social order, particularly on the question of the "gentiles," as Schüssler Fiorenza points out. Certainly original with Christianity is the notion of gentiles (and perhaps it is women who represent their obscure

paradigm) having access to the benefits of redemption. Thus Jesus instructs women, but he also listens to them and succumbs to the force of their confidence and faith, understood not as belief but as the power of affirmation, especially in matters of spiritual receptivity and sharing (Schüssler Fiorenza, *Memory* 140-54).

Contrary to the socio-cultural norms of his time, Christ approaches both women and men with the same freedom founded on wisdom rather than on logical reasoning. Read or reread the Gospels and try to find the logic of Jesus's words; he continually contradicts everything he says. Is this indicative of the impotence of an age in transition, or is it these contradictions that allow his message to rise above understanding? It's touching but also revolting to hear most priests argue over Christ's contradictions in the language of everyday rationality. The Good News turns to moral platitude or falls into a social bathos bearing little resemblance to the teachings of Jesus, as far as I can see. The irrational in Jesus leads to the liberation of the spirit, not to love, not to nothingness or the spiritual and mystical torture that probably originates in the stifling or paralysis of becoming, particularly along sexual lines.

On this point concerning contradiction, the course of Jesus's life appears close to the teachings of certain Indian sages, the Buddha, for example. They resemble one another on other points as well, including the fact that spiritual becoming and corporeal becoming are inseparable. Every stage in the life of Christ is noted and described in the Gospels as an event of the body: conception, birth, growth, fasting in the desert, immersion in the River Jordan, treks to the mountain or walks along the water's edge, meals, festivals, the laying-on of hands, the draining of physical strength after a healing, transfiguration, trials, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension. . . . His life cannot be reduced to speeches given in closed, airless structures, or to repetitive rituals and disincarnation, or to the unsaid, to abstractions of the flesh, or arguing fine distinctions in which the body is lost to lessons in tact. It cannot be reduced to moral injunctions or to debates among clerics. . . . Jesus disliked this. He said so. His words are in the Gospels. He made the point many times. Then why is there so much deafness? Why so many misunderstandings in handing down his story, his memory?

For me the best hypothesis here, the one most in keeping with the accounts of Jesus's life, is that women, who were his witnesses as much as men, were eliminated from all evidence relating to him. The history of the distancing of women from the announcement and sharing of the word and from the practice of the sacraments is patiently and informatively described by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in *In Memory of Her*. She discusses the first

disciples' arguments on the subject and Peter's position in particular. She describes what things were like concerning women's rights and contributions within the missionary communities of Paul's time. She relates how women founded house churches and explains how women and men became the children of God through baptism, while circumcision separated the sexes as far as religion was concerned. And on this point, she recalls that becoming a Christian cannot correspond to racial, family, clan, or national rights, since it comes about as the result of the sacrament of baptism which is made available to all (men and women). And it is baptism that assures individual salvation and access to a religious community. Schüssler Fiorenza distinguishes the theological rights and duties of Christ's male and female disciples from their evolution and transformation following the patriarchalization of the Church. And so on.

Schüssler Fiorenza recounts and explains many things which clarify the status of Christian theology today. I am giving only a very imperfect account of her book. Any cultivated person, but above all any evangelical community, ought to take the time to read *In Memory of Her*. Several hours spent reading her seem far more indispensable than attending some supplemental sermon which, according to the complaints of some clerics, no one (man or woman) understands anyway. It never occurs to these priests, who blame their parishioners for not listening, for their lack of attention and application, that the problem may lie in the image the preacher is projecting. It is true that these ignorant unfortunate Christians (men and women) find themselves in such a muddle of undifferentiated persons, intermediary personal pronouns and possessives, that it's no wonder they fail to know who is who, who is speaking to whom and about whom or what, with all those "ones," those "I" 's uttered in place of you, those "we" 's uttered instead of God, and so forth. Loss of identity is thereby assured, and I refuse to liken it to the communion of saints, if such a thing exists. This subjective dejection that quickly threatens the loss of all spiritual drive, is accompanied today for Christians by the prospect of "martyrdom," the need for a "baptism by blood," rather than by spirit, and announced on the occasion of John the Baptist's feast day.

None of this keeps them from preaching the Gospel in a neutral/neuter fashion on Christmas Day in Notre Dame. Indeed, the whole effect is one of great coherence. That Christmas sermon signed "Paris," based on an Evangelical text relating the childhood of Jesus, spoke of nothing else but the neutral incarnation of the word. I'm sure that the most advanced technocracy will have recognized in it the source and tone of its driving force. I'm certain, too, that cultivated (?) Parisians and carefree tourists from all nations can pa-

tronize such a God one day a year. But is this about Jesus of Nazareth? And what modern turn of mind necessitates the selection of this particular text and sermon? I see two possibilities: the more or less conscious pressure brought to bear by women's liberation movements and the fear of offending the faithful of other traditions. Actually, at that crowded Christmas afternoon service in Notre Dame, no apparition occurred. There wasn't so much as a trace of the birth of God made man, and no incarnation save the choice of text, the voice of the preacher, and the congregation gathered there. No one and nothing else.

This is obviously scandalous from the point of view of a possible feminine or feminist theology. Women, already made submissive to God the Father and God made Man for centuries (sometimes under pain of a martyrdom inflicted by clerical authorities), find themselves by virtue of ecclesiastic decree, through whatever "good will," once again submitted to a neutral God. Up until now they haven't even been freed from motherhood, their only share in the redemption of the world. Out of the question to speak of their divinity as women. But also no images of the divine mother. No more incarnation either. Is this the work of science . . . or . . . ?

Is this how Christians see themselves as adults? Why invite the people to a celebration of the Eucharist on Christmas day if not to glorify the felt, the corporeal and fleshly advent of the divine, this coming, all the consequences of which theology seems far from understanding. Was it the calling of theology to turn away or mask the probing mind? Is that the Christian way?

As far as the neuter is concerned, who or what allows us to cancel out the difference between the sexes in a Catholic church today? Is this Paradise with no more men or women? It's a false impression. And may God or gods keep me (us) from its realization! And should most of the clergy refuse to acknowledge the importance of sexuality, it would only be fitting for them to give up on the theology of incarnation. Do you know of any asexual life? Just because the Patriarchy takes bets on a life after death and on the neutrality (neuterness) of the logos, doesn't mean that we should, in Christ's name, renounce our respect for life. Such a respect is integral to the witness he bore. Either his time is at an end, and so it's best not to continue exploiting him, even in his death, or else that time has barely come into its own as the result of an effacement of the sexual significance of his message. While other periods in history could afford to avoid that meaning, ours does so at the risk of sinking into absurdity and despair. The pathos of absurdity, so prized by the rich in our culture, leads whole peoples into a sort of profoundly depressing, really almost melancholy, state of unrest and aggression. Haven't they been deprived both of the organizing force of their own societies and of their

God(s)? Have they concocted something better for their individual and collective well-being? Money? Apparently the masses are not satisfied with the substitution. A cultivation of the sexual, a spiritualization and divinization of the flesh, remain. Christ is the manifestation of only a part of this: he is God made man. But at least he's flesh and blood, living in the confines of a body and therefore sexual. He openly displays the sexual side of his relations with people. And while we know nothing of his private life, what is there about it that we ought to know? If it is true that certain sacred erotic models remove taboos surrounding sexuality and aid in its cultivation, should public teaching always be accompanied by some revelation of the instructor's private life? What perverseness, what lack of maturity, what childishness makes us want to witness the amorous behavior of those in authority in our society? By means of what narrow interpretation of the flesh do we underestimate instances of chastity as stages along the way to carnal wisdom? Apparently Christ wasn't married. Are we sure that is all we know about it? Why do we want it to be so? Perhaps because we want to avoid the duties that go along with sexual responsibility. Isn't this because we see our relationship to sexuality, and to nature, as the last irreducible reality of our lives as human beings? Of course, this view of nature and sexuality is conditioned upon their realization, not as a destiny or a fault, but as a locus of creation, creation of ourselves as body and flesh.

So is that the reason we ask why Christ's sexuality should have been that of a married man? Isn't marriage, first and foremost, the affair of matriarchs and patriarchs? Isn't it a matter of goods and property rights, names and family privileges, with no necessary connection to the divine? And isn't this so even if matriarchal solutions generally seem closer to the divine than do others as a result of their respect for all life, nature, and truth? Besides, Jesus takes a stand concerning the institution of marriage when he considers the question of divorce and the resurrection of the dead (see pages 143-44 for Schüssler Fiorenza's comments on Mark 10: 2-9 and 18-27). He does not call upon his followers to marry. Far from suggesting some more or less obscure and perverse chasteness, this lack of allegiance to the institution of marriage may be significant as a resistance to the patriarchal structures set into place at that time. It may also denote a wish to maintain the cult of Aphrodite, to draw one example from our cultural heritage. The cult could potentially be closer to the divine as it allows all (men and women) the possibility of celebrating their love without the need for human social contracts or even a dowry. Along those lines, Mary, Mother of Jesus, might represent Aphrodite, being pregnant outside of marriage and protected as such by the angels and birds of heaven. Other women – Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, etc. – are

closer to the aphrodisiac traditions than to others. As for Jesus, he claims to bring the sword, or dissension, to the family (though not among all its members, it's true: the mother-son relationship seems to be spared this, a fact that Schüssler Fiorenza fails to mention (145-46). However, their relationship is called into question as concerns Mary's privileged status as Jesus's mother vis-à-vis his other women disciples. This is a question which Schüssler Fiorenza does indeed point out (147). We should also recall that "fathers" are not part of Jesus's entourage, of his mixed "family of disciples" (147). This seems cruelly ironic, given that the history of the Church goes counter to this pattern as it ceaselessly (as Nietzsche has it?) covers over the meaning of Jesus's life.

The denegation of Christ's incarnation as a sexual being and the use to which that denial is put in the service of sexual hierarchization and exploitation seem to have blocked an understanding of that sexual nature and confined it to the province of the patricians and Pharisees. This is what I find most compelling in Schüssler Fiorenza's theological-historical argument. But, having said that, I think it's something else that interests me in part, namely the fact that a theology of women's liberation establishes as its priority not equal access to the priesthood, but rather an equal share in the divine. This means that what I see as a manifestation of sexual liberation is God made a couple: man and woman and not simply God made man.

Might Christ be the harbinger of this living reality? Why is his sexual incarnation denied or else treated on a human plane alone? To answer these questions, I would call upon the work done by Schüssler Fiorenza in *In Memory of Her* in order to formulate the hypothesis that this denial results from the exclusion of women from preaching the Gospels and from the priesthood. I believe that their lack of an "equal footing" among the disciples and their exclusion from the duties of preaching and the practice of the sacraments weigh heavily on the interpretation of the life of Jesus. At the very least the question has to be asked. Even if it should be necessary to redefine Christ as an exclusively patriarchal figure, it remains important to question why the Christian Church excluded women as ministers, if indeed they were excluded. Actually, this exclusion has been rationalized and has had a profound effect on the way the tradition has been handed down. Moreover, it has probably contributed to the cult of Christ's suffering, which has little to do with the life of Jesus of Nazareth apart from the accident of his passion and death. Jesus's life wasn't a particularly sad one, nor was it filled with drunkenness and debauchery as some would have us believe. His way of life approached wisdom.

That is to say, apart from his relation to the Father? But what does the Father mean to him anyway? And how could he have reconciled such an exclusive loyalty toward that patriarchal paradigm with his oddly liberal attitude toward women? Are we to suspect him of being Machiavellian? Because, after all, it is quite easy to dismiss him as his Father's son or as a member of a male trinity. Yet will that resolve the question of his incarnation? I think not. But I do believe that the question ought to be subjected to women's interpretation and considered a step toward becoming divine (for men and women). Otherwise Jesus truly does represent the realization of the Patriarchy, the appearance of the father's and the Father's power, the phenotype of a genotype glimpsed in the Word, since the father, unlike the mother, propagates outside himself and in a way that remains invisible. Thus, in order to affirm the reign of the father, it became necessary to eliminate the divine phenomenality of the daughter, of the mother-daughter couple, and lock it into the father-Father-son-Son genealogy and the triangle, father-son-holy spirit.

If this is the case, what interest can women have in being disciples or priests at all? The important thing is for them to find their own genealogy, the necessary condition for their identity. And saying that Jesus is the son of God-Sophia, as Schüssler Fiorenza has (134), doesn't suffice, or suffices only to confirm the end of gynecocratic genealogy, the son descended from the mother-daughter line. This being the case, it marks the appropriation of the daughter's divine status and of the mother-daughter relationship. This would mean that Jesus entrusts his mother to John and not to a woman at the moment of his death. Thus Jesus would stand for the erection of the system of patriarchal structures at the crossroads of the Greek and Semitic traditions at least. His defense at the hands of some American feminists would be rather comical! It's true that a great many European feminists know little of his life. They hope to be done with these religious traditions without having gauged their impact on the societies in which they live. They often imagine that equality in the workplace and in (neuter?) science will grant them sufficient status as subjects. This strikes me as quite an ingenuous error since they still lack what's needed to define their own socio-cultural identity. Many are ready to give up the little they have in order to bring about their neutralization by means of an identification with the generic masculine: they want to be "men" or "man." I wonder if something of this kind isn't secretly at work in Schüssler Fiorenza's book, given the short shrift she gives the divinization of sex in the history of Christianity.

The last chapter of *In Memory of Her* is a call for the overall reconciliation of women: Catholics, Jews, Mormons, black, white, or homosexual,

which already take into account a mixture of women's communities. But what is not clearly laid out is the conditions under which these "people of God" can get together. Though an appeal to the *ekklesia* of women is exciting, I am well enough acquainted with women's movements to know that they lack a rallying point. What they lack, at the very least, is the symbol of a divine mother. The so-called "people of God" are a people of men gathered in the name of the father, their father. What women need is a symbolic mother of daughters – woman-mother and lover – and not a mother of sons whose predications are defined by the incest taboo among others. Besides, women cannot make up their own communities removed from choices concerning History. This is why I don't believe that those women who reject the meaning of the incarnation of Christ are ready to come together in the name of sisterhood. And the same is true for those of other religions. In order for women truly to come together, there must be a reinterpretation of the meaning of all religious traditions and an examination of those which leave room for the genealogies of holy women.

Moreover, is it possible to put together the *ekklesia* of women as the "body of Christ"? Is this merely the manifestation of a zealous and pious desire? After all, Christ is not of our sex the way he is part of men's, of the people of men. And it is on selected numbers of them that the privilege of the ministry was conferred. This reality of a human and divine identity is in all likelihood the driving force behind centuries of religious law. Monotheistic religions speak to us of God the Father and God made man; nothing is said of a God the Mother or of God made Woman, or even of God as a couple or couples. Not all the transcendental fancies, or ecstasies of every type, not all the quibbling over maternity and the neutrality (neuterness) of God, can succeed in erasing this one reality that determines identities, rights, symbols, and discourse. It is for this reason that I've suggested that the divine incarnation of Jesus Christ is a partial one; a view which, in any event, is consistent with his own. "If I am not gone, the Paraclete cannot come." Why not? What coming of the Paraclete can be involved here, since Jesus is already the result of its work? We do not know the incarnation of the spirit, but the notion of a holy spirit as the pure product of patriarchal culture seems erroneous in view of Jesus's personality. His behavior toward women, in conjunction with his personal qualities, is evocative of a resistance to the patriarchy. Moreover, it is impossible for God to represent three instances of the masculine only as one aspect of the divine. That would be tantamount to ascribing divinity to men and the profane to women. This division, which certain men and women do not hesitate to consider the norm, has not always existed, nor has it always been the same. In the great Oriental traditions, a female trilogy exists along-

side the male and, in their movements and their stability, neither one exists without the other.

However, insofar as a respect for the identity and dignity of women is concerned, two bridges must be established or re-established. One is the bridge consisting of the mother-daughter relation; the other is that of feminine identity. It is impossible to ask a woman to be holy, absolved of blame, as long as she is unable to recognize the potential holiness of her own mother. God made man or God the father are not enough to sanctify the female sex. All those women who have progressed by virtue of the risks and not merely the claims of women's liberation (starting with their own), understand the truth of this statement regardless of the difficulties and suffering it has imposed on them. But these trials are no longer synonymous with a collective pathos. They are born of women's need to be and remain vigilant, careful, and aware, in order to free their bodies and their sensibilities and make them accessible to the intellect and the spirit. It's the path we take "in memory of her" and, if possible, of him. This requires us to let go of those secondary benefits, those attachments and habits, that are correlates of the *modus operandi* of society as it now exists.

As things stand, how can we ask a priest to absolve us of a sin defined as such by a so-called Christian religion unless he himself is aware of the harm done to a woman who is preached to about God the Father and God made man alone, about a masculine Holy Spirit and about her function as the mother of sons. If today's Catholic religion involves only men and their mother-wives, perhaps it might make better sense to exclude from the churches those other women who cannot find any identity of their own there. Otherwise they ought to be advised that they have to find models for themselves other than those which have been proposed. They ought to be reminded that the Church may provide them with a possible stepping-stone but not with the truth. Without such warnings, welcoming them into the Church exposes their religious openness to constant frustration and a succession of pathological effects that result from it.

Why is it that Catholicism is not in accord with the conduct of Jesus Christ? Why does it provide such a minimal public presence to Mary, Mary Magdalene, Martha and the others? As for Protestantism, what it allows women in the exercise of pastoral functions is annulled or revoked, at least in part, by the disappearance of anything representing holy women. Patriarchal religions are decidedly cunning! Confronted with the reality of all this, what sense does it make to speak of a woman sinner? Isn't this a designation more appropriate to men, since by definition it is they who practice exclusion and sacrifice and are therefore sinners? This in no way means that women are

born saints. What it does signify is that their faults and shortcomings are first of all to be defined in relation to their bodies, their mothers' bodies and those of their daughter(s). One must first be a subject before being in a position to admit one's sins and seek repentance. In what way are women subjects in our cultures and religions? What words, images or symbols allow women a social identity other than that of the mother of sons? And even this latter identity isn't freely chosen by women; it falls to them without any decision on their part, unless they kill their baby daughters. For centuries, in the religious communities we call our own, men have stayed pretty much to themselves. They define the systems of representation and exchange by and for themselves. And while women may possibly gain access to these systems, divine identity and divine rite are not accorded them. Should they demand their reinstatement in existing male communities, or does the future hold in store something newer than such "equality," since what does being equal mean as far as religion is concerned? Does it mean being equal to the other disciple, or to God? And how can woman be equal to that other when he is another sex?

In other words, can a claim to equality be acceptable without a fundamental respect for the subjective rights of both sexes, including the right to a divine identity? This would imply nothing more nor less than the remodeling of our culture so as to reconcile the reigns of women with patriarchal history. Only this historical synthesis (often defined as both prehistoric and historic) can reforge sexist hierarchies so as to bring about a cultural marriage between the sexes. All the rest can be tolerated in the interim only as a wish for the equal "redemption" of women and men. But equal means different and, once again not along the lines of the mother-son relation.

During this interim period, a considerable number of women refuse to confine themselves to male-female structures. And even if this withdrawal into same-sex groups doesn't accord with the liveliest and most creative engagement of human culture, those women's groups which have found no other solution to the problem should not be judged too quickly. Most misunderstanding and even provocation take place elsewhere! And isn't the Christian Church today, and for that matter society in general, part of the closed male order? While I do not find myself in agreement with Mary Daly, who often seems to me to lag behind what women might expect by way of a relationship to the divine, I would not be so quick to dismiss her choice of communal sisterhoods as is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. It may be that Mary Daly and others could do little else in their efforts to save their lives, their truth, and their own way. Personally I prefer to try everything in an effort to preserve the dimension of a sexual mix because that difference seems to me to safeguard those human limitations that allow room for a notion of the divine not defined

as the result of a narcissistic and imperialistic inflation of sameness. What's more, both sexes need to form an alliance based on mutual respect; this is still far from happening. Meanwhile this detour through a separation of the sexes is preferable to discouragement, isolation, regression, and servitude. Besides, we still have everything to discover and rediscover about religion among women. So periods during which the sexes remain separate are necessary. Of course these separations cannot be controlled or recognized by men in the way traditional convents were. They must constitute moments of discovery and affirmation of the divine-made-woman (women).

In this regard, it is fitting to recall that in the early days of the Christian Church, communities of women would exclude men in order to pray and to celebrate certain rites dedicated in particular to the mother goddess. These women's communities served as "new families" and furnished "new mothers" to those women who suffered at the hands of their natural mothers (174). Today this task still seems more urgent, more divine, than the one that consists of simply obliging women to have one more child with no concern for their spiritual neglect or salvation.

Nonetheless, there's no question of a "leap" (24, 26) into another world but of discovering or rediscovering feminine identity by means of concrete instances rather than through "ecstasy." We don't have to become other than what we are. But we do have to mark out a qualitative threshold. For me the mark of that threshold is sexual difference. Within one sex it is usually the quantitative factor that holds sway. What we have to do is avoid the comparative mode through the perception, practice, and expression of our sexuality, our sensitivity, and our spirit by subjectivizing our relationships to mother, the universe, other women, and other men. Striking a blow against the mingling of the sexes is not enough to establish an identity. Such an identity risks falling into the trap of internalizing or continuing the internalization of the thing it claims to exclude. All sociological analyses, models, and techniques fail to provide access to such an identity. And this is why *In Memory of Her* disappointed me a little after having pleased me so much. I have to ask the woman who has given us such a work to excuse me. It can be of considerable use to those who hear its message. But sociology quickly bores me when I'm expecting the divine. She describes what already exists without inventing a new subjectivity which I don't believe can be reduced to a neat social effect. This is what certain men (and women) call my "ontological" side, most often without a clue as to what that means. A feminine identity brings ontology into question again, but it can define itself only by going back to that question. And though other social strategies are valuable and useful in part, they lack subjective dimensions for defining the relations to mother, to self, to the

world and other living beings, to other subjects (men and women), to existing language and culture. What's at stake here is no stranger to Christianity. Jesus is given a Father and a mother (Mother?). He's the model man-son; he has a vision of the world; he furnishes the parameters of individual, social, and cultural identity. But for women that model is inadequate, because even if, as representative of the life of Jesus, it is not in opposition to them, it does not furnish them certain needed representations of themselves, of their genealogy, and of their relation to the universe or to others. Older religions offer them better examples of mother-daughter relationships, of the divinity of woman in her own sexual body, and of her relation to nature. For me, these form a radical dimension of women's religion which cannot be treated in simple sociological terms. Most societies, at least most societies among men, are organized against nature, in spite of nature or by sacrificing nature, but not by remaining rooted in it and cultivating it. On this score communities of women are urgently needed. Mary Daly is right to be concerned with the cosmic dimensions of culture. And while I haven't read all she has written on the subject, I think it is more useful today to concern oneself with the vegetable than with the animal. This is, in any event, more closely in concert with women's traditions and their solutions for world salvation.

I think that any sermon on the salvation of the soul, on love of the poor, any so-called Eucharistic ritual, any Evangelical discourse that doesn't concern itself with saving the earth and its natural resources, is perverted. How can certain men and women repeat the words "This is my body, this is my blood" over the fruit of the earth without worrying about how long that earth will remain fruitful? What are these men and women talking about? There is a direct relationship between Jesus's words and the wheat and the fruit of the vine which serve life and are sufficient to it. At the moment of the Eucharist, Jesus blesses and shares only what has ripened naturally and nothing that has been sacrificed. In so doing, he is perhaps re-establishing a bridge to those ancient traditions with which he keeps faith. Those traditions are often gynecocratic or matriarchal. Does he appropriate them to himself or act as their mediator? In any case, he respects them and hands them down to us as a legacy, a last sacrament.

Christianity isn't necessarily the religion of a single people. It isn't simply a social religion. It separates Church and State, but it cannot separate Jesus from nature, the divine from the corporeal, or the Eucharist from a respect for the earth. Unless, perhaps, *that* Jesus is sacrilegious. I believe it is the majority of his disciples, his male disciples, who are just that.

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| Notes | 1 | See Irigaray, "Épître aux derniers chrétiens" in <i>Amante marine</i> (175). | provide. However, Bachofen's interpretation of the development of the patriarchy deserves to be questioned. |
| | 2 | On this point, see the works of Johan Jacob Bachofen [Swiss philosopher, 1815-1887] which are invaluable for the information they | |
| | 3 | See "Quand naissent les dieux" in <i>Amante marine</i> (129-204). | |

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