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BERGER, MODERNITY AND FEMINISM

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As a social movement born in the west during the mid-nineteenth century,[1] feminism is theoretically rooted in the critical reason of the Enlightenment. In his portrayal of the enlightenment world view, Paul Tillich describes critical reason as a "revolutionary emphasis on man's essential goodness in the name of the principle of justice."[2] Motivated to "speak in the name of truth and justice" by a religious belief in universal reason,[3] critical reason "overcame the prejudices of the feudal order, the heteronomous subjection of people both by the state and the church."[4] In her history of feminism in the west, feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether shows that "all modern theologies of liberation, including feminist theology" are rooted in the Enlightenment attempt to retrieve the "original order of creation."[5]

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1. In the United States, feminism's historical beginnings have been traced, by Rosemary Ruether, back to the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention held in 1848. At this convention, the "Declaration of the Rights of Women" was drafted based on America's "Declaration of Independence," ratified in 1776. See Rosemary Ruether, "Christianity and Women," in Arvind Sharma, ed. *Women in World Religions* (NY: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 231.

2. Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought: From its Judaic and Hellenistic origins to Existentialism*, ed. Carl E. Braaten, (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1967), p. 328.

3. *Logos* is the first principle of Christian theology according to Tillich. It "includes our power of knowledge, our

ethical awareness or conscience, and our aesthetic intuition." Ibid, p. 326

4. *Ibid.*, p. 328.

5. The passage which grounds "modern theologies of liberation" is *Genesis* 1:27. Ruether comments on the radical egalitarianism of the passage:

Early feminists extended the rights of man orientation of critical reason to include those of women, thus amending the notion of "man" to mean both men and women. Combining theological knowledge with social concern, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony,[6] were feminist and abolitionist leaders as well as America's first feminist theologians. Paralleling the theological roots of the enlightenment in universal reason, feminism's roots too were theological, according to Ruether.

While feminists have advanced their cause during the last century, the legitimacy of their theory and practice continues to be hotly debated. Feminist theology was the lead subject of a recent issue of Canada's weekly news magazine, *Maclean's*. Entitled "Is God a Woman? A new female spirituality movement rattles the old foundations," writer Marci McDonald reported on the struggle in the Christian church between feminist critics of the traditional, male God and their opponents. An important aspect of the struggle is the sensitive issue of women's ordination to the priesthood. Like most theological struggles, this issue has both a historical and contemporary context. In particular, the issue concerning women's ordination has been emboldened by what observers describe as "the biggest single thing that is happening in contemporary religion"--namely, a "feminist spiritual renaissance."[7] This renaissance or "third wave" is very different than those which preceded it: "There was the wave that came out of political and economic unfairness. And the wave that dealt

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"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." Ruether, "Women in Christianity," p. 229.

6. Ruether, "Women in Christianity," p. 229.

7. Tom Harpur, "Is God a Woman?" *Maclean's* (April 8, 1996), p. 47.

with relationship inequality. Now, we're defining who we are and what matters to us."[8]

Feminist religious thinkers such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza are making a striking contribution to this "third wave." Their goal is to replace patriarchal interpretations of revelation with ones which are egalitarian or matriarchal. Feminist religious thought is a response to the fact that religious traditions have either uncritically or with full awareness internalized and supported the dogma that women are at their best as care-givers within the private sphere. Propelled by an awareness that such beliefs foster gender inequities within the private and public sectors, feminist religious literature shows an affinity with Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah or Amos. Rosemary Ruether, for example, asserts that western religious traditions must repent of their sexist misdoings and promote "the full humanity of women,"[9] or be prepared to suffer the consequences of their sin. She grounds her unequivocal message in New Testament passages which support a highly modern Jesus who treated women with respect and care--as friends and colleagues. Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza are reformers because they see through the corrupted framework of Christianity to its foundation which continues to redeem humanity. Radicals like Mary Daly, on the other hand, argue that the tradition's harmful effects on women outweighs its potential for liberation and must therefore, be abandoned in favour of one which affirms women.

The introduction of feminist theory into theology, religious studies and ministry over the past few decades has generated a lively discussion concerning its legitimacy as a means of interpreting reality. Generally, opposition to

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8. Jean Shinoda Bolen, in *Maclean's*, op. cit., p. 48.

9. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), p. 18.

feminist religious thought adopts social scientific language to make the case that feminism's ideological nature precludes it from the academic round table. Sociologist Peter Berger defines ideology as that which "both justifies what is done by the group whose vested interest is served and interprets social reality in such a way that the justification is made plausible."[10] Hence, ideologies are unfit for academic consumption because they lack objectivity, are agenda-driven and serve the "interests of a select group." Conversely, the academic enterprise follows objective criteria in its quest for truth and the scholarly results it produces serve society as a whole. Universities should, therefore, discourage ideologies from gaining ground within their domain.

Throughout his career but more so in later years, Berger has asserted that neither ideology nor positivism should determine the nature of the social sciences. As the discipline of sociology became increasingly dominated by what Berger straightforwardly called "aberrations of the sociological enterprise"--ideologues and positivists--he signalled his choice to remain within the classical fold of sociological theory.[11] This paper will look first at Berger's understanding of ideology, then examine his assertion that ideology distorts the vision of the interpretive sociologist.[12] In the second part, the respective methods of inquiry taken up by Rosemary Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and

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10. Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (NY: Anchor Books, 1963), p. 112.

11. Peter Berger and Hansfried Kellner, *Sociology Reinterpreted* (NY: Anchor Books, 1981) is almost apocalyptic in tone, arguing that unless the discipline return to its classical roots, it will not "survive in any authentic form." p. 171.

12. I am borrowing the phrase, "vision of the interpretive sociologist," loosely, from the title of a collection of essays on Peter Berger's sociology, edited by James Hunter and Stephen Ainlay, entitled *Making Sense of Modern Times. Peter L. Berger and the Vision of Interpretive Sociology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

Mary Daly will be set in focus. The object here is to determine, if possible, whether their respective methods are ideological according to Berger's definition. What I will attempt to show is that Berger's critique of ideology in general and feminist religious thought in particular fails his own methodological test. He has not bracketed his personal beliefs, likes and dislikes in making the judgment that feminism and feminist religious thought are ideological in nature. Berger has allowed his theology of two kingdoms rooted in the Pauline-Augustinian-Lutheran tradition, to obscure his interpretive vision and is thus unable to see the world of feminism as clearly as he might. In bending Berger's definition of ideology back on himself, we will see surprising similarities between Berger and those feminists thinkers he judges to be `ideological.'

I. Ideology

Berger's critique of ideology can be summarized as follows: first, ideology encourages a false sense of security on the part of its adherents; second, it is concerned with power rather than truth; and third, ideology is not oriented towards understanding reality *as it is* but rather towards selecting from data that which justifies the *a priori* view(s) of the interpreter, whether that person(s) has power or is struggling for power. But what exactly is ideology?

The term "ideology" carries with it several meanings. In the interest of clarity, we will distinguish Berger's definition from several alternatives while noting the connections (if any) between them. The giant in the study of ideology is Karl Marx, whose analysis of the origin and function of ideology has contributed to areas as diverse as the critical theory of the Frankfurt school, postmodern philosophy, theologies of liberation and the sociology of knowledge. For Marx, an ideology is a set of ideas

produced by or taken up by the ruling class which justifies their position of power.

Paul Tillich adds another meaning of the term to that of Marx. He defines ideology in two ways:

> Ideology can be a neutral word, meaning simply the system of ideas which one can develop. Every group or class has such a system of ideas. But ideology can also mean--becoming then the most dangerous weapon in the class struggle--the unconscious production of ideas which justify the will-to-power of a ruling group. This is mostly an unconscious production, but it can be used in a conscious way.[13]

Feminist theologian Marsha Hewitt shows how the term can be used in a pejorative manner. Here, the "ideologue" is one whose ideas are discredited or denounced.[14] This meaning becomes pertinent when it is related to the academic context. The ideologue is deemed incapable of seeing beyond his/her own limited frame of reference, is seen as blindly committed to the interests s/he represents and presumably affirms, and perhaps most seriously, cannot be trusted to produce objective insights concerning his or her area of study, or any study for that matter.

Berger's understanding of ideology is linked to that of Marx with one difference. Instead of only serving the needs of oppressors, ideologies can be employed by any group within society:

> We speak of an ideology when a certain idea serves a vested interest in society ...the ideology both justifies what is done by the group whose vested

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13 Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, pp. 481-482.

14 Marsha Aileen Hewitt, *From Theology to Social Theory: Juan Luis Segundo and the Theology of Liberation* (NY: Peter Lang, 1990).

> interest is served and interprets social reality in such a way that the justification is made plausible.[15]

From the standpoint of those whose interests are *not* being served, ideologies are experienced as weapons in which case the decision might be made to counter-attack with an ideology of one's own. For example, an ideology centered on the rights of victims might be juxtaposed against an ideology based on the rights of crime-perpetrators.

To summarize, then, the term "ideology" has essentially three meanings: a) a set of ideas (in this way every thinking person has an ideology or is an ideologue); b) a set of ideas consciously or unconsciously arrived at, which justifies those with power (oppressors) or those struggling for power (the oppressed); and c) a type of sin in the academic context--that is, transgressing the "divine" law of objectivity in one's intellectual activity. According to the second meaning, ideology carries with it political baggage insofar as it either aims for power, or wants to preserve and perpetuate it.

Berger's understanding of ideology falls mainly into the second category, which is itself an expansion of the first. In my view, there is little relationship between the third meaning of the term and Berger's critique of ideology. His critique of ideologues is not so much denunciatory as it is a warning. Perhaps Berger is guided by a pastoral goal of "saving" those who, having harkened to the siren song of political correctness, are in danger of losing their "academic souls".

Berger aims his critique of ideology at the different settings of the social sciences and modern Christianity. His critique of ideology is unequivocal. Utopian Christians (the

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15. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, p. 112.

term "utopian" is interchangeable with "ideologue" in Berger's usage)[16] are politically active insiders, attempting to change the Church to fit their utopian vision of the Christian mission. Caustically, Berger observes that utopian visions may be opposed to one another:

> Thus what Christianity supposedly demands of us morally may be to bring about revolution, or suppress revolution; to free one's nation from foreign domination, or impose domination on another nation. It could be to change the relations between the sexes, save the natural environment, eradicate economic and racial injustice, or cleanse society of alcohol, tobacco, or cholesterol.[17]

The crusader gains psychologically from a "simplified moral economy:" Moral choices are made on the basis of "whatever serves the cause," and . . . "all actions are finally judged in terms of their serviceability."[18] Ironically, the crusader and the behind-the-scenes strategist are alike in this respect, since:

> Both the fanatic and the technician avoid the *sentimento tragico* that comes from honest confrontation with the realities of the human condition. The fanatic avoids it by convincing himself that he possesses all the right answers, the technician by denying that there are any deeper questions. The psychological gain may be similar in both instances.[19]

Berger's critique of ideology in the social sciences and modern Christianity will be unpacked further as we turn our attention to feminist religious thought. Is feminist religious thought ideological in nature, according to Berger? To answer this question it is necessary to investigate how

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16. For example, see Berger's *Pyramids of Sacrifice* (NY: Anchor Books, 1976), pp. 250-252.

17. Peter Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an age of Credulity* (NY: The Free Press, 1992), p. 205.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice*, p. 247.

feminist religious thinkers conceive their method of inquiry. To this end, we will examine the respective methods of three leading feminist religious thinkers--Rosemary Ruether, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mary Daly.

II. Method in Feminist Religious Thought

A. Rosemary Ruether

Methodological acumen is evident in Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk.*[20] In her first chapter, she argues that decisions concerning method should be shaped by the raw data of what is being investigated. Within theology, this data constitutes itself as a specific type of experience--that of human situatedness between "aspiration and alienation."[21] Experience of this brooding fact of being human in the world grounds the reflective enterprise which is theology. Ruether points out that within the male-dominated, theological domain, a special place must be opened up for the study of woman's experience of being human.

Restoring to the tradition that which was vigorously suppressed by its male guardians means that Ruether is a *reformist*, feminist theologian. Her project to reform the Christian tradition is grounded in an expose of the tradition's "cover-up" of its true origins. The "bedrock of authentic Being," vitally present in the past, now lies hidden beneath the surface of Christian tradition. Its facticity, albeit hidden, is what inspires feminists to retrieve the authentic past and criticize that which has and continues

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20. Concerning *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether states: ". . . it continues to be a good statement of what I have to say about the key Christian symbols, my critique of their patriarchal context and content, and my reconstruction of their liberating potential." (xv).

21. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

to distort our vision of this past. As women, alienated by a corrupt tradition, become aware of the authentic past and aspire to see that past as it really was, the ground is prepared for feminist theology.

Whereas reformists want to salvage redemptive elements from the past in order to reform the tradition, their radical sisters dismiss the past altogether in favour of new traditions. Feminist philosopher Mary Daly judges the Christian tradition to be intrinsically sexist and beyond redemption. But Ruether argues:

> Only by finding an alternative historical community and tradition more deeply rooted than those that have become corrupted can one feel sure that in criticizing the dominant tradition one is not just subjectively criticizing the dominant tradition but is, rather, touching a deeper bedrock of authentic Being upon which to ground the self. One cannot wield the lever of criticism without a place to stand.[22]

The second task of Ruether's feminist theology is to criticize those aspects of traditional theology which cannot be traced back to the earliest Christian community. Here, she exposes two fallacies of traditional theology: a) only a select few are endowed with the epistemological capacity to know universal truths. These chosen ones alone are capable of disseminating theological knowledge to the faithful (as well as those in need of faith). b) Only males qualify for the select group of tradition-transmitters because Jesus and his disciples were male. This second fallacy concerns the preferential treatment assigned to the male gender so far as knowledge and dissemination of universals is concerned. According to sociology of knowledge theory, knowledge is both shaped by and shapes social reality. Moreover, gender and other aspects of social situatedness play significant

22. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

roles in the construction of knowledge. The claim of traditional theology that knowledge of universals as interpreted and taught by a select group of male theologians constitutes the truth in an absolute sense, fails to account for the social context of theological knowledge. The task for feminist theology is to render "the sociology of theological knowledge visible, no longer hidden behind mystifications of objectified divine and universal authority."[23]

B. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza brings a feminist perspective to New Testament exegesis. In the preface of *In Memory of Her*, Schüssler Fiorenza states a central premise of feminist theory, namely, ". . . all texts are products of an androcentric patriarchal culture and history." It follows, therefore, that feminist scholarship must "construct heuristic models and concepts that allow us to perceive the human reality articulated insufficiently in androcentric texts and research."[24] Her examination of the record for the early Christian community is ultimately geared towards providing "a richer and more accurate perception of early Christian beginnings."[25] To realize this aim, Schüssler Fiorenza retrieves the story of early Christian women hidden behind the male-centered, (sub)version of the New Testament. This emphasis on retrieving a forgotten past in order to see clearly into the tradition itself places her alongside Ruether as a reformist of feminist religious thought.

Schüssler Fiorenza adopts a "critical hermeneutics of liberation" that employs the following guidelines.

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23. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

24. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (NY: Crossroad, 1983), pp. xv - xvi.

25. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

First, instead of abandoning the memory of woman's past, one ought to reclaim and remember it. She warns that this research activity might subject the researcher to various types of punishment because it subverts an androcentric system of authority.

Second, the reclaiming of "herstory" will involve the investigator's imagination, given that the relevant documents are largely silent about women. With a keen imagination, the researcher can begin the task of reconstructing the few fragments of information about women which have survived the centuries. Whereas traditional New Testament scholarship interprets the silences concerning women as evidence of their insignificance, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that these same silences signify women's importance as leaders in the early Church. Their potent presence in the early Church threatened an increasingly misogynist and power-oriented stratum of leadership over the community of Christians. The result of this tension was that the earlier circular and more informal polity of the community was replaced with a more formal and hierarchical model of church government. Instead of encouraging the spiritual leadership of women, the new breed of leader chose the security of an establishment which would ensure the safety and preservation of the church during a politically dangerous period. The more creative and adventurous route mapped out by these spiritually energized mothers of the Church was rejected in favour of a manageable and surprise-free domesticity within the Roman empire.

Closely related prototypes for the contemporary movement to liberate women in the church are the life of Jesus and the praxis of the earliest Christian community. The main narration of these essentially kairotic phenomena is found in the New Testament. A third guideline, then, is

to remember that the narration of the story is not the same as the story narrated.

Given that society is shaped in significant but not always obvious ways by religious traditions, a final guideline is that a critical hermeneutics of liberation assesses which documents of the early Christian community support values and practices of liberation, and which ones support oppression.[26] This assessment is necessary due to the primary status of the New Testament for traditional theology and the degree to which traditional theology has shaped society.

Schüssler Fiorenza's "critical hermeneutics of liberation" seeks the transformation of society *from* patriarchy which denigrates women *to* liberated humanity which ennobles women. A liberated society is one in which men and women are no longer in a state of alienation with respect to each other but in one of reconciliation.

C. Mary Daly

Daly's ground-breaking treatment of sexism in the Christian tradition, entitled *Beyond God the Father,*[27] draws (perhaps surprisingly) to a considerable extent on the work of Peter Berger and Paul Tillich. As a "radical feminist philosopher,"[28] Daly's aim is that women become inspired to create meaning-systems rooted in *their* own experience. To create *their* meanings, instead of internalizing those constructed by males, women must join their sisters in movement to the beat of their own drums.

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26. *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) p. 46.

27. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

28. This is Daly's self-designation as found in *Outercourse: The Be-Dazzling Voyage; Containing Recollections from my Logbook of a Radical Feminist Philosopher (Be-ing an account of my Time/Space Travels and Ideas--then, again, now, and how)*, (Harper: San Francisco, 1992).

Why then would she turn to male thinkers for theoretical grounding, albeit with her own feminist interpretation and application? One explanation for this curious anomaly is that, at the time of writing *Beyond God the Father*, there were virtually no known feminist, religious thinkers in the western tradition to whom she could turn.[29]

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's sociology of knowledge theory, set forth in *The Social Construction of Reality,*[30] helped Daly understand the debilitating effect of a patriarchal, social structure on woman's ability to attain knowledge. While Daly refers to Berger as a "sociologist of patriarchy" he has, albeit "unwittingly," provided helpful theoretical support to feminists wanting to respond to the "process of erasure" whereby their reality/being is trivialized in patriarchal societies. She applies Berger's theory of "world construction" [31]to the problem of finding the best way for women to respond to those institutions which have either erased or trivialized their reality.[32]

Paul Tillich's analysis of courage in terms of the existential categories of "anxiety," "being," and "nonbeing" played an important role in Daly's program to confront sexism. Daly writes:

> This confrontation with the anxiety of nonbeing is revelatory, making possible the relativization of structures that are seen as human products, and therefore not absolute and ultimate. It drives consciousness beyond

29. Another possibility is that during the early years of the feminist movement Daly sought common ground with male thinkers whose writings hinted at a shared concern to combat sexism in society. Noting the increasingly radical nature of her research over the last twenty-six years, perhaps Daly's early overtures were rebuffed, which in turn solidified her trademark "take no prisoners" approach to sexists.

30. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (NY: Doubleday, 1966).

31. See sections II and III of Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality.*

32. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, pp. 136-138.

> fixation upon `things as they are.' Courage to be is the key to the revelatory power of the feminist revolution.[33]

While Tillich uses "universalist, humanist categories" to analyze courage,[34] Daly points out that he "does not betray any awareness of the relevance of this to women's confrontation with the structured evil of patriarchy."[35]

Comparing herself to Tillich who located himself on the boundary between theology and philosophy,[36] Daly locates herself on the boundary of theology/philosophy and woman's experience. Like Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza, her basic assumption is that patriarchal societies foster and legitimate unfair policies with respect to women. Accordingly, Daly takes on the daunting assignment of liberating women from the meaninglessness and alienation of "nonbeing" (because women have internalized "objectivated" male meanings), becoming instead self-transcendent creators of their own respective meanings. Daly singles out the experience of hope as vital to woman's journey from "nonbeing" to "being." Once internalized, the woman who *hopes* is exuberant, energized and courageous. Attaining such a state takes time as it involves passage through several ontological regions--namely, nonbeing, being, communal hope, and revolutionary creativeness. Here, the now affirmed self in community with other sisters "reaches out toward the nameless God"[37] and feminist theology is born.

Daly is vociferous in her argument that feminist religious thought be shaped by woman's experience of injustice within sexist, social structures. She warns that an

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33. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 24.

34. Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 1952).

35. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 23.

36. Paul Tillich, *On the Boundary: An Autobiographical Sketch* (NY: Scribner's, 1966).

37. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 33.

obsession with securing the correct research method might obscure the more fundamental fact that woman suffer under a patriarchal master-class. The fact of woman's suffering should provide the basis for the research method feminists adopt instead of a rarified "correct" method being applied to the study of women as social facts.[38] To achieve the hoped for state of liberation for men and women who are ensnared in the nets of nonbeing,[39] "language and images that reflect and perpetuate the structures of a sexist world" must be castrated.[40] This method of castrating sexist language and images, arises out of the problem of woman's suffering and is, therefore, faithful to Daly's rule with respect to method. An image presents itself of Daly clad in the garb of a surgeon, holding a scalpel in her hand. Bent over the operating table on which the organism of women's culture rests, she busily removes life-threatening tumours from the patient's body. The image fades leaving the fate of the patient unknown.

III. Feminist religious thought: Ideology or De-ideology?

Whether berger actually holds that feminism is an ideology is not easy to determine, for all that one has are a few passing references, comments made during interviews, and an extrapolation from his general work on ideology. A step towards answering this question has been taken in the previous section which outlines the respective research methods of Ruether, Schüssler Fiorenza and Daly. Whether

38. She refers to method as an idol worshipped by scholars. Accordingly "methodolatry,--the worship of or obsession with method, must be repudiated or `killed.'" Cleverly playing with the word, Daly refers to this act as "methodicide."

39. See Mary Daly, "After the Death of God the Father: Women's Liberation and the Transformation of Christian Consciousness," *Commonweal* (March 12, 1971), as quoted in Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, editors, *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 55.

40. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 9.

their methods fit Berger's definition of ideology can be determined in large part through an analytical comparison of the four thinkers on this point. In his most recently published work on religion entitled *A Far Glory*, Berger explores utopianism within the contemporary Christian church as a type of moral action. Under the general theme of leftist movements in the church such as liberation theology, Berger refers to other "utopian movements" such as "radical wings of feminists, gay liberationists, environmentalists, and black nationalists in this country."[41] In an interview with Gary Dorrien in 1990, he referred to feminism as "this grimly humourless ideology" which had become "the unquestioned orthodoxy throughout the mainline churches."[42] Dorrien explained Berger's critique as follows: "He could not bear the grammar, the anger, or the politics of feminists in the churches or in academe. Having endured his share of conferences at which feminism was spoken, he would avoid further encounters when he could. The world of neo-conservative conferences and think tanks would have to do."[43]

For a better understanding of his critique of ideology and its application to feminist religious thought, I met with Berger in May, 1994.[44] From this meeting it was clear that Berger sees feminist religious thought in both its radical

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41. Berger, *A Far Glory*, p. 206.

42. Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 322.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Funding for this purpose was provided by a university research council grant from St. Francis Xavier University, 1994. My meeting with Berger took place on May 26, 1994, at the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture in Boston, MA. A day prior to our meeting, I submitted a set of questions for Berger to address These questions were oriented towards clarifying Berger's critique of ideology and ascertaining his response to the respective methodologies of Ruether, Schussler-Fiorenza and Daly in light of his critique of ideology. Later I turned my notes into a written transcript of the meeting and to ensure as much accuracy as possible, sent a copy to Dr. Berger which he, in turn, reviewed.

and reformist forms as ideological in nature. Moreover, his view concerning the ideological nature of feminist religious thought is formulated in terms similar to his better known critique of ideology. Berger's critique can be positioned within an intellectual tradition critical of ideology and fed largely by two long-standing debates within the respective areas of theology and the social sciences. In a word, this tradition is theologically grounded in the Christian doctrine of two kingdoms and methodologically grounded in the Weberian axiom of valuefreeness. By briefly reviewing the debates out of which these positions arise, I hope to shed light on Berger's treatment of ideology.

To begin with, Berger's alignment with the Pauline-Augustinian-Lutheran doctrine of "two kingdoms" helps to explain his critique of ideology on theological grounds. According to this doctrine, the kingdom of God is *not* of this world nor is it ever destined to be of this world. Eternal in nature, this kingdom was preached by Jesus, foretold and anticipated by the prophets, and its eschatological fulfilment ("thy kingdom come") is prayed for by Christians. Apart from faith, humans remain hopelessly lost in the second kingdom, that of man and, by nature, temporal. Redemption is possible through grace but, in the "two kingdom" tradition, salvation is incomplete due to the finite context in which it occurs. One might be "saved," but this salvation does not at all mean that one will cease to sin. In his commentary on the New Testament book of Galatians, Protestant theologian Martin Luther drew attention to this strange paradox :

> We therefore do make this definition of a Christian, that a Christian is not he which hath no sin, or feeleth no sin, but he to whom God imputeth not his sin because of his faith in Christ. . . . Thus a Christian man is both righteous

and a sinner, holy and profane, an enemy of God and yet a child of God.[45]

Luther extends his understanding of the nature of man's fallenness into the ethico-political sphere. The tragedy is that the most ingenious plans to transform an unjust world into one which *is* just, will never succeed. Only the naive believe that an outstanding leader or brilliant political platform will provide the means by which this wounded world is healed. Berger argues that both legalists and utopians in the Church have misunderstood the New Testament and "a core tradition of Christian experience and thought over the centuries." He states:

> Each in its own way, both legalism and utopianism curiously *secularize* the Christian Gospel, shifting its message from transcendence to the affairs of this world. . . But the Kingdom of God, which Jesus announced in his earthly ministry and which his disciples experienced in the events that followed Easter, is *not* of this world."[46]

Berger positions himself on that side of the theological debate which sees a fragile connection at best, between the kingdom of God and kingdom of man. Countering the two-kingdom doctrine, however, are those who believe that, through ethical action, the kingdom of God gradually displaces the kingdom of man. This position grounds itself in a different interpretation of Jesus' teachings concerning the kingdom, one which underscores man's essential goodness based on the doctrine of universal logos. Since the Enlightenment, this position has regained the ground it once held within the classical period of the Christian tradition. Modern examples of this tradition include the

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45. Martin Luther, "Commentary on Galatians," in John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (NY: Anchor Books, 1961), pp. 112 and 130.

46. Berger, *A Far Glory*, p. 207.

nineteenth century social gospel and theologies of liberation running across the social spectrum.

Berger's critique of ideology is illuminated further by an important debate within the area of methodology. On the one side are "Weberians" who stipulate that the researcher *qua* researcher bracket his or her values in order to achieve objective research results. On the other side are those who argue that objectivity is an impossible quest given the researcher's finite human character. Research is the means by which the researcher makes his or her interests more plausible than they were before the research project was carried out. Throughout his career, Berger has consistently maintained his Weberian allegiance on this point while acknowledging its inherent difficulties. He states:

> . . . there is a peculiar human value in the sociologist's responsibility for evaluating his findings, as far as he is psychologically able, without regard to his own prejudices, likes or dislikes, hopes or fears. . . . It is especially difficult to exercise in a discipline that touches so closely on the human passions. It is evident that this goal is not always achieved, but in the very effort lies a moral significance not to be taken lightly.[47]

He contrasts the "sociologist's concern for listening to the world, without immediately shouting back his own formulations of what is good and what is bad," with the normative disciplines like theology and jurisprudence. Here, "one meets with the constant compulsion to squeeze reality into the narrow frame of one's value judgments."[48] For Berger, openness to the "otherness" of others, paying heed to *all* the evidence rather than selecting only that

47. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, p. 166.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 167.

which will serve the interests of the researcher, ensures fairness and "systematizes good manners."[49]

Of relevance to the debate concerning method in the social sciences is that within philosophy concerning approaches to truth and the status of knowledge. On the one side is the claim that research is the means by which the researcher's *a priori* notions of truth are legitimated. Moreover, the knowledge produced by such research reflects the unambiguous nature of the notions with which it began. The antithesis to this position is one which sees research as an opportunity to explore a region of inquiry for an increased understanding and knowledge of that which pertains to the region studied. Within the course of research, truths of a contingent nature may be discovered. Proponents of this position maintain that the quest to know with certainty is an ongoing one due to the finite nature of those who know.

Berger's critique of ideology demonstrates his adherence to the second position as outlined above. A dangerous reduction of truth to whatever serves the interests of the researcher underlines the first position. For example, feminists "know" that sexism both is evil and must be expelled from social reality. Whether through linguistic castration (Daly), prophetic denunciation (Ruether), or an imaginative reconstructing of silences in New Testament texts with regard to herstory (Schüssler Fiorenza), a liberated Church and/or society[50] will be born through feminist praxis.

Feminists might respond to this argument by pointing out that their interests were activated as a direct result of opposite interests to their own, aimed at either restricting or

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49. Discussion with Berger, May, 1994.

50. Reformists and radicals divide on the question of whether or not to the church is worth the effort with respect to its liberation.

erasing their presence in the public arena. Even more damaging for feminists is the often hidden nature of such interests, lurking behind rhetoric such as objectivity within the social sciences or the revealed nature of truth in theology. A counter ideology results as feminists oppose their oppressors with weapons of their own.

Another point on which feminists together with their opponents claim certainty concerns the value they place on one gender over that of the other. Sexists claim with certainty that maleness is intellectually, morally and ontologically superior to femaleness while radical feminists argue the opposite position.[51] While conceding the absurdity of both positions, Berger went on to observe that religious institutions usually legitimate the society in which they are embedded, patriarchal or matriarchal.[52] Extrapolating from this observation, women in traditional, patriarchal societies should not be surprised when their religious institutions relegate them to a "servant" class, in obedience to the will of God. Moreover, to maintain social order, it might be necessary to oppress women--and what better instrument for that purpose than religion? Feminists urge action to remedy those situations where women are denigrated in the name of God.

By legitimating patriarchy, religious institutions show their complicity in the ideology business. De-ideologization is one process available to all victims of oppression. Berger describes the basis for and character of de-ideologization in the following passage:

> It is a sociological commonplace that social groups manufacture convenient illusions that rationalize and ratify their roles in society. The clergy have no monopoly on this. It is true of physicians, advertisers, public-

51. Reformists place an equal value on both genders.
52. Discussion with Berger, May, 1994.

> relations experts, labour-union officials--and even social scientists. 'De-ideologizing' means the process of radically honest thinking and communicating by which these systematic illusions are breached.[53]

The response of feminist religious thinkers to the oppression of women in the church and society is a massive program of de-ideologization with respect to the sources of such oppression.

IV. In Search of Common Ground

Are there similarities between feminist religious thinkers and those persuaded by Berger's critique of ideology? Berger and the three feminist religious thinkers presented above agree that positivist methods of research fails to do justice to the fullness of reality. Positivism assumes that personal values can be separated from research and that research undertaken with methodological precision will produce knowledge which is objective in nature, unmarred by human foible. Berger sums up the problem with positivism as follows:

> The basic fault of every form of positivism in the social sciences is the belief that the act of interpretation can be circumvented. . . . The fault, as we have tried to show, lies in the failure to comprehend the peculiar character of human reality and, therefore, the peculiar character of any effort at describing and explaining this reality. . . . [Positivist procedures] cannot penetrate to what is specifically *human* in human reality--rather a serious fault in a science that takes this human reality as its avowed object! The resulting statements about society tend to be very abstract, far removed from the social

53. Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America* (NY: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 155-157.

> reality of living human beings--and *therefore* neither very illuminating nor very useful.[54]

All three feminists would concur with Berger on this point: the separation of theory from practice ignores the fact that knowledge is socially constructed. Schüssler Fiorenza states that knowledge is "informed by our own historical-cultural location as well as by the ways we are implicated in power relations."[55] She employs a hermeneutics of suspicion with respect to that "knowledge" which manipulates and coerces people (at an unconscious level) for its own interests. Through a hermeneutics of suspicion, ideologies are de-ideologized for the dual purpose of liberation and clarity with respect to knowledge itself.

Another similarity relates to how religion is defined. With Berger, all three feminist religious thinkers rank experience before reflection with respect to sources of revelation. Against Berger, however, feminists argue that gender plays a role in the experience and interpretation of divine reality. Women bring a different perspective from that of men in the field of religious studies and this in turn widens the horizon of knowledge for the humanities and social sciences. To this point, Berger responded that when feminists privilege woman's experience of divine reality as the point of departure for theology, they undermine the universality of theological knowledge.[56] Hence, gender (male or female), should *not* play a role in religious thought.

All four discuss the values which form the basis for their respective research methods. With Weber, Berger emphasizes the "calling" side of social analysis: "There is a vocation of thinking thru [sic] and living thru [sic] the

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54. Berger and Kellner, *Sociology Reinterpreted*, pp. 129-130.
55. Schussler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, p. 91.
56. Discussion with Berger, May, 1994.

tensions between 'is' and 'ought,' between understanding and hope, between scientific analysis and action."[57] All three feminists prioritize the role that values connected with the liberation of women play in their respective methods of research.

The differences between Berger and feminists are first, methodological in nature. Feminists challenge Berger's approach to religion which stresses the importance of maintaining a "broken connection" between theory and praxis. On this point, Berger states:

> The general problem both in the technocratic and ideological uses of sociology is the relation between theory and praxis. In our view, there certainly can be a relation, but it is not a direct, 'one-to-one' relation. Rather, it is a 'broken' relation. The sociologist who is committed to any pragmatic project, be it technical or political, must remain aware of this 'brokenness' if he is not to be pulled into a pragmatic mentality that in the end threatens the survival of the scientific attitude. Again, he must remain conscious of his 'dual citizenship.'[58]

Berger's approach differs from the premise of feminist theory that values undergirding liberation praxis *cannot* be "bracketed" or suspended in research. For example, Schüssler Fiorenza asserts that scholarship is a value-laden industry insofar as its practitioners (scholars) are "ideologically scripted" through social location and cultural influences.[59] Her "critical feminist theory," intersecting with postmodernism and new historicism, "recognizes that all representations of the world are informed by our own historical cultural position, by the values and practices shaped by our historical-cultural location as well as by the

57. Berger, *Sociology Reinterpreted*, p. 13.
58. Berger and Kellner, *Sociology Reinterpreted*, p. 139.
59. Schussler Fiorenza, *But She Said*, p. 89.

ways we are implicated in power-relations."[60] With liberation theology, Schüssler Fiorenza affirms that ". . . all theological discursive practices--knowingly or not--are by definition engaged for or against the oppressed. Intellectual neutrality and value-free objectivity are not possible in a world with a history of exploitation and oppression."[61] In short, neutrality or silence about oppression in theological discourse signifies support for or collusion with the oppressors. Simply stated, you're either for them or against them!

This methodological disagreement between Berger and feminists is supported on both sides by each side's theology concerning the kingdom of God. For Berger, the kingdom of God is that "far glory" towards which the weary traveller is drawn. For contemporary Christianity, this means that:

> The vocation of the church is to proclaim the Gospel, not to defend the American way of life, not to 'build socialism,' not even to build a just society, because, quite apart from the fact that we don't really know what this is, all our notions of justice are fallible and finally marred by sin.[62]

By contrast, Ruether and Schüssler Fiorenza declare the hidden presence of that kingdom which awaits its manifestation through those empowered by a vision of justice and hope, enabling them to persevere in the struggle

One way to synthesize the two theological positions would be to retain a sense of irony as captured in Robbie Burns' line that "the best-laid plans of mice and men oft go astray," while working nonetheless for a just society. Endeavouring to see that justice prevails is recognized by theologies of liberation as essential to the church's mission

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60. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

62. Peter Berger, "Different Gospels: The Social Sources of Apostasy," *This World* (Vol. 17, Spring 1987, 6-17): 13.

in the world. Understanding, however, that questions surround human existence, and that in, through and under our being lies mystery, are the ancient insights derived from the Pauline tradition in Christianity.

V. Conclusion

What can one conclude from this study of Berger's critique of ideology in relation to feminist religious thought? In the preceding pages, I have outlined the ideological dimension of all four thinkers in accordance with Berger's definition of ideology. As we have seen, feminist religious thought does not pretend to be free from the interests, values and commitments related to the struggle for gender equity in church and society--matters that, in turn, are theologically rooted in a modern interpretation of the kingdom of God. Berger's critique is, on the other hand, informed by his Pauline theology of two kingdoms--but his apparent lack of awareness of the implications of this undercuts his attack on feminism as ideological in nature.

Since Daly, Ruether, and Schüssler Fiorenza are more forthcoming about their values, the *raison d'être* of their work is clear. There are no hidden agendas. But, in identifying themselves so closely with values centered on one group within society, feminists are in danger of becoming more provincial than cosmopolitan, and more predictable than adventurous, with respect to ideas. To be consistent, they should acknowledge the legitimacy of criticism which stems from interests different than their own, given the inevitable interest-laden nature of knowledge itself. They are not in a position (whatever the justice of that position) to hold their interests to be above critique. This is not to suggest that feminists should

abandon their position but, rather, that they should affirm the right of their critics to disagree with them.

In making the statement that "all theological discursive practices--knowingly or not--are by definition engaged for or against the oppressed," Schüssler Fiorenza demonstrates an inability to interpret silences concerning liberation praxis within theological discourse in any way other than her own. However, such silences might signify a different understanding of ethics. An ethics rooted in a theology of two kingdoms is, for example, deeply aware of the flawed nature of human reason. A sense of irony about our capacity to achieve perfect justice might explain, therefore, why discourse concerning the oppressed is sometimes muted. There may, in fact, be different ways to demonstrate the value of taking action on behalf of the oppressed than those adopted by many feminists.

The ideological nature of Berger's critique of ideology means that he and `ideologues' share common ground. Berger is as much an ideologue as many feminists, although this may not be immediately obvious. Both approaches represent and defend certain interests, whether these interests are made explicit or not. Berger's roots in phenomenological sociology (Schutz) and valuefree methodology (Weber) show that he recognizes, with feminism, the social context of ideas and, hence, the social nature of knowledge itself. The interpretation of social reality thus takes on the character of a vocation involving a disciplined eye trained to see all there is to see rather than only what one wants to see. I submit, then, that Berger's two kingdom theology prevents him from giving feminist religious thought its full due.

On the other hand, feminists, along with many postmodern thinkers, conclude from the socially constructed nature of knowledge that their research should

not be dismissed on ideological grounds, given that the academic enterprise itself is guided by various values and serves specific interests. They wonder, moreover, what criteria are used to determine that the alleged state of objectivity within the university has been achieved, and who is to decide on that set of criteria. Here, I am more in agreement with Berger than with his critics. Instead of abandoning the quest for objectivity altogether (as feminists and postmodern thinkers appear to argue), evaluative structures germane to research should aim at fairness and objectivity while recognizing its limits. In the interest of such principles, scholars must be prepared to disclose and discuss their values and beliefs which play a role, consciously or unconsciously, in their perception of reality. It should be clear that neither feminist religious thinkers nor Berger are in a position of cognitive privilege.

In sum, Daly, Ruether, Schüssler Fiorenza and Berger need to recognize that values and interests are involved with *each other's* work *qua* academics. A provincialism fuelled by territorial interests and serving only the interests of its clientele is poorly equipped to address the diverse field of religious thought in its contemporary, global context. I suggest, instead, a move towards a collaborative cosmopolitanism, motivated by the interests of the common good but ever mindful of the ironies of existence.