

**Choosing Limits, Limiting Choices:
Women's Status and Religious Life**

A conference presented by the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute
and JOFA: the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance
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Loyal Daughters and Liberated Women: An Interfaith Discussion

Welcome: Shulamit Reinharz, founding director, Hadassah-Brandeis Institute

Introduction: Carol Newman, president, JOFA

Moderator: Bernadette Brooten, Brandeis University

Riffat Hassan, University of Louisville

Sister Mary C. Boys, Union Theological Seminary

Tova Hartman, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem

Shulamit Reinharz: Hello, everyone. Welcome. *Shavuah tov*. My name is Shulamit Reinharz. I'm a professor at Brandeis and the founding director of the Hadassah Brandeis Institute. I'm delighted that this year's conference is a partnership. The partnership is between the two organizations whose banners are hanging on the wall behind me: JOFA, the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, was at one point thought of as an oxymoron, but is now seen as something very significant and clear. I can barely say the word "Orthodox" without saying the word "feminist" right after it. And the Hadassah Brandeis Institute (HBI), which is itself a coalition between Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America—350,000 members strong, 90 years old—and Brandeis University—4,000 students strong at any given year and 55 years

old. I'm delighted that JOFA and the HBI have decided to partner to discuss some very important questions: the place of feminism in world religions, the place of orthodoxy in world religions, how they combine, and what the potential is for unlocking world conflicts by working from within religion. I'm delighted that we have a diverse audience here tonight. Some of the people are interns from the HBI, others are Lily Safra interns from the past, Brandeis faculty, Brandeis students, community members, New York people, and JOFA board members. Welcome to all of you.

This conference may feel a little different from some other conferences—*mah nishtanah hakinus hazeh?* Why is this conference different from others? Each session is extremely focused. There will be no rambling; there will be no going off in tangents, because we really want to understand very clearly the issues at hand. There have been many conference-call discussions about every single session until each is finely tuned and finely honed. Another thing that is perhaps special about this conference is that we're not dealing on the level of theory, although we will get to theory at times. Our primary focus is to understand the woman's experience: what does it feel like to be engaged with these issues as your own lived experience. As we say in sociology, what is the phenomenology of it—not from the outside, but from the inside. To study things from the inside, as women experience them—which is not necessarily the way they are defined from the outside, as they should be—is one of the contributions of feminist research methods and of feminism in general to the academy. And so I am delighted that we are having this conference. I hope that many of you will be able to participate tomorrow also.

And now I would like to introduce to you Carol Newman, the president of JOFA.

Unfortunately, Carol has lost her voice somewhere between New York and Boston, so she is going to get some help in making her remarks. Thank you very much.

Carol Newman: I cannot deliver my entire speech, and someone will do it for me, but I do have to thank a few people. When six women from HBI and JOFA met in New York last year to talk about collaborating on a conference, little did I imagine such an outcome. The response has been overwhelming. The theme of the conference has generated enormous excitement. I have had emails from all over the United States, from Los Angeles, Boston, Washington, Maryland. People stopped me in New York in the street saying that they wished they could come or, even better, that they were coming. It has been so gratifying. This is a first, and, I hope, not a last. I just want to thank the people who made this possible.

First, working from two different states was not easy and could never have been done without our Boston contingent, Debby Finkel and Nancy Vineberg, and our New York contingent, Shanah Finmann and our indefatigable executive director, Robin Bodner.

Now for our conference committee. First of all, our chair with the vision to bring this to JOFA, Sylvia Barrack Fishman. If I had the words and could go on, I could tell you about those conference calls. They were the most exciting things that happened to me this year, just being able to listen in to these women and see their minds develop. They were extraordinary: Janet Dolgin, Michele Friedman, Idana Goldberg, Blu Greenberg, and Norma Baumel Joseph. I thank them all for such an extraordinary, extraordinary job, and now I turn this microphone over to Audrey Trackman, our vice president and treasurer.

Audrey Trackman: Before I read Carol's prepared remarks, I want to tell you why Carol can't speak tonight. It's a story about Carol, and it's also a story about JOFA. During the past two weeks, I think with the exception of Shabbat, Carol has not had a phone away from her mouth or her ear, because we've been trying to garner support for an ad about *agunot* that will appear in *The Jewish Week* and *The Jewish Press*. We've tried to get a huge number of organizations across the spectrum of the Jewish community and hundreds of individual names to support those women who are victims of *Get* refusal, where men will not give them Jewish divorces. We are also working to help prevent the emergence of new *agunot*. So if you learn anything about JOFA tonight and tomorrow, I certainly hope that you will learn that JOFA really leads with its voice and its heart. We know where our priorities are.

Okay, now for the prepared text:

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are often called the three Abrahamic traditions. Conferences other than this one have been devoted to exploring the development and evolution of these three great western religions, to exploring their similarities and their differences, to analyzing their cooperative and their-less-than-cooperative interactions. Our focus throughout this conference, and tonight in particular, is different. Rather than focusing on religion or on these religions per se, we are focusing on the experiences of religious women within each of these faith traditions.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have each been characterized as religions in which women are prescribed a subordinate status, and yet in which religious society is in certain ways gynocentric, that is, the society depends on the activities of women, in both the domestic and

communal spheres. It depends on the intelligence, enterprise, articulateness, and religious devotion of women who are daughters, wives, and mothers, who serve as the hub of religious life, making possible the turning of the wheels of religion from day to day. Women not only bear the children and cook the meals, they organize and facilitate holiday celebrations, which then shine the spotlight on boys and men. They arrange for children to receive religious education and often transport them to and from those educational settings. They maintain the emotional and sexual functioning of their spousal relationships within the guidelines of their religious culture. They educate their children from infancy onward in the intricacies of religious observances, and it is often they who are called on to deal with their children's religious quandaries and doubts. Without the active, efficient, dedicated work of women, each of these religious traditions would grind to a halt, and yet, in each of these patriarchal religious traditions, women have been distanced from the seats of actual decision-making and power and denied roles in communal and liturgical leadership. Indeed, until very recently, women were denied the intellectual tools to access their great classical books, much less shape the writing and exegesis of those books. Within the Jewish tradition, for example, one often-cited reason for not allowing women to lead a prayer service is that the leadership of a woman would be embarrassing to the congregation, with the clear assumption that the congregation is defined by its male members, and that women's public participation in this male congregation is somehow shameful.

Given the fact that the majority of Christians and Jews, and large numbers of Muslims as well, live in open societies with many options, why do Jewish, Muslim, and Christian women remain within traditional societies and perpetuate systems that seem to oppress or at least to

subordinate them? Many women choose to walk away from religious life that they perceive as oppressive, but many women do not. Why do so many extraordinary women feel powerful loyalty to their religious traditions and choose either to accept the traditions as they are or to work for change from the inside? Our task here together, beginning tonight and continuing all day tomorrow, is to explore various aspects of these compelling questions.

Tonight, we have the privilege of hearing brilliant academics and leaders from the worlds of Orthodox Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. And our moderator's innovative work shines the spotlight on many religious traditions. Tomorrow, our sessions will focus specifically on aspects of women's experiences in Orthodox Judaism. Each of our moderators and session participants was given a series of questions to grapple with, and we eagerly look forward to their reflections and to your reflections as well.

Bernadette Brooten: I am extremely honored to welcome you to this opening panel of the conference of the JOFA, about which I have heard for many years.

Since the rise of the women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, we have seen some dramatic changes in the lives of at least some Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women. As a Catholic student in 1971 who wanted to go on for graduate education in Catholic theology, I was one of the first generation to be able to enroll in the same course of study as candidates for the priesthood. Like many other Catholic women, I entered academe in part because ordained ministry was not open to me. When I did my doctorate, I was part of a whole movement of Catholic women who were gaining a deeper knowledge of the tradition than parish priests, because the academy had opened up to us, whereas ordained ministry had not. Judaism and Islam

have seen similar developments over that time period. Even during my time at Brandeis—I came in 1993—I have seen an ever increasing knowledge of *gemara* among my Orthodox women students. And Muslim women throughout the world are devoting greater attention to learning Qur'an, hadith, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic law. What difference has all of this knowledge made? This panel gives us an opportunity to compare the traditions and to learn from one another.

The conference organizers have asked our panelists to address several questions in their remarks: How is the situation changing--or not changing--in regard to leadership, clerics, and education in your respective religious traditions? Is the younger generation asking the same questions as their mother's generation, or have their issues moved to a different emphasis? What are the areas of your religious tradition you would most like to change? What do you worry about? What are the areas that give you the most hope and feelings of optimism?

Tova Hartman has creatively and tirelessly worked to create space for feminism within Orthodox Judaism. Among other things, she started a minyan in Jerusalem, Shira Hadasha, in which women read from the Torah (in the regular service, for men) and lead parts of the service (Pesukei d'Zimra and the Torah service).

In the JOFA journal, Tova Hartman Halbertal and Tamar Miller, write:

All feminisms, including modern Orthodox feminism, claim that what "is" does not serve as a justification for continuing the status quo and certainly is not necessarily what "ought to be." All feminisms are concerned with exclusion and invisibility. And so we ask: is gender inequality in Orthodox Judaism really God

given? Perhaps there are other ways of conceptualizing and expressing the nature of our womanhood, our rights, our obligations, and the character of our relationships. These matters are central to the Orthodox feminist agenda.

In her professional life, Tova Hartman is a lecturer at the School of Education, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Her writings include *Appropriately Subversive: Modern Mothers in Traditional Religions* (Harvard University Press, 1993), about which one reviewer wrote:

This is a study of women on the boundaries between ambiguity and conviction; tradition and change; law and life; self-expression and silence. But it is more. By crossing boundaries herself between dispassionate scholarship and compassion; Jews and Catholics; mothers and daughters—Tova Hartman Halbertal creates an opening into hope, the true holy place. (James Carroll)

Mary Boys, a member of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, a congregation of Roman Catholic women, since 1965, is the Skinner and McAlpin Professor of Practical Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York City. Very active in promoting interreligious understanding, she serves on the boards of the Tanenbaum Foundation for Interreligious Understanding, the Suenens Foundation, and the National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education. She also serves on the advisory committee for the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Catholic Bishops.

Helping Christians to move beyond centuries of entrenched anti-Judaism has been central to Mary Boys's work. Her most recent book, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (2000), ends with the words:

In our time, Ecclesia's dialogue with Synagoga is meant to draw us into the boundlessness of the Divine. It challenges us to move beyond the narrow limits in which we confine the Holy One, and to acknowledge in our heart of hearts that God, Mother and Father of us all, has many children—and more than one blessing.

Riffat Hassan, who teaches at the University of Louisville and the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, is one of the pioneers of feminist theology in the context of the Islamic tradition, an area in which she has been engaged since 1974. She has also been extensively involved in interreligious dialogue with Jews, Christians, and Muslims, with a particular focus on human rights in religious traditions. In February 1999, she founded The International Network for the Rights of Female Victims of Violence in Pakistan (INRFVVP), a nonprofit organization with a worldwide membership that has played a noteworthy role in highlighting the issue of violence against girls and women, particularly with reference to “crimes of honor.”

In *Jihad Fi Sabil Allah: A Muslims Woman's Faith Journey from Struggle to Struggle to Struggle*, Raffat Hassan writes:

[I]t was another setting—that of interreligious dialogue among believers in the one God that I found the community of faith I had sought all my life. In this community of faith I have found others who, like myself, are committed to creating a new world in which human beings will not brutalize or victimize one another in the name of God, but will

affirm, through word and action, that as God is just and loving so human beings must treat each other with justice and love regardless of sex, creed, or color. I have found in my community of faith what I did not find in my community of birth: the possibility of growing and healing, of becoming integrated and whole. Due to the affirmation I have received from men and women of faith I am no longer the fragmented, mutilated woman that I once was. I know now that I am not alone in the wilderness, that there are some people in the world who understand my calling, and that their prayers are with me as I continue my struggle on behalf of the millions of nameless, voiceless, faceless Muslim women of the world who live and die unsung, uncelebrated in birth, unmourned in death.

Riffat Hassan: Thank you, Bernadette. It's very good of you to ask three semesters' worth of question and give us each twenty minutes to talk about them. I am deeply privileged and honored to be here tonight to see so many caring, creative, like-minded people, who are trying to understand where we are in the world today, where women are, what the issues of change are, and what the issues of continuity are. I think this discussion is even more important given what has happened in the world and in this country since 9/11.

There are many, many things I would like to share with you tonight, but since I am terrified of Bernadette's time-keeping, I shall confine myself to a few remarks.

My journey as a Muslim woman cannot be separated from my work as either a feminist theologian or as an activist. Sometimes I say I am an academic by profession, and I am an activist by choice. Existentially, of course, I have always known what it means to be a Muslim woman. I come from Pakistan. It's the only country in the world created in the name of

religion, besides Israel. These are the only two countries that had religion as their justification. I come from Lahore, which is a historically Muslim city, and I am from a Sayyid Muslim family descended from the Prophet's family. So existentially, there has never been any doubt about my Muslim identity. But it was not until 1974, when in a strange way I became involved with this question of women in Islam, that I began to realize many things. I began with a focused study of the Qur'an, which is, for Muslims, the highest authority, to see what the Qur'an was saying about women. The Qur'an is not a chronological or historical book like the Bible. It's not neatly divided into themes or subjects, and you have to read through all of it to get a sense of what the message is. As I began this research, I began to feel very angry, and my anger was due to two reasons: One was that I realized the discrepancy that exists between what the Qur'an is saying about women's rights and what is actually happening to women in Muslim societies; and the second one was that I realized how many things had happened to me because I was a Muslim woman.

My work in this area was driven by my deep existential need to make sense of my own life as a Muslim woman, not for any other reason. I did this work for ten years, from 1974 to 1984. In the 1970s, a process started to unfold in the Islamic world that is sometimes called "Islamization." Simply stated, "Islamization" was the promulgation by some Muslim governments, or governments of some Muslim countries, to institute laws that were designed to make these countries more Muslim. They were Muslim to begin with, so it was not a matter of converting anybody to Islam, but the assumption was that they were not Muslim enough, and so they needed these laws. If you look at the content of these laws, you find that their primary target

is women, and their secondary target is the institution of Islamic punishments, and most of the punishments are inflicted on women. So the question obviously arises: In the Islamic world—with a population of 1.6 billion, more than sixty countries—why is it and how is it that despite huge problems of political corruption, economic mismanagement, and all sorts of other issues, there is this total obsession with women? This is a very important question.

In order to answer that question, let me point out two things. First, it is extremely important, in order to understand what is happening in the Islamic world, to understand what the period of colonialism meant to Muslims. Muslims were colonized by western countries, and this was a very harsh experience for them, and they are still reacting to it. This has led Muslims to have an ambivalent attitude toward modernity, which they think of as constituting two aspects. One is modernization. Modernization is equated with size and technology—better information technology, health care systems, etc. I don't know anybody who is against that. But the other aspect of modernity is westernization, and there is a tremendous reaction in the Muslim world against westernization, which is associated not only with colonialism but also with the influx of mass western culture into Muslim societies.

Second, in traditional societies—and by and large, the Islamic world remains highly traditional—there is an invisible barrier, which in Arabic is called the “curtain” or *hijab*, between public space and private space. Women belong to private space, which is the home, and the rest of the world belongs to men. The two are very obviously unequal, and women are not to enter into men's space because they are a threat to men's sexuality. We find the same answer all the way from St. Augustine to Mawlana Maududi, the same idea. St. Augustine said, “I do not

allow women to enter in men's space because 'they cause erections even in holy men.'" Well, one can say that's a problem of men, isn't it? Not women!

By 1984, ten years after I had begun my study, I had done enough work to become convinced that the Qur'an, if read from a nonpatriarchal perspective, does not discriminate against women, and in fact is very supportive of women. Now what do I mean by that? As has already been said, all the major religious traditions of the world—Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—have developed in the context of patriarchal cultures. This means that the texts of these religions have been interpreted almost exclusively or primarily by men, who have then assigned to themselves the right to determine the role of women, whether it is political, economic, personal, social, or even astrological, and that is one reason for where we are today. But I was convinced for myself that the Qur'an does not discriminate against women but is very protective of the rights of women.

However, there was this other reality that was unfolding outside. Though I had come to the United States in 1972—that was my *hijra*, my emigration—I always had a home in Pakistan, and I was very much aware of what was going on there. In 1984, I was asked by some of my activist friends in Pakistan if I would come up with an ideology or a strategy for countering certain laws that were being promulgated: we were having one law after another. This was a turning point in my life, because instead of just doing this study for myself, I was being asked to become a sort of an ideologue for a movement. I had to rethink everything.

I became very much interested in the question of gender equality and inequality and what the theological reasons are for it. I identified three theological assumptions that are common to

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity: First, that God's primary creation was Adam; that he was a male person; and that from the rib of Adam God created a female person, and therefore woman is subordinate, secondary, and inferior. This is the issue of woman's creation. Second, that though woman was secondary in creation, she's primary in guilt, because she got poor Adam thrown out of paradise. We have all heard that story, it's called "The Fall of Man." And third, that woman was not only created *from* Adam but *for* Adam, to be a helpmate unto him. For want of time, I can't go into the details, but I have done a good amount of work on the issue of creation, about which I have written a book. I have demonstrated that none of these assumptions is validated by a correct reading of the Qur'anic text. Nevertheless, most Muslims believe, just as the majority of Jews and Christians believe, that Eve was created from the rib of Adam, that she was responsible for the Fall, and that she is instrumental, and he is fundamental. At the theological level this is what I have spent many years doing, creating this discourse of feminist theology, which did not exist before the seventies at all.

But then in the 1980s simultaneous to this new development in my theological thinking, I became very aware that something had to be done on the ground to empower Muslim women. So I started developing a lot of projects for the empowerment of Muslim women. I have traveled all through the Muslim world, and I have spoken to Muslim women in all kinds of places trying to educate them about their rights in Islam, because the majority of the Muslim women, even educated ones, don't know what these rights are.

I want to make a big leap now and talk about contemporary discourse at the two UN conferences at which I was a major speaker, the first in Cairo in 1994 and the second in

Beijing in 1995. The Cairo conference was, I think, a tremendous breakthrough for women. It is very interesting that this was a conference in which conservative Muslims and conservative Catholics came together for the first time, and they were in total agreement, because they both wanted to deny women any control over their bodies. So the real question at the Cairo conference was who owns women's bodies: is it the church, the state, the men, the community—who? The answer we got at Cairo, which had never been received before, is that women own their bodies. And the majority of the women who made this response were Muslim, because this was Cairo, which is one of the great Muslim capitals of the world.

I felt very encouraged by that and I thought, this is wonderful. For the first time in history, we are owners of our bodies. We were always bodies in terms of dualistic thinking, but never *owners* of our bodies. So this is good. Maybe next year we will get back the rest of ourselves, the souls and the minds and all of it. But it didn't happen, because at Beijing there was a tremendous backlash. The largest presence at the NGO (nongovernmental organizations) forum was that of Muslim women, all dressed in black, covered from head to foot, supported by a lot of men. The position they took was the following: Islam is a wonderful religion, it gives us all we want, it treats us like princesses and queens, we have no issues, we are taken care of, we don't want to work, and who are these western feminists and the UN, which is a secular institution, why are they interfering with us, they should leave us alone, we have no problem. So what I have to say to this party-line position is the following: I'm a believing Muslim, I think Islam is a wonderful religion, my question is, where is it being practiced? Having been a women's rights activist for so long, I have a great deal of difficulty believing that Muslim women have such a

wonderful time, because the vast majority of them have three characteristics: they are poor; they are illiterate; and they live in a village. Many of them live in subhuman conditions and suffer tremendous violence and hardship.

Now I'm going to shift from Beijing to the Muslim world in general, and Pakistan in particular, which is my country of origin. There is another group about which many people in the West don't know much. This is a group of people who came into existence or were supported largely after the Iranian revolution of 1979. The two superpowers became terrified that the Islamic revolution was going to spread, so they were instrumental in creating a lot of NGOs, women's groups, and human rights groups in the Islamic world that were very anti-Islamic. These groups take the position that religion and human rights are not compatible, and especially that Islam and human rights are not compatible, because Islam is the most antihumanist and the most misogynist of all religions; therefore, we cannot talk about human rights and Islam at the same time. My issue with these groups is that anybody who says that Islam and human rights are not compatible has never read the Qur'an. Every single right that you can mention, I can give you the chapter and verse in the Qur'an that supports it.

I would also like to share with you a practical question that means a lot to me. The reason I have spent so much of my life doing this work, going from place to place, trying to talk to groups, Muslim women in particular, is that I want to reach that average Muslim woman who is illiterate and who is poor, who lives in a village and has no face, has no name. How should I talk to her? What should I say to her? Can I say to her, "My sister, I bring you liberation in the name of the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948"? It's a wonderful document, I have great

respect for it, but what I submit to you is that it is irrelevant to this woman. But if I ask her, “Do you believe in God?”—of course she does. “Do you believe that God is merciful and compassionate?” And she does, which is rather strange, because her own life is filled with so much injustice and oppression, but she believes God is just. And so I say, “Do you think then that this God wants that you should have no rights, you should not even have the right to live, that you should be beaten and brutalized, that you should have no childcare, no healthcare, no opportunity for education?” Now this is very simple theology, but it makes sense to this woman, and a sort of a light goes on in her eyes, and she begins to see that this religion, which has always been a sustaining factor in her life but has also been a constraining factor, a limiting factor, need not be so, and that it can become a source of empowerment.

So now where are we going with this? What are the options? I want to contextualize this again in terms of the larger world in which we live, because there are so few opportunities for an audience like this to hear the voice of a Muslim. I want to say this: We are all in some way or the other engaged in the fight against terrorism and extremism, and nobody in the world is more a victim of extremism than women.

Now the question is, how do we deal with this issue? One way is to go in with tremendous military force and root out extremists. This has been tried. It has some efficacy, undoubtedly. It has succeeded in overthrowing the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, etc., but has it rooted out extremism in the world? Can anybody say that it has? It has not. So, what is the alternative? The alternative is, in my opinion—and I am very, very strongly convinced of this—to strengthen the middle. Think about it for a minute. The stronger the middle grows, the weaker

the extremes become, and if the middle is strong enough, then it can really overpower the extremes.

So, who is in the middle? If you travel the Muslim world, even including Saudi Arabia, you will find that the groups that are at the cutting edge of change—economic groups, self-help groups, educational groups, health groups, etc.—are women's groups. They are by far the most active and the most creative. And there are so many of them! I wish that there was some way that we could create a platform and bring all of these groups together at one time and in one place so you could see their strength. Then, you would not despair of the state of the world. But, unfortunately, we do not have any such platform, and the average person has no way to see that. The media in the West, especially in the United States, has been so negative and so one-sided that it has constantly talked about all the extremists. Those are the people who get the press, and those are the people who get the support, and those are the people who get the funds, and not the people in the middle. And I think that's the tragedy.

I want to end on a sign of hope. For a number of years I have been working with a group trying to create a new movement called The Middle Way. Last year I was asked by the Education Commission of Pakistan to call an international conference of progressive Muslim scholars. And I did. We had Muslim scholars from seventeen countries—the most progressive, most forward-looking Muslim scholars in the world. They came together November 19-21, and it was absolutely unbelievable to have all these people under one roof. And the questions before them were, What is your vision of a moderate or a modern Muslim society in the 21st century? What issues do you define as critical? At the end we also asked, What do you think about setting

up an institute in Pakistan for the promotion of enlightened Islam, as President Musharraf refers to it, that can become the focal point of change, not only in this country, but throughout the world?

The answer that came was a very, very strong, unanimous affirmation. These scholars met the president of Pakistan, who was very happy to meet them, and after the meeting was over the president asked me to present a proposal for this institute, which I did on the 17th of February, and the president has approved of this institute. And I have been asked to help in setting up this institute, which is going on right now, and I think that maybe, if God wills, by the end of this year I will do a reverse migration and go back to Pakistan to work in this institute, because I think that's where the real work needs to be done. But, I will remain forever very grateful to my community of faith that has brought me to this point, and they will always be my community.

Mary C. Boys: Thank you for the invitation to speak. Last weekend, during the final of six sessions as a scholar-in-residence sponsored by an interfaith clergy group in northern New Jersey, I received two questions in succession. The first was, "Could you briefly explain the Trinity?" Then, "Why do you stay a Catholic?" Neither is easy to answer while standing on one foot, perhaps especially the second, because any "answer" has some deeply personal elements.

Catholicism provides a vision by which I catch glimpses of the Divine Presence manifest in ever surprising and startling ways. Catholicism gives me language by which I might image and relate to God, practices for a way of life lest I be swallowed up by secular values and quotidian demands, and a worldwide community of over a billion people whose members are

drawn from virtually every tribe and tongue (in James Joyce's phrase, "Here comes everybody.") Catholic tradition is deep and wide—deeper and wider than the guardians of traditionalism recognize—and filled with beauty and wisdom.

Catholicism. Ah, yes. Then there's the *Catholic Church*, what Pierre DuMaine observes "may be the most elaborately structured anarchy in the history of human institutions."¹ (DuMaine, by the way, is the retired bishop of San Jose, California). Yes, *Catholic Church*, with its messy and too often grim history vis-à-vis other religious traditions, its authoritarian ways, triumphal posturing, and lurid scandals, and its very real exclusion of women from most positions of ecclesiastical leadership.

Explaining why I remain identified with and active in *this church almost* makes me prefer discussing the Trinity.

Rosemary Haughton captures the tension between "Catholicism" and "the Catholic Church" in her insightful book, *The Catholic Thing*, with her images of Sophia and Mother Church. While Sophia brings vitality through the wisdom of mystics, activists, and scholars, Mother Church vigilantly guards the order, reserving for herself the task of interpreting God's will, and speaking primarily in declaratives and imperatives. Although a dedicated person who is concerned about her "children," Mother Church "is extremely inclined to feel that her will and God's are identical."

She is hugely self-satisfied, and her judgment, while experienced, is often insensitive, and therefore cruel. She is suspicious of eccentricity and new ideas, since her own are so clearly effective, and non-conformists get a rough time, though after they are dead she often feels differently about them.

This is Mother Church, a crude, dominating, violent, loving, deceitful,

compassionate old lady, a person to whom one cannot be indifferent, whom one may love much and yet fight against, whom one may hate and yet respect.²

In contrast, Sophia plays freely and charismatically, resists conformity, and refuses to be bound by institutional sclerosis. Significantly, Sophia is immortal, and Mother Church mortal.

Like Houghton, I believe in the end Sophia will prevail, but there is no question that Mother Church now rules with an iron hand. The Catholic impulse is to live in this tension between Sophia and Mother Church, to struggle to keep the conversation going, to push against boundaries even while accepting the notion of boundaries. The church is meant to be a “communion of communions”—and staying “in communion” with persons with dramatically different views while maintaining one’s integrity requires a considerable degree of self-transcendence. Mary Jo Weaver writes:

What keeps this whole frustrating process *Catholic* is the willingness to stay in conversation even when the dialectic gets fierce. Put another way, the stubborn refusal of the papacy to accept or entertain some new ideas is functional. Its job is to call for obedience and conformity, whereas the agitating work of intellectuals who keep bursting out with new questions and ideas is also functional: their job is to be creative and pushy. Neither of these jobs is better or nobler or more necessarily concerned with the life of the faithful than the other, and each is quite capable of squelching genuine religious spirit.³

That being said, there are three matters that I am deeply concerned about in the church today. The first two are intertwined: the misuse of power and what Garry Wills (in *Papal Sins*) calls the “structures of deceit” in the church—the subordination of truth to ecclesiastical tactics. Specifically in regard to women, especially those identified in any way with challenging the status quo in the church, many church officials exercise subtle forms of exclusion. Since they seem to fear engaging differences in a respectful, open way, they resort to trivializing,

caricaturing and censoring. Moreover, too many in ecclesiastical leadership today seem preoccupied with managerial issues and, as a consequence, have too little time to study, so they tend to view scholars, particularly of the female variety, as threats. What looks like (and acts like) anti-intellectualism among many in the American hierarchy seems connected to the misuse of power.

A more recent worry is the lack of civility in church life, and, in particular, the inability of those on the far right wing to entertain any view but their own absolutes. I saw this in living color last year when, as part of the team of scholars who criticized elements of Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*, I received many hate letters and emails from his partisans, revealing a mean-spirited and dangerous fundamentalism.

One of my survival skills is a sense of irony, which I needed when our team of scholars—all active, practicing Catholics publicly identified with the church—was attacked personally and nastily by none other than the Catholic League. Meanwhile, the Catholic League championed Mel—who operates his “own” Catholic church—as if he were a saint. My friends tell me that being publicly berated by the Catholic League is quite a compliment. Personally, I am content without their attention. But what bothered me most was the silence of those church officials who, aware of this campaign of hate, kept silent. (The late Joseph Cardinal Bernadin, concerned by precisely such a lack of civility in church life, founded the Catholic Common Ground Project in 1996. However obvious the need for this project, some, such as Boston's own Bernard Cardinal Law, opposed it. I am happy to report the Common Ground Project lives on.)

So why stay in this messy church, this fragmented communion?

First, there is the virtue of perspective. We American Catholics constitute just six percent of the church worldwide. Since I am deeply distressed by our nation's imperialist rhetoric and action, I realize that I should not simply *impose* my feminist convictions on those in the church from radically different cultures—cultures where many women have few opportunities for education and no access to positions of leadership. Similarly, even as I rail against the abuse of power, I note the difficulty of using my own power wisely and justly. And while my power might be marginal, it is real, nonetheless. As one of my doctoral students observed, after I had written copious notes on the margins of her manuscript, “There's power in the margins. Only the professors get to write there.”

Second, as one who has a living memory of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), I know that change does happen in the Catholic Church, sometimes in quite wonderful and dramatic ways, if never announced with a drum roll. (It is one of the strange aspects of Catholic life, that when a teaching is promulgated that reverses prior teaching, that reversal is not made explicit). Insofar as there is a divide between generations, it is connected in large part to those born too late to have a sense of why our ecclesiastical tectonic plates shifted at Vatican II (hence, the importance of history in religious education). I have witnessed in my lifetime momentous changes in the liturgy, in understandings about religious liberty and in the church's relationship with other religious traditions—and, yes, even (perhaps especially) the role of women. Sixty years ago, for example, there were virtually no Catholic women with doctorates in theology; now women theologians are prominent in virtually every theological specialty. In the realm of women religious (a.k.a., “nuns”) the most dramatic change is neither about the habit nor wider

opportunities, but rather in our increased agency. We were exhorted to “renew,” and we took that mandate with the utmost seriousness—more seriously than many church officials bargained for! Catholic women, whether members of religious communities or other laywomen (all the non-ordained are “lay”) have, of course, traditionally exercised leadership in running Catholic schools (including colleges and universities) and hospitals, but today women also are in many positions of pastoral leadership. In many sections of the country, for example, women act as pastors of parishes, though they have to import a priest on Sunday and do not carry the formal title of pastor. Nevertheless, their ministry is integral to church life in North America in ways that might not have been imagined fifty years ago.

Having mentioned the “p” word—priesthood—let me detour briefly to a less hopeful arena: the Vatican’s refusal to ordain women, which is promulgated entirely in declaratives with no opening for dialogue. It would appear that the maxim *Roma locuta est, causa finita est* (Rome has spoken, the case is finished) is once again operative. But the reality is much different: *Roma locuta est, causa incepta est* (Rome has spoken, the project begins), or even *causa stimulata est*. The Vatican’s theological arguments are weak.⁴ Moreover, women all over the world are already doing much of the priestly work.⁵ The centrality of the Eucharist to Catholic life and the increasing paucity of priests place the Vatican in the position of making the preservation of a male, celibate priesthood more important than access to the Eucharist—surely a betrayal of what is most significant. And the “facts on the ground”: many women continue to say they discern a call to the priesthood, and in many cases, their lives reveal priestly gifts. Can the Vatican be so sure it alone possesses the spirit of wisdom? Simply to dismiss women’s discernment of the

Spirit is a misuse of power. By the way, polls indicate two-thirds of American Catholics favor ordination of women.⁶

I often reflect on the importance of relationships for interreligious understanding—what James Fredericks speaks of as a “new theological virtue.”⁷ Perhaps the most powerful factor in women’s experience becoming a “transforming grace” in Catholicism would be healthy, peer relationships between the pastoral magisterium (teaching office) and women. If bishops and Vatican officials dealt with women as *peers* on a regular basis, if they *collaborated* with women who were as educated (or more so) and committed as they, I believe much would change. The present structures and norms, however, effectively prevent this from happening.⁸

It is not simply a matter of ordination, though that issue remains as the preeminent symbol of the lack of the presence of women in the official life of the church, a symbol of women’s exclusion from all significant decision making and practical policy formation, a traditional exclusion that is historically based on the inferiority and subservient status ascribed to them.⁹ It is a matter of the integrity of Catholicism, of the official church living by its own words from the Second Vatican Council that “every type of discrimination, whether societal or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome.” It is, if you will, “Sophia” who speaks of the fundamental rights of a woman “to embrace a state of life or acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men.”¹⁰ Will these words have any force if “Mother Church” brushes them aside as having no effect *within its own structures, policies, and culture*?

In the end, what sustains me is the company of so many persons made alive by their love

of Catholicism—women and men shaped by its vision, grieved by its sinfulness, sustained by its life of prayer, animated by its beauty, passionate in their commitment, and involved in its institutions in order to fashion a just and peaceful world. Or to say it another way, what sustains me is the love revealed in the actions of those formed in the generosity of a Catholic spirit. These are the people who have taught me what “holy perseverance” means. I borrow poet Antonio Machado’s words (in English translation): “Walker, walker, there is no road. Walker, walker, there is no road. The road is made by walking.”

Several years ago I was asked—by a Vatican official, no less—to give a paper at a Catholic-Jewish conference in London on feminism in the church. I gave it the title, “Loving a Church that Squanders the Gifts of its Women: A Lament.” The highest ranking church official present—a cardinal who heads a major Vatican office (and, I might add, a very decent person)—was suspiciously absent at the session when my paper was discussed. Overall, the response of the Catholic men present (mostly but not exclusively clerics) was disappointing; perhaps pathetic would be more accurate, as they simply wouldn’t *engage* in any substantive way. I do remember a rabbi friend saying she wept when she read my paper.

Yet perspective is crucial. Who could have imagined even forty years ago a conference between Christians and Jews on a “Theology of Partnership”? Who could have imagined a Vatican official even saying “feminism” without choking? Who could have imagined that an occasion to lament in public before one’s male religious authorities could be a sign of progress and a source of hope? Perhaps those with a sense of irony, and a loyalty grounded in the belief that the Holy One desires our flourishing.

Tova Hartman: As we all know, in Orthodox Judaism, women have finally been given access to the holy book. Basically, people have found out that even if you have breasts and a womb, you still can read Aramaic, and so our tradition have been opened up to people of both genders. However, the unequal access to power in Orthodox Judaism is an extremely, extremely significant point, and it is at the heart of the inequality in Orthodox Judaism. Women can know what men know, but they do not have the power of that knowledge. What does that mean? Not having access to the rabbinate does not only mean that we cannot stand up in *shul* and give a *drasha* or that we cannot perform ceremonies. These are serious, but they are not the major issue. The major issue is, whom does the community empower to decide what is in and what is out, what is innovation, what is legitimate, and what is legal but not legitimate? This is the source, I believe, of what we all have to struggle with again. We are feeling so good because our women's *yeshivot* are filled, and our girls are learning, and we're really feeling like we're doing so much. However, we have lied to our girls. We have told them that the way to change is through interpretation. We have told them that we have a legal tradition, and if you bring in precedent, if you show that it has been done before, if you show an argument, then you have a legitimate claim to change.

But then begins the meta-*halakhic* discussion, which is the discussion that is going on now in Orthodoxy. That is the discussion between mainstream Orthodoxy and feminist Orthodoxy. *Halakha* basically can be reinterpreted. There are many precedents for the things that women want to do. The question is, who decides that they can do it, and who decides that they

cannot do it? Is the text what decides, or is it a certain group of people in power who decide what can happen and what can't? In a response a few years ago by Rabbi Torshi to a women's prayer group, he admits that there is no *halakhic* problem whatsoever. But he frames his whole answer to the issue of the women's prayer group with the beginning of an unpleasant story. In other words, we can pass the *halakhic* litmus test, but we cannot pass the power of people who refuse to give up power even if it is legally okay.

Where does that leave the community of women learning? Where does that leave our whole community? What do we tell our girls when we say, "Come learn"? What are we really saying to them? And then why are we surprised that they say, "What is this for?" We have to recognize that it's really great to study. However, we would never tolerate it if our girls graduated from law school and were not allowed to become judges. How do we tolerate it that our girls are going to Jewish law schools and are not becoming judges? Because the things that they're about to judge are what is considered in and what is considered out. We can say about women's learning "*ha z'manim hishtanu*"—"the times have changed"—and that is enough to change all of Jewish history, and women will begin to learn. We have empowered a class of people to define when it is legitimate to say, "the times have changed" without even bringing any *halakhic* precedent; never mind those of us who *have* brought *halakhic* precedent to bring about change.

Feminism is defined as outside. It is defined as outside by all three traditions. This is what is similar. This is our struggle. Our struggle is to say that feminism is a moral critique. It's a religiously moral critique of our life that is not about women but about the holiness of our

community. It is about how men and women stand together before God. It is a religious critique that bonds people from all over the world. There are those who have defined it as an outside critique. Those who have defined it as outside see it as a danger to the continuation of the Jewish tradition. In fact, if you look through about one hundred years of rabbinic *responsa* to anything that has to do with women's issues, the legal response is usually in two parts: No. Then there are usually pages upon pages upon pages about the danger of feminism. They understand correctly that feminism is a deep critique. The question is, can it be assimilated? Can it add to the religious life of the men and women of our communities, or will it really bring about the end? The responses are never—almost never—“yes,” or, “your legal argument is weak.” Basically, it is, I have the power, and I'm saying “no. And we really just have to admit that this is what the discourse is now. It's very painful to admit it.

In a community that we started in Jerusalem, *Shira Hadasha*, we decided not to wait for official rabbinic approval, but to try to live as best as we could within the integrity of *halakha* and to try to begin a religious community that is based on as much inclusion as possible for women. Now, the response to that is, “The time is not right.” What are we supposed to respond when someone says, “The time is not right”? The time is not right—for whom? This will lead to Conservative Judaism, to Reform Judaism, to assimilation, and to Catholicism. I always ask the rabbis, “Don't you get it that if, instead of *davening Ashrei* (praying), I wanted to go to a feminist consciousness-raising session, I would go?” They say that the fact that we want to pray in a different way is the slippery slope. I say, “Yes, it is a slippery slope—but upward.” They can only think about it with the slope downward.

I try to think of the backlash against what is going on in Orthodox feminism in all three religions as actually a point of hope. The nastiness with which we are attacked is a testimony to the fact that they do understand that there's a lot of power [in what we are saying]. My father always tells me that I should answer the rabbis who attack me. He says, "Tova, are you becoming a Christian, turning the other cheek by not responding?" I say, "No, I'm not responding, because I refuse to be in a conversation with nastiness." When I know that the issue is not truly a legal conversation anymore, I'm just not in the conversation. I don't need to prove anymore that I'm really a good enough Jewess. I want to live as a religious women with honesty and with integrity and to try to build a community together. I will not respond anymore to those kinds of comments that really are not *halakhic*.

So why do I stay in the Orthodox tradition? I deeply believe in the self-correcting mechanisms of *yahadut* (Judaism) and of Orthodoxy. I deeply believe in it. I've seen how Orthodoxy has changed in so many areas when it has been challenged. When it was decided that Zionism was a religious way of living, I saw how much change could be made. I think Orthodoxy is too rich and too important to leave it to the rabbis.

Bernadette Brooten: Thank you all so much. This is truly speaking truth to power. I would like to pose one question first to the panel, and then I will open it up to conversation with the audience. You each have spoken about various steps that you have taken, and each of you is aware that there are many women and men working for feminism in each of the traditions. I wonder if you could each tell us about one next step that you think is a useful step to get us further along the road?

Riffat Hassan: I think that in the world in which we are living today, the global and the local are inseparable, and national and international are also very much interlinked. So I think that one next step that would be very useful is to do exactly what we are doing this evening, which is to share our experience with others who may be inside our tradition or outside it. Even people who belong to the same group or denomination may not be exactly the same place as you are. Dialogue has to be education-based, and I think that by disseminating education or even correct information, we are taking a step forward.

However, at one level, it's an intensely private affair of each group to bring about the changes. The changes that have to come about in the world of Islam have to be undertaken by Muslims themselves. Islam has to change from within. At the same time, it's very important that there should be understanding of what's happening within each world from outside that world, and that we make alliances, we make partnerships with our friends who are outside of the tradition, because I don't think that anybody can just do it alone. We're not living in that kind of an isolated world, so this exercise is very, very important, in my opinion.

Mary C. Boys: I can't think of anything that would be the magic bullet, but I agree with what [Riffat] just said. When we focus exclusively on working for change within our own tradition, it's very easy to get discouraged and to close up and become parochial. To constantly be stimulated by alliances across other boundaries helps to keep us with a wider horizon. Also, sometimes, scholars say, it's the people from outside the tradition who can speak a certain truth to power that those within it can't. I've seen this happen within our hierarchy—when Jewish scholars call, they get the calls returned. That's all right. Whatever we can do. I'm not ashamed

to work underground. I think being surreptitious is not a bad idea. And to work ecumenically and with religious alliances I think is just enormously important. We always need to look out for one another, and if people can't find space anymore, room to breathe, then they have to find some space where they can do that.

Tova Hartman: I hope that the next step will be that in all three faiths, women will be on the top of the hierarchy. As I teach my students at Hebrew University, the answer to why women cannot be priests have the similarities to the *responsa*. You could almost change, "Why they can't be rabbis?" to "Why they can't be priests?" It's embarrassing: Who are the ones who are assimilating?

So I believe that we must train our younger generation to see how the issues they're facing are really crosscultural and universal, and that we will work on them each in our own faith in our own way. If we help them understand what is really going on, that they're not alone in the struggle, then I think that will open up the doors for change in ways that we didn't know.

Bernadette Brooten: We now have about twenty minutes for discussion. I invite you to be concise with your questions, and to tell us your name and one sentence about who you are.

Q: I'm a recent law school graduate. My question is for all three panelists. How do you strike a balance between moving quickly enough, with regard to women's position within a religion, so that the women themselves don't feel the need to flee, as opposed to moving so quickly that people farther to the right push us away and create a schism within the religion?

Mary C. Boys: It's never been a problem in Catholicism that we've moved too fast! I wish we could have the problem. But the delicate dance we have to do is the crosscultural one. We're an

enormously complicated, worldwide community. If we're just talking of North American Catholics, it's one kind of issue, but if we're talking about people who come from deeply traditional societies, [it's something else.] In some ways we have more similarities here with Islam, so keeping these crosscultural alliances going, especially among women, has to be a real priority.

Tova Hartman: I don't think that we're moving that quickly either. The issues have been around for really a long time, so the question really isn't moving too quickly, and who's going to like us, and who's not going to like us. We constantly have to look inward and ask, "Does what we're doing have religious integrity?" That has to be our question. And if we feel it has religious integrity, then there is no time limit on it, and it really doesn't matter. Then we will ask other people to join us, and if they don't want to join us, they don't have to. This is not the only interpretation, this is not the only way to be. We have to also understand that a lot of people will not like it, and we must accept, rather than being shocked each time, that it is a revolution. It's a real change, even if it is reinterpreting. Revolution is to revolve, to go back to a certain place. We believe that it's a genuine interpretation but it is also something new. So *khadesh yamainu kekedem* (renew us). We say join us, those who want to join us.

Riffat Hassan: Let me try to answer your question from a slightly different point of view. This kind of issue is constantly coming up in many Muslim communities—that we have to keep the community together, and therefore that this discussion has to keep going on, whether it is dealing with *hijab* or whatever is the issue. We have to keep discussing it until the whole community comes together. Well, my study of history has shown that the community never came together,

not even in the time of the Prophet, so my attitude is, let's move on with the like-minded people. I think it's very important, for instance, at this moment in Islam and in Muslim countries, that like-minded or progressive people come together and move forward together, and that they do not waste time or wait till everybody else is going to join them—because nobody's going to join them. But if they gather strength, and they develop their own foundation and build on it, then they will come to a point where the other people are more likely to take them seriously. If you work with people who are like-minded, then the progress is much faster, and I think that's what we should do.

Q: I'm Kecia Ali, a Mellon postdoctoral fellow in Islamic Studies and Women's Studies here at Brandeis, and my question is directed to Dr. Hassan, but I think it has a broader relevance. We've heard a lot this evening about religious authority and, in particular, the question of ordination as a sign of religious leadership. I was wondering if you would just comment briefly on the plans by Dr. Amina Wadud to lead a public prayer service in New York this Friday. It's generated a tremendous amount of controversy within the Muslim community, and I'd like to hear your thoughts about it.

Riffat Hassan: I was almost wishing you would not ask me that question, Kecia, but I think it's important to discuss it. I know Amina very well. She was, in fact, my student in the very first year that I came to the United States. I think that it's very important, as we continue our struggle forward, to know what is an issue and what is a non-issue in a particular tradition. Because I have so many wonderful Christian friends, I understand how important the issue of ordination of women is in the Christian church. But it is not an issue in Islam, because in Islam, there is no

church. So this is not the real issue. Historically, we have had women leading prayers. In early Islam, there were cases, and then even in later Islam. Professor Leila Ahmed in her book also talks about that. This is not the first time it has happened. Professor Amina Wadud has created this situation in South Africa, in Canada, and in Malaysia a couple of years ago, when I was at the same conference as she was, and she was about to be prosecuted for blasphemy. I look at it this way: I take the utilitarian approach. What is good for the greatest number of people? Muslim women have so many issues that are very critical—issues of education, issues of development, issues of choice. Forced marriages are a big issue in England. The issue of violence against women. These are issues that are very, very serious. And there is theoretically no reason why a woman should not lead prayers. To establish something that nobody is disputing theologically—culturally, maybe, but not theologically—is to distract attention from the deeper issues. I think that this is going to be a setback for women, not an advancement of it. This is my honest opinion about it.

Q: I'm writing for the *Jewish Advocate*. All three of you seem to be arguing that there is some purity to religion, but it's become corrupt over time because of certain traditional sources of authority or leadership. Would you advocate disregarding some of these traditional sources of authority in aspects of religious life? And, where would a new source of authority, a new decision, come from, and where would it find sustenance?

Mary C. Boys: It seems to me that one of the keys of being a feminist scholar is to know the tradition and to know ways of interpreting it. So we have to know the texts, and we have to put the texts in their full context. I think that right now in the Catholic Church, the people who are

making the policy decisions are not as learned as might be desired. And by speaking so much in declaratives and imperatives, they have given short shrift to interrogatives, thus stunting open discussion about and analysis of some vital issues in our time. So it's not a matter of rejecting the tradition—quite the contrary. It's a matter of knowing it in its breadth and width and depth.

Tova Hartman: I do not think that the traditional Orthodox rabbinate is corrupt. I did not say that, and I do not say that. What I do say and think is that they're very learned, but the way I understand it, the issue is not of learning. The issue is whether feminism is a religious value, and as such, does it move them to interpret the tradition in that way. It is not that they are corrupting the tradition, nor that I am corrupting the tradition. It is whether feminism has something to add to our religious life as a religious community? That's the question. It's not about corruption or not corruption. They tell women to be quiet so that we will have a whole community—don't know what you know, don't need what you need. This is something that happens all over. Just be quiet, and if you have no needs, then everything will be fine. That's the problem. The way I understand the Orthodox establishment, it's not at all a matter of corruption. I again use the example of Zionism. Zionism divided Orthodox Jewish people, and those who felt that it was a religious movement interpreted and changed things because they felt it would bring about a different kind of religious Jew. So too is the attitude towards feminism.

Q: I'm a student at Barnard College, and I was wondering if you could talk about how you see your vision of feminism as a worldview, and is implementation limited at all by your views of religious law and theology? Is there any cap on those lines? Do you see any of your feminist visions limited by the fact that you're working within a religious framework?

Tova Hartman: I will give you the example of the *shul* that we started in Jerusalem. There, I knowingly compromised on certain feminist values, basic values of equality. We did not yet see a way of making a prayer service of men and women participating equally. So I admit that there are times when I come to a wall, and I don't yet know a way out. I do not say that because there's an *aron ha'kodesh* (holy ark) in the room, it is equal. There is a wall in my face. I know I have no oxygen, but I am deeply committed, as much as I can be, to the *halakhic* tradition, and as such, I am struggling to find a way out. I believe there will be a way out, but I still haven't gotten to it. So in that sense, yes, I do compromise and I am aware of that compromise.

Q: My question is for Dr. Hartman. I'm a student here at Brandeis, and I spent a year studying in a seminary in Israel. I'm also speaking as someone who grew up wanting to be a rabbi, and not Orthodox. Then I became Orthodox. That kind of killed being a rabbi. With regard to what Dr. Hassan said about speaking to Muslim women about their lifestyles, and also with regard to what she said about focusing on women leading services as leaving behind something more basic, do you consider women becoming rabbis important simply for the sake of women becoming rabbis and having a voice in *halakhic* community? Or, do you think that having women in that position will make important changes for women in the Jewish community, and that the effect of that achievement will be resounding for women? I know that especially for ultra-Orthodox women growing up, a lot of the things that Dr. Hassan talked about, like abuse, and people knowing their rights, and knowing how to exercise them—those sorts of things don't exist. So even if you had women working as rabbis, I don't know that there would necessarily be the sort of lasting change that those women really need.

Bernadette Brooten: Okay. I'd like to just get the other questions out on the table, so take careful notes, and please be concise.

Q: My name is Aharon Horowitz. I'm a recent graduate of Columbia University, and this question is for Dr. Hartman. One of the arguments leveled against students who were involved in *halakhic* modernity and some of the more progressive Orthodox groups at Columbia was that you can speak about women wanting this and trying to open up opportunities, yet the vast majority of Orthodox women don't actively pursue that or even say that they are interested in it. I just wanted to see how you would respond to that, whether you think that's an argument that has any grounds, and what the effects are if that is actually true from an empirical perspective?

Q: My name is Shulamit Reinharz. All three of you talked about the power that other people have that limits what you can do, and all three of you talked about attempting to address that power through knowledge and courage, that is, speaking the truth. But there are at least three or four other things I can think of as strategies for dealing with people having power that limits what you do, and I was wondering if they're of any interest to you. [Laughter.]

One is money. Having a lot of money can make a big deal of difference. The church has an enormous amount of money. I don't know if the same is true with the other two religions up there. But having a lot of money makes a big difference in how people listen to you. Also, having a social movement, gathering lots of people around you, is a way of dealing with what's called unjust power. A third strategy that has been used in history is just plain old violation of boundaries, the dramatic gesture that shows that the power cannot be sustained. So I was curious about whether any of you is interested in any of those techniques.

Q: I'm on the board of JOFA. And this question is really more for Dr. Hassan and Sister Boys, because I know a little more of the answer on the other side. I was curious about this question of generational divide, and whether you find in your communities, among women my age and younger, women who are committed to both the tradition and the faith and also to the serious feminist perspective in trying to blend them. I guess, like Dr. Hassan, that this is more of a question for the educated or middle-class women in your tradition than for the vast majority of Muslim women, who face other kinds of issues. But how are these things transmitted to the next generation? Is there another group coming after you who is going to continue these questions in your religion?

Bernadette Brooten: Thank you. I'd like to ask the panelists to respond briefly, if they can.

Tova Hartman: I think that the issue of women becoming rabbis does not take away from other issues. I find that if we speak about one injustice, then all other injustices get addressed. I think it's one of the problems, although not the only problem. But I think that it is at the heart of the matter of injustice between genders, and I think it will have very deep effect on many, many things that will come afterwards. I was recently at another conference about modern Orthodoxy, and many of the rabbis there got up and said how pained they are about the *agunah* (woman trapped in marriage) issue. At this point I started to have that shaky feeling, because they can and should fix the issue. They all know what they have to do, and they are not doing it, so their pain about it is no longer interesting to me.

Now the fact that not all women are interested in feminism—is that something against it? No. The fact that many people are not interested and don't have this kind of angst is okay—not

everybody has to. In my introductory lecture about feminism at the university, I speak about false consciousness. How do we relate to women, and how do we relate to men, as well, who don't feel like there's any problem when they stand before God with women behind them? Do I say they are all suffering from false consciousness? We must accept the fact that not all people have the same needs. All over the world people are in different places and if not everybody feels it, that does not take away from the extent to which I feel it and feel it is important. But I accept that not everybody does. But, the issue of needs is more complicated than we know. So many women and men, before they came to our *shul*, never thought that they needed to have an *aliyah*. But why is it that women who are in their eighties, after they have their first *aliyah*, cannot stop crying? The *mechitzah* (division between men and women in synagogue) is the best thing—we have a great women's section. The first experience of women who come and do this is so deep, and the emotionality that goes on because there's something that is more than what you just know—I don't exactly think it's false consciousness; it's something else.

Mary C. Boys: There are so many rich questions. I want to be brief, so let me just talk to the generational question. First of all, for the last eleven years, I've been teaching only graduate students, so I don't feel I know enough younger Catholic women. But when I taught at Boston College, I felt that many of the younger women thought feminism was not something they needed. They had no idea what women ahead of them had been through. Of course, with a name like Boys – well, anyway, I won't go into that.

In one way, in the Catholic Church, there are two generations: those of us of an age to remember what the Church was like before the Second Vatican Council ended in 1965, and all

the changes that happened in the next ten years or so and continue; and those for whom that's just about as ancient as World War I and Jesus and Moses. It's all back there in the dustbin of history. So I think the teaching of history in a lively way is one of the most important things that we can do to educate women, and men, too.

I'll end with this little story: Many years ago I gave a workshop in Cleveland on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and at the very end, I gave an exercise. "Remember that the people who wrote all the documents were the bishops of the world and the heads of men's religious orders," I said. "Let's imagine Vatican III. Who would come?" And immediately, a younger woman's hand shot up and she said, "All the bishops of the world and their husbands!"

Riffat Hassan: I want to respond very briefly to the intergenerational question that was addressed to me, and I also want to say something about money.

I see this question of the intergenerational in the context of what's going on in the Muslim world, which is, as I stated before, huge problems of lack of education, massive illiteracy and so on. What I've observed is that the older women, though they have themselves grown up in very traditional and patriarchal ways, still want their daughters to be educated. This is not only amongst the educated people but amongst totally illiterate people, village folk: they want uniformly that their daughters should be educated. I see this as a sign of great hope. A couple of years ago, I did workshops on violence against women in several major institutes in four provinces of Pakistan. In each of the institutions that we went to, the ratio of women to men

was four to one in favor of women. So this is just to blow your stereotype that Muslims don't want to educate their daughters. Not true at all, not today.

The second question is about money. I agree that money is very important, and the questions are, who has the money, and who funds what? Look at the current problems in the Muslim world, like the Taliban. Who were these guys? They were the descendents of the mujahideen. And who were the mujahideen? They were the freedom fighters, the warriors. And who was funding them? The CIA. I believe that in order to move forward, and in order to come to grips with the enormously difficult issue of extremism, which is affecting all of us, the people in the middle have to be strengthened. They need a lot of support. They need political support and financial support. We have to create partnerships, and we have to create understanding. Some time ago, the USA announced that it was going to give ten billion dollars for the reform of the *madrasas*, the religious schools. But I think that this is quite a misguided priority, because only about two or three percent of students go to these daily *madrasas*, and 97 percent go to other kinds of schools. It's the reform of the other kinds of schools that's important. So there has to be a consultative process. People sitting in Washington do not know what people in Afghanistan need, or what people in Pakistan need, or how to bring about changes. I'm very sorry to say that they are very badly advised. If we are going to make some real progress, a mechanism has to be found to identify the real change agents in the societies and to support their work and let them do what they think is necessary. The aid should not be restricted, saying I want you to do this. Rather [the attitude must be] I'm your friend, and I want to support you in what you're doing. We need to build a lot of bridges here. So I absolutely agree that we need

money, and we need a lot of political support, and I hope that you all will be instrumental in giving some of it.

Bernadette Brooten: I want to thank the speakers and the audience for the stimulating conversation that we've had this evening. I will go away from this with the recognition once again of the power of faith in sustaining us in our work. I interviewed a woman a few years ago who had become an Eastern Orthodox Christian. She had been Protestant and had become Eastern Orthodox, and she was involved in very difficult social service work, working with the homeless, working with violence toward women. She said the difference that her spiritual change had made in her life was that she no longer despaired; she had something to sustain her through all of the levels of work that she wouldn't have had otherwise. That's what I see here, and that's what gives me the greatest hope. The faith sustains us, the religious community sustains us.

Sylvia Barack Fishman: I know you're all as excited as I am about the magnificent beginning of the discussion that we had tonight. So many of the things that were said resonate for people no matter what their faith. When Sister Mary Boys talks about loving the church that squanders the gifts of its women, for example, I think of Cynthia Ozick's early, ground-breaking essays, in which she says that not only do women lose out when the genius of half of the people is not used, but the whole society loses out. And when Riffat Hassan talks about the hijacking of her religion by religious extremists and the necessity for supporting and sustaining the middle, because extremists have a corrosive effect on the lives of girls and women, that's something that I know is unfortunately very relevant to many faith traditions.

For me, one of the most moving and troubling questions that was raised this evening had to do with education. Riffat Hassan said that she hopes that providing girls and women with the intellectual tools to access their own tradition will transform society, and Sister Mary Boys said that women must know their texts better than the men do. Tova Hartman strikes a cautionary note, saying that just knowing the text does not necessarily transform society. We have to acquire power to be able to implement what we know in order for society to be transformed. Well, tomorrow, luckily, we have from nine to five to explore these issues, including whether education is a force for change or changelessness, and even though Riffat Hassan told us that even in the days of the Prophet, the community didn't come together, now we have a chance to come together. We have refreshments, we have book sales, we have a chance to socialize. I invite you all to join us again tomorrow.

¹<http://www.scu.edu/bannancenter/eventsandconferences/lectures/archives/dumaine.cfm>

² Rosemary Haughton, *The Catholic Thing* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1979), 9.

³ "Rooted Hearts, Playful Minds: Catholic Intellectual Life at Its Best," *Cross Currents*
<http://www.crosscurrents.org/weaver.htm>

⁴ Both Popes Paul VI and John Paul II have said that the Roman Catholic Church has "no authority whatsoever to confer priestly authority on women." They seem here to be following the logic of the 1976 declaration *Inter Insigniores*, which formulates three arguments against the ordination of women: longstanding church tradition, the witness of Scripture and the religious symbol *in persona Christi* (i.e., "the priest acts in the role of Christ to the point of being his very image. It is required, therefore, that the priest be male" #26). Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, responding to Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter, has declared that the teaching on the impermissibility of women's ordination is virtually "infallible."

⁵ Some claim, for example, that women could never keep the secrecy of the confessional. Such sexist stereotyping is ridiculous; many of us have heard "confessions"—albeit of the non-canonical variety—

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and would never entertain betraying the confidences. What is most important is that people might experience the healing of God's mercy.

⁶ George Gallup, Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay, *Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs* (Harrisburg, Pa: Morehouse, 1999). This is from a 1993 poll; this poll indicates a higher percentage of Catholics under thirty support ordination of women (76 percent; ages 30-49, 67 percent; 50 and older, 48 percent). The usual rejoinder to such information is "the church is not a democracy." But is it an oligarchy?

⁷ James L. Fredericks, "Interreligious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35/2 (1998): 168-72.

⁸ *The Tablet* (29 March 2003) reports that the papal nuncio in Britain, Archbishop Pablo Puente said in a homily at the European regional conference of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations that "in some church environments it was difficult for women to be allowed to think in depth and to be listened to with the respect that every baptized person merits." The news item continues: "He told the delegates that women were welcome to pray and to work in the Church, but not always to think" (p. 32).

⁹ *Transforming Grace*, p. 21.

¹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965 ("Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), #29.