THE PERSONAL IS THE THEOLOGICAL: ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER'S PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AS SOCIAL CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

THE PERSONAL IS THE THEOLOGICAL: ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER'S PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AS SOCIAL CRITIQUE

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Rosemary Radford Ruether is one of the most well-known and influential Christian feminist theologians, having emerged in the early 1970s as a leader in Catholic feminist theology. Ruether produced the first systematic theology based on women's experience, that is, a feminist treatment of the Christian symbols, in her classic, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, published in 1983. To label Ruether strictly as a feminist theologian, however, is to risk overlooking the broad scope of her interests and her work. This dissertation argues that while Ruether is one of the most widely read feminist theologians and a deservedly recognized pioneer in the field, she is far more than a feminist theologian.

It is the contention here that Ruether's feminism emerges out of her much broader interests and experiences. That is, feminism did not, and still does not, come first in either priority or sequence for Ruether. The broader concern for her out of which she writes in a wide variety of areas is liberation from "a world system of oppression." Thus, this dissertation presents Ruether as a liberation theologian. This dissertation argues that

Ruether has developed her theologies – liberation theology, feminist theology, her Christology, and her ecclesiology – from her personal encounters, her own life's experiences; thus for Ruether, the personal becomes the theological. Her passion for justice and human rights and her lifelong involvement in varieties of social activism that resulted from that passion, led her to develop a wide-ranging theology of liberation.

In her social involvements and her writings, she has sought to probe a world system of oppression, divided by race, class, gender, ecological abuse, and imperialism. In each of these diverse areas, she has sought to probe the justifying ideologies and to imagine how to create a liberated world beyond. This is what ties all her thought and writings together.

Three of the areas of her work are presented in this dissertation: Christian anti-Semitism, ecofeminism and the ecological crisis, and reform of the Catholic Church. This dissertation ends with a brief discussion of how, in spite of her criticism of the Catholic Church, Ruether continues to self-identify as Catholic.

Dedicated to Rosemary Radford Ruether
for her Christian witness, her scholarship, and
her passion for justice and liberation of the oppressed

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INTRODUCTION

Rosemary Radford Ruether has been for several decades one of the most well-known and influential Christian feminist theologians, having emerged in the early 1970s as a leader in Catholic feminist theology. As Michael Novak observed early in her career, "Her vision is complex and rich. She sets before us an image of a society we ought to struggle to achieve, a society in which we may live out the ancient promise that 'In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female' (Galatians 3:28)."[1]

To label Ruether strictly as a feminist theologian, however, is to risk overlooking the broad scope of her interests and her work. This dissertation intends to show that while Ruether is one of the most widely read feminist theologians and a deservedly recognized pioneer in the field, she is far more than a feminist theologian. It is the contention here that Ruether's feminism emerges out of her much broader interests and experiences and concerns; that is, feminism did not, and still does not, come first in either priority or sequence for Ruether. In truth, her feminist theology is grounded in her civil rights work in the Mississippi Delta in the mid-1960s and in the Latin American tradition of liberation theology to which she was introduced in the early 1970s. Her early experiences in the civil rights movement and then in living in a predominately Black neighborhood in Washington, D.C. when she taught at Howard University were very

[1] Michael Novak, "The Women's Experience and Perspective," in *American Religious Values and the Future of America,* ed. Roger van Allen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 134.

formative in grounding her understanding of feminist theology as situated in the analysis of an interconnection among class, race, and gender. Following her experience with the civil rights movement in the South, it was from her passion for justice and human rights that her liberationist vision developed. Through the years, her liberationist vision drove her writings in an ever widening variety of areas. Ruether has said that the working assumption of much of her work has been that liberation theology is multidimensional and needs to be looked at across a wide range of diverse contexts.[2]

The broader concern out of which Ruether writes in a wide variety of areas is liberation from what she calls "a world system of oppression." Her feminist theology is the consequence of her broader view of the ethical and social implications of the Christian gospel, and this worldview is especially rooted in her personal experience and praxis. In Ruether's own words,

> My intellectual questions and research have never been thoroughly theoretical. I have in every case dealt with existential questions about how I was to situate my life, my identity, my commitments. I have never taken up an intellectual issue which did not have direct connections with clarifying and resolving questions about my personal existence, about how I should align my existence with others, ideologically and socially.[3]

Ruether's theology is thus primarily a more practical or praxis theology as distinct from a more philosophical or theoretical theology. In this dissertation I argue that she has developed her theologies – liberation theology, feminist theology, her Christology, and her ecclesiology – primarily from her own experiences and from her personal encounters with the experiences of others.

Thus, for Ruether, the personal becomes the theological. To label Ruether

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[2] Rosemary Radford Ruether, in *Transforming the Faiths of Our Fathers*, ed. Ann Braude (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 77.

[3] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Asking the Existential Questions," in *Theologies in Transition*, ed. James M. Wall (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 161.

strictly a feminist theologian and to interpret her solely in that light is certainly to slight the broad range of her writings and even to misinterpret her feminism. Her passion for justice and human rights and her lifelong involvement in varieties of social activism that resulted from that passion, led her to develop a wide-ranging theology of liberation of which feminism is an important but hardly the only or even the most central component. It was a theology of liberation derived from personal experience of faith that fundamentally drove Ruether and out of which she spoke and wrote about her concerns for sexism, racism, heterosexism, militarism, imperialism, and the ecological crisis.

Coming to intellectual awareness as a Roman Catholic lay woman in the 1960s, Ruether's attention was initially drawn to the Civil Rights Movement which began reshaping American society in that era and to the Vatican Council II which began simultaneously reshaping the Catholic Church. These two movements – the one questioning American society and the other questioning the Catholic Church – were the foundational double matrix in which her theology developed, and her experience of these two movements set her on her lifelong agenda. Her writings are therefore concerned regularly with the interconnection between theological ideas, subjective experience, and social practice.[4]

Beginning with racial justice and church reform, Ruether applied her essential method to the increasing range of matters that came into her vision and experience. In her subsequent writings Ruether has sought to probe a "world system of oppression" divided by race, class, gender, ecological abuse, and imperialism, as she has come to understand and interpret those interacting forces. This dissertation demonstrates how her

[4] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Development of My Theology" in "Rosemary Radford Ruether: Retrospective," *Religious Studies Review* 15 (January 1989): 1.

concern about systems of oppression ties all her writings together, in spite of the wide variety of areas in which she has written. I argue that Ruether's interests and writings, even those that are strictly feminist works, derive fundamentally from her liberationist concern for justice and human rights as well as from her reformist Catholic religious sensibility. I further argue that it is her personal and social experiences and encounters with social injustices and violations of human rights that give depth to these concerns; and I follow with examples that demonstrate how these personal and social experiences and encounters become interpreted into theological and religious terms that challenge existing norms. The contention here is that Ruether's liberationist vision, emerging out of her lived experiences and her reflections on these experiences, has resulted in a liberation theology that is a kind of "praxis theology."

Ruether has been criticized for boldly speaking out against some of the teachings of the Catholic Church. She has even been labeled "anti-Catholic" by some. This dissertation argues that here also, she is responding to her personal experiences, from which emerged her conflict and disagreement with many positions of the Church. Her theology is nevertheless well informed by her training in the social and intellectual history of Catholic Christianity. She grounds her theology in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and the major theological themes of the Christian tradition. Additionally, her background in classics and in early Christianity gave her the tools she needed to pursue her interests further. Ruether's critical norm is the prophetic tradition of the biblical faith, embodied in the Hebrew prophets as well as in Jesus' critique of the dominant systems of power and his vision for the coming of the kingdom of God. While she can be seen as a dissenting Catholic by some measures, her critique itself emerges from her own

knowledge and experience of the Catholic Christian tradition.

What unites all of Ruether's major thought and her writing is her probing and criticism of a "world system of oppression," a world divided by race, class, gender, ecological abuse, and imperialism as she has come to experience and to understand those interconnected forces. Ruether adds that in her writings and social involvements, she seeks to probe different aspects of this system and its justifying ideologies and then to imagine how to create a liberated world beyond.[5] In the following chapters attention will be given to demonstrating this concern and to showing how this concern ties together her thought and her writing.

This work begins with a brief intellectual biography of Ruther, with emphasis on how her family background and early educational experience set the framework within which her thinking and writing develop. It then provides an overview of Ruether's fundamental liberationist viewpoint as it underpinned her feminist theology. The subsequent chapters look at her application of this perspective in several particular areas: Jewish-Christian relations, the ecological crisis, and reform of the Catholic Church. I conclude by summarizing Ruether's work and its importance for current theology.

Chapter One, "Rosemary Ruether's Theological Pilgrimage: An Overview," presents a brief intellectual biography of Ruether to illustrate the course of her intellectual journey and how she arrived at her basic perspectives. Particular attention is given to her life's experiences and the people she encountered which influenced the development of her passion for social justice and human rights. The reader will see that her feminist theology only gradually emerged out of her liberationist vision which began

[5] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning, an Autobiography,* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 29.

with her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and her probing into the issue of anti-Semitism.

In order to set Ruether within the larger context of feminist theology, Chapter Two, "Ruether's Feminist Theology as Liberation Theology," begins with a brief history of early feminist movements, one beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and leading up to the passage of the 19th Amendment, followed by what became known as "second wave" feminism beginning in the 1960s, a movement which gradually moved into religious circles. Since American religious feminism was first dominated primarily by women from Protestant traditions, two Protestant feminists and their work are presented first. Following this background, Ruether is introduced as one of the first Catholic feminist theologians.

Chapter Three, "Ruether and Jewish – Christian Relations" discusses Ruether's engagement with Jewish Christian relations and her critique of anti-Semitism. She first became aware of the "Jewish question" when she was doing research for her bachelor's thesis on the development of eschatology in the intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature. This chapter will consider her historical research and conclusion that the origins of Christian anti-Semitism go back to the early church and the church's proclamation, "Jesus is Messiah." With her book *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*[6] as the primary resource, her biblical and theological arguments, as well as her more plainly political and social views rooted in her liberationist vision are discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion of the book *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* written with her

[6] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: the Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

husband Herman. It was when she and Herman made a trip to Israel and witnessed the situation of the Palestinians that her liberationist concerns turned to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Chapter Four, "World Systems of Oppression and the Destruction of Earth's Ecosystems," presents Ruether's thought and writing on ecology as a justice issue. Her argument that the domination of earth is metaphorically interconnected to the domination of women in patriarchal ideology is treated in a discussion of her ecofeminism, the connecting of ecology to feminism to show how women's use and abuse interfaces with the abuse of nature. To stress the broadening of her liberationist vision, emphasis is placed on her definition of ecology as referring to all of creation that is a part of the web of life, that is, all of nature: soil, air, water, plants, animals, and humans. Primary sources used for this chapter are Ruether's ground breaking book *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*[7] published in 1992 and her most broad-based contribution to this movement *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*,[8] published in 2005.

Chapter Five, "Ruether's Catholicism: Critiquing, Challenging, Staying," begins with a consideration of several of the factors which contributed to Ruether's critiquing and challenging her own religious tradition, Roman Catholicism. Highlighted are the influence of her mother in teaching her to be an independent thinker in relation to the teachings of Catholicism and her education, including studies of Greek and Roman cultures and religions that led to her interest in researching Christian origins. Noting that

[7] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992).

[8] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005).

her personal experiences and encounters with the Catholic Church were a driving force in her critiquing and challenging various teachings, attention is given to the grounding of her challenges in the teachings of the Old Testament prophets and the liberating words of Jesus.

Following a discussion of the five principles for a democratic church which Ruether advocated in a written work in 1992, is her proposal -when she became convinced the hierarchical Church would not change - of a variety of alternative Catholic communities outside the hierarchical church which she offered in her book *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican* in 2010. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of why Ruether remains a Catholic, and the strong impact her experience at Pilgrim Place in Claremont California, the community where she and her husband live in retirement, has on her well-being and the continual restoring of her faith.

The writings of Rosemary Radford Ruether, historian, theologian, and activist, span six decades. She has been driven throughout her life by a passion for justice and human rights and her strong desire to make a difference in the world. Thus, this dissertation argues that Ruether is first and foremost a liberation theologian. Her colleague Carter Heyward said of Ruether, "She has always been a liberation theologian, even before she/we were able to articulate clearly the language of 'liberation theology.'"[9] Ruether's liberationist vision, couched in her feminist perspective, has been a response to racism, anti-Semitism, economic exploitation, environmental destruction, and other forms of systematic violence. The venerable Gregory Baum notes in his 2017 autobiography that he learned to do a more radical analysis of social evil through his friendship with

[9] Carter Heyward, "Carter Heyward on Rosemary Radford Ruether: *America, Amerikkka* Panel (AAR San Diego, November 2007)," *Feminist Theology* vol. 17(2) (2009): 146.

Ruether, along with his study of Latin American liberation theology. Baum asserts that Ruether's 1974 book, *Liberation Theology*, "anticipates in brilliant fashion the theological movements of subsequent decades."[10] What makes Ruether stand out from the majority of feminist theologians is the broader concern out of which she has written in a very wide variety of areas, a concern to transform what she calls "world systems of oppression."

This dissertation is thus an overview and interpretation of Rosemary Radford Ruether's life and work. It does not attempt to cover every dimension of her work or influence, but does try to show how she does theology and why she has been, and continues to be, so important to her readers.

[10] Gregory Baum, *The Oil Has Not Run Dry: The Story of My Theological Pathway* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 77.

CHAPTER 1

ROSEMARY RUETHER'S THEOLOGICAL PILGRIMAGE: AN OVERVIEW

This chapter presents a brief intellectual biography of Ruether to explain the course of her intellectual journey and how she arrived at where she currently is. There is an emphasis on the particular people she encountered and her life's experiences that were key to the development of her passion for social justice and human rights. This foundational background is important for the reader to understand the development of Ruether's thought, her involvement in social issues, and her most important writings. In Ruether's own words, "I was shaped by my family, my social context, my educational experiences to raise the questions and issues that have characterized my thought."[1]

Early Beginnings of Ruether's Intellectual Development

The greatest influence in her younger, formative years was her mother, Rebecca Cresap Ord. Ruether describes her mother as "a devout Catholic, but of independent mind, with little trace of ecclesiastical subservience."[2] The unspoken message she gave to her three daughters was that Catholicism was a profound spiritual tradition that had nourished her, but what she saw as its rote and dogmatic demands could be ignored. Her

[1] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning, An Autobiography* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), xii.

[2] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography," in *Journeys: The Impact of Personal Experience on Religious Thought,* ed. Gregory Baum (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 35.

mother had little tolerance for what she saw as "ignorant superstition."[3]

Ruether describes her childhood environment as having been religiously ecumenical, humanist, and free-thinking even in its Catholic dimensions, as opposed to a parochial or "ghettoized" Catholicism. Her family included a Catholic mother, an Episcopalian father, and a Jewish favorite uncle, David Sandow, who was married to her father's sister. This uncle became in effect a surrogate father when Ruether's own father died. She describes her mother as "serious and free thinking in her spiritual life, in a way that suggested that there were both valuable and questionable aspects of Catholicism." Her father was Episcopalian of the twice a year variety. While her mother took Ruether and her two sisters to mass every Sunday and on holy days, she wasn't adverse to her attending church with her father on one of the few days he went.

Ruether felt unconditionally supported by her mother, affirmed that she could do anything she set her mind to. She offers this about affirmation from her mother:

> When I was a child she and I used to play a game at night in bed about what I should do when I grew up. Mother would canvas various professions (teacher, lawyer, doctor, etc.). I realized later that she never mentioned wife and mother. She assumed I would eventually marry, but only after college and travel.[4]

Ruether's father was present in her life only briefly. He left for Europe in World War II when she was four years old. At this time, the family was living in Washington, DC. He returned for a year in 1945-1946, but soon left to become head engineer for the American Mission for Aid in Greece where he was in charge of restoring the railroad system and clearing the Corinth Canal trashed by Nazis. Ruether, her sisters, and her

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[3] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning, 37.* Ruether adds that the implicit distinction her mother conveyed between a serious intellectual Catholic tradition worth cultivating and ignorant, superstitious fears that could be dismissed gave her a freedom to think for herself that would be invaluable throughout her life.

[4] Ibid., 1.

mother joined him in Greece in 1947-1948. But then her two sisters left for France and Switzerland to attend school accompanied by their mother, leaving Ruether alone with her father, when he suddenly became ill and died in October 1948. She was twelve years old at the time. While she had spent a limited amount of time with him during those twelve years, it was his death that would prove to have a powerful impact on her intellectual journey. At the time of his death she remembers feeling a strange detachment. "I was haunted by a vivid image of my father in his grave, sinking down into the earth. Both then and in subsequent brushes with death, I have experienced a strong sense of human mortality, the finitude of the individual self."[5]

In short, the impact of her father's death on her was profound. It initiated the beginning of her sense of human mortality and a new, revolutionary trajectory in her intellectual journey. She describes it as:

> The doctrine of the personal immortality of the soul slipped away from me as an idea without real roots in my own better intuitions. Nature clearly cared only for the species, not the individual. If there is meaning in ongoing human life, it must be sought somehow in solidarity with the race, with the earth, with the matrix that binds us all together.[6]

With this perception gradually taking shape in her mind, the critical discarding of the central doctrine of Catholic popular faith, she realized she had come to a new self-understanding which she describes as:

> I had crossed over from heteronomous to autonomous selfhood. Whatever else I made up my mind to believe in thereafter would be because I personally found it believable, not because 'the Church' taught it. Without knowing it I had also

[5] Ruether, "Beginnings," 39. Ruether adds that in college a passage she read from Homer's *Iliad* added to this sense of human mortality. She wrote these lines in her notebook as an expression of her own perception: As is the generation of leaves, so that of men. The wind scatters the leaves on the ground, but the live timber burgeons with leaves again in the season of spring returning. So one generation of men grows while another dies (*Iliad* 6, 145-150). She noted that religious visions of angelic souls flying off to heaven were a stark contrast with this vision of mortality and perpetuation only through the species, not the individual. But the latter seemed to her to ring of the truth that was preferable to "vain illusions."

[6] Ibid.

> detached the keystone of any relation to the traditional mode of Catholic authority.[7]

This detaching from any relation to the traditional mode of Catholic authority is key to understanding how Ruether, in spite of her expansive writings critiquing and challenging many teachings of the Catholic Church, at the age now of eighty, has remained a lifelong Catholic. On what grounds she still identifies as Catholic, what she finds of value in the Catholic tradition, will be addressed in Chapter Five.

A few years after the death of her father, Ruether's widowed mother moved the family to La Jolla, California when Ruether was in her mid-teens. For her mother, this was a return to where she had grown up and friends from the past. Her mother's close circle of women friends had an important impact on Ruether. Mostly single or widowed, they were involved in cultural activities and social concerns. One of the women, Helen Marston Beardsley, even though in her seventies, was very involved in peace and civil rights, demonstrating against nuclear testing and the Vietnam War. During the Nixon administration a list of people the president regarded as key enemies was leaked to the press, a list which also included names of progressives he saw as opponents. Helen's name was on the list! Ruether comments, "I still remember my mother and her female friends laughing and exclaiming, 'We are so proud of Helen. She made the enemies list!'"[8] On several occasions Helen invited Ruether to accompany her to antiwar and pro-farmworkers demonstrations, even once attending the trial of antiwar resisters in the military. Thus began not only her involvement in civil rights and justice issues while she was yet in her teens, but also her education and involvement in politics.

In addition to her family and her mother's circle of friends, her intellectual

[7] Ibid., 39-40.
[8] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 7.

development was strongly influenced by a series of charismatic adults. The first of these was a history teacher in the Catholic high school she attended in Washington, D.C. Immaculata was an all-girls school with a teaching staff and administration of nuns. Very boldly for a woman in the nineteen-fifties, particularly a nun, this teacher cultivated black friends and taught, by word and example, the evils of American racism. The influence of this teacher planted seeds of awareness of racial issues, although they were not to flower in Ruether for another decade.

Interest in Ancient History, Classical Antiquity, and Christian Roots

Ruether originally planned to major in fine arts at Scripps College with a possible career as an artist, but her interests shifted dramatically to ancient history and the world of classical antiquity through the influence of a very powerful teacher in history and the classics, Robert Palmer. In Freshman Humanities, a course that brought together history, literature, philosophy, religious studies, music, and art, Palmer hooked her on the classics and the study of Western civilization. He drew her into his group of select students whom he groomed to study the Greek and Latin classics. Studying with Palmer opened up a whole new world for Ruether, sending her off in an entirely different direction in pursuit of answers to the many questions that now arose for her as she studied the cultures of the ancient Greco-Roman world.[9] It was here that she began to "experience the excitement of understanding ideas, moving into the world of human cultural legacy for its own sake."

[9] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Robert Palmer: First the God, Then the Dance," *The Christian Century* 107, no. 5 (February 7-14, 1990): 125-126. Palmer loved the world of the ancient Greeks and Romans. For him this was still a living world into which one entered. He believed that to understand the culture of ancient Greece and Rome, one must enter the people's religious experiences. He didn't like Christianity much and thought it a shame it had "won." Triumphing over all the ancient Near Eastern religions, he referred to it as "a religion of death."

One example reveals what Ruether refers to as the "revolutionizing" impact Palmer had on her. To demonstrate his perspective on religion and culture, he used the phrase: First the god, then the dance, then the story. Religion begins in theophany, in revelation as religious experience. The god is really there in the theophany. The experience is re-created in liturgy and dance. The text of the story is third-hand derivative of the theophany and its liturgical expression. In Ruether's own words:

> This understanding of religious ideas rooted in theophany as real experience revolutionized my worldview and, with it, my interests. If story is the third-hand derivative of theophany, then surely dogma is even further removed, the dusty rationalizing of story. Yet behind these ever-fading reproductions lies a compelling and transforming encounter with the divine heart of reality. The task of religious studies is to lead us back to the theophany and open us up again to the experience. Religion suddenly became profoundly interesting to me and has remained so.[10]

Ruether became fascinated with the world of classical antiquity and, subsequently, with Christian origins in that world. Questioning how a "somewhat unlikely Jewish messianic movement of the first century had managed to conquer the ancient Mediterranean world and fall heir to all the going ideas [*sic*] of late Greco-Roman civilization,"[11] she then began to explore the intellectual and social history of late antiquity and patristic Christianity. These explorations resulted in the emergence of two interests: the quest for historical origins of religious beliefs and practices and the meaning of religious symbols. These two concerns would in one way or another shape much of her intellectual enthusiasm and inquiries from then on.

Ruether completed her undergraduate work at Scripps College in Claremont, California, graduating in 1958 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy and religion.

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[10] Ibid., 126.

[11] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Development of My Theology," in "Rosemary Radford Ruether: Retrospective," *Religious Studies Review* 15, no 1 (January 1989): 1.

Though Scripps was a women's college, the professors were all male except for three women, all of whom taught languages, including a woman whose PhD was in philosophy. For Ruether, this carried an implicit message that women were secondary teachers just as language was a secondary subject. Men taught ideas; women taught you how to read ideas in languages other than English.

In 1957, one year before her graduation from Scripps, she married Herman Ruether whom she describes as "another scholar who enjoyed getting lost in a library stack as much as I."[12] One year married and with a baby, Ruether nevertheless insisted on going on for graduate work. She received a Master of Arts degree in ancient history from Claremont College in 1960 and a PhD in classics and patristics in 1965 also from Claremont College. By the time she completed that degree, she had three children under the age of seven.

Influence of Civil Rights Movement and Vatican II

Coming to intellectual awareness as a Roman Catholic lay woman in the 1960s, Ruether's attention was initially drawn to the Civil Rights Movement which began reshaping American society in that era and then to the Second Vatican Council which began simultaneously reshaping the Catholic Church. These two movements – the one questioning American society and the other questioning the Catholic Church – were the foundational double matrix in which her theology developed; her experience of these movements set her on her lifelong agenda. Her writings are therefore concerned regularly with the interconnection between theological ideas, subjective experience, and social practice. [13]

[12] Ruether, "*Beginnings,"* 51.
[13] Ruether, "The Development of My Theology," 1.

As mentioned earlier, Ruether's mother's friend Helen Beardsley had introduced her to peace and civil rights demonstrations, and a teacher in her Catholic high school had taught, by word and example, the evils of American racism. So Ruether's becoming involved in the Civil Rights Movement was simply the continuation of her earlier ventures and experiences. The seeds had already been planted, but they now grew into a sturdy plant. The summer of 1965, leaving her three children in the care of her husband and her mother, she went to Mississippi to work with the Delta Ministry and volunteered with a statewide organization running a Head Start program for Black Mississippi preschoolers. This hands-on experience made her aware of the realities of racism and the struggle for justice in the African-American community.

Ruether continued her involvement with civil rights as she took a teaching position at the Howard University School of Religion, a predominantly African-American seminary in Washington, D.C. (1966-1976). Here she became involved in the peace movement, participating in countless marches and demonstrations, often spending time in jail with other activist Catholics and Protestants. Unlike many whites, she was not shocked nor threatened by Stokley Carmichael's proclaiming the need for "Black power." She saw the need for Blacks to affirm their own autonomy and organize their own power to take their place as equals in American society. Here too at Howard University she was exposed to the Black liberation theology that was just beginning to emerge. James Cone, a young Black theologian, presented a Black theology rooted in Black power and Black religious experience.[14] While her Black colleagues were uncomfortable with this militant language, Ruether found herself in the odd position of

[14] James Cone, *Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969); Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: Lippencott,1970).

introducing Black theology to her Black students at the Howard School of Religion and writing articles defending the appropriateness of Black theology.[15]

In the late 1960s and early1970s, Ruether became aware of racism and oppression as international or global systems, rooted in European colonialism. Groups around the world were beginning to seek their liberation.[16] In particular, the resistance to oppression in Latin America got her attention. There was a militancy to the movement in Central and South America, including even the involvement of some priests in wars of resistance. In 1968, the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) met at Medellin, Columbia, to examine the situation in Latin America in light of the documents and theology of Vatican II. The bishops were shocked at the extent of the socio-economic problems, the extreme poverty and inhumane conditions under which the people lived, naming it "institutionalized violence." Liberation from poverty and oppression became central in the vision of the Catholic Church, especially in Latin America.[17] Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian theologian and Roman Catholic priest, began writing a Latin American theology of liberation.[18] Increasingly concerned with the Latin American situation, Ruether read part of Gutiérrez's book in 1970 before it was translated into English in 1973.

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[15] See, for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Black Theology and the Black Church," *America* (June 14, 1969). "Black and White Power Subreption" (Review of J.R. Washington), *National Catholic Reporter* 129, no 24 (January 1970); "Education in Tandem: White Liberal, Black Militant," *America* (May 30, 1970).

[16] In addition to the Black Civil Rights Movement in the United States, there were the Chicano Movement in the 1960s and early 70s and the American Indian Movement organized in 1968. Both addressed issues of oppression and human rights. More global were the Women's Liberation Movement which was gaining momentum in the mid- to late 60s and the LGBT Rights and Liberation Movement with "Gay Lib" groups formed in numerous European countries as well as the United States. Additionally, colonized nations around the world were striving for liberation, such as the Prague Spring that took place in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

[17] Following the CELAM gathering in 1975 in Pueblo, the Latin American bishops met again in Santo Domingo in 1992. The Vatican now began to interfere, rejecting the working document of the bishops. While another document was hurriedly written by the Latin American bishops and then watered down by the Vatican before final approval, the spirit of Medellin's preferential option for the poor did survive.

[18] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973).

At this same time, as her Latin American interests indicated, the waves of renewal and the changes that began to take place in the Roman Catholic Church as a result of Vatican II were critical in Ruether's further development at this stage in her life. After the Council, the Church became engaged in intense self-questioning. For Ruether, this made Catholicism a more open community within which she could contribute her insights. She was between the ages of 23 and 32 during the 1960s, the period of the Council and its immediate aftermath. Ruether states that this critical period of her adult identity "coalesced both with the decade of Catholic renewal and the decade of American social crisis." Further, she acknowledges, "If I had been born ten years earlier, I might well stand in a different place today."[19]

Thus, by the 1970s, Reuther was not only involved in the issues of racism and social justice, but also with the Church's being more open to self-questioning and revising its identity as a result of Vatican II, she began to speak and to write more about what she considered issues in the Church and the need for Church reform. Her first published book, *The Church Against Itself,* is a collection of essays in the theological tradition of dialectical theology in which she critiqued what she saw as the Church's self-delusion of triumphalist ecclesiology.[20] She argued that the Church confuses its historical existence with its divine essence and must be stripped of this mythology if it is to maintain the tradition through which the gospel was first proclaimed and to be truly apostolic.

[19] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Asking the Existential Questions," in *Theologians in Transition,* ed. James M. Wall (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 164.

[20] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Church Against Itself: An Inquiry into the Conditions of Historical Existence for the Eschatological Community* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967).

Ruether also began to criticize some aspects of Catholic sexual ethics. In 1964, she had written a brief article defending her own use of birth control. It was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* as *"*Why I Believe in Birth Control: A Catholic Mother Speaks Out,"[21] and reprinted in the *Reader's Digest.* Ruether explains that while she arranged to use the birth control pill after her third child was born she had not thought of becoming a crusader on the subject. However, this changed when she was in the hospital giving birth to her youngest child. In the bed next to her was a Mexican woman who had just given birth to a ninth child with complications in the delivery. Her doctor insisted that she must start using birth control; she might die if she had another child. The woman cried, saying that her husband and her priest would not allow this. She also revealed that she lived in a cold crowded home and had to turn on the stove (which had a gas leak) to keep the house warm.[22] Witnessing this exchange and response, Ruether became outraged. She realized birth control was not her private issue. She wrote several other articles on birth control and sexuality in the mid-1960s and soon found herself joining many other lay Catholics campaigning to change the Church's teaching on this issue.[23]

In the mid- to late sixties, feminism was exploding as a movement. Betty Friedan was a key player in instigating this movement with the publication of her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963.[24] Friedan subsequently helped found NOW, The National

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[21] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "A Catholic Mother Tells 'Why I Believe in Birth Control,''' *The Saturday Evening Post*, vol. 237, no. 13 (April 4, 1964): 12-14.

[22] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 117.

[23] See, for example, Rosemary Radford Ruether, "A Question of Dignity, a Question of Freedom," in *What Modern Catholics Think of Birth Control,* ed. William Birmingham (New York: New American Library, 1964), 233-240. "The Difficult Decision: Contraception," in *The Experience of Marriage: The Testimony of Catholic Laymen*, ed. Michael Novak (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 69-81. "Birth Control and the Ideals of Marital Sexuality," in *Contraception and Holiness*, ed. Gregory Baum (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 72-91.

[24] Betty Friedan, *Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963).

Organization for Women, in October 1966, and became its first president.

Meanwhile, Ruether had begun to engage in theological reflection on the wider heritage of the Christian church in relation to women's questions. In 1971, influenced by the militant Black Power Movement which spoke out of Black anger, she produced her first essay that was a product of this reflection titled: "Male Chauvinist Theology and the Anger of Women." During this period Ruether's image of God or the divine went through a process of change or perhaps clarification. Though she said she had never imaged God as an old man ruling from the skies, she now believed the divine was quite different than imagined in traditional theology, and "existed everywhere as a great nurturing and empowering energy that existed in and through all things, sustaining and renewing them."[25] Digging into her knowledge of church history to search for the roots of sexism in the church led to her researching further the patriarchal legacy of Christianity and the marginalization of women in the church. The deeply rooted patterns of asceticism and dualism in patristic and medieval Catholicism gained her attention. Pursuing the issue of dualism of mind and body, an entirely new area of interest opened up to her that, together with her existing interest in a theology of liberation, became foundational in many areas of her future research and writing.[26]

In the midst of her research on church history and the marginalization of women, Ruether came to the realization that patristic times were also the context of Christianity's

[25] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 18. While Ruether didn't envision the divine as human person, she did understand the divine to be more maternal than paternal. Ruether adds that the Great Mother or Holy Wisdom seemed the right title for the divine. "This was the divinity that I really experienced, could pray to, be in tune with and who represented the source of all that is. The matrix of who had nurtured and empowered me as I grew up is the experiential base for this vision of the Great Mother."

[26] Ruether maintains that problems are caused by a centuries-long tradition of dualistic thinking which results in a hierarchy of domination. Racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other forms of domination/oppression are the result of dualistic thinking. The impact of dualist thinking will be addressed in later chapters of this paper.

increasing alienation from Judaism. This had led to centuries of marginalization of Jews and to the anti-Semitism that culminated in Nazi genocide. Thus, she encountered what would become another area of concern for her. In addition to racism, and sexism, her liberationist vision would soon extend to opposing all forms of anti-Semitism.

Meanwhile, Ruether was developing her own personal theology of liberation. That is to say, her liberation theology was a product of the times as well as her own experiences and reflections, coming out of the Civil Rights Movement and the emerging Black theology of liberation along with the more politically charged movements for liberation in Latin America. In 1972, she published her book *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power.*[27] This book was a collection of essays she had written, some previously published, which looked at the question of human liberation as she had begun to understand it. Her perspective is that the oppressor-oppressed relationship as a dynamic of human history applies to Christian anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, and colonialism. The book's emphasis is on seeking the transformation of Christianity from an ideology of the oppressors to a gospel of liberation for the oppressed.

Ruether's Emerging Feminist Thought

Thus, one can see that early in her career, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ruether was discovering the direction or path of her thought and writings in a variety of areas that she would follow and expand as the years unfolded. The focus of her work became "to probe the many aspects of a world system of oppression divided by race,

[27] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972).

class, gender, ecological abuse, and imperialism."[28] In both her writings and her personal social involvements Ruether sought "to probe different aspects of this system and its justifying ideologies, and to imagine how to create a liberated world beyond it."[29] It is this concern for a broader human liberation, rather than particular issues, that would tie all her thought and writings together across what may appear disparate areas of human activity.

While Ruether eventually became known as a feminist theologian, her interest and work in feminism only gradually emerged. While teaching at Howard University in a predominately Black seminary (1966 - 1976), she was primarily involved in the issues of civil rights and racism and not as aware of feminist issues as she might have been in another context. Although feminism was taking off as a movement in the mid- to late 1960s, it would be several years before Ruether would become involved as a direct activist, or begin seriously to re-shape her theology around feminist themes.

In the early 1970s, Ruether was offered two major opportunities to develop her work in feminism and theology. In 1972-73 she was invited to teach one year as a visiting lecturer in Roman Catholic Studies at Harvard Divinity School. Here she taught a course on the rise of patriarchy and patriarchal religions in the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world and the role of patriarchy in the shaping of early Christianity. A second course was on nineteenth-century European misogynist anthropologies and the beginning of modern feminism.

In 1973-74, she was invited to teach a year-long course in feminist theology at the Yale Divinity School. Still living in Washington, D.C. and teaching at Howard, she flew

[28] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 29.
[29] Ibid.

to New Haven once a week to teach the class. She soon found this course was very helpful in systematizing her emerging theological critique of much church life and thought. Thus, her feminist theology began to take root as a result of her experiences teaching at the essentially Protestant Harvard and Yale Divinity Schools. In 1975, she published her first books on feminism.[30] Ruether said of her move in this direction, "Feminism seemed like a natural issue to add to my concern for theology and social justice."[31]

It is the contention here that Ruether's feminism emerges out of her much broader interest and experiences; that is, feminism did not, and still does not, come first in either priority or sequence for Ruether. As mentioned earlier, the broader angle of vision from which she writes and does theology in a wide variety of areas is liberation from what she sees as "a world system of oppression." Ruether's feminist theology was thus a consequence of her broader view of the ethical and social implications of the Christian gospel, rather than vice versa. And this worldview was in turn especially rooted in her personal experience and praxis. In Ruether's own words:

> My intellectual questions and research have never been thoroughly theoretical. I have in every case dealt with existential questions about how I was to situate my life, my identity, my commitments. I have never taken up an intellectual issue which did not have direct connections with clarifying and resolving questions about my personal existence, about how I should align my existence with others, ideologically and socially.[32]

[30] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Tradition,* ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), 150-83. Rosemary Radford Ruether. *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

[31] Ruether, "The Development of My Theology," 2.

[32] Ruether, "Asking the Existential Questions," 161.

Thus, as is argued in this paper, Ruether's theology is a practical theology as opposed to a philosophical or theoretical theology. She has developed her theology from her personal encounters, her own life's experiences.

Ruether's Expanding Feminist Thought

By the mid- 1970s, Ruether realized her limitations as a white woman attempting to teach and write about sexism at a Black, mostly male seminary. Since she was beginning to focus more on doing work in feminism, an area in which she wanted not only to teach, but also to do more writing, she decided it was time to move on. In 1976 she interviewed with the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois for a position in feminist theological studies which Garrett envisioned as balancing the work with Black theological studies to which they were already committed. As one of the few women scholars of the time published in feminist theology, as well as someone who had taught at a Black school and was familiar with the Black church tradition, Ruether was offered the position. This move proved to be a major turning point in her career, and the United Methodist institution proved to be an enduring home for her. She remained at Garrett until her retirement in 2002.

At Garrett, Ruether met a key influence and collaborator in Rosemary Keller who taught courses on women in American history. The two quickly bonded as colleagues and began teaching courses together on women in American history, as well as writing and editing several books on women and American religion. Though Ruether had never studied in this area, she learned through her work with Keller. Three volumes of their work were published in 1981, 1983, and 1986. In 1995 they wrote a fourth volume integrating the previous three volumes. Culminating the two Rosemarys' work together

was the three–volume *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America.*[33]

Meanwhile, Ruether had begun to do more work in feminist theology as more strictly defined. Early on, she set about reconstructing the major symbols of Christian systematic theology from a feminist perspective. The result of this effort was the publication in 1983 of her major book *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology,* which for many still remains the basic or foundational text for feminist theology.[34] During the next two decades (1980s and 1990s), Ruether wrote seven more books in the area of feminist theology, contributed chapters to more than two dozen books, and published more than five dozen journal articles.

Anti-Semitism/Israeli-Palestinian Crisis

Ruether's sensitivity to issues of Jews and Judaism was deeply rooted in personal experience, going back to her relationship with her uncle David Sandow who came from a New York family of Jews originally from Russia. As already noted, Sandow became a kind of surrogate father for Rosemary when her own father died when she was twelve years old. Thus, at an early age, she was aware of Jews and Judaism, and any expressions of anti-Jewishness she encountered aroused negative feelings. This sensitivity was sharpened when in 1945, as a nine-year-old at Saturday afternoon movies, she saw news reel reports on the atrocities of the Holocaust which left a lasting impression on her.

Ruether's more mature awareness of the "Jewish question" in Christian theology

[33] Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Keller, *Women and Religion in America,* vol. 1, *The Nineteenth Century* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); *Women and Religion in America,* vol. 2, *The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983); *Women and Religion in America,* vol. 3, *1900-1968* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986); *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of Women's Religious Writings* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995); *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America,* 3 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

[34] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (1983; reprinted with new Introduction, Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

unfolded when she was a student at Scripps College, where she wrote her BA thesis on the development of eschatology in the intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature.[35] She says of her thesis research:

> I became aware of several important themes that have continued to concern me ever since. First of all, I discovered that what Judaism meant by the word "Messiah" at the time of Jesus had very little in common with what the Catholic tradition taught as the meaning of the word "Christ." Christ was understood as a divine man, the incarnation of the Word of God who appeared to save us from personal sin, reconcile us with God, and make immortal life available to the redeemed. The Messiah was not an incarnate divinity, but a human king and warrior who represented God. His deeds were not focused primarily on the personal realm of sin and life after death. Rather he was a real historical actor who appeared at the end of the era of injustice, to defeat real physical enemies of Israel, to end oppression, and to inaugurate a new era of peace and justice.[36]

As a child in Catholic schools Ruether had been taught that the Jews had been waiting for centuries for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus arrived and fulfilled their expectations, but they refused to accept him. Jesus was, she learned, exactly what the Jews were waiting for – or at least what they ought to have been waiting for, if they had understood their own prophets and scriptures correctly. But when doing the research for her BA thesis and reading the Jewish literature of messianic hope, the apocalyptic writings from the second century BCE to the end of the first century CE, she came to see these Christian assumptions in a different light. There was a large gap between the Jewish concept of the Messiah and the Catholic idea of Christ. Unable to find any satisfactory treatment of the dilemma this gap presented, she set out to do her own

[35] Rosemary Armstrong Radford Ruether, "A Historical and Textual Analysis of the Relationship between Futurism and Eschatology in the Apocalyptic Texts of the Inter-Testamental Period" (BA thesis, Scripps College, Claremont, California, 1958). An electronically sent scanned copy of this thesis was received form Denison Library archives, Scripps College, June 21, 2014.

[36] Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 46.

research and develop her own perspective.[37] Here was another area in which she would pursue her concern for freeing people from oppressive global systems. Ruether's eventually extensive writings on Jews, Christianity, and the tradition of anti-Semitism will be discussed in Chapter Three.

However, here it can be briefly noted that it was in the early 1970s that Ruether began to explore Christian theological practices of anti-Semitism which she saw as leading to the Holocaust. During that period, she wrote a number of articles on the history of anti-Semitism in Western Christianity, and in 1974, her book *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* was published.[38]

In the 1980s, Ruether's perspective began to shift when she took two trips to Israel where she witnessed the realities of Palestinian oppression in Israel and the Occupied Territories. In 1986, during the second visit, she and her husband Herman both taught courses at Tantur Ecumenical Center located between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Here she met Naim Ateek, a Palestinian theologian, and became interested in his work on Palestinian liberation theology. This experience led to her co-authoring with her husband their book *The Wrath of Jonah: the Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.*[39] She also wrote the Forward for Ateek's book on Palestinian liberation theology.[40]

Thus once again Ruether's guiding liberationist vision would expand. While her

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[37] In the late sixties she began writing on the Messiah of Israel and the Cosmic Christ. Drawing on her background in ancient history, she pursued extensive research attempting to find the roots of the Jewish messianic idea, going back to the Ancient Near Eastern myths.

[38] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: the Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

[39] Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989).

[40] Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*; Foreword by Rosemary Radford Ruether (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).

views on anti-Semitism did not change, she added to her concerns for liberation from world systems of oppression the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as the situation of the Palestinians living under occupation in Israel.

Ecology and Ecofeminism

While most of Ruether's early work was on the liberation of oppressed social groups, she also began to develop an interest in the role of the environment in relation to religious worldviews. Ecology eventually became a major interest and concern for Ruether. This interest had its beginning in the 1970s. In her thought and her writings, she early on connected ecology to feminism. As Ruether explains: "I sought to connect ecology and feminism, both in recognition of the ways the domination of the earth is metaphorically interconnected with the domination of women in patriarchal ideology, and also to reveal how women's use and abuse in society interfaces with the abuse of nature.[41]

In the mid- to late 1970s Ruether did some limited writing on ecology and the exploitation of the earth, but her ideas were fairly conventional and not linked much to her wider vision of feminism, liberation, and faith. By 1992, however, she had done considerable study of this subject, and in that year she published her first major work pointing to what she had come to see as the interconnection between the domination of women and that of nature, and how the liberation of women and of the earth connect. She further saw both of these dimensions of exploitation, of women and of the earth, as fundamentally theological in origin and therefore requiring a religious vision of how to overcome them. The result was a significant book *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* that broke new ground and had substantial influence on

[41] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 27.

others.[42] Continuing her work in this area, she subsequently discussed both world religions and the socioeconomic context of ecological devastation as dimensions requiring critical theological analysis. Her book *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* published in 2005 is her most broad-based and comprehensive contribution to this theological movement.[43] Its wide-ranging critique and vision will be discussed in Chapter Four.

In 2010, Ruether's liberationist vision led the retired, venerable, but still very active theologian in yet another direction. She began writing about what had long been an area of concern for her and her family: mental illness and the inadequacies of the mental health system. Her book *Many Forms of Madness: A Family's Struggle with Mental Illness and the Mental Health System*[44] was based on her family's experience of many years of dealing with their son David's mental illness. Rather than keeping private what she considers a public problem, Ruether insisted on a change in national mental health policy to provide resources for their son and for millions of others. As in her earlier spheres of interest, she brought together a critique of existing ideas and practices with a liberating vision of hope for those who suffer.

This chapter has presented a brief intellectual biography of Ruether and an overview of her changing but essentially consistent vision. It has noted the particular people she encountered as well as the life's experiences that have had an important influence on the development of her thought and the direction of her interests and

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[42] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

[43] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

[44] Rosemary Radford Ruether with David Ruether, *Many Forms of Madness: A Family's Struggle with Mental Illness and the Mental Health System* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

writings. These foundational influences are important for the reader to understand Ruether's thought, her writings, and her involvement as a social activist. Her interests encompass many and diverse areas, so it is no surprise that her large body of writing covers many and diverse topics. Among these topics are Black theology, anti-Semitism, Third World liberation theologies and the anti-colonial struggle in Latin America and Asia, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, feminist issues, US American imperialism, the ecological crisis, and the dilemma of Roman Catholicism in modern society.

Chapter Two will consider Reuther's feminist theology and writing. I will demonstrate that her feminist thought and theology is a consequence of her deeper liberationist vision. Since there is a predominance of feminist thought in Ruether's work and her feminist theology undergirds her writing on a variety of issues, I will then address her particular approach to feminism and its connection to her larger vision. Lastly, I will place her within the larger feminist movement.

CHAPTER 2

RUETHER'S FEMINIST THEOLOGY AS LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Rosemary Radford Ruether is most widely known as a feminist theologian, and she works primarily out of a feminist perspective in most of her writing. To show how her feminist theology is rooted in liberation theology or a liberationist vision, I will first set her within the wider context of feminist theology. Beginning with a brief history of the feminist movement, in particular what became known as the "second wave" feminist movement, I will demonstrate how feminist theology gradually emerged out of this secular feminist movement. I will further delineate Catholic feminism as a distinctively separate movement out of which Catholic feminist theology emerged. My discussion of Ruether will then present her as a particular kind of Catholic feminist liberation theologian who works from a religious vision, but one who has from the beginning looked to overturn what she sees as oppressive systems that affect women, but not only women. I will thus argue that her general theological stance emerges out of her broader concern: liberation of human beings, including women, from all world systems of oppression.

Early Feminist Movements

What became known as "second wave" feminism emerged in the midst of the social unrest of the explosive era of the 1960s, movements that included the anti-Vietnam

War protests, the New Left, and Civil Rights. Some called it a revival of the women's movement that had won women's suffrage in 1920. However, the roots of American feminists are far deeper than the suffrage movement in the first decades of the last century. Feminism began to emerge from wider social reform movements, especially abolitionism, as early as the mid-nineteenth century. As activist women gained confidence to seek change for other causes, some began to identify and oppose gender[1] injustice and to realize that very few of their male comrades in the various reform movements, including abolitionism, took this gender injustice seriously.

While Rosemary Radford Ruether's theology emerged out of a unique background in Roman Catholicism and social activism, it is important to understand the context of the early American religious feminism which was at first dominated primarily by women from Protestant traditions.

In her book *Women Called to Witness*, Nancy Hardesty challenges the common notion that the nineteenth century movement for women's rights was primarily a secular one. She locates the roots of American feminism in the evangelical revivals that occurred during the Second Great Awakening of the early nineteenth century.[2] Hardesty argues, "The revivalists' emphasis on conversion and commitment gave women and men a mission to save the world which included not only souls but bodies, minds, social relations and the body politic. The same strategies used in evangelism –spreading of the

[1] In this paper, the term "gender" is used as understood at that time, that is, female and male.

[2] Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999). Enrolled at the University of Chicago Divinity School in the mid-1970s, Hardesty took a course in American revivalism. Having been raised in a Fundamentalist church, she was familiar with many of the names, such as Charles Finney, Dwight Moody, and Billy Sunday. It was the names of women that were "buried" in the stories of American revivalism that got her attention. Hardesty alleges that these women had published works presenting biblical arguments supporting the roles of women in the scriptures, but the arguments had been lost and buried in the ongoing effort to keep women from asserting their own power in the home, the church, and society.

gospel per se – were also used to spread the gospel of reform."[3]

Sarah Grimké was a forerunner among the small group of evangelical women activists who brought attention to the cause of women. A highly unusual Southern-born radical Quaker, abolitionist, and antiracist, she became in 1837 the first American to write a full-length feminist treatise, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*.[4] Grimké strongly rooted her advocacy for women's rights and social equality in her evangelical Protestant and biblical vision. Her governing principle of human rights was a divine law discernible in the immutable truths of the Bible. At the beginning of "Letter 1" of her treatise she made it clear that the source she would use to support her arguments is the Bible. She boldly declared,

> In examining this important subject, I shall depend solely on the Bible to designate the sphere of woman, because I believe almost everything that has been written on this subject, has been the result of a misconception of the simple truths revealed in the Scriptures, in consequence of the false translation of many passages of Holy Writ. My mind is entirely delivered from the superstitious reverence which is attached to the English version of the Bible. King James's translators certainly were not inspired. I therefore claim the original as my standard, *believing that to have been inspired*, and I also claim to judge for myself what is the meaning of the inspired writers, because I believe it to be the solemn duty of every individual to search the Scriptures for themselves, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, and not be governed by the views of any man, or set of men.[5]

Grimké made an important contribution to feminist thought. Citing the texts in Genesis 1-3 which for centuries had been used to demonstrate the hierarchy of men over women, she provided an interpretation to show a scriptural basis for the equality of the sexes. Well over a century later, the scripture scholar Phyllis Trible would use a similar

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[3] Ibid. xi.

[4] Elizabeth Ann Bartlett, ed., *Letters on Equality of the Sexes and Other Essays/Sarah Grimké* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 1.

[5] Ibid., 15. Denied the same education as her brothers, Sarah's brother, Thomas, had taught her Latin and Greek. Thus she had access to the scriptures in both the early Latin translation and the original Greek.

argument in her feminist interpretation of the two creation stories.

Grimké's work helped to inspire the organizers of the first women's rights conference in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. Here a formal Declaration of Women's Rights was drawn up that included the then-radical demand for women's suffrage. Although retaining a strong religious (Protestant) flavor, the American women's movement became increasingly critical of the churches and even the Bible, as in Elizabeth Cady Stanton's biting *The Woman's Bible.*[6]

In truth, many of the evangelical feminists of the nineteenth century were making the same demands that feminist would make in the twentieth century. They demanded a woman's right to control her own finances, to sue for divorce and child custody, to practice birth control, to get an education, to seek employment, and to vote.[7] Frances Willard (1839-1898) was a leading activist among this group of evangelical feminists in the post-Civil War period. An educator, an evangelist deeply rooted in the Methodist tradition, an activist, and a broad-gauge social reformer, she was a leader in both the women's suffrage movement and the temperance movement. A delegate to the first convention of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874, she was eventually elected the president of the national WCTU, a position she used to change the organization into a broader women's rights movement with a wide range of social concerns.[8] Calling Willard "the Woman of the Century," Hardesty adds, "Heir to the revivalist legacy of broad-based, gospel-rooted reform, she sought to do everything within her power to empower and uplift women. Gathering up all the strands of women's

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[6] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (1895; repr., Salem, NH: Ayer Company, Publishers, Inc., 1991). This was originally a two volume collection of comments on various biblical passages to support Stanton's argument that the Bible was used to relegate women to an inferior status.

[7] Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness,* xi.

[8] Ibid., 9.

resources and efforts, she brought together in one huge, very political organization – the WCTU – the power to make women a force in American life."[9]

During the mid-nineteenth century, after the women's rights conference at Seneca Falls but before the Civil War, a few women's activists groups held conventions to work toward "co-equality" with men. They raised a variety of issues pertaining to women's place in society, from the place of women in the church, in professions, and in the community to married women's status and divorce. They brought attention to the ways that culture, law, religion, and long- accepted moral standards served only to restrain women. Following the Civil War, the activism spread into a nationwide effort for voting rights for women.[10] At this same time, many women's activists groups worked to better the whole society, improving women's status in the process.[11]

In 1920 the passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution giving women the right to vote added to the momentum of the participation of women in the public life. However, attempts beginning in 1924, led by the radical Alice Paul of the "Women's Party," to pass a more comprehensive Equal Rights Amendment stalled, and the Great Depression led to setbacks for women's roles in the workplace. World War II escalated the gradual challenge to the gender norms when the government turned to women to fill the jobs created by war-time production and the loss of men in the workforce due to their serving in the military. Women in the workforce soon found that

[9] Ibid., 12.

[10] Nancy MacLean, *The American Woman's Movement, 1945-2000* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009), 4. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were among the leaders in these movements.

[11] Ibid., The Women's Christian Temperance Union and the General Federation of Women's Clubs were two of the largest groups. The National Association of Colored Women, the Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor were among other groups that attracted the participation of women.

industrial unions provided an arena in which they could begin working for equality.[12]

When World War II ended, many women lost their jobs to the returning men. However, some, particularly female household heads and women whose husbands didn't earn a living wage, insisted on continuing to work, even though with men returning to the workforce they most often had to settle for lower paying jobs. These working-class women within the industrial unions became activists for gender-equality such as equal pay and employer and government policies to help alleviate the weight of "double duty" on mothers working outside the home.

Although more women now enrolled in college than before World War II, many did not earn degrees, dropping out in order to marry and become housewives and mothers or to support husbands through school.[13] While some college-educated women found fulfillment, or convinced themselves they found fulfillment, in being full-time homemakers, others began to feel trapped and isolated. Even for women who had not earned a degree in higher education and didn't have the feelings of giving up a career, doing housework and staying home to take care of children could become boring and monotonous.

The patriarchal norms of society were reinforced by popular TV shows like *Father Knows Best* and *Ozzie and Harriet* that portrayed the ideal family, and even by women's magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*, *Better Homes and Gardens* and

[12] The United Auto Workers provides a good example. Under pressure from the women members, the UAW set up a Women's Bureau in 1944. The women used the union to bargain for women's needs with employers and to combat the union's sexism. While the UAW was the largest union where female activism occurred, women also found in other unions a source of power for gender justice.

[13] Women who did finish their degrees, often were not able to find jobs to develop careers in their chosen fields. When they took traditional jobs for women such as a secretary they were overeducated, thus becoming frustrated and bored. If a woman was able to secure a job in her field, she usually found she was underpaid and even exploited because of her gender. The overwhelming emphasis through the decade of the 1950s was the stay-at-home wife and mother.

McCall's which presented the housewife as pursuing a "career" in homemaking, offering her information on cooking, sewing, interior decorating, and child raising. However, as the unrest and activism of the latter 1950s and on into the 1960s unfolded, the hypocrisy of the public myth of the "contented" housewife would be exposed.

Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, identified the "problem that has no name."[14] Educated American housewives were feeling trapped, their aspirations stifled, within the four walls of the home. Friedan articulated and brought out in the open what so many largely middle class, suburban women of the time were experiencing - an unsettling yearning for a greater purpose in life than overseeing their families' well-being.

As Nancy MacLean states in her book *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000*, "After Friedan's book put a label on the problem, thousands of women who had struggled privately with all kinds of gender-related unhappiness suddenly felt connected to others."[15] Friedan's book became a clarion call that encouraged and gave momentum to the "new" feminist movement that would soon erupt.

Second Wave Feminism

With Friedan's book as one of its manifestos, second wave feminism in the United States emerged as a full-fledged movement in the late-1960s, originally stimulated by the decade's activism for civil rights, attacks on the "establishment," Vietnam War protests, and attempts to create a "counter-culture."[16] Encouraged by civil rights

[14] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr., New York: Dell Publishing, 1983), 15-32.
[15] McLean, *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000*, 12.
[16] In other words, the 1960s feminist activism was informed and fueled by the social, cultural, and political climate of that decade. Some even consider it a delayed reaction against the renewed domesticity of women after World War II, the pressure put on women by the media in shows such as *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* which idealized the husband as breadwinner and head of the household and the wife and mother as the one who stayed at home taking care of the children and doing all the housework.

demands for social justice, a few early women activists pressured President John Kennedy to establish the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961. The Commission issued a major report in 1963 outlining an agenda for reform. Affirming women's rights to paid employment, it called for pay equity, child-care, paid maternity leave, and other reforms to create more equality between men and women.

At the same time, women involved in the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War protests, and Students for a Democratic Society were finding they were not treated as equals in the movements by their male counterparts who regularly took their male privilege for granted, giving the women menial tasks to serve as a support for the men, or worse - treating them as sex objects. As with women in nineteenth-century abolitionism, twentieth-century activists began to discover that they needed to identify and address their own oppression, even within the broader causes they supported. By the late 1960s, women had discovered skills and strengths from their activism in the Civil Rights and other movements and began to use these to organize a new feminist movement.

In addition to the wide influence of her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan helped to establish NOW - the National Organization for Women - in October 1966, becoming its first president. NOW was originally founded in part to try to ensure specifically that federal cases against job discrimination would include grievances based on sexual discrimination along with those cases brought on grounds of race.[17] However, it also fought for maternity leave and child care, equal education, a woman's rights to control her own fertility, and passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). NOW soon became the largest feminist organization in the United States with its membership

[17]McLean, *The American Women's Movement,* 16. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 included the word *sex* in the ban against discrimination in employment. The purpose of including this word was to try to defeat the Act, but it was defended and passed.

growing from fourteen chapters with 1000 members in 1967 to more than seven-hundred chapters with 40,000 members by 1974.

Gloria Steinem was another feminist who rose to prominence at this time and began to push beyond the more mainstream oriented perspective of Friedan and NOW. A journalist and social and political activist, Steinem became nationally recognized as a leader and spokeswoman for the feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1960 she had moved to New York where she began writing freelance for popular magazines such as *Life, Esquire,* and *Time Magazine.* In 1968 she helped found *New York* magazine where she wrote feature articles as a political columnist in support of causes on the American left. It was her article, "After Black Power, Women's Liberation" published in 1969 in *New York* magazine that especially brought her to national fame as a feminist leader.[18]

One of the most distinctive elements of the second wave feminist movement was its developing ideology which in turn required new forms of organization beyond those of standard social-advocacy groups. In the mid- to late 1960s, women began to meet in small local groups in a process called "consciousness raising." It was in the sharing of their feelings and experiences in these meetings that they began to realize they faced societal problems that could be changed, and that the key to making those changes was not simply through personal changes but through their collective action. Adopting the slogan "The Personal is Political," the groups found there was power in numbers to advocate for and bring about change around issues that emerged from their own

[18] Gloria Steinem, "After Black Power, Women's Liberation," *New York Magazine* (April 4, 1969): 8-10.

experiences.[19]

While nineteenth and early twentieth century first wave feminists demanded civil and political equality, second wave feminists thus broadened the debate to a wide range of issues: sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, *de facto* inequalities in attitudes toward men and women as well as official legal inequalities in many areas of law and society. Women began making job gains in the professions, the military, sports, and the media in large part due to the second wave feminist advocacy.

Feminism Moves into Religious Circles

While much or the initial thrust of second-wave feminism was concerned with secular and political conditions, feminist reflection also began to appear in the churches and theological schools in the same period. Women, taking notice that they could be ordained in some denominations, especially those of liberal Protestantism, began to enroll in seminaries in large numbers, demanding to enter the ordination track, not just prepare to serve as laywomen in fields such as Christian education which had long been part of "woman's sphere" within religious communities.[20] These women also called for the hiring of women professors in the seminaries and for feminist courses in the curriculum.[21]

It was during the unrest of the 1960s which included the increasingly hostile questioning directed at all traditional institutions including the church and patterns of thought such as Christianity that the question was presented with increasingly firm

[19] MacLean, *The American Women's Movement,* 17. The origin of the slogan "The Personal is Political," has been credited to Gloria Steinem among others. Carol Hanisch wrote a paper in 1969 which was originally published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* in 1970 and titled "The Personal is Political." In a 2006 introduction to the paper, Hanisch clarifies she did not give the paper its title and assumes Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, editors of the book gave the title to her paper. (Cited from www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html) assessed July 7, 2016.

[20] The Methodist Church voted at its General Conference in 1956 to ordain women and grant them full clergy rights. The Presbyterian Church (USA) also began ordaining women around this time.

[21] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 17.

directness: are Christianity and Christian theology irredeemably sexist, or can Christian symbols and patterns be re-imagined and re-stated in ways that value women? Beginning in the more liberal Protestant denominations, such as the United Church of Christ, these questions soon spread to other mainstream and conservative denominations and beyond.

Thus, Rosemary Ruether's political and ideological feminism had roots in both earlier American female religious activism, mostly Protestant, as well as in social movements and ideas of the late 1950s and 1960s. But development of a distinctly feminist version of liberation theology also grew out of feminist religious thought – especially biblical criticism and church history – that was emerging in American religious circles, again mostly Protestant in the 1960s and after.

Among Protestant feminists, Phyllis Trible was a leading pioneer in the text-based exploration of women and gender in scripture. A Biblical and Hebrew scholar, Trible earned a PhD from Union Seminary/Columbia University in 1963 with an emphasis in Old Testament.[22]

Trible became a leading authority in feminist interpretation of biblical texts using literary and rhetorical methods of biblical criticism. She is the author of what are considered two of the groundbreaking works in feminist biblical scholarship: *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*[23] and *Texts of Terror.*[24] In the former she offers a reinterpretation of familiar texts from a feminist perspective. In the latter, she singles out four women in the Bible who suffered terrible defeats and who have so often been

[22] After teaching at Wake Forest University and Andover Newton University,Trible returned to Union Seminary/Columbia University where she was appointed Professor of Old Testament. In 1980, she was appointed the Baldwin Professor of Sacred Literature, the first woman to hold this position at Union.

[23] Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

[24] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

unheard and overlooked. In her work, she often brings to light women in Scriptures who have played important roles but have been nearly written out of later Christian interpretation and use of the scriptures, overshadowed by the leading males in the text.[25]

Acknowledging that the Scripture and biblical religion are both patriarchal, Trible argues that the intentionality of biblical faith is "neither to create nor to perpetuate patriarchy but rather to function as salvation for both women and men.[26] Trible was thus a pioneer in taking up the hermeneutical challenge to translate and interpret biblical faith without sexism.

"Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread"[27] is an excellent sample of Trible's early work. Here she calls for a reexamination of the text, attempting to free it of the historical accumulation of male exegetical work and expose the core message that recognizes the original role of woman as the peer of man. In the opening statements of this essay, Trible makes clear her approach to biblical criticism: "Accepting centuries of (male) exegesis, many feminists interpret this story as legitimating male supremacy and female subordination. They read to reject. My suggestion is that we reread to understand and to appropriate."[28] In her work she often seeks to recover neglected texts in the scriptures. In *Texts of Terror* she singles out women in the Bible who suffered horrendous physical violence, among whom are Jephthah's daughter whom he offered as a burnt sacrifice to the Lord (Judges 11:29-40).[29] Trible's interest as a feminist biblical scholar and her focus in many of her writings, such as *Texts of Terror*, was to critique misogyny, but to

[25] Phyllis Trible, "Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows," *Biblical Review* (February 1989): 14-34.
[26] Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 41, no.1 (March, 1973): 31.
[27] Trible, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 13 (1973): 251-258.
[28] Trible, "Eve and Adam," 251.
[29]Other examples are Hagar (Genesis 16:1-16, 21:9-21), Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22), and an unnamed concubine (Judges 19:1-30).

do so by close analysis of sacred Scripture. John J. Collins argues that Phyllis Trible, perhaps more than any other scholar, put feminist criticism on the agenda of biblical scholarship in the 1970s.[30]

Letty Russell (1929-2006), a feminist liberation theologian, educator, and ordained pastor in the United Presbyterian Church, was a contemporary of Trible. Russell once wrote that her work grew out of two directions, "that of my experience and that of my theology. My experience is that of life in a Christian community set in the midst of poverty, failure, and despair that has nevertheless learned to give thanks (Eph. 5:15-20). My theology is based on the conviction that the resurrection and victory of Christ is the starting point and ending point of Christian life and nurture."[31] Shortly after graduation from Wellesley College in 1951, Russell took a job with the East Harlem Protestant Parish in New York City as Director of Religious Education at Church of the Ascension. Here, working among a marginalized community, she discovered a "call to join God in practicing hospitality for all persons." [32]

Russell soon found that she needed a seminary education in order to do the ministry she felt called to do in the church. In 1955, she entered as one of the first two women in the Masters of Divinity Program at Harvard Divinity School. Following her graduation in 1958, she returned to the Church of the Ascension in Harlem where she was one of the first women ordained in the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. Serving as pastor of the Church of the Ascension for the next ten years, she focused on encouraging and equipping the congregation of mostly Blacks and Hispanics to claim their voices as

[30] John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 78.
[31] Letty Russell, *Christian Education in Mission* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 9.
[32] Ibid.

leaders in the parish and the community. Her ministry among the oppressed shaped her soon to emerge feminist theology of liberation.

Beginning with her work in the early 1950s in East Harlem in an interracial, low-income neighborhood, Russell discovered the importance of fostering change by promoting partnerships among people of all races and classes. In her theological autobiography "Moving to the Margin" Russell describes herself as "constantly on the move to find the margin and to claim it as the site of my theology of resistance." [33]

It was when she took a part-time position as the Religious Consultant to the National Board of the YWCA and at the same time became involved in the World Council of Churches that Russell began to realize that women too are often victims of social prejudice and discrimination. Thus she began to work for justice and human dignity for women as well as men, and the new margin to which she now moved was feminism.[34]

Russell's advocacy for women led her to find a place to teach women who were preparing for the ministry. She took a full-time position as a professor of theology at Yale Divinity School in 1974, where she stayed until she retired in 2001. At Yale she began to publish in areas of liberation and feminist theologies. Among her most notable works are: *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology* published in 1974.[35] While Russell was not part of the more explosive feminist activism, the impact of her feminist liberationist vision was far and wide. As an educator, pastor, and theologian,

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[33] Letty Russell. "Moving to the Margin," *Dialog*, vol. 36, no. 4 (fall 1997): 305. Russell explains her use of the term margins as the socially constructed areas that dominant groups consider the location of those of little worth and where those like herself move as a critical response to domination.

[34] Ibid., 307.

[35] Letty Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974).

Russell influenced a generation of women and men who were seeking theological, educational, or biblical frameworks that liberate and empower.

While American religious feminism was originally dominated for the most part by women from Protestant traditions, there were grassroots movements stirring in Catholic circles. It is important to note that a distinctively Catholic feminism began to arise in the early 1960s. In fact, American Catholic feminism has roots in several important but little-know Catholic women's initiatives and groups founded in the United States several decades earlier. Two seedbeds important for Catholic feminism were the Grail and the Christian Family Movement.

The Grail was an exclusively women's group brought to the United States from the Netherlands in 1940. The group's residence and headquarters was established in 1944 on a farm in Loveland, Ohio, where the community took the name "Grailville."[36] While there was a core of permanent residents who adopted many of the practices of vowed religious communities, but without the commitment to permanence, they welcomed women to come - staying a week, a month, or several years - to live an ascetic, monastic lifestyle centered around liturgical celebrations and to be trained as "lay apostles." The vision of the Grail was to empower women as social transformers.[37]

By the end of the 1960s, the US Grail had become involved in the women's liberation movement and, in particular, Christian feminism. Throughout the 1970s, primarily at Grailville, the Grail sponsored a series of programs in feminist theology with noted feminist theologians such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell,

[36] The Grail was founded by a Jesuit priest in the Netherlands in 1921 as a lay organization called Women of Nazareth. It was brought to the United States in 1940 by two Dutch Women.

[37] Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 19.

Phyllis Trible, and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.[38] In 1966, the US Grail General Assembly voted to welcome its first two Protestant members. Then in 1975, the General Assembly welcomed two Jewish women into membership and subsequently severed its official affiliation with the Catholic Church.

The Christian Family Movement (CFM), a movement for married couples and families, emerged in the late forties. Committed to transforming their lives by trying to bring Christ into their families and communities, they sought ways to raise awareness of and combat the injustices of racism, poverty, and other systems of social injustice.

Pat and Patty Crowley were leaders of the movement from its inception in the late 1940s. In 1964, they along with two other married couples were asked to participate in the Papal Birth Control Commission. Polling CFM membership on birth control, they brought to the commission their findings that the rhythm method was deeply resented by married Catholics and seen as reflecting a male celibate view of sexuality. As a result of the testimony of the three couples and lay experts, the clerical members of the commission voted overwhelmingly to reject the traditional Catholic teaching. When Pope Paul VI rejected the majority view of his own commission and in 1968 issued the encyclical *Humanae Vitae,* the Crowleys eventually dissented from the document.[39]

It is also worth noting that the Pre Cana programs for engaged couples, which continue to be offered today, gradually emerged from the gatherings for a day of reflection of a few married couples, among them the Crowleys, in the early 1940s.

While both the Grail and the CFM were founded and led predominantly by

[38] Marian Ronan, "Brief History of the U.S. Grail," accessed March 3, 2017, www.grail-us.org/who-we-are/history-of-the-grail-in-the-us.

[39] Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women's Religious Writing,* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, 28-29.

women, these founding women could not be considered feminists, but these groups enabled women to have authority and gave them the opportunity to lead and to devote themselves to reform inspired by the Gospels. Both groups were intentional about remaining strictly lay groups and not under the control of the Catholic hierarchy.

While lay groups certainly played a part in the incubation of Catholic feminism, perhaps a more important influence were women religious. In 1954, a group of sisters established the Sister Formation Conference (SFC) to promote education and professionalism for women religious. The traditional practice had been to place young sisters to teach in Catholic schools with inadequate education, often beginning their teaching roles after only one year as a novice. The SFC proposed a program for nuns to complete college and earn a teaching credential before being assigned to teach in schools. The Vatican supported the training but did not foresee the impact this enhanced education would have on the sisters. Gathering with so many other sisters, they were exposed to new ideas and the spirit of change beginning to take place in the latter fifties. They brought that spirit back into their religious communities and began to address issues to modernize their sisterhoods, some even daring to assert themselves before the leadership of their communities, insisting on changes.[40]

An important figure who advocated for better education of sisters teaching in Catholic schools was Sr. Madeleva Wolff, CSC, president of Saint Mary's College (Indiana), 1934-1961. Sr. Madeleva founded the first graduate school of theology for women, The School of Sacred Theology at Saint Mary's in 1943. Before the School's founding at Saint Mary's, women had been excluded from the theological profession.

The superiors of women religious also organized, forming the Conference of

[40] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 20.

Major Superiors of Women (CMSW) in 1956. They began dialogue with the Vatican and American hierarchies seeking to begin reforming their orders to be more in step with the times. Although major changes did not occur until Vatican II, the groundwork for reform began in the fifties among the sisters who wanted to make themselves more relevant to the world. [41]

While these grassroots movements in the fifties helped to lay the groundwork for a distinctively Catholic feminism, the catalyst for the emerging Catholic feminist movement was the growing impetus for reform in the worldwide institutional Church and Vatican Council II. One could say the Council both provoked and inspired these emerging feminists. On the one hand, among the thousands of official participants and observers attending the council, none were Catholic women, although twenty-three Catholic women observers were invited for the third session. Among the many topics for discussion on the agenda of the council, none dealt with the rights and concerns specific to women in the Church. Though it appeared the Church was opening itself to modernity, Catholic women in the Church and society were seemingly ignored. For many Catholic women, the council showed the Catholic Church's deeply rooted sexism.

On the other hand, some feminists found in the Council documents hope for a modern church more in touch with the world. As Mary Henold comments, "In particular, they interpreted the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World as supportive of feminism, an interpretation surely unintended by the majority of the council fathers."[42]

A distinctively Catholic feminism emerged in the United States in 1963, the

[41] Ibid., 21.
[42] Ibid., 22.

same year as the publication of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* and the Civil Rights march on Washington, D.C. Henold explains,

> In that year, a small number of Catholic women began writing openly feminist articles in the Catholic press. While they were certainly influenced by these important events, these writers were not primarily motivated by the runaway best seller or the growing civil rights and new left movements. Rather, the spark that ignited the distinctively Catholic feminist movement was the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), an inspiring but overtly sexist event that enraged and exhilarated Catholic women in equal measure [43]

Henold argues that Catholic feminism was not imported into the church and was not rooted in the secular movement, as many believed. Rather, a distinctively Catholic feminism emerged out of women's experiences as Catholics. Perhaps, Catholic women who began to speak out against the inequalities between the sexes in society and in the Church were emboldened by their involvement in civil rights and peace demonstrations. Some began to challenge the "Catholic Woman" ideology.[44] However, they sought to do so on religious grounds, in relation to their own experience of faith and Church.

Rosemary Lauer's article "Women in the Church" published in 1963 in *Commonweal* was groundbreaking for a distinctively Catholic movement. Lauer, a philosophy professor, published the first American Catholic feminist article of the second wave. Broaching the subject of the "Catholic Woman" ideology, often referred to as the "eternal woman," Lauer challenged both the Church's conception of women and women's roles in the Church. She called attention to the difference between the rhetoric of Vatican II and women's experiences. Citing the Church tradition itself as responsible for the Catholic sexism and discrimination against women, she called for radical

[43] Ibid., 4.

[44] Ibid., 25. Henold points out that as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, American Catholic magazines gave advice to reinforce the "True Catholic Woman" ideology – "an image of women as pious, pure, submissive, domestic, and confined to the private sphere." Every woman's duty was to sacrifice her body, her will, her work, and her personality for the sake of her family and the kingdom of God, 25-26.

solutions.[45] During the next decade, Catholic feminism gradually became a full blown organized movement critiquing Catholic women's identity, the centuries of patriarchy, the tradition and the theology of the Church, the clerical culture, and the hierarchy.[46] Among the leading early Catholic feminist writers in the 1960s, Mary Daly added momentum to the Catholic feminist movement with the publication of her book *The Church and the Second Sex* in 1968. Daly was the first to publish a major scholarly critique of Catholic sexism, its origins, and its impact on women. At the time she wrote this book, Daly was a practicing liberal-to-radical Catholic who still believed the Church was redeemable through reform. However, by the early 1970s, rejecting Christianity as too oppressive to be redeemed, she experienced a "dramatic/traumatic change of consciousness from 'radical Catholic' to post-Christian feminist."[47]

Three years before Daly's militant manifesto, Sidney Callahan had written the first American book-length critique of the Catholic identity of women. Published in 1965, *The Illusion of Eve: Modern Woman's Quest for Identity*, was an indictment of the "eternal woman" ideology. [48] Callahan's work provided a sort of transitional tone to the emerging Catholic feminist writings of that era. With hope fed by Vatican II, Callahan was inclined to think change was about to take place in the Church that would be more inclusive of women. Her writing was geared more toward young married Catholic women, focused on a middle path for them to balance their involvement in the Church with their responsibilities to their families as wife and mother. Henold suggests,

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[45] Rosemary Lauer, "Women and the Church," *Commonweal* 79 (December 20, 1963): 365-368.

[46] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 36.

[47] Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, Autobiographical Preface to the Colophon Edition (New York: Harper Colophon Books, Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975), 5.

[48] Sidney Callahan, *The Illusion of Eve: Modern Woman's Quest for Identity* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965).

"Callahan's early feminist writings marked the transition between eras"[49] as Catholic women became more vocal about their roles in society and the Church and the "eternal women" ideology was attacked by the growing Catholic feminist movement.

Another early Catholic Feminist of the mid-sixties who deserves attention is Sally Cunneen. Her book *Sex: Female, Religion: Catholic* written in 1968 was the result of a study Cunneen did of *Cross Currents* readers on the subject of women and the Church. For the most part, the women readers who contributed responses in Cunneen's study, though unhappy with how women had been viewed in the Church, were hopeful that there would be change following Vatican II.[50]

Thus, as feminism moved into religious circles, one of the first issues addressed was the role of women in the scriptures. The work of Phyllis Trible, a leading Protestant scripture scholar, focused on a feminist interpretation of scripture that denigrated or abused women. She also called attention to women who played important roles but were all but written out of later Christian interpretation, overshadowed by the leading males in the text.

Letty Russell, an ordained Presbyterian pastor, educator, and liberation theologian, was a leading advocate for justice and human rights. While her advocacy work was primarily for women, it was her work serving as a pastor at a church in Harlem with Blacks and Hispanics that led to her developing a feminist liberation theology.

The emphasis on gender continued as a distinctively Catholic feminism emerged beginning with grassroots lay movements such as the Grail and the Christian Family Movement. While the former focused on empowering women to transform society, the

[49] Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 41.

[50] Sally Cunneen, *Sex: Female, Religion: Catholic* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968).

latter dealt with family issues such as birth control as well as with the injustices of racism, poverty, and other systems of social injustice. Even more influential for the emerging Catholic feminism were the organizations the women religious began to form in the 1950s to address reform in their communities.

In the 1960s, Catholic feminism gradually became a full blown movement critiquing Catholic Women's identity. Sidney Callahan, Mary Daly, and Sally Cunneen were among those who contributed momentum to the movement with their writings on the subject of women in the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, Vatican II had given Catholic feminists hope that change was on the way. It was at this time, in the mid-sixties, that Rosemary Ruether began to critique the Catholic views of sexuality and reproduction as a personal issue. However, at this point she didn't consider herself a feminist theologian; but rather, as a liberation theologian she was promoting Church reform.

Rosemary Ruether as Feminist

It is important to point out here that Ruether's experience as a feminist was very different from that of, say, Friedan or Steinem. Ruether notes:

> There were two quite different contexts in which the feminist movement arose in the mid- to late 1960s. One was the movement among women lawyers, government workers, and writers from which NOW arose. This movement was open to issues of class, but was not particularly sensitive to race. A second movement arose out of the civil rights, antiwar, and the Black Power movements. It was this context in which my own feminist perspective arose.[51]

Although Ruether is best known as a feminist theologian, it is the contention here that she is more accurately described as a liberation theologian for whom women's liberation is just one of her many concerns. Feminism did not, and still does not come

[51] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Rosemary Radford Ruether, Feminist Theologian," in *Transforming the Faith of our Fathers: Women who Changed American Religion*, ed. Ann Braude (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 74.

first in either historical sequence or priority for Ruether. As a survey of the diverse areas which she has probed, written about, and engaged in activism for will show, liberation from all systems of world oppression was her foremost concern from the beginning of her career, even if she did not identify it that way, and it remained first even as her interests shifted and evolved. As mentioned earlier, she became involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-sixties, and her activism soon spread to the peace movements and anti-Vietnam War protests that were taking place at that time. Her involvement in social action is not a surprise considering her upbringing, especially the influence of her mother and her mother's circle of friends, which had instilled in her a passion for human rights and justice.

In the mid-sixties, already involved in the civil rights and the peace movements, Ruether became a social activist in the more "churchly" sphere as well. Some of her writing began to critique the Catholic views of sexuality and reproduction as her own personal experiences as a woman, wife, and mother began to conflict with the teachings of the Catholic Church.[52]

Although Ruether had made a personal decision to use the birth-control pill following the birth of her and her husband's third child, she had not thought of becoming a crusader on this subject or of linking it to her emerging theological concerns. However, as mentioned earlier, this changed when she was in the hospital giving birth to her third child and encountered a Mexican woman in the bed next to her who had just given birth

[52] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 40. The priest who married Rosemary and her husband told them that if they did not have a child by the next year, he would know they were living in sin. Ruether admits she was deeply offended and adds that this was the first time she had been "confronted by the Catholic anti-birth control dogmatism." By the time she was finishing her doctoral degree in 1963 and gave birth to their third child, it was clear to both her and her husband that there were enough children if she was to have any hope of combining scholarship and family life. Meanwhile, the birth-control pill had been developed and was on the market, and she arranged to use it after their third child.

to a ninth child because she was following the Church's teachings. Ruether became outraged when she learned the woman's plight.[53] Birth control, she came to see, was not her private issue nor was it an individual issue for other Catholic women. It was a public issue of deep injustice for millions of women, particularly poor, uneducated women. Shortly thereafter and over the next couple of years, Ruether wrote several articles and contributed chapters to edited books critical of the Catholic Church's teachings on marital sexuality and birth control.[54] Perhaps, the most courageous was a brief article defending her choice of birth control as a Catholic. It was published in the *Saturday Evening Post* as "Why I Believe in Birth Control: A Catholic Mother Speaks Out."

Thus, one might say, in response to her personal experience and her encounter with the experiences of another, Ruether entered into the discussion of women's issues and the Catholic Church. The personal was becoming the theological and the feminist theologian was beginning to emerge. This dialectic of personal experience and theological reflection is characteristic of all or most of Ruether's work. This was the beginning for Ruether of a life devoted to eliminating social injustices by creating dialogue between opposing forces, holding them in creative tension while seeking higher and better solutions. At this time Ruether did not consider herself as joining the ranks of the feminist movement which was beginning to gather momentum following the 1963

[53] Ibid., 41. The Mexican woman lived in abject poverty. When her doctor told her due to complications with this birth, she must start practicing birth control or risk her own death, the woman cried that her husband and her priest would not allow this.

[54] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Marriage, Love, and Children," *Jubilee* (November 8, 1963): 17-20; "Women, Birth Control, and the Church," *Frontline* (February 3, 1964): 131-138; "Why I Believe in Birth Control: A Catholic Mother Speaks Out," *Saturday Evening Post,* vol. 237, no 13 (April 4, 1964): 12-13; "A Question of Dignity, a Question of Freedom," in *What Modern Catholics Think of Birth Control,* ed. William Birmingham (New York: New American Library, 1964), 233-240; "The Difficult Decision: Contraception," in *The Experience of Marriage: The Testimony of Catholic Laymen,* ed. Michael Novak (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 69-81; "Birth Control and the Ideals of Marital Sexuality," in *Contraception and Holiness,* ed. Gregory Baum (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 72-91.

publication of Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*. She was simply writing about women's issues in the church that were a concern to her.

With her background in history and religion Ruether's developing activism in the civil rights and peace movements moved her to begin reflecting on the religious roots of the racism and military oppression she had encountered. These reflections led her to begin to develop a broad-gauged theology of liberation. Emboldened by the documents coming out of Vatican Council II and by a Church seemingly more open to self-questioning and reflection, she began writing on issues of Church reform beyond her initial particular concern for the Church's teachings on sexuality and birth control.

Her first book, *The Church Against Itself,* published in 1967, addresses the ambiguities she finds in the Church. She probes the Church as an institution upheld by "rhetoric which accustoms Catholics to think and speak of the Church only in a glorified form." This rhetoric creates what she calls a paradoxical relation between the reality and the vision of the church. Critiquing what she considers the Church's self-delusion of triumphalist ecclesiology, she argues that the Church confuses its historical existence with its divine essence, a confusion which has led it astray from the apostolic tradition through which the gospel was first proclaimed. [55] Her argument throughout this first book is that revelation that does come from God has been reflected on and become the tradition (a human construct) of the Church. But the Church tends to forget that this reflective theology is once removed from the direct encounter with God's Word (revelation) and thus is secondary to revelation and has a secondary relation to the truth. Tradition is imbedded in the culture of the time when the revelation was reflected upon;

[55] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Church Against Itself: An Inquiry into the Conditions of Historical Existence for the Eschatological Community* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 2.

and when it is finalized and absolutized, it becomes a barrier to the Church's future. [56] Ruether continued throughout her career to write about the need for reform of the Church as well as its theology. [57]

In the mid-sixties, Ruether began writing articles critiquing the Church, including its patriarchy and discrimination against women and advocating significant reforms. She critiqued what she considered the failure of the Church to carry out the reforms of Vatican II with the lines of authority still proceeding from the top down and no institutional reform in the way of collegiality and community. She questioned if reform in the Church was even possible.[58] She argued from history that celibacy was in crisis because it had long ago outlived its original rationale rooted in monasticism where it was integral to an ascetic, contemplative definition of perfection. "We no longer believe that celibacy has an absolute relationship to radical discipleship."[59]

In the early seventies, Ruether's interests expanded to writing articles and contributing chapters to edited books in the areas of racism and anti-Semitism as well as feminism. Her book, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power*, published in 1972, brought her Black, liberationist, and feminist theologies together. In this book she addressed in a preliminary way a number of issues on which she would later write full length books.[60] A prolific writer, in the seventies she

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[56] Ibid., 227-228. Ruether continues, "It absolutizes the specific cultural perception of the past and the church is not free to encounter God through the Spirit and be open to a real future."

[57] Her two latest books are *Catholic Does Not Equal Vatican; a Vision for Progressive Catholicism* (New York: The New York Press, 2008) and *Christianity and Social Systems: Historical Constructions and Ethical Challenges* (New York: Rowan &Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009).

[58] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Is Roman Catholicism Reformable?" *The Christian Century* (September 22, 1965): 1152-1154.

[59] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Catholicism's Celibacy Crisis," *The Christian Century* (October 19, 1966): 1268-1270.

[60] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972). This book exemplifies Ruether's already

wrote or co-wrote eight books, contributed chapters to over two dozen books and published nearly a hundred journal articles. While she began writing more about women, particularly, religion and sexism, she did not focus on feminist issues. Ever the liberation theologian, she wrote in diverse areas including racism and Church reform as well as a newer concern, anti-Semitism.

In 1974, Ruether edited *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, one of the first research anthologies to enlighten both religious and secular women on the role religion played and has continued to play in legitimating oppressive measures and attitudes against women.[61] That same year her book on anti-Semitism, *Faith and Fratricide*,[62] was also published. In *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, written in 1975, Ruether interprets the women's movement as encompassing all other liberation movements.[63] *New Woman, New Earth* laid the groundwork for much of Ruether's later work in that she examines closely the interrelation of ideology and social structure in the history of sexism. She argues that because domination is society's fundamental model of relationships, liberation of women must be tied to all other liberations, including a new concern, the liberation of nature and the environment. For Ruether, sexism is only one of the structures of oppression and along with racism, classism, and other kinds of oppression interconnected in an overall

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expanding concerns of liberation. Among issues addressed are the rise and hegemony of early Christianity, anti-Semitism, the roots of misogyny found in Christianity, ecology, and theologies of Blacks and Hispanics.

[61] Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed. *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

[62] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

[63] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), xi.

pattern of human alienation and sinfulness.[64]

In 1983 Ruether wrote her most seminal book *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* in which she developed the first definitive feminist systematic theology, reconstructing the major symbols of Christian systematic theology from a feminist perspective. *Sexism and God-Talk* quickly became and has remained for many a basic text for teaching foundational feminist theology. In 1989, she widened her liberationist vision, and along with her husband Herman Ruether wrote *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.*

Thus, although Ruether had begun to develop her own feminist theology in the early seventies while teaching courses in feminism at Harvard Divinity School (1972-1973) and Yale Divinity School (1973-1974), she continued to expand the areas of her thought and work under the broad heading of liberation theology. That is, she never focused on any one area because her ever-widening vision moved her on to new developments in her liberationist thought, adding to the many areas of concern about which she would continue to write.

When questioned about how she became a feminist, Ruether responds that it is difficult to trace her specific awakening to feminism because it seems that she was implicitly always a feminist, "if by being a feminist one means a woman who fights for her full realization and accepts no special barriers to her aspirations on the basis of sexual identity." She adds that even as a child she instinctively rejected efforts to define her in traditional female roles.[65] Instilled with a sense of autonomy which was nourished by a

[64] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Of One Humanity: A Feminist Theologian Discusses Issues Confronting Women, Men, and the Church," *Sojourners* 13, no. 1 (January 1984): 17-19.

[65] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982), 109-110. Ruether adds that she recalls once at the age of eight she had baked a cake

family background of strong, independent, and intellectual women, Ruether asserts that she had always assumed she could do anything she wished to do. Being a woman was no impediment. [66]

Ruether argues that the first issue for feminist theology was "to establish that women were oppressed subjects; that sexism was a form of social oppression in its own right, that even middle class white women had issues of sexist oppression."[67] Ruether's feminist critique emerged from within the civil rights and peace movements which she found put down women and made them exploited workers of these movements despite the women's noble aims, aims that Ruether fully shared. The idea that women were oppressed subjects was rejected by males in these movements who saw only issues of class and race and refused to take sexism seriously as a social issue. In order to show that sexism was a form of oppression in its own right, feminists – especially religiously committed feminists – had to do social and historical analysis. Given Ruether's training in social and intellectual history and Christian thought,[68] her work was to document this longstanding oppressive dualism through religious history: to show how the Bible, the Church Fathers, and the teaching of the church discriminated against women and that this history had shaped theology as a patriarchal ideological system that privileged men over

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and her older sister commented, "You will make some man a good wife someday." This comment deprived her of her own identity and future as a person, and she felt anger and betrayal; she felt an enormous sense of injustice and insult without being able to name exactly the cause of her annoyance.

[66] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Development of my Theology" in "Rosemary Radford Ruether: Retrospective," *Religious Studies Review* 15 (January 1989): 2. Ruether's mother and her mother's friends belonged to the end of an earlier feminist generation.

[67] Lisa Isherwood, "Interview: Rosemary Radford Ruether with Lisa Isherwood," *Feminist Theology* 24 (May 2000): 106.

[68] Ibid., 105. Ruether's doctoral work was in classics and patristics, with European intellectual history. In Ruether's own words, she has basically "done theology as a historical theologian or intellectual historian."

women.[69]

As was demonstrated in the first chapter, from early on the focus of Ruether's work was to probe the many aspects of a world system of oppression divided by race, class, gender, imperialism, militarism, and abuse of the environment. Studying the justifying ideologies of these systems, she sought to imagine how to create a liberated world beyond it.[70] Thus she developed her own theology of liberation.

In order to set Ruether within the wider feminist movement, this chapter has presented an overview of the history of the feminist movement beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Sarah Grimké, Frances Willard, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were among the early activists who called attention to the way culture, religion, law, and the accepted moral standards served to restrain women.

Second wave feminism emerged as a full-fledged movement with the publication, in 1963, of Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*, the founding of NOW, and the political and social activism of Gloria Steinem. In the early 1960s, some of Ruether's writing had begun to critique the Catholic views of sexuality and reproduction as her own personal experience as a woman began to conflict with the teachings of the Catholic Church. However, Ruether did not consider herself as joining the feminist movement at that time, but rather as promoting Church reform dealing with women's issues.
In the late 1960s, as she was developing her own liberation theology, Ruether began to add questions of gender to her writings on race and class. Thus, as was noted above, Ruether's experiences as a feminist, emerging out of the civil rights and peace movements, was very different from that of many second wave feminists, among them

[69] Ibid., 107.
[70] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 29.

Friedan and Steinem. It was Ruether's passion and commitment to justice and liberation from all forms of oppression that led to her gradually adding feminist issues. Thus, one can see feminism did not come first for Ruether but came out of her widening liberationist vision and is only one area of her writings as a liberation theologian. Two of the areas she wrote on extensively, Christian anti-Semitism and ecofeminism, will be discussed in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 3

RUETHER AND JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

This chapter will focus primarily on Ruether's early engagement with Jewish-Christian relations and her critique of Christian anti-Semitism. Her seminal book *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* was published in 1974.[1] She continued writing about this issue throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, contributing chapters to edited books and articles to scholarly journals as a Christian theologian engaged in addressing relations with Judaism. However, following a trip to Israel in 1980 where she got her first glimpse of the situation of Palestinians at that time, her concern began to turn to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

After Rosemary and her husband Herman Ruether spent several months in Israel-Palestine in 1986, together they wrote the book *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.*[2] This led to a shift in emphasis in Ruether's work, although she firmly adhered to her fundamental hostility to any form of anti-Semitism. Through the 1990s, she contributed nearly two dozen articles on the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to scholarly journals and the *National Catholic Reporter*. This chapter will conclude with a brief survey of Ruether's writings about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without attempting a comprehensive analysis of her changing

[1] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

[2] Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman J. Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

perspective on the complex political and religious situation in the Middle East.

Ruether's sensitivity to issues of Jews and Judaism was first sparked by her relationship with her uncle, David Sandow. Married to her father's sister, he was from a family of New York Jews originally from Russia. Ruether was quite fond of this uncle who became a kind of surrogate father for her not only after her father died when she was twelve years old, but even earlier when her father was away during WWII. Her sensitivity to Jewish questions had been sharpened during the war when at the age of nine she saw contemporary Saturday afternoon movies newsreels of the Nazi death camps and all the horrors of the Holocaust. Later in college when she studied church history, she became aware of the anti-Semitism of the Christian tradition. When she wrote her book *Faith and Fratricide,* she dedicated it to David Sandow.

Some background will further explain Ruether's more academic interest in the Jewish-Christian relationship and, in particular, Christian anti-Semitism. During her undergraduate humanities studies, she became fascinated with Christian origins and in particular the development of the concept of afterlife in early Christianity. It was during these studies that she first became aware of the "Jewish question." In doing the research for her bachelor's thesis on the development of eschatology in the intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature, she became aware of several important themes that were of particular concern to her. She found that what Judaism meant by "Messiah" at the time of Jesus had very little in common with what the Catholic tradition taught as the meaning of the word "Christ." For Catholics, Christ was understood as a "divine man," the incarnation of the Word of God who appeared to save humans from personal sin, reconcile them with God, and make immortal life after death available to the redeemed.

Ruether found that the Jewish conception of the Messiah, on the other hand, was neither incarnate of God nor divine but a fully human king and warrior sent by God. He would appear at the end of the era of injustice to defeat the physical enemies of Israel, to end oppression and to inaugurate a new era of world peace and justice. In Judaism, the Messiah has nothing to do with saving humanity from mortality or making available life after death.[3]

Israel's expectation of the Messiah began shortly after their return to Palestine from the Babylonian Exile, the latter part of the sixth century BCE.[4] While the details of this idea of the coming of the Messiah changed over the years and varied among sects of Jews, the doctrine of the Messiah was well established by the first century C.E.[5] Although the various Jewish sects at this time had different concepts of how this would take place, "the Jews (as a whole) expected the Messiah to overthrow the rule of the Roman Empire." [6] A new age of world peace would then be ushered in. However, contrary to this more widespread Jewish conception, the (initially Jewish) followers of Jesus in the early first century CE were convinced he was the expected Messiah even though he had fulfilled none of the standard Jewish expectations. Rabbi Wylen in his book *Settings of Silver* states:

> The Christian sect that arose in this century came to believe that their Messiah came not to end the oppression of the Jews but to provide salvation from sinfulness through faith in him. This doctrine did not reflect the messianic hopes of the Jews, a fact that became apparent as Christianity developed into a separate and distinct religion.[7]

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[3] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 45-46.

[4] See for background Stephen M. Wylen, *Settings of Silver: An Introduction to Judaism,* 2nd ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 116-123.

[5] Ibid., 120.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

In the late sixties and early seventies, Ruether had begun writing articles raising the issue of Christian anti-Semitism, examples of which are "Theological Anti-Semitism in the New Testament,[8] "In What Sense can we Say that Jesus is the Christ?," [9] and "Anti-Judaism is the Left Hand of Christology."[10] These were followed by her book *Faith and Fratricide* which is essential to understanding her deep sympathy with Judaism and her fundamental critique of Christian anti-Semitism. Indeed, for a Christian theologian her book was "groundbreaking in the English-speaking Catholic world."[11] It set the agenda for much subsequent Christian study of theological anti-Semitism. Ruether's beginning thesis is that the origins of Christian anti-Semitism go back to the very beginning of the early church and the church's proclamation: "Jesus is the Messiah."

In the late sixties, not finding anything of substance written on the legitimacy of Christianity based on the Jewish messianic hope, Ruether had started putting together some of her own findings and began writing on the theme of the Messiah of Israel and the Cosmic Christ. The outcome of her efforts was a manuscript of some 460 pages in 1970. However, the manuscript was rejected for publication by Oxford University Press which had published her PhD thesis. Realizing that some reviewer critics were hostile to her ideas about the Canaanite origin of messianic ideas, she acknowledges that her research made her determined to "follow systematically the question of anti-Semitism in Christian

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[8] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Theological Anti-Semitism in the New Testament," *The Christian Century* (February 14, 1968): 191-198.

[9] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "In What Sense Can We Say that Jesus is the Christ?" *Ecumenist* 10 (1972): 14-19.

[10] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Anti-Judaism is the Left Hand of Christology," *New Catholic World,* (Jan-Feb, 1974): 12-17.

[11] Gregory Baum, e-mail message to author, May 17, 2017. Baum adds, "Her learned study opened the eyes of Catholics and Protestants to the anti-Jewish rhetoric that had been part of Christian preaching almost from the beginning. Hers was an important book in the history of American theology. It stood out because it was written as a provocation, challenging the reluctance of Christians to recognize the dark side of their tradition."

theology, to show its origins in the conflict of Judaism and early Christianity over the messianic idea, its development in the Church Fathers, and its subsequent course in the Christian tradition up to the present."[12] Her more extensive research and revised writing eventually culminated in the publication of the book *Faith and Fratricide* in 1974.

It was Ruether's persistent concern for liberation (in this case the liberation of the Jews from anti-Semitism) that fundamentally drove her research. The first thing she set out to do was to attempt to find the origins and source of the anti-Jewish trends in the Christian tradition. Many scholars have argued the anti-Jewish trends in Christianity are a late development, having originated in cultural and social conflicts with the Jews in pagan Greco-Roman society. However, having read extensively during her undergraduate studies the Jewish apocalyptic literature on the messianic hope and then comparing this to what she had been taught in Catholic schools concerning the Jews and their rejection of Christ as the Messiah, Ruether thought otherwise.

What follows is an account of Ruether's extended argument from her historical research on the origins and the sources of the anti-Semitism in the Christian tradition and her interpretation of her findings.

She began her research looking for Greek and Roman roots of the negative myth of the Jews. While there were anti-Jewish attitudes in the Hellenistic society directed at the Jews living in the Diaspora, Ruether argued this wasn't racial. It was a cultural-political reaction to the Jews living in their midst and adhering to their own religious law which set them apart from others. It was a cultural affront that the Jews considered the gods false and accepted manners and diets "unclean" in the Hellenistic society. This conflict between Jewish and Greek society sometimes led to forced attempts at

[12] Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 52.

Hellenization of the Jews such as in the second century BCE under Antiochus Epiphanes[13]

On the other hand, Jewish religious thought in the Diaspora and even in Palestine appropriated many Hellenistic elements. For example, Jewish Hellenistic apologists, among them Josephus and Philo, presented Judaism in the "dress" of Greek philosophy. Some Greeks, in turn, developed a curiosity about the people of the Ancient Middle East, including the highly distinctive Jews. Considering ancient Eastern wisdom as a kind "natural philosophy" that predated Plato, these Greeks thought the Jews, as well as Egyptians, had developed an ancient version of this original philosophical religion.[14] Thus, there was an element of assimilation of Judaism into Greek culture which helped to blunt some of the negativity toward Jews in Greek society.[15]

Following the Roman conquest of Palestine and especially after the Jewish Wars in 66-73 CE and 133-136 CE, the Roman attitude was one aimed at control and pacification of the Jews. Jewish laws were recognized by the Romans as the legitimate national customs of a protected people fitted within a framework so long as they would not jeopardize Roman dominance.[16] The Jews were primarily left alone as long as they paid the Roman taxes and didn't attempt to start a rebellion against the dominant society. In accord with the policies they followed in many regions they conquered, the Romans wanted simply to place each ethnic group in a workable administrative relationship to the imperial governing structure.

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[13] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 25.

[14] Ibid, 26. Ruether added that the Jewish apologists could take advantage of this Greek tradition and use it to argue that Plato had learned his philosophy from Moses.

[15] Ibid. It is important to note that from 300 – 100 BCE while many Jews were influenced by, even absorbed Hellenistic culture, some even embarrassed by their native laws and customs, other Jews refused a compromise with the Hellenistic culture, thus there was a schism within the Jewish community itself.

[16] Ibid., 27-28.

Drawing on these findings, Ruether contended that the reaction of the pagan Greco-Roman world to the Jews was an ambivalent one, with eventually the cooperating Jews in the Roman Empire being given a protected status in Roman society.[17] She argued that the anti-Judaism of Christianity is not rooted in a pagan anti-Judaism, but rather its source lies in the theological dispute between Christianity and Judaism over the messiahship of Jesus. She added, "The privileged status of the Jews in Roman society began to be rescinded only after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and a Christian anti-Judaism began to be expressed in anti-Jewish legislation."[18]

Convinced that the anti-Jewish trends in Christianity were not due to pagan anti-Judaism, Ruether then concentrated her research on the first century and the early beginnings of Christianity to support her argument that Christian anti-Semitism is rooted in the Church's very origins. The Church's proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah, and its belief that Jesus is thus the fulfillment of the promises made by God to Israel in the past, was a bold innovation and, of course, met with opposition from the Jewish establishment. Ruether argued that as the Church developed its Christological exegesis and found it opposed by the traditional midrash of the priests and the scribes, and especially by the Pharisees, an anti-Judaic midrash formed to negate this negation given to the Church's messianic interpretation of the official Scriptures of Judaism.[19]

Ruether therefore alleged, "Anti-Semitism in Western civilization springs, at its

[17] Ibid., 28.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 64. Ruether noted here that Christology and anti-Judaism were both exegetical traditions in early Christianity. That is, they both were interpretations of the Torah, the Psalms, and the Prophets which was for the Church, as well as Judaism, the sole Bible. From this common Scripture the scribes and Pharisees were developing Oral Torah based mostly on the Torah, while the Church developed its oral New Testament upon a messianic midrash of the Psalms and Prophets.

root, from Christian theological anti-Judaism."[20] She argued that it was Christian theology in response to the Jewish religious teachers not acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah that developed the thesis of the reprobate status of the Jews. Calling anti-Judaism the "left hand of Christology," Ruether contended that anti-Judaism was the negative side of the Christian affirmation that Jesus was the Christ. In defense of this claim, Christianity developed a polemic against the Jews and Judaism to explain how the Church could profess to be the fulfillment of a Jewish religious tradition when the overwhelming majority of official Jewish religious teachers denied it.[21]

In her book *Faith and Fratricide,* Ruether reconstructed what she believed is the development of the Church's anti-Jewish tradition. Beginning with the rejection of the Jews in the early church and New Testament and moving on to the Jewish negativism found in the *adversos Judaeos* tradition in the Church Fathers, she demonstrated how the "negative myth of the Jews" continued to develop and then was passed on to the Middle Ages leading to the social incorporation of this negative myth in Christendom.

Anti-Judaism in the Early Church and the New Testament

Ruether contended that the crucial experience that generated the Church's Christology was the crucifixion, or rather, the decision of faith made by Jesus' followers in response to the trauma of the crucifixion.[22] Many of the people had thought as he rode into Jerusalem (for what turned out to be the final time) that he was the Messiah promised by God and was inaugurating the in-breaking of God's kingdom, "God's incursion into history, overthrowing the reign of evil powers and establishing the reign of blessedness

[20] Ruether, *Disputed Questions,* 57.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide,* 66.

for God's elect."[23] They refused to see the crucifixion as "proof" that Jesus was not the Messiah; but rather, they saw it as a "necessary test" through which he was intended to pass. So now the claim that Jesus was the Messiah had to be constructed to explain the scandal of Jesus' execution at the hands of the Romans.

Referring to the reports of the after death appearances of Jesus to several groups of his grieving followers, Ruether introduced them as an "extraordinary experience, the objectivity of which can never be verified."[24] She argued that believing by some miracle he had risen from the dead and still sojourned among them, a powerful but unseen presence, Jesus' followers now explained that the advent of the new beginning had not been disproven by Jesus' death, but rather only postponed. Not long after his resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven with God, and soon the heavens would again open and God would come to overturn the evil powers of this world. Jesus himself would appear with his avenging Lord.[25] But a dying Messiah, resurrected and rising to heaven, and returning later to defeat the evil powers of the world was incompatible with the Jewish understanding of the Messiah. So, early Christians turned to searching the Scriptures to support their claim. Ruether contended the early Christians united several ideas from the Jewish tradition that had not been so united before. They joined together the messianic idea with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 to affirm that the suffering and death of the Son of Man, or Messiah, were necessary for redemption. Christian teachers endeavored to vindicate their belief in Jesus as the Messiah by reinterpreting Hebrew

[23] Ibid., 67.
[24] Ibid., 69.
[25] Ibid., 70.

prophecy to foretell Jesus as the coming Messiah. [26] Thus, Christianity simply denied the ability of Jewish teachers to interpret their own scriptures. Ruether argued that the real clash between Christianity and the Pharisaic teachers was not the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Rather, she added,

> the crux of the conflict lay in the fact that the Church erected its messianic midrash into a *new principle of salvation.* For Christianity, salvation was now found no longer in any observances – ritual or ethical – founded on the Torah of Moses, representing the covenant of the past. Rather, salvation was now found solely through faith in the messianic exegesis of the Church about the salvific role of Jesus as Prophet-King-Son of Man, predicted by the prophets. Only that community gathered around this cornerstone is God's true people.[27]

Ruether argued that Christianity as much as demanded from Judaism a conversion that laid aside its past, since that past no longer provided a covenant of salvation that could be extended to non-Jews. Christianity did not ask Judaism simply to extend itself in continuity with its past, but to abrogate its covenant and replace it with the covenant provided by Christ.

Ruether pointed to parables in the synoptic Gospels which the Church used to support its claim of superseding Judaism. Christianity is neither a "new patch" put on an old garment nor "new wine" poured into old wine bottles. An entirely new "garment" and "container" of this new wine is demanded (Luke 5:3ff.). As the church, soon expelled from the Jerusalem temple, moved into the Diaspora, it began to attract Gentiles in large numbers, and soon the church found its missionary field to be among the Gentiles. Ruether argued that by the second decade of the church's mission, its

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[26] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 32. Ruether added that in addition to citing the prophets, several of the Psalms were cited to foretell Jesus as God's anointed who would be made king over the whole earth at the time of salvation (Pss 22; 69; 18), the messianic king who would be placed at the right hand of God until God had defeated his enemies (Ps. 110). Other examples are the "glorious figure like unto the Son of Man" in the book of Daniel (7).

[27] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 78.

interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures "expanded to include the idea that God was carving out for himself a people from *among the Gentiles.* This, too, was declared to have been known and continuously predicted by the prophets."[28] The Jews who insisted on clinging to the "old covenant" and thus rejected the Gospel, God has in turn rejected.

Ruether concluded, "An exegesis that added the idea of inclusion of the Gentiles to the idea of apostate Israel must then have begun to be formed in the second decade of the Church's life."[29] She added that this new exegesis of the inclusion of the Gentiles is expressed in a number of Jesus' parables in a correlation between the "unbelieving Jew" and the "believing Gentile." Now all the texts about the rejection of apostate Israel, found especially in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures, became available for the idea that God finds faith among the Gentiles. Ruether contended that the *adversus Judaeos* tradition was built on a two-sided exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Christian interpretation of the Psalms and the Prophets endeavored to show that the Scriptures predicted Jesus as the Christ and at the same time showed the unbelief of the Jews and predicted their apostasy. Ruether argued that this type of exegesis distorted the meaning of genuine Jewish prophetic criticism. The Christian exegesis split apart the dialectical structure of judgment and promise in prophetic thought. The "affirmative side, of forgiveness and promise, was assigned to the Christian church while its negative side, of divine wrath and rejection, was read out against the Jews."[30] Examples of this

[28] Ibid., 83. Ruether added a note here that she suggests this development took place at this early date, the second decade of the Church's mission, because the synoptic traditions which assert the Christian covenant over against that of "apostate Israel" already exists in an integral relation, in so many cases, with the idea that God in rejecting this apostate people, is choosing the Gentiles.

[29] Ibid., 84.

[30] Ruether, *To Change the World,* 34. Ruether added that this splitting of the left hand prophetic criticism from the right hand of hope and promise creates a "caricature of evil projected upon another people with whom the Christian no longer identifies. The Church divorced herself from the heritage of

type of exegesis cited by Ruether will be discussed more in the next section of this paper. However, Reuther did acknowledge that this long tradition of exegesis has practically disappeared in the modern era, with most contemporary Christian scholars of Hebrew Scriptures interpreting them historically and not simply as predictions of Jesus as the Christ as was the case for centuries.

Ruether contended that a more difficult problem exists in the New Testament where anti-Judaic exegesis has been woven into the theological interpretation and put into the mouth of Jesus himself. Referring to passages in the synoptic gospels where Jesus confronts the Scribes and Pharisees, calling them hypocrites and denouncing their tedious practice of the law at the exclusion of justice and mercy, Ruether argued Jesus is rejecting neither the Law nor Judaism, but rather remains firmly within the Jewish tradition. Warning them about priorities for interpreting and following the Torah, Jesus stands firmly within the debate of rabbinic schools of his time. In other words, Ruether is comparing Jesus' warnings to the prophetic criticism found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus is warning those in his own Jewish tradition about hypocritical religion, much as the Hebrew prophets had done.

Ruether alleged that later when the Christian church came to see itself as the new covenant, the new way of salvation through Christ that supersedes the Torah as the way to salvation, Jesus' prophetic critique of hypocritical ways of living the Law began to be read as denunciation of the Law itself. The Torah, the Law, was in this view obsolete and replaced by the new covenant in Christ. Here Ruether reminded the reader that "we must recognize that prophetic criticism is always internal criticism, a criticism that springs

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prophetic self-criticism and stands triumphant and perfect." The Hebrew Scriptures which contain the tradition of Jewish religious self-criticism and repentance is turned into a remorseless denunciation."

from loyalty and commitment to the true foundations of the people whom you criticize. It is fundamentally distorted when it becomes simply the repudiation of another people who are no longer your own."[31] Jesus was born a Jew, and he died still faithful to his Jewish tradition.

Negation of the Jews in the Church Fathers

Ruether argued that the Christian polemic against Jewish leaders as blind came to include the idea that their rejection of Jesus as the Christ discredits their authority and changes the relation of the Jewish people as a whole to God. Since the earliest Christian Scripture before the written New Testament was the Hebrew Scriptures, these Jewish texts were used by the Church and given Christological interpretation in its polemic against the Jews. In other words, a Christological interpretation of Judaism's sacred writings was used by the Church to discredit the Jewish interpretation of its own scriptures and to confirm the Church's own faith as the authentic culmination of the Jewish religious tradition. Ruether held that both the Christological and anti-Judaic exegesis of the Hebrew Scriptures pre-existed Christian writings and formed the hermeneutical basis of the New Testament itself.[32] She contended that this anti-Judaic tradition was further developed and expanded in the *adversus Judaeos* writings of the Church Fathers during the second to fourth centuries to prove that Jesus is the Messiah predicted by the prophets and that the Jews who reject this are both blind and depraved.

With her considerable background in both classics and patristics, Ruether's writing is grounded in solid scholarship on the anti-Judaic themes found in the *adversus*

[31] Ibid., 36.

[32] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The *Adversus Judaeos* Tradition in the Church Fathers: The Exegesis of Christian Anti-Judaism," in *Essential Papers on Judaism and Christianity in Conflict: From Late Antiquity to the Reformation,"* ed. Jeremy Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 174.

Judaeos tradition of the Early Church Fathers. She structured her argument around two primary themes found in these writings: the rejection of the Jews by God and the election of the Gentiles, and the abrogation and spiritual fulfilment of the Law and the temple cult. She argued, "The *adversus Judaeos* tradition was a tool of active polemic between the two faiths. It expressed Christian self-affirmation in the face of a live and proselytizing Judaism that continued to challenge Christianity."[33]

With regard to the rejection of the Jews and the election of the Gentiles, Ruether argued that while the final act of the alleged apostasy of the Jews is the patristic assertion they rejected and killed Christ, "as in the New Testament, the Church Fathers projected this final act of apostasy backward and constructed a view of Jewish history as a trail of crimes."[34] Proof-texting the Hebrew Scriptures, the case was made that the Jews had a long history of apostasy which included the rejection and even killing of the prophets, culminating in the rejection and the killing of Christ.[35] Ruether noted that the Church Fathers built their case against the Jews by scouring the prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Selecting a verse or two here, another verse there, and so on, removing the verses from their contexts, they regularly distorted the original intent of the texts.[36] Ruether argued the prophetic dialectic of judgment and promise is presumed by these Church Fathers to apply not to one people, the Jews, but to two peoples, the Jews and the future Church. She added,

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[33] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide,*123.

[34] Ibid., 124.

[35] The references to "killing of the prophets" are mostly from texts in I and II Kings.

[36] As a careful historian, one works within the horizon of the author one studies. While I am aware of and respect more recent biblical scholarship, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand Rosemary Ruether in her context and times. Ruether used the historical critical method, a method used by many biblical scholars at that time and still today, to attempt to determine the original intent of the scriptures.

> This means that all the statements of divine wrath and judgment, which the prophets used as a language of ethical exhortation to that one people whom they also expected God would redeem, are read schizophrenically. Every negative judgment, threat, or description can then be taken out of context and read monolithically as descriptive of "the Jews." The positive side of the prophetic message – the traits of faith, repentance, and future promise – are said to apply not to the Jews, but to the future Church.[37]

True to her broader vision of liberating all people from systems of oppression, Ruether was severely critical of this non-liberating use of the Hebrew texts by the Church Fathers: "By dividing prophetic wrath from prophetic promise, one makes the Old Testament a text for anti-Judaism on the one hand and for ecclesial triumphalism on the other."[38] From among the writings of the many Church Fathers who contributed to the *adversus Judaeos* tradition, Ruether cited Tertullian's early second century writing, overtly titled *Adversus Judaeos,* as the best example of a comprehensive tract that covered the whole scope of anti-Judaic themes.[39] She also noted Augustine's *Tractatus Adversus Judaeos* as a simple but powerful statement of similar themes, and she referred to Chrysostom's eight sermons against the Jews which he preached in Antioch 386-388 CE as the most famous and actually vicious case of sermonic use of the *adversus Judaeos* material.[40]

Ruether contended that the heart of the *adversus Judaeos* tradition is the "proof" of the election of the Gentile church and its inheritance of the election of the rejected Jews. She added that the patristic tradition does not present this as the division that simply divides the "new people" from the "old" at the time of Jesus. It presents the

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[37] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide,* 131. Ruether called this the "schism of judgment and promise."

[38] Ibid., 132.

[39] Ibid, 119. Among the anti-Judaic themes are: The Jews fell under divine wrath because they worshipped idols beginning with the Golden Calf, they disbelieved in and killed the prophets, it was foretold that the Jews would reject Christ and would not understand the Scriptures, but the Scriptures would become intelligible to the Church, that they would lose Jerusalem and the promised land, that the Gentiles would replace the Jews as God's people.

[40] Ibid.

Gentile church as implicit in the Old Testament. It is, this tradition holds, prefigured and foretold in the Hebrew prophets.[41] Ruether continued,

> A basic method of proving the election of the Gentiles in the patristic writings, as in the New Testament, is to read all the texts about Israel as a 'light to the nations,' the future sway of the Davidic king over 'the nations,' and praise for non-Hebrew peoples, as prophecies of the gentile Church. These texts are read antithetically to the texts condemning Israel, to prove the rejection of the Jews and the election of the gentiles from among the nations.[42]

Ruether supported her argument by citing verses from the Prophets used by the Church to show that the Gentile church is the faithful people who are referred to in such texts as: "The peoples shall abandon their idols" (Jer. 6:19); "I have found a people who did not seek me" (Isa. 65:1; Rom. 10:25); and "Those who are not my people I shall call my people" (Hos. 2:23; cf. Rom. 9:20). Juxtaposed to these texts are texts which are said to refer to the unbelieving Jews, such as "On your account the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles" (Isa. 52:5), read as referring to the unbelieving Jews.[43] Ruether asserted this exegesis is an "extraordinary distortion of the actual meaning of the biblical texts." She added,

> There the Israel which is chastised and the Israel whose messianic fulfillment is predicted are the same. The messianic fulfillment of Israel includes the ingathering of believers from among the nations. In the Church's reading of these texts, however, the messianic Israel is identified with the believing Gentiles, in antithetical relationship to the chastised Israel, the reprobate Jews.[44]

Again, Ruether pointed out that in this method of proof-texting the Hebrew Scriptures contrary to their own intent, the evil-doing supposedly characteristic of the Jews is divorced from the message of forgiveness and future promise which is instead applied to the Church. The Jewish Scriptures, which contain the record of Jewish self-

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[41] Ibid., 137.
[42] Ibid., 139. Ruether adds that Christ was identified with the Davidic king of the Psalms.
[43] Ibid., 140. Ruether cites as the source Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos*, 13.
[44] Ibid., 140-141.

criticism and repentance, are turned into a remorseless denunciation of the Jews.[45]

Ruether noted that very few of the *adversus Judaeos* tracts and sermons appeal to the Jews for conversion, considering them beyond divine mercy. Citing writings of Eusebius, Cyprian, and Chrysostom, among others, Ruether alleged these Church Fathers held that God's discipline of the Jews offered the possibility of forgiveness only until the death of the Messiah, Jesus. Thereafter, their reprobation is permanent. However, she acknowledged that in his treatise "Against the Jews," Augustine is relatively more positive and implores the Jews to acknowledge that the Christians are the fruit of the promise of the Scriptures. He calls them to repent and come into the Christian Church. Only by becoming Christian now or at the end of time will they be saved.[46]

Addressing the second theme found in the *adversus Judaeos* tradition, "the inferiority and spiritual fulfillment of Jewish law, cult, and scriptural interpretation," Reuther maintained that the primary way Christians have dealt with the Jewish Law is to prove that the Jewish understanding of the Law is entirely unworthy. The Jews cling to the letter of the Law in an outward way while the Christian realizes the Law's spiritual meaning. The Church Fathers built their case by asserting that the Jewish Law and the temple cult were given by God only in a punitive way not for a redemptive purpose. They allege that the Jews had fallen into idolatry and all sorts of vices while in Egypt, so God gave the Mosaic Law to restrain their attraction to these immoral ways. They claim that the Mosaic Law was meant to be temporary to restore the Jews to a level of minimal humanity, to prepare them for the "natural law" restored by Christ. They argue from Jeremiah 31:31 that it is Christians who are the true "Law Keepers," as it is they to whom

[45] Ruether, "The *Adversus Judaeos* Tradition in the Church Fathers," 179.
[46] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide,*144-148.

God has given "hearts of flesh"; that is, Christians possess the new Law of inward obedience. Christ is the "new Lawgiver like Moses" who gives a law "written on their hearts." God intended the Jews be saved through the cross, not through the Law. The Mosaic Law has been abrogated. Ruether cited both Diognetus and Chrysostom who refer to the Jewish cultic practices such as resting on the Sabbath, feasts celebrated according to the new moon, sacrifices, circumcision, and dietary laws as profane, in error, and folly.[47]

Once again, Ruether charged the Church Fathers with the distortion of the prophetic texts. The fall of the temple (and thus the temple cultus) is said to be a sign of punishment for the crucifixion. Prophetic passages that rebuke cultic practices when separated from inner obedience are cited in such a way as to make it appear God always rejected the cult. In this view, God had allowed the cult only as a temporary, essentially punitive measure. The Church claimed for itself supersession of the Law and the cult. True sacrifice to God is not the temple cult of bulls and rams, but the sacrifice of a contrite heart. True worship of God is the spiritual service of prayer. The new cult instituted by Christ thus entirely superseded the Jewish cult of the temple.[48] Ruether challenged this argument of the Church Fathers by responding that after the fall of the temple "rabbinic Judaism used a similar spiritualization to argue that the temple cultus could be legitimately replaced by the worship of the contrite heart, prayer, and deeds of loving-kindness. But Christianity either ignored or tried to illegitimize this parallel

[47] Ibid., 150 -152. Diognetus, *Epistle of Diognetus* and Chrysostom, *Eight Orations Against the Jews*, IV, 6.

[48] Ibid., 156-158. Ruether cites Chrysostom, *Eight Orations Against the Jews*, IV, 7 (881); IV, 3 (PG 48, 874).

universalism and spiritualization of worship in the synagogue." [49]

Thus, Ruether argued the Church Fathers made use of the Christological perspective found in the New Testament to create a broad anti-Judaic tradition which presented the Jews as an unfaithful people and the worship of the Synagogue as devoid of meaning. The New Covenant in Christ had replaced the Old Covenant of the Torah; the Church had replaced the Jews as the elect of God.

The Social Incorporation of the Jewish Myth in Christendom

. Ruether then, finally, argued that the Christian anti-Judaic polemic would have had little effect on the status of Jews had Constantine not made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. When Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire, the polemic was now translated into official legal and political disabilities against the Jews. Civil and canonical legislation in the fourth to sixth centuries marginalized the Jews in Christian society. They were forbidden to proselytize, to hold political offices, and to hold Christian slaves on which large scale manufacturing and farming depended; additionally, special taxes were imposed on them. Ruether allowed that in spite of these restrictions, the Jews were not excluded as a social and religious group which is notable since by the end of the fourth century pagans and Christian heretics were proscribed in the Christian Empire.[50]

Ruether's account of the impact of Christian theological anti-Judaism on Jews in the centuries following Christianity's becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire can be more briefly summarized. While Jews experienced shifting levels of isolation and persecution throughout the Middle Ages, her primary thesis remains that all subsequent

[49] Ibid, 157,

[50] Ruether, "Christology and Jewish-Christian Relations," in *Messianism Through History*, ed. Wim Beuken, Seán Freyne and Anton Weiler (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 128.

forms of Christian anti-Semitism go back to the early church and the church's proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah. Theological anti-Judaism developed as a defense against the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. The anti-Judaic tradition was further developed and expanded in the *adversus Judaeos* tradition of the Church Fathers in the second through fourth centuries to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and the Jews who reject this are both blind and depraved. Although additional factors contributed to hostility against the Jews, the subsequent centuries of Christian anti-Semitism in the European Middle Ages all rested on this fundamental theological anti-Semitism.

Ruether noted that after Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, "What had previously been the hostile tradition of an illegal sect (Christianity) toward its parental faith now became the official creed of the civil religion of the Christian Roman Empire."[51] This gradually perpetrated a much wider range of restrictions on the Jews resulting not only in a suppression of their religious independence, but also in a widening social oppression of the Jewish people. In medieval and early modern Christendom, Jews were segregated in many places in special sections of cities known as ghettoes, forced to wear identifying dress, forbidden the normal range of economic activities, but permitted to function in areas forbidden to Christians, such as money lending which eventually added a negative social stereotype of the Jews to the negative religious images. Ruether argued that, finally, during the modern period religious anti-Judaism was translated into a racial anti-Semitism. "Negative characteristics thus became attributed to Jews as a race, as a matter of

[51] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 184.

'blood.'"[52] Ruether contended the major turning point for the worst of Jewish status in Christian Europe took place during the Crusades. Crusading armies on their way to destroy the Muslims in the Holy Lands frequently stopped along the way to pillage and massacre Jewish communities. She alleged that even though the Jews supposedly had protected status, neither the Christian princes nor the bishops did much to stop these attacks.[53]

Ruether indicted the Church and its years of indoctrination of popular religious hatred of the Jews for the escalating oppression of the Jews through the Middle Ages. The expulsions of entire Jewish communities from European countries that began in the late thirteenth century reflect the new concept of nationalism along with religious fanaticism, but there were also economic concerns as the Christian society took on the role of moneylender, traditionally one of the few occupations of the Jews. Myths about the Jews had been promoted to justify the massacres of the Crusades.[54] Blamed for the Black Plague of the mid-fourteenth century, pogroms broke out all over Europe against the Jewish community. Ruether continued stressing the part Christians played in the weaving of a destructive religious/racial mythology, "The image of the Jew deteriorated in the minds of Christians to that of a deformed monster, with horns, tail, cloven hoofs, and a peculiar stench to betray his fundamentally diabolic character."[55]

Ruether noted that anti-Judaic laws in most of Western society remained in force until the early nineteenth century when revolutions (especially the French Revolution)

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[52] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Anti-Semitism," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, ed. Daniel Patte (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56-57.

[53] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Christianity and Social Systems: Historical Constructions and Ethical Challenges* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 64.

[54] Ibid., Examples given by Ruether are the myths of ritual murders of stolen Christian children, well poisoning, and profaning the Eucharistic host.

[55] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 213.

and the rise of European nation states dissolved the legal structures of Christianity as the established state religion. Ghettos were disbanded and full citizenship was gradually granted to Jews in most of Western Europe. In Eastern Europe, emancipation came later or not at all with pogroms as well as the restrictive ghetto continuing into the twentieth century.

As positive as modern emancipation of the Jews may sound to modern ears, Ruether reminded the reader it came with a price. The process of secularization that shaped the modern state would not tolerate self-governing groups, so the "liberated" Jews had to give up their self-government and autonomous corporate identity, the latter of which had allowed them to keep a sense of peoplehood within Christian society. Ruether contended that "while Jews were told to dissolve any corporate identity as Jews to become simply citizens of the nation in which they resided, at the same time nationalists in France, Germany, and elsewhere began to think of their nation as possessing a particular spiritual essence or 'nature' that Jews could not acquire."[56] The Jews were considered materialistic and "rootless people," foreign to the French or German people who were rooted in their particular soil. They thus continued to be scapegoats, this time blamed by varied Christian groups and some secularists for the movements of secularism, industrialism, democracy, and/or socialism (depending on ideology) that threatened the traditional culture of Europe. They were depicted as "poison" threatening the spirit of European nations.[57] Ruether concluded from this: "Thus, a racial nationalist anti-Semitism developed in Europe. Since these evil qualities were attributed to Jewish

[56] Ruether, *Christianity and Social Systems.* 66.
[57] Ibid.

'nature,' not to a faith or culture that could be changed, the 'final solution' to a racist anti-Semitism was expulsion (or extermination)."[58]

Christian Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust

Thus, Ruether laid the groundwork for addressing the question of the role which Christian teaching may have played in the Holocaust. She has argued that anti-Jewish Christian ideology had conditioned Christians for two millennia. Branded as murderers of Christ and condemned as devils by the Church Fathers, a deep hatred of the Jews had developed. She has argued that after the emancipation of the Jews with the rise of the nation states, in place of a religious or cultural anti-Semitism, they were subject to a racist anti-Semitism. Ruether added,

> The racial theory was new, but the stereotypes of hatred were old. The mythical Jew, who is the eternal conspiratorial enemy of Christian faith, spirituality, and redemption, was being shaped to serve as the scapegoat for all things in secular industrial society which the middle class had created and now feared and hated for their dissolution of traditional religion, culture, social hierarchy, and life style.[59]

The question is asked, "Did Christian anti-Jewish ideals influence Hitler and help him rally the support for the extermination of the Jews?" Ruether argued, "Although the Nazis hated Christians as well as Jews, the church must take responsibility for the perpetuation of the demonic myth of the Jew that allowed the Nazis to make them the scapegoat of their project of racial purity."[60] Continuing to address the church's part in the Holocaust, she contended that this Christian tradition of oppression of and hatred toward the Jews, promoted antipathy toward them, which resulted in the church as much

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide,* 222.

[60] Ruether, *Disputed Questions,* 59. Ruether added that "in Nazism the Christian demonization of the Jew's spiritual condition was converted into a demonization of their biological condition. However, the Nazi final solution was not religious conversion as it was for the church, but physical extermination, to make way for the millennium of the Third Reich."

as turning its back on what was happening to them at the hands of the Nazis. While she did not directly assert the church had a direct responsibility for the success of Hitler and the Holocaust, she did contend that it seems contradictory that the church which had through the centuries provided some sort of token protection to the Jews, for the most part did not stand up for them in the face of Hitler.[61] True, there were some who attempted to hide and to protect the Jews, but the church for the most part was silent. Ruether added that

> although the Christian polemic was murderous, it was not genocidal. While they were objects of hate and oppression, there remained a place for the Jews in Christian society. There was the hope for the Jews' eventual conversion to Christianity which was projected into Christian eschatology and was part of the "last things" that indicated the second coming of Christ and final redemption.[62]

The Key Issue: Christology

While acknowledging other sources of anti-Semitism, Ruether consistently argued in her work that the anti-Judaic patterns of Christian theology were, and are still today, tied to a dogma of fulfilled messianism, so it is not possible to rethink these anti-Judaic patterns without questioning their Christological basis.[63] She suggested that

> two steps in this critique of Christology are necessary. First, Christians must formulate their faith in Jesus as the Christ in terms that are proleptic and anticipatory rather than final and fulfilled. Jesus should not be said to fulfill all the Jewish hopes for the coming Messiah, which indeed he did not. Rather, he must be seen as one who announced his messianic hope and who gave signs of its presence, but who also died in that hope, crucified on the cross of unredeemed human history.[64]

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[61] In her autobiography published in 2013 Ruether acknowledges that although the Christian polemic was murderous, it was not genocidal. While they were objects of hate, there remained a place for the Jews in Christian society. There was hope for the Jews' eventual conversion to Christianity which was projected into Christian eschatology and was part of the "last things" that indicated the second coming of Christ and final redemption. Thus it was important to protect them from extermination.

[62] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 68.

[63] Ruether, *Disputed Questions*, 72.

[64] Ibid.

Ruether contended that in Jesus' name Christians continue to proclaim the messianic hope and also to begin to experience its presence. But like Jesus, Christians also do that under the cross of unresolved human contradictions. The final point of the messianic advent remains in the future. Christians, as much as Jews, currently struggle with their deeply unresolved history, and Christians hold on to the memory of Jesus' resurrection as the basis for refusing to take evil as the final word and for hope that God will win in the end.

Ruether added that the second step in a Christian critique of Christology is to see Christology not only as proleptic, but also as paradigmatic. Christians must accept it as relative to a particular people. The Cross and the Resurrection are contextual to a particular historical community. They are breakthrough experiences that mediate hope in the midst of adversity for *Christians.* This does not mean that other people may not have parallel breakthrough experiences. Ruether continued that while the events of Jesus did not become paradigmatic events for the Jews, the Exodus and the Torah were watershed events of God breaking through for the people of promise. "For those who incorporate themselves into this experience, it becomes their foundation for continued and ultimate hope." [65]

Ruether acknowledged that some Christians will see this contextualizing of the Jesus events as unacceptable. For them, that Jesus is "the only way" to God is absolute. She conceded that he may be the only way for Christians, but other peoples have been given other ways that bear fruit. Ruether also held that it doesn't seem to her that the power of Jesus' name will become less if Christians cease to use that name to deny the validity of other peoples' experience of God through other means. She charged that only

[65] Ibid., 72-73.

when the Church ceases to use Jesus' name to negate other peoples' experiences of the victory of life over death, can the name of Jesus cease to be a name that creates alienation of Jew from Christian, and Christian from non-Christian.[66]

Ruether acknowledged many Christians were horrified by the atrocities of the Holocaust and a few began to realize that Christian theology held some responsibility. They began to rethink some Christian teachings such as the collective guilt of the Jewish people for Christ's death, the supersession of Christianity over Judaism, and the exclusivity of the redemptive role of Christ.

Making reference to the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate,* the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," Ruether commented that the Council addressed the question of the Jews in the context of a document on the relation of the Church to non-Christian people.[67] Stating it this way, one might conclude that Ruether while applauding the Church for addressing the issue, is admonishing the Church for not addressing Judaism individually rather than in a group with all non-Christian traditions. Judaism's history has a much more intimate relationship with Christianity than the other non-Christian religions and deserves more from the Church.

Ruether offered only a few statements from the content of *Nostra Aetate*. One can conclude these are select statements to prove the point she wants to make. She acknowledged that the Church affirms all humanity is one community descended from one stock created by God in the image of God and to be ultimately united in God's work of redemption. She added that the Church affirms all religions have some true insights into authentic relation to God, and the Church affirms whatever is true in every religion.

[66] Ibid., 73.
[67] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 69.

Moving toward making her point, she stated that "the Church orders the sequence of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and finally Judaism: and each of these is seen as having progressively more of the truth, and Christianity is understood as the final fullness."[68] Thus, while giving the Church some credit for attempting to make amends with Judaism, Ruether still implied the Church has fallen short of coming to terms with its long anti-Semitic history.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict[69]

Although she had written about Judaism for many years, Ruether made a trip to Israel in 1980 and got her first personal glimpse of the situation of the Palestinians. While she remained a strong "pro-Semite" after this visit, her liberationist concerns increasingly turned to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. Her concern for this situation was deepened when in 1986 she returned to Israel-Palestine with her husband, Herman Ruether, and spent several months at the Tantur Ecumenical Center, a scholarly institution located between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.[70] Here she met Naim Ateek, a Palestinian theologian, and was drawn to his reflections and pioneering work on Palestinian liberation theology. Subsequently, Ateek invited Ruther to write a Foreword to his book.[71] While her opposition to anti-Semitism remained strong, following her experience during her second visit to Israel-Palestine, her critical views of the Israel-Palestinian situation changed the direction of her work.

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[68] Ibid.

[69] In this section, I will be referring to the "Ruethers" in discussing the material in the *Wrath of Jonah* since Rosemary Ruether and Herman Ruether are co- authors of the book. However, it seems evident to me that Rosemary Ruether is the primary creator of the material and therefore I have included it in this study of her thought about Jews and anti-Semitism. All quotes and citations will be taken from the second edition published in 2002.

[70] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning,* 21.

[71] Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation,* foreword by Rosemary Radford Ruether (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989).

In1989, Ruether and her husband together wrote the book *The Wrath of Jonah: Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.* They published a second edition in 2002, adding an account of the intervening thirteen years which includes the "failed" Oslo process and the second intifada. Though her historical account of the origins of the crisis remained unchanged, Ruether also added further reflection on the tremendous difficulties of securing a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, given the worsened situation of the past thirteen years. One other source of their writing in this area, which will be used, is a chapter in an edited book: "Zionism, Christianity, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict".[72] Aware that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a highly contentious issue and their intentions in writing might be misunderstood, the Ruethers stated clearly in the Introduction their purpose in writing:

> We write as persons concerned about human rights and global justice. The two of us also write as Western Christians with special concerns about injustice, violations of human rights, and an unending spiral of violence in the Middle East, sparked particularly by the unresolved conflict between Israel and Palestinian nationalism. Both claim the one land of Israel/Palestine.[73]

The Ruethers held that in order to have any understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one must have some knowledge of the history of the land, the people who have occupied it, and the importance of the land to the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions. The first chapter of *The Wrath of Jonah*, "Peoplehood, Covenant, and Land in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam," gives an account of the role of religion in shaping Jewish, Christian, and Muslim attitudes toward "the Holy Land." The Ruethers asserted that their brief survey should make it clear that, from the point of view of

[72] Herman Ruether and Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Zionism, Christianity and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," in *Speaking the Truth: Zionism, Israel, and Occupation*, ed. Michael Prior (North Hampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2005).

[73] Ruether and Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah,* xvii.

historical residence, the Jews do not have an exclusive claim on the land. They note that "the Arabized Jewish, Christian, and Muslim people have the longest continuous residency in Palestine and are themselves an amalgam of all the peoples who have entered and colonized the region."[74] They argued further that the history of the region, going back millennia to the ancient Canaanites and the successive migrations of peoples and cultures into the territory now called Palestine, should make clear the reality that no one religious-ethnic group has exclusive right to the land. From the point of view of historical residence, neither the Jews nor any other group have an exclusive claim on the land. The Ruethers illustrated that all three monotheistic faiths have seen this area as the cradle of their religious beginnings and call it their "Holy Land," and thus have a spiritual claim on the land. The Ruethers clearly showed the complex history created by the claims of each of the monotheistic faiths on the land of Palestine over the centuries.

In tracing the historical development of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Ruethers proposed that the conflict can be seen as the result of the clash of three histories:

> 1) the history of Zionism as a movement of western and eastern European Jews seeking to escape from an anti-Semitic environment in Europe, to return to what they saw as their historic homeland in Palestine and to found a Jewish state. Zionists began planting small colonies of immigrants in Palestine in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; 2) Arab nationalism that emerged from the disintegrating Ottoman Empire . . . and that sought to found an Arab state that would include the whole of the Arab-speaking world from Syria to Saudi Arabia; and 3) European colonialism, especially that of Britain and France, who were seeking to divide up the Arab world among themselves.[75]

The Roots of Jewish Zionism

The Ruethers pointed out that through most of their history the Jews understood themselves as a unique religious community with basic rights of self-government such as

[74] Ibid., 5-6.

[75] Ruether and Ruether, "Zionism, Christianity, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," in *Speaking the Truth: Zionism, Israel, and Occupation,* 51.

legislation, taxation, and judiciary even though they lived within larger imperial systems. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the rise of the nation state and resultant nationalism created a new ideology that attacked Jews as not belonging to any European nationality, and consequently they became the target of a rising anti-Semitism. This prompted the rise of Zionism and the theory that the Jews were a nation in the political sense and that they too were entitled to live together as a nation and create their own state. The Ruethers presented several of the varieties of Zionism active in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, adding that dominant among them was the theory that Jews had the right, divinely given, to establish a Jewish nation in the Holy Land. The variant forms of Zionism each contributed in decisive ways to the shaping of the state that would become Israel in 1948.[76] The Ruethers agreed that Jews are indeed entitled to a homeland, but they argued that the Zionist theory of an exclusive Jewish nation (that only Jews are entitled to live in the State of Israel established in the Holy Land) prevents the Israeli government and large numbers of the Jews all around the world from recognizing that the Palestinians are also a people with the right to self-determination and are not simply groups of Arabs that happen to live in these territories.

The Rise of Arab Nationalism

The rise of Arab nationalism and hope for a unified Arab state that would include the whole of the Arab speaking world began to emerge as the Ottoman Empire was disintegrating in the early twentieth century. The Ruethers argued that while Western imperialism –especially that of Britain, France, and the United States – encouraged Arab nationalism against the crumbling Ottoman Empire, that encouragement turned to betrayal following World War I. The British made an agreement with the French to

[76] Ruether and Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah*, 54.

divide the Arab world into five areas with Syria and Lebanon becoming French mandate regions and Jordan, Iraq, and Palestine British mandate regions. In addition, in an agreement with the Zionists, the British promised in the "Balfour Declaration" in 1917 that the Jewish people would be granted a homeland in Palestine.[77] Palestinian protests and open rebellion were violently suppressed by the British during the following years.

A major blow to the Palestinians came in 1947 when the United Nations voted to partition Palestine into two states, giving fifty-five percent of the land to the Jewish settlers (who at the time numbered some 600,000 and occupied around seven percent of the land) and forty-four percent of the land to the Palestinian Arabs (who were at that time about 1.5 million). More than half of the Palestinian Arabs were living in the area that was designated as a Jewish state.[78]

The Ruethers presented two key arguments concerning the injustice of this partition of Palestine and the subsequent violation of the human rights of the Palestinian Arabs at the hands of the Jewish Zionists.

First, the Ruethers argued that the partition of Palestine by the United Nations and the awarding of the Jews a territory that they declared the State of Israel (at the expense of the Arab residents), was driven by guilt, the guilt of Europeans for the Holocaust and therefore a concession to the Jews based on strictly European history and experience. They contended this guilt has continued to play out through the years with support, especially from the United States, for Israel in Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. It has blinded these supporters to the injustice of the violence that the Israelis have used against the Palestinian Arabs as Israel has continued to take over more and more of the land

[77] Ruether and Ruether, "Zionism, Christianity, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," in *Speaking the Truth: Zionism, Israel, and Occupation*, 52.

[78] Ibid., 53.

originally allotted to the Palestinian Arabs.

Second, the Ruethers decried both the Zionist claim that this territory is exclusive Jewish homeland and the subsequent policy of the forced removal of Palestinian Arabs from the areas of Palestine allotted to the Jews.[79] They argued that while the Zionists accepted the partition as "providing the basis for a Jewish state, they did not accept their territorial limits of this state, the residence of so many Palestinians in it, or a parallel Palestinian state,"[80] adding that the Zionists from the beginning planned to change the facts on the ground by war. This proved to be true.

The Ruethers noted that for the Palestinian Arabs, the Jewish state was not legitimate. It was part of the Arab world and had been inhabited by Arabs for centuries. They, not the Jews, were the historical people of the region. They, in turn, demanded a Palestinian Arab state but declared that Jews could be members of such a state. [81]

Shortly after the State of Israel was established, fighting broke out which the Ruethers see as essentially initiated by the Zionists to take more of the land (although others see the Arab states as initiating the conflict). While the Ruethers have written a well-documented account of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict beginning from the time of the partition, here will be considered only, first, some of the Ruethers' reflections on what has taken place since the partition; second, an analysis of what the Ruethers have presented concerning the ongoing conflict; and third, how both of these relate to their larger liberationist vision.

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[79] The Ruethers argued that this land had never been a land of one people. Many people had lived there before the ancient Hebrews. Many people have come to this area in migrations and a mix of peoples and cultures for the past 2500 years. At one time the area was predominantly Christian, at another time Muslim, and all three cultures became Arabized in language and culture. They added that the descendants of all the people who have lived on the land are Palestinians and have the right to the land of Palestine.

[80] Ruether and Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah,* 132.

[81] Ibid.

Those who concentrate on the passages critical of Israel and allege that the Ruethers are partial to the Palestinians and hostile to the Jews have either not read their writings thoroughly or have interpreted them incorrectly. Just as the Ruethers opposed some Israeli policies, they were critical of some Palestinian leaders for perpetrating the conflict by refusing to accept compromises with Zionism and for misleading the Palestinians in attacks against Israel that didn't have a chance of being successful. They also were critical of key Arab states (such as Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon) that didn't defend Palestine, because they had their own nationalist ambitions and desire to co-opt the Palestinian cause into their own agendas. Saudi Arabia and Egypt were more concerned about keeping in check Jordanian and Syrian expansion.[82]

True to Rosemary Ruether's general methodology, the Ruethers probed the different aspects of the oppressive features of the Zionist system and its justifying ideology, and then imagined how to create a liberated world beyond. They pointed out that basic to Zionism is the argument that Jews are not a religious community but a nation and as such must establish a Jewish state for Jews alone (Zionists add that Jews need an exclusive Jewish state to protect them from anti-Semitism). Some Zionist leaders argue that Jews are entitled to all of Palestine, which they say was given to them by God as their ancestral homeland. Thus, the Ruethers argued that militant Zionism has been the major antagonist of a peaceful settlement because the Zionist ambition to establish a Jewish state in all of Palestine required that there be no Palestinian state. They alleged the plan has thus been to gradually force the Palestinians out of Palestine, even if that has not been publicly stated.

The Ruethers are critical of the expulsion of Arab Palestinians from their land

[82] Ibid., 89-90.

following the UN establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the additional expulsions after the wars that broke out between Arab states and the new Jewish state in 1948-1949 (when the Israelis took more land from the Palestinians) that resulted in hundreds of thousands of refugees. In addition, the Ruethers decried the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians living under occupation since 1967 when Israel initiated a military strike, occupied the West Bank and Gaza, and ever since then has steadily confiscated land from the Palestinians, building settlements in a deliberate pattern to cut off Palestinians living in the enclaves from each other.

If the Ruethers appear to be partial to the Palestinians, then it is not because of any hostility to Jews, but because of Rosemary's liberationist theological concern for justice and human rights, her vision of a world liberated from all global systems of oppression whatever their source. In their "Postscript" to the second edition of their book, the Ruethers admitted they find it difficult to hold out any hope for real improvement in the situation of the Palestinians. At the time of this writing (2002), they noted that the underlying problems remained much the same as they have been since the 1967 war, the endless efforts of Israel to remove or to subjugate Palestinians on less and less land. They did not attempt to advocate a particular political solution to the conflict, but what they did offer is this: there must be a change of attitude in both the Israelis and Palestinians toward each other. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians must recognize that two national communities have arisen in Palestine, and for either of them to deny that the other exists as a national community is futile. In particular, the Ruethers contended there must be a changed consciousness on the part of the Israelis that would accept the Palestinians as their neighbors, not people to get rid of. [83]

[83] Ruether and Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah*, 243.

The Ruethers noted that there are progressive Israeli and Diaspora Jews who have changed their thinking in relation to Palestinians by looking at them as part of the "family," as a people with common ancestors, common culture, and common roots in the same land. While acknowledging this change of consciousness on a large scale would require a long process of healing, they argued, "it can and must begin now in those Israeli Jews who represent a genuine alternative voice."[84]

The Ruethers did not place the responsibility solely on the Israelis to make this happen, but added that there must also be massive efforts among Palestinians to cease assassinations and bombings, which cause retaliation from the Israelis. They urged Palestinians to carry out non-violent resistance to occupation. Acknowledging that this change of outlook and behavior by the battered Palestinians will not be easy because of the deep hatred many have for the Jews, the Ruethers contended there must be the active presence and support of outside groups who can both support the Palestinians and help protect them, as they engage in non-violent actions, from Israeli attacks and give an enlarged public profile to the efforts.[85]

Acknowledging the extreme oppression of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israelis, the Ruethers contended if there is to be any hope for peace, the occupation must end and the Palestinians must be given autonomy and the means of a dignified existence – be able to attend school, have health care, run their own institutions, and represent themselves politically – in a national territory of their own. They too must be granted some measure of liberation.

This chapter has demonstrated how Rosemary Ruether's personal encounters with

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 244.

the prejudice and the violence against Jews moved her to research and to locate the roots of anti-Semitism and eventually to write about Jewish Christian relations. Following her usual methodology, Ruether's argument is based on extensive historical research and her analysis of this history's impact on negative attitudes toward the Jews.

Beginning her research with the Greek and Roman societies, she became convinced the anti-Jewish trends did not originate in the Greco-Roman world. Concentrating next on first century Christianity, she alleged an anti-Judaic tradition in the early Church based on the Church's proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah along with the rejection of the "unbelieving" Jews in the New Testament. Ruether then addressed the *adversus Judaeos* tradition in the writings of the Church Fathers during the second to fourth centuries, which she alleged further developed and expanded the anti-Judaic tradition by distorting the Hebrew Scriptures, giving them a Christological interpretation to "prove" the election of the Gentiles by God and the rejection of the Jews.

Locating the roots of an anti-Judaic tradition in the early Church, Ruether then traced the impact of the social incorporation of anti-Judaism in Christendom, after it became the official religion of the Roman Empire, into the twentieth century. Arguing that the key issue is Christology, in particular the dogma of fulfilled messianism, Ruether offered two steps to critique the Christological basis of anti-Judaism. First, Christians must formulate their faith in Jesus as the Christ in terms that are proleptic and anticipatory rather than final and fulfilled. Second, Christians must accept Jesus as the Christ as relative to a particular people, the Cross and Resurrection as contextual to a particular historical community. Referring to *Nostra Aetate,* Ruether acknowledged the Church has attempted to make amends with Judaism; but citing the statement that

Christianity is understood as the final fullness of truth,[86] she implied that the Church has fallen short of coming to terms with its long history of anti-Semitism.

In order to give a more complete account of Ruether's work in Judaism, this chapter ended with a brief survey of her writings about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, using primarily the book *The Wrath of Jonah*, written by Rosemary Ruether and her husband Herman Ruether. Basing their argument on Rosemary's usual method, historical research, they contended that neither the Jews nor any other group have an exclusive claim on the land of Palestine. Addressing the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Ruethers were critical of both the Palestinians and the Israelis for perpetrating the conflict. They did not offer a political solution to end the conflict, but they did propose that there must be a change of attitude in both the Israelis and the Palestinians toward each other, acknowledging that two national communities exist in Palestine. They contended that in order for there to be any hope of peace, the occupation must end and the Palestinians given autonomy in a national territory of their own. In the second edition of their book, published in 2002, the Ruether's conceded they find it difficult to hold out any hope for real improvement until there is a changed consciousness on the part of the Israelis that accepts the Palestinians as their neighbors, not a people they can get rid of.

While Rosemary Ruether continued to abhor anti-Semitism, she argued that support of the creation of a State of Israel that uproots Palestinians is the flip side of anti-Semitism. Her writings are driven by her passion for justice, her personal encounters with the violation of human rights, and her broader concern for the liberation of all people from any form of oppression.

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[86] "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, new revised edition, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1975), 738-742.

CHAPTER 4

WORLD SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION AND THE DESTRUCTION OF EARTH'S ECOSYSTEM

Ecology as a justice issue first came to Ruether's attention in the early 1970s. Reading an analysis of the findings of the Club of Rome report *Limits to Growth*[1] in 1972, she became aware of ecology as a social justice issue and as a challenge to the ideology of endless growth of industrial society. In Ruether's words:

> It became evident to me that the current capitalist-industrial model of the economy promoted by the West could not be expanded to include the poor of the world. Rather, this model of growth was itself based on impoverishing the majority of the people of the world and depleting the natural resources of the planet. There needed to be a fundamental reconstruction of this whole system of relation of human peoples to each other and to the earth.[2]

The report made it clear to her that the existing system of industrial development was unsustainable in terms of the earth's resources and needed to be radically revised.[3] Reading the summaries of this report made a profound impression on her, resulting in opening up yet another area she would explore as she widened her liberationist vision. She began to investigate the ecological crisis, searching for possible causes. Her

[1] "The Limits to Growth – Club of Rome," accessed June 22, 2017, https//www.clubofrome.org/report/the-limit-to-growth. In 1970 an international team of researchers met at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to study the implications of continued world-wide growth. They examined five basic factors: population growth, non-renewable resource depletion, agricultural production, industrial output and the generation of pollution. The team concluded that the earth's interlocking resources probably could not support the present rates of economic and population growth much beyond the year 2100.

[2] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 135.

[3] Lisa Isherwood, "Interview: Rosemary Radford Ruether with Lisa Isherwood," *Feminist Theology*, no 24 (May 2000): 108.

eventualconclusion, developed out of her prior commitments, was that here was yet another victim of global systems of oppression – this time not a human one but nature itself. She thus began her work in this area by working at integrating ecology into her social critique and re-envisioning of Christian theology.

Ruether was a forerunner in her perception that humans cause much ecological destruction. Given her theological orientation, she began to argue that a lot of growing environmental damage was due to twisted religious ideas of divine-human relations and subsequent dualisms that result in privilege for some and oppression for others: male domination of female, human domination of animals and indeed all of nature.

When ecology became a major interest and concern for Ruether in the early 1970s, she also began in her thought and in her writings to connect ecology to feminism. Ruether later recalled, "I sought to connect ecology and feminism, both in recognition of the way the domination of the earth is metaphorically interconnected with the domination of women in patriarchal ideology, and also to reveal how women's use and abuse in society interfaces with the abuse of nature."[4] Ruether contended that part of what feminism is about is "sensitizing us to a new model of relationship." While all liberation movements call for this, she especially emphasized that feminism particularly promotes a model of relationship that stresses mutuality, rather than domination and subordination, a model that becomes relevant to ecology when applied to the relationship of humans to nature.[5]

This chapter begins with a brief overview of Ruether's work in ecofeminism and will then briefly examine some of her earlier work in this area. While ecofeminism

[4] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 27.
[5] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Of One Humanity," *Sojourners* 13, no. 1(January 1984): 18.

remained a theme in her other theological work throughout her career, her most significant contributions came later, in the 1990s and early 2000s. A major portion of the chapter will therefore analyze her two major works in ecofeminist theology: *Gaia and God* published in 1992[6] and *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religion*, published in 2005.[7] The discussion will especially attend to the differences in emphasis and perspective in the later work, reflecting Ruether's developing ideas in the intervening thirteen years.

Overview of Ruether's Thought and Writings on Ecofeminism

Ruether's work in ecofeminist theology is a venture into a vast global, even planetary, subject that eventually spanned four decades, taking on increasing importance in the later period. Her initial work in ecofeminism in the early 1970s was an article "New Woman, New Earth: Women, Ecology, and Social Revolution" which became the last chapter in her book *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies & Human Liberation*, published in 1975.[8] This book is made up of essays in feminist thought addressing a variety of her concerns, among which are religion and the subjugation of women, anti-Semitism, the connection between sexism and racism, and sexism and domination of nature.[9] She noted that it was in her study of the Church Fathers for her doctorate that she became aware of the parallel in the Church Fathers' thought between women as "sinful body" and Jews as "sinful materiality," both of which seemed to express a similar

[6] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God, An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992).

[7] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions,* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc., 2005).

[8] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies & Human Liberation* (1975; repr. with new preface, Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

[9] Ibid., xvii, Ruether noted that this collection of essays came together as a book, and not just a series of disconnected articles, when it became apparent to her that these essays were "interconnected parts of one story, a common system of domination and of ideological justification, with many ramifications and expressions."

projection of mind-body dualism. She added that in the early 1970s when ecology began to emerge on the agenda of social consciousness, she began to speculate "about the patterns of this binary dualism in Christian thought in which women, Jews, Blacks, Indians, lower class people, and (now she added) the earth itself were all located as variants of 'bad bod' [*sic*], that is grossly physical inferior things, over against a 'spiritual' controlling white male Christian ruling class center."[10]

In her article "Rich Nations/Poor Nations and the Exploitation of the Earth" written in 1974,[11] Ruether addressed the issues of technological development and neo-colonialism, locating the roots of these in the eras of industrial revolution and Western expansion and colonialism. She decried the impoverishment of Third World countries, at the hands of the industrial West, as foreign capital was used for the exploitation of their natural resources and cheap human labor. She contended neo-colonialism[12] is an instrument of imperialism which increases the gap between the rich nations and the poor nations**.** Ruether also addressed the environmental destruction caused by Western industrialization and American agribusiness inserting poisons into the ecological systems of soil, plants, water, and air thus depositing toxic chemicals in fish, birds, animals, and humans "with long term fatal consequences for the ecosphere as a whole."[13] It is interesting to note that in 1974 Ruether warned, "In the ecological crisis we find prospects for an apocalypse in the not far distant future."[14]

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[10] Ibid., xv.

[11] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Rich Nations/Poor Nations and the Exploitation of the Earth," *Dialog* 13, no. 3 (1974): 201-207.

[12] The term neocolonialism was first use after World War II to refer to the continuing dependence of former colonies on foreign countries. It soon applied more generally to places where the power of developed countries was used to produce a colonial-like exploitation of developing countries using them as sources of cheap raw materials and cheap labor.

[13] Ibid., 204.

[14] Ibid., 205.

While suggesting a variety of ways to "head off" what she then considered the impending "apocalypse," Ruether was most insightful when she acknowledged that it is not hard for any social critic to develop a utopian "plan" for an ecologically viable society and technology, but it is much harder politically to dismantle the power presently concentrated in the hands of those who benefit from the current patterns and to bring about actual change[15]

In her book *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism*, Ruether addressed the ecological crisis from the perspective of social domination in the chapter "Ecology and Human Liberation"[16] This book is a collection of essays first delivered by Ruether as the Kuyper Lectures at the Free University in Amsterdam in September 1980. Addressing social domination, she pointed to the evils of industrialization, arguing that the roots of the ecological crisis are in the structures of power and ownership which propel industrialization. A small ruling class establishes ownership and control of land, people, and techniques and uses the labor of the poor and the powerless masses to extract the natural resources without having to consider their rights and needs as human persons. These workers are victims of bad working conditions and live in crowded tenements with all sorts of social problems, polluted air, and water that is not drinkable. Ruether maintained that the environmental crisis cannot be solved as long as such a system of social domination remains.[17]

Therefore, Ruether called for more than specific changes in environmental

[15] Ibid., 206. It is interesting to note that the suggestions for change Ruether advocated when she wrote this in 1974, still have not been acted on, or if so, very little. She expanded on this article thirty-one years later in her book *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions.*

[16] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001). Even though the book was published in 2001, I place it here, as my order in this overview of her work is tracing the development of her thought, not necessarily the order of publication of her work.

[17] Ibid., 59.

practice: she called for conversion, a complete shift in understanding, a rediscovery of the finitude of the earth as a balance of elements which together harmonize to support life for all parts of the community. She warned there is an interconnectedness and interdependence of all parts of the community of creation so that no part can long flourish if the other parts are being injured or destroyed.[18] As a liberation theologian, this is a recurring theme in many of Ruether's writings. The long held understanding of a hierarchy in creation, with humans at the top and "raw" material nature at the bottom, has resulted in relationships of domination and subordination and thus the misuse, abuse, or even destruction of the lower parts of creation in the hierarchy.

In her book *Sexism and God-Talk*, published in 1983,[19] Ruether developed, in the chapter "Women, Body, and Nature: Sexism and the Theology of Creation," her critique of mind-body dualism as she addressed the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature. She argued that it was in the ancient world's religious worldview that the feminine was first devalued and linked to a subordinate "Mother Nature." She maintained that "ecofeminists discern both a symbolic and a structural connection between the mistreatment of women and the mistreatment of nature in patriarchal cultures and social systems." Ruether continued,

> As ancient patriarchal culture shaped its system of female subjugation, it also dethroned female deities of natural renewal. Patriarchal cultures have seen the bodily world as something both inferior and evil and have imagined a higher, male, spiritual world where this lower world could be both escaped and dominated from the outside. Thus, for ecofeminists, the struggle against ecological devastation is interconnected with the struggle against patriarchy[20]

[18] Ibid., 67.

[19] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

[20] Ibid., xv.

Ruether's early ecological writing, therefore, presented a grand vision of the problem and its potential for transformation, but by her own admission contained less specific theological analysis or recommendations for change. By 1992, however, Ruether had done considerable more study of this subject, and in that year she published her first major work probing the interconnection between the domination of women and that of nature and explaining how the liberation of women and of the earth connect. She developed in depth the argument that both of these dimensions of exploitation were fundamentally theological in origin, and therefore required a new kind of religious vision of how to overcome them. The result was a significant book titled *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* that broke new ground as a critique of the way domination of women and of the earth had been linked in Western religious thought, and pointed other religious thinkers in similar directions.

Gaia and God pulled together and expanded Ruether's thought on several of the issues she had addressed in her earlier writings – patriarchy, mind-body dualism, social domination, industrialization, ecological devastation, and liberation from oppressive systems – but did so in more ambitious and thorough fashion. This book was truly a major venture in which she wrote from the combined perspective of feminism and ecology, thus setting it apart from her earlier writings which tended to focus on strictly human social-justice and liberation issues. Furthermore, she developed a new emphasis in *Gaia and God* on the thesis that the entire planet is a living system, behaving as a unified organism and thus requiring a different kind of religious and human relationship.

In Gaia *and God* she thus systematically worked out the connections among these issues she had earlier touched on. She stated that her objective in writing this book was

"to seek to assess the cultural and social roots that have promoted destructive relations between men and women, between ruling and subjugated human groups, and the destruction of the rest of the biotic community, of which humans are an interdependent part."[21] Her goal was to evaluate these findings and to detect something in them to propose a method for earth healing, healed relationships between men and women, classes and nations, humans and non-human creation, humans and the earth.

As elsewhere in her work, Ruether identified herself as a historical theologian and plainly brought that perspective to her ecofeminist writings as well. True to her customary method, she laid out the problem in historical terms, tracing how mistaken concepts have originated in the past, and at the same time, she combed through the Christian and Western cultural traditions to find usable ideas and overlooked traditions that might nourish healing of these destructive relations.

Of particular importance in her later work was Ruether's deeper sense of the global character of the ecological crisis and the need for equally worldwide solutions. In particular, Ruether's expanding experiences among Third World peoples in these years and her awareness of the increasing environmental degradation in those parts of the world, made it clear to her that her work in ecofeminist theology needed to be broadened and enriched by the voices of women in the Third World whose perspectives are rooted in a far different culture and history than that of most Westerners. Thus, she collaborated with feminist colleagues from Third World countries to publish *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* in 1996.[22] This book, edited by Ruether with an Introduction, is a collection of essays on religion, ecology, and feminism

[21] Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 2.

[22] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

by women in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In the Introduction, Ruether stated that it was important to present "an effort at cross-cultural communication and solidarity between women in the 'First World' and women in those countries that are struggling against the effects of Western colonization." Ruether continued,

> As a Euro-American woman living in the United States, I have for thirty years been deeply concerned with the oppressive use of power by my own country against subjugated people in the "Third World." I feel in solidarity with their struggles for liberation. My own experience of "crossing worlds" between affluent and poor, white and people of "color," and between "first" and "third" world has been revelatory and transformative for my understanding and my life. By viewing the ruling classes of my country from the underside, its evils and lies are revealed and put in the context of a larger reality and call for justice. [23]

The essays in this book are from a wide variety of perspectives; but for the most part, together they reveal a marked difference in the perspective and the concerns of ecofeminist women in the Third World from those in the developed countries. The overarching message in these essays is the linking of the ecological crisis to the social systems that foster inequality. Ruether noted that what connects these essays is "a complex reality of how women and nature have been exploited both by their own societies as well as by colonizing powers, how women function as the mediator of nature's benefits for their families and in this context, as caretakers of nature."[24]

Many of the writers were from countries that have struggled against the effects of Western colonization on the exploitation of their natural resources and the devastation of the land. In such countries, Ruether pointed out, it is the women, the caregivers and in many ways providers for the family, who are usually most vulnerable. The forests where the women once gathered wood for cooking and heating, the land where they grew vegetables for their families, and the clean water they used for drinking, cooking, and

[23] Ibid., 1.
[24] Ruether, *Women Healing Earth,* 2.

washing were all spoiled or taken from them. The development projects by elite outsiders destroyed or polluted these natural resources necessary for the production of sustenance and survival. The female writers Ruether assembled all reinforced this fundamental thesis in different ways from different countries.

Vandana Shiva from India in her essay "Let Us Survive: Women, Ecology, and Development" said this about the displacement of women by development projects: "It destroyed women's productivity both by removing land, water, and forests from their management and control, as well as through the ecological destruction of soil, water, and vegetation systems so that nature's productivity and renewability were impaired."[25] In her essay "In Us Life Grows: An Ecofeminist Point of View," Mercedes Canas from El Salvador argued that it was the large indigo, coffee, sugar, and cotton growers of Central America along with the construction companies of the power elites that have destroyed the environment and are responsible for the grave ecological crisis in the region, while it is the majority population, primarily the female population, whose quality of life has been affected along with the environment by these economic models.[26]

From Africa, Teresia Hinga of Kenya explained in her essay "The Gikuyu Theology of Land and Environmental Justice" that the indigenous peoples had values and ideologies that both celebrated and worked for a balanced relationship with the environment upon which they depended. They had a sense of respect for the environment as a source of life. Hinga lamented that it was the colonizers who imposed their own view of the human relationship with nature supported by the Christian ethic of

[25] Ibid., 66.
[26] Ibid., 26.

dominion that resulted in gross abuse of the environment.[27] Clearly, Hinga demonstrates the connections among social domination, domination of nature, and the ecological crisis.

Ruether drew from these essays the most important conclusion that while women of the Third World and those of the developed countries are concerned with some of the same themes such as the masculine-feminine *qua* culture - nature split, there is a difference when these themes are contextualized by women from the Third World. Ruether contended, "Women from Asia, Africa, and Latin America are much less likely to forget, unlike Northern women, that the base line of domination of women and nature is impoverishment: the impoverishment of the majority of their people, particularly women and children, and the impoverishment of the land."[28] She added that the connection of the impoverishment of women with the impoverishment of the land is not, for Third World women, an abstract theory as it often is for many women in developed countries who have plenty of food and clean water and enjoy material abundance. For women in the Third World, impoverishment is present in concrete realities one lives every day. It is clear from these arguments that for Ruether both women and nature have been undervalued, but especially so in a global perspective.

Thus, once again, Ruether's personal experience and encounters, this time with the women who contributed these essays, along with her passion for justice and human rights became a driving force leading her into yet another area to explore and to broaden her liberationist vision. What made Ruether's ecological vision different from some others was plainly its deep connection to both social justice and feminist liberation. The ecological crisis could not be solved without also addressing women's global

[27] Ibid., 172-173.
[28] Ibid., 6.

subordination and exploitation, especially in poor countries. Ruether's early work on connecting ecology and feminism thus influenced many theologians to link these concerns and also brought a religious voice to environmentalism which was not always attentive to theology.

Continuing her work in global ecofeminism, Ruether has subsequently analyzed both world religions and the socioeconomic context of ecological devastation as dimensions requiring critical analysis. Her book *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions,* published in 2005, became her most broad-based and influential contribution to this theological movement. This book will be discussed more at length later in this chapter with reflections on any changes in Ruether's emphasis or perspective since the writing of her earlier book *Gaia and God.*

Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing

As the title indicates, the three concepts Ruether explored in this book are the relationship between "Gaia" – the living planet earth, itself conceived as divine presence and power - and the traditional Western God, and thus between ecofeminist theology and earth healing. She offered this description of what she sought to do in this book:

> I juxtapose the terms *Gaia* and *God* in the title of this book because all the issues that I wish to explore finally pose the question of the relationship between the living planet, earth, and the concept of God as it has been shaped in the Western religious traditions. *Gaia* is the word for the Greek Earth Goddess, and it is also a term adopted by a group of planetary biologists . . . to refer to their thesis that the entire planet is a living system, behaving as a unified organism.[29]

It is important to note that Ruether used the word *Gaia* here not to refer to the historic Greek Earth Goddess but in the sense of the entire planet being a living system which functions as a unified organism. This use of *Gaia* is important to her overall

[29] Ruether, *Gaia & God,* 4.

argument, shapes her understanding of both the problem and ways to address it.

Ruether began by defining the sense in which she uses the term *ecology*:

> The word *ecology* comes from the biological science of natural environmental communities. It examines how these natural communities function to sustain a healthy web of life and how they become disrupted, causing death to plant and animal life. Human intervention is the major cause of such disruption. Thus ecology, in the expanded sense of a combined socioeconomic and biological science, emerged in the last several decades to examine how human misuse of "nature" is causing pollution of soils, water, and air, and the destruction of plant and animal communities, thereby, threatening the base of life upon which the human species itself depends.[30]

Again, it is important to keep in mind this definition of ecology and that when Ruether speaks of the ecological crisis she is referring to all of creation that is a part of the web of life, all of nature: soil, air, water, plants, animals, and humans, and their mutual interactions and interdependence.

For Ruether, bringing together ecology and feminism provided a critical perspective from which she sought to evaluate the heritage of Western Christian culture. In bringing together ecology and feminism, she explored how male domination of women and human domination of nature are interconnected both in cultural ideology and in social structures. The goal is what Ruether calls "earth healing, a healed relationship between men and women, between classes and nations, and between humans and the earth."[31] She added that such healing is possible only through recognition of the way in which Western culture, sanctified in part by Christianity, has justified such domination. Once this is acknowledged, a transformation must follow.

In *Gaia & God,* Ruether's approach to the issue of the ecological crisis is similar to her methodology in approaching the social issues of sexism and racism that she

[30] Ibid.,1.
[31] Ibid.

addressed in her earlier work. Again, she systematically worked through three questions: What is the problem? How has injustice been created by inadequate or false ideology and false dichotomies? How can we improve the system with better thinking and acting? In the context of each social issue, she traces the ideological patterns in Western culture and the Christian tradition that have served to justify violence and oppression. In each case, she found that the existing social hierarchy and the system of power are justified and sacralized by defining them as the natural "order of creation" and the will of God.[32] As a feminist theologian, then, she seeks to overcome this binary domination without simply reversing it. Ruether thus upholds a feminist model of relationship that stresses equality and mutuality, rather than domination or subjugation. She calls for reshaping the actual social structures of human power, so as to develop a new understanding of human ecology in relationship to nature.[33]

> At the outset of writing *Gaia & God* Ruether makes clear she assumes that
>
> earth forms a living system of which humans are an inextricable part. We are latecomers to the earth, a very recent product of its evolutionary life. Yet we, particularly in the West, have constructed our concept of ourselves as humans over against all that is nonhuman, and thereby constructed our concept of "nature" as both the nonhuman and the non-divine.[34]

That is to say, humans, though late in the chain of evolution, from early on – beginning with hunting/gathering and then agriculture – developed their own social and cultural construction of "nature" changing the earth's interdependent systems, reshaping plants, animals, air, water, and soil.

Ruether's central argument is that the ecological crisis, with its depletion of natural resources, the destruction of the balance of nature and of plant and animal

[32] Ruether, "Of One Humanity," 17.
[33] Ibid., 18.
[34] Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 5.

communities, and the pollution of water, air, and soil is rooted in structures of social domination. She began her research into the root cause of this social domination by drawing on her background in ancient history and the theological classics along with European intellectual history. True to her method and liberationist outlook, she traced the ideological patterns in Christian thought that have served to justify violence and oppression, in this case, the domination and exploitation of nature. Her starting point was three creation stories that have shaped the biblical and Christian tradition: the Babylonian story, the Hebrew story, and the Greek (Platonic) story. She argued that

> creation stories not only reflect the current science, that is, the assumptions about the nature of the world, physical processes, and their relationships; but they are blueprints for society. They reflect the assumptions about how the divine and the mortal, the mental and the physical, humans and other humans, male and female, humans, plants, animals, land, waters, and stars are related to each other. They both reflect the worldview of the culture and mandate that worldview to its ongoing heirs.[35]

Such perspectives are central to Ruether's argument in all her ecofeminist writings. She repeatedly argues, as some others have done, that the ecological crisis that has overtaken Western civilization has a theological basis developed from interpretation of the scriptures, especially the foundational creation stories, both biblical and extra-biblical.

Ruether began with the Babylonian creation story, the *Enuma Elish*, which celebrates the city of Babylon and its main deity, Marduk. As he rises in power, Marduk kills the Mother Goddess, Tiamat, a dominant female power with subordinate male consorts because she threatens his control. He then sets about creating the universe, the last act of which is the creation of humans to serve the gods. For her purposes, Ruether pointed out two social messages in this story. First, the fact that Tiamat the Mother Goddess who had been the dominant power was killed by Marduk when she was a threat

[35] Ibid., 15.

to his power shows that the earliest worldview was matriarchal, as Tiamat had been dominant with subordinate male consorts. Second, she contended the story ultimately mandates a hierarchy of rulers and slaves, with the creation of humans to serve the gods. She compared the gods to the leisured aristocracy of the temple and palace and their human counterparts with serfs who labored in the ancient elite's fields and workshops.[36]

Ruether then turned to the Greek creation story conveyed in the *Timaeus* by Plato which provides a strong philosophical foundation for her argument. As in all his work, Plato thinks of reality as divided between "Ideas" and "Matter," between mind and body. For support of her argument, Ruether drew from this story three points. First, mind or consciousness is primal, eternal, and good. Body is secondary, derivative, and the source of evil in the form of physical sensations to be mastered by the mind. The soul, mind, or consciousness is ultimately alien to earth and body, to which it is unfortunately connected. Its true home is the pure and eternal world of Platonic ideas, as symbolically represented by the stars. Second, the earth, the lowest level of a cosmic hierarchy, like the body, is the "prisonhouse" of the soul, a collective prison of human souls who must work their way out of this fallen state to return to their "true home" in the heavens. Third, the hierarchy of mind over body, Ruether argued, is then duplicated in the hierarchy of rational male over irrational female, of superior humans over mindless animals. Thus, clearly, for Ruether, the creation story and the philosophy Plato derives from it validate a hierarchy in the cosmos and in nature that supports social domination.

Ruether thus contended that the hierarchy over nature found in such Babylonian and Greek texts and other ancient mythologies that validates domination and subordination was, in essential respects, absorbed into Christian thought. Citing the

[36] Ibid., 18.

creation story in the book of Genesis, Ruether argued that the Judaeo - Christian tradition has also consistently favored a theory of "man's" domination over nature that was rooted in a particular understanding of God. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" is the biblical command found in Genesis 1:28. Ruether asserted that because Western Christianity accepted the Genesis 1 account as its official "revealed" story of creation, nature has been understood as an "inferior" realm from early on.[37] To justify this hierarchy in creation, it was said to be the will God.

Ruether thus contended that we need to question both the ethic of unrestricted domination over the rest of creation and the "fertility ethic" of female subordination to which it is tied. Humanity is tied to interdependence with plants, animals, air, water, and soil; so the health and prosperity, even the survival of the human community is not possible without the health of the non-human community. Thus, she argued for a new theology and ethic of nature based on mutuality and interdependence rather than domination and subordination.

Similarly, as in her discussion of creation, in the next section, "Destruction," Ruether began with ancient religious narratives of world destruction. She analyzed the biblical account of the ancient flood story in Genesis, the Jewish apocalyptic writings of the second century BCE through the first century CE, and the Book of Revelation in the Christian tradition. However, she made it clear that these stories do not convey a vision of the total destruction of creation. God saves a remnant in the Genesis flood story and makes a covenant with Noah never again to destroy the earth with a flood. In the Jewish

[37] Ibid., 26.

apocalyptic writings, the evil that has taken temporary control of the world is finally destroyed, and the good triumphs. The Book of Revelation promises that after the destruction of the evil forces that currently dominate the world, there will be a "New Heaven and a New Earth."

To address the current ecological crisis, Ruether therefore presented "new narratives of destruction," drawing on the frightening yet ultimately hopeful ideology of destruction and renewal found in the apocalyptic religious narratives."[38] She contended that the religious narratives that have shaped Judaism and Christianity function as warnings, threats of destruction and punishment for the wicked, but ultimately as assurances of salvation. She argued,

> Israel may be punished for her sins, but if she turns and repents, God will inaugurate a time of harmony between humans and between humans and nature. In the apocalyptic narratives, punishment is turned against the enemy nations and unbelieving communities. Through cosmic destruction, their annihilation and the annihilation of the cosmic powers of evil they represent, is assured. But a renovated earth will rise on the other side of this destruction.[39]

But Ruether also emphasized that this kind of salvation is not automatic. The narratives of world destruction that were arising from ecologists in the last decades of the twentieth century carried no such assurance of subsequent renewal. She stated, "The ecological message is that humans have usurped such power over the foundational life forces of the planet itself, and this power has been used so unwisely, that we are facing at the end of the twentieth century the real possibility of irreparable destruction to a biosphere that nature took 4.5 billion years to develop."[40]

Ruether thus warned that we cannot expect some life force unconnected with the

[38] Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 85.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.

biosphere to intervene and recreate the earth after we have destroyed it. She added that humanity, by having already become agents of destruction of nature or Gaia, must learn to be its co-creators before the destruction becomes terminal. Nature follows basic laws of energy, and only by understanding how the web of life works can we learn to sustain it rather than destroy it.[41]

Ruether further presented her own historical account of the accumulating effects that have led to the current crisis in the environment. Making it clear that these are "interconnected aspects of one picture," she discussed population, food, energy, pollution, extinction of species, and war.[42] While Ruether presented in detail each of these categories, the thrust of her argument is their interconnectedness and their accumulated impact on the environment.

Ruether contended that a fundamental issue underlying the global environmental destruction and ecological crisis is the exponential growth of human population in the last several centuries. However, she added that it is not just the increase in number of people itself, but the level of human consumption and the use of technology that have accompanied that increase. She put this in perspective with the following example:

> The same size population that primarily uses the human body for labor and transportation, that has a subsistence economy (producing and gathering its own food, using only local, natural materials for its clothes, building materials and fuel, and reusing or recycling all its wastes), will make much less of an environmental impact than the same number of people who consume a great variety of foods and goods transported from great distances, using petroleum, gas, and electricity for transportation, production, heating, and cooking, and discarding toxic waste products of each stage of production and consumption.[43]

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[41] Ibid., 86.

[42] Ibid., 87. Ruether noted that she follows the information and analysis available from well-established sources, such as the Worldwatch Institute, funded in part by the United Nations Environmental Program, which since the mid-1970s has issued its *Worldwatch Papers,* and since 1984 its annual *State of the World* report.

[43] Ibid., 88.

The first group clearly is representative of many Third World countries and the second group of the more affluent countries of the West. However, Ruether pointed out that even the poorer populations living at a low level of consumption and technology make an environmental impact. The confiscation of their land by the wealthy and the destruction of natural habitats of indigenous peoples undermine their existence as the self-subsistent hunters and gatherers as they once were. For Third World peasants and farmers, crowded and pushed to the margins of the land, their farming and animal grazing strip and erode the soil, their wood gathering for fuel strips the forests. Their crowded conditions often mean their water supply is polluted by human and animal wastes, and malnutrition and sickness run rampant.[44] These situations clearly reflect Ruether's argument about the relationship of social domination to the destruction of the environment and the ecological crisis.

Ruether supported her argument that the growth in the world population is a fundamental issue underlying the ecological crisis by describing the "snowball effect" of the world population and its consequences. She argued that this population has led to industrial forms of agribusiness which are not sustainable and are contributing to the ecological crisis.[45] She addressed the issue of the amount of energy needed for every aspect of life, and she noted the intensive amount of energy used, especially by advanced

[44] Ibid., 89. The confiscation of the land by the wealthy leaves the native people without access to enough land for their traditional self-sustaining life-styles, but their skills are not useable in the new productive systems. Thus, they are driven into poverty in their own land. Further, the populations living in poverty are subject to sub-human conditions of illiteracy, lack of medical services, unemployment, and substandard housing.

[45] Ibid., 93-94. In expanding her analysis, Ruether argued that the need for expanded food production led to genetically enhanced high yield grains, which required more potent petroleum based fertilizers and pesticides and more mechanized farm equipment to harvest the increased amount of crops. She decried the accumulated impact of these so-called advances which have led to an escalating destruction of the environment from air pollution caused by the mechanized farm equipment to toxicity of the soil to pollution of lakes and rivers from the run off after rains of toxic fertilizers and pesticides. Overgrazing of land by larger herds of cattle and other livestock strips the foliage, leading to erosion and further destruction of the environment.

industrial societies, and the destruction to the environment caused by burning of fossil fuels filling the atmosphere with harmful poisonous gaseous byproducts as well as causing a global warming with devastating effects.[46] While Ruether wrote before intense scientific alarms about the imminent disaster of global warming and never discussed it in detail, her attention to these interconnected developments was prophetic.

Another category Ruther discussed as part of the accumulating effect contributing to the ecological crisis is the extinction of plant and animal species for which she placed the major blame on the expanding human population, deforestation, and toxic wastes polluting the air, water, and soil (thus showing the interconnectedness of these factors). Here again, Ruether supported her thesis that the ecological crisis and all of its implications is directly connected with structures of social domination which includes domination of humans over nature.[47]

Unlike many other ecological thinkers of the time, Ruether drew a strong connection between environmental destruction and global militarism. Ruether contended that even when not at war, militarism must be seen as the ultimate polluter of the earth causing immense environmental damage, taking over large amounts of land for training and weapons testing, littering it with dangerous materials. Nuclear weapons' testing contaminates entire regions and the burial of nuclear wastes creates a danger of radioactive leakage indefinitely.[48]

Similarly, Ruether contended that Western intervention to prevent third-world

[46] Ibid., 96.

[47] Ibid., 101. Further, Ruether argued the expanding population, developing more land for housing and other structures and for producing food, is destroying the habitats that support wild animal and plant life. She noted that in tropical rain forests which are being stripped for profit at the hands of wealthy outsiders, large numbers of as yet unstudied plants and animals are becoming endangered or extinct because of the destruction of their habitats. She added that many animals endangered or extinct because they have been hunted for tusks, pelts or simply for recreation.

[48] Ibid., 109.

revolutions from being successful has been responsible for many regional wars with devastating death tolls and destruction of the environment. Ruether argued that in the latter half of the twentieth century regional conflicts and civil wars were seldom purely "internal" but were fueled by superpower rivalry and intervention – notably that of the United States. She noted the chronic wars, supported from outside, that took place in impoverished, formerly colonized regions of the world. Often these were led by guerrillas, hoping for a new more just social and economic order, who fought against neocolonial oligarchies and their armies. Ruether cited Nicaragua, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe as examples of such places where nationalist revolutionary regimes had taken control only to be followed by economic boycotts and "contra" armies organized and funded by outside countries in an effort to sabotage both the economic development of the new regimes and their liberation efforts. Nationalist revolutionary regimes that had taken control were taken down by outside countries and brought under the control of repressive regimes. The destruction of these revolutionary regimes by more dominant powers, such as the United States, Ruether asserted was yet another example of social domination and the part it plays in the ecological crisis and further undermining the liberation of these countries.

One might argue that in spite of her strong words against militarism, Ruether seemed to endorse "revolutionary" militarism on behalf of anti-western forces that could also possibly be economically and environmentally destructive. I would claim, however, that Ruether did not necessarily endorse "revolutionary" militarism. She did not disagree with countries striving for liberation from repressive colonial or neo-colonial rule, but saw these efforts as fundamentally defensive and limited. I would also argue that while

she did not endorse civil wars in those newly independent countries, her primary criticism was directed against the outside involvement of super powers like the United States and the Soviet Union which took the local civil wars or revolutions to a different level of all around destruction. Again, the bottom line for Ruether is what advances liberation.

When *Gaia & God* was published in 1992, just as the Cold War was ending, the immensity of the environmental destruction and the growing ecological crisis were just beginning to get attention. Like most thinkers of the time, Ruether focused on issues of population growth, industrial pollution, and potential nuclear destruction. Ruether did insightfully warn of the potential of radical climate change due to the destruction of the biosphere through greenhouse gases, but her comments were modest compared to later dire scientific alarms.

As Ruether had done in many of her past writings, she turned to scripture and the Christian tradition to search for a solution to, in this case, the ecological crisis. She explored two lines of biblical and Christian tradition to be reclaimed for an ecofeminist spirituality and practice to heal the earth. Thus in her search for an ecological ethic, she drew on these two traditions: the covenantal tradition and the sacramental tradition which she considered to be complementary. She explained, "The one tradition shapes our relation to nature and each other in terms of law and ethical responsibility. The other tradition experiences the divine bodying forth in the cosmos, and beckons us into communion."[49]

Ruether's best and clearest explanation of these two themes came in a later, more

[49] Ibid., 9.

succinct article published in 2011, two decades after her exploration in *Gaia and God.*[50] Probing the Hebraic roots of the "covenantal tradition," Ruether noted that for the Hebrews, the God who made heaven and earth is the same God present in historical acts who parted the Red Sea and delivered them out of Egypt. Thus, the God of history also relates directly to nature. Ruether added that an important part of the covenantal relation of God to Israel is the gift of the "land." Further, Ruether pointed out that God delights in the creatures God creates, and the creatures rejoice in joy and praise, all creation – fields, mountains, streams, birds, animals, and so forth – interacts as living beings with God.[51]

Supporting her liberationist vision and concern for the environment, Ruether referred to the sabbatical legislation in the Hebrew Scriptures that describes three cycles: seven days, seven years, and seven times seven years or the Jubilee Year. In each of these three cycles, the land, animals, and humans are to rest and to be restored (Lev. 25). In the Jubilee Year, all is to be restored to right balance. Naming this as a model of redemptive eco-justice, Ruether contended there is an intimate unity between justice and right relation to all of nature in the covenant relation between God and Israel.[52] Extending her argument to the New Testament, Ruether added that Jesus' language in the Lord's Prayer shows an understanding of God's Kingdom as the establishment of justice and right relations on earth.[53] Ruether thus contended, "The basic insight of the biblical covenantal tradition that we have to translate right relation into an ethic, which finds

[50] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Ecology and Theology: Ecojustice at the Center of the Church's Mission," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, vol. 65, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 354-363.

[51] See, for example, Psalm 65:9-13.

[52] Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 214.

[53] Ibid., Ruether pointed out "forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors" and suggested this should be understood in the Jubilee tradition and not simply as "sins."

guarantees in law, is an essential element in building an ecological world order."[54]

Ruether described the other tradition to be reclaimed for an ecological ethic for earth healing as experiencing the divine bodying forth in the cosmos and calling us into communion. This is the "sacramental tradition" which Ruether proposed complements the covenantal tradition. Ruether explained this tradition "valued by Roman Catholic Christianity" thus:

> It starts with the community as a living whole, not only the human community, but, first of all, the cosmic community. The human being not only mirrors cosmic community as micro- to macrocosm, but also inter-communes with the whole cosmic body. God is seen not only as over against and "making" this cosmic body, but also as present within it. The visible universe is the emanational manifestation of God, God's sacramental body. God is incarnate in and as the cosmic body of the universe, although not reduced to it.[55]

Ruether's discussion of the sacramental tradition in the 2011 journal article is noticeably different from her discussion of this tradition nearly twenty years earlier in *Gaia and God.* In this later writing, she began with the above quote, immediately setting the sacramental tradition firmly within Catholic teaching. By contrast, the discussion in *Gaia and God* had presented a very lengthy and sometimes wandering historical discussion as Ruether traced the line of Christian tradition that regards Christ as the cosmic manifestation of God appearing both as divine source and ground of creation and its ultimate divine redemption. It is difficult see how her discussion in *Gaia and God* was in any important way connected to the Catholic understanding of the sacramental tradition.

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[54] Ruether, "Ecology and Theology: Ecojustice at the Center of the Church's Mission," 360. Ruether noted the World Charter for Nature, signed by all members of the UN except the United States in 1982, laid out the basic principle of an ecological ethic. She added that a body of international law is emerging, but without adequate means to enforce it, that affirms the interdependency of the global human and earth communities.

[55] Ibid.

In the later writing, however, Ruether pointed out that the cosmogenic Wisdom of God found in the Old Testament (Wisdom of Solomon 7:24-8:1) is identified in the New Testament with Christ, adding that "Jesus as the Christ not only embodies, in crucified form, the later king and redeemer, but also incarnates the cosmogonic principle through which the cosmos is created, sustained, redeemed, and reconciled to God."[56] Ruether further added that because humans "forget" their connection to the divine source, God has continually through salvation history sent manifestations of Godself, culminating in Christ whose work is now carried to fulfillment in the body of Christ, the church.

It is this relationship to the divine source of all creation that is key to Ruether's development of an ecological ethic that is "earth healing." As she argued in *Gaia and God*, "The urgent task is to direct human consciousness to the earth, to understand the web of life and to live in that web of life as sustainers, rather than destroyers."[57] Thus, one can draw from Ruether's argument that attention to living as sustainers in communion with this web of life, the cosmic body of the universe as the "emanational manifestation of God, God's sacramental body," provides a more sacramental spirituality for an ecological ethic for healing the world.

Lastly, Ruether compared the complementarity of the covenantal and sacramental traditions to the complementary voices of God and Gaia. The covenantal tradition speaks from the mountaintops in the voice of power and law, but when most authentic speaks on behalf of the weak as a mandate to protect the powerless. The sacramental tradition is a voice that speaks from the intimate heart of matter and beckons us into communion. This

[56] Ibid., Ruether noted the cosmological Christology found in the preface to the Gospel of John, the first chapter of Hebrews, and some of the Pauline letters, with the fullest expression in Col 1:16-20.

[57] Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 250.

is the voice of Gaia.[58] If we are to act on a response to the environmental destruction and ensuing ecological crisis, we need both of these voices, the one representing the law, the other representing communion with all of creation.

Ruether thus skillfully crafted her argument about the causes of ecological crisis so that it leads up to the solution she proposes for healing of the earth. She demonstrated and emphasized that all of nature is a living organism, the parts of which are not only interconnected but also interdependent. This organism comprises not only plants, all living creatures, animals, and humans, but also water, air, and soil. Throughout her account of both the problem and its potential solution, Ruether operated with the assumption that the ecological crisis is ultimately rooted in structures of social domination from which "liberation" is the only escape. After demonstrating the cultural and social roots of this domination which has resulted in destructive relations between men and women, ruling and subjugated groups, humans and animals, the destruction of the rest of the biotic community, she argued,

> Rebuilding human society for a sustainable earth will require far more than a plethora of technological "fixes" within the present paradigm of relations of domination. It will demand a fundamental restructuring of all these relations from systems of domination/exploitation to ones of biophilic mutuality.[59] New technologies may well have their place, although there may also be a need to rediscover old techniques of agriculture, artisanry, and community-building.[60]

In making suggestions for change to move forward in healing the environment, Ruether contended there must be a radical transformation of all patterns of destruction

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[58] Ibid., 255.

[59] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 223. Ruether argued that "biophilic mutuality" is our nature rooted in God. "God is the source of being that underlies creation and grounds its nature and future potential for continual transformative renewal in biophilic mutuality." That is, biophilic mutuality names an interdependence found in all creation, one that has its ground in creator God and as such is a model for how we ought to embrace each other and all of creation.

[60] Ibid., 259.

that are contributing to the ecological crisis. Many of these changes are interrelated; one example is the phasing out of fossil fuels as the primary energy source and turning to solar and wind energy for generating electricity, increasing the fuel efficiency of cars and machinery, and controlling industrial emissions.[61]

Aware that the changes her liberationist vision proposed to promote "earth healing" were daunting, Ruether advised that those who want to move forward with change must build strong "base communities" (a popular theme in Latin American liberation theology) to work together and to develop strategies of resistance. She advocated the following three interrelated aspects of work in each local base community: 1) shaping spiritualities and corporate liturgies by which a new biophilic consciousness is nurtured,[62] 2) utilization of local institutions over which the members have control such as homes, schools, churches, locally controlled businesses as pilot projects of ecological living, 3) the building of organizational networks that reach out regionally, nationally, and internationally to change the power structures that keep the present destructive system in place.[63]

Last, and perhaps most importantly, Ruether urged religiously grounded "base

[61] Ruether was aware that even such small steps were easier said than done and was quick to raise the issue of backlash from automakers, energy companies, and many large corporations that profited from the systems as they were who would mobilize their political and economic power to prevent the changes. Of course, Ruether was correct. While the government has mandated some regulations such as more fuel efficient automobiles and controls on industrial emissions, there has been a lot of resistance from the automakers and other companies who are impacted by the stricter regulations.

[62] Ibid., 270. To explain what she means by this, Ruether stated the need to get back in touch with the living earth – take time to sit under trees, look at water and the sky, observe small biotic communities of plants and animals, draw, write poetry and "know we are on sacred ground." Some new liturgies need to be added in places of worship that mourn the violation of lives and the environment. Liturgies can be carried into the streets in non-violent protest marches to raise awareness of care of the earth.

[63] Ibid., 269.

communities" to become the political sources of organization and action.[64] She added that even while working from local bases, believers must think globally, become aware of what other countries are doing, and join their efforts with the efforts of those in other countries. Acting globally opens doors to international forums such as the United Nations in the struggle against corporate abusers. What is necessary to accomplish needed ecological goals, Ruether advocated, is "committed love." Ruether offered this:

> Being rooted in love for our communities of life and for our common mother, Gaia, can teach us patient passion, a passion that is not burnt out in a season, but can be renewed season after season. Our revolution is not just for us, but for our children, for the generations of living beings to come. What we can do is to plant a seed, nurture a seed bearing plant here and there, and hope for a harvest that goes beyond the limits of our powers and span of our lives.[65]

Writing *Gaia & God* in 1992, Ruether proved to be very insightful in her warnings of where the then current unabashed abuse of the environment would lead. She warned of global warming, even if only in a preliminary way, and today global warming is a reality causing climate changes with further destruction to the environment in their wake. Some of the solutions to aid in healing the earth that Ruether then suggested are in place, but many are not. As Ruether warned, there has been a lot of resistance to change from large corporations who profit from the current abusive systems.

Thirteen years after *Gaia & God*, Ruether returned to ecofeminism by publishing *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions.* This book reflected her changed thinking in the interim, refocused her major concerns, and added some new themes. Because the book is her last systematic study of this topic, it warrants close attention.

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[64] Ibid., 271. For example, when a group has devised a clear plan for change, say a system for recycling in conjunction with the community's waste collection, the group will take the plan to city council, network with other groups in the city like schools and businesses.

[65] Ibid., 273-274.

Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization and World Religions

Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions consists of four chapters: "Corporate Globalization and the Deepening of Earth's Impoverishment," "The Greening of World Religions," "Ecofeminist Thea/ologies and Ethics," and "Alternatives to Corporate Globalization: Is a Different World Possible?" These chapter titles make clear Ruether's central convictions, as well as the content of the book.

One could say that *Gaia and God* serves as background or foundational theological material for *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions.* As her first major venture into ecofeminism, *Gaia and God* included in a detailed and systematic fashion the results of her research which assessed the cultural, social, and religious roots that have promoted destructive relationships between men and women, between ruling and subjugated groups of people, and the destruction of the entire biotic community. Her research took her back to the classical traditions, back to the Babylonian and Greek creation stories. Ruether's approach tended to be analytical with much of the content grounded in formal theology.

In *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions,* by contrast, Ruether's writing is less formal and structured than in *Gaia and God.* She writes in a more personal tone, expressing her concerns with destructive relationships, the domination and impoverishment of people by the more powerful and wealthy, and with the overall abuse and destruction of the environment. Written thirteen years after *Gaia and God,* this book clearly took Ruether to a different plane of analysis and prescription. It propelled her into political issues on a global scale using arguments that are more scientific than overtly theological (as in *Gaia and God*).

In *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, Ruether creatively knitted together three of her concerns: corporate globalization, interfaith ecological theology, and ecofeminism. She had touched on these concerns in her earlier writings, but here her intention was to examine these concerns more thoroughly and to show their interrelationship with each other.

In *Gaia and God* and some earlier writings, Ruether presented a narrative of the history of the current ecological crisis going back to the Industrial Revolution and Western expansion with the colonization of much of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. She showed how liberation of many of the colonies along with the economic advantages of the industrial West led to neo-colonialism, the wealthy nations' domination of many of the former colonized Third World countries, resulting in impoverishment and dependence of the latter countries.

Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions continued the narrative with the focus on the sixty years of globalization and economic development following World War II. The particular globalization Ruether critiqued in this book is a "centralized and top-down globalization manifest in transnational corporations and financial institutions."[66] It is clear that the perspective of her critique here was the latest stage in Western colonialist imperialism. She argued that growth in corporate globalization had resulted in increased poverty especially in undeveloped or developing countries and added to the destruction of the environment and the ecological crisis. Citing the global financial institutions the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as the major players in governing the world economy on behalf of the transnational corporations, she added that these global financial institutions function to the advantage

[66] Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, ix.

of the wealthier nations at the expense of the poorer ones.

Ruether's discussion of corporate globalization and the financial institutions that function to the advantage of the wealthier nations is another example of social domination – the rich dominating the poor – which she has argued is a major factor in the ecological crisis.[67] Both the people and their land and resources become victims of abuse.

Ruether then defined two ideologies that she believed interact to justify the global system of domination, wealth, and impoverishment as well as its U.S. military enforcement. One of these she called "the neoliberal economic ideology that presently controls official economics." The other she referred to as the "ideology of messianic nationalism that dictates the vision of an American world empire."[68]

Ruether was among the first to use the term "neo-liberalism" to characterize the modern regimes of advanced Western countries and their global systems. She argued that the theory of classical or liberal economics[69] might well have worked effectively when it was developed in the late eighteenth century and continuing into the nineteenth century, but as the world moved into the mid-twentieth century and the age of larger and larger corporations, the theory simply does not work as intended. In a world dominated by global corporations that hold monopolies and have driven out smaller producers, merchants, and farmers, markets are overwhelmed by power. She called for justice between humans, particularly the marginalized, and for economic sustainability to

[67] See discussion earlier in this paper of the chapter "Ecology and Human Liberation" in Ruether's book *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism.*

[68] Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, 166.

[69] Ibid., 34. Ruether referred here to Adam Smith's theory in his book *The Wealth of Nations*, a theory that was intended for a world where the competition was among small, relatively equal, local producers.

become the norm.[70]

In this vein, Ruether was extremely critical of the United States which she argued had a sense of itself as unique both in its economic and political system and in its "way of life." She alleged that whenever the United States launched a war against "enemies," it tended to take on the language of Holy War with "America, God's chosen people, against God's enemies."[71] She particularly accused the George W. Bush administration, supported by the Christian Right, of escalating this kind of rhetoric which she contended had taken on the tone of a nationalistic messianic mission. Ruether argued that this ideology needs to be quashed by American Christians (to whom this ideology seeks to appeal and to justify itself as "Christian") who should become engaged in dialogue with other religious traditions, particularly with Jews and Muslims to renounce false theological claims linked to American ideologies. She contended that only by doing this can the nations around the world lessen the military violence, social injustice, and environmental degradation and create a more just and sustainable future for humanity. It is important to note here that for Ruether, religion is a key component in response to the ecological crisis with its impoverishment of people and the environment.

Ruether threw the net of her liberationist vision wider as she turned to the major world religions and showed how each of them has been challenged to critique patterns that may have contributed to environment destruction and then to recover traditions that are more environmentally friendly. She presented a summary of the conclusions of papers on the ecological import of major world religions and indigenous religions given

[70] Ibid., 166. Further, Ruether argued that economics which was based on a model supported by individual self-interest to expand profits must be changed. She contended social and environmental ethics needed to be brought into conversation with economics along with a "vision of human and planetary life as self-generating organisms in community."

[71] Ibid., 37.

at a series of conferences at Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions between 1996 and 1998. She argued, once again, that religious understandings of gender, race, and class in religious traditions of the world have contributed to "the relation between human-nature abuse and inter-human abuse," but at the same time, she maintained that religion is a key component in the quest for a just and sustainable world.[72]

Using Hinduism as an example, she suggested the traditional symbols such as the sacredness of forests, rivers, and land can be tapped for an ethic of protecting the environment. She pointed out the importance of goddesses in the Hindu tradition and particularly the Great Goddesses who possess cosmic energy that activates the creative processes of the world as symbols that can be interpreted both to lift Hindu women from their status of subordination and as an ethic of protecting the environment. Additionally, she noted male asceticism can be reinterpreted as a separation from and resistance to the world of industrial development that is destroying nature and human life, and their lifestyle of fasting and renunciation can be tapped to lead a community movement against deforestation and other practices harmful to the environment. Contending once again the relation between domination of woman and domination of nature, Ruether added that the ascetic's "simple living in harmony with highest reality can express a struggle to create alternatives both to gender hierarchy and to environmental destruction."[73]

Important to Ruether's argument is the fact that there are people of different faith traditions who are inspired and see themselves given a mandate through their faith to engage in preventative or restorative action. Ruether concluded from these papers

[72] Ibid., 47.
[73] Ibid., 53.

representing various world religions that "the worldview most conducive to an ecological ethic is not necessarily one that sees nature as sacred, permeated by divine energy nor the one that sees God as transcendent creator who mandates humans to care for nature." She argued that what is necessary is

> some view that the nonhuman world has its own integrity, its own dynamic of life and renewal of life. Humans need to respect the way in which the natural world sustains its own life, which is also the basis for sustaining human life. Whether religious communities see this self-sustaining ecology of nature as created by God . . . is perhaps less important than that they actively cultivate respect for nature's own life and see themselves as having to harmonize their own behavior with it. [74]

Ruether emphasized that world religions not only need to create theological or religious visions to respect the self-sustaining life of nature, but also need to promote action to prevent further abuse to the environment. Emphasizing the importance of religion in healing the environment, she added that religion introduces

> the cultivation of sensitivities of reverence, love, and empathy with the natural world that draw us to concern for it. Such concern calls us to act ecologically as a moral duty and as a redemptive hope, as obedience to God and alignment of ourselves with divine imperatives for a more peaceful and just world.[75]

While the two quotes above may seem contradictory, might they not be complementary, harkening back to Ruether's discussion in *Gaia and God* of the sacramental and the covenantal traditions? Viewing the nonhuman world as having its own integrity, its own dynamic and renewal of life, and acknowledging the dependence of human life on nature and thus the need to harmonize human behavior with nature, reflects the interdependence and communion Ruether discussed in the sacramental tradition. While "acting ecologically as a moral duty as obedience to God," reflects the covenantal tradition.

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 80

Through relating these more personal perceptions of the participants in these conferences, Ruether revealed her perspectives on how both nature and women have been undervalued, but also how the two are related. When the soil, water, and other natural resources are destroyed or impoverished, in particular in Third World countries, it is the women who are hit the hardest, especially those women with children, who are the caregivers and often the providers who are robbed of clean water, land to grow vegetables, and forests that provide wood for cooking and heating. In order to enhance the lives of women, attention must be given to care of nature, beginning with environmentally friendly and sustainable lifestyles, business practices, and use of natural resources. Key to this change is the ecofeminist worldview of nature and all of creation as a living system which functions as a unified organism with all of the parts interconnected and interdependent.

Addressing feminist theologies and ethics that explore the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature, Ruether turned to ecofeminists whose perspectives represented a variety of religious and cultural contexts. A common theme among the ecofeminists from Africa, India, and Latin America is the takeover of their land by Western development that not only stripped their natural resources and impoverished their land, but also displaced women, especially in the rural areas, who for the most part played the dominant role in the subsistence agriculture needed to feed and support their families.[76]

Theses feminists agreed that to develop an ecofeminist theology calls for the deconstruction of patriarchal thinking with its hierarchical structure and methodology.

[76] See the discussion of Ruether's book *Women Healing Earth; Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion,* pages 7-11.

The traditional patriarchal paradigm must be replaced with an ecofeminist one which starts with experience, embodied experience of women in daily life. Experiences cannot be transposed into thought directly, but for ecofeminists, and for Ruether, they must be the foundation of any meaningful ideas. They are always in a context in a particular network of relationships. This includes not only interaction and interdependence with humans, but also with the non-human world. Thus, one could say, the focus of ecofeminist theology is on living experiences not abstract theory.[77]

As ecofeminists describe them, their experiences of the divine are similar but varied: the divine as the underlying process of the universe that relates women and men, the diversity of cultures, humans and nature in an interconnected world; a feminine and panentheistic sense of divinity as divine Wisdom that underlies the universe and interrelates all things; the divine as the cosmic energy that underlies and sustains all life. Clearly, in an ecofeminist theology God is not a transcendent being, ruling over the world from somewhere out in the universe, but is very much an active presence in and within all of creation.

Most of these ecofeminists whom Ruether drew on understood nature as made up of dynamic communities of living beings. They called for egalitarian relationships between all humans, men and women, diverse ethnic groups, and those in different classes and cultures. They advocated a partnership between humans and nature. In short, what was clear is the call for how humans should relate to each other and to nature,

[77] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 25-65. Cited in Ruether. *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions,* 111, n. 44. Gebara contended that changing this paradigm starts with epistemology, with transforming the way one thinks. She noted that patriarchal epistemology bases itself on eternal unchangeable "truths" that are presuppositions for knowing what truly "is." She added that Catholicism added to this the hierarchy of revelation over reason, revealed ideas that come directly from God and thus are unchangeable.

recognizing interdependence and forging interrelationships of mutuality. Should this be realized, all of creation, human and non-human, will be liberated from all global systems of oppression.

One might argue that Ruether's vision of alternatives to corporate globalization is utopian. But this is vintage Ruether. Throughout her work whenever she critiques what she considers injustice or an oppressive system, she suggests alternatives, imagining how to create a liberated world beyond. As a liberation theologian with a passion for human rights and for justice, Ruether's approach to a possible solution is always one of hope, which requires projecting a potentially better world.

Even the best ideas are one thing, however, and actions another. Following this line of thought, Ruether therefore warned that these shared ideas would have little effect unless they resonated with the conflicts, struggles, and change of consciousness that are happening worldwide. The patterns of domination based on a top-down epistemology, whether men over women, humans over nature, elite nations over the poor, must be changed. Once again, Ruether advocated local community efforts of men and women across class and ethnic groups. She called for withdrawing from the larger centralized systems of control and banding together in local communities that are accountable to the needs at the local level and then networking across regions and even across the globe to undermine the systems of domination.[78]

For Ruether, the key to all of this is the ecofeminist worldview of nature as a living matrix of interconnection which provides the cosmological basis for this alternative view of relationships. The divine is understood as a matrix of life-giving

[78] Ibid., 124.

energy that is in, and through, and under all things.[79]

Ruether brought *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* to a close on a note of hope, offering alternatives to the dominant theories of capitalist globalization. She addressed various movements that have challenged the present system and then asked if they are enough to represent real change.[80] She again addressed, as she did earlier, how women are affected by globalization, discussing how many have organized and become leaders in some of the anti-globalization movements.

As in *Gaia and God*, Ruether ended this book by reimagining an alternative global society, rethinking the ideologies that are used to justify existing power structures, in this case, globalization, or as she so aptly states it "corporate and military dominance."[81] Indeed, her discussion is no less than an attack on three major global institutions which she alleged are components of the dominant system of world power: the transnational corporations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (along with the World Trade Organization). She argued these three needed to be diminished if not dismantled. As in *Gaia and God*, she proposed as an alternative a system of local government control with local organizations and financial institutions that would be accountable to and serve the needs and the interests of each particular community.

Overall, Ruether's critique of corporate globalization was well researched and expansive, covering the sixty years following World War II. Her suggestions for

[79] Ibid., 124-125. Ruether refers to Paul's words in Acts 17:28. God is the "one in whom we live and move and have our being."

[80] Ibid., 131. Among others, Ruether refers to the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, that took place in 1994 the day the North American Free Trade Agreement was to go into effect and the street protests that broke out in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organization and other Bretton Woods institutions.

[81] Ibid., 166.

change to create a just and sustainable world are challenging if not idealistic. However, as in some of her other writings, this book should be seen not as a set of detailed policy recommendations, but a way of starting the conversation and raising questions for possible future research.

While *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions* is concerned with the ecological crisis which had been hinted at in Ruether's earlier book, G*aia and God,* and has now become a reality, the later work exudes far more sense of urgency. The major theme running throughout this second book is corporate globalization with its mega corporations and government institutions, presented as an extremely destructive force setting the world on a social, economic, and ecological calamitous course. *Gaia and God* explored how centuries old beliefs and practices influenced relationships between humans and between humans and the non-human world and led to the ecological crisis. From the perspective of the crisis thirteen years later, in *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions,* Ruether explored the practices of the sixty years since World War II that have escalated the ecological crisis. In critiquing corporate globalization, she wove together issues addressing the environment, women's rights, the attitudes of major world religions towards nature, and transformation of global economic practices.

Ruether's most recent and perhaps final analysis of the ecological crisis comes in the last chapter of her autobiography published in 2013. Beginning, once again, with a discussion of the ecological crisis and the ideologies of domination of nature followed by an ecofeminist critique of this domination (all of which she has explored in earlier writings), she ends on a note of hope for the future, addressing "building an alternative

system of survival on a tough new planet" and exploring the possibility of "spirituality for new communities of life."[82] This somewhat more personal discussion of the alternative systems that Ruether sees as beginning to take place in the early twenty-first century, and the possibility of an accompanying new spirituality, both of which she holds as vital to deal with the ecological crisis, will be presented briefly.

Ruether first notes that there is a trend in many parts of the world, even in the "advanced" world, toward small farms, with food produced locally for local consumption. Ideally, these farms include small herds of animals that produce organic fertilizer, and composting of organic wastes. Since the farms are small, much of the work of sowing and harvesting can be done by hand instead of by machinery and thus provides jobs while limiting pollution caused by the machinery. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is another new movement. It consists of small farms that produce crops by organic methods. CSA connects the farms with consumers in the local area who pay an annual fee and in return receive a box of seasonal foods weekly. Thus, storage and long distance shipping are avoided. She observes that urban and suburban gardens are also becoming popular. People produce food for their family but may also sell it to neighbors. Weekly farmers' markets have become quite common in most parts of the United States. Most of these people practice organic farming and gardening which is ecologically friendly.

Ruether argues that this kind of redeveloped agriculture must be matched by redeveloped energy production, beginning with fossil fuels being replaced with sustainable energy production by wind, solar, and hydropower. This shift would mean

[82] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 135-157. Her reference to "a tough new planet" comes from a book by Bill McKibben, *Earth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet* (New York: Time Life Books, 2010).

moving away from the large corporate energy companies that require long distances to deliver fossil fuels like coal or gas from source to consumer to more local methods of energy production. In addition, humans must be more conscious of energy efficiency and conservation.

Once again Ruether contends, however, that technological "fixes" are not enough to make a real and lasting difference in healing the earth. We need to change the way we think about our relationships with one another and to the earth. Recall her assumption in *Gaia & God* that the earth forms a living system, of which humans are an inextricable part[83] and her use of the word *Gaia* with the thesis that the entire planet is a living system, behaving as a unified organism.[84] She argues we must become more attuned to the energies of the earth itself and work with these energies in farming organically and generating power from the natural sources of air, sun, and water.

In her autobiography, Ruether directly links her own life experience to her approach to theological and ecological change. Referring to the changes she herself has made in growing, preparing, and consuming food, she says, "My consumption becomes part of a life cycle: growth, eating, disintegration, composting, renewed soils, and growth again. Preparing food and composting waste become part of a spiritual discipline for the renewal of life."[85] Consisting of two major books and numerous articles addressing the ecological crisis, Ruether's ecofeminist theology is a testament to her genuine concern for care of the earth and the increasing devastation that has been done at the hands of humans. She began addressing this concern in the early 1970s with a chapter titled "Mother Earth and the Megamachine" in her book *Liberation Theology: Human Hope*

[83] Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 5.
[84] Ibid., 4.
[85] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 156.

Confronts Christian History and American Power.[86] Since then, her research has taken her into the realms of sociology, economics, and global politics as she further addressed the worsening ecological crisis. The alternatives to corporate globalization which she has suggested will take an effort on every level – local, regional, national, and global. In truth, it is not so much not knowing what to do as being willing to do it.

Some changes Ruether suggests, if not many, are resisted by those who profit from the way things are currently. Others resist the changes because often they are more costly. Still others, like carpooling or taking mass transportation, are resisted because people don't want to give up the convenience of having their own vehicle to go where they want when they want. On the other hand, there are successful movements in some of the directions she has suggested: planting vegetable gardens and composting, collecting rainwater to water vegetation, organic gardening, grocery stores buying local produce in season, and recycling to name a few. The question that her work raises, but does not entirely answer, is this: do these changes by a small minority really help heal the earth and promote a sustainable world? Will it take government support or even mandates at all levels to promote these changes to make a real difference in liberating the earth from abuse by humans? If nothing else, Ruether has raised awareness of some of the root causes of the ecological crisis - in particular the ramifications of corporate globalization - and she has offered alternatives. She has started – or continued – the conversation.

[86] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972).

CHAPTER 5

RUETHER'S CATHOLICISM: CRITIQUING, CHALLENGING, STAYING

While a number of factors have influenced Ruether's critique and challenge of her own religious tradition, Roman Catholicism, it is the contention here that two of these factors were the most influential. One is her family background and the way she was raised, in particular by her mother. The other factor is her educational experience beginning with her study of the Greek and Roman cultures and religions as well as the ancient Near Eastern texts.

Ruether experienced a variety of religious traditions starting at an early age. Her mother was Catholic and raised her and her two sisters in the Catholic tradition. Her father was an Episcopalian, though one who attended church services only on Easter and Christmas. Her favorite uncle was Jewish and a great aunt was Russian Orthodox. Having been taught by her mother that there were both valuable and questionable aspects of Catholicism, she describes her childhood environment as religiously ecumenical, humanistic, and free-thinking, as opposed to a parochial or "ghettoized" Catholicism.[1]

Ruether acknowledges that she was always an individual who assumed that she could do anything she wished to do; being a woman was not a barrier. Her sense of autonomy was nourished by a background of strong, independent, and intelligent women.Her mother was a role model and instilled these traits in her daughters. Her

[1] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 221.

mother also did not reinforce the dominant concept in that day of women's role as wife and mother. As mentioned earlier, her mother's female friends in La Jolla, California, all early feminists and involved in social concerns, had a lasting impact on Ruether as well.

Ruether did not receive the typical Catholic formation that one might expect of a Catholic theologian. While she attended Catholic schools only through the tenth grade, she favorably recalled the schools run by the Sisters of Providence as being "matricentric enclaves in a patriarchal world" where priests with whom she had no interaction appeared only for daily mass. She recalls the nuns as not only affirmative of females but also good teachers who even joined the students on the playground, whether for a game of baseball or sledding on snowy days.[2] Thus one might conclude that even her Catholic education was not the more usual Catholic experience.

Ruether completed her last two years of high school in a public school. Following her Father's death, her mother moved the family to La Jolla in her native California. Here at La Jolla High School, Ruether became involved in writing for the school newspaper and soon was appointed its editor. At one point a local retired admiral found the paper's editorials threatening and told the school principal he thought the paper was "communist." The principal told the student editors he supported them and that they need not worry. They never did find out with what the admiral found issue, but Ruether and her colleagues were quite proud of themselves for having been called communist and causing the stir.[3] This early experience with stirring controversy and actually thriving amidst it may have contributed to Ruether's later tendencies to fearlessly spark "trouble."

Ruether's undergraduate education was not typical for a Catholic theologian

[2] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 4.
[3] Ibid., 6. This was during the McCarthy Era in 1954.

either. She never attended a Catholic university. She received her undergraduate degree in philosophy and religion at Scripps College, a private, secular college in Claremont, California, and her MA Degree in ancient history and PhD in classics and patristics from Claremont Graduate School, also in Claremont, California.

Critiquing and Challenging

Ruether points out that it was only when she married, at the age of twenty, that she experienced the first major assault upon her well-being as a woman in the world.[4] Shortly after marriage, she and her husband Herman were informed by the priest at his parish that if she wasn't pregnant within a year, he would know they were "living in sin." During the first ten years of their marriage Ruether gave birth to three children and in the same period finished a BA, an MA, and a PhD. Recalling the enormous amount of work it took for her to continue to be a creative thinker and writer and yet maintain the minimum expectations of family life in the society of the time, she experienced an "acute sense of injustice."[5] In contrast to what she had experienced growing up, she realized that this was the reality of women's unequal place in society.

It was Ruether's observations[6] and her personal experience of marriage and motherhood that led her to begin writing in the areas of sexuality and reproduction, with increasing criticisms directed at the official Catholic teaching and culture on birth control. By the time she was finishing her doctoral degree in 1963 and gave birth to their third child, it was clear to both her and her husband that three were enough children if she

[4]Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Disputed Questions on Being a Christian*, 113. Ruether added that she is astonished to think how thoughtlessly she married at the end of her junior year in college, but this was part of the culture of the fifties. By the end of college, women were supposed to get married. In truth, she met her husband in her junior year and after a short courtship and discovering a fair amount of compatibility, they decided to get married.

[5] Ibid., 116.

[6] See chapter 1, footnote 23.

was to have any hope of combining scholarship and family life. She knew she wanted to teach, to lecture, and to write. While her reflections emerged out of her own personal experience and dreams, she soon realized that the issue of birth control was not her private struggle but a public issue of injustice inflicted on millions of women, particularly the poor and the uneducated. Her first writings in the early to mid-sixties criticized the Catholic views of sexuality and reproduction.[7]

During the sixties she contributed chapters to a number of edited books on birth control and sexuality.[8] Looking back, she says that at the time she did not think of these writings as particularly feminist. Rather, she considered these writings to be a critique of the Catholic Church's assault on what she came to see as women's rights of control over their own bodies.

Meanwhile, with the self-questioning and the changes that began taking place in the Roman Catholic Church following Vatican II, Ruether was encouraged that Catholicism was becoming more open and self-critical, giving her the opportunity to contribute her insights. She had been working on her first book, *The Church Against Itself*, which was published in 1967.[9] Here she argued that the existing institutional church must be "destroyed" in order to maintain the tradition through which the Gospel was first proclaimed. She argued that the Body of Christ is not so much a mystical experience, but rather the doctrine that itself testifies to the claim that God's grace is

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[7] Ruether, "Why I Believe in Birth Control: A Catholic Mother Speaks Out," *Saturday Evening Post,* 12-14. Ruether, "Marriage, Love, Children," *Jubilee,* 17-20. Ruether, "Women, Birth Control, and the Catholic Church," *Frontline,* 131-138.

[8] Ruether, "The Difficult Decision: Contraception," in *The Experience of Marriage: The Testimony of Catholic Laymen,* ed. Michael Novak, 69-81. Ruether, "A Question of Dignity, a Question of Freedom," in *What Modern Catholics Think of Birth Control,* ed. William Birmingham, 233-40. Ruether, "Birth Control and the Ideals of Marital Sexuality," in *Contraception and Holiness,* ed. Gregory Baum , 72-91.

[9] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Church Against Itself: An I*nquiry *into the Conditions of Historical Existence for the Eschatological Community* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967).

mediated by the bread and the wine, with the believers becoming Christ to their neighbor. It is "where two or three are gathered" by the action of the Holy Spirit that Christ is in the midst of them. However, she argued, deluded by a triumphalist ecclesiology, the Church had confused its historical existence with its divine essence.[10] She contended in these early pieces that the Church of the time had become an obstacle between the faith of the apostles and the life of modern believers. Much of Catholicism's early twentieth century theology had become just a rigid ecclesiology, with the Church simply demanding obedience to itself.[11]

Throughout the sixties and seventies, Ruether continued to contribute chapters to edited books and to submit articles to journals critiquing the Catholic Church. While in the early sixties her writing had begun by addressing the issue of the Church's teaching on birth control, toward the end of the decade she began to critique what she considered the failure of a complete renewal in the Church following the initially hopeful conciliar reform laid out by Vatican II. Moving into the seventies she started addressing more fundamental changes like women's ordination.

In "The Free Church Movement in Roman Catholicism,"[12] published in 1969, Ruether addressed the slowness of the Church in carrying out the reforms of Vatican II. She argued there that the Catholic Church had become "spiritually in schism,"[13] adding that those open to the spirit of change should engage in their own conversations while still attending the same parishes and sending their children to the parochial schools. The power structures of the Church were still hierarchical, she pointed out, with all lines of

[10] Ibid., 2
[11] Ibid., 4.
[12] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Free Church Movement in Roman Catholicism, in *New Theology, No. 6*, ed. Martin Marty and Dean Peerman (New York: Macmillan, 1969).
[13] Ibid., 272.

authority proceeding from the top down, and "despite all the verbiage about community and collegiality, there are still no institutional structures which really express the collegiality of the bishops with the Pope, of priests with bishops, and of people with the hierarchy."[14] In her trademark biting way, Ruether contended, "This hierarchical intransigence toward any real change that touches on their powers as magistrate, font of sacramental power, and arbiter of doctrine has virtually forced the emergence of a widespread phenomenon which I have chosen to call 'The Free Church Movement in Roman Catholicism.'"[15] By this Ruether meant the various ways by which Catholics of the time began setting up their own parallel communities or organizations where their voices could be expressed and heard outside parish boundaries.

Ruether asserted that there was a deep spiritual hunger among lay Catholics and a quest for authentic community and celebration of life together not often found in typical institutional Catholicism. Lay groups began to form and meet on a regular basis in homes or other places outside the church building. There were also spontaneous movements of renewal among religious communities, both male and female. Some even defined themselves outside the jurisdiction of the hierarchy and continued their work as a free community.[16] Ruether pointed out that neither the lay nor religious groups considered themselves as having left the Roman Catholic Church, but rather to have left only the power structure of the institution; they simply made a distinction between the "authentic" Church and the ecclesiastical organization. However, increasingly, many male and female religious did leave their vowed communities, dissatisfied with the lack

[14] Ibid., 273.
[15] Ibid., 274.
[16] Ibid., 277. Ruether cites the Benedictine monastery in Cuernavaca, Mexico and the Glenmary Sisters in the Midwestern United States as examples.

of reform following Vatican II. Some went into secular witness as individuals; others found ways to live together in small communities bound together with the same religious vows but without adhering to the hierarchy. The latter was particularly true of women religious.

It is important to note that Ruether explained that the free church movement within Catholicism in the sense that she used it is "the free community within historical Christianity."[17] She added that

> it is founded on a view of the church which denies that hierarchical institutionalization belongs to the essence of the church. The church is seen essentially as the gathered community of explicit believers in which sacramental distinctions between clergy and laity are abolished, priestly roles become purely contextual and functional; the whole community arising by joint covenant entered into by the existential analogue of believer's baptism; that is to say by voluntary adult decision.[18]

Ruether believed this concept of the believer's church is the real understanding of church whenever there is authentic church renewal. She made it clear, however, that the believer's church does not replace the institutional church and added, "The institutional church represents the historical dimension of the church's existence. It is a necessary, albeit secondary, expression of the church."[19] She acknowledged the institutional church is necessary for the perpetuation through history of the church's message as tradition which is passed on to each generation and that the gathered church of believers cannot perpetuate itself by itself, rather the two are interdependent.

However, she argued that the historical church must be willing to let communities form autonomously without any specific institutional ties to work out their own gifts and at the same time remain open in communicating with these communities so the fruits of

[17] Ibid., 285.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 286.

their work can be given back to the church. Expressing doubt that the institutional church concerned for its vested interests would ever really permit this to happen, she asserted that those most active in exercising a witness to Christ are therefore most often found on the fringes of the institutional church, even outside its formal boundaries. Allowing that the Church "is what it is," she advocated that one be dedicated to the Church and yet disinterested in it, concerned about its failures, yet not ultimately concerned, knowing that "God is not limited to the church but will raise up a people to do his will wherever he pleases."[20] The latter is a statement that appears continually throughout her numerous later writings critiquing the Catholic Church.

Twenty years later, continuing her critique of the lack of much church reform following Vatican II, Ruether co-edited a book with Eugene Bianchi, *A Democratic Catholic Church: the Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism.*[21] In addition to writing the Introduction and the Conclusion, Ruether contributed a chapter entitled "Spirituality and Justice: Popular Church Movements in the United States." Considered here briefly will be two types of popular American Catholic movements that Ruether presented: peace and justice organizations, which included women's rights among others in their vision of a new church and society, and feminist movements linked to racial, economic, and peace issues with women's experience as the defining perspective.[22]

These movements arose in the context of what Ruether saw as the increasing reactionary repression by the Catholic Church and the slowing of the momentum of change in the 1970s and 1980s. Vatican II had raised the hopes for change, but almost

[20] Ibid., 287.
[21] Eugene C. Bianchi and Rosemary Radford Ruether, eds., *A Democratic Catholic Church: The Reconstruction of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992).
[22] Ibid., 191.

immediately there was resistance from the Roman Curia. Ruether discussed the ministries and kinds of participation of five groups that were an outgrowth of this period: Chicago Call to Action, the Eighth Day Center for Justice, the National Assembly of Religious Women, Chicago Catholic Women, and Mary's Pence.[23] Each of these will be considered briefly here.

Call to Action organized in Chicago in 1977 as a predominantly lay group with its own staff and board of directors and initially served as a sounding board for Chicago's progressive Catholics.[24] By 1990, CTA was becoming more a national organization with some 5000 members. Today it is a national organization of 25,000 members with 50 chapters across the country. In addition to calling for reform in the Catholic Church, it promotes acts of justice and the building of inclusive communities.[25]

The Eighth Day Center for Justice, organized in 1974, is sponsored by religious orders with staff and major funding coming from these orders. It is organized around four working groups: poverty, peace and human rights, economic justice, and women's issues. With members and financial support from forty-six states and twenty-six countries, it functions as an activist community. Driven by its mission: "Impelled by the belief that all creation is sacred and interrelated; imbued with the principles of nonviolence, mutuality and cooperation, 8th Day Center for Justice, a coalition founded by Catholic religious congregations, acts as a critical alternative voice to oppressive systems and works to change those systems," the Center describes itself as "a progressive

[23] Ibid., 195. Ruether chose these five as she is very familiar with them.

[24] A year earlier, in 1976, the U.S. Catholic bishops had launched a church renewal movement with delegates composed of priests, women religious, and laity, gathering for an assembly in Detroit. Many resolutions for reform of the Church were passed. However, shortly after the assembly, the bishops voted to scrap the process and to reject those resolutions that pertained to church reform. The Chicago CTA arose out of the failure of the bishops CTA when Chicago delegates to the Detroit Assembly decided to continue the process.

[25] Call to Action website, accessed January 19, 2017, cta-usa.org.

Catholic social justice organization that works to dismantle exploitative systems of power such as racism, sexism, capitalism, militarism, and borderism through education, advocacy, grassroots organizing, and direct action with others who are committed to a just and peaceful world." [26]

The National Assembly of Religious Women (NARW) was established in 1968 with concerns to provide a network for women religious who wanted to respond to the Vatican's call to Church renewal and a renewed mission to the poor. In 1975, the name was changed to National Assembly of Religious Women in order to include laywomen.

NARW is a feminist organization that addresses a broad range of justice issues from the perspective of women. Ruether noted that working out of a faith commitment and lived spirituality the organization is committed to work with women from different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds aware of the diversity of perspectives of women from different cultural and social backgrounds.[27] Of particular importance are the emergency action responses of the group to exploited women workers, especially through networking with solidarity movements in Third World countries.

Chicago Catholic Women was a local feminist group organized in 1974 by Donna Quinn. An activist group, it played a vital role in the women's movement. It was involved in education and advocacy for equal rights, abortion rights, and lesbian rights. An example of CCW's outreach was an elder-care project which networked elderly women in public housing with homeless women and children in a nearby shelter. The homeless women did housekeeping, ran errands and did some nursing, gaining skills for future employment while the elderly in return became parent and grandparent to the

[26] 8th Day Center for Justice website, accessed March 20, 2017, www.8thdaycenter.org.
[27] Bianchi and Ruether, *A Democratic Church*, 200.

women and children. Chicago Catholic Women also played a major part in the formation of the Women's Ordination Conference and the Women-Church Convergence.[28]

Mary's Pence arose in response to the lack of access to Church funds by Catholic women's advocacy groups. While women were often the major fundraiser in the Church, they had little or no access to funds for their ministries to women. In 1986 when Call to Action was advocating for financial accountability in the Church and for a boycott of the annual collection for the Vatican Peter's Pence, the idea arose that what women in grassroots movements needed was an alternative fund. Thus Mary's Pence was established to which progressive Catholics could give to support women's ministries to poor women and children. Mary's Pence celebrated "30 years of funding women, changing lives" in April 2017. "Mary's Pence invests in women across the Americas by funding community initiatives and fostering collaborations to create social change. We envision a world where empowered women and their communities flourish in solidarity and justice."[29]

Ruether highlighted these five groups as representative of the variety of grassroots U. S. Catholic organizations that came into being in the twenty years after Vatican II. All were committed to social justice and saw a connection among issues such as sexism, racism, heterosexism, militarism, and violence, especially against women. While there are directors in the various organizations, the groups are participatory rather than hierarchical. Ruether commended these organizations as finding a way to be faithful to the Church as a historical community, while being free of its hierarchical control. All of these groups illustrated Ruether's general claim that the most genuine Catholicism

[28] Ibid., 201. CCW folded in 2000.
[29] Mary's Pence website, accessed March 21, 2017, www.maryspence.org.

existed alongside, not within, official Catholic institutions. With her liberationist vision Ruether noted,

> They exist both within the Catholic Christian community and yet independently of its hierarchical system of control, becoming liberated zones of justice-seeking, participatory community in witness against the apostasy of segments of the larger institution and in direct ministry to the community. Most of all, they celebrate now the presence of the liberating Spirit in their midst.[30]

Ruether argued that the assumption the Catholic Church has always had a centralized monarchical form of government and that this form of government was given by Jesus Christ and is therefore divinely mandated and unchangeable needs to be challenged. She contended that the New Testament shows no evidence of a monarchical hierarchy practiced in the church. The early church was more a discipleship of equals, with leaders chosen at the local level, primarily emerging by virtue of their "charismatic" gifts.[31] During the third through fifth centuries the Church moved toward a hierarchical system modeled after the Roman imperial system with the papacy imitating the Roman emperor's rule over the empire. In the Middle Ages the papacy became a powerful political institution, directly ruling territories in Italy and regularly competing with European monarchs. In the late nineteenth century under Pope Pius IX the centralization of the Church was tightened and absolute papal primacy was declared along with papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council in 1869.

Arguing against this long but artificial historical development and instead for a democratic Catholic polity, Ruether maintained that a democratic polity better expresses the theological meaning of the Church as redemptive society. She reminded her readers

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[30] Bianchi and Ruether, *A Democratic Church*, 206.

[31] Ibid., 248. Ruether contended that in the early church the community was "held together by a common faith and similar practices. An egalitarian dynamic was at work, a 'discipleship of equals,' based on a common baptism. Underlying these participational dimensions was a profound theology of the Holy Spirit that militates against the sacralizing and fixing of any form of governance."

that Vatican II consistently used themes such as collegiality, people of God, and pilgrim people, which denote an egalitarian and communal church.[32] She added that because the Vatican bureaucracy prevented such reforms as collegiality from actually taking form in more democratic structures such as the synod of bishops or episcopal conferences, "greater hope for democratic reform might lie in forging effective coalitions beyond hierarchical control, movements that would be strongly influenced by lay participation." These groups could employ the strategies of molding free public opinion in the Church, lobbying for change, and focusing on specific issues leading toward democratization of the Church. Ruether advocated five principles for a democratic restructuring of the Church, contending it was essential that these principles be based on solid theological reflection.[33] The following is a brief summary of the principles and the theological basis that Ruether gave for each.

1. Participation – "Through faith and baptism all Christians, not only the hierarchy, constitute the Church. Through the gifts of the Spirit, all Christians are called to represent Christ in the assembly and in the world."[34] Ruether argued that elected representatives of a council and the parish congregation as a whole should participate in calling the pastor and have more control in planning ministerial programs in the parish. On the diocesan level, elected representatives of parish councils would work together in calling a bishop, in accounting for the use of diocesan funds, and in program and policy development (in effect, a diocesan council).

2. Conciliarism – "The theological roots of conciliarism go back into the collegial dimensions of New Testament Christianity . . . seen in the collaborative ministry of Jesus

[32] Ibid., 248.
[33] Ibid., 253.
[34] Ibid., 254.

and his disciples . . . the Council of Jerusalem in Acts."[35] Ruether argued that councils, a traditional form of Catholic "democracy" that also flourished in the late Middle Ages, needed to include representatives of the laity and other religious orders and professions, with special attention to including women. As in the early centuries of the Church, defining doctrine would be the task of ecumenical councils including episcopal, sacerdotal, and lay representatives with the pope a titular head of the Church as bishop of Rome but not a universal "monarch, as he had come to be." He would function primarily as a spiritual and moral leader of the Church, not its directing authority.

3. Pluralism – "The theological basis for the principle of pluralism in restructuring the Church resides in the freedom of God's leadership as well as in respect for the diversity of the Holy Spirit's gifts."[36] Ruether suggested that in addition to the pope no longer being the head of the universal Church as a "monarch," the Church should be decentralized by moving the Vatican every ten years to a different country while the pope would remain at the Roman see. This would enable Church leaders to experience personally diverse cultures of the world. Similarly, respecting diversity in lifestyle, gays and lesbians would be included in the structures of the Church along with minorities and women at all levels of ministry and decision making.

4. Accountability – This principle "rests on the theological doctrine of stewardship for the gifts God has given us. It reflects the New Testament attitude that to whom much has been given, much will be required."[37] Ruether argued there must be full accountability concerning the use of money and property at all levels of the Church –

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[35] Ibid., 255.

[36] Ibid., 256. Ruether asserted that the problem with the Vatican control over the whole Church is the identification of God's will with the will of, for example, John Paul II. She added, "The freedom of God and the gifts of the Spirit would be more truly respected in a decentralized and pluralistic Church."

[37] Ibid., 258.

parish, diocese, and Vatican.[38] She contended that there should be effective lay participation in the disposition of church assets at every level with specific structures of accountability. Written procedures of financial disclosure and accountability need to be worked out so that all church activities would support well-determined goals of mission and ministry. [39]

5. Dialogue – "The democratic church principle of dialogue flows from a theology of the freedom and mystery of God. Dogmatic closure of discussion among theologians today and sanctioned suppression of dissent negate the quest for the truth that shall make us free."[40] This principle would amount to a commitment to freedom of thought, speech, and discussion within the Church, so that no ideas would be automatically suppressed. Ruether saw this as a way to strengthen Church teaching by making sure that no true understandings of the Gospel are ruled out. She adds that a dialogical church offers forums for agreement and disagreement among Christians of good will.

It should be emphasized that these represent Ruether's theological bases for the five principles which she argued are crucial for the inner reform of the Church toward more democratic structures. She added that abstract agreement with these principles is not enough; their implementation demands strategies for bringing about actual institutional change in the Catholic Church. Two types of strategies for action she suggested were nonviolent resistance, as was used in the Civil Rights Movement, and being proactive in creating workable alternative structures outside formal Catholic

[38] Ibid. Ruether notes the Vatican bank scandals in the mid-1970s and again in the mid-1980s.

[39] Ibid., The Vatican bank scandals a few years ago and the exorbitant amount of money spent by retired bishops for their personal retirement homes can be cited as cases of abuse due to lack of accountability.

[40] Ibid., 259.

institutions. The first strategy might be played out in financial boycotts or demonstrations designed to get existing leadership to change. The second strategy might be implemented through educational programs or experimentation with alternative ministries. Ruether warned, however, that in planning such strategies and acting to bring about Church reform, it must be remembered the Church does not exist for itself but for the welfare of the world.[41]

In 2005, more than four decades after the Second Vatican II, Ruether returned to her reforming Catholic ideal by proposing a more comprehensive vision for progressive Catholics of a renewed democratic and participatory Church in her book *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican.*[42] Convinced by many years of hierarchical resistance to change that the Catholic Church was not going to follow through any time soon with the reforms proposed at the Second Vatican Council, Ruether laid out an alternative vision of Catholic Christianity. Grounded in her wider liberationist vision of the Gospel and human development, she argued that "the Church's foundations lie in Jesus Christ and a vision of the church as a new humanity freed from all forms of violence and oppression," adding that this must be the Church's grounding if there are to be prophetic reformers in the Catholic Church in the twenty-first century.[43] In this book, as throughout all Ruether's work over many years, her liberationist vision is grounded in the biblical vision of the Old Testament prophets and in Jesus' teachings, in particular his advocacy for the poor and the oppressed. Likewise, her vision of the Church, which she understands to be an authentic Catholicism, is shaped by what she believes is the meaning of the Gospel,

[41] Ibid., 260.
[42] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican* (New York: The New Press, 2010).
[43] Ibid., 2.

rooted in the person of Jesus Christ and "a grace that is the authentic being of God and made present to us in the life, death and resurrection of Christ that both liberates us from the deformations of power and returns us to our deeper and authentic self and calling as God's good creation."[44] The central themes of the 2005 book were ones she had written about in the past, but this time in presenting her vision for a progressive Catholicism she offered more practical suggestions for bringing this vision into reality. She contended that an authentic Catholicism would be multicultural, democratic, and liberated from sexism. It would acknowledge its fallibility, live by grace rather than power, and be committed to the poor and the oppressed. These elements of what Ruether sees as a future authentic Catholicism constituted the substance of her book.

With these elements of an authentic Catholic Christian community in mind, Ruether suggested several specific qualities that believers need to begin to change in order to move forward and to realize this vision. They need to have confidence that they are autonomous adults who can make decisions on their own and are not "children" dependent on the hierarchy of the Church. They need a deep grounding in the discipline of daily prayer to cultivate divine presence in their lives. A critical knowledge about church history and theology is a must in order to discern genuine Christian doctrines and themes that are meaningful and to recognize the truth claims that need to be questioned as merely assertions of power, not authentic teaching.[45] They need to be socially and ecologically committed, to be in solidarity with those less fortunate and to live more sustainably in relation to the earth; and they need to build "alternative church

[44] Ibid., 3.
[45] Ibid., 13.

communities and organizations" independent of hierarchical control.[46] She argued that developing these "alternative" groups beyond the control of the hierarchy would be truly Catholic because the people forming the groups would not only have Catholic roots, but also they would see themselves as addressing reform issues in the wider Catholic Church. Ruether asserted that such groups are vital to the hope for a renewed Catholicism and contended that they should self-identify as Catholic out of a sense of taking responsibility for being the Church and for calling the institutional Church to be open to the work for reform. At the same time, they would be free of any institutional control that could disband them.

Throughout *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican,* Ruether called for an end to sexist teachings and the authoritarian *modus operandi* of the Vatican while promoting communities where all are welcomed equally into the Catholic Church, a church that should be grounded in the teachings of Jesus who came to liberate from all forms of violence, discrimination, and oppression. She described this book as providing "snapshots of progressive Catholicism that provide a vision for the future."[47] The specific elements of a progressive Catholicism she presented were: reproductive rights and women's moral agency, key elements of the church's mission in the world, the women-church movement, the church as a discipleship of equals, and liberation and ecofeminist theologies in Latin America. A few points of each topic will be briefly highlighted here.

The issue of birth control had been a concern for Ruether since the early 1960s. In this work she expanded her argument to include the Church's position on abortion as

[46] Ibid., 15.
[47] Ibid., 16.

well as birth control. She accused the Church of being guilty of moral contradictions, specifically in its claim to promote a "consistent life ethic."[48] Ruether argued that the Church uses very different kinds of moral reasoning in dealing with issues of war than when it deals with the issue of abortion. In the case of abortion, the Vatican uses an absolutist ethic, and allows for no debate or qualifications. When dealing with war, however, it uses a consequence-based ethic allowing for a variety of opinions and ultimately leaves the matter of participation in war in the hands of individual conscience. Ruether therefore argued that while the Vatican makes absolute the right to life of the unborn, "it possess very little moral rigor" when it comes to the destruction and loss of lives between birth and old age from war, poverty, and environmental devastation.[49] She offered as examples the fact that the Church applies no effective sanctions to killing noncombatants in war, selling toxic wastes to farmers as fertilizers, impoverishing the poor at the hands of the wealthy and their corporations, or other actions that have the consequence of unjust or untimely death.

Addressing the mission of the church, Ruether referred to the gospel to provide norms. She quoted from Luke 4:18 where Jesus says he was sent to preach good news to the poor, to set the prisoner free, to give sight to the blind, and to liberate those who are oppressed. Arguing that Jesus made social justice central to his mission, she added that Christians and followers of Jesus are called to do the same. That is, "the mission of the church is to be a community of liberation, a redemptive community where one has a taste of what the world would be like if all forms of evil were overcome."[50] She added that while this mission cannot be complete within history, the church must be a place where

[48] Ibid., 53.
[49] Ibid., 54.
[50] Ibid., 66.

its members are moving in the direction of redeemed and redemptive living. Acknowledging that all humans sin, she contended the church must be the place where those failings can be admitted and critiqued and repented of. Ruether admonished that the worst contradiction to the church's mission is to justify sin, refusing to name failings as failings, and thus refusing to repent. This, she argued, is for her "the primary sin against the Holy Spirit."[51]

Ruether defined sin or evil as fundamentally the distortion of relationships. For Ruether, right relation means relating to one another in ways that are not only equal, but mutually enhancing, ways that contribute to collective well-being. She gave the example that whenever humans construct theories in which some groups of people have a different nature from others and therefore should be excluded from certain aspirations, they are creating wrong and thus sinful relationships. She added that this does not mean that everyone must do the same jobs or have the same roles, but rather that all jobs need to be honored as equal in dignity and in their ability to sustain an adequate life.[52]

Ruether asserted there are three dimensions to forming these wrong relationships (which she has termed "evil."). First, some people set themselves up as those with power, wealth, and honor (one could add education) by subjugating and exploiting others and forcing them into roles that benefit themselves (those with power). Second, society institutionalizes these relationships by setting them in laws and establishing them in social policies and economic systems. Third, ideologies are constructed to justify these

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 70. In other words, Ruether contended that some work such as a janitor or cleaning lady should not be seen as inferior and made demeaning by earning a very low wage so the person can barely survive, while the work of others is seen as superior and deserving of an extraordinary wage because their work is more important. All must be treated with dignity and earn a "living wage" which is often more than the minimum wage.

oppressive relationships claiming they are the order of nature or the will of God. The mass of people thus become socialized to accept this condition as normal and divinely mandated. [53] But, Ruether insisted, these social arrangements are not divinely mandated, because God opts for the oppressed and violated, proclaims their freedom, and judges unjust wealth gained by exploitation. Again, Ruether argued that the mission of the church is to be the place where these wrongs are repented, where the oppressed are liberated, and where social and moral transformation is continually taking place.

In addition, Ruether asserted that the church must be the place where truth is spoken. It must be a place where people can be truthful about themselves, speaking both of their own abuse of others as well as of abuses where they are victims. That is, the church must be the place where both the victim and the victimizer can seek help. It is in this context that Ruether addressed the revelation of the years of sexual abuse by Catholic priests and the cover-ups at the hands of the bishops. She acknowledged that this scandal raised questions about the Church as the place where both victimizers and victims can turn for repentance and redemption. She contended that by forcing victims to turn to secular courts, the crime of sexual abuse could be dealt with but not the deeper offense of sin. Acknowledging that secular responses have their place with trials and resultant punishment, Ruether contended the Church has fallen short of what the church should be and how its members should be relating to each other as church. She argued the abusers should stand before the Church community and confess their sins, indicating a desire to be healed, and ask for forgiveness. Removed from priestly duties and all contact with children, they should be closely monitored and rehabilitated in their priestly communities. Ruether concluded, "If they remain among those who know them, love

[53] Ibid.

them, and can help them to amend their lives, they have some hope of healing their souls.[54]

Ruether developed in more detail her argument for a more democratic church with full lay participation in church government at all levels. This would add a system of checks and balances, providing accountability for the hierarchy. For those who argue that lay participation is not the Catholic tradition, Ruether countered that the current hierarchical structure is "the reflection of the social systems in which the Catholic Church was shaped by its history within the Roman Empire, feudalism, and early modern European monarchies. These political contexts have nothing to do with the message of Christ."[55]

Ruether ended her manifesto for radical Catholic reform by admonishing that Christians in the United States especially need to stand up against their own society that is racist and deeply divided between the wealthy elite and a large impoverished mass who are disproportionately people of color. American Christians, she added, must hereto speak prophetically to their society today as followers of Christ who announces good news to the poor, liberation to the oppressed, and redemption of humanity and the whole creation.

Addressing the issue of women in the Church, Ruether asserted, "this is one of the thorniest problems for the Church and one on which it is most recalcitrant."[56] She cited the Vatican's reasserting authority over women religious requiring them to submit their constitutions to the Holy See for censorship, seeking to dismiss from membership in their congregations women who publicly disagree with the ban on birth control and abortion,

[54] Ibid., 74-75.
[55] Ibid., 76.
[56] Ibid., 79.

and trying to impose obedience to its demands on congregations who protect members under attack.

Ruether argued that the Vatican's insistence that women cannot be priests because the priest represents Christ, a male, and that the maleness of Christ is thus intrinsic to the representation of Christ, rests on the false assumption that there is an "essential difference between women as 'feminine' and men as 'masculine.'" Most social thinkers today see this view as an outdated and unproven social bias that is instilled by culture and education and not a biological necessity.[57] However, Ruether had earlier argued against the ordination of women in the present hierarchical Church. She had then called for the dismantling of a hierarchical clericalism and formation of an egalitarian and democratic Church where female and male clergy would work together with laity in a participatory and collegial community. This issue of seeking equality within the Church order, or abandoning the very idea of ordination, remained a difficult one for Ruether and some other Catholic feminists.

One response of women to the intransigence of the Catholic Church regarding even discussion of the possibility of women's ordination was the formation of Women-Church, a group that considers themselves an "exodus community" within (and in some instances beyond) the institutional Church.[58] In 1986, nearly twenty years before the publication of *Catholicism Does Not Equal the Vatican,* Ruether had published *Women-*

[57] Ibid., 88.

[58] Miriam Therese Winter, "The Women-Church Movement," *The Christian Century* 106, no 8 (May 8, 1989): 258-260. A gathering of 1400 women, most of them Catholic, met in Chicago in November 1983 for a conference called Woman Church Speaks and envisioned a church liberated from patriarchy. In October 1987, 3000 joined the "Women Church Convergence" in Cincinnati with the theme "Claiming Our Power."

Church: Theology and Practice.[59] She stated in the introduction that this book was written out of recognition that Christian feminists could not wait for the institutional churches to reform to provide the faith and worship that women need. She included ordained Protestant women who find themselves up against traditional patriarchal interpretations of symbols and rituals and meeting resistance to change in the churches they serve.[60] Ruether contended the history of Christianity has experienced continual tension and conflict between two models of church: church as spirit-filled community and church as historical community. She argued that Christianity began as a spirit-filled messianic sect that believed Jesus would soon return and history would be transcended as they entered the messianic age. The models of early Christian ministry were therefore charismatic, based on the belief the spirit of prophecy restored in the messianic times was already present in their midst and manifest through spiritual gifts of ecstatic revelation, exorcism, and healing. However, as time passed and Jesus did not return, Christianity had to adapt to its historical existence. A hierarchy of leadership was formed with bishops, elders, deacons, and deaconesses who gradually expanded into an episcopal hierarchy with presiding bishops over major areas with other bishops under them. Gradually, the Church structured itself after the late Roman Empire, with the pope in Rome comparable to the Roman emperor.[61] Thus Ruether described the morphing through the centuries of the early spirit-filled, more democratic church into the monarchical Church of the modern era.

Meanwhile, since the Vatican refused to discuss the issue of ordination of women

[59] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, San Francisco, 1986).
[60] Ibid., 4.
[61] Ibid., 11-12.

and continued to restrict the priesthood to celibate males, the number of ordained priests was dwindling. Fewer men were opting for the priesthood under these conditions, and the Church faced a crisis of having enough pastors to minister the sacraments at parishes. Women at the same time were earning degrees in theology and pastoral ministry and were serving more and more as chaplains, campus ministers, and as pastoral associates in parishes.

Ruether referred to the above issues and expressed doubt there would likely be any movement from the top down to deal with these issues any time soon.[62] She then argued that history shows that historically reform in the Catholic Church seldom comes from the Vatican, but rather from "the real world experiences of Catholics who dissent from the dogmatic stances of the hierarchy until it is required to change."[63] Her liberationist concern is evident in her words, "Hopefully it is only a matter of time before the church teaching adapts itself to deeper visions of liberation in Christianity and progressive Catholicism."[64] Ruether argued that the early church was a community of liberation. Through baptism all were equal. There was to be no discrimination between Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (Galatians 3:28). Thus she supported her argument that an authentic Catholic Church must return to being a community of liberation.

Contending that to be authentic the Church must be a discipleship of equals, Ruether pointed to the hierarchy and resultant clericalism which, she alleged, was not founded by Christ passing on his divine power through a line of succession beginning with Peter, as is taught in official Catholic teachings. Instead, clericalism is built on and

[62] At the time Ruether wrote this, Benedict XVI was the pope.
[63] Ruether, *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican*, 95.
[64] Ibid.

duplicates patriarchy. She further argued that sacramental life grounded in the divine must be freed from the assumed authority of clericalism. "The Eucharist should be a symbol of our participation in the authentic life, our nurture and growth in such life."[65] Instead clericalism has turned the Eucharist into a tool of clerical power over the people.[66] Thus, Ruether argued from her liberationist vision that the laity must be liberated from the power the clerics hold over them through the Eucharist, a power they have sometimes used to withhold the Eucharist from individual laity.

To establish a discipleship of equals, Ruether proposed that all ministry be understood as function. This, she contended, can draw on the skills and gifts of people in the community to teach, to be involved in creating programs and developing material resources, to take lead roles in worship, and so forth. Allowing that a community would need someone to coordinate and oversee the many processes, Ruether contended this individual should be seen as "first among equals."[67] In other words, she is arguing for a more democratic and participatory church as, she has argued, was the early church.

To address further the issue of a Christianity and Catholic Church of liberation, Ruether turned to the work of the Latin American liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuría. She pointed out that Ellacuría was critical of the Western intellectual traditions of idealism that separate knowledge from sensation, turning knowledge into abstract logic and viewing reality as static "objects." His historical understanding of reality also leads to understanding the Christian faith historically.[68] Ruether lifted up Ellacuría's point that

[65] Ibid., 101.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., 105.
[68] Ignacio. Ellacuría, "Historia de la Salvación," in *Escritos Teológicos,* vol 1 (San Salvador: UCA, 2001), 597-601. Cited in Ruether, *Catholic does not Equal the Vatican,* 123, n.8. Ellacuría argued that Christian faith was distorted through Platonic idealism which dehistorized Jesus Christ, the cross, the

the critical question for understanding Jesus' life, death and resurrection is not "Why did he die, but *why did they kill him."* Ellacuría argues that the question "why did Jesus die" takes Jesus' death as an abstract transaction between God and sinful humankind outside an historical context. It is then answered without historical context or content: "He died to save us from our sins."

Ruether used Ellacuría's argument to support her argument that the church is called to be a community of liberation. She contended that "why did they kill him" gives us a different understanding of Jesus' death as in its historical context. She contended,

> Historical actors executed him: the Roman governor of Palestine, with the collaboration of Jewish religious leaders under Roman occupation. Why did they kill him? Because Jesus lived in a certain way, as a prophetic denouncer of those who oppressed the poor and marginalized; he announced the good news of liberation to these oppressed people. His denunciation of injustice and annunciation of good news threatened the security of those in control. . . . They executed him in a particular way. They hung him on a cross to die a very public and excruciating death.[69]

From this foundation Ruether joined with Ellacuría in contending that only when Christians rediscover the historical context of Jesus' life do they realize the meaning of his death on the cross. Ruether flew in the face of much of the Christian tradition when she asserted, "Jesus did not come to 'suffer and die,' as though suffering and dying were the purpose of his life. His mission was to proclaim that God "has anointed me to bring good news to the poor (Luke 4:18)."[70] Again, citing Ellacuría, Ruether added that the impoverished and oppressed today are the continuation of the crucifixion, and she warned that God in Christ continues to call us to join in solidarity with the poor to complete the

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resurrection, sin, and salvation. He urged Christian faith to recover its historicity, its meaning both in history and as history.

[69] Ruether, *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican*, 123-124.

[70] Ibid., 124.

liberation of humanity.[71]

As has been a central argument throughout this thesis, Ruether is first and foremost a liberation theologian, and her feminist theology is therefore one part of her liberationist vision, as are her other particular stances on church and social issues. This is obvious throughout her argument for a democratic Church as she continually returns to scripture and to the liberating message of Jesus. Ruether's vision for the Catholic Church therefore challenges the Vatican and the entire hierarchical institution to become a more democratic and participatory church, a church of and for the laity as well as a church that is grounded in the liberating teachings of Jesus and committed to a vision of justice and peace.

Remaining Catholic in Spite of the Institutional Church

Despite her often harsh criticisms of the Church, Ruether has continued to present herself as a Catholic theologian. Ruether grew up in a family that was Catholic, ecumenical, and interfaith. Her Catholic mother passed on to her a sense that the Catholic tradition should be both taken seriously and thought about freely and critically. Nuns and priests who made people feel guilty about questioning the faith, she considered backward and uneducated.[72] In other words, the ghetto mentality of many Catholics growing up in the 1940s and 1950s in the United States was largely not a part of her experience. Thus from an early age Ruether had no problem raising questions, critiquing, and challenging the teachings of Catholicism.

There was a time, in graduate school, when she did consider leaving Catholicism and joining the Episcopal Church, a tradition she also considered part of her family

[71] Ignacio Ellacuría, "El pueblo crucificad," *Escritos Teológicos,* vol. 2, 137-170. Cited in Ruether, *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican*, 124, n, 11.
[72] Ibid., 19.

heritage. This was during graduate school when she occasionally attended the Episcopal service on campus. At one point, she had thought deeper about the Catholic Church's teaching of the pope's infallibility and it became clear to her she did not believes in the pope's or anyone else's infallibility. She charged that the Catholic Church had erred at Vatican I when they made that declaration.[73] She therefore decided to become Episcopalian. The Episcopal campus chaplain arranged for her to attend an Episcopal weekend retreat which he also was attending. However, upon arrival at the event she found she was assigned to stay with the Episcopalian nuns instead of at the male retreat house. She found the atmosphere among these nuns "suffocating," a striking contrast to the Benedictine priory where she had previously gone on retreats with very lively monks who did not discriminate against women retreatants. She left the Episcopal retreat center immediately and caught a ride back to campus. She says of that experience, "I felt shaken but also deeply relieved that I had found myself back home."[74] It appears that this experience sealed once and for all Ruether's lifelong commitment to Catholicism. She reasoned that while infallibility might be a mistake, and the Catholic Church had made many mistakes in its history, no church was perfect and this was her church. She concluded that however mistaken the Catholic Church might become, it held for her a core sense of her personal and historical identity and concern. She became more aware now that this Catholic Church, like her nuclear family, was the place where she had a special responsibility, whatever its flaws.[75]

Regarding her religious commitment, this was a major turning point for Ruether. She would not leave the Catholic Church but neither would she be conformed to the

[73] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 38.
[74] Ibid., 38-39.
[75] Ibid., 39.

traditional Catholic concept of authority. Being supposedly infallible makes it impossible for the institution to admit to mistakes, but these mistakes would no longer function as "norms" that would define her as "outside the Church."[76] The entire concept of authority that had been adopted by the Church made honesty about its mistakes impossible. Concluding that the way this issue of authority functioned in the institutional Church was impossible to be resolved made it clear to Ruether that for her challenging the Catholic Church, thus defined, was inevitable. Instead of letting the Church define her in relation to norms she could not accept, she would define her own relation to the Church.[77] Although in her earlier years she "tried" a variety of religious traditions[78] and as noted gave serious consideration to becoming Episcopalian, and in spite of the fact she challenges many of the Catholic Church's teachings, especially those dealing with sexuality and reproduction, she remained committed to Roman Catholicism as a historical community and tradition. It is this commitment that led her to be part of the movement of resistance against papal absolutism. She describes herself as "in communion as a Catholic with Catholic progressives"[79] seeking reform and renewal in the Roman Catholic Church to create a liberating and life-giving community of faith.

As has been emphasized throughout this dissertation, Ruether is first and foremost a liberation theologian, but it is important to see that she is a distinctly Catholic liberation theologian. It is no surprise that her commitment to remaining in communion as a Catholic is to contribute to the effort to make the Roman Catholic Church – her Church - a church that is liberating and life-giving. Ruether writes in her autobiography

[76] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography," 50.
[77] Ibid.
[78] As mentioned earlier, Ruether attended Quaker meetings with her mother's friends, and she attended the Greek Orthodox Church with her sister.
[79] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 64.

published in 2013 that this work of resistance and call for renewal in which she has been involved is not simply "beating heads against closed doors" which is mostly unproductive, but is creating "alternative organizations and communities for living 'good church,' and a faithful quest for a good society, now."[80]

Ruether has been active for many years with other progressive Catholics in what she calls "alternative organizations and communities." For over forty years she has been a member of the board of Catholics for a Free Choice and its Latin American sister group *Catolicas por el Derecho de Decidir.* She has been a member of Call to Action since its inception, speaking nearly every year at its national meetings. She refers to CTA as "a lifeline to a true vision of an alternative, more liberative vision of the church."[81]

Ruether has also been involved with The Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. Although she is not eligible to be a member of the group, she has been in dialogue with its development since its inception in 1982 and has been a speaker at some of its meetings. Each of these organizations has served as a type of support group for Ruether, alternative communities where she lives out her witness to creating a liberative church.

She added that the communities of colleagues at the schools of theological education where she has taught have been essential to her life, communities where she has been able to share many aspects of her life. With these communities she has been involved in projects important to her liberation vision such as working in neighborhoods in greater Chicago to create more livable cities or developing and working with an ecological project to promote sustainability.

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[80] Ibid., 64.
[81] Ruether, *Catholic Does not Equal Vatican,* 106.

Ruether called attention to an important step that was taken in July 2012 toward the work of organizing alternative Catholic opportunities. Twenty Catholic feminists who represented a variety of Catholic peace and justice movements and ministries plus college teachers in theology and ethics met in Baltimore to respond to then prominent attacks by the Vatican and some bishops on women's work in the Church. Ways to create a more organized network of Catholic feminists in the US Church were discussed. They began to formalize their relation to each other and to imagine how they might create a movement for gender justice in the American Church. Ruether added, "This is the kind of Catholic community with which I feel in communion.[82]

As of 2017, Ruether experiences a community of liberation at Pilgrim Place, a retirement community in Claremont, California, where she and her husband moved in 2002. Everyone in the community comes from a background in church service, education, or ministry. She describes it as a Christian community made up of Catholics and people from many different Protestant traditions, all committed to justice and peace who volunteer to work with the poor, homeless, or marginalized. Constantly looking for ways to practice better sustainability, community vegetable gardens are maintained as well as dozens of fruit trees from which a farmers' market is offered weekly to the community. Ruether mentions her own composting of food scraps and her recycling as a part of the community's caring for the earth.

In addition to the weekly Sunday ecumenical worship service, there are a variety of opportunities for worship and Bible study during the week. A women-church group that offers a feminist Eucharist service once a month attracts participants from the larger Los Angeles community as well as residents of Pilgrim Place. Ruether notes there

[82] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 64.

are also many other active women's groups at Pilgrim Place which read books together and also organize around peace and justice issues.

With her broad vision of liberation and her passion for peace and justice, the now-venerable Ruether is very much at home at Pilgrim Place. She acknowledges that the many types of community found at Pilgrim Place all engaged in the work of liberation at the local, national, and even global level are what keep her alive and continually restore her faith.

CONCLUSION

Rosemary Radford Ruether has been a pioneer Catholic feminist theologian for over six decades and has been consistently among the most widely read feminist theologians in North America. Not only is Ruether the first feminist theologian to produce a systematic theology based on women's experience, but her classic, *Sexism and God Talk,* a feminist treatment of the Christian symbols, remains for many a basic text for teaching feminist theology. The claim of this dissertation is twofold: First, Ruether's feminist theology emerged out of her much larger vision of liberation from, what she calls, "a world system of oppression." Second, she developed her theologies – liberation theology, feminist theology, her Christology, and her ecclesiology – from her personal encounters, her own life's experiences. For Ruether, the personal becomes the theological. Therefore, her theology is a type of practical or praxis theology.

It was important to begin this dissertation with some foundational background, to note particular people Ruether encountered and her life's experiences that help to explain the development of her passion for social justice and human rights. Ruether acknowledges she was shaped by her family, her social context, and her educational experiences to raise questions and issues that characterized her thought throughout her work and her writing. It was also noted that her educational experience - beginning with her study of the Greek and Roman cultures and religions as well as her degrees in

philosophy an religion, ancient history, and classics and the patristics - also had an important impact on her thought and her writing.

This paper has demonstrated how Ruether's feminist theology, driven by her liberationist vision, was a consequence of her broader view of the ethical and social implications of the Christian gospel. Her passion for justice and human rights and her lifelong involvement in varieties of social activism that resulted from that passion, led her to develop a wide-ranging theology of liberation of which feminism was an important but hardly the only or even most important component. It was a theology of liberation derived from her personal experience of faith that fundamentally drove Ruether and out of which she spoke and wrote about her concerns in a wide variety of areas including racism, sexism, militarism, imperialism, the ecological crisis, and a democratic reform of the Catholic Church.

To support the claim that feminist theology was a consequence of her broader liberationist concerns, it was noted that Ruether had already written a book on liberation theology and another on anti-Semitism, when she began adding feminist theology to her writing interests. Emphasis was placed on her method which is consistent throughout all of her work, a method based on three questions: 1) What is the problem? 2) How has injustice been created by inadequate or false ideology? 3) How can the system be improved with better thinking and acting? It was demonstrated how, in the context of the various social issues about which she wrote, she traced the ideological patterns in Christian thought which have served to justify violence and oppression and how her critical norm throughout is the prophetic tradition of the biblical faith, embodied in the

Hebrew prophets as well as Jesus' critique of the dominant systems of power and his vision for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

In this dissertation, Ruether's work in three areas was presented: Jewish-Christian relations, ecofeminism and the ecological crisis, and Church reform. All three were presented as evolving from her concern for liberation from world systems of oppression. In each one of these areas, it was demonstrated how her personal and social experiences and encounters became interpreted into theological and religious terms that challenge existing norms.

The discussion of her critique of anti-Semitism used her book *Faith and Fratricide* as the primary resource. This book was received by many as provocative because it challenged Christians to acknowledge the dark side of their tradition. It was noted that she followed the methodology she used in most of her writings. Beginning with historical research of the "problem," in this case, the origins of anti-Semitism, she then laid out what she considered the ideologies that support anti-Semitism. She ended with a proposal for moving forward in an attempt to mend Jewish-Christian relations.

To give a complete accounting of Ruether's work in this area, a brief presentation of her writing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was included. Here, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, which she and her husband Herman wrote together, was the primary resource. When Ruether made a trip to Israel in 1980, she got her first personal glimpse of the situation in Palestine. While her commitment to opposing anti-Semitism remained strong, after this visit her liberationist concerns increasingly turned to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It was noted that while Ruether continued to abhor anti-Semitism, she argued that support of the creation of a

State of Israel that uproots Palestinians is the flip side of anti-Semitism. Again, her writings were driven by her passion for justice, her personal encounters with violation of human rights, and her broader concern for the liberation of all people from any form of oppression.[1]

The chapter "World Systems of Oppression and the Destruction of Earth's Ecosystem" addressed Ruether's concerns with the global ecological crisis. Ecology became a major interest and concern for her in the early 1970s, and from the beginning she sought to connect ecology and feminism to demonstrate the way the domination of the earth is metaphorically interconnected with the domination of women in patriarchal ideology.[2] The major portion of this chapter analyzed her two major works in ecofeminist theology: her groundbreaking book *Gaia and God*, published in 1992, and her most broad based contribution to this movement *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*, published in 2005. This dissertation demonstrated how Ruether turned also to world religions, which are carriers of moral values and symbolic worldviews, as a key factor in the struggle for a more just and sustainable world and to healing the anti-ecological worldviews of the past.

The dissertation ends with a discussion of Ruether's continuing to self-identify as Catholic in spite of her often harsh criticisms of the Church. In many circles Ruether is considered a dissenting Catholic. This paper pointed out that her mother who was Catholic and raised Ruether and her two sisters in the Catholic faith, taught her three daughters to be "selective" in accepting Catholic teachings. What she considered rote and

[1] The Rosemary Radford Ruether Conference for Justice and Peace in Palestine/Israel was held in Claremont, California at the Pilgrim Place Retirement Community on October 7-9, 2017, to honor Rosemary Ruether's work and advocacy for justice and peace in Palestine/Israel.

[2] Ruether, *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*, 27.

dogmatic demands could be ignored. Reuther was taught at an early age that it was okay to be critical of and to disagree with Church teachings. Thus, her first writings, in the early sixties, critiqued the Catholic Church's teachings on sexuality and birth control. Toward the end of the sixties, Ruether began to critique what she considered the failure of a complete renewal in the Church following the initially hopeful reform laid out by Vatican II. While her liberationist vision led her into many other areas of concern about which she wrote, she continued to write about a democratic reform of the Catholic Church. In 2005, convinced that the Catholic Church was not going to carry out any time soon the reforms proposed at Vatican II, she wrote a more comprehensive vision for progressive Catholics of a renewed democratic Church in her book *Catholic Does Not Equal the Vatican.*

As has been the central argument throughout this dissertation, Ruether is first and foremost a liberation theologian. This paper has demonstrated that her feminist theology as well as her other particular stances on the Church and social issues are all parts of her liberationist vision. This is obvious throughout her argument for a democratic Church as she continually returns to scripture and to the liberating message of Jesus.

This dissertation has demonstrated that while there are those who would argue Ruether is not a Catholic, she has continued to self-identify as a Catholic, but not one confined by the institution. Further, noted was her involvement in a variety of groups which are engaged in the struggle for justice and liberation in both the Catholic Church and the wider cosmos at the local, national, and global levels. Ruether acknowledges that it is her participation with these groups that continually restore her faith.

Ruether leaves an expansive legacy, beginning with her early involvement in the Civil Rights Movement and writings in black and liberation theology to her writings and activism on behalf of the global ecological crisis and her own family's experience with her son's mental health issues and what she considers the failure of the mental health system. She has written or edited over forty books plus hundreds of articles. What is astounding about her work is not only the quantity but also the breadth of range of her writings. She became involved in and wrote about global political issues from Christian anti-Semitism and the Palestinian conflict to neocolonialism and the global environmental crisis. Theologian, scholar, and activist, Rosemary Ruether's legacy is firmly grounded in her passion for justice and a world liberated from all systems of oppression.

Theologian, scholar, activist, Ruether's legacy is firmly grounded in her passion for justice and a world liberated from all systems of oppression. Once asked about the underlying motivation for her work, she responded, "Basically I don't like injustice and I don't like to see religion used to justify injustice and oppression."[3] In other words, Rosemary Radford Ruether's priorities for writing and for activism are shaped, not by the failures of the Church or any other entity, but by the needs of the world.

[3] Rosalind Hinton, "A Legacy of Inclusion: An Interview with Rosemary Radford Ruether," *Crosscurrents* (Spring 2002): 29.

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