A Guide for the Perplexed:
Feminist Theological Scholarship
An Annotated Bibliography

Laurel M. Jordan
University of Notre Dame
December 1987

Bibliographic Resources
Focus and Recommended Introductions
Consciousness Raising: Readers That Give the Bitter Taste of History
Critique and Construction in Theology and Ethics
Biblical Translations, Interpretations, Criticism and Reconstructions
Women's History within Christianity - The search for a usable past
Ethics
Ordination of Women, Women as Pastors, Sermon Collections
Language, Writing Resources, Worship
Hymns and Prayers
Impact on Academia
The Path of Pre- and Post- Jewish and Christian Traditions: Goddesses and the Spirituality of Women
Other Disciplines - Psychology and Sociology
Relations to Black and Third World Liberation
Conclusion
Introduction: 1960

Twenty-seven years ago, theologian Valerie Saiving published “The Human Situation: A Feminine View,” in the *Journal of Religion* (1960). In the article she stated,

I am no longer as certain as I once was that, when theologians speak of 'man,' they are using the word in its generic sense. It is, after all, a well-known fact that theology has been written almost exclusively by men. This alone should put us on guard, especially since contemporary theologians constantly remind us that one of man’s strongest temptations is to identify his own limited perspective with universal truth. [Womanspirit Rising, p.25]

She went on to provide a critique of the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr and Anders Nygren, pointing out the deficiencies in their understanding of sin and salvation from the perspective of women’s experience. Using her own experience as clarified by the writings of anthropologists Mead and Benedict, she observed that the process of "becoming a woman" is experienced as an almost automatic unfolding. From the onset of menstruation, to pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, to the time of menopause these processes are "things which happen to a woman more than things that she does." [p. 31] For men there is nothing biologically comparable to the creativity of women through childbirth. According to this anthropological/ psychological view, men are forever having to prove their masculinity through creativity in culture, hence, the constant temptation to self-absorbtion and pride.

Saiving argued that women's situation presents a different temptation,

A mother who rejoices in her maternal role... knows the profound experience of self-transcending love. But she knows, too, that, it is not the whole meaning of life. ... She learns, too, that a woman can give too much of herself, so that nothing remains of her own uniqueness; she can become merely an emptiness, almost a zero, without value to herself, to her fellow men, or, perhaps, even to God. ...

[Feminine temptations] have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as "pride" or "will-to-power." They are better suggested by such items as triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the
expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality; .... -- in short, underdevelopment of the self. [p.37]

If by ignoring women's experience, Niebuhr and Nygren developed a one-sided view of sin, then their requirements for salvation (humility) and description of its fruits in human life (self-giving love) are equally lop-sided. The whole theological construction falls to the ground for lack of an adequately human foundation.

Saiving's article marks the beginning in 1960 of a 20th Century critique of patriarchal Jewish and Christian theology and tradition. The emphasis upon women's experience was to become central to the movement which picked up her themes in the late sixties and early seventies. As the amount of feminist theological scholarship has grown in the eighties, the questions, "what are the differences between the experiences of the sexes and do they matter?" have been central to the debate.

Bibliographic Resources

Several bibliographies and review essays are available, though many of them are not currently part of Notre Dame's collection. The Center for Women and Religion at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley funded work by Clare B. Fischer, published as Breaking Through: A Bibliography of Women and Religion, Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union Library, 1980. There may be updated volumes currently in process.


Many of the more recently published works that I will mention in the following sections have extensive footnotes and some have helpful bibliographies, most notably Mainstreaming: Feminist Research for Teaching Religious Studies, Arlene Swidler and Walter Conn, eds., Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985; and God's Fierce Whimsey: Christian Feminism and Theological Education, The Mudflower Collective, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1985.

**Focus and Recommended Introductions**

For this essay my main concern is to look at the literature produced by scholars I will call Christian Feminists--those who while pressing a critique and reconstruction of traditional patriarchal Christianity maintain their commitment and loyalty to that same tradition. Feminist scholarship in religion has taken a number of different directions and been in dialogue with scholarship in other disciplines. I will note these directions and dialogues, particularly those works which continue to impact the developments within Christian Feminism.

Also I will note some books and articles on a more popular level. Theological scholarship has an impact beyond academia within its true community, the church. Church men and women, clergy and lay have in one way or another been affected over the last twenty years by the feminist critique of sexism within the church, its theology, its scripture, liturgy, and hymns.

who have become the central figures in the debate in the eighties. The book has become a classic in a way and its organization of the essays is helpful for the beginner. The first two sections pose the questions: 1) Does theology speak to women's experience? and 2) The Past: Does it hold a future for women? The final two sections place the work of these feminists into two basic categories: 3) Reconstructing tradition and 4) Creating new traditions. Weidman's book has not been around as long, and because it enters the field later its impact is less noticable and its influence will not likely be as enduring. However, as a one volume introduction, with eight articles some by the same authors as the earlier book, it serves to bring one into the major concerns of the field as they are articulated seven years after *Womanspirit* first appeared.

Especially written with lay church women in mind are several books which attempt to bring clarity and wisdom to bear upon feminism's perceived threat to faith. An early attempt at this is the highly readable *"I'm Not a Women's Libber, But..." and other Confessions of a Christian Feminist*, by Anne Bowen Follis, Nashville: Abingdon, 1981. It however focuses a great deal upon why churchwomen should support the ERA and is therefore dated. Two excellent books intended for non-specialists but not at all simplistic are *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation*, by L. Scanzoni and N. Hardesty,Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1974; and *Feminism and Christianity: Two-Way Reflection*, by Denise Lardner Carmody, Nashville: Abingdon, 1982. The first is written by two evangelical Protestants who call themselves Biblical Feminists and the second is written by a liberal Catholic. From a Catholic social justice angle comes, Mary Bader Papa's, *Christian Feminism: Completing the Subtotal Woman*, Chicago: Fides/Claretian, 1981. Ronda Chervin, a Jew converted to Roman Catholicism writes from a more traditional Catholic perspective and in defense of Vatican teaching in *Feminine, Free and Faithful*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986. Most feminists would argue that Chervin's understanding of femininity is very limited and I found the book far too saccharine-sweet for my taste.
Consciousness Raising: Readers That Give the Bitter Taste of History

Part of the initial work in feminist religious scholarship was simply a matter of drawing together blatantly sexist aspects of the Christian Tradition and drawing out the misogynist tendencies in its more subtle theologians. Two examples of this kind of work are Elizabeth Clark's and Herbert Richardson's *Women and Religion: A Feminist Sourcebook of Christian Thought*, New York: Harper and Row, 1977; and Rosemary Ruether's *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973. The Clark and Richardson book includes selections from the church "Fathers" through to Karl Barth and feminist and proto-feminist selections from Julian of Norwich, to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Mary Daley.

Rosemary Agonito's, *History of Ideas on Woman: A Source Book*, New York: Paragon Books, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1977, makes a good companion reader that moves beyond simply theological writing. Also Gerda Lerner's, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, is helpful as a resource for this type of overall critique of Western culture. As Lerner herself has said, "Women's History is indispensable and essential to the emancipation of women." [*Creation of Patriarchy*, p.3.]

Critique and Construction in Theology and Ethics

As the *Womanspirit* organization pointed out, the discovery of the depth of patriarchal oppression within the Western religious heritage leads to one of two basic paths, critique and reconstruction or critique and new construction. Of those on similar paths, there is of course no complete unanimity about the source and locus of the problem or the methods and goals for the solution. Phyllis Trible renders the pathos of the situation,

I face a terrible dilemma: Choose ye this day whom you will serve: the God of the Fathers or the God of Sisterhood. If the God of the Fathers, then the Bible supplies models for your slavery. If the God of Sisterhood, then you must reject patriarchal religion and go forth without models to claim your freedom.  


Mary Daley has from the beginning been one of the prophets of this movement, usually several years ahead of everyone else, her first publication in this field was *The
Church and the Second Sex, Boston: Beacon Press, 1968. (This has recently been reprinted with a "postchristian introduction"). This was followed by Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, which perhaps also deserves to be called a classic and has been widely read. When it first appeared, many traditional scholars considered it merely faddish (such as the Death of God Theology). Those who perceived it as a threat were more correct in their understanding of the depth and appeal of its criticism of religiously legitimated sexism. Daley's work has moved steadily in the postchristian direction with Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism, Boston: Beacon Press, 1978; and Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

Daley was trained in the Roman Catholic tradition and continues to be on the faculty of Boston College. Interpreters have said of her, as they have said of James Cone's Black liberation theology, that her own pain has become the central core experience in her theological development. Her rhetoric is both angry and poetic. Her analysis is dualistic to the extreme and her solution is female separatism. Many have noted the similarity of her system to Gnosticism. Her critique of the tradition and the modern situation is as thorough-going and realistic as anyone writing today. However, because of her subjective idealism, her ability to work out real solutions for a real world are less than adequate.


Alice Hageman, ed., Sexist Religion and Women in the Church: No More Silence!, New


At the opposite end of the spectrum from Mary Daley is evangelical Protestant scholar Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Her Women, Men, and the Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1977 has been influential among clergy and church people. While not offering much that is new in the world of scholarship, she serves as a moderate in gaining a hearing for feminist claims among those least likely to listen to someone like Mary Daley. By continuing to claim her evangelical commitment and Biblical feminism she gains a wide audience for topics that would once have appeared scandalous, such as *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female*, New York: Crossroad, 1983; and her earlier work *Is The Homosexual My Neighbor?*.

Rosemary Reuther has been the most prolific of any of the people treated in this essay. She has been on the faculty of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois and a contributing editor to *Christianity and Crisis* for many years.
Her *New Woman/New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, New York: Seabury, 1975, has been and continues to be widely influential. She believes that the dualism/dominance syndrome as reflected in the male-female relationship is the primary model for numerous other destructive and sinful dualistic/dominating-isms, such as racism, classism, ageism, imperialism, etc. She saw clearly, as have others, the psycho-sexual/religious roots of our present day ecological crisis. In her analysis she leans heavily on what she considers the Judao-Christian prophetic tradition and the critical tradition she finds within Western political liberalism. Her search for solutions is much more politically and economically oriented than Daley's; specifically, she links messianic socialist answers to her wide-ranging political questions.

Her *Sexism and God Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1983, is also widely read in classrooms and pastor's studies. I have even seen it open on the desk of a United Methodist bishop! Reuther is fond of using the slash (/) and now for her God-talk uses the unpronounceable term God/dess.


Another important contributor to the "cause" of Christian Feminism has been Letty Russell, professor of applied Christianity at Yale Divinity School. Her background training and approach is along the Christian education model. Ordained in the 1950's in the Presbyterian tradition, Russell has had more opportunities for first hand leadership in local congregations and served a parish in Harlem for many years. She has been much
influenced by the experience of people in the mission field and by third world liberation theology. Her books are attempts primarily to educate the oppressed and oppressors into a model of living more clearly in keeping with the liberating good news of the gospel. In all her books the tone is much more pastoral, even when highly challenging, than jarring, though poetic language of Daley. However, perhaps for just that reason, her books are often more tiresome. They are in chronological order: Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974; The Future of Partnership, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979; Growth in Partnership, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981; Becoming Human, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982.

Her books on Biblical Interpretation will be mentioned elsewhere.

Examples of other recent contributions in feminist theology are:


A recent issue of Horizons 14.no.2 (1987), is a thematic issue on Feminist Theology beginning with the article "A Discipleship of Equals: Past, Present, Future," by Joann Conn. The number of journal articles in this general field has increased almost exponentially each year, more women are trained and interested in theology and more male scholars take the feminist critique seriously. Examples of the types of issues dealt with in the journals are: Roberta C. Bondi, "Some Issues Relevant to a Modern Interpretation of the Nicene Creed with Special Reference to 'Sexist' Language," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 40, no. 3, (Spring 1985), pp. 109-115; Anne Dinkelspiel, "When the Sacred Canopy Rips Apart," Journal of Women and Religion 1, no.1, (Spring 1981), pp. 2-6; Margaret Farley, "Justice and the Role of Women in the Church: Thirteen Theses," in New Visions, New Roles: Women in the Church, Lora Quinonez, ed., Washington, D.C.: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 1975;


Biblical Translations, Interpretations, Criticism and Reconstructions

In the area of Biblical scholarship Notre Dame can claim some preeminence.

Adela Yarbro Collins, currently on leave from the Theology Department has edited a series of essays *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1985. Notre Dame was also for many years the home of Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, who is now at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA, and finally working in the same neighborhood as her theologian husband, Francis, who is at Harvard. Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, New York: Crossroad, 1983, I believe, is currently the standard by which other feminist theological scholarship is to be judged. Her examination of the "discipleship of equals" and the leadership and ministry of women in the earliest days of the church displays her passionate devotion to history, to wrestling with the scriptural text, and her concern for the

The National Council of Churches received a lot of unfounded criticism for its *An Inclusive Language Lectionary*, three volumes, prepared by the Division of Education and Ministry, National Council of Churches of Christ, USA, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983, 1984, 1985. Next time they need to put some poets on the committee. Some churches have been using it, but for the most part it has been ignored. An excellent inclusive language version of the Psalms is Gary Chamberlain's, *The Psalms: A New Translation for Prayer and Worship*, Nashville: The Upper Room, 1984. Another volume was also published by the Upper Room setting several of the Psalm translations to music.


Not within our timeframe, but often referred to is Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible: The Woman's Bible*, facsimile edition, New York: Arno, 1974, which originally appeared in 1895 and 1898. Krister Stendahl's *The Bible and
the Role of Women, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966, is based on a study published in 1958 in the course of the debate over women's ordination in the Church of Sweden. Stendahl was one of the first of the present generation to look to Galatians 3:28 as the breakthrough verse in the Pauline corpus proclaiming the church's unfolding agenda as the abolition of the divisions between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, and man and woman. Leonard Swidler's Biblical Affirmations of Woman, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979, is an excellent one-volume, comprehensive introduction to the problematic and liberating verses about women in the scriptures with considerable contextual background to the passages.


Rachel Wahlberg's Jesus and the Freed Woman, New York: Paulist Press, 1978 and her earlier Jesus According to a Woman, New York: Paulist Press, 1975, are easy reading and good for church study groups.


Women's History within Christianity - The search for a usable past
Feminism has created a historical drive among women in search for a usable and liberating past. Church history scholars in the past two decades have responded to this need with an outpouring research. Much of the critical and reconstructive theology already mentioned has a historical dimension, so the lines between church history, Biblical criticism, and theology are not always easily drawn. Nevertheless here are some examples of what is being done:


Examples of this kind of scholarship in the journals are:


Ethics

While the entire movement of feminist scholarship obviously has an ethical thrust as a call to justice and recognition for women, within the seminaries and universities there are also feminists whose work is specifically ethics. Foremost among them are Margaret Farley at Yale, and Beverly Wildung Harrison, who teaches at Union Seminary in New York.


Ordination of Women, Women as Pastors, Sermon Collections

Increased numbers of women were attending seminaries throughout the seventies and eighties, many of them going on to be ordained within mainline Protestant denominations. During the mid-seventies the women's ordination issue focused on the irregular ordinations of nine Episcopal women in Philadelphia, eventually leading to the decision by the Episcopal Church in the United States to open the priesthood to women. In 1977 the Vatican issued a statement against that possibility within Roman Catholicism. There exists a vast literature both scholarly and popular on the topic of women and ministry. This is just a sample.


The Swidlers' book, Carter Heyward's autobiography, and the sermon collections are the most interesting. Sociologists and historians in the next century will find something of use in the other rather dull books.

As an example of the same sort of literature from the last century there is Frances Willard's, Woman in the Pulpit, Boston: D. Lothrop Company, 1888.

**Language, Writing Resources, Worship**

Concern for the way in which language both shapes and expresses our most basic concepts about ourselves and the world has been at the heart of this movement and body of scholarship from the very first paragraph of Valerie Saiving's 1960 article. Since the late seventies and more especially in the eighties the pressure to use more inclusive language within the church and scholarly communities has been building.


Seabury, 1979, uses something like a catechism format to organize a number of religious concepts and terms with suggestions for eliminating sexism in religious education and worship.

My personal favorite book on language and Christian worship is Keith Watkins' Faithful and Fair: Transcending Sexist Language in Worship, Nashville: Abingdon, 1981. It is especially appealing because it is written by an older man who has changed his mind on the issue. He relates in an early chapter how his "conversion" began at a service celebrating world mission. He was singing with the congregation, "O Zion, Haste". Singing the last verse, "Give of thy sons to bear the message glorious; Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way..." it occurred to him that it was his daughter who was being commissioned and was about to leave for Zaire. (His daughter, Sharon, later became a classmate of mine.) Old hymns are not sung in vain!


Hymns and Prayers

The concern about language has also produced new hymns, prayers, and liturgical texts. Most of what is being published now in mainline denominations and from their church presses conforms to guidelines about inclusive language about the community of faith and is less strict about language for God.


Sharon and Thomas Neufer Emswiler, Women and Worship: A Guide to Nonsexist Hymns, Prayers, and Liturgies, New York: Harper and Row, 1974; and Jane Parker Huber,
Impact on Academia

Several works describe the actual or suggest the optimal impact of feminist religious scholarship upon the world of higher education and theological training. Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Feminist Alternatives in Theological Education, by the Cornwall Collective, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1980, is a collaborative work by women within seminary administrations and faculties on the goals and needs of women seminarians from a feminist perspective. The Mudflower Collective, which included one of the women in the earlier "collective," published God's Fierce Whimsey: Christian Feminism and Theological Education, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1985. It is less focused on institutional goals and more a record of the personal wounds received at the hands of patriarchal theological organizations, departments, and seminaries. One day it will make more interesting reading for a historian than the Daughters book.


The Path of Pre- and Post-Jewish and Christian Traditions: Goddesses and the Spirituality of Women

Just to show the direction taken by those who have moved beyond traditional religion, I offer this select list of general "Women's Spirituality":

Carol Christ, Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest, Boston:

Other Disciplines - Psychology and Sociology

Other disciplines have informed the work of feminist scholars in religion and often find their way into their course curricula. Jo Freeman is the editor of a volume of essays entitled Women: A Feminist Perspective, Second Edition, Palo Alto, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1979. These essays can be a helpful addition to a study of Feminism and Religion, by broadening the social background to a variety of problems and questions in feminist theory. The essays on language and on "the rape culture" is especially worth reading.

Carol Gilligan's In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982, has been an inspiration for some and a battleground for others in the feminist movement. Her work is often placed together with the anthropological model of gender differences, but she herself has denied the import of the similarity. Gilligan's main point is that studies of moral development have not included female subjects in the research and therefore the models obtained are inadequate. A "different voice," an ethic of caring or non-harm, can also be heard if women are included in the research. In fact both men and women can learn to reason morally with either the
voice of principles or the voice of care. It appears, however, that under the current conditions of socialization, with mothers as the primary caregivers of children, that girls learn first the voice of care and boys the voice of principles.

In *The End of God: Important Directions for a Feminist Critique of Religion in the Works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung*, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1982, Naomi Goldenberg argues that feminists have too quickly passed over important insights from the "fathers" of modern psychology. As a psychologist of religion, with little interest in any revelatory truth claim for religion, Goldenberg believes that Freud's criticism of religion is basically correct. It is an illusion—a male projection. Jung's willingness to consider the present-day revelatory character of dreams and fantasy is also at the foundation of modern post-Christian women's spiritual quest.


**Relations to Black and Third World Liberation**

Feminist theologians, have been informed by, and perhaps can be considered part of the larger movement of liberation theology. Their emphasis on women's experience is analogous to the Latin emphasis on praxis. Books often cited within the work of feminists with form this perforated boundary are:

**Conclusion**

As to the scholarly agenda for Feminist Christians, the end is not yet in sight. There is more work to be done on every field or front. Theologians have always looked to scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as the general authorities upon which to articulate one's faith with fear and trembling. For nineteen centuries androcentric texts have been given canonical status by men, interpreted and expounded upon by men on the basis of their own reason and experience. Until the history, reasoning powers, and experience of women are lifted up and taken seriously, the Christian faith will continue to be criticized, by the cultured despisers and the faithful alike, as one of the primary agents of women's oppression.