L'auteure étudie d'abord les arguments principaux de Mary Daly dans Beyond God the Father*; elle est personnellement sensible à cette oeuvre car les traditions évoquées sont celles de son passé. L'auteure fut, pendant 12 ans, une religieuse catholique; en 1969 elle quitta les ordres. A travers la poésie et la prose qu'elle écrit, l'auteure contemple son itinéraire religieux. Elle connaît aujourd'hui "l'espace nouveau", ce "nouveau temps" dont parle Daly — cet espace guérisseur " 'invisible', 'inviolable', inconnu de ceux et celles qui ne l'ont pas pénétré' ".*

A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO MARY DALY

Mary Lou Soutar-Hynes

Mary Daly reveals that, as women in the church, we "have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves, the world or God." We have had the "power of *naming* stolen from us" (*Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, p.6). She describes the church as wresting from women the very functions supposedly assigned to them in the patriarchial "Divine Plan." Birth, feeding, washing, strengthening, consoling become the "sacred" preserve of men — uplifted, as she sarcastically puts it, "to a higher and more spiritual level" (p.195) and renamed as the Sacraments of Baptism, Communion, Penance, Confirmation, and Extreme Unction. Daly's message to women is clear: do not be limited by the rules, definitions, space allotted to you by patriarchy. Seize, create your own space, name your own names, tap into the power of your own BE-ing and BE-coming.

She declares that a God envisioned as exclusively male is offensive to women, implying as it does the ultimate need for submission to his will and a description of one's relationship with him in human terms. She reminds her readers that the entire theological tradition in world religions, formulated by males, has left the concerns of women ignored and unrevealed. She sees the malaise that results from this limited, sexist view of God as infecting men as well as women.

At the time she wrote *Beyond God the Father*, Daly felt that the new wave of feminism would have far-reaching effects for both men and women. She saw it as "multifaceted — but also *cosmic* and *ultimately religious* in its vision . . . reaching outward and inward toward . . . the Gods who have stolen our identity" (p. 29). The image of God in which human beings are said to be made and toward which she would see them reach is "the creative potential itself" (p. 29) within each person. Even this quality, she documents, was withheld from women, the image of God "recognized as existing unambiguously only in the male" (note 21, p. 203).

With characteristic thoroughness, Daly unmasks the "false deities" of the Church: "The God of Explanation," limiting women's role and proclaiming it to be "God's plan"; "The God of Otherworldliness," encouraging a focus on life after death, especially for women allowed so little self-realization "in this world"; "The God who is the Judge of Sin," maintaining the status quo through fostering guilt feelings and false consciences (p. 31).

She exposes the fact that women have been the victims of the dichotomizing processes of patriarchial consciousness, a "syndrome . . . making 'the Other' the repository of the lost self" (p. 33). God named as noun becomes thing, "other," static. Daly's response is to urge women's renaming of God as verb — most active, most dynamic, needing no object to limit its dynamism. The unfolding of God as verb becomes, then, an event in which women participate, creating in the process a new space and a new time. These are new dimensions existing on the boundaries and without the securities of patriarchial space and time. Venturing into them is dangerous, though infinitely safe, offering women a "participation in being as opposed to inauthenticity, alienation, nonidentity . . . nonbeing" (p. 41).

Daly demythologizes the Fall, where women are seen as the "primordial scapegoats," responsible somehow for man's "original sin" and consequently for the "tragedy and absurdity of the human condition" (p. 45). Women's refusal to be co-opted, to be cast in the role of scapegoat is, for Daly, a refusal to link self-esteem with emotional dependence on men. In fact, the fall she urges women to initiate is the "fall into freedom," a movement beyond the concepts of good and evil as defined by patriarchy. She describes it as: "a fall from false innocence into a new kind of adulthood. Unlike the old adulthood that required the arresting of growth, this demands a growing that is ever continuing, never completed" (p. 67).

Ultimately, Daly sees women's growth realized and expressed through a new sisterhood characterized by a desire to "overcome the divided self and divisions from each other" (p. 133). The new space, the liberated space, is ever-moving and becoming because it is ourselves. She sees this moving in sisterhood as a true "exodus community": "the energy source of the new sisterhood . . . is the promise

in ourselves. It is the promise in our foremothers whose history we are beginning to discover, and in our sisters whose voices have been stolen from them" (p. 159).

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

I respond to Daly's work out of a past that mirrored the traditions of which she writes. Her thoughts strike resonant chords in my journals and poems over twenty-two years. My childhood and adolescence were steeped in the doctrines and traditions of the Church. I was the product of a devout Catholic family and a traditional girls' high-school education. Just before my seventeenth birthday I entered the novitiate and, for the next twelve years, I was a Roman Catholic nun.

The Early Days

With a certain fondness and chagrin I look back at the young religious of twenty-two who wrote the following notes during a 1962 lecture on the "Role of the Religious Sister": "She lives *obedience*. (Nuns take three main vows — of poverty, chastity, and obedience) . . . Never see a person or the action of a person (when receiving an order from a Superior). The Superior is an instrument, the 'pen' in the hands of God. On *poverty*: Living community life, she frees herself from *less noble occupations* and can concentrate her life on the things of God." I have a sense of déjà vu, of strangeness, as I confront this earlier incarnation of myself.

Because my experiences verify the dichotomizing force of patriarchial consciousness, I enjoy Daly's vision of "woman's renaming of God as verb": "Women who are now experiencing the shock of non-being and the surge of self-affirmation against this are inclined to perceive our transcendence as the Verb in which we participate — live, move and have our being" (p. 34).

In my notes of 1963, I attempted to define and explore my sexuality through the chastity of spiritual motherhood: "All her energies are devoted to Christ in her apostolate of spiritual motherhood. In her life there is an ever-growing union with Christ." In practical terms, my religious superiors advised: "Watch your affections. *Use* attractions in so far as they can be *used* in the Apostolate. Accept seculars — priests, doctors, etc. as men of God. Do not diagnose feelings, forget about them. (One's) Superior should be most spiritually attractive to one."

A year earlier, I took notes from *Moments of Light*, by the Benedictine monk Dom Hubert Van Zeller: " 'Take all', we say, and when He (Christ) does, we cannot understand how He can possibly be so hard on us . . . it is only to be expected that we should find ourselves without taste for spiritual things. Taste also for natural things, for life itself, seems to leave us. There is no zest about anything we do, and there is nothing to look forward to." Zealously, I copied further: " . . . the condition of true spirituality is that we should not be pleased with ourselves. Neither pleased with ourselves in the body nor in the spirit."

Incongruously placed beneath these glum words, I had also copied a series of wryly humorous sayings. Notable among them are "Recall that self-pity is putting rouge on a corpse" and "Never give your neighbour a piece of your mind lest you soon become a mental bankrupt."

The Apostolate

In 1964, after teaching for a year, my concerns revolved around the apostolate — how to integrate my "vocation" with my growing interest in education. From a religious journal I copied sections of an article by Sister Mary Emil, I.H.M.: "Our teaching is a matter of heart as well as head. They (the works of mercy) engage us as whole persons, as women, as mothers, not as shrivelled-up school mistresses or abstracted professors." This advice, the first from a woman author quoted in my notes, differed radically from that of the Benedictine monk cited earlier.

Along with my regular work, I taught Sunday school in a poor, inner-city parish. Reflecting on my experiences with the children, I wrote:

How to stir the lethargy,
the sins unknown?
tempted. . . hungry
vital. . . drifting
Changing. . . never changing.

I saw lethargy, sin, hunger, and poverty as causally related and realize I felt I had some responsibility for the sin of others. I see myself as having accepted the concept of original sin, the "indelible stamping on the soul," from which each person had to be freed. Somehow it seemed part of my role to help with the freeing.

In 1965, I wrote a poem entitled "Dedication":

Union . . .oneness
use, abuse and fruitful hurts tearing
at the heart,
All
Weakness . . . blunders
zeal . . . love
Are
uplifted, crushed. . .
used in the Glorious Plan.

Grant, Lord, constant awareness of
the fruitful power of all.

Keep me living, loving, . . . vibrant,
Far from time's stagnant waters,
Laying hold on that for which you
have laid hold on me.

I seemed to be searching for a way to accept and understand the parts of myself that did not fit the pattern to which I was struggling to conform, trying to accept what Daly calls the role of "scapegoat." I hear now the violence of the language — "crushed," "abuse" — the incongruity of "fruitful hurts."

I knew then that I did not fit but could not yet articulate the truth. Rather, I chose to find a way to make whole, to rationalize the struggle — internalizing the blame and guilt for the person I was experiencing myself to be, a process described by Daly as one of the "side effects of women's internalization of identity as 'the other' " (p. 51).

By July of 1969, I had evolved to the point where I could make the break with the community. My writing reflects the period of progression:

1966 —

a sunset. . . calls
Yearning to free chains too
uninterested to leap in answer.

1967 —

Tumultuous
blundering. . .
through hazy deeps
as yet too small
for air.

1968 —

Somewhere
is
hope
though
crushed. . .
wrung. . .
oozed
through
life's deep pit
of
purple. . .
haunting
sorrow.
Somewhere
is light.

A Sense of Self

The 1967 poem "Woman" emerges from someone who attempted to define herself through spiritual motherhood; whose attention was focussed on Daly's "God of Otherworldliness"; whose life was a mystery to be clarified only by trusting in the "God of Explanation"; a person whose role in the patriarchal church, in life, was to be accepted as "God's plan," "God's will."

○ ○ ○

Woman,
whole. . .
entire
fruitful in all
yearning to give birth. . .
to
conceive
The Other.
Channel graced and gracing,
the eternal giver. . .
risking love
that she
might
truly worship.
Mysterious. . .
shrouded. . .
called. . .
and
led unseen;
floundering in victory. . .
uncertain in triumph. . .
trustful
in
the face of passion. . .
rooted
in
Faith.

○ ○ ○

Ten years later I wrote "Scorpio Woman," a poem that speaks of the solidarity of women, celebrates our collective vision, our wisdom, and our bonds with the forces of nature.

○ ○ ○

We are a life-force,
you and I
we
sculpt our worlds
unleashing
wholeness. . .

We see visions
in the fractured dusts of clay
and
wisdom in the night forests
burning.

We are the ocean
and the seas' fierce tides
subdued
and
nurturing beauty. . .

our reefs form mystic circles
and
our waves fan deep
caressing distant shores.

Today I know the "new space," the "new time" of which Daly speaks, its "center the very lives of women, whose experience of becoming changes the very meaning of center. . . that 'invisible,' 'inviolable' healing space unknown to those who have not entered it" (p. 40). This "new time" seems to transcend the boundaries of patriarchal time. It is, indeed, as Daly so aptly describes, "women's *own* time. . . It is our *life-time*" (p. 43). The poem that follows flows from this new time, this inviolable, healing space:

You are my thought
as each day's waves recede
warm, pliant shadows of your
moon's revealing
white with light,
their traces etched in feeling.

○ ○ ○

You play your melodies
with silent hands,
your moonlight-music filtering
the sands.

○ ○ ○

Softly, my shores
renounce their liquid shield;
the tide withdraws,
the seabed lies revealed.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Further Reading:

Mary Daly. *The Church and the Second Sex.* With a New Feminist Post-Christian Introduction. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975. (first printing, 1968).

— *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1973.

— *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1978.

Mary Lou Soutar-Hynes, a Jamaican-Canadian living in Toronto for fourteen years, is an English teacher, poet, and Doctoral student. She is a consultant in immigrant education and race relations.