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## Transcendence in Christian (Eco)feminist<sup>1</sup> Hermeneutics

*Abstract:* The paper addresses the question of how the transcendence of God, which affirms that God is both »within« and »outside« the world, both immanent and transcendent, could be perceived from the perception of Christian (eco)feminism and its ontology of the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings in the web of life. Later it attempts to rethink divine transcendence in relation to modes of human self-transcendence. The Christian (eco)feminist imagination continuously stands in need of healthy and hopeful ways of (re) thinking about God. From this perspective, the paper also considers the shift in the theological basis from a doctrine of creation to Christology and its doctrine of incarnation. Such a shift consequently transforms relationships in such a way as to address the imbalances of power and privilege that are objects of critique by Christian (eco)feminists. In these terms thinking of God as a Trinity provides an important resource for Christian (eco)feminist theology. The paper opens with a conceptual outline of the different models of understanding (and rethinking) the idea of transcendence, immanence and incarnation through the lens of Christian ecofeminism.

*Key words:* Christian (eco)feminism, transcendence, immanence, incarnation, interconnectedness, relationality

*Povzetek:* **Transcendence v krščanski (eko)feministični hermenevtiki**

V prispevku izpostavljamo vprašanje razumevanja transcendence Boga, ki predpostavlja, da je Bog tako »znotraj« kot tudi »zunaj« sveta, tako imanentni kot tudi transcendentni. To vprašanje izpostavljamo skozi prizmo krščanskega (eko)feminizma in njegove ontologije temeljne medsebojne povezanosti in soodvisnosti vseh živih bitij v mreži življenja. Prispevek nadalje poskuša preučiti razumevanje odnosa med božjo transcendenco in človeško samo-transcendenco. Krščanska (eko)feministična paradigma poskuša misliti zdrave in upajoče načine umevanja krščanskega Boga. V nadaljevanju se tako osredotočamo na pomen premika teologije od doktrine stvarjenja h kristologiji in doktrini o inkarnaciji

<sup>1</sup> (Christian) ecofeminism is anything but a monolithic phenomenon. There are many types of ecofeminist religious thought, and tensions by all means exist between different eco-feminist theological camps (reformers, revolutionaries, womanists, etc.) This paper will focus only on the voices of the prominent Christian ecofeminists who stay within Christianity and reveal their critical approaches.

(učlovečenju). Takšen premik preoblikuje razumevanje odnosov, da se ti posledično premaknejo k vprašanju neenakomerne porazdelitve moči in morebitnih diskriminatornih vzorcev, ki so predmet kritike krščanskega (eko)feminizma, s čimer postanejo vidni in prepoznavni. V tem kontekstu je izjemnega pomena prav vprašanje razumevanja Boga v luči trinitaričnosti, ki je pomemben vir za krščansko (eko)feministično teologijo. Osrednja nit prispevka je obravnava različnih modelov razumevanja (in kritičnega razmisleka) transcendence, imanenence in inkarnacije z vidika krščanskega (eko)feminizma.

*Ključne besede:* krščanski ekofeminizem, transcendenca, imanenca, inkarnacija, medsebojna povezanost, odnosnost

## 1. Introduction

The basic starting point of this paper is the question of how the transcendence of God could be perceived from the perception of Christian (eco)feminism and its ontology of the fundamental interconnectedness of all beings in the web of life.<sup>2</sup> The incarnation, or taking of flesh, by God in the person of Jesus Christ emphasized the immanent nature of the divine, and in this act of incarnation we can see the notion of a possible bridge between transcendence and immanence. Immanence, or the notion that God dwells in creation, has often been played down by Christian theology. However, the manner in which the incarnation occurred has lent itself to an emphasis on the transcendent, since God »sent down« his son and placed him in the body of the Virgin. From the perspective of Christian (eco)feminist theology, it would be wrong to suggest that Christian theology has not placed any emphasis on the immanence of God, and indeed it has been a frequent theme in the writings of the mystics; the greater emphasis has, however, been on the transcendent. (Isherwood 1996a, 106–107)

From this standpoint, Christian (eco)feminist theology wishes to rethink the idea of immanence and place it in the centre of the weaving of theology. It understands God as part of the evolutionary process of the created order, and as its Creator, God would not stand apart from it. This has direct consequences for many areas of theology. For example, Christology can be reimaged from seeing the Christ descending to viewing the Christ growing up the divinizing process of communities and the individuals within them. Ethics can no longer be seen as »sent down« but once again must be experienced as growing out of the creative immanence that exists between people. Here the importance of relationality is emphasized. Relationality emerges as a key concept in (eco)feminist theology, and particularly in (eco)feminist ethics. It includes the concepts of interdependence and mutuality.

<sup>2</sup> The web of life is a quite widespread metaphor originating in ecofeminism and poetically denoting the dynamics of the collective female view of a world of interconnected subjectivity.

In some schools of feminist discourse it also suggests a special relationship between women and nature. It also implies a call for the reconceptualization of sacred symbols to take account of immanence and to forge new relationships between the deity, human beings and the Earth. Carol Gilligan (1982) argues that women have a distinctive *modus operandi* in ethics. This has become the classic statement of relationality. She shows that women display different perspectives on the self, relationships and morality than those described by traditional theories of moral development. This discussion is brought a stage further by (eco)feminists. Mary Grey (1989) proposes a »metaphysics of connection«, which begins with an understanding of redemption as self-affirmation and right-relationship, and which empowers ecological healing and growth.

A feminist vision which stresses the importance of relationality recognizes the need for the reformulation of the meta-narratives of Western culture. Rosemary Radford Ruether (1992) argues that, in the quest for the healing of the Earth, we need to create new narratives which will evoke eco-justice and endorse the metaphysics of connection. This leads naturally to the reconceptualization of primary sacred symbols, so that human talk about the divine will inspire relationality. Carter Heyward (1982) suggests conceiving the Christian God as a power-in-relation model which ought then to be mirrored in egalitarian and just relationships in society. In this light, placing the emphasis on divine immanence consequently requires the construction of a new relationship between humanity and the rest of the created order, since the latter conveys the divine as much as the former.

The search for confirming Christian spirituality, which promotes the immanence of God, the sacredness of this world and the wholeness of body, sensuality and sexuality, is in close connection with the question of Christian (eco)feminist understanding of incarnation (Ivy Singh 2003, 17).

This paper, with the help of methodology from the hermeneutic key of Christian (eco)feminist theology, explores and analyzes the connection between the concepts of transcendence and immanence. In this context, the focus is on the authors who represent a constructive, (eco)feminist voice within Christianity and represent different models of understanding (and rethinking) of the ideas of transcendence, immanence and incarnation within a Christian (eco)feminist perspective.

## **2. Indwelling presence of God in humans and nature – the model of the world as the body of God**

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Embodiment and personal experience are of big importance in feminist hermeneutics. Feminist theology rejects the Greek dualism of spirit and matter, and so finds problematic the patriarchalisation of the transcendent nature of God. The patriarchal view of Christianity is seen as being keen to preserve the transcendence of God as a central component in creating a religious hierarchy on Earth. From

this standpoint, those who move from the attachment to earthly things and towards the transcendent God are seen as worthier than those who remain connected with the Earth. The patriarchalised side of Christianity has, through the lens of feminist theology, labelled women as earthy and therefore claimed that since they are lower in the hierarchy they cannot reflect the transcendent God. This kind of emphasis on transcendence has also had negative effects on the understanding of nature and its respect in patriarchal theology. The concept of power over<sup>3</sup> is criticized here. Lisa Isherwood made a strong statement that

»feminist theologians consider personal experience to be the starting point for theology and this has implications for our view of transcendence. We experience in and through our bodies, and so experience the immanence of the divine; to suggest that God is ultimately transcendent is perhaps the greatest illusion of all.« (1996b, 227)

The question of God's transcendent immanence is closely connected to the understanding of God's presence in the created world, in terms of the indwelling presence of God. Here the core of the (eco)feminist ethics of relationality – the interconnectedness of all beings in the web of life – plays a part. Rosemary Radford Ruether understands ecological interdependence in the sense of a life-giving web as a pantheistic or transcendentally immanent web of life. This common source, in her opinion, fuels and maintains a continual renewal of the natural life cycle, and at the same time allows and binds us to fight the exploitative forms of hierarchical relationships, and to strive for the establishment of renewed relationships of mutual acknowledgement. (1992, 260)

Into this interconnectedness, Ivone Gebara echoes the Trinitarian understanding of God. In her interpretation, the concept of the Holy Trinity does not translate as a revelation from above that should be understood as an eternal, unquestionable truth, incompatible with the experience of everyday life, but as that which is continually constructed anew through everyday experiences of the relationships within the web of life, and as such keeps acquiring new looks and new faces. (Radford Ruether 2005, 113)

Sallie McFague (in her book *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*) uses different models to depict God in relation to creation. She developed her critical Christian ecofeminist theology around the image of the world as the body of God, God as mother, God as lover, and God as friend. She compares the

<sup>3</sup> Feminist theology differentiates between three kinds of power: »power over«, »power within«, and »power with«. Power over is the basic mode of power of patriarchal societies. It expresses the logic of domination by which some, mostly elite males, dominated women and subjugated classes and races, as well as the non-human world. This kind of power is fundamentally competitive. The more power one side has, the less the other side has. Power within, by contrast, is a process by which dominated people shake off the control of others and their own realization of the powerlessness and inferiority projected on to them, laying hold of their own innate power and goodness. Power with is the development of ways to share power which do not negate others in order to affirm oneself, but can mutually affirm one another, while being able to acknowledge the special talents of particular people. In this relation of mutual empowerment each person flourishes by also promoting the flourishing of others.

love of God to a mother's love, and what the mother God gives is life itself. God as the mother of the universe is interested in all forms of life. She argues that humanity consists of both male and female, and so if we have to understand God in terms of the image of God, then both male and female images are important. She argues:

»God as the giver of life, as the power of being in all being, can be imaged through the metaphor of mother and of father. Parental love is the most powerful and intimate experience we have of giving love whose return is not calculated: it is the gift of life as such to others. Parental love wills life /... / parental love nurtures what it has brought into existence, wanting growth and fulfilment for all. This agapic love is revolutionary, for it loves the weak and vulnerable as well as the strong and beautiful /... / parental love is the best metaphor we have for imaging the creative love of God.« (1987, 103)

For Sallie McFague, the doctrine of creation comes from the model of God as mother. She highlights an alternative view that »creation is a physical event; the universe is bodied forth from God, it is expressive of God's very being. It is not something alien to or other than God but is from the womb of God, formed through gestation.« (110) This implies that the universe and God are neither totally distant nor totally different. In the second model, God as lover, she points out that those who believe in God as love find it difficult to accept God as lover. She explains this model as »a God who relates to all that is, not distantly and bloodlessly but intimately and passionately, is appropriately called lover. God as lover is one who loves the world not with the fingertips but totally and passionately.« (114; 197)

This model implies that God loves the world and needs it, and God as lover is interested in the wellbeing of the entire cosmos. It also implies that God wants us to help to redeem the world, which is very different from the traditional view of salvation. The third model of God, God as friend, deals with the more intimate, free and reciprocal relationship. She says that the basis of friendship is freedom, whereas all other relationships are bound with duty or utility or desire. She writes:

»If God is the friend of the world, the one committed to it, who can be trusted never to betray it, who not only likes the world but has a vision for its wellbeing, then we as the special part of the body – *the imago dei* – are invited as friends of the friend of the world to join in that vision and work for its fulfilment.« (165)

In *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, Sallie McFague moves on to develop an organic model of theology from the Earth perspective which challenges the classic hierarchical, anthropocentric and androcentric, individualistic, dualistic models of theology, and their complicity with the current ecological crisis. The model of the world as the body of God represents McFague's way of thinking of

God's transcendence in an immanent way that is »the world is our meeting place with God« (1993, vii). Her development of anthropology does not focus on human beings only in relationship to God, but

»starts with our earthly context: our inter-relationships and interdependence with all other creatures on our planet as well as our important differences from other life forms /... / because the earth is our only home and the home of all other beings as well« (34).

Her doctrine of incarnation, the belief that God is with us here on earth, is radicalized beyond Jesus of Nazareth to include all matter – that God is incarnated in the world: »God is the breath or spirit that gives life to the billions of different bodies that make up God's body. But God is also the source, power, and goal of everything that is.« (xi)

The incarnation, in terms of the union of divinity with humanity and the embodiment of the Christian God in the earthly form of Jesus Christ, could be perceived through her lens as the act of relationality that deepens and radicalizes us at the same time:

»The liberating, healing and inclusive ministry of Jesus that overturns hierarchical dualisms, heals sick bodies, and invites the outcast to the table, should in our time be extended to a new poor – nature.« (xii)

The shift from an anthropocentric theological paradigm to a so-called »life-centred theological paradigm«, in which God's entire creation, including women and nature, become the subject of theologising occurs<sup>4</sup>. Ecofeminist theologians presuppose that this dialogic paradigm will mutually enrich and critically correct us, and thus contribute to the life of God's whole creation. The indwelling presence of God in humans and in nature is understood in terms of the model of the world as the body of God. Because of this Christian (eco)feminism considers land a sacrament of God.

### 3. The Holy Trinity, transcendence and the question of the feminine

Christian belief is in a God who is a Trinity of love, active both towards the world and within itself in its internal relationships between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The notion of perichoresis (co-inherence, mutual loving interchange) has been used from the seventh century onwards in respect of the Trinity, that is the »dance« of divine love which flows in constant motion from and through one to the other of the divine »persons«. God is ultimately unhindered in love, in the divine life itself, in creation, in incarnation and in the liturgy and sacramental life

<sup>4</sup> This perception could be linked with the understanding of transcendence from the light of the process thought that God is the active relationship between the ideal and the actual, Lenart Škof refers to. (2015, 105)

of the church. The Trinity has thus been associated both with the intra-personal and with the personal self-in-relation. (Sorč 2009; Moltmann 2010)

Ioanna Sahinidou also reclaims the patristic Christological use of perichoresis to show how we could bring together different entities, such as God and nature, look at them in unity, as the one person of Christ, and acknowledge the perichoresis between divine and human, divine and nature, while not confusing their identities. Christological perichoresis supports the idea that the whole of creation will be included in God's recreated cosmos, responding to the redeeming power of Christ who became flesh, entering the web of life as a creature. (2015, 118–119)

From the perspective of feminist theology, one important theological rule is that God transcends both sex and gender.<sup>5</sup> The Divine Persons are not feminine nor masculine. They transcend gender as a Trinity. However, their transcendence of gender makes them equally available to all. God came as a man, but can return to any of us at any time, whether male or female. From this standpoint, Ann Loades has suggested that the important goal for feminist theology is

»to overcome the deep unease in formal expressions of belief about the association of the female and the feminine with the godlike. /... / And to negotiate the associated difficulty in thinking that divine transcendence is compromised by associating God with the ›feminine‹, which in turn genderizes appropriate ways of thinking and experiencing the divine presence and immanence, sacramental or otherwise.« (1996, 228)

From a feminist perspective, the search for a compelling feminine image in *the Bible*, especially that of Lady Wisdom, is put forward here. In the Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom literature, beginning with *the Book of Proverbs*, God's Wisdom is personified as a woman (8:1-9). As many biblical scholars now recognize, some of the principal *New Testament* passages about the incarnation (including John 1:1-18 and Col 1:15-20) are rooted in this Jewish Wisdom tradition, depicting Jesus as the incarnation of divine Wisdom (1 Cor 1:30).

As far as the feminist polemics about a suitable theological language are concerned, the research by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who professed the God of the Biblical tradition anew, is of the utmost importance. Schüssler Fiorenza complements the discoveries made by Phyllis Trible in connection with the findings on *rahamim*,<sup>6</sup> the womb of compassion and God's eros. Schüssler Fiorenza revives the religious image of the past which, in the Biblical heritage of wisdom literature and evangelists, used to denote the female image of God as Sophia – wisdom – and as Jesus' Sophia deity. (1995, 198–243)

<sup>5</sup> By the term gender is denoted: (1) what any given society makes of the complexity of biological differences between women and men, and (2) gender as grammatical classification.

<sup>6</sup> The Slovene philosopher Lenart Škof also calls attention to the meaning of *rahamim*: »The Hebrew language knows for God's compassion the root ›rhm‹, which in the singular (*raham*, *reham*) carries the meaning of the (female) womb, while in the plural, as *rahamim*, it conveys the meaning of ›motherly sentiment, compassion‹. This means that a mother's body was originally understood as the seat of compassionate feelings.« (2002, 54)

The renewal of the Sophia tradition has considerably enriched the female affirmation of God, since Sophia/Wisdom is transcendent and immanent (Sladek 2017, 110). According to the wisdom tradition, she was with the Lord before he began to create the earth (Pr 8:22-30),<sup>7</sup> and she was pleased with his world and pleased with its people (Pr 8:31); she set her tent up among the descendants of Jacob (Sir 24:8-12) and encouraged them to love justice, do what is right and keep the Lord in mind (Wis 1:1). The Biblical tradition regarding Sophia/Wisdom to which Schüssler Fiorenza called attention was complemented by numerous women scientists who studied its roots in the early female figures of deity and its appearance in Jewish, Christian and other wisdom traditions, as well as its influence on the lives of women. Sophia language and imagery have enabled women to profess God in a way that vitalizes their souls, sharpens their vision and gives new meaning to their ecstasies. What we should not forget, though, in this process of restoration, is that much of the Sophia lore was formed in androcentric traditions and should therefore also be studied critically. (243)

From this perspective, feminist theologians argue that Jesus incarnated both his »Father« (God) and his »Mother« (Wisdom) in his own person (also Matt. 11:19; Luke 7:35). God's Wisdom and God's Spirit are closely linked and even equated in biblical literature (Wis 7:22) and the argument that the Spirit is an archetypal image of the Divine Feminine is also put forward by Christian feminist theologians. Here the importance of the »metaphor of the body as the icon of the divine«,<sup>8</sup> proclaimed by Rosemary Radford Ruether, also comes into play. The body metaphor explains the inter-connectedness between women and nature. She calls this metaphor *shekinah*: »Woman/body/nature, no longer as the icon of sin and death, but as the icon of the divine, the divine Shekinah, the Wisdom of God manifest, alive in our midst.« (1983, 259–260)

*Shekinah* is *the Old Testament* theophanic expression, which indicates the presence of Yahweh in creation. In *the New Testament* also, particularly in Paul's writings, body concept is well explained as the »body as the image of God« (1 Cor 15:39). Paul uses different terms to denote different meanings such as *sarx*,<sup>9</sup> and *soma*.<sup>10</sup> The nearest Pauline term to Rosemary Radford Ruether's body metaphor is *sarx/soma*. *Soma* refers not only to an organ of the body, but also to its members altogether as a unit. It is a term very close to personality. This shows that the

<sup>7</sup> Sophia/Hokhmah thus assumed the status of goddess or of the female pole of »God«, who is together with YHWH the co-creator of all creation. In this case Sophia represents »Lady Wisdom« or »Woman Wisdom« (Clifford 2001, 105).

<sup>8</sup> In this context we could in fact put forward a question – regarding the meaning of the Chalcedonian Definition – *theon aléthós kai anthrópon aléthós* – truly God and truly a human being. We can always ask ourselves if ancient authors, when they wrote *anthrópos* or *homo* meant »human being regardless of gender« or if they were more often thinking of »male men«, but the word *anthrópos* refers to a human being of either gender (women or man). And throughout the Chalcedonian definition itself, all the terms used to refer to Christ's human nature are derived from *anthrópos*, not *anér* (*andras*), the word for »man«.

<sup>9</sup> Gal. 4:13; 1 Cor 7:28; 2 Cor 12:7; Col 2:1.5; Eph 2:15, Col 1:22.

<sup>10</sup> Gal 6:17; 1 Cor 9:27, 13:3.2 Cor 10:10; Col 2:23.



term *soma*, which refers to the personality and personhood, is very relevant to ecofeminist theology. (Ivy Singh 2003, 23) This metaphor, therefore, is profoundly important in explaining the indwelling presence of God both in humans and in nature.

#### 4. Conclusion: enacting<sup>11</sup> the divine

While feminist theologians have advanced radical reformulations of the traditional symbols of God, and have clearly explained the social transformation that they want such new symbolism to effect, they have been less interested in exploring the equally radical ontologies that their reformulations imply. Despite some difficulties with some forms of ontology there are good reasons for exploring the being of God in feminist theology. It is useful to explore the ontology behind feminist God-talk because the feminist perspective on the being of God may represent a revolutionary way of thinking about the divine, which sheds light on the future of God-talk in feminist theology and beyond.

Richard Grigg has highlighted another important characteristic of feminist theology in terms of understanding the divine, saying that »there is an implicit motif in much of current feminist theology, according to which God is a relation that human beings choose to enact« (1994, 507). As he elaborates further on, this does not entail reducing the divine in Feuerbachian fashion to an unconscious, alienating projection, or dismissing it as a mere imaginary entity. On the contrary, essential constituent elements of the divine may genuinely transcend the human – both nature and the »power of being« are familiar candidates in feminist thought – and one actualizes a relationship to them consciously and in a way that is productive not of alienation but of positive transformation. But neither, in this current of feminist theology, is God conceived as an independent reality. Human beings do not simply enact a relation to the divine, they enact the divine itself, insofar as God is a particular transformative relationship between the self and nature, or the self and the power of being, or perhaps the self and other selves. This pattern seems much closer to Martin Buber's observation that the »I« is formed by the relationships in which it is engaged: the »I« of the »I-IT« relationship is a different »I« from the »I« of the »I-Thou« relationship (Buber's position obviously has influenced a large number of feminist religious thinkers: Carol Christ, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Judith Plaskow, and Mary Daly, among others). Human beings choose to enact the divine, but they are to a large degree creatures of this relationship and not just its creators. Or, as Richard Grigg has put it:

»Traditional Western theism understands the divine as a transcendent

<sup>11</sup> »Enact« can mean, first of all »to legislate«, which carries a creative, active sense. But »enact« can also mean »to put on a play«, in which case the people who »act« are not acting as autonomous ego but are the vehicles for something else, namely, the identities that they are representing on stage. Similarly, to enact the divine is to actualize the self's creative powers at the same time that the self is formed by something beyond itself.

Supreme Being. Modernity negates theism by reducing it to a projection of human subjectivity. The feminist position negates this negation by conceiving of the divine as neither an independent supernatural being nor a product of misplaced human imagination, but as a way of existence, a particular kind of relationship that human beings can enact between themselves and others and between themselves and non-human beings and forces. /... / The divine is a relationship that human beings decide to enact. Theology's task, then, is not to gain access to and make claims about some objective entity that it naively supposes is ›out there‹, but to actualize the divine.« (1994, 508)

This claim follows naturally on the feminist inclination to pursue a theology that is, in the fullest sense of the phrase, a theology »from below«, a theology that is openly a function of women's experiences and goals. It is important to note that this conception of the divine as a relationship enacted by human beings goes beyond the vision of the ultimate, found in thinkers such as Heidegger and Tillich. Both (Heidegger and Tillich) envision a non-objective ultimate, and both tie the ultimate to the human subject. From the feminist perspective that we are exploring, human beings choose to enact the divine.

All of this implies a rejection of the traditional image of the divine as a supernatural individual who can stand outside the finite. At the same time, there is a type of transcendence that can be combined with the emphasis on immanence so essential to feminist theology, at least according to thinkers such as Radford Ruether. She rejects the transcendent imperial God of patriarchal Christianity in favour of the root human image of the divine as the primal matrix, the great womb within which all things, Gods and humans, sky and Earth, human and non-human beings are generated ... Here the divine is not up there as abstracted ego, but beneath and around us as the encompassing source of life and renewal of life. (1983, 48–49)

In this image of what Radford Ruether would have us call »God/ess«, the divine is clearly immanent, but also all-encompassing, and also transcendent to some degree (85). The term »primal matrix« suggests an embracing framework or ground, something beyond us that we are nonetheless a part of. The underlying logic of feminist theology leads to the conclusion that human beings enact the divine. In *Weaving the Visions*, Judith Plakow and Carol P. Christ make it clear that relationality is constitutive of human beings for feminist theologians, and they note a connection between the feminist emphasis on relationality and that on divine immanence. The self is essentially relational, inseparable from the limiting and enriching contexts of the body, feeling, relationship, community, history, and the web of life. The notion of the relational self can be correlated with the immanent turn in feminist views of the sacred: in both cases connection to that which is finite, changing, and limited is affirmed.

The grace of God always comes to us in, with, and through each other. As Carter Heyward says, God is the power of relation (1989, 299). Radford Ruether claims that God/ess is experienced »in and through relationships, healing our broken re-

lations with our bodies, with other people, with nature» (1983, 71). It is when we overcome the destructive mind-set of man versus woman, rich versus poor, and spirit versus matter – dualisms that separate us from nature and from other human beings – that we find ourselves in relation to divinity: »Community with God/ess exists precisely in and through this renewed community of creation.« (163) The cosmic matrix of matter/energy is not God/ess, then, but it is a crucial element in the being of God/ess. Other feminist theologies exhibit a similar pattern. Mary Daly, for instance, often appears to equate the divine with the »power of being«.

The understanding of the transcendence of the Christian God in the earthly form of Jesus Christ through the lens of Christian (eco)feminist theology is always centred on the redemptive community, as an ongoing and expanding movement of the emancipation of women and men from systems of domination, as the location of the Christic reality. Feminist Christology also deconstructs the patriarchal concept of the Trinitarian God as Father, Son and Spirit. Feminists turn to a wisdom-centred understanding of the divine transformative presence in history that evokes the feminine symbol, Sophia, as its central focus of God-human relationships. The Wisdom-God can be seen as mother and father in a way that goes beyond mere gender inclusivity to the emancipatory transformation of gender symbols.

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