

Next wk: - Nothing on Wicca - excellent Book is  
Drawing down The Moon by Margot Adler.

## LECTURE #9

Women in the Christian tradition:

Reformation to the present

unfortunately, the Protestant reformers seem not to have perceived the sexism that biblical patriarchalism contained, so their "return to the Bible" did little for women's rights

by restraining devotion to Mary and the saints, and closing the convents, the Reformation removed several of women's most helpful safety valves.

this was somewhat compensated for by a new cherishing of marriage, tho paradoxically, marriage was considered non-sacramental, and by moves for mass education;

but in terms of sexual liberation, the Reform was not any less near sighted than Rome.

women at this time were losing some of the economic and political rights they had enjoyed under the feudal system, where women had sometimes been given the prerogatives associated with landholding.

with the evolution of the nation state, these feudal rights were abolished for a more uniform concept of citizenship which excluded women.

the economic trends were also removing women from independent guild membership or professions that they had previously exercised by apprenticeship or popular folkknowledge (such as medicine, midwifery, and pharmacy) and were restricting women

more and more to dependency as housewives within a male controlled economy.

thus the reformers adopted the patriarchal reading of the Pauline tradition, which enjoined silence and submission on women as their vocation, both within the order of creation and as punishment for the sin of Eve.

### Luther

added to the already long story of Christian ambivalence toward women, for he both delighted in his wife Katy (an ex nun, as he was an ex monk) and thought of marriage as "the bandage God puts on the sore of incontinence."

Women can be no priests of Christ, for they are "priests of Satan."

In fact woman's main role, in his exegesis of Genesis, is to be useful for procreation.

by the Fall, Eve was made inferior to Adam, and this inferiority is symbolized when a woman assumes her husband's name and therefore comes under his control.

While men are out and about the business of wars and building, wives are "like a nail driven into the wall," condemned to stay at home.

It is not for them to teach or rule. their domain is procreation, nursing and nurturing.

for Luther, tho, men are dependent on women in many ways, and the

Fathers invective against women is regularly misplaced.

Men and women both have need of medicine for venereal desire, so if a man is impotent, he may arrange for his wife's satisfaction thru a secret "second marriage".

So strong is this need for sex as medicine, he said, that celibacy is not genuine for more than one in a thousand persons, and Rome has erred grievously in its institutionalization of religious virginity.

in fact, Luther found celibacy so unnatural he agreed with some medical theoreticians of his day that it would make the body unhealthy, enervated, sweaty, and foul-smelling.

for women there is the added biblical fact that salvation comes thru childbearing:

"Let them bear themselves out. This is the purpose for which they exist"

like Augustine, (Luther had been an Augustinian monk before the Reformation), Luther thought that intercourse could never occur w/o sin, which meant that a man could hardly speak of a woman w/o a feeling of shame.

### Calvin

in contrast to this earthiness and quasi fixation (some commentators refer to Luther's "genitalism"), Calvin spoke of sex rather primly.

he credited women with purposes beyond childbearing, but this turned out to be a dubious advantage, since he meant that woman

is man's inseparable companion, "to help him live more comfortably."

the change brought by the Fall moved woman not from freedom to subservience, but from subservience to slavery.

insofar as it is a uniting "in one body and one soul," Christian marriage should defend women against society's enslavements.

on the other hand, all Christian women, whether they be virgins, wives, or widows, belong at home, subject to male control.

against Rome, Calvin pointed out the inconsistency of calling marriage a sacrament and forbidding it to priests as something incompatible with sacramental service.

he warned couples against making marriage a provocation to lustful overindulgence.

his own ideal wife would be "modest, complaisant, unostentatious, thrifty, patient, and likely to be careful of my health."

few things justify divorce,--certainly not course behaviour, threats, mental cruelty, or beatings, for these are less important than a husband's right to rule his wife.

the women of Geneva in the early days of the Reform divided into mutually hostile groups of protestants and catholics.

both groups were willing to move beyond harsh words to throwing stones or dumping one another's laundry in the river.

Reform women would set upon convents to preach against the evils of virginity, mariolatry, and romand abuses of scripture.

the nuns in turn would create a hub bub, shouting and spitting and finally give their visitors the gate.

from these and other recorded activities it emerges that Reform women were more active than many accounts have shown them to be.

it also emerges that they were freed from celibacy, only to be coerced into submission, justified by the biblical patriarch's <sup>injunctions</sup> ~~injunctions~~

#### Sectarian groups

it was the sectarians, rather than the Lutherans or Calvinists, who really enhanced women's social and theological standing.

the Puritan tradition from England (late 16th and 17th cent.) stuck with the main reform by seeing the husband as the benevolent ruler looking out for the spiritual and material welfare of his dependents.

wives were to be docile helpmates in all things

the man had to submit to the church

the Puritan vision of family harmony, based on compliance to one's appointed role in the social heirarchy had its dark side in its constant suspicion that women (and servants) were secretly rebellious against constituted authority.

the woman is seen as the "weaker vessel" and thus the Devil

can more easily influence her.

one reason that women succumb to the blandishments of the Devil is that they are naturally insubordinate and wish to reject their divinely appointed subordination to men, thus they are an easy target for the devil.

this laid the basis in Puritanism for an identification between witchcraft and female insubordination and patriarchal authority in the family, church and state.

a woman may rebel against husband, cleric, or ruler when that authority is heretical and fails to accept the purification of the Reform.

Some radical Puritan groups, such as the Baptists and fifth Monarchists, even championed the right of women to preach during the religious struggles of the 17th cent.

such dissenting Puritans reclaimed the ancient Christian identification of preaching with the gift of prophecy given to men and women alike on the basis of charismatic gifts.

this identification allowed anyone, male or female, who manifested such gifts to preach.

John Rogers a fifth monarchist preacher during the Puritan Civil war, wrote a treatise in which he championed the equality of women with men in all affairs of ministry and church governance.

he based this on Galatians 3:28, since women are given equal redemption with men this equality means that in the spiritual government of the Church, women should exercise equally with men

all the rights and privileges of ministry.

Quakerism or the society of Friends is the group that synthesized these charismatic and egalitarian tendencies of radical English Puritanism.

Margert Fell patron of George Fox and eventually his wife, not only supported the early society financially, but developed its theology of male-female equivalence in Christ.

in her treatise Women's speaking iustified, proved and allowed of by the scriptures (1667) she develops the classical texts of the theology of equivalence.

this equality of women took the form of allowing women to share in the evangelistic ministry.

many Quakers of both sexes preached thruout England and increasingly carried their message to America, the Caribbean and the Middle East.

the society of friends fostered female literacy and at least 75 Quaker women wrote published tracts in the 17th cent. defending their faith.

the clash between patriarchal and radical egalitarian Puritanism was played out in the New England colonies in the period of 1630-1700.

it took three forms: 1. a struggle against antinomianism and free church radicals, 2. a struggle against Quakerism and , 3.

witchcraft persecutions.

Anne Hutchinson is the best known among the leaders of the antinomian movement.

she gathered a group in her home for prayer and spiritual guidance, and this group increasingly took on the form of a dissenting congregation which included men as well as women.

the official pretext of her indictment for heresy was a technical dispute over the relationship of the covenant of grace and the covenant of works.

Anne saw the covenant of grace as transcending this social order of men over women and dispensing revelation in the Spirit directly, w/o male ecclesiastical mediation.

this was seen as both a lay and female rebellion against ecclesiastical patriarchalism.

Anne and her followers were forced to leave the Mass. Bay colony in 1638. they were killed by indians on the way to Rhode Island.

Mary Dyer was one of those who went with Anne (tho she survived) and in the 1650's she joined the Society of Friends, was imprisoned for this offense on her return to England.

she returned to Massachussetts to continue the fight against Puritanism and was ordered hung.

she was reprieved once but when she returned again to challenge the Puritan theocracy, she was hung on the Boston Common.

there is a link between these struggles and the witchcraft persecutions that broke out in the later half of the 17th cent.

2 Quaker women arrested for being Quaker on ship board on their way to Barbados were also pricked and examined as witches.

in the official puritan mind, a woman who diddented from male Church authority was not only a heritic, but very likely a witch as well, for only promptings from the Devil could so strengthen the frail female that she would contend against male authority in this way.

thus the main accusation against women thought to be witches was insubordination.

recent demographic studies of witchcraft in New England have shown that those most likely to be accused and eventually executed were women between 40 and 60 years of age, widows with property, or women otherwise independent in the administration of their affairs and who exhibited a spirit of independence to authority, either by having no husbands or by appearing to rule their husbands rather than being ruled by them.

in other words, the woman most likely to be accused of witchcraft was the woman who did not fit into the Puritan theory of female subordination in the "domestic economy" of patriarchal, theocratic society.

although dissenting protestantism was crushed in Mass. by the end of the 17th cent., it continued to raise its head elsewhere. pietist reform movements in Germany and England in the 17th

and 18th cent., new mystical and communitarian sects arose which often adopted versions of the ancient gnostic anthropology of the androgynous Christ.

mystical sects such as the Rappites or Harmonists adopted celibacy and a communal life style and immigrated from Germany to America to find free space for their version of the "New Jerusalem".

some sects, inspired by Jacob Boehme also placed emphasis on a mystical communion with divine Wisdom, or the female side of

### SHAKERS

from the perspective of female leadership the most important sect in this tradition of protestant mysticism were the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing or the Shakers.

this developed under the leadership of Mother Ann Lee in England in the 1770s and immigrated to America in 1774, gathered up all the themes of gnostic and prophetic theologies of equivalence from Scripture and Christian history and synthesized them into one clear expression.

God is androgynous, having both a male and female side.

the creation of humanity in the image of God, both male and female, expresses this androgynous divine nature.

sin appears with the fall of humanity into carnal sexuality.

Christ comes to deliver us from this sin of carnality, but redemption is incomplete as long as God has been revealed only in male form.

thus it is necessary that a female Christ, the revelation of

the mothering or Wisdom side of God, appear to complete the revelation of God and the redemption of humanity.

this revelation, the Shakers believed, had happened in Mother Ann Lee.

Through her, the messianic humanity was being gathered.

they would return to their spiritual unity by renouncing sexuality.

the androgynous nature of God and redemption must be expressed in a religious leadership of paired orders of men and women.

Shaker men and women lived in spiritual community but in separate sections of the household, each led by their own leadership of men or women.

Shakerism was the most explicit effort of mystical Christianity to work out the theology of equivalence in terms of the doctrine of God, anthropology, Christology, and Church polity within the framework of the classical assumptions of an end times transcendence of patriarchy as the order of fallen creation.

Mary Baker Eddy founded Christian Science in the 19th century and replaced the Christian God the Father with a Father-Mother Deity, more potent for curing sickness.

Eddy's religion called sickness and sin illusions, based on the deeper illusion that the body is real.

w/o a body, a woman could be a man's spiritual equal.

the painful biography Eddy traveled on the way to this conclusion included escaping a stern Calvinist father and

overcoming the wispy, fainting gentility that was supposed to mark a lady in her day.

her Father/Mother God owed much to Ann Lee of the Shakers but her first edition of her book also owed much to Hindu sources. This was taken out of the next edition, however.

### Counter Reformation Nuns

the only religious women who could do active works of mercy were those who did not profess their religious status officially,

one good example is the daughters of charity founded by Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac, who chose not to become nuns because of the rule of cloistering.

so strong were the controls of the Catholic reform initiated at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) that not until 1900 were nuns officially granted the right to an active life.

### Modern Western Christianity

the dilemma bequeathed to Christianity by the Pauline letters lay in the assumed dualism between a patriarchal order of creation associated with marriage and procreation, and a theology of equality in Christ associated with transcendence of creation thru a renunciation of marriage and sexuality.

both patriarchal and radical Christian groups acceded to this basic dualism, altho in different ways.

for patriarchal Christianity, the patriarchal order should govern the order of the Church as well as a historical community.

Equivalence is reserved for heaven

for radical Christianity, equivalence begins on earth, but only within the redeemed community of prophetic witness, usually associated with celibacy.

it does not extend to women in the civil order.

The Enlightenment of the late 18th century is significant because it broke the connection between the theology of creation and patriarchalism.

in Enlightenment thought, the original order of creation is associated with the image of God, in which all humans are created equally in the image of God and none is given domination over others.

all humans, equally and collectively, are sovereign over creation and all enjoy the same human nature, which the Enlightenment identified with reason and free will.

the enlightenment also broke the mystical gnosticism in that it no longer regards this original equality as a transcendent, spiritual, androgyne prior to the division into male and female. rather, this original equality is the embodied, created order of nature.

the old theory of embodiment and sexual division as a fall into sin and subordination is eliminated.

the sin of domination and division arises, not thru embodiment, but thru the entry into social arrangements of

civilization which distort the original order of nature into a hierarchical order of privilege and servitude.

with this idea, then the idea that society can be reformed to reflect this original, egalitarian order of nature.

through reason, a new social contract can be written.

since all persons have the same human nature, it follows for liberal thinkers that all should have the same human rights.

Enlightenment thought allowed modern Christians, for the first time, to identify the Christian view of redemption and equality in Christ with a reform of the social order in the direction of egalitarian justice of rights and opportunities.

salvation is no longer other-worldly, available only in heaven.

nor is it just associated with sectarian groups who anticipate the eschatological order by transcending the civil and family order.

now redemption can be seen as a reform of the civil and even the familial order in such a way as to vindicate the equality of all persons with equal access to political power and economic and cultural opportunities for self-expression.

this shift in the relationship of the theology of creation and redemption is basic for all modern theologies of liberation, including feminist theology.

the first to formulate clearly a theology of liberal feminism were a generation of women who were active in the abolitionist movement in the 1830s and 1840s.

their vision of feminist reform of all social institutions of the state, society, family, and the church was based upon the liberal feminist understanding of creation and redemption outlined above.

Sarah Grimke laid out what she understood as the biblical basis of women's equality.

she wrote letters in response to a pronouncement of the Mass. Congregational clergy denouncing the sisters for their public speaking in churches on behalf of abolition.

the clergy claimed that women's dependence on the male was the ordained nature of things and by speaking publically, the sisters had violated nature and God's commands.

Grimke replied by defending an egalitarian interpretation of original nature based on Gen. 1:26-27.

in the original plan of creation, men and women were created equal, endowed with the same human nature, but neither was given dominion over the other.

it was not they, but male domination which violated nature by subverting this divinely ordained equality of the sexes.

for Grimke, the appearance of women's inferiority in intellect or leadership ability is the product of distorted socialization, not of nature.

once released from unjust bondage and given equal rights and opportunities, women can develop into the equality with the male that is her authentic potential.

in 1848, early women's rights leaders met in Seneca Falls, N. Y. to draft a Declaration of the Rights of Women based on the American Declaration of Independence.

the declaration ends with a call for the "speedy overthrow of the male monopoly of the pulpit"

thus early feminism saw the church as one among other social institutions which must be reformed to include women.

in 1853 this demand for equal opportunities in the church was realized in the first ordination of a woman to the Congregational ministry.

she was Antoinette Brown, a graduate of Oberlin College, the first theological seminary to admit women.

the ordination sermon showed that since preaching is basically a prophetic ministry, and since it can be shown from the N. T. that the ministry of prophecy was conferred by Christ upon women equally with men, it has always been wrong for the church to deny women the ordained ministry.

it was declared that by ordaining Antoinette Brown, they were not inovating, but simply returning to the original mind of Christ.

the Cult of True womanhood

in the 19th cent. this movement confused egalitarian Christianity by stressing the different and complementary natures of men and women.

according to this anthropology, women were not inferior, in fact in many ways they were superior to men.

Femaleness was equated with love, altruism, spirituality, and piety, in contrast to male rationality and force.

thus feminine virtue became equated with Christian virtue and both were located in the private, domestic sphere set apart from public life.

this view reflected the increasing domestication of middle-class women, the secularization of society, and the disestablishment and privatization of religion.

both secular and Christian conservatives used female altruism and piety as arguments for women's unfitness for public power.

women, like religion, should be kept at home.

women used this increasing influence within religion to bring about missionary societies and other things thus shaping female church institutions by which they could lay claim to public roles in Church and society.

instead of accepting the conservative view that women's more spiritual nature made them unfit for public life, these reform feminists argued that female virtues were exactly what the public order needed.

the WCTU organized in the late 19th cent, was the classic example

of the use of the idea of female moral superiority as the basis of a crusade, not just for temperance, but many other reforms.

a few christian denominations began to ordain women in the 19th cent. (congregationalists, the unitarians, Disciples of Christ, (1888) universalists, and Methodist Protestants) most did not.

mainstream protestantism (Methodists, Presbyterians and Lutherans) refused to ordain women.

in 1956, the Methodist Church voted to ordain women,

the Presbyterians followed that same year.

over the next decade and a half, most other Protestant churches in American and thruout the world followed suit, with the Episcopal church voting for women's ordination in 1975.

only conservative fundamentalist protestant groups and the historic traditions of Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism still cling to the tradition of excluding women from ordained ministry.

between 1968 and now this shift is seen in seminaries, where women and men are about equal.

all branches of Christianity today feel themselves under increasing pressure from women to accept full equality in all levels of the church's polity and to expunge from their teaching and language the theological denigration of women.

there has been resistance however,

in the last decade reactionary movements have been everywhere evident.

protestant fundamentalists have dusted off the historic arguments of male headship as the order of creation and women's subordination as an expression both of nature and of divine punishment for the sin of Eve.

Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologians write new versions of the traditional arguments for the male priesthood based on the maleness of Christ.

Liberal Protestants today are often caught in the middle, accepting the mounting demands for inclusion of women and for inclusive theological language, and, on the other hand, tending to conform more and more to historic patterns of hierarchical ministry in their pursuit of ecumenical alliance with the Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

it is by no means evident that the gains of feminism in the church will continue and will not be sold out by a male-defined ecumenism based on historical patriarchal patterns of ministry.

thus the Christian church stands today at the crossroads between a tradition of hierarchical order that has traditionally subordinated women and excluded them from the ministry and the full and systematic renewal of the Christian message and mission

Two important theologians need to be mentioned yet.

Karl Barth whose theology has greatly influenced protestant churches in both Europe and America, sees God as both master and masculine, a creator who has ordered the sexes in such wise that woman is definately derivative from man.

woman's religious task is to obey the order inherent in nature from creation.

if a man abuses his natural preeminence, neither is the divine order vitiated, nor is woman's revolt justified.

by keeping her own place, despite all abuse, she will be found victorious by God.

contemporary women reading Barth are saying "there have always been far too many male or masculine theologians"

Paul Tillich has the concept of God as the "Ground of Being"

he has written little about women but his "Ground of Being" allows for both masculine and feminine attributes, and his analysis of human reason has an important place for affectivity.

w/o being disciples, recent feminist theologians such as Mary Daly have drawn on portions of Tillich's systmatic thought.

perhaps the saddest part of the current picture among Christian women is the way, with a good deal of manipulation from male powerholders, they have been set against one another as conservatives and libertals, evangelicals and radicals, right to lifers and pro choicers.

in the Bible belt fundamentalist protestant churhces have

combined with Roman Catholics to vote down civil rights for gay people, while the matter of what the churches don't do regarding sex education, black people, day care centers, concern for single women, help for battered wives and children, and so on is a serious blow to their credibility.

the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, who was no friend of women, cynically wrote that the last Christian died on the cross.

Christian feminists want to confute Nietzsche, but they find their churches giving him a lot of

## Brazil: Crimes of Passion

**T**he mountainous southeastern state of Minas Gerais is commonly known as the *terra dos machos*, or land of the machos. "Here, if a man sleeps around with other women, it's a sign of masculinity," says Elaine Matozinho, a police-woman in Belo Horizonte. "But if a woman is an adulteress, it's a different story: she pays with her life."

During the past 20 years, the murder or beating of women by their husbands or boyfriends was so common an occurrence that *legítima defesa da honra* (legitimate defense of honor) became a popular and tolerated legal defense. National murder statistics are not tracked by sex, but according to Matozinho, in Belo Horizonte (pop. 1.5 million) 24 women are killed each year by husbands or boyfriends. Many more cases go unreported. Most of the assailants are never convicted. "Regardless of the real reasons she was

killed, the man's defense is always the same: she was seeing somebody else," says Matozinho.

There are encouraging signs, however, that the old ways of Brazilians are changing. Women's groups in Rio de Janeiro are mobilizing to bring public pressure on the justice system. Earlier this year, a Belo Horizonte man was sentenced to 19 years for killing his wife. "Things have got better," says Sandra Lima of the Confederation of Brazilian Women, "but they are still far from ideal." ■