CHAPTER 27

Gender and Religion

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1. OVERVIEW

The saga of gender and religion, as told in one faith tradition after another, traces a theme of founders' original texts placing equal value on women and men, texts that were later used selectively by male religious leaders to legitimate patriarchy (Holm, 1994). This is not the end of the story, however. External social forces and situational exigencies impinge on any faith community and its members, leading them to change gendered roles temporarily or more permanently (Lindley, 1996; Wessinger, 1996). For such reasons, faith communities across religions, and within one religion in varying regions and times, are likely to exhibit differences in the degree to which women are perceived and treated as the spiritual and mental equals of men. For many decades women's participation in the leadership and development of religions was nearly invisible (Wallace, 1997). However, during the present decade, women and religion has become a major research focus, with many new books and articles in this area appearing annually. Recent publications make it possible to begin answering the question: Under what conditions and circumstances will women gain and retain parity with men in world religions? This chapter summarizes recent answers to this question, based primarily but not exclusively on research focusing on women in twentieth century American religion.

2. RELIGIOUS VALUES AND GENDER PARITY IN RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

Scholars generally concur that religious tenets are not the cause of women's lesser standing in the liturgy and leadership of religious or secular communities and institutions.

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Rather, religious values are used to justify and "explain" practices arising from more worldly sources for curtailing the leadership role of women (Chafetz, 1989; Holm, 1994; Nason-Clark, 1987; Wessinger, 1996). Although the founders of major faiths may not have gone as far as championing complete parity in men's and women's potential for spiritual growth and fitness for religious leadership, they were unusual for their times in being advocates of greatly increasing the rights of women in society and in their faith communities. For example, Jesus, Muhammad, and Buddha are described in core religious texts as supporting women's assumption of active roles in the new faith communities, and they are cited for promoting more humane treatment of women than existed in their societies during their lifetimes (Holm, 1994). Original texts of major religions contain passages that can be used to support equality between the genders in most, if not all life arenas, passages that were selectively ignored by later religious patriarchs in favor of passages justifying women's appropriate position in faith and family as clearly under male jurisdiction (Holm, 1994; Wessinger, 1996).

Confluence of emphasis on divine patriarchy and of men's domination of religious and secular leadership has long undergirded women's subordination and limitations in many faith traditions. However, in eras of rapid social change, myths are modified to fit the altered situations into which women and men are thrust. New situations that cause people from different traditions to live and work with one another can disrupt this patriarchal peace. Advocates of new paradigms emphasizing women's divinely sanctioned leadership role in the formation and maintenance of a particular faith are able to gain more legitimacy and acceptance. For a contemporary illustration, women scholars and spiritual feminists of both genders are emphasizing the importance of women in the formation and development of Judaism and Christianity, through retranslations of original texts and new exegesis, and through more thorough examination of women's actual roles in the history of these religions.

Religious and other cultural movements, abetted by industrialization, have brought women together outside their families and communities of faith. Women who gather away from the direct supervision of men, both now and earlier may, through sharing experiences and ideas, begin to question some of the religiously based notions about women's place with which they grew up. Beginning in the latter part of the eighteenth and continuing into the nineteenth centuries, the Second Great Awakening in the United States brought women together in mission activities, inspiring many to take, or attempt to take unprecedentedly active roles in their congregations as well (Lindley, 1996). The industrial and postindustrial revolutions increasingly created jobs for women, and the women's movement led to far greater acceptance of women's salaried employment, even in traditionally male-dominated occupations such as the clergy. These factors not only brought women together outside their religious and family groups, but also increased their motivation for acquiring access to higher education. In turn, increasing education expedited women's refusal to accept the idea that they are not as capable as men of serving as leaders in congregations and in regional and national organizations (Wessinger, 1996).

Immigration or social mobility can also bring women into contact with others who may share some but seldom all of their values. Immigrants with traditional religious faiths who come to the United States may encounter a different set of social values and expectations than those in their country of origin. Younger immigrants, and especially their children, often depart from their familial religious beliefs and modes of gendered participation in worship settings and private life (Lindley, 1996). At least partly as a

result of the "export" of American cultural values concerning gender, liberalization of social and religious attitudes pertaining to gender roles among members of traditional religions has also been occurring in other countries. This has resulted from the influence of Americans working abroad as missionaries, business entrepreneurs, and medical personnel; from visiting relatives or touring; and through the export of mass media and translations of English language films and books into the language of the native country (Young, 1994). Such comingling of people who share religious identities but not other social location characteristics (or vice versa) can raise questions about why one's religious leaders, in comparison to those of others one meets, are interpreting texts in a particular way or are less eager to include women in religious organizations (Holm, 1994; Lindley, 1996; Reuther, 1994; Wessinger, 1996).

Migration, imperialism, international travel and communication, and ensuing modernization can contribute to valuing pluralism on a collective level. This pluralism can occasion dissonance for individuals between their core beliefs, changing perceptions of the world around them, and divergent values of others. Some find that such dissonances can be resolved fairly smoothly by altering slightly how they interpret or apply basic beliefs to their new situations; some find it easier to shut out incompatible views by denigrating and avoiding those who express them. However, the more persons interact with those of other faiths and practices, the greater their opportunity to adopt different outlooks.

Congregations, faith communities, denominations, or other divisions within religious traditions that have come to value being seen as "modern" are likely to voice commitment to gender equity in religious participation and leadership (Chaves, 1997; Young, 1994). Changes toward gender equity include: small increments in the number of women in some liturgical roles or supervisory positions; long-term "temporary" measures in which women fill interim positions without doctrinal change or promise of continuation; and more sweeping changes, such as ordaining women to full clergy status. Some apparent changes religious authorities make to better incorporate women are so minor or tentative that they can easily be reversed to the status quo ante, and may well be with a switch in top leadership of the religious body. Some of the changes will be seen as a good by substantial numbers of congregants, legitimated by canon and constitution, and become the new institutional paradigm. Other changes will be accepted by one division or faith community and rejected by others, causing schism and possibly resulting in the formation of new faith communities or larger divisions within the religious body.

The foregoing factors are not unique to any one major religion, but each religion exhibits a different pattern of change toward greater gender equality in religious values and leadership. This is illustrated in the following overview of how these factors combine and interact to affect the inclusion of women in religious leadership in four historic faiths.

3. GENDERED FAITH AND FUNCTION IN FOUR WORLD RELIGIONS

3.1. Judaism

Women heroines, teachers, and prophets appear in the Old Testament but more sparsely than recent scholarship indicates was their influence in biblical times (Elwell, 1996). Jewish law traditionally governed almost all aspects of daily living. The law was consid-

ered divinely inspired by most Jews until the nineteenth century and is still by many contemporary Orthodox Jews. Jewish law was the scaffolding of a "separate but equal" theory of gendered authority, in which men were to be the leaders in the external world of synagogue and society, and women were expected to be primarily responsible for seeing that the laws were followed faithfully within their households. In practice, women were clearly subordinate to the men in their homes. In the synagogues, women were expected to sit demurely apart from the men and never lead prayers for a mixed-sex group. Women were revered in the home only (Elwell, 1996; Wright, 1994).

In small, stable communities of preindustrial Europe, women had little choice but to accept their place if they wished to remain Jews. However, during the nineteenth century, in response to the expanding opportunities for Jews to work and socialize with other Europeans in mixed religious and ethnic enclaves, a group of educated younger Jews developed a looser interpretation of Judaic law, more in keeping with the practices of non-Jews near whom they lived and worked. Women in wealthier Jewish families began to obtain education equal or superior to that of most Jewish men. These women and their families were among those who supported the development of Reform Judaism, which does not hold that the law was divinely dictated. Rather, the law could and should be adapted to bring the Jewish faith more in line with the modern world, particularly in equalizing the status of women to that of men in the family and in worship. Women in Reform Judaism were included with men both in prayers and synagogue seating arrangements, but they were still unlikely to hold organizational positions within the synagogue. In keeping with middle-class German and American family life of the nineteenth century, the women's place remained the home and men's the rest of the world. Still, the fact that change was permissible and even desirable in applying religious laws to daily life laid the groundwork for future changes (Davidman, 1991; Lindley, 1996; Umansky, 1985).

Today in the United States, Reform Judaism is second in size to Conservative Judaism. Conservative Judaism is a denomination that came into being in twentieth century America, combining elements of both Reform and Orthodox Judaism. Although it retains more strict adherence to dietary laws and religious observance set forth in Jewish law, Conservative Judaism resembles the Reform movement in its emphasis on the equitable treatment of women (Davidman, 1991). At the end of the twentieth century, women are still not allowed to be rabbis or lead prayer services within Orthodox synagogues in the United States. The Reform tradition, and the small but even more liberal Reconstructionist branch of Judaism, began ordaining women as rabbis in the early 1970s. Under pressure, the Conservative Jewish Seminary followed suit a decade later and in 1984 enrolled women in the program leading to ordination (Schulman, 1996; Umanksy, 1985).

Growing proportions of liberal synagogues not only have women as well as men leading prayers, but they are also using gender-inclusive language to refer to humans and to God in prayers (Elwell, 1996). Some feminist Jewish women want a great deal more change in the treatment of women theologically, including the use of a female image of God in rituals and reinterpreting the Torah to make it less patriarchal in language and application (Carmody, 1994). At the end of the twentieth century, non-Orthodox Jewish women have a far greater role in public worship and synagogue leadership than they did at the beginning of this century. Nonetheless, some Jewish faith communities (e.g., the Hasidim) are almost as restrictive of women's roles as was typical generations earlier (Davidman, 1991; Kaufman, 1991).

3.2. Islam

The Qu'ran is believed by Muslims the world over to be the last revelation of God given only to Muhammad. The Qu'ran was unique for its time in specifically delineating basic rights, as well as duties for women, and in stressing that women are the spiritual equals of men. In addition to the Qu'ran, further interpretation and guidance is given by the *hadith*, or sayings made by or about Muhammad and written down by his followers. The Qu'ran and *hadith* form the basis of Islamic law, guiding all aspects of life. Yet, no set of laws could fit all the changes that were occurring even in the time of Muhammad, not to mention subsequently. Muhammad himself changed practices he instituted but later found unworkable.

Muhammad may well have treated his wives and other women better than many other men of his time. However, toward the end of Muhammad's life, and especially after his death, women's freedom to participate in communal religious life was curtailed for "their protection" (Badawi, 1994; Smith, 1985). In past centuries as in the present, there have been differences among Muslim communities in the extent to which they believe Islamic law should be applied strictly or interpreted to meet the needs of Muslims in their particular social and cultural circumstances. Even "strictly interpreted" Islamic law is not unequivocal. Since the tenth century there have been four classical schools of law: Hanbali, Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi'i. In Sunni Islam, to which 85% of the world's Muslims belong, it is an accepted tenet that there will be some differences among schools in how to apply religious laws in particular situations (Badawi, 1994). This factor has allowed, if not encouraged, Muslim communities in different areas and of diverse ethnic identities to develop their own variations in applying Islamic law.

Most of the increasing numbers of Muslims in the United States are immigrants or their descendants from Middle Eastern countries, although the number of "indigenous" or Black Muslims is also growing. Muslims of different national origins carried their varying interpretations of Islamic practices to the United States. Serial migration of extended families often resulted in enclaves of Muslims in large cities, each with its own mosque, religious practices, and set of expectations about how Muslim women were to dress and act in the home, in the mosque, and with non-Muslims (Haddad & Lummis, 1987).

Mosques became centers of religious and social life in America to a degree far greater than in their countries of origin. Although women seldom attend mosque prayers in Muslim countries, they are far more likely to do so in the United States, where Islam is not the predominant religion. Also unlike women in Muslim countries, Muslim women in America have taken a major role in developing educational programs for children and youth, and raising funds for missionary outreach in their mosques. One reason Muslim women in the United States are both more active in their mosques and more likely to have their husbands' approval for this involvement than would be true in Muslim countries is because mosques serve as centers of worship, education, and social activities that help families teach their faith and keep their children in an otherwise non-Muslim environment (Haddad & Lummis, 1987; Lindley, 1996) Modern American values that support women's religious and social involvement beyond their front doors also encourage Muslim women's greater involvement in their mosques. Muslim women can see Jewish and Christian women, other "people of the Book," expressing their faith through regular attendance at congre-

gational services and being active in its educational, social, and mission work. Are Muslim women less religious?

Immigrant Muslims in America may have particular difficulty in remaining pious practitioners of Islamic laws if they do not have ongoing involvement with other Muslims in a mosque or Islamic community center. Muslim men and women immigrants who socialize with those of other faiths more readily adopt liberal attitudes toward women's role in the family, society, and religion than those who socialize little, if at all, with non-Muslims. Also, gender egalitarian values in the surrounding culture are transmitted through the mass media and through non-Muslims with whom they work and go to school. The longer immigrant Muslim men and women live in America, the more apt they are to approve of women taking leadership positions in their mosques (Haddad & Lummis, 1987). Even in the most liberal mosques, however, women are still not allowed to be imams.

Women who wear "Islamic dress," or clothing that covers all parts of their bodies and veils that hide their hair, if not their faces as well, are most likely to be those who adhere to a traditional interpretation of women protected and directed by men. Fundamentalist movements in some countries have led to an insistence that, whatever their own inclinations, women wear Islamic dress or be severely punished. There are also, however, well-educated Muslim women, fairly outspoken leaders in this country and in the Muslim world, who wear Islamic dress as a symbol of their commitment to the Islam. They believe that creating needed social reforms to benefit women and children will be easier if by their dress they exemplify dignity and their pride in being Muslim women (Haddad & Lummis, 1987; Lindley, 1996; Smith, 1994).

Smith (1994) predicts that expanding educational and occupational opportunities for Muslim women in more traditional Muslim countries will likely lead to new interpretations of women's appropriate role there as well as in America. However, given the Islamic focus on the family, these interpretations are unlikely to be those that would appeal to most liberal women of other faiths. Further, in the United States as in other countries, some mosques and Islamic movements have taken a conservative, if not reactionary turn, attracting men particularly but also women who prefer traditionally gendered roles in mosque and family. The likelihood is that although the core of Islam will remain stabilized by the Qu'ran, cultural differences in interpretation of Islamic laws will continually maintain Muslim communities that are quite diverse in what they expect and permit women to do in mosque, family, and in the larger society.

3.3. Buddhism

Buddhist central tenets apply equally to women and men. Both genders are capable of and exhorted to attain spiritual enlightenment through disciplined growth in self-knowledge, not through pleasing a Divine Father-Judge. By establishing an order of nuns as well as monks, Buddha demonstrated that he believed that women could rise as high as men in spiritual attainment. However, because Buddhism, like the other major world religions, arose in a patriarchal era, from the outset there was an accompanying cultural expectation that Buddhist women would defer to the authority of men in all settings. Buddha, too, conformed to temporal mores in his lifetime (about 560–480 B.C.) by making the order of nuns subservient to monks, a situation that has not altered in over 2000 years (Gross, 1994).

In the following centuries Buddhism spread from India to other Eastern countries, especially those areas now part of China, Japan, Korea, and Malaysia, changing in various aspects to fit particular local cultures. In medieval Japan, there were eight distinct Buddhist sects and there are even more in contemporary Japan (Martinez, 1994), with varying conceptions of women's spiritual state. Traditional Buddhist sects in Japan held women to be more polluted spiritually than men. Hence, women needed more restrictions placed on their involvement in Buddhist ceremonies, as well as close oversight by men in their families. In newer forms of Buddhism, such as the Reiyukai sect, women are more often seen as spiritual counselors and may come to be regarded as living Buddahs (Barnes, 1994). Yet despite some differences among Buddhist sects, and the prominence of individual women as teachers, counselors, and nuns, Buddhism has remained clearly male dominated in practice throughout the Eastern world (Barnes, 1994; Gross, 1994a).

Buddhist immigrants to America, primarily Asians, brought both their particular versions of this faith and its varying degrees of patriarchal cultural packaging. Although there are Buddhist temples in the United States, most of the worship activities are performed in the home, as they are in other countries. It was not until about the middle of the twentieth century, when Zen Buddhism and other sects began to attract non-Asian Americans, that Buddhism changed in practice. The non-Asian converts were leaders in urging that women's status be improved and that temples more closely resemble American congregations in offering regular prayer services, education, and outreach and other programs. This led to the formation of a new sect, the Buddhist Churches of America, that retain Buddhist core beliefs but also incorporate Western ways of "congregating," even to the extent of allowing some women to lead prayers and a rare few to be ordained (Lindley, 1996). Many traditional Buddhist sects continue to operate in America as they had in their countries of origin, often in cultural enclaves of immigrant and first-generation families residing near one another and maintaining the same gendered division of authority as had their ancestors.

3.4. Christianity

Jesus is portrayed in the New Testament as including women among his friends, followers, and co-workers. Further, it was to women, not men, that Jesus first appeared after death as the resurrected Christ. However, in the ensuing five centuries, men shaped and focused Christian doctrine mainly around those biblical passages that relegated women to positions under men's authority (Drury, 1994; Torjesen, 1993). Change arose in women's perceived theological and actual church status, from colleague to subordinate, as Christianity moved from its radical beginnings to being a well-established religion, a pattern that would be repeated over and over in Christian congregations and sects during the next 2000 years.

In the life cycle of the vast majority of Christian sects and denominations, women who had been spiritual authorities and congregational leaders on a par with men lost their influence and position to men as the congregations grew. However, this trend has not been linear. In some eras, regions, and denominations, women appear to have regained a measure of religious authority, which sometimes they can nourish and expand throughout denominational echelons, and which sometimes they lose again to those who uphold the preeminence of male religious leadership (Barfoot & Sheppard, 1980; Brubaker, 1985; Carroll et al., 1983; Lindley, 1996; Wessinger, 1996).

3.4.1. The Catholic Church. Roman Catholicism has been the largest and most stably patriarchal Christian denomination since its inception. From the early history of this denomination, both its organizational leadership and spiritual life have been directed by men. Women in the New Testament, and later most women saints, were acknowledged for their gentle piety, caring, and support of men and children. Not all Catholic women accepted this interpretation of women's ideal role in the Christian family and congregation. However, women had no sustained support in their families or social circles to successfully challenge the male hierarchy to reconceptualize women as strong leaders in church, home, and country. One partial escape for such women was to join a convent.

Catholic women's orders of nuns provided opportunities to live independently and fairly comfortably in spiritual community with other women. Not only did Catholic religious orders typically provide some education for nuns, but becoming a nun secured for Catholic women an enhanced social status, if not standard of living, and offered opportunities to become leaders in their orders and other Catholic organizations. Although nuns may have enjoyed more autonomy than other Catholic women in Europe from the close oversight of men, they still deferred to the authority of male clergy in most areas. Nuns who followed Catholics immigrants to nineteenth century America were more successful in gaining independence. They pressed their claim with Rome and their local bishops that for their orders to survive and flourish in America, there had to be an alternative to the European cloistered way of existence. They successfully sought the opportunity to actively serve the educational and material needs of the faithful poor. New duties required new training. By the first decades of the twentieth century, American nuns were better educated than not only most other Catholic women, but also most women of other faiths (Drury, 1994; Lindley, 1996; Neal, 1996).

Vatican II in 1965 instigated many reforms, thereby shaking conceptions of an unchanging church and heightening anticipation for further liberalizing changes. Vatican II reforms appealed to many in the American communities of well-educated nuns. They stretched further, educationally and occupationally, taking positions of authority in schools, hospitals, social service organizations, colleges, and universities. Some of these more modern religious communities supported nuns who pressed the Catholic hierarchy for more operational autonomy and permission to organize across orders to more effectively engage in social justice work. These requests met with resistance from a good number of Catholic bishops, especially those who already disapproved of nuns who now wore secularized dress and were actively involved in community, political, and social justice causes. The bishops' resistance made these nuns more determined to fight for even more extensive changes. They began lobbying the hierarchy to involve women far more in the liturgy and leadership of the Catholic Church (Ebaugh, 1993; Quinonez & Turner, 1992, Weaver, 1985).

The decrease in the number of priests in the United States provided the opportunity for highly educated nuns and other Catholic women, who had earned graduate degrees in Catholic institutions, to become, in effect, "pastors" of priestless parishes in the more liberal dioceses (Wallace, 1993) or to work in parish leadership teams with priests (Finn, 1996). However, in recent years the Pope, who does not look favorably on this practice, has appointed bishops in dioceses across the United States who have terminated the appointment of many women who worked as pastors and pastoral associates in team ministry. The question remains, will the Church be able to continue this practice, given the continuing and worsening shortage of priests?

Nuns are still among the most highly educated women in the United States, but their numbers are decreasing, especially in more socially concerned and actively involved orders. In part, this may be attributable to the fact these orders give their nuns the choice of whether to live in a convent or to reside in the outside community alone, or with one or two others. Because the latter has become the most popular choice, the sharp reduction in the number of convents may be a factor in the diminishing ability of orders to recruit and retain nuns (Wittberg, 1994). However, a recent cross-national study indicates that social structural factors in industrialized countries, which are beyond the control of the Catholic Church, are likely of more importance. Specifically, women in industrialized nations have greater ease in acquiring higher education and gaining employment in managerial and professional occupations outside of the Catholic Church. In developing countries where social mobility for women is blocked, recruiting women to religious orders is still fairly easy (Ebaugh, Lorence, & Chafetz, 1996).

Another possible contributory reason for the decline of nuns is that lay (nonvowed) women are beginning to more closely resemble nuns in taking major roles in the mission and ministry work of parishes and dioceses. Through organizations such as the Grail and the Catholic Worker's Movement in the first part of the twentieth century, Catholic lay women became actively involved in social justice causes (Lindley, 1996). In recent decades, vowed and nonvowed women have joined national organizations (e.g., the Women's Ordination Conference) and local groups that work for a greater role for women in the religious leadership of the Catholic Church (Farrell, 1996; Winter et al., 1994). In the United States, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of Catholic laity, especially women, advocating not only that women be ordained in the Catholic Church, but also that laity have a say in making this decision (D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, & Wallace, 1996).

Parishes in the United States and other countries do make some changes in response to parishioners' demands. A recent study found that continual migrations of Catholics from one country to another, with frequent returns to their birth country, actually created reciprocal parishioner- and priest- led changes in procedures and worship practices of parishes in both countries (Leavitt, 1997). The large size and international spread of the Catholic Church gives every reason to assume that continual change will occur, some of it possibly in terms of women's participation, but mostly opening opportunities for women to take leadership roles nationally and internationally.

3.4.2. Protestant Churches. Unlike the Catholic Church, which is one denomination, Protestantism is composed of diverse denominations, each of which may have as many internal divisions and variations as the Catholic Church. Some of these broad denominational divisions were created within the last half of the twentieth century. Others are several centuries old in identity, basic liturgy, and polity, although these may have subdivided and made some changes in name, worship, and organizational styles. Some of the Protestant faith groups that were strong in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not survive into the twentieth century. In contrast, some currently growing sects and denominations have resulted from schisms and recombinations of groups of congregations and jurisdictions within the last two decades.

In nineteenth century America, the British Empire, and Europe, the degree to which individual Protestant denominations encouraged women's speaking in worship, leading prayers, or taking other active roles in congregational ministries varied widely. These

denominational divergences in acceptance of women in leadership roles continued and multiplied during the twentieth century. In changing social times, organized women's groups in denominations rose in influence, fell to the control of men, and sometimes recovered their autonomy. In several denominations, lay women who had led their national women's board to a position of prestige and influence through successful fundraising efforts saw these boards taken over by men and effectively dismantled (Zikmund, 1993). Theology and church history accounts were variously used by denominations as a means of enhancing the growing chasms between those denominations that ordained women to some but not all positions, those that ordained women to every position open to men, and those that steadfastly refused to ordain women at all. With a few individual exceptions of famous women evangelists who also became organizational leaders of their denominations (such as Evangeline Cory Booth of the Salvation Army; Mary Baker Eddy of the Church of Christ, Scientist; and Aimee Semple McPherson of the Foursquare Gospel Church), women who were allowed to preach, teach, and counsel when their small autonomous congregation or movement began found themselves replaced in these roles by men when the congregation or movement expanded in size, wealth, or joined with a larger congregation or became denominationally affiliated (Brubaker, 1985; Chaves, 1997; Lehman, 1987, 1993, 1994, 1997; Lindley, 1996; Nesbitt, 1995, 1997a, b; Poloma, 1989; Schneider & Schneider, 1997; Zikmund, 1996).

Protestant denominations have waxed and waned in how equitably they incorporate women into congregational, judicatory, and national church leadership. However, certain denominations have more consistently followed a path toward gender equity then others. The denominations that have progressed steadily, with fewer backslides, are the historically liberal Protestant denominations: American Baptist, Episcopal, Disciples of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (merged denomination of the former American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America), Presbyterian, United Methodist, United Church of Christ, and Unitarian. These are the denominations that ordain the greatest proportion of clergy women to full ministerial standing. It is tempting to attribute the ascendancy of these denominations in promoting women's inclusion in church leadership primarily to their more liberal theology. However, convincing historical analysis by Chaves (1997) shows that it is the extent to which denominations are eager to adapt to the modern world, rather than their theological stance, that is the most important predictor of whether and the extent to which they ordain women. Denominations and sects that maintain an identity of standing firm against cultural winds tend to see women's ordination as symbolic of pressure to conform to the surrounding society. Refusing to ordain women is, therefore, an indicator of how strongly the denomination can be a bulwark of faith against worldly forces (Chaves, 1997).

At the same time, denominations that do not grant full ordination status to women but still wish to flourish in industrialized nations cannot completely ignore the strong secular norms for gender equality. It has not escaped the notice of several scholars that the renewed emphasis placed by conservative denominations on the "separate but equal" argument in maintaining distinct gender roles in congregational and family life is simply a way of rationalizing and legitimating their continuing patriarchal practices (Chaves, 1997; Lindley, 1996; Wessinger, 1996). The culture of the congregation or denomination affects the extent to which its lay and clergy members will accept "separate but equal" arguments and theological justifications for male dominance in formal religious leadership. Congregations most likely to endorse "separate but equal" arguments for preserving gendered spheres of congregational activity are those denominations with an "other

worldly" orientation to life. However, these may also be congregations which have pressing realities of life other than sexism with that their membership or immediate community must deal, such as racism, poverty, crime, and substance abuse.

In the conservative Holiness and Spirit-centered denominations, women may be very active as ordained or lay leaders in their churches, but are far less likely to be employed full-time in church work compared to women in the liberal Protestant denominations (Zikmund, Lummis, & Chang, 1998). Studies of evangelical clergywomen in Pentecostal and "Spirit-Centered" denominations (e.g., Assemblies of God, Church of God, Nazarene, Free Methodists, and Wesleyans) indicate that in comparison to men, far fewer women are being ordained and even fewer are receiving full-time paid pastoral positions. Nonetheless, these "Spirited" clergywomen seemed curiously content with this inequitable situation (Kwilecki, 1987; Poloma, 1989; Stanley, 1996; Zikmund et al., 1998). Researchers studying these groups arrived at similar explanations: these clergywomen are primarily focused on heaven, not earth, so earthly leadership is of less importance. Further, among earthly rewards, protecting the traditional nuclear family life is of higher priority than career success. For such reasons, these clergywomen tend to reject feminist values of gender equity in church, family, and occupations.

Women in predominantly African-American/Caribbean congregations (both freestanding and denominationally affiliated) take active roles in the work, worship, and ministry of the churches, but men retain most of the formal leadership roles and "titles," such as chair of church board and pastor (Briggs, 1987; Gilkes, 1986; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Lindley, 1996). For example, in some black Pentecostal churches women are called "teachers" when they preach, and only men hold the title "preacher" (Briggs, 1987). In rural black Baptist churches, women may preach at revival meetings held several times a year, but not on a regular basis as "pastors" of churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Like white clergywomen in the evangelical denominations described previously, black clergywomen may also value the nuclear family and heavenly rewards over career success. In addition, black women are also exhorted to support the church leadership of black men who are denied leadership in white society. Not all black churches are equally discouraging of women taking formal leadership positions. In the historic black denominations, African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E. Zion), and the Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.), where there has been a long history of female ordination, there is also more verbal support for clergywomen as preachers and pastors than in the black Baptist churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Like clergywomen in the white evangelical churches, until 1970 A.M.E. clergywomen were either not hired at all or hired for the lowest paying, least pleasant church positions. However, since the mid-1980s, in response to clergy-women's challenge (and probably denominational interest in being seen as modern), A.M.E. clergywomen have been far more likely to serve as church pastors and fill denominational supervisory positions (Dodson, 1996).

Taken as a whole, the trends within Protestant denominations show a very uneven rate of growth in the opportunties for women to take leadership roles. Some denominations continue to refuse to ordain women. Athough from 1977 to 1994 the numbers of clergywomen have stayed about the same or declined in the conservative, evangelical "Spirit-Centered" denominations, in the more liberal Protestant denominations the numbers of ordained women have at least quadrupled during this time period. At the same time, clergywomen are stll being paid $5000 less on the average than clergymen with the same amount of church experience (Zikmund et al., 1998).

3.5. Education, Attitudes, and Orientations Affecting Women's Role in Christian Churches

Clergy and laity in most religions have attitudes and orientations that will impact how well they fit within the leadership expectations of their worship communities. Most of the research to date, however, has been conducted only within Christian or Jewish faith groups. The following discussion is therefore applicable mainly to Christians and Jews, but is likely also applicable to the experiences of women in other religions.

Religious feminists differ in what they see as the major causes of sexism and patriarchy, as well as what solutions they prefer for ending systemic gender discrimination. These solutions vary all the way from including women more equitably with men within the present structures to completely discarding these and rebuilding in a manner more inclusive and less hierarchal (Reuther, 1994; Riley, 1989; Russell, 1993; Schneiders, 1991). There are denominational variations in what feminists stress (Briggs, 1987), although the use of inclusive language, ordination of women, and female preachers and pastors are important to most feminists. Religious feminists have overwhelmingly come from the educated middle class, rather than the working class, and are predominantly Anglo. Women of color and ethnic minority women tend to feel that their major concerns are not heard by Anglo women. Anglo-feminism does not sufficiently take into account the demonics of racism and classism in the opinion of Asian-American women (Southard & Brock, 1987), Latina women (Isasi-Diaz, 1993), and African-American women (Grant, 1989; Williams, 1986). Similarly, women in the middle East and Asia reject much of Western women's individualistic feminism because it is disjunctive with their cultural values (Holm, 1994).

The higher their level of formal education, the more likely American Anglo women are to have a feminist perspective on leadership roles in religious organizations and using inclusive language in worship services, and this is especially true of Catholic women (Winter, Lummis, & Stokes, 1994). One reason clergywomen in the "Spirit-centered" denominations and in the black Baptist and independent congregations do not appear "feminist" is that they have not had their expectations for equality with male clergy raised through seminary education (Wessinger, 1996). For example, Southern Baptist clergywomen, clergywomen in the predominantly white "Spirit-centered" denominations, and in predominantly black denominations who have M.Div. degrees are considerably more likely to protest inequitable treatment of women clergy in their denominations than their sister clergy who have not obtained an M.Div. degree from an accredited seminary (Ammerman, 1990; Blevins, 1996; Carpenter, 1986; Zikmund et al., 1998).

What if the women who are active leaders in denominations with more traditional notions of gendered authority acquire graduate seminary degrees and accompanying convictions that women can be capable clergy, but find their denominations resistant to changing their patriarchal ways? This is the situation with the increasing numbers of Catholic and Southern Baptist women who are earning graduate seminary degrees. Some of these angry Catholic and Southern Baptist women, like women alienated from their churches in other denominations, may join another denomination that they find more compatible, or drop out of Christian churches altogether. They may turn to religious movements such as Wicca or New Age/Neo-Pagan "Goddess groups" which offer them a spiritual antidote to the patriarchy they experienced in their former churches (Griffin, 1995; Neitz, 1991).

Some religions that include goddesses have been just as patriarchal as present denominations with a mother-god (e.g., Church of the Latter Day Saints) and female saints

(e.g., the Roman Catholic Church). Nevertheless, strong, wise, independent female images of the Divine are cited by feminist women as essential to their spiritual growth and an important corrective to an exclusively male or subservient female deity (Gross, 1994b; Schneiders, 1991), and a support for their engaging in social justice actions (Lummis & Stokes, 1994). This last statement remains true for feminist women even if they do not envision God only in female forms (Block, 1997; Porterfield, 1987) and even if they remain in traditional churches (Lindley, 1996; Winter et al., 1994).

Sexual orientation is also likely to impact church involvement. Both Catholic and Protestant gay and lesbian persons are painfully aware of the disjunction between most of what their denomination teaches about sexuality and their own lifestyles. Christian gay men may hold either traditional views on women's church involvement, or more activist beliefs stressing gender equality in liturgy and church leadership. Christian lesbians are more likely than gay men to concur that women should have a role in church liturgy and leadership equal to or greater than that of men, and that liturgy should always incorporate female images of the Divine. Like heterosexual men and women disenchanted with organized religion, gays and lesbians may also drop out of church altogether. However, many stay if they can find ways to integrate their personal faith with those church doctrines and practices that reinforce their spirituality, while trying to ignore the hurtful aspects of their church's teachings about or treatment of homosexuals (Kirkman, 1996; Mahaffy, 1996; Yip, 1997; Zikmund et al., 1998). Some denominations are taking a lead in advertising at least certain of their congregations as "open and affirming" of the membership of gays and lesbian members and hiring "out" gays and lesbians as pastors (Wessinger, 1996).

4. ENHANCING WOMEN'S ROLE IN RELIGIONS: OBSTACLES AND SUPPORTS

It has been long observed that women, not men, are the mainstay and most frequent attenders of services offered by communities of faith in almost all religious traditions, almost regardless of where they are located (D'Antonio et al., 1996; Hertel, 1995; Hoge & Roozen, 1979). In Christian churches, moreover, having a female pastor is not a significant predictor of whether the church will grow or decline in membership, or even whether more women will attend services (Lehman, 1985, 1987, 1994; Nesbitt, 1997a; Wallace, 1992, Zikmund et al., 1998.). Such facts do not change the minds of those who direfully predict that the rapidly approaching "feminization" of the ministry produced by an increase in the number of women clergy accompanied by some diminuition in the number of male clergy, will also result in an exodus of men from the pews. This numbers-based fear of "feminization" is a major cause of "backlash" against women clergy in those denominations that ordain women and, in those denominations that do not, is another reason for never starting, when added to theological objections to women's ordination (Nesbitt, 1997a; Wallace, 1992).

"Feminization of ministry" fears are also based on the issue of whether women will "heretically" alter biblical texts, prayers, and reference to God to make them feminine or gender neutral, especially after the 1993 "Re-Imagining" conference in Minneapolis (Schneider & Schneider, 1997; Wessinger, 1996). A recent cross-denominational study found that clergywomen in liberal Protestant denominations are somewhat more likely than clergymen to endorse "inclusive language" in church services, and are much more likely than men to want to use female imagery and names for God in worship. In liberal

Protestant denominations, it is also true that lay leaders of congregations pastored by women are more likely to endorse inclusive language in church services than lay leaders of congregations pastored by men. However, clergywomen in the more evangelical "Spirit-centered" denominations are as ambivalent or opposed to using gender-inclusive language for humans or the Divine as clergymen in these conservative denominations, and their lay leaders are in accord with their clergy (Zikmund et al., 1998).

This suggests that women clergy are more likely than clergymen to be the "avant-garde" in heralding further increases in the "feminization" of liturgy and theology only *in those denominations which are open to modernization,* to extend the argument of Chaves (1997). The very autonomy religious organizations enjoy from state control makes it unlikely that the feminization of clergy or theology will become normative throughout Christian congregations or those of other faiths in the United States. At the same time, industrialization, modernization, pluralism, and relative tolerance for diverse religious beliefs in the Western world have created the conditions under which even the most sacredly masculine organizational structures have been subtly feminized. These developments have greatly expanded the variability among faiths and worship centers in their conceptions of women's place in theology, liturgy, and leadership (Chafetz, 1989; Chaves, 1997; Lindley, 1996; Wessinger, 1996) and have contributed to freedom of religious choice in industrialized democratic countries. In developing countries with autocratic regimes, a new government can curtail any such religious freedom within months, if not overnight (Young, 1994).

Western feminists strongly affirm freedom of religious choice. However, it is dismaying to those who have struggled to ensure gender equality in their faith communities that some young women appear uninterested in using inclusive worship language or taking leadership roles in congregations. Worse, they see some women of their faith among the younger generation remaining in or even joining congregations and sects in which liturgy and leadership are male imaged and controlled (Azria, 1996; Davidman, 1991; Kaufman, 1991; Lindley, 1996; Wessinger, 1996). Among these contemporary women "traditionalists," some may be rejecting gender equality because they want to be taken care of by a man, rather than having to agonize over making choices and taking responsibility for their decisions (Azria, 1996; Davidman, 1991). Other women may value personal autonomy and gender equality in their work and social lives, but attend services in their congregations (churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples) primarily in order to be spiritually uplifted and experience a caring community. As long as they derive this comfort, they do not care who plans liturgies, mission, and ministry programs or who makes financial and personnel decisions (Ozorak, 1996). Some feminist laywomen, nuns, and ordained women leave their congregations and denominations for other faiths or even life completely divorced from organized religion (Carpenter, 1986; Ebaugh, 1993; Lummis, 1996; Schneider & Schneider, 1997; Zikmund et al., 1998). Other women stubbornly stay in their congregation/denomination despite its patriarchy, and try to change it toward more gender inclusion in its liturgy and leadership (Winter et al., 1994). Choices women make in a free society will impact how much equity they and their daughters experience in their religious traditions and in their particular communities of faith.

In the United States during the last two centuries, women in Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other faiths have moved "two steps forward and one step back," toward gender equity in theology and religious leadership, as Lindley (1996) concludes. The degree to which such change continues to march, however slowly, in a " forward" direction nationally and internationally will depend significantly on the degree to which

proponents can convince opponents that more gender equity is inevitable or will produce other outcomes valued by the proponents, such as the expansion of the particular religion (Sered, 1997). This overview of religion and gender indicates that women's full and equal participation in religion will continue to spiral upward, but just to the point where women achieve, not dominance over, but parity with men.

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