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THEOLOGY OF PROVOCATION
An Encounter of Jesus with the Woman

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1. Introduction

> From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose daughter has an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go – the demon has left your daughter." So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone (Mark 7, 24-30 NRSV).

This biblical passage provides the readers with a starting point of our reflection in feminist theology. This particular story of the Syrophoenician woman indicates both positive and negative points in the over-all issues raised in feminist theological discourses addressed to our dominantly patriarchal) society and church. These feminist discourses provoke our masculine taken-for-granted way of thinking and acting. This feminist provocation calls us to rethink our cherished tradition because of a pressing responsibility for the 'other' who in this case happens to be a woman. Moreover, the 'same' which is referred to the adherents of traditional theology is hopefully challenged in this provocation. Once we heed the challenge, we may never revert back to the 'same' but we start to recast our theological discourses. Even if we remain unchallenged, the provocation remains in our midst; but we are deaf or blind to it. The rereading of the story may open our eyes and ears to the challenge of the

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woman to Jesus apply its message to us today. The story informs us about the first century biblical world and we can note some salient points that are relevant to our concern.

Let me start with the positive aspects of the story. First, moving from one place to another is indispensable in Jesus' mission of proclaiming the reign of God. In his itineraries, Jesus encounters many things along his way which might have been unexpected or surprising in various ways, like his encounter with the Syrophoenician woman. Travelling to different places, like Tyre, can change our patriarchal mindset and expand our human experience that can even influence our parochial attitude. Going to a specific place may trigger men to rethink their unquestioned worldview. In the story, Jesus wants to withdraw himself from the crowd and take a rest for a while. However, knowing that he is around, people still frequent him. The woman hears of Jesus' presence and comes to see him. Second, the unnamed woman is only characterized culturally as a religious outsider and identified ethnically as a Syrophoenician woman. The woman begs insistently on Jesus for compassion or mercy. At first Jesus seems to ignore her appeal. Due to her insistence, Jesus finally responds to her. The intrusion of the woman in Jesus' life may have disturbed him and consequently created a space for a dialogue. This space becomes a condition of possibility for the inclusion of the woman in Jesus' mission. Moreover, it is her insistent appeal to Jesus that eventually breaks the boundary that separates them whereby the woman traverses the limit. Third, the woman's appeal is not for herself but rather for her daughter's healing and wellbeing. Due to her concern, the mother is forced to appeal and beg to Jesus. This concern to the daughter indicates an intimation or solidarity with her suffering. It is therefore the urgent need that moves her to meet and beseech Jesus at all cost. Ultimately, the woman succeeds in persuading Jesus because he finally healed her daughter from a distance.[1]

Let me now move to the negative aspects of the story. First, the woman bows down at Jesus' feet. Bowing down to someone may indicate not only begging for mercy, but also manifesting submission to an authority. Her address to Jesus as 'sir' or better, 'lord' (Mark, 7, 28 RSV) suggests this subordination. In Greek society, *kyrios* implies an

[1]Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998, 122.

asymmetrical relationship, an overlord who overpowers others.[2] In this case, the woman is submissive to the man Jesus.[3] In a patriarchal world of the biblical era, bowing seems to be a 'natural' or 'normal' thing to do as an expected 'proper' behaviour. Looking back on the early history of the church, where gradual changes were taking place, the church has slowly assimilated the Greco-Roman hierarchy based on the rule of the lords or, in short, patriarchal set-up. We have to keep in mind the difference between Jewish patriarchy with Greco-Roman patriarchy since "Jewish patriarchy at that time was the patriarchy of the politically and economically oppressed people who were fighting for the very survival of their culture and religion."[4] The difference is generally between the patriarchy of a colonized people of a nation and a colonial master of the empire. The Greco-Roman patriarchal world superseded the early Christian notion of discipleship of equals, where women exercised some forms of leadership and power. In the Jesus movement, women and men are involved in the itinerary mission of Jesus as can be gleaned from the New Testament bible. Women are members of the company of Jesus who shared his mission.[5]

Second, the woman goes home and finds her daughter lying on bed and already well. We assume that the woman is in charge of the care of household. There are two reasons for this assumption. First, the 'one-nature' anthropology[6] of Greek philosophy 'hierarchizes' man and woman. In Greek society, woman is 'naturally' subordinated and subjected to man. Second, this 'one-nature' anthropology is extended to society as well.

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[2]Luise Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters: A Feminist Social History of Early Christianity*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, 36.

[3]Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 124.

[4]Schottroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, 23.

[5]Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Origins*, London: SMC Press, 1983, 285ff.

[6]Fiorenza uses the term 'two-nature' anthropology. However, I prefer to use one-nature because I am more convinced by T. Laqueur, as I shall demonstrate. In Greek philosophy, the 'one' has a prominent place compared to the 'many.' In fact, being is considered one, or coming from the one or returning to the one. This can be seen for instance, as we shall explain, in the case of Plato and Aristotle. See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision," in *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Carol P. Christ & Judith Plaskow, eds., New York: Harper San Francisco, 1979, 141-3.

Thus, it further creates a distinction between *oikos*[7] (household) and *polis* (city). Just like man and woman, the distinction of *oikos* and *polis* follows a hierarchical arrangement. Applied to early Christians, however, this distinction is ambiguous because *oikos*, as private place is, at some occasions, a public place of Christian worship. Thus, the distinction between *oikos* and *polis* is blurred in so far as Christians are concerned. Nonetheless, in Greek society, women, children and slaves are tied to *oikos* as their destiny. Due to the pre-eminence of *polis* in Greek society, which is the world of free men, *oikos* is then inferior or subordinated to it. The *oikos* is the proper place of inferior women. Though *oikos* may not be as patriarchal as the *polis*, the fact remains that *oikos* is ruled by the so-called *pater familias*.[8] This is seen at the end of the story. While the woman is accorded a 'voice' by arguing with Jesus, she nonetheless remains inside a patriarchal world that relies on man. The 'master' voice of Jesus ends the story.[9]

Jesus (in both Mark and Matthew) and his disciples (in Matthew alone) are provoked by the Syrophoenician woman. It is a provocation by an other, which comes from a woman's voice. The provocation is, of course, occasioned by the sickness of her daughter. It is therefore her daughter's condition that compels her to beg for mercy to Jesus. The insistent appeal of the woman intrudes into the identity of Jesus and his disciples. In a parallel text from the gospel of Matthew (15, 21-28 NRSV), the narrative provides more detailed account. I just would like to mention two of them. First, Jesus' mission is explicitly stated there, which is limited 'to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' In this case, Jesus reveals his "religious prejudice and exclusivist identity."[10] The woman's powerful appeal may have unsettled Jesus that he is unable to resist it. The woman even puts Jesus' mission into question where his argument "turns against itself [and] overcomes the prejudice of Jesus."[11] His exclusive mission is transgressed by the woman because after the argument, it is no longer

[7]According to Rosemary Radford Ruether, the "home which was once itself the center of the public life has now become a ghetto within which women were confined." See Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Sexism and Liberation: The Historical Experience," in *From Machismo to Mutuality: Essays on Sexism and Woman-Man Liberation*, Eugene Bianchi & Rosemary Radford Ruether, New York: Paulist Press, 1976, 8.

[8]Schuttroff, *Lydia's Impatient Sisters*, 31.

[9]Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 123-4

[10]Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 122.

[11]Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 122.

limited to the Jews, but to the Gentiles as well. Jesus' indifference to the woman is shattered, so to speak, because, in the story, he eventually responds to the appeal and grants it. Second, the disciples tried to stop the woman by urging Jesus to send her away. The disciples are also affected by her appeal because they wanted to silence her. Perhaps, they are also disturbed by the woman that is why they would like to dismiss her so that she would disappear from their sight. They could do that, of course, but her voice will always reverberate in their memory and discomfort their complacency.

2. Emergence of the Other

Let us continue reflecting on the history of the many 'Syrophoenician women' spread all over the world across different cultures. History has been undoubtedly written by men who are biased on their accounts by centering on men. Women merely hear about this history and admire men's achievements. Although it is a history of people (both women and men), it is told from the viewpoint of men and framed in a patriarchal worldview. In her book, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, G. Lerner argues that "men have explained the world in their own terms and defined the important questions so as to make themselves the centre of discourse."[12] Thus, men are centred by having the prerogative to represent the world. Women have to refer to these representations in order to be understood and accepted. The Scripture writers are not exempted from the grip or sway of patriarchy because they are also socialized into it and being affected by it. We still read the patrilineal scripts and hear the paternal voices speaking through the texts. To borrow J. Exum's expressions, 'murder they wrote' because the voice of women have been 'executed' and 'silenced by the text;' and again, women are 'raped by the pen,' to use her other phrase, because they have been violated and forced in this world.[13] Historically, women have been questioning this patriarchal world, though in the past they have been muted and ignored. Nowadays, they stand for their right and fight for their freedom.

What is the 'root' of woman's subordination in the world? According to E. Schüssler Fiorenza, woman's subordination is rooted in Greek anthropology. This is corroborated by the theory of R. Ruether, who traces

[12]Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, New York: & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 220.

[13]J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narrative*, Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1981, 16-41, 176-201.

the root of this subordination from sexual dualism which is the foundation of other unequal relations.[14] This dualism becomes more pronounced in the emergence of 'transcendental subject' in modernity as a self-conscious and self-referential ego which differentiates or distinguishes itself from its other. In this sexual division, man is opposed to and separated from woman. Through this sexual binarism, man is centred at the expense of the excluded woman. Since the woman is cut off from man, man is estranged from his other. Thus, the "domination of women is rooted in the fundamental schism and alienation in the male psyche."[15]

This theory should be nuanced, however. According to T. Laqueur, there is a distinction between 'one-sex model' of the pre-Enlightenment period, and 'two-sex model' of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment period. In a 'one-sex model,' men and women are "arranged according to their degree of metaphysical perfection."[16] This can be shown in the idea of Plato and Aristotle followed by Augustine and Thomas that man embodies the perfect model of humanity. This one-sex model is framed in a masculine perspective in order to valorise the cultural achievement of patriarchy.[17] In a 'two-sex model,' men and women are explained in a "radical dimorphism of biological divergence."[18] In this model, the two sexes are anatomically opposed, which replaces the metaphysical hierarchy of one-sex model. At this stage, we can properly speak of binary opposition of sexes, not just hierarchical perfection. Comparatively, female body is always in a disadvantaged position because she is an empty category or deficient state which needs filling or completing. In both cases, however, these two models of viewing sex are placed within a power relation between men and women. Feminism can be seen as a struggle against patriarchy that pursues equivalent rights between the sexes rather than something that generates war between the sexes. In this way, feminism is not just the liberation of women from the bondage of

[14]Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1975, 3.

[15]Rosemary Radford Ruether, Women's Liberation in Historical and Theological Perspective," in *Women's Liberation and the Church: The New Demands for Freedom in the Life of the Christian Church*, Sarah Doeley, ed., New York: Association Press, 1970, 27.

[16]Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1990, 5.

[17]Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 20.

[18]Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 6.

subordination but also the liberation of men from the prison of patriarchy that entraps the two sexes into this limiting world.[19]

In her classic work, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir has persuasively argued that throughout history, woman has been considered as an 'other' of man.[20] This is evident even in the linguistic component of 'woman' (wo + man). There seems to be an idea that 'woman' is always dependent on or derivative from man. The prefix 'wo,' which cannot stand by itself is always affixed to the 'man,' which can stand by itself so that it can form an intelligible word 'wo+man'. This would suggest a fated dependency of woman from man. Language seems to favour man and to disadvantage woman. Moreover, patriarchy has deprived women of an equal opportunity with men by imprisoning her into the household world. The world seems to be split between the world of the home and the world of the work wherein women are consigned to household chores while men are elevated to the workplace. Thus the domestic work of women is unpaid and this condition keeps her dependent on men for her needs. Women are fixed with the home as a place of sex and reproduction. Women can never achieve an equal status of autonomy compared to men because they are always portrayed as subordinate to men, if not opposite to men.

There is some ambiguity in the way Simone de Beauvoir goes on explicating the situation of woman as the other of man. This other is not absolutely outside of the 'same' but merely positioned ambivalently because she is neither a complete insider nor a complete outsider. Thus, her ambivalent position does not completely paralyze her status, but empowers her to shift from one place to the other. Thus, she can use this ambivalence to her advantage. In her conclusion, de Beauvoir states that "... woman is opaque in her very being; she stands before man not as a subject but as an object paradoxically endued with subjectivity; she takes herself simultaneously as *self* and as *other*, a contradiction that entails baffling consequences."[21] Thus, paradoxically her ambivalent position provides her a better position because of her mobility by shuttling her position and occupying both standpoints of the same and the other. Thus, knowing both positions, she can hurl her critique of the universal pretension of patriarchy.

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[19]Ruether, *Sexism and Liberation*, 8.

[20]Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, H. M. Parshley, ed. & trans., New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

[21]Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 718.

3. Various Faces of the Other

In the story, the Syropheonician woman is the other of Jesus (and his disciples). This otherness is clearly shown in that encounter being a woman and an outsider. However, the woman did not allow herself to be completely trapped or imprisoned into the patriarchal world, but she struggled in the process and succeeded in the end. The woman envisions an 'otherwise' identity by becoming an agent of change. However, this otherwise woman is not well represented in the story and it is our responsibility to pursue it. The reason of the 'silence' of the otherwise other is that there are limits imposed on her by the narrative by ending it. Though we can infer from the story an otherwise Jesus because as the story unfolds, Jesus gives in to the demand, we can also imagine an otherwise woman who argues with Jesus. In our discussion, we are more interested with the otherwise woman in our imagination. We need to pursue a 'feminist reading' that will open up the story into possibilities. Feminist reading subverts a text by interrogating and breaking it; it creates a fissure of political space where woman can insert her experience and regain her subjectivity. Woman refuses to be subsumed by man or merely replace him.

For Levinas in his discussion of the 'other,' the other remains to be external to the 'subject.'[22] The subject "is in itself outside the subject."[23] In his ethics, we cannot start from the subject or else we revert back to the 'ego' or the 'same.' Thus, we need to start from the other, not the subject. The 'other' always provokes the subject. In this way, the subject is redefined or 'conscientized' by the other. The other that comes from outside incessantly awakens the subject. There is a primacy of responsibility of the subject to the other. "This is the subject irreplaceable for the responsibility there assigned to him, and who therein discovers a new identity."[24] The subject cannot grasp the other for it slips away. The Syrophoenician woman remains to be external, to be other, to the man

[22]Arguably, Levinas' terminology has an androcentric bias. His notion of 'other' is susceptible to a male-privileged interpretation. See, Luce Irigaray, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas: On the Divinity of Love," Margareth Whitford, trans., in *Re-Reading Levinas*, Robert Bernascoli & Simon Critchley, eds., Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, 109-118.

[23]Emmanuel Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, Michael B. Smith, trans., California: Stanford University Press, 1994, 151-8.

[24]Emmanuel Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Bettina Bergo, trans., California: Stanford University Press, 1998, 73.

Jesus. He could not take hold of her or dissolve her 'alterity,' even by his disciples. This is the first sense of 'other.'

The second sense is taken from Foucault, following Nietzsche.[25] 'Other' means the reinvention or remaking of self or subjectivity. The self or subjectivity is a discursive effect, placed within power relations. The power relations that exist between the same and the other are strategically situated to each other. There are always forms of ongoing resistance, not mere blind obedience in power relations. "It means that we always have possibilities, there are always possibilities of changing the situation."[26] Consequently, the subject can locally resist some forms of fixation, stabilization or definition. Since we are placed in power relations, we can always struggle or resist any discursive constitution. Thus, the other can resist the same and recreate itself. Our own subjectivity is not something determined by nature or fixed by socialization. Though it is discursively constituted, it is not determined. It can be altered, subverted or recreated, if we will.

The third sense of 'other' is the 'otherness' of God. This sort of otherness is best captured by a tension between 'alteration' and 'alterity' of God. However, alteration precedes alterity. In her book, *A History of God*, K. Armstrong concludes that "our personal deity, who because of 'his' gender, has been a male since tribal, pagan days."[27] Since our 'God' has been discursively constituted as a patriarch, we cannot logically begin with this patriarchal notion of 'God'. We need a major surgical operation, so to speak, in order that this God can be reinstalled. Thus, we need to subject this God into a deconstructive critique, not to purify it, but rather to open its possibilities. As K. Bloomquist titles her essay: "Let God be God."[28] We can therefore 'depatriarchalized' God and reconstruct God. Second, one needs to retain God's alterity. God should remain 'beyond being.' The reason is that one should always be wary of the inadequate symbol or language that we use to name or conceptualize this 'unnamable' and mysterious God. Furthermore, this transfigured God should always call one

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[25]Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Thomas Common, trans. & Nicholas Davey, intro., Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1997.

[26]Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth; Essential Works of Foucault*, 1954-1984, vol. 1, Paul Rabinow, ed., New York: New Press, 1997, 167.

[27]Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1993, 454.

[28]Karen Bloomquist, "'Let God Be God'": The Theological Necessity of Depatriarchalizing God," in *Our Naming of God: Problems and Prospects of God-Talk Today*, Carl E. Baaten, ed., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989, 45.

to responsibility for the other. As Levinas puts it, God "wakes thought up."[29] Thus, "the idea of God causes the breakup of the thinking."[30] This God will always question the subject in her/his responsibility for the misery suffered by woman as the other. "The Word of God in that misery committing him to a responsibility impossible to gainsay."[31]

Furthermore, in these three senses of 'other,' one should note that in history, these three senses of the other have been applied differently to woman and to man using the logic of binary opposition. This would mean that historically, woman has been identified with the inferior parts of humanity such as immanence, carnality and sensuality, having negative connotations, while God has been identified with transcendence, infinity, absoluteness, having positive implications. Man partakes of both qualities because he possesses both form and matter, intellect and passion and transcendence and immanence. However, behind this privileged place of a man is a deep-seated fear. This fear is a disavowal of his other 'nature' but, at the same time, an incapacity to escape from and live without.[32] As far as man is concerned, the 'other' usually represents some part of man that he needs "to repudiate, vilify and reject as a condition of consciousness itself."[33] Woman's difference to man is that she has accepted her carnality, sensuality and embodiment but struggled for her recognition, profession and transcendence; while man repudiates his body, passion and immanence by capitalizing his privileged position in a patriarchal world.

4. Interruption of the Woman

> But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." (Mark 7, 28 NRSV)
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> She said, "Yes, Lord yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (Matthew 15, 27 NRSV)

At first glance, the difference between the two versions seems to be negligible. But upon close scrutiny, it reveals an empowering difference that can transform the world. Both verses identify the interlocutor of Jesus

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[29]Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 66.

[30]Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 63.

[31]Levinas, *Outside the Subject*, 158.

[32]Paula Cooey, "Emptiness, Otherness, and Identity: A Feminist Perspective," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6, 1990, 11.

[33]Mary Condren, "The Theology of Sacrifice and the Non-Ordination of Women," *Concilium: The Non-Ordination of Women and the Politics of Power*, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Herman Haring, eds., London: SMC Press & New York: Orbis Books, 1999, 55.

as an outsider woman. The woman "represents the biblical-theological voice of women, which has been excluded, repressed or marginalized in Christian discourse."[34] The introductory word 'but' spells out the crucial difference between the two verses. This 'but' signifies an interruption or discontinuity to the 'malestream' theological argument of Jesus.[35] The action of the woman is derived from her daughter's situation that pushes her to argue with Jesus and such action opens the condition of possibility for the woman's voice. Looking at the woman, she is able to argue with Jesus because of her need. This need is an experience that she perceives and feels to be urgent. It is the life of her daughter that is at stake. Thus, the Markan 'but' makes a significant twist not only from a rhetorical viewpoint, but also from a political standpoint. By introducing the sentence with a 'but,' the horizon is opened up to the woman empowering her to bring out what she needs (daughter's sickness), what she feels (Jesus' bias), what she thinks (her insistence) towards Jesus. In a society marked by silencing of female voices, the argument must have been an experience of breaking the deadening silence that has imprisoned her in society that eventually releases her power and liberates her subjectivity. The 'but' enables her marginal voice to be inserted into the ubiquitous patriarchal world. Thus, the 'but' creates cracks or fissures where a space is created in positioning herself vis-à-vis the preaching mission of Jesus.

There are two utterances of 'buts' in the history of feminist movement. Considering women's historical position, in its early stage, feminist critique has primarily revolved around 'denunciation' of patriarchy. This is understandable since the 'consciousness-raising' method of feminism has awakened them from this appalling victimization and distressing subordination in society and church specifically addressed to men who are the visible representatives of patriarchy. This emerging feminist consciousness paves the way for ventilating women's discontents and grievances by denouncing the master plot of men that has historically marginalized and excluded them. They hurl their strong criticism against the pernicious 'universal claim' of patriarchal discourse since it only favours half of the population that speaks on behalf of humanity. This master plot has become the privileged 'normative discourse.' Thus, history is told only according to men's perspective discounting women's participation.

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[34]Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, 11.

[35]Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 11-3.

As it develops further, feminist discourse shift from denunciation to 'annunciation' of women's differences and experiences. This annunciation provides women the affirmation and representation of their subjectivities creating possibilities that can advance their potentiality and agency. Though the ideology critique of patriarchy is, no doubt, of significance, feminists have realized that they need to refocus their efforts in articulating their own worldview transcending the combative tendency of denunciation. Women need not only denounce men, but also reconstruct women, as E. Schüssler Fiorenza suggests.[36] This transcendence should not give us the impression that they have given up critique; rather they have shifted the focus of their effort. Moreover, critique and affirmation should not be taken separately but they should be interwoven together so that feminism can become more effective and intense in transforming society and church.

5. Feminist Schism on Reconstruction

The effort at reconstructing the self and subjectivity has created an internal division among feminist theologians. The 'but' has opened the gates of criticism against patriarchy so that it will no longer revert back to patriarchy but rather the landscape of theology should be transformed by the dent of feminist provocation. For feminists, the 'but' has elicited two possibilities which can be labelled as Christian (also called reformist) feminists and post-Christian (also called revolutionary) feminists. In the first category, we can name R. Ruether, and E. Schüssler Fiorenza, while in the second category, we can identify C. Christ and D. Hampson. The basic disagreement between these two groups is the problematic status of tradition. Christian feminists remain to work within Judeo-Christian tradition by filtering out the patriarchy and retrieving prophecy in tradition. However, they do not just rely on official tradition, but they widen their horizon because they too admit the limitations imposed by tradition. R. Ruether and E. Schüssler Fiorenza have exemplified this attempt in ideology critique of patriarchal or kyriarchal tradition. They work from within Christianity and try to reform this tradition. On the contrary, the post-Christian feminists break from tradition because for them tradition is irredeemably patriarchal. Thus the only way out left is an exodus from the church.

Christian feminists like E. Schüssler Fiorenza and R. Ruether insist on returning to Christian origins. They still consider Christianity as

[36]Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 105.

potentially liberating. By reading critically on the texts of Christian Scriptures, E. Schüssler Fiorenza locates women from the Jesus movement in early Christianity who are visibly marginalized or excluded. These marginalized or excluded women are surfaced and resuscitated from the texts and history and are provided a rhetorical space to interrogate the texts. By interrogating the texts, she created or widened the space for women. This space will allow feminists to reclaim the '*ekklesia* of women.' R. Ruether looks for materials beyond the limits of Judeo-Christian traditions and discovers the many potential resources for feminists in reconstructing history of women. Both E. Schüssler Fiorenza and R. Ruether are convinced that by critically rereading history and tradition, they can redeem the erasure of women. Moreover, Christian feminists emphasize the prophetic message of the reign of God which the prophets and Jesus preached and announced to the world. The message of the reign of God clearly sides with the poor and the oppressed people. Patriarchy or kyriarchy circumvent the *kerygma* of the reign of God; it is definitely anti-reign of God which must be criticized and abrogated at the roots.

Both E. Schüssler Fiorenza and R. Ruether operate within the logic of an eventual forming of a meta-narrative of women as evident in their words such as 'fullness' or 'totality' or 'wholeness.' They "assert a universal and common essence that somehow defined women as women, and that laid the basis for feminist solidarity as well as providing the content for feminist reflection."[37] First, E. Schüssler Fiorenza and R. Ruether operate within the discourse of ideology critique, pointing out to an overarching ideology of kyriarchy or patriarchy. Second, the fundamental framework of the reign of God in liberation theology encompasses the whole of humanity. Liberation theology brings to view the struggle for liberation of people from all forms of evils, including patriarchy. Liberation is realized primarily in the equality of human beings, not in their irreducible differences.[38] In a way, their thinking remains to be a utopia which is always a negation of patriarchy. A negative feminist critical theory of religion must resist premature reconciliation

[37]Rebecca S. Chopp, "Theorizing Feminist Theology" in *Horizon in Feminist Theology, Identity, Tradition and Norms*, Rebecca Chopp and Sheila Greeve Daveney, eds., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, 217.

[38]Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid, "On Wearing Skirts without Underwear: 'Indecent Theology Challenging the Liberation Theology of the Pueblo,' Poor Women Contesting Christ," *Feminist Theology* 20, 1999, 42.

with any aspect of present reality. In the absence of a complete transformation of society and humanity, reconciliation can be nothing more than accommodation or assimilation.[39]

Moreover, they accept the relevance of metaphoric language for this 'unnamable' and 'ineffable' God of history in solidarity with the poor and oppressed in history. As explained by S. McFague, metaphor is like a whisper, "it is and it is not."[40] This 'it is' is explicit (like saying God is a Mother), while, 'it is not' is implicit (like saying God is not a Mother). This understanding indicates that this God is inclusive of both female and male metaphors that can be used to refer to God. In this way, female and male metaphors can coexist in God.[41]

D. Hampson understands Judaism and Christianity with reference to a 'history' which reflects a patriarchal worldview.[42] This worldview is deeply entrenched into these religions that they are irremediably hopeless. Like D. Hampson, C. Christ considers patriarchy as deeply rooted in Christianity. However, she goes beyond that by indicting this patriarchal God. For her, this patriarchal God should be made accountable for the exclusion of women in history and tradition.[43] According to D. Hampson, feminism is a 'revolution' to distinguish it from 'reform,' implicitly referring to reformist feminists (such as R. Ruether and E. Schüssler Fiorenza). The logical move of revolution is to break from these patriarchal religions.[44] This break is compelled by women's realization of their exclusion from these traditions and therefore post-Christians have to devise ways and means in order to compensate for their frustration and deprivation.

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[39]Marsha Aileen Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion: A Feminist Analysis*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 227-8.

[40]McFague, *Metaphorical Theology*, 13.

[41]This use of female and male metaphors for God would, however, in a way, re-inscribe sexual dualism that can lead to subordination of woman. The reason is that 'metaphorical language' implies its opposite, 'literal language.' This would mean that we can demarcate the line where literal meaning ends, and where metaphor begins, and vice versa. As far as it is used, the literal would mean an 'ostensive' meaning of a word. However, this is contrary to the idea that meaning of a word is 'polysemic.' People can mean different things to the same word depending upon their experiences. In short, it is difficult to establish the difference between 'literal' and 'metaphorical' level of linguistic use.

[42]Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, 1.

[43]Carol P. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess*, New York: Harper San Francisco, 1987, 3, 12.

[44]Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 2.

In order to be free from this patriarchal religion, P. Christ breaks from what she perceives as patriarchal tradition and explores her personal experience in search for God. She realizes that breaking from tradition is a struggle of inventing new language based on her personal experiences.[45] The Goddess religion provides a relief and hope for her recovery from the death of God. Moreover, D. Hampson also points out the irreducible differences of women from men and from among women themselves. These differences should be given space and be allowed to flourish. In this understanding, feminism is a different way of viewing the world.[46] In the absence of a religion, women are free to experiment and to explore the world in its variety and diversity. They have to create symbols of their own making, without any tradition or history that takes control of their imaginative innovations. This can be accomplished by creating different thought patterns that express women's understanding of God and humanity. There is no idea of a vision of 'fullness,' totality or 'wholeness' as R. Ruether and E. Schüssler Fiorenza insist, but only about women emerging into their own way of viewing the world using their personal experiences.

This thealogy (with the Goddess) has been heavily criticized by R. Ruether and E. Schüssler Fiorenza. According to them, these post-Christian feminists merely replace the patriarchal God with the matriarchal Goddess, which would therefore uncritically re-inscribe binary worldview prevalent in patriarchy. C. Christ argues, however, that "women, who have been deprived of a female religious symbol systems for centuries are therefore in an excellent position to recognize the power and primacy of symbols."[47] R. Ruether argues that the tradition of Mother Goddess religion is not 'completely 'feminist,' but "more or less androcentric."[48] Hence, she warns that this Goddess religion in history has been a patriarchal construct that serves men's own needs. C. Christ counters that "though this is true for the Goddess traditions, like Jewish and Christian traditions in the Near East and ancient Mediterranean world that R.

[45]Carol P. Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite*, xii.

[46]Daphne Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 2.

[47]Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess: Phenomenological, Psychological, and Political Reflections," in *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., New York: Harper San Francisco, 1979, 279.

[48]Rosemary Radford Ruether, *WomanGuides: Readings towards a Feminist Theology*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, xvi.

Ruether continually cites, it is unlikely that this was true of the prehistoric Goddess traditions of these same areas."[49] E. Schüssler Fiorenza comments that this thealogy "too quickly concedes that women have no authentic history within biblical tradition."[50] However, D. Hampson points that "the core symbolism of Christianity is masculine."[51] On the contrary, E. Schüssler Fiorenza believes that there are still potential materials found in Christianity by reconstructing its origins. D. Hampson points out that "there is considerable evidence that greater equality prevailed between women and men in the cult of some ancient polytheistic communities."[52]

6. Appeal to Men

In a roundtable discussion on the topic: *The Influence of Feminist Theory on My Theological Work*, a consensus has emerged among male theologians that patriarchy has crept into the foundation of theology in "its very way of doing theology."[53] Realizing that, we also need to re-think the way theology is done and constructed. Feminist theology is not just something added to theology, but it is something critical to theology because of its critical component. According to David Tracy, feminist theology is "the intellectual conscience of all Christian theology in our period." [54] However, instead of heeding to the appeal of the feminists, the institutional church has resented it because it is seen as "disruptive and upsetting."[55] The church should always be open to 'signs of the times' in order to change for the better.

Patriarchy is defined not only as a rule of men, but also as a masculine worldview. This worldview is imbibed by women and men alike, who, consciously or unconsciously, maintain and reproduce it. Women who become conscious of their subordination usually feel outraged to men and men who are sympathetic to women in turn feel

[49]Christ, *Laughter of Aphrodite*, 15.

[50]Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xviii-xix.

[51]Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 109.

[52]Hampson, *Theology and Feminism*, 35.

[53]Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Roundtable Discussion: The Influence of Feminist Theory on My Theological Work," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, 1991, 95.

[54]David Tracy, "Roundtable Discussion: The Influence of Feminist Theory in My Theological Work," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, 1991, 124-5.

[55]John C. Cobb, Jr., "Roundtable Discussion: The Influence of Feminist Theory in My Theological Work," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7, 1991, 109.

guilty of it. However, we have to be aware that patriarchy can assume many forms that are, in many ways, invisible. There are monsters which can oppress and exclude many women. The appeal is therefore addressed to many men and few women who, in one way or the other, and, in varying degrees, continue and perpetuate the evils of patriarchy. There is a need for consciousness-raising of both women and men in getting rid of these evils that victimize women. This conscientization requires not just translating a text to a non-sexist and inclusive language, but also changing our consciousness, making it more respectful and affirmative of differences. Consciousness-raising should also be accompanied and supported by changes of many social structures that support and reproduce it. Patriarchy is not only found in our speech, but it is ingrained in our very social structure. Hence, language and social structure should be changed together. "Structural change and linguistic change go hand-in-hand."[56] The 'personal is political' is a rallying political discourse of feminists who would like to include the personal aspect which has been almost politically rendered 'invisible.' This personal is affected by or connected to the socio-cultural and geo-political domain of our lives.

As far as our Christian tradition is concerned, feminist provocation is not something tangential or peripheral to theology, rather it affects the fundamentals of theology. Feminism challenges our own ideas about God, cosmos, humanity, relationship, which have been "male-oriented and male-shaped by a patriarchal culture."[57] These ideas have resulted in a distorted understanding of the nature of God and cosmos and humanity and our relationship to God, cosmos and humanity. Feminist discourse is a cogently compelling and uncompromising one that cannot be ignored or evaded by any person who is committed to justice issues, for feminism exposes the injustices suffered by women and by children who depend on their mothers. Hopefully, our patriarchal ideas of God, cosmos and humanity will slowly erode in order that an androgynous and egalitarian understanding of theology will eventually emerge. The appeal of the other does not only happen to Jesus and his disciples, rather to each one of us who follow Jesus in our own way. Like Jesus and his disciples, in many ways, we may have tried to ignore or silence the appeal of the other in our society and church. When I speak of 'we,' I mean those of us whether men

[56]Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, New York: Crossroad, 1992, 40.

[57]Anne McGrew Bennet, "A Feminist Critique of Theology," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 4, 1988, 96.

or women, who have been accustomed to an patriarchal worldview, that privileges a masculine way of thinking and acting. I would like to underscore both 'thinking' and 'acting' in our discussion because there is always a tendency, which we have inherited from western civilization, a bipolar opposition of thinking from acting. Thinking and acting are inseparably linked together. As we begin to think and reflect our ways, may we also change along our actions and our social structures. Feminist discourses in history generate new ways of constituting and reconstituting our worldview.

7. Conclusion

We have shown the feminist struggle against the well-entrenched patriarchy in society. Just like the Syrophoenicean woman, feminists have advanced the struggle of women by wrestling with patriarchy. The woman in her own way was able to hurdle the hindrance by arguing with Jesus who was eventually convinced of the urgency of her need. In this instance, feminists have to struggle from within patriarchy by engaging with men who have been socialized and formed within patriarchal order. They have to present their struggle to men by persuading and convincing then of the merit of their case. Hopefully, men would heed and respond to their appeal. Moreover, feminist struggle is not just against patriarchy but also among women themselves. As we have seen, feminists have been divided on the status of tradition in Christian religion whether they would still adopt it like the Christian feminists did or should reject it like the post-Christian feminists. We have opted for the Christian approach by engaging with the tradition from within but, at the same time, would 'deconstruct' it by inserting and affirming women's experiences.

In this approach, we can adopt what L. Schneider calls 'tensive foundations' between what she calls 'skepticism of the metaphoric exemption' (all constructions are never descriptive of true divinity) and the 'affirmation of experiential confession' (embodied reality claims of women). In this tensive and dynamic confluence, divinity is viewed not as 'either/or' but rather 'both-and.'[58] She explains that in the differences of locations/positions of women, "feminist theologies most coherently support notions of the divine that are suitably open, suitably mobile, suitably multiple."[59] Furthermore, the constructions of divinity remain to

[58]Laurel C. Schneider, *Re-Imaging the Divine: Confronting the Backlash against Feminist Theology*, Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1998, 19.

[59]Laurel C. Schneider, *Re-Imaging the Divine*, 19.

be ongoing and unfinished. Hence, at this time of explorations and experimentations, the making of rules of the game can be counterproductive to women because rules set a normative limitation that may constrain the emergence of other diverse and creative possibilities of naming the 'divine power.' "The trick is to keep the two forms of description on dialogue within a system of checks and balances so that one is never privileged at the expense of the other."[60]

We have to accept that the tension between Christian and post-Christian feminists is inevitable in the emergence of feminist theology. Considering the various contexts where women are socially located, tension will emerge. This tension bears witness to both the power of differences among women in their experiences of God and of Christ. These women's experiences generate and regenerate other feminist images of God and Christ. They also demonstrate the power of imagination in constructing and reconstructing metaphors in advancing the well-being of women.[61] The tension will probably continue, and its synthesis may never arrive. Yet, the future is always full of possibilities for women. R. Ruether still expects for a Hegelian synthesis in the future that can accommodate both positions.[62] Contrary to R. Ruether, we may expect more proliferation of symbols. The significant moment is that women "know God through communal practices, through physical experiences, through the soaring imaginings of the mind."[63]

The commonality between Christian and post-Christian feminist theologians is the shared conviction that experiences of women throughout history has been debased or denigrated. Thus, feminists are united in the conviction that women have been victimized and dehumanized by patriarchy. Furthermore, they admit the relevance of women's experiences as a resource for doing feminist theology. Thus, the inclusion of women's experiences in theologizing is a way of doing feminist theology. Moreover, they also agree that they need to subvert this patriarchal tradition or history

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[60]Morny Joy, "God and Gender: Some Reflections on Women's Invocations of the Divine" in *Religion and Gender*, Ursula King, ed., Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995, 138.

[61]Heyward, *Saving Jesus*, 15-16.

[62]Ruether, *Disputed Question*, 140.

[63]Rebecca Chopp, "Eve's Knowing: Feminist Theology's Resistance to Malestream Epistemological Frameworks," *Concilium: Feminist Theology in Different Context*, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and M. Shawn Copeland, eds., London: SMC Press & Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996, 122.

that they have inherited from the Judeo-Christian traditions by offering some subversive texts from feminist perspectives. Feminist reading is a way of subversion because feminists can insert or inject their experiences into the texts. Feminist reading is experience-based narrative which can falsify the dominant masculine reading because feminists 'demystify' any assumed 'universal claim.' In fact, it is not a universal claim at all because it excludes other narratives – the narratives of women's experiences. Furthermore, feminist reading is also 'deconstructive' because it criticizes the 'malestream' discourses and, at the same time, 'reconstructive' because it affirms the potential agency of women.

After laying their respective positions, we may ask: Can we claim a complete break from tradition? When we look at the works of D. Hampson and P. Christ, they are committed to a radical critique of patriarchy found in the Judeo-Christian traditions. From this critique, they advance their alternative proposal of Goddess religion derived from their personal experiences. This is captured by the metaphor of 'weaving' and 'reweaving' their experiences. They emphasize the weaver and weaving because they are concerned with the 'agency' of women; agency involves an action of doing and acting, or to put it differently, in making a difference; and, at the same time, woman is involved or engaged in the act of weaving and in making a new world. Hence, both person and action are implicated in the imagery of weaving. However, we have to note that the metaphor of weaving has also a patriarchal history. The metaphor of weaving implicates the 'thread' in making a fabric. The thread refers to the materials used in weaving a cloth. During the industrial revolution, the thread is manufactured by the machine in a factory which is dominated by work force of men. In this case, the father is involved in the production of the thread that women use in weaving a fabric. There is a division of labour between men and women in the production of a cloth. However, such division does not necessarily mean that there is equality and partnership in their labour. Thus, there is a need for a thoroughgoing criticism of patriarchy so that it will be eventually neutralized.