

DESIGNER THEOLOGY: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

by Mary E. Hunt

Abstract. This is a critical look at the question of design from a feminist theological perspective. The author analyzes James Moore's 1995 *Zygon* article, "Cosmology and Theology: The Reemergence of Patriarchy." Then she looks at the relationship between science and religion from a feminist perspective, focusing on the kyriarchal nature of theology itself in light of the myriad power issues at hand. Finally, she suggests that, instead of pondering the notion of design, scientists and theologians might more fruitfully look for new ground for dialogue since feminist scholars are asking very different questions, not just answering questions differently.

Keywords: animal rights; antiviolence; design; ecology; feminism; feminist theology; kyriarchy; patriarchy.

I take my inspiration for the question of design from a picture titled *Creation of the Birds* (1957) by the Mexican surrealist painter Remedios Varo. The creator, looking quite birdlike, sits at her drawing table as birds leap from her paper in front of her. She wears a small violin around her neck. The colors on her palette are conducted into her studio from outside. The birds she creates fly happily out of her open window. Design and designer are one.

My goal in this essay is to look critically at the question of design from a feminist theological perspective. I divide my analysis into three sections. First, I analyze James Moore's 1995 *Zygon* article, "Cosmology and Theology: The Reemergence of Patriarchy," since his formulation of the problem is clear. Second, I look at the relationship between science and religion from my feminist perspective, suggesting that the problem of the kyriarchal

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nature of theology itself is, relatively speaking, cosmetic compared with the power issues at hand. Finally, I suggest how, instead of prioritizing design, we might look at new ground for dialogue as a more promising approach. I am concerned about how to keep talking together when scholars are asking very different questions, not just answering questions differently.

A few words about feminist work will frame my discussion. As a feminist, given the many other pressing issues, I believe that the matter of design would be better left to good architects. Such questions are simply not at the top of my theological agenda. Rather, the issues of power and justice are the central themes on which we need to find new ground for dialogue between religion and science.

In fact, as far as I can see in the literature, the question of design is all but absent from feminist theological considerations. It is not that feminist theologians are unaware of the issue; it is simply not a priority for us, given the urgency of other matters. This fact is significant if feminist work is to be a part of the debate.

At least three methodological problems keep feminists from being attracted to the design debate. The first is that, insofar as religion is construed as theology and not ethics and science is seen mainly as the so-called hard sciences and not the social sciences, the terms of the debate are far narrower than most of us favor. While there is nearly infinite variety among feminist thinkers, the trend is for more inclusive categories of analysis that would include both ethics and the social sciences along with, and not subordinate to, the others.

Second, feminist work gives epistemological privilege to experience, especially to the realities of gender, class, race, sexual identity, nationality, and age. In the current design debate, as I read it, these issues are at best tacked on, not given high priority, as we would have it. This dynamic shapes priorities, suggesting that ours are not taken seriously here.

Third, feminist work—at least what I consider cutting-edge, state-of-the-art work—is done in interreligious, international, and interdisciplinary ways with social change goals articulated up front. One example of this work is the project that resulted in the volume *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions* (Jung, Hunt, and Balakrishnan 2001), a project that involved a dozen scholars from eight countries and six religious traditions. Beginning in our respective traditions, and incorporating social scientific data, we asked how women would define “good sex.” We discovered that the issues were far more about the boardroom, that is, macro economic and safety issues, than about the bedroom, the micro approach taken by many religions.

Such feminist-style work in religion forces participants from the United States to be aware of the hegemonic discourse and assumptions that we need to rethink. It pushes those of us who are Christian to move beyond the normative ways in which we so often think of religion. Such are not

matters of political correctness but of scholarly rigor that acknowledges limits in perspective and clarifies the context in which we are working. These are feminist contributions to the conversation that I take as givens as I look at designer theology.

JAMES F. MOORE'S "COSMOLOGY AND THEOLOGY:
THE REEMERGENCE OF PATRIARCHY"

I appreciate James F. Moore's article, "Cosmology and Theology: The Re-emergence of Patriarchy" (1995), for its clarity and thoroughness. In what I can imagine was a controversial analysis for some in the religion-and-science conversation that heretofore has not been distinguished by its feminist flair, Moore concludes, "We need, rather, theologies and philosophies sensitive to feminist critique" (p. 632). He implies, I think correctly, that feminist thought has been conspicuous by its absence in discussions until quite recently, suggesting that "those either unfamiliar with such thinking or contemptuous of it" (p. 631) have simply not taken seriously what would presumably change their views. He explores the work of feminist theologians such as Sallie McFague, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Mary Gerhart as a way to offer some feminist content to the conversation.

Patriarchal critics can hardly hold against Moore his view of feminist work that "we do not assume, as a matter of course, that feminist vision is preferable to the dominant vision of patriarchy, even though we find a refreshing newness in feminist thinking." Rather, the heart of his well-intentioned argument is to suggest that there are "alternative views of reality . . . challenging the notion that there is one and only one true view of reality" (p. 631).

As a post-Einsteinian feminist liberation theologian, I am astonished that there are scientists who think there is but one view. However, I should not be surprised when there are theologians of the same mindset. For example, Moore points to the thought of Frank Tipler, who insists on physics and mathematics as the *only* keys to reality and, subsequently, on God as a certain control mechanism in such a universe. This view reduces effectively to a one-answer model and functions prototypically as the patriarchal scientific view in question. Its theological cognate would be, for example, the Roman Catholic Church on most questions of women's sexuality: there is but one answer.

By contrast, an enormous plurality of perspectives, a seemingly infinite number of questions, and little consensus about anything characterize feminist work in virtually all disciplines. I consider such variety a virtue, more so when we find effective ways to keep the conversation going despite widespread differences.

Moore notes a wide range of views between McFague, Ruether, and Gerhart. McFague employs the metaphor of body for the divine in a

postmodern scientific world. It is far from absolute and rich with layered meaning. Rather than following Tipler to call human life the pinnacle of creation, McFague sees us as one more element in a very complex web. The major implication of her view is that it removes anthropocentrism from the table, thus reconfiguring the theoethical equation with regard to human beings who take our place alongside the rest.

For Ruether the Gaia hypothesis serves more usefully, especially when coupled with a feminist relational approach to theology. She sees all human beings as connected to the Great Matrix, whence we come and to which we return. Her work implies a reordering of human priorities so as to live in greater harmony with the cosmos. This position, too, has the potential to radically reshape the theoethical project along lines of justice seeking and equality without recourse to hegemonic humanity.

In Gerhart's thinking, there is a range of approaches to problems for which dialectical thinking is a useful mode, despite some cosmologists' seeming allergy to it. She is less overtly feminist in the early work cited by Moore but moves in the direction of far more variety than many cosmologists admit. I think she hints at what I outline here, namely, that the questions prioritized in the conversations go a long way toward shaping the answers. Alternatively, who is worried about design, and why? In fairness, maybe we should be, and we ignore it at our peril. But the burden of proof lies with those who claim that it should be a priority given the situation that most women and dependent children face.

Moore hazards that "cosmology remains firmly patriarchal and feminist approaches offer real alternatives" (1995, 628). This seems clear, but from my perspective the data referenced in the article and elsewhere suggest a good deal more. I offer three observations that dovetail with Moore's conclusion, though clearly they do not bolster it. I add these in the name of enlarging the conversation, not to suggest that his analysis is entirely wrong.

1. Contrary to what Moore implies in the article, some feminist theologians actually like cosmological approaches. Judy Ress, a theologian in the feminist spirituality center Con-spirando in Santiago, Chile, is quite enamored of the popularized cosmological work of physicist Brian Swimme and cultural historian Thomas Berry (Ress 1998, 2–8). She and her colleagues find in the so-called Universe Story scientific elements that link favorably with their myths and rituals (Swimme and Berry 1994). My view is that this connection has less to do with the underlying scientific ideas and their alternatives than with reaching for some historical scientific facts, however sketchy, as a foundation for their work. In the absence of any such feminist critical readings of the universe, the popularized cosmologies are, in their judgments, the best alternative.

I must admit that my eyes glaze over when the various billions of years are ticked off in the exposition of this view. I am always tempted to ask

who is doing the counting and why we accept such scientific stories with any less hermeneutical rigor than we apply to the theological or scriptural equivalent. But I report it to say that there are indeed feminist theologians, in this case a U.S. woman working for the past two decades in Chile, who find cosmological work of this sort in keeping with their thinking. In contrast to Moore's conclusion, this points to a possible convergence of the two approaches rather than to a clear divergence.

2. An example of an actual conversation between a feminist and a cosmologist points to the heart of the contrast. At a panel at the American Academy of Religion some years ago, McFague and Berry were honored for their respective work. I was a respondent to McFague.

Berry began by saying that his goal for his work was to "place a blanket over the entire universe." In short, his effort was to understand, or at least offer an explanation for, everything. McFague remarked that the goal of her work was to examine a small piece from a patchwork quilt. In essence, she was content to focus her efforts in a modest, thorough way of analyzing a bit of something and then to add her insights to the mix. The difference could not have been more stark, despite the fact that the two were doing very similar kinds of work.

I concluded that this contrast between the blanket and the quilt piece was the epitome of the difference between a patriarchal and a feminist starting point. I may have been right. However, this does not explain *why* these differences occur. Here I begin to sound more like a scientist than a theologian. Why Berry would presume that he could accomplish what he set out to do, putting a blanket over the universe, and who he thinks he is in relation to it all, is still rather puzzling. It is similar to Freeman Dyson's claim that "the problem is to read God's mind" (Dyson 1992, 21). This statement implies that it might be possible to do, leaving in doubt, among other logistics, the self-understanding of the one who would propose such a thing.

Of course, there is "the mountain is there so I will climb it" mentality, but what else drives such efforts? My question begs not so much for a psychological as a cultural answer. Why does McFague set such a modest goal when the implications of her work are so obviously far-reaching? I think this is less a gendered move than a way of expressing an ideological point. She seems to imply that there are many ways of looking at reality and that hers will serve best when put in relationship to others. From that statement, I understand who she thinks she is in realistic relation to others. I also prefer her approach because it reflects values of collegiality and community seemingly lacking in the alternative.

Such disparate ways admit of no easy meshing. A deeper issue is that one is generally valued so much more than the other—the scientific, cosmological, "complete" approach versus the piecemeal, tentative, admittedly

partial approach. The grand project is lauded as definitive while the small experiment is applauded politely and forgotten quickly. I worry not only that the twain will never meet but that the feminist work, by its own logic, will always be seen as second-rate, ideologically or politically conceived, and therefore, from the perspective of science, highly suspect. The same will likely be true as the conversation takes on specificity such as race, class, and various religious perspectives from what has heretofore been predominantly white, male, Western, higher-educated, Christian speculation.

No reductions to mathematical certainties are anywhere in sight in feminist approaches. Indeed, such reductionism is anathema. Neither are clearly gendered or even clearly politically driven reasons sufficient to account for the differences. After all, they could simply be matters of disposition. More likely, they are conditioned by previous choices circumscribed by the thinkers' respective social locations that are largely irrelevant to most scientific and, increasingly, to mainstream theological discourse. That seems to me to be the heart of the problem: priority setting and privileging of perspectives long before the current work began and design became the concern of choice.

It occurs to me that their positions could even be reversed, with McFague knitting the blanket and Berry sewing the little patch. The results would attend not to the gender of the theologian but to the size, scope, and percentage of the whole implied in the product. It is this dynamic—that bigger is better, that the whole is more important than the sum of parts, that one “correct” view is more valuable than many partial ones—that is far more problematic from my feminist perspective than any gendered aspect. Of course, the fact that cosmology is more often associated with men than women is surely more than coincidental but less than determinative. What makes the difference is whether one or many views can simultaneously be valued equally.

By “views” I do not mean simply whether one sees design within the commonly accepted categories. Rather, from a feminist perspective the challenge is to wean ourselves from the need to find the right answer and concentrate on seeing bits of truth in many answers. It is to diversify the conversation so that issues of economics and politics that so clearly underlie our efforts and perspectives are problematized along with science and religion. Such rethinking will help to reshape the priorities and perhaps put design in its proper place.

3. A third observation on Moore's article relates to the nature of patriarchy as described. I submit that patriarchy is no longer the only way or the best way to understand the issues at hand. Likewise, in my judgment, Anne Schaeff's largely psychological approach, which Moore uses as a prototype, does not provide the most adequate theoretical framework for doing so. I would turn instead to feminist theorists bell hooks (1990) and

Patricia Hill Collins (1991) for approaches that are more adequate because of their critique of race and class as well as their social and not personal approaches.

“Patriarchy” is still used widely as shorthand for a description of how our society is structured along sex lines that privilege men and oppress women, but the term now strikes me as one-dimensional. Biblical scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1992) has coined what I consider to be a far more useful concept, “kyriarchy,” to describe with more precision and more depth the situation at hand in all of its complexity.

Patriarchy highlighted father rule as the normative model of unjust social structures and personal interactions between men and women. Kyriarchy—literally, from the Greek, “a system of lordship or domination”—points to “interlocking structures of domination that include racism, economic injustice, heterosexism, ageism, discrimination on the basis of physical difference and the like” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1992, 117, 123). This approach allows a more realistic analysis and strategizing of what is no longer (if it ever was) a purely gender-driven problem. Rather, what is now under consideration for change is a complex of structures that privileges some and disenfranchises others. After all, white women with ample education are clearly in a different situation than African American men without skills are. Kyriarchy explains this in a way that patriarchy never can.

The move in this direction for religious feminists came from the impetus of womanists (that is, African American feminists) and from *mujeristas* and *feministas* (Latina feminists), who critiqued the degree to which feminism was developed by white women for white women with no programmatic regard for anti-racist, anti-imperialist issues.¹ They were right, and feminism is different because of it. Now it is impossible to present an adequate feminist critique on the basis of gender without including the racial, economic, and other components of a justice agenda. Concepts grow, and with them the analysis.

Now feminist critiques of religion begin with the givens of globalization and religious pluralism, quite different starting points from those that McFague, Ruether, and Gerhart presumed. We ask whether monotheism is even a possibility, given the new plurality of views. Feminists include ecological concerns as well as human ones, supplanting the androcentric perspective of old not with a gynocentric one but rather with a biophilic center as articulated early on by Mary Daly (1992, 4). We contend that antiracism, concern with economic issues, and the like are essential to the work.

Perhaps of greatest significance, *feminist* today means inviting a range of voices not simply to join the conversation but to shape it from the outset. Hence my question whether we would even be having a conversation about design if there were anything feminist about our effort. Feminists tend to

start on ethical issues given the pure urgency, as womanists have shown, of the survival of women and their dependent children. A wealth of strategically chosen issues sets an activist agenda. It is hard to imagine where in this conversation the matter of design would fit in.

If it were to fit, the conversation would be quite different. For example, we might more likely ask, If there is a design, how do we change it? or, If there is a design, does the historical treatment of women and the earth represent more than just bad taste? or, If there is design, is there really only one pattern? Of course, we could construct a fairly sophisticated rationale, but as far as I am aware the questions of design simply do not appear on most feminist screens, theological or otherwise. That in itself is telling. It is not as if we are unengaged; rather, we are so deeply engaged with other matters that this is simply not a priority. Who sets the theoretical priorities? is an ethical question for us.

I offer these three observations on Moore's piece because they flesh out the useful argument he has initiated. I hope that the fundamental point he hints at will be underscored: if religion and science are to join in useful conversation, it cannot be business as usual. Patriarchal theology in league with patriarchal science will likely produce a patriarchal product. However, if this result is to be different, the priorities will need to emerge from the shared concerns of the participants, not from an a priori agenda in which some are far more invested than others, an agenda that largely ignores, obscures, or even detracts from urgent survival concerns for a large share of the earth's people and of the earth itself.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCIENCE AND RELIGION FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Feminist theology has little concern for matters of design, but some feminist architects do. *Design and Feminism: Re-Visioning Spaces, Places, and Everyday Things* (Rothschild 1999) contains several clues relevant to feminist theology and science. In her introduction to this excellent collection of essays on new forms and methods in architecture, Joan Rothschild writes: "Feminist critics are not concerned with reclaiming the whole world and declaring whose time it is but rather are taking the necessary steps to complete and revise history, while helping to focus attention on what used to be considered subtext" (p. viii).

That sums up nicely what feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, and other theologians have been about for the past four decades. We seek not to substitute a matriarchate for a patriarchate, women for men, our way for all others. Rather, we seek to bring to the foreground what bell hooks calls moving "from margin to center," those issues, people, and concepts that will reshape the whole, not appropriate it to ourselves.

Several examples of that move are obvious in current feminist work in religion: ecology and animal-related concerns, antiviolen work, and so-

called everyday life. None of these is likely to be part of the patriarchal theological contribution to the religion-and-science discussion. I suggest the reason is that these issues, far more than the gender of the divine, upset long-cherished myths of objectivity and the assumed right of human beings to some place of priority in the world. Each makes a vital contribution to a new way of shaping the conversation.

Ecology and Animal-Related Concerns. Ecofeminist theology is the closet cognate to the religion-science discussion. Major works include the writings of Ruether, Carol Adams, and Ivone Gebara, with the social/economic focus of Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies forming a backdrop. Far from a stereotypic Mother Earth and female care ethic, these scholars and others demonstrate that the ecosystem is made more fragile by human choices that put humans first. The Greek philosopher Xenophanes had the early insight that if dogs and cats and cows and pigs had gods and goddesses, they would look like dogs and cats and cows and pigs. Remedios Varo picked up on this in her painting of the early birds. So, too, ecofeminists insist that the gods and, less so but still not blameless, the goddesses, whom we have made in our image, have functioned as lords of the land—that is, in kyriarchal ways with devastating ecological consequences.

In an early constructive shift away from this patriarchal approach, Adams, pioneer of the feminist vegetarian connection and author of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), put the question of animal rights as part of feminist theology. In *Neither Man nor Beast* (1994), in a chapter titled “Beastly Theology: When Epistemology Creates Ontology,” she wrote:

Similarities exist between discussing the other animals and discussing God, and no, it is not just that *dog* is *God* spelled backwards. Granted, some of the similarities are actually expressed in oppositions: the idea of God as an unembodied, disincarnate force, while animals are seen as soulless and solely body. . . . Our concepts of God, ourselves, and how we relate to animals are all bound together. Theologically as well as culturally positioned under man’s control, animals have been devalued. While all language about God is metaphorical, animals often become reduced to metaphors that reflect human concerns, human lives. The term *beast* functions in this way. Beastly theology is Christian patriarchal theology about animals in which they are seen as “beasts” in a pejorative sense—categorized as less than, as representing the opposite of human beings. (1994, 180).

With this salvo, Adams opened the way for approaches to animals that are grounded in feminist assumptions and values.

In concert with Adams, Mary Lou Randour explores this issue in *Animal Grace: Entering a Spiritual Relationship with Our Fellow Creatures* (2000), a volume reminiscent of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962). Randour probes our relationships with animals, describing what most of us miss, namely, the many and varied ways of our animal fellows. When observed and embraced, animals can lead humans to useful theological insights. She offers one:

As animal grace helps me to transcend the arbitrary boundary of species, it also helps me overcome other distinctions, such as race, gender, nationality, and religion—differences often used to exclude and exploit. I realize that these distinctions are more illusory than real, more superficial than enduring. For weaving itself throughout all our perceived differences is the pulse of life. . . . If one is speaking in religious terms, then that pulse of life comes from, or perhaps more accurately is, God. If God resides in any of us, then God resides in all of us—human and nonhuman animals alike. (Randour 2000, 144)

According to this view, there is no longer a radical split between species. Theological implications abound for changed views and behavior toward those formerly known as beasts. The ethical discussions of the calamities that will befall us as a civilization if we move in this direction are well rehearsed though the direst consequences remain unrealized. I suggest that this kind of ecofeminist work in religion makes for rich theological conversation, not to mention far more complicated discussions with scientists as we deal with design.

Antiviolence Work as a Major Theological Theme. A survey of feminist theological work in the past ten years reveals a remarkable cluster of writings, conferences, and workshops related to matters of religion and violence. Whether antiracism or antihomophobia, or efforts to overcome domestic violence, clergy sexual abuse, or economic injustice, a major theme in feminist work in religion is the way in which the rampant spread of violence has been aided and abetted by certain religious concepts, especially those of lordship, domination, submission, and dualism.

In Christian circles, this debate began in 1989 with the proposal by Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker in their essay “For God So Loved the World?” (Brown and Parker 1989). Their provocative suggestion that the Christian doctrine of the Atonement could be taken as divine legitimation for child abuse shocked feminist theologians into looking critically not so much at discrimination or oppression based in language and imagery as at violence baptized and confirmed by theological concepts. If “God the Father” would give up his only son even for so lofty a purpose as the salvation of the world, what might other parents rationalize about their own behaviors toward their children?

Marie Marshall Fortune’s work on clergy sexual abuse (1992) pushed the question of how religious institutions, especially clericalism, can be the locus of violence in the name of the divine. Adams (1995) looked at the relationship between the battering of women and harm done to animals. In each case it was clear that deep assumptions about “the way things are” and “the way things should be” regarding power and privilege, social position, and the kyriarchially dualistic way of thinking that is so enmeshed in patriarchal theology were responsible. Its roots are religious. But is it a design flaw or the design itself?

This move from an analysis of oppression to a claim of violence signaled

a new moment in feminist work in religion. It emerged around the world such that, at a 1994 meeting of the women of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, violence was the consensus theme.² I do not mean to suggest that other theoretical concerns have gone by the board. I do mean to point out how different much feminist work is now with this very concrete focus, this sense of urgency and accountability in a violent culture in which kyriarchal religions have played a key role. It is this difference that needs to be reflected in any religion-science conversation deemed feminist.

Everyday Life as a Resource for Theology. Another prominent theme in contemporary feminist theology is what *mujerista* theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz of Drew University Divinity School describes as the “liberative daily experiences,” or *lo cotidiano* (1996, 66). Springing from her belief that all theology must emerge from critical subjectivity rather than from objectivity, which she sees as “the subjectivity of those who have the power to impose it on others” (p. 2), Isasi-Diaz begins with her own Latina community. She claims that it is best to begin with shared rather than common experience. The distinction is that *common* implies the lowest common denominator, whereas *shared* implies difference. By paying attention to daily life and the difference it makes, the community can come to understand its own questions of meaning and value, not simply respond to questions imposed from outside.

Such an innately practical focus stands in sharp contrast to the theoretical explorations of much theology and most science. Feminist theologian Catherine Keller (1996, 164) minces no words: “The magisterial ‘universalism’ of the modern scientific paradigm, extrapolated from its elite white masculine subjectivity, has well served the economics and politics of Western nation states.” It is hard to imagine how such science might ever be informed by *lo cotidiano* of poor women. The issue is not so much theoretical as political, a matter not of interest but of urgency. Feminists bring *lo cotidiano* to the table when we think about science and religion.

These themes raise their own questions of design. What kind of universe includes such a rich variety of species? Why do human beings privilege some to the detriment of others? By what design is violence prevalent in so many forms? And what role do the world’s religions, especially Christianity in the United States, play in that scandal? What is it about everyday life, especially the lives of women who are marginalized, that needs to be taken seriously in the shaping of designs? What needs to be reshaped so that their everyday lives will improve? How might these strategies become part of the religion-science conversation? And if not, why should feminists participate when our priorities are so clearly other?

Ironically, in the Rothschild book on design, there is by sheer coincidence (could it be by design?) a lengthy treatment of an architectural project

with a group that has been active in feminist theology. Leslie Kanes Weisman engaged her architecture students in a service-learning project to design transgenerational co-housing for the Grail at Cornwall, New York.

The Grail is an international women's religious movement with roots in the Christian tradition, bringing together women who live simply and with intention about social justice, feminism, and ecological concerns. The group at Cornwall was interested in building new housing that reflects their values and does justice to the environment, for themselves and their friends as the core group approaches retirement age.

The Grail women have long sponsored feminist theological programs at their centers, training my generation of feminist theologians in the kind of work I have just described. To discover them in the midst of *Design and Feminism* surprised me into seeing the concrete connection between the practical, everyday work that makes change and the speculative, theoretical work that goes with it. Hence, I urge feminist theologians to be part of the design conversation whether we want to or not.

I come to the religion-science conversation as a layperson when it relates to science, albeit one who devours the *New York Times* "Science Times" and its equivalent to keep abreast of major developments. I am intrigued by reports of recent discoveries suggesting that, rather than life's having sprung from a single unit, perhaps there was "a community of primitive cells" (Wade 2000, D1). Maybe that scientific model, more than anything feminist theologians have ever said, will encourage more multiplicity in the conversation. I hope so, because without a major shift, those in the conversation and any alliances it produces run the serious risk of reinscribing and reinforcing power dynamics that could make the masculine gender designation of the divine pale by comparison to the new hegemonic constructs that are likely to emerge.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FINDING NEW GROUND FOR DIALOGUE

In casual conversation with a friend and colleague, a renowned mathematician who is a practicing Episcopalian, I asked what she thought of the whole religion-science conversation. Without skipping a beat she replied, "I like my religion straight up." I suspect she would say the same about her science, reminding me that most scientists and most theologians do not think that the connection between science and religion is central to their concerns.

This seems to be Lawrence Krauss's point in his controversial piece, "An Article of Faith: Science and Religion Don't Mix" (2000), bound to elicit some fascinating responses from theologians. My own approach is to admit limited agreement with his general trajectory, though for reasons quite different from those he suggests. Krauss bases his case on the notion that "Science and religion are on opposite sides of the human experience" (p.

35). Contra Krauss, that fact, in my view, is precisely what makes the conversation so interesting. But even if Krauss is right, and there is more antagonism than commonality between the two disciplines, why automatically assume that what is different must be estranged? Indeed, why labor under the delusion that one must triumph and the other be vanquished, one learn and the other teach? Here we separate the kyriarchal from the feminist.

The only justification for such assumptions is the implicit notion that one member of the pair must triumph—either the inherently falsifiable or the inherently unknowable. Pick your poison. Why can't we have both? As a pediatric anesthesiologist who is trained in acupuncture remarked to me when I suggested a certain conflict between her methods, "I use them according to the need. A child in pain may need different things, depending on the pain." If she does not privilege modern techniques over ancient wisdom but rather uses each as needed, why should I?

Insofar as the parameters of the conversation and the usual makeup of the discussants reflect the prevailing power structures in science and religion, more so in business, technology, and cultural control, like Krauss I consider our efforts suspect. Without significant changes in how the discussions are shaped, however, involvement for people with my concerns becomes at most a matter of self-defense. If we are not here, who will raise our issues?

I think there is more at stake than simply debates over design, namely how to find new ground for dialogue. If the problem is, as I have tried to sketch it, not so much one of interest as of access, not so much the wrong question as whose question, not so much who is here as who is not here, how might we engage fruitfully from our respective starting points if feminist values are to be part of the mix?

First, we might bring together feminist theologians with feminist scientists to have this conversation among ourselves before we go too much further. To my knowledge, this has not been done widely, and it is ripe for the doing. It would be wonderful to contrast historian of science Londa Schiebinger's analysis in her book *Has Feminism Changed Science?* (1999) with a theological equivalent, perhaps yet to be written. That way we could compare our respective progress and see whether we are indeed working at cross purposes or in concert. Amazingly, no one I know knows.

Second, we might acknowledge the radical difference between science and religion as a plus, not a minus, as an invitation rather than a challenge. Here I think the straw person, the evangelical Christian of Krauss's analysis, needs to be joined, if not replaced, by progressive voices in religion who do not "promote beliefs that fly in the face of scientific evidence" (Krauss 2000, 36). There is simply as much variety on the religious side as on the scientific, and the variety invites three- and four-dimensional conversations, not two-dimensional ones as have been the norm.

Third, we might find some ways to live more comfortably with answers such as “I don’t know, and I don’t need to right now” when it comes to setting a common agenda. That would mean that some of the urgency in the matters of design, for example, could be shelved for now in favor of exploring the equally challenging and perhaps more important issues of building cosmic community. We might discover that prioritizing design and designers could be a trap, consigning us to superficial results.

CONCLUSION

In my view, what matters is not who or what or whether there is a design but how we use what access we have to it. As long as that access is distributed so unevenly, I see plenty of work to do. Distractions abound. But when that work is finished, I will be more than happy to ponder the unsolved question of its origin. Anthropologists teach that myths of origin are typically written backwards to explain how a particular state of affairs occurred. I look forward to writing one that explains how we arrived at equitable human relations, deep attention to the well being of the earth and its animals, and an end to violence.

NOTES

1. For womanist theology see, for example, Williams 1993. For *mujerista* theology see Isasi-Diaz 1993. For *teologia feminista* see, for example, Aquino 1993.
2. For a report of the Women’s Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) meeting in San Jose, Costa Rica, 7–12 December 1994, see Manazan, Oduyoye, Tamez, Clarkson, Grey, and Russell 1996.

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