

## Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* after Fifty Years of US Catholic Feminist Theology

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### Abstract

In 1968, Mary Daly published *The Church and the Second Sex*, one of the first monographs in the field of Catholic feminist theology. On the fiftieth anniversary of its release, this article remembers the book not only as an important historical milestone in Catholic theology, but also as an early and still-resonant articulation of issues that have concerned US Catholic feminist theologians since. This return to 1968 also puts into focus how the field has moved beyond Daly's original project, clarifying important characteristics of the current discourse and its trajectories.

### Keywords

Catholic, *The Church and the Second Sex*, Mary Daly, feminist theology, hermeneutics, intersectionality, oppression, sexism, United States, 1968

Mary Daly's 1968 monograph *The Church and the Second Sex* (hereafter *Second Sex*) features a letter from a Catholic third grader named Rita Martin, who wrote to the editors of the *National Catholic Reporter* to

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express her interest in ministry as an altar server. With the innocent candor of a child, Martin inquires, “Why do you think that we should not have girl servers?” She then advocates for her ministry with a theological proposal: “After all we are a Christian family, and Christ wants us to do things.” Commenting on Martin’s letter, Daly concludes that if the young girl’s words are any indication, then “the breed of tomorrow will have many questions.”<sup>1</sup>

Fifty years of Catholic feminist theology have proven Daly’s prediction true. The establishment and vitality of feminist theological networks and working groups across the globe represent the proliferation of this discourse.<sup>2</sup> The field has generated a significant body of scholarship that not only centers on women’s experiences but also interrogates the multiple oppressions that render many groups unnecessarily vulnerable, of which women-identified people are only one group among and containing many others. Catholic feminist theology today is more than a marginal subfield of Catholic theological investigation. Numerous Catholic feminist theologians have gained renown among their peers, earning prestigious academic appointments and election to lead the guild’s professional societies.

When Daly foreshadowed the growth of feminist challenges to Catholicism in 1968, she was among only a small group of Roman Catholic women to have earned a doctorate in theology. She had earned her first PhD at St. Mary’s College in Notre Dame, which was the first doctoral program in theology for women in the United States. She went on to earn two more doctorates, one in theology and one in philosophy, from the University of Freiburg in Switzerland. *Second Sex*, the first of her many books, was published shortly after Daly finished her studies and took up a faculty appointment in the theology department at Boston College in 1967. Five years after the publication of *Second Sex*, Daly famously renounced Christianity as irredeemably patriarchal and disavowed the hopeful Catholic feminism that she had introduced in her first book.

Today *Second Sex* endures as a historical milestone in the emergence of feminist theology.<sup>3</sup> In the first issue of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* in 1985, Carter Heyward identifies *Second Sex* as one of the “first efforts by churchwomen of our generation to signal the value of women’s lives in counterpoint to the devaluation of women in the Christian tradition.”<sup>4</sup> Affirmatively, Catholic journalist James Carroll calls *Second Sex* “every bit as important in the Catholic world as Betty Friedan’s *The*

1. Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 1985 edition (Boston: Beacon, 1985), 146.

2. For example, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians; the Catholic Women Speak network; Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER); Feminist Studies in Religion; the Women’s Consultation on Constructive Theology at the Catholic Theological Society of America.

3. This is not to say that women had not influenced academic theology or the life and teachings of the Church prior to the publication of *Second Sex*. Here, we position Daly in relation to feminist theology, by which we mean the widely recognized academic subfield that emerged in the 1960s.

4. Carter Heyward, “An Unfinished Symphony of Liberation: The Radicalization of Christian Feminism among White U.S. Women,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1 (1985): 99–118 at 101, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002008>.

*Feminine Mystique*” in Daly’s 2010 obituary in *The Boston Globe*.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps because of Daly’s early post-Christian turn, *Second Sex* is often remembered as *merely* a historical milestone: it is a product of its time that the rest of Catholic feminist theology quickly moved beyond, just as Daly did with the publication of her second and most famous book, *Beyond God the Father*.<sup>6</sup>

The fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Second Sex* occasions our return to Daly’s monograph to reconsider its legacy. While feminist theology has emerged and expanded globally, here we examine the legacy of *Second Sex* in relationship to the last five decades of Catholic feminist theology in the United States, Daly’s native context as well as our own. Our look back to her original assessment of sexism in the Catholic Church in part 1 of this article illuminates continuities that have shaped the field over the last half century and up to the present. In light of these continuities, we remember Daly’s legacy within theology as more than her famous rejection of Christianity, though it includes that. We show that her first work, *Second Sex*, is an early articulation of the many critiques that have fundamentally shaped Catholic feminist theological discourse over the last fifty years.

The discontinuities between *Second Sex* and the subsequent work of US Catholic feminists are edifying, as well. In part 2, we identify two ways that US Catholic feminist theology has moved beyond Daly’s 1968 project. These critiques nuance the picture of Daly’s legacy while clarifying the present contours of the field and some important trajectories for ongoing work in this context. By identifying significant departures from Daly’s monograph, we hope to open conversation and spur more questions about the US Catholic feminist theologies of today and among the next “breed of tomorrow.”

## Continuities

Daly traveled widely during her seven years of graduate study in Europe, including a most important trip in the Fall of 1965 to Rome, where the Second Vatican Council was underway. Nabbing a press pass, she sat in on proceedings, watching the bishops in their regal white and crimson and the nuns veiled in black who shuffled to receive communion from the “princes.” Daly returned home invigorated by the spirit of Vatican II but found herself with as much concern about the state of the church as she had hope for its future. It was then that she began to write *Second Sex*.<sup>7</sup>

In *Second Sex* itself, it is not the ecumenical council that Daly names as the premise for her project, however. It is the unapologetic ecclesial critiques of the atheist feminist philosopher and author of *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir, that Daly presents as the occasion for her book.<sup>8</sup> Across de Beauvoir’s writings, Daly witnesses “a

5. Bryan Marquard, “Mary Daly, 81; Feminist Writer Challenged Church, Patriarchy,” *The Boston Globe*, January 6, 2010, [http://archive.boston.com/bostonglobe/obituaries/articles/2010/01/06/mary\\_daly\\_feminist\\_writer\\_challenged\\_church\\_patriarchy/](http://archive.boston.com/bostonglobe/obituaries/articles/2010/01/06/mary_daly_feminist_writer_challenged_church_patriarchy/).

6. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation*, 1985 edition (Boston: Beacon, 1985).

7. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 11.

8. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011).

vigorous criticism of Catholic ideology and practice” that leads to her guiding inquiry: “What can the Christian who is truly sensitive to the problem of women in the Church offer as an adequate response in the dialogue initiated by de Beauvoir?”<sup>9</sup> The chapters that follow are Daly’s answer to this inquiry, and they are, by and large, an affirmation of de Beauvoir’s analysis. She elucidates de Beauvoir’s concerns with concrete examples from across church history, and what results is a vivid description of the problem of sexism in the Catholic Church, organized in five critiques: the church is an “instrument of oppression”; it deceives women into “passivity”; Catholic moral doctrine is violent to women; the exclusion of women in the tradition “results in feelings of inferiority”; and the church “obstructs women’s transcendence.” To de Beauvoir’s critiques Daly brings not only the authority of an “insider” Catholic but also her tremendous breadth of knowledge as a careful and well-trained theologian.

Yet Daly’s resounding “yes” to the philosopher’s indictment of Catholic patriarchy is qualified; it is really a “yes, but—.” Toward the end of *Second Sex* and in brief asides throughout, Daly argues that Catholics can affirm the problem of women in the church *but* also hope for and work toward Catholicism’s feminist reform. De Beauvoir argues that the church warranted no such hope, and Daly, too, would concede this point in time. Nevertheless, Daly’s original articulation of ecclesial sexism is compelling. The breadth and perceptiveness of Daly’s analysis is evinced by its numerous continuities with concerns that have occupied Catholic feminist theology in the USA over fifty years. The following examples from this discourse show each of Daly’s five critiques of ecclesial sexism to be remarkably consonant with many of the US Catholic feminist theological projects that followed it.

### *The Church as an Instrument of Oppression*

The first assertion from de Beauvoir that Daly engages is to the point: Christianity is an instrument of women’s oppression. Of particular interest to Daly is how the church promises women the offer of heavenly reward in exchange for their passive obedience. Furthermore, “by diverting women’s attention to bright rewards in a future life, Christianity creates the delusion of equality already attained.”<sup>10</sup> In chapter 2, Daly gives a thorough account of this dynamic in the history of Christian thought. She shows that while the church and its prominent figures proclaim the equal worth and dignity of every person, including women, it simultaneously expresses women’s inferiority. Daly traces these conflicts from the Christian Scriptures to the early Church Fathers, for whom the “horror of sex is the horror of woman.”<sup>11</sup> Proceeding through medieval and modern figures such as Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, and Ignatius of Loyola, Daly offers a litany of quotes naming women as constitutionally less human than men in both body and intellect. Her survey continues with papal documents from the mid-twentieth century, which tie the dignity of women to their roles as mothers, a

9. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 56, 72.

10. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 59.

11. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 88.

service to the greater dignity of husband, family, church, and homeland. Framing these examples within de Beauvoir's critique about the deceptive promise of women's eschatological reward, Daly exhorts women to resist these degrading stereotypes.

US Catholic feminist theology has continued to critique, with de Beauvoir and Daly, how church teachings attempt to coax Catholic women into obedience with the promise of heavenly reward. In fact, Daly's 1968 book was one among numerous theologies across the globe at this time that critiqued how the eschatological promises of Christianity contributed to dangerous religious apathy in the face of social suffering and often worked to pacify victims of oppression. This watershed moment in twentieth-century theology continues to shape US Catholic feminist and other liberation theologies today. Here we look at just two examples, works from Rosemary Radford Ruether and Ada María Isasi-Díaz, which represent a continuation and deeper development of this critique from *Second Sex*.

Rosemary Radford Ruether's 1983 book, *Sexism and God-Talk*, traces the historical development of Christian salvation as "alienation from nature"—a nature that, since the ancient Greco-Roman world, has been overwhelmingly identified with the female body.<sup>12</sup> Her study begins with the ancient Christian worldview that, under the influence of Greco-Roman thought, claimed, "Only by extricating mind from matter by ascetic practices, aimed at severing the connections of mind and body, can one prepare for the salvific escape out of the realm of corruptibility to eternal spiritual life."<sup>13</sup> Because women were associated with the corruptible world of nature, they were especially bound to the fleshy world from which they needed salvation. At times, ascetic practices enabled women to negate their gendered identities and thus "become neutral or 'honorary' male spirits, equal to males in the flight to eternal life."<sup>14</sup> Yet only through strict obedience to the church and renunciation of their bodies could these women become like men and therefore receive the promise of salvation. Ruether observes, however, that this was not the norm. In Christianity, asceticism "as means of spiritual equality of women" was suppressed, while the patriarchal oppression of women prevailed. Women's equality was delayed until the shedding of one's body in heaven, an opportunity exclusively merited through "the strictest subjugation to male power in Church and society."<sup>15</sup> Ruether then links this doctrinal degradation of women's bodies to the degradation of the rest of non-human creation, marking one of the earliest articulations of Christian ecofeminist thought.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas Ruether looks at the historical use of salvation as a tool of oppression against women in the church, Ada María Isasi-Díaz examines how the doctrine of salvation has demanded the obedience of Latina women in the contemporary United

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12. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (1983; Boston: Beacon, 1993), 79–82. Ruether's work in this book builds on her earlier treatment of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, and ecology in her monograph, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

13. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 79.

14. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 80.

15. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 80.

16. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 85–92.

States. Isasi-Díaz contrasts the magisterium's depiction of salvation outside of history from salvation as a part of the *proyecto histórico*. The former notion delays salvation, offering it as a reward outside of history for obedience to the church within history. In doing so, it threatens to subordinate the primacy of Latina women's consciences to obedience by suggesting that their salvation is attained outside of history through obedience to the church. "The increased influence of the official Roman Catholic Church on Hispanic Women ... worries *mujerista* theologians because recent blatant attempts by the Roman Curia to stifle opinions and understandings in the church to the point of threatening primacy of conscience."<sup>17</sup> This disempowers Hispanic women's moral agency, an essential component "in our struggle for liberation."<sup>18</sup> It does not encourage women to be agents struggling for the realization of their liberation today. In contrast, Isasi-Díaz demands liberation in history. She writes, "As Latinas become increasingly aware of the injustices we suffer, we reject any concept of salvation that does not affect our present and future reality. For us, salvation occurs in history and is intrinsically connected to our liberation."<sup>19</sup> Latinas understand themselves as agents in the struggle—*en la Lucha*—for their own liberation.

Isasi-Díaz, like Ruether, shows how teachings on salvation have coaxed Catholic women into obedience that denies them agency and the hope of flourishing today, with the promise of heavenly reward. Furthermore, by attending to the lived experiences of Latina women today, Isasi-Díaz furthers Daly's soteriological critique for ongoing Catholic feminist theological reflection.

### *The Church Has Deceived Women into Passivity*

Daly's second critique of ecclesial sexism interrogates how Catholic doctrine, dogma, and theological writings solidify women's inferiority to men through the glorification of the Virgin Mary, Catholicism's great ideal of womanhood. The church's representation of the Mother of God reflects a long history of reducing women's nature to a particular set of stereotypes, which has perpetuated what Daly calls "the myth of the eternal feminine."<sup>20</sup> Her vocation is to surrender and hiddenness, symbolized by the Catholic woman's veil. "Self-less, she achieves not individual realization but merely generic fulfillment of motherhood, physical or spiritual (the wife is always mother to her husband as well as her children)," Daly observes.<sup>21</sup>

Daly traces this mythical vision of womanhood across Catholic writings from the early to mid-twentieth century, including influential figures such as Teilhard de Chardin, who writes that women possess an "illuminating and idealizing power which she exercises by the simple action of presence and as at rest." This rightly places her

17. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology*, 10th anniversary edition (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 151.

18. Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 151.

19. Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha*, 53.

20. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 147–53.

21. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 149.

“outside the tumult of prose and action.”<sup>22</sup> These teachings and theological writings praise the feminine ideals that render women passive and inferior to men. As a result, Daly argues that this “glorification” of women serves as a smokescreen for the contradiction between the church’s stance on human dignity and its simultaneous degradation of women. Ultimately, women are praised into submission. With de Beauvoir, Daly expresses concern for Catholicism’s idealization of the Virgin Mother as the passive and obedient feminine ideal, who is positioned on a pedestal above all others precisely because of her sacrificial submission.

In the decades after the publication of *Second Sex*, John Paul II’s hugely popular pastoral teachings on the body and human sexuality have fueled feminist theologians’ persistent critiques of the church’s glorified images of women, especially the Virgin Mary.<sup>23</sup> John Paul II upholds Mary, the Mother of Jesus, as the “highest expression of the ‘feminine genius’” that is ontologically, spiritually, and psychologically constitutive of all women. “Through obedience to the Word of God she accepted her lofty yet not easy vocation as wife and mother in the family of Nazareth,” acclaims the pope. “Putting herself at God’s service, she also put herself at the service of others.”<sup>24</sup> As these excerpts from his 1995 “Letter to Women” suggest, it is Mary’s obedient receptivity, exemplified in the story of the Annunciation, that John Paul II identifies with the essence of women. He situates this in complementary and absolute distinction from the male essence, which he models on the active agency of Jesus and God the Father.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, across the last half-century of Catholic feminist theology in the United States, a number of scholars have continued to name the sexist implications of this glorified depiction. Well known among them is Elizabeth Johnson, whose 1985 essay “The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women” culls a number of feminist critiques of Mary’s treatment in contemporary Catholicism and her use to the detriment of women.<sup>26</sup> There, Johnson cites Ruether’s charge that Mariology in the hands of men has served as a discourse that “sanctifies the image of the female as the principle of passive receptivity to the transcendent activity of male gods and their agents, the clergy ... [It] is the exaltation of the principle of submission and receptivity, purified of any relation to sexual femaleness ... Mariology exalts the virginal, obedient, spiritual feminine and

22. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 151. See Teilhard de Chardin, *Genèse d'une Pensée* (Paris: Grasset, 1961), 154–55.

23. One account of the influence of John Paul II’s teachings on gender and sexuality in academic and popular Catholic moral reflection is John S. Grabowski, “The Luminous Excess of the Acting Person: Assessing the Impact of Pope John Paul II on American Catholic Moral Theology,” *Journal of Moral Theology* 1, no. 1 (2012): 124–35.

24. John Paul II, “Letter to Women” (1995) no. 10. See [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_29061995\\_women.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html).

25. For a concise yet thorough overview of John Paul II’s teaching on gender and sexuality, see Katie Grimes, “Theology of Whose Body? Sexual Complementarity, Intersex Conditions, and La Virgen de Guadalupe,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 32 (2016): 75–93, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.32.1.06>.

26. Elizabeth Johnson, “The Marian Tradition and the Reality of Women,” *Horizons* 12 (1985): 116–35, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0360966900034344>.

fears all real women in the flesh.”<sup>27</sup> Johnson references similar criticisms from Patricia Noone, Kari Børresen, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Mary Gordon, Marina Warner, and Mary Daly herself to demonstrate how “the marian tradition has functioned to block the self-realization of women as persons.”<sup>28</sup> Across these feminist voices, it is Mary’s glorified submission that alarms them, for, as Daly suggests in *Second Sex*, it suggests to contemporary Catholic women that their own glory rests in submission to what life presents—and what life presents is often determined by unnecessary and unjust patriarchy. These critiques run through Johnson’s later work on Mary, including her book-length project, *Truly Our Sister*, published in 2003.<sup>29</sup>

Some of the most significant contributions to Mariology since 1968 are found in the work of Catholic Latina feminist theologians. Theologizing with communities where Marian devotions continue to thrive, these theologians have brought valuable perspective to the powerful influence and potential dangers of the symbol of Mary, especially in the icon of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The 1994 groundbreaking study of Our Lady of Guadalupe by Jeannette Rodriguez, for instance, takes as a starting point the growing concern for how “Our Lady of Guadalupe is often experienced as a Marian image to support and encourage passivity in women, and thus is viewed as an instrument of patriarchal oppression and control.”<sup>30</sup> Rodriguez demonstrates that, in fact, the devotions of Mexican-American women reveal Guadalupe to be an “active and liberating symbol.”<sup>31</sup> Still, to demonstrate the weight of her contribution, Rodriguez notes the backdrop of the patriarchal history of using the symbol of Mary to subjugate women. “I agree with Elizabeth Johnson that the feminine religious imagery in the Christian tradition must be freed from the projections of male theologians and the priestly hierarchy,” Rodriguez writes. She affirms the relevance of Daly’s concern for the potentially pacifying effects of Marian imagery, even as the lived theologies of Mexican-American women present us with an alternative.<sup>32</sup> A number of other Catholic Latina feminist theologians have showcased the liberating potential of the symbol of Mary while also affirming its enduring vulnerability as a mechanism of female subjugation.<sup>33</sup> The work of these and other US Catholic feminist theologians show that the

27. Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Christology and Feminism: Can a Male Savior Help Women?” *Occasional Papers* (United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry) 1, no. 13 (1979): 5–6; cited by Johnson, “The Marian Tradition,” 117.

28. Johnson, “The Marian Tradition,” 120.

29. Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 47–70.

30. Jeannette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), xviii.

31. Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, xviii.

32. Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, xviii.

33. Natalia Imperatori-Lee explores both oppressive and liberating uses of Marian imagery in ecclesiology since Vatican II; see Natalia Imperatori-Lee, “The Use of Marian Imagery in Catholic Ecclesiology since Vatican II” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2007). Nancy Pineda-Madrid’s dissertation brings the critiques of Chicana feminists to bear on Virgilio Elizondo’s US Latino/a interpretation of Guadalupe, and in turn offers a constructive



Church's glorified images of Mary continue to serve as a mechanism of women's subjugation. Even feminist theologians who explore the symbol's empowering possibilities do so with an eye towards its persistent sexist misuses in the Church today.

### *Moral Doctrine Is Violent to Women*

De Beauvoir's third critique points a finger at Catholic moral theology's contribution to the church's teachings about women's inherent inferiority to men. The moral tradition's account of the fixed inferior nature of women stems specifically from the Aristotelian idea, refracted in Thomas Aquinas and subsequent natural law theologies, that men are the singular agents of procreativity.<sup>34</sup> Men provide the "form" of procreation, and women merely provide the material. Because women cannot procreate as perfectly as men, women are inferior. Using De Beauvoir, Daly explores two troubling trajectories that result from this assertion. First, because women contribute the "material" of procreation, women are associated with materiality itself, with flesh, and thus with sinfulness, sexual temptation, and shame. The "inferior nature" of women results in their "special sinfulness."<sup>35</sup> As Daly puts it, "the flesh that is for the Christian the hostile *Other* is precisely woman."<sup>36</sup> Women are associated with material, and all materiality with sin. Every woman who is not a Mary is an Eve, an unclean temptress who leads man to sin. If she is not a wife, she is shamed as a prostitute. The portrayal of women as "material" in creation reduces them to instruments of reproduction and temptation, limits the legitimacy of their agency, and erases the fullness of our humanity. Second, Daly notes that the basic biological fallacy that men are primary agents of procreation perpetuates women's servility to men as sexual property, with troublesome implications for moral doctrine on sexual activity and reproduction.

Catholic feminist theologians continue to interrogate the presumption of women's inferior nature and its implications for their alleged materiality and "special sinfulness." As we explored above, Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that the church's direction to suppress the embodied dimensions of women's existence, including their sexuality and reproduction, in order to reach spiritual salvation, is oppressive. In addition, theologians Sandra Schneiders and, together, Sally Reynolds and Ann O'Hara Graff further Daly's critique of Catholic moral doctrine by suggesting that feminist spirituality and women's experience can be used as tools to dismantle the oppressive understanding of women's bodies. Theological ethicist Cristina Traina goes further to

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feminist reinterpretation of the symbol; see Nancy Pineda-Madrid, "Interpreting Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mediating the Christian Mystery of Redemption" (PhD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2005). Pineda-Madrid continues to explore the oppressive and liberative multivalence of the symbol of Guadalupe in her study of the women of Ciudad Juárez who are experiencing and resisting femicide in their community; see Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 48–50.

34. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 92, a. 1.

35. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 62.

36. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 63.

show how we can reinterpret moral doctrine itself in ways that promote women's embodied experience and well-being.

Directly addressing the association of women's bodies with materiality, Sandra Schneiders argues for feminist spiritualities that reclaim "the reality and power designated by the term 'spirit' and the effort to reintegrate spirit and body."<sup>37</sup> By reclaiming "spirit," Schneiders asserts the right of women to participate in roles that moral doctrine historically associates with men and the realm of "form": reason, leadership, and authority. She encourages women to reclaim those roles, specifically in the realms of religion and culture. At the same time, because the goal of feminist spirituality is the integration of spirit and body, it must give language and legitimacy to the life-giving aspects of embodied existence that have been reduced to shame, uncleanness, and silence. Feminist spiritualities that understand God with a woman's body, such as theology or God/dess spiritualities, help women process the self-hatred and self-rejection they have learned in the Church as "inferior" women and instead see their holiness and goodness. At the heart of this spirituality is "a reclaiming of female power beginning with the likeness of women to the divine, the rehabilitation of the body as the very locus of that divine likeness."<sup>38</sup> The history of moral doctrine may be harmful to women, but women, according to Schneiders, have the spiritual power to advocate for a Church that acknowledges their full humanity, goodness, and bodily integrity.

In an essay on sin and theological anthropology, Sally Ann Reynolds and Ann O'Hara Graff explore how women have been categorically defiled through an over-identification of women with sin in the symbols of Christianity, especially the symbol of Eve. Eve represents sexuality, irrationality, and temptation. This symbol functions as the inverse to the passive, pure Virgin Mary. The authors point out, like Daly, that neither symbol reflects women's actual lived experience. Women's embodied experiences reveal that it is not their bodies that create or define sin in the world. The suffering and pain that besiege women constitute the real sin of the world. Through the lens of women's experiences, theology is able to name sin in the world, and begin the work of exorcising those demons from society.<sup>39</sup>

Extending Daly's charges against the moral tradition, Cristina Traina strives to correct the misuses of Thomistic natural law against women. Rather than focus on the ways in which moral doctrine has contributed to narratives that define women's bodies as inferior, Traina, like Lisa Sowle Cahill and Margaret Farley, shows how moral theology can be used in ways that are life-giving for women today.<sup>40</sup> Where Traina focuses

37. Sandra Schneiders, "Feminist Spirituality," in *Women's Spirituality: Resources for Christian Development*, ed. Joann Wolski Conn (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1986), 30–67 at 32.

38. Schneiders, "Feminist Spirituality," 36.

39. Sally Ann McReynolds and Ann O'Hara Graff, "Sin," in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Ann O'Hara Graff (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 161–72.

40. Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2006); Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

on Thomas she points out that, for him, there is no dualism between body and spirit. For Thomas, sense knowledge is the basis of human epistemology. This is compatible with feminist ethics in which women's embodied experience, "bodily suffering, health, pleasure, and pain ... are the first truth tests."<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Traina argues, citing Jean Porter, Thomistic justice for society begins with bodily goods: "the most basic inclinations for physical temporal survival generate the strongest obligations of nonmaleficence."<sup>42</sup> This, she argues, is compatible with the feminist stance that the maintenance of women's private health is connected to the common good, and respect for women's embodiment.<sup>43</sup> With these integrations of natural law and feminist ethics—feminist natural law—Traina interprets the goals of the later as fundamental to the former. Women's embodied experience and flourishing are not correctives to moral tradition, but foundational to it.

### *Women's Exclusion Results in Feelings of Inferiority*

Daly likewise derives from de Beauvoir's writing her fourth critique of ecclesial sexism, which asserts that women's exclusion from the hierarchy of the church "contributes significantly to the process of inculcating inferiority feelings and causes psychological confusion."<sup>44</sup> Along with overt and implicit messages of female inferiority, this exclusion conditions women to "accept a mutilated existence as normal."<sup>45</sup> It "imbue[s] the girl with a sense of *specific* inferiority."<sup>46</sup> Drawing on the social-scientific literature of her day, Daly shows that the gender stereotyping propagated by the Church results in anxiety among girls that has long-term effects on their intellectual development and inhibits social dynamics between women and men in institutions such as marriage.<sup>47</sup>

Of the critiques that Daly attributes to de Beauvoir, this appears to have had the least traction across the last fifty years of US Catholic feminist theology. However, there is no indication that the relative scarcity of theological scholarship on the psychological effects of ecclesial sexism represents a rejection of Daly's critique. More likely, it results from shifts in the feminist theoretical frameworks that Catholic theologians engaged over the last half century.<sup>48</sup> The under-engagement of this dimension

41. Cristina L. H. Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law: The End of the Anathemas* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 155.

42. Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law*, 155.

43. Traina, *Feminist Ethics and Natural Law*, 155.

44. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 65.

45. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 168.

46. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 65.

47. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 173–76.

48. For instance, at the time of the original publication of *Second Sex*, psychoanalytic theory was a primary interlocutor of feminists across academic disciplines, even among critics of psychoanalysis such as de Beauvoir herself. While psychoanalytic theory offered the groundbreaking insight that social relations—including gender relations—inform one's experience of self, its emphasis on individual psychological experience and interfamilial relations has

of Daly's project may also reflect the course of psychology itself. In a 1995 essay, Ann O'Hara Graff deems feminist research and practice in the psychological arena still "relatively new."<sup>49</sup>

Drawing on the emerging literature of feminist psychology, Graff explores the ill effects of growing up amid patriarchy for girls and women of various racial identities. However, Graff does not implicate the Catholic Church in the patriarchy that this research quantifies, as Daly did in 1968. In fact, more often than not, Catholic feminist theologians have focused on the psychological effects of oppression *outside* the church rather than tracing these struggles to ecclesial sexism itself. We see, for example, a growing body of Catholic feminist theological scholarship engaging trauma theory. This literature tends to focus on trauma that originates outside the church rather than the psychological suffering that also results from ecclesial patriarchy.<sup>50</sup>

Some US Catholic feminist theologians have recently begun to draw connections between ecclesial sexism and women's psychological suffering, however. In her 2015 essay, memorably titled, "Father Knows Best: Theological 'Mansplaining' and the Ecclesial War on Women," Natalia Imperatori-Lee gestures toward the psychological consequences incurred by Catholic women theologians as a consequence of the malicious interpretation and unfounded over-regulation of their work by ecclesial authorities. Imperatori-Lee identifies this phenomenon as "mansplaining," a term that Rebecca Solnit describes as "the persistent need of some men to explain reality, even the reality of a woman's own area of expertise, in a confrontational, clueless, and somewhat gendered way."<sup>51</sup> Solnit observes that a culture of mansplaining, which Imperatori-Lee identifies with the current ecclesial climate, assumes and reinscribes a "lack of self-assertion" in women, which—to the extent that it exists—is "a result of years of conditioning in which men assume the public world is theirs and women are

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its limits. As feminism developed, it turned from the individual to social-structural analysis, which required additional analytical tools—that of the social sciences and of other cultural theoretical frameworks. While feminists continued to recognize the "personal as political," questions of women's individual psychological experience were of lesser concern than larger structural analyses. While developments in social psychology eventually brought together the social-structural concerns of feminism and psychology, this is relatively recent.

49. Ann O'Hara Graff, "Strategies for Life: Learning from Feminist Psychology," in Graff, *The Embrace of God*, 122–37.
50. See, for example, Johann M. Vento, "Violence, Trauma, and Resistance: A Feminist Appraisal of Metz's Mysticism of Suffering unto God," *Horizons* 29 (2002): 7–22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0360966900009695>; Jennifer Erin Beste, *God and the Victim: Traumatic Intrusions on Grace and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Susan A. Ross, *Anthropology: Seeking Light and Beauty* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 123–30; Julia Feder, "Edward Schillebeeckx and Sexual Trauma: Salvation as Healing," in *Edward Schillebeeckx and the Theology of Public Life* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 215–27.
51. Natalia Imperatori-Lee, "Father Knows Best: Theological 'Mansplaining' and the Ecclesial War on Woman," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 31 (2015): 89–108 at 89, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.31.2.89>.

taught self-control, self-doubt, and self-censorship.”<sup>52</sup> The psychological violence that stems from this ecclesial dynamic in 2015 is precisely what Daly identified as a troubling dimension of ecclesial sexism in 1968. Other theologians have recently considered additional instantiations of psychological distress among Catholic women theologians that stem from the church's constructions of gender.<sup>53</sup>

Some of the most compelling, in-depth explorations of gendered psychological suffering in the church in recent years have come not from feminist theologians but from psychologists who, in response to the global clergy abuse crisis, have crossed disciplinary boundaries to comment on the violence stemming from the church's all-male hierarchy and its patriarchal doctrines. Before the abuse crisis broke, some Catholic feminists had joined other feminists to assess the connections between Christianity's exploitative patriarchal power and abuse of many kinds.<sup>54</sup> The news of the clergy abuse crisis led psychologists such as Mary Gail Frawley-O'Dea and Marie Keenan to demonstrate concretely the connections between the gendered hierarchy and theologies of the church, on the one hand, and the sexual and psychological abuse that an alarming number of male clerics and religious have inflicted on young people and children, on the other.<sup>55</sup> Looking back on Daly's keen assessment of male clerical power in view of the scandal of clergy abuse, Mary Hunt in 2014 noted that, unfortunately, “Mary Daly was always ahead of the curve.”<sup>56</sup>

### *Religion is Unnecessary for Women's Transcendence*

Lastly, Daly employs de Beauvoir to challenge the necessity of Christianity for mediating women's “transcendence.” De Beauvoir understands transcendence not as an experience of God, but an experience of the self as fully actualized. The transcendent self is active, creative, and productive. According to Daly, de Beauvoir believes that religion is not only unnecessary for this process but is often a hindrance to women's self-actualization. De Beauvoir comes to this conclusion with an examination of some

52. Imperatori-Lee, “Father Knows Best,” 93.

53. See Jessica Coblenz, “Ghosts in the Office: The Ecclesiological and Soteriological Implications of Stereotype Threat among Women in Catholic Theology,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33 (2017): 127–36, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.33.1.11>; Susan Abraham, “Mentoring (In)Hospitable Places,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33 (2017): 119–25, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.33.1.10>.

54. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1989).

55. Marie Kennan, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church: Gender, Power, and Organizational Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Mary Gail Frawley-O'Dea, *Perversion of Power: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003). Historian Philip Jenkins has a thorough, albeit somewhat dismissive, survey of feminist responses to the clergy abuse crisis in *Priests and Pedophiles: Anatomy of a Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 113–24.

56. Mary E. Hunt, “Pure Complexities: Mary Daly's Catholic Legacy,” *Feminist Theology* 22 (2014): 219–28 at 224, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735014522565>.

ascetic female saints, whom she labels “neurotic, over-emotional, narcissistic.”<sup>57</sup> Rather than empowering these women to actualize themselves in defiance of female stereotypes, religion inhibited them. De Beauvoir points to St. Teresa of Avila as an exceptional woman who achieved “transcendence” in spite of institutional location—a point with which Daly disagreed, at least in 1968.<sup>58</sup>

Even as Daly challenges de Beauvoir’s assumption that religion is ultimately a hindrance to women’s transcendence, she demonstrates the partial validity of this critique with an assessment of Catholic anthropological assertions about the nature of maleness and femaleness.<sup>59</sup> Daly locates the problem of the Christian view of female transcendence in a male–female duality in which maleness is depicted as complete selfhood, a mark of full transcendence, and women are excluded. In keeping with the Aristotelian physiology on which Thomas Aquinas draws, there is an assumption within this framework that “woman” is a “distinct species,” a second sex, that can be understood apart from men. Based on this, Daly writes that “attempts to develop a ‘theology of women’ [will] fall on their various faces because they naively assume that the sex images of a patriarchal culture infallibly correspond to ‘nature’ and to God’s will.”<sup>60</sup> Daly, in turn, calls for the development of a “theology of the man–woman relationship which rejects as alienating to both sexes the idea of a sexual hierarchy founded upon ‘nature.’”<sup>61</sup> Daly uses de Beauvoir to point out that Christianity and patriarchal anthropologies hinder women’s transcendence, even as she is hopeful in *Second Sex* that it need not always be so.

Catholic feminists have continued to challenge the notion that women’s transcendence, that is, women’s experience of themselves as fully human, depends on their institutional affiliation with hierarchical Catholicism. We look here in particular at arguments made in two compendiums of Catholic feminist theology in the United States, *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* and *Shoulder to Shoulder: New Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology*.<sup>62</sup>

In her chapter on method in the 1993 compendium *Freeing Theology*, Anne Carr argues that patriarchy and sexism in the Catholic Church have not inhibited feminist reflection and transcendence. She explains that feminist reflection begins, just as Daly did, with the recognition and fundamental contestation of how Christianity has denied the full personhood of women. In response, feminists measure the legitimacy of theology according to the criterion that it recognizes women as “subjects of authentic, full

57. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 67.

58. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 68–69.

59. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 188–89.

60. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 189.

61. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 189–90.

62. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993); Susan Abraham and Elena Procaro-Foley, eds., *Shoulder to Shoulder: New Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

humanity.”<sup>63</sup> With this basic principle of interpretation, women can “claim the center.” That is, feminist biblical interpretation and feminist theological hermeneutics can be understood not as a subgenre, but as an integral aspect of fundamental theology that begins with women’s “transcendence.”<sup>64</sup>

In *Shoulder to Shoulder*, Jeannine Hill-Fletcher, Laura Taylor, and Elena Procaro-Foley critique the necessity of the church for women’s transcendence through a look at the stark bifurcation of “Christian” and “post-Christian” identities, and between staying or leaving the tradition. “Many of us wanted to take both paths as we felt in our hearts a radical critique of the Church that refused to change and continued to control women’s bodies and reject women’s gifts, while we also feel in our souls the deep nourishment that comes from struggling and gathering and celebrating together.”<sup>65</sup> This candid reflection is predicated on the assumption that, with de Beauvoir and Daly, women do not require institutional mediation to actualize their full personhood. Still, for these theologians the tension between institutional affiliation with Catholicism and the commitment to women’s “transcendence” need not provide a binary choice. They eschew the necessity of church for transcendence while also affirming its affordances to this end.

In addition to expanding Daly’s critique by affirming women’s selfhood within or adjacent to institutional affiliation, Catholic feminists have also advocated for understandings of Catholic identity not based in a gendered hierarchy. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s “ekklesia-logy” envisions the church as a “discipleship of equals.” Based on biblical descriptions of the early Christian community, Schüssler Fiorenza reclaims the church from its androcentric and patriarchal history and interpretation and suggests instead that we read it as a community of liberation from *kyriarchy*, the multiple and intersecting hierarchal oppressions that shape our world.<sup>66</sup> In *Women–Church*, Rosemary Radford Ruether explores how contemporary women in multi-denominational feminist liturgical communities lay claim to this “ekklesia-logy” today, seeking identity in a church community that also offers redemption from patriarchy.<sup>67</sup>

## Moving “beyond” Daly’s 1968 Critiques

These examples from the last fifty years of Catholic feminist scholarship show that the critiques of sexism in the church that Daly presented in 1968 have persisted as major

63. Anne Carr, “The New Vision of Feminist Theology: Method,” in LaCugna, *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, 5–30 at 14.

64. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “Introduction,” in LaCugna, *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, 1–4.

65. Abraham and Procaro-Foley, *Shoulder to Shoulder*, 220–21.

66. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1983; New York: Crossroad, 1994).

67. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women–Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (1985; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001).

concerns in US Catholic feminist theology. We could with additional space present a great many more examples. But interestingly, Daly's substantive articulation of ecclesial sexism in *Second Sex* is rarely cited. When it is explicitly referenced, it is often only as a chronological marker in the field's development, which likely contributes to its remembrance as a historical milestone and little more. We note this not to suggest that Daly's first book is a shadow source for decades of US Catholic feminist theology, but rather to propose that the continuities between Daly's articulation of the problem of sexism in the church and the work of subsequent Catholic feminist projects indicate that Daly's assessment of ecclesial sexism was more substantive than its legacy reflects. Some of the book's central critiques remain consonant, even if the context of the book has largely faded into the past.

For all these continuities, however, a return to *Second Sex* a half-century later also illuminates how the field has moved beyond this project. And, notably, the US Catholic feminist theologians we have examined did not move beyond Daly's 1968 contribution in the way that Daly herself did; that is, their clear-eyed assessments of ecclesial sexism did not compel these scholars to leave Christianity behind altogether. Instead, upholding their dual identities as Catholics and as feminists, they sharpened assessments of ecclesial sexism and developed conceptual strategies to bridge the seeming contradictions of their faith and political commitments. In this sense, just as Daly's relationship with the work of de Beauvoir was a "yes, but—" so too, the work of US Catholic feminist theologians during the last half-century speaks a "yes, but—" to Daly's 1968 text. In the following section, we highlight two major developments that, while not unique to Catholic feminist theology in the United States, represent important developments of the field in this context since the publication of *Second Sex*.

### *Multiple and Intersecting Oppressions*

For all their continuities, the examples from the previous section already begin to display how scholars have shown the problem of sexism to be far more complicated than Daly first articulated in *Second Sex*. Following de Beauvoir, Daly's analysis of women's ecclesial oppression focuses solely on dynamics of gender, whereas the subsequent work of Catholic feminist theologians in the United States reflects growing attention to the multiple and intersecting structures of oppression that shape and hinder women's lives. These include structures of racism, xenophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, sizeism, nationalism, and colonialism, among others.

Whereas Daly acknowledges structures of oppression other than sexism in *Second Sex*, she presents them as parallels to women's oppression, not as structures that contribute to the manifold realities of sexist oppression itself. For instance, she acknowledges that "insensitivity to the situation of another through stereotypes is a widespread phenomenon, which is not confined to the problem of women. The images of the 'greedy Jew' and the 'lazy Negro' have the same effect. In each case, the victim is seen as completely 'other,' not as a person with whom one can identify or enter into



a relationship of friendship and respect.”<sup>68</sup> Daly fails to recognize how instances of racism and xenophobia like these are not only analogues to sexism; these oppressions also shape the workings of sexist oppression, a fact that women of color have long noted and which theoretical frameworks such as Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality theory have brought to the fore of feminist scholarship in recent decades.<sup>69</sup>

The parallel arrangement of sexism, racism, and xenophobia in this example from *Second Sex* glares in contrast to the shift among most US Catholic feminist theologians toward a feminism that attends to multiple and intersecting social dynamics in order to accurately address experiences of women inside and outside the church. In the scholarship treated in the previous section, we see examples of Catholic feminist theologians attending to the multiple structures of oppression that contribute to sexism and constitute women’s experiences of the world. In the broader discourse, we find additional examples as well: We cannot understand the gravity of Christianity’s stigmatization of women as sinful and dangerously sexual if we do not attend to how systematic and cultural racism in the United States disproportionately sexualize black women’s bodies, as M. Shawn Copeland demonstrates in her work.<sup>70</sup> Diana Hayes exposes the role of racism in the glorified images of womanhood inside and beyond the church, showing that black women have either been neglected as ideal women or recognized only as role models for enslaved or abused women. “Not for them was the protected pedestal of ‘true womanhood.’ They were not seen as ‘ideal’ women or wives, even for their fellow slaves,” writes Hayes.<sup>71</sup> Likewise, Teresa Delgado shows that we cannot understand the gendered consequences of the idealization of Mary in Catholicism if we do not also attend to the particular economic and sexual exploitation of the Latina women enslaved in sex trafficking.<sup>72</sup> While, to be sure, Catholic feminist theology in the United States, like other subfields in Catholic theology, must do more to attend to the effects of racism, colonialism, and other oppressions on women’s lives (especially in light of the history of Catholicism’s complicities in these and many other oppressions), scholarship in this field reflects a growing awareness of and effort to address this need.

This shift beyond *Second Sex* is apparent in the debates of recent decades concerning “women’s experience.” Daly’s 1968 project reflects feminists’ long-standing

68. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 166.

69. Throughout her career Daly’s comments on race and on transgender persons garnered intense criticism. The feminist writer and active Audre Lorde famously penned an “Open Letter to Mary Daly” to address Daly’s failure to understand racial justice as a feminist cause. See Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Ten Speed, 1984), 66–71.

70. M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

71. Diana Hayes, “Faith of Our Mothers: Catholic Womanist God-Talk,” in *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience*, ed. M. Shawn Copeland with LaReine Marie Mosley and Albert Raboteau (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 129–46 at 130.

72. Teresa Delgado, “This Is My Body ... Given for You: Theological Anthropology *Latina/mente*,” in Abraham and Procario-Foley, *Shoulder to Shoulder: Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology*, 25–47.

appeal to women's experience as a measure of whether or not a theological framework promotes, in Ruether's words, the "full humanity of women."<sup>73</sup> The realization that constructions of experience often reflect the lived realities of only some women—nearly always white, cisgender, mid-to-upper-class women—has spurred significant and sometimes radical reappraisals of the category of experience. Debates persist about the content and legitimacy of women's experience as an authenticator of Catholic theology, but today's Catholic feminist theological proposals agree on the need for attention to the manifold particularities that result from the various and intersecting social structures that condition human life.<sup>74</sup> In doing so, US Catholic feminist theologians redress some of the blind spots in Daly's project.

Attention to the multiple and intersecting structures of oppression that shape the experiences of women provides us with a more complicated profile of sexism than what Daly presents in *Second Sex*. It shows that recognizing and transforming sexism in the church requires a confrontation with Catholicism's legacy as a "white racist institution," for example—a charge famously posited against the church by the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus the same year as the book's publication and repeatedly affirmed by historians and theologians since then.<sup>75</sup> Feminist ecclesial reform thus requires that we dismantle the enduring effects and realities of white supremacy in the contemporary American church. Essays from Catholic feminist theologians in the United States and around the globe gathered in the 2009 volume *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women's Strategies for Reform* reflect the increasing attention to the need for transforming oppressive structures of race, nationalism, and class as part of dismantling the patriarchy that has been at the center of the feminist agenda for ecclesial reform since 1968.<sup>76</sup> The field's articulation of the problem of "the Church and the second sex" is thus more comprehensive—and more daunting—than ever.

73. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 18.

74. See Ann Elizabeth O'Hara, "The Struggle to Name Women's Experience: Assessment and Implications for Theological Construction," *Horizons* 20 (1993): 215–33, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0360966900027407>; Nancy Dallavalle, "Neither Idolatry nor Iconoclasm: A Critical Essentialism for Catholic Feminist Theology," *Horizons* 25 (1998): 23–42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0360966900030711>; Donna Teevan, "Challenges to the Role of Theological Anthropology in Feminist Theologies," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 582–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390306400306>; Daniel P. Horan, "Beyond Essentialism and Complementarity: Toward a Theological Anthropology Rooted in *Haecceitas*," *Theological Studies* 75 (2014): 94–117, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563913519562>.

75. "Statement of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus," in *Stamped in the Image of God: African Americans as God's Image in Black*, ed. Cyprian Davis and Jamie T. Phelps (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 111–14. See also M. Shawn Copeland, "White Supremacy and Anti-Black Logics in the Making of U.S. Catholicism," in *Anti-Blackness in Christian Ethics*, ed. Vincent W. Lloyd and Andrew Prevot (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), 61–76; Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010).

76. Colleen Griffith, ed., *Prophetic Witness: Catholic Women's Strategies for Reform* (New York: Crossroad, 2009).

### Hermeneutics and Methods

In 1982, Anne Carr observed that “the major work of Christian feminist theologians thus far has been negation, unmasking cultural and religious ideology that denies women’s full humanity.”<sup>77</sup> With its focus on the fivefold instantiations of ecclesial sexism, *Second Sex* represents one early example of the vital feminist work that Carr names. While affirming the import of “unmasking” sexism, however, Carr exhorts feminist theologians to follow the lead of feminist biblical scholarship, including the pioneering contributions of Catholic feminist Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, to reinterpret the Christian resources that have been deployed in support of sexism. With the aid of philosophical hermeneutics, Carr believes that Christian feminists can engage Christian symbols, beliefs, and practices in ways that “are both Christian and feminist, that negate and affirm, unmask and restore.”<sup>78</sup> Liberating feminist interpretations of Christianity can supplant the long-standing patriarchal ones, she suggests. Daly’s work subsequent to *Second Sex* goes in a different direction. Rather than adopting a method that allows her to interpret tradition, Daly’s later work is predicated on a clean cut from history and symbols steeped in patriarchy. From this methodological standpoint, she is able to create the entirely new lexicon and set of rituals for which she is most famous today.<sup>79</sup>

Because of Daly’s early post-Christian turn, it is easy to overlook her call in the original 1968 version of *Second Sex* for the kind of creative retrieval and reinterpretation that Carr champions. While “the reformed, democratized Church of the future is not yet here,” Daly observes, “the seeds of it are present in the living faith, hope and course of the Christian community.”<sup>80</sup> For instance, while Daly critiques the prevailing notion of God as “the old man with a beard” who is characterized by omnipotence, immutability, and traditional notions of providence that unwaveringly sanction the patriarchal status quo, she also affirms the possibility of positively reinterpreting the symbol of God in light of contemporary philosophy and other resources from the ancient Christian tradition.<sup>81</sup> In fact, Daly suggests that it is her faith in the possibility of reinterpreting Christian symbols that sets her apart from her interlocutor, Simone de Beauvoir.<sup>82</sup> Because critique, not reinterpretation, is the focus of *Second Sex*, Daly only gestures toward some of the hermeneutical trajectories that other scholars paved as they moved beyond the horizon of her project.

Indeed, what Carr foreshadowed about the importance of feminist hermeneutics for the future of the Catholic feminist project has come to fruition. Evidence of this can be found, once again, in some of the examples from our previous section. The work of US

77. Anne Carr, “Is Christian Feminist Theology Possible?” *Theological Studies* 42 no. 3 (June 1982): 279–97, at 287.

78. Carr, “Is Christian Feminist Theology Possible?” 288.

79. Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978); Daly, *Websters’ First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (Boston: Beacon, 1987).

80. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 213.

81. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 180–86.

82. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 180–86.

Catholic feminist theologians to reinterpret the symbol of Mary, the Mother of God, is predicated on the hermeneutical insight that even those Catholic symbols most often and most deceptively used to pacify women are irreducible to their ill uses. Innumerable projects provide additional examples as well. One can consider, for instance, feminist critiques and theological interpretations of the doctrine of *imago Dei*. Mary Catherine Hilkert traces the misogyny embedded in many influential articulations of humanity's *imago Dei* but also shows how the doctrine's use as a foundation for the principle of human dignity can be harnessed for a liberating feminist reinterpretation.<sup>83</sup> Following a more expansive survey of the misuses of *imago Dei* against women, Michelle Gonzalez offers a trinitarian reinterpretation of the doctrine grounded in a relational and "critical essentialist" interpretation of gender.<sup>84</sup> Anne Clifford and Rosemary Radford Ruether offer feminist reinterpretations of *imago Dei* that not only support the flourishing of women but also affirm the divinely given worth of all creatures.<sup>85</sup> Whereas Daly's rigorous textual, historical, and philosophical critiques characterize *Second Sex*, the feminist hermeneutical methods exemplified in subsequent projects represent a concrete and beneficial move beyond Daly's method in 1968.

The development of feminist hermeneutics accompanied theologians' engagement with the multiple and intersecting oppressions we outlined above and to which Daly's philosophical approach was blind. Feminist hermeneutics requires attentiveness to the particularities of experience, both as a source for reinterpretation and as a measure of interpretive legitimacy, and authentic attentiveness to women's multiple and variegated experiences illuminates multiple and intersecting structures of oppression. Just as white feminists interrogated how biased theologies erased or maligned women's realities, so too feminist theologians of color showed how white biases erase and malign certain groups of women and men of other vulnerable groups. M. Shawn Copeland, for example, draws on the narratives of black oppressed and enslaved women as a resource for reinterpreting theological anthropology and Christology. She extends the feminist critique of women's identification with sinful "flesh" by exposing how this dynamic is amplified in relation to black women, whose bodies have been perceived as exceptionally and inherently evil.<sup>86</sup> Beginning with the full humanity and sacredness of these black female bodies allows Copeland to reinterpret anthropology and Christology as liberating for and inclusive of all human bodies.

The hermeneutical claim that all truth is interpreted truth enables feminists to reinterpret the central symbols and doctrines of Christianity in life-giving rather than death-dealing

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83. Mary Catherine Hilkert, "Cry of the Beloved Image: Rethinking the Image of God," in Graff, *The Embrace of God*, 190–205.

84. Michelle Gonzalez, *Created in God's Image: An Introduction to Feminist Theological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 133–60.

85. Anne Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 241; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 19–22.

86. Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 24.

ways, all while remaining committed and faithful to the Catholic tradition. Although Daly argued in the decades following *Second Sex* that Christianity was too entrenched in patriarchal power to be interpreted anew, many US Catholic feminists claim that their reinterpretations, while new, actually return the tradition closer to the heart of Jesus' foundational, liberative message about the marginalized and oppressed.

## Conclusion

In light of Daly's fast move "beyond" Christianity after the publication of *The Church and the Second Sex*, it may surprise contemporary readers to learn that a central theme of the book's conclusion is hope. It is hope that fundamentally distinguishes Simone de Beauvoir's assessment of the Church from that of Catholic women such as Daly:

De Beauvoir was willing to accept the conservative vision of the Church as the reality, and therefore has had to reject it as unworthy of mature humanity. However, there is an alternative to rejection, an alternative which need not involve self-mutilation. This is commitment to radical transformation of the negative, life-destroying elements of the Church as it exists today. The possibility of such commitment rests upon clear understanding that the seeds of the eschatological community, of the liberating, humanizing Church of the future, are already present, however submerged and neutralized they may be. Such commitment requires courage.<sup>87</sup>

This passage shows that Daly's courageous move beyond de Beauvoir's "philosophy of despair" was not motivated by a rejection of the reality of de Beauvoir's account of the church. Daly's critical hope for the church was grounded in her conclusion that "it represents an incomplete and partial vision" of the eschatological church.<sup>88</sup> Even as her book focused on the patriarchal failings that the church imposes on the second sex, a broader, more inclusive experience of what the church was and could be was the horizon against which she wrote *Second Sex*, from its original first pages to its conclusion.

This is the hope, strengthened by the intersectional and hermeneutical advancements of the field, that we ourselves hold to today. The aim of this analysis of *Second Sex* is to appreciate the continuities between Daly's 1968 groundbreaking account of sexism in the church and the developments of US Catholic feminist theology that surpassed what the bright young theologian could have anticipated fifty years ago. By revisiting this major contribution to Catholic feminist theology in 1968 and considering its relationship to Catholic feminist theology in the United States fifty years on, we track the continuities and discontinuities that make the field what it is today.

Fifty years after *Second Sex*, the "breed of tomorrow" has many lingering questions and a great deal of work ahead. If US Catholic feminist theological analysis is to come to fruition as an intersectional discourse, we must come to terms with the white supremacy of American Catholicism, the "theological racism" that continues to hinder

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87. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 221.

88. Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex*, 223.

our discipline;<sup>89</sup> the capitalist structures that shape and limit who participates in our theological discourse; and the heteronormativity that renders Catholic ecclesial and academic workplaces hostile environments for many Church employees, theologians, and their loved ones. This work requires white feminists such as ourselves to follow the example of Catholic feminist theologians of color, who lead the field in their attention to the complexities of intersectional analysis.

We must also consider the disjunctions between the ecclesial hierarchy and the work of US Catholic feminist theologians. It is alarming to read in the pages of *Second Sex* a clear and compelling critique of “theologies of women” knowing that, five decades later, Pope Francis advances this very kind of theology as a solution to the underappreciation of women in the church.<sup>90</sup> Knowing that many theologians have repeated the critique that Daly articulated in 1968 and also proposed alternative anthropologies, the pope’s enthusiasm for a “theology of women” stands as evidence that he and those he consults on matters of gender are either unaware of or uninterested in the arguments of US Catholic feminist theology. The recent disciplinary actions against Elizabeth Johnson by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and against Margaret Farley by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith are further evidence of the disparities between US Catholic feminist theology and the views of many influential leaders in the church hierarchy.<sup>91</sup> How to compel these leaders to consider the contributions of Catholic feminist theologians with the fair-mindedness that is owed to all Catholic theologians is a challenge we continue to face.

Furthermore, US Catholic feminist theology must have an honest and critical conversation about the disparities between, on the one hand, the rich hermeneutical potential of Christian symbols, which Catholic feminist theology has demonstrated in abundance, and, on the other hand, concrete feminist reform of the church at every level. In the United States and across the globe, Catholic feminist theology has expended incredible intellectual energy on the feminist reinterpretation of Christian beliefs and practices with the intention that this scholarship would amount to a transformation of lived Catholicism. While continuing to work with and learn from the lived theologies that emerge from Catholic life “on the ground,” we must also invest

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89. See Jon Nilson, *Hearing Past the Pain: Why White Catholic Theologians Need Black Theology* (New York: Paulist, 2007); M. Shawn Copeland, “Black Theology and a Legacy of Oppression,” *America Magazine*, June 24, 2014, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2014/06/24/black-theology-and-legacy-oppression>.

90. “The church is the bride of Jesus Christ. And the Madonna is more important than popes, bishops and priests. I must admit we are a bit late in developing a theology of women. We have to move ahead with that theology. Yes, that’s true.” Quoted in “Pope’s Quotes: A Theology of Women,” *The Francis Chronicles* (blog), *National Catholic Reporter*, December 14, 2016, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pop-es-quotes-theology-women>.

91. Richard Gaillardetz, ed., *When the Magisterium Intervenes: The Magisterium and Theologians in Today’s Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012); James T. Bretzke, Richard Gaillardetz, and Julie Hanlon Rubio, “The Road Ahead: Moral Theology after the Margaret Farley Case,” *America*, September 24, 2012, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/5151/article/road-ahead>.

in the practical efficacy of our hermeneutical work through ongoing conversation about how it might better reach our communities. To the point, a recent study found that only ten percent of surveyed Catholic women in the United States reported experiences of sexism in the Catholic Church.<sup>92</sup> This evinces gross discontinuity between the state of discourse in US Catholic feminist theology and the conscientization of women in the American Church.

In light of this analysis, we view *The Church and the Second Sex* as a telling aperture through which to look back at the developments in US Catholic feminist theology over the past fifty years and one that also offers insights for looking forward. It is not the only or final view, but it is one that shows the strength of feminists, including Mary Daly, who work in the hope of dismantling the ecclesial sexism that continues to constitute the Catholic Church—our church.

### Author biographies

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92. Mark M. Gray, Mary L. Gautier, and The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, *Catholic Women in the United States: Beliefs, Practices, Experiences, and Attitudes* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 1–94 at 24, <https://cara.georgetown.edu/CatholicWomenStudy.pdf>.