

Women, Religion, and Social Change II

PANEL: RELIGIOUS NETWORKS AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL

SPERRY ROOM

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10:45 - 12:15 AM

DOROTHY AUSTIN: The title of this panel is "Religious Networks and Women's Leadership." And the questions before us are these: "How do we assess new forms of women's leadership in our respective religious traditions? What have been the gains? The backlash? The prospects for the future? In what ways should we be taking leadership in relation to the future of religious traditions? We have before us a good many questions. How to globalize from below? We have ourselves, we have our unity, we have our cooperation. Yes, Nawal, I was listening. And before we leave this place we know that we will indeed have assignments, that we will have homework to do. Those women who have sat, as we have, in our kitchens, looking at the homework of our youngsters, we know what it means to do our homework.

It's my pleasure to give a cursory, quick introduction for those of you who do not have the material of the conference before you. I'll just give a word of introduction to our speakers. Elizabeth Amoah, Dr. Elizabeth Amoah is a senior lecturer, former head of the department of the study of religion, University of Ghana. She is a founding member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. She is an integral partner in running the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture at the Trinity Theological Seminary. When she was here at the '83 conference she taught us how to wrap our heads-- some of you may remember that-- and also how to wrap our minds around the issues.

Chatsumarn Kabil Singh. Dhammananda bhikkhuni was a professor of Buddhist philosophy in Bangkok for 27 years. In February of 2001 she retired from the university to receive ordination from Venerable Sumana, and has become a Theravadin nun in Thailand, an act of great bravery and it has stirred a controversy. The Thai sangha will have to reconsider their attitude towards the monastic tradition in her country and to be more inclusive of women.

Daphne Hampson holds a personal chair in post-Christian thought at the School of Divinity at the University of St. Andrews, publishes largely in the field of constructive systematic theology. Her books include *Theology and Feminism*, *After Christianity*, *Christian Contradictions*, *The Structures of Lutheran Catholic Thought*. She's edited a collection called *Swallowing a Fishbone: Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity*. She's working on a new book entitled *God in Question: Theology, Feminism and Continental Philosophy*. She describes herself as post-Christian.

Judith Plaskow is Professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College, where she has taught since 1979 as a Jewish feminist theologian. The author and editor of numerous important books in women's studies and religion, including one of the very first feminist dissertations

in religious studies entitled *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich*. With Carol Christ, she co-edited that memorable volume *Women's Spirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion and Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, anthologies that are still widely used in many women's studies and religious study courses. With Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza she co-founded the *Journal of Feminist Studies and Religion* and co-edited it for its first decade. Her book, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* is the first full-length Jewish feminist theology, a book that none of us have forgotten.

Ines Talamantez received her PhD from UC San Diego. She's been involved with the women's studies program since its inception. Professor Talamantez has been a member of the faculty in the Religious Studies Department at UCSB since 1978. She specializes in Native American religious studies and philosophies, Native American literature, comparative literature, ethno-poetics, oral traditions, translation theory, anthropology of religion. Her publications are numerous: *The Goddess Within, Native American Religions: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. But the thing I should say to you that's most exciting to all of us who have been waiting is the book is finally finished, and it is called *Becoming*. Is there anyone I have missed? No. Then without any further delay let me say that each of our panelists will speak for ten minutes. My role will be to ride gentle herd on the women. Elizabeth. [applause]

ELIZABETH AMOAH: Thank you very much, Dorothy. I also sincerely thank all our international and global partners and sisters, who have been accompanying us in Africa through our struggles to live despite globalization or whatever you call it.

For us in Africa, this new web globalization is not a new system. We have experienced it the first day we had contact with the west in the 15th century, and we have devised ways of dealing with any situation that we find ourselves. So my story now is about what we've been doing after the 20 years of meeting here. And before I go into the story, let me share with you some of the images that we have in our traditional African cultures with regard to leadership.

I come from the western part of Ghana, which is very close to the Ivory Coast. It is an area with very thick forests, tropical forests, and the image of a leader is a person who finds herself or himself with a group of people in a very thick forest. They want to go in a certain direction but there is no way out. Then within that group you find that one of them takes initiative and clears a path for the rest to pass through. And we also say that that person clearing the path, because he or she is going straight on clearing the path, doesn't know that the path is crooked. It is for those behind him or her to point out that there are some crooked paths.

With that image of a leader, I want to share with you what I've been involved with in the past 20 years that I was here. This story is a story of hope, that religion, spirituality, whatever you call it, if handled well, can play a positive and life-enhancing role in the human community. It is a story of hope, that African culture can be milked for its life-giving aspects and transformed where it brings hate.

Our story of African women's participation in creating gender awareness in religion and society began as far back as in 1980 when Professor Mercy Amba Oduyoye brought together a few African women theologians in a consultation in Ibadan, Nigeria, where Connie Parvey was part.

Nine years after, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, which I was a founding member, was integrated in Trinity Theological Seminary at Ghana. That event brought together about 70 African women to deliberate on how to contribute to generate gender sensitivity and equity in the theological studies and in their various faith communities. The participants convened to research, write, publish in order to communicate and democratize knowledge in the hope that it will positively affect daily living.

The Circle is a mutual mentoring community that is multi-cultural, multi-national, multi-racial and multi-religious. In fact, out of the wake of the Circle, our Ghanaian Muslim sisters have come to form and have an association called ... Federation of Muslim Women in Ghana. And many of them came as members of the Circle. The Circle has now about 40 women doing theology from the standpoint of several disciplines, and from daily living. It is broad-based, and this enables it to include all women who find culture and religion central to worship women's lives.

I will stress here, in this meeting we've been talking about some people think religion is irrelevant in our living, but I have a different opinion. Because on Tuesday, when I go to the airport at Boston, I was going through the immigration and when it came to my turn the immigration officer said, "We cannot admit you--" I haven't told anybody yet, "because you have a different Visa." So I said, "Well, that's not my fault because I didn't issue the Visa for myself." [laughter]

So I was taken to a different place, delayed a little bit, and I was given to one of the immigration officers, who called me and said, "Ma'am, did you know that you have the wrong Visa?" I said, "No, I don't know anything about US types of Visas." And he said, "Yes, look that." Because I normally dress like this with my African print and my headgear. And he just looked at me from the top to the bottom and asked, "Do you have any religion?" And I said, "Yes, I do." Then he said, "Which one?" Because I think he didn't know whether I was a Muslim or a Christian or whatever, or traditional, whatever. And I said I was a Christian. Then he said, "Good. [laughter] Which denomination?" And I said, "I'm a Methodist." Then he said, "I'm also a Methodist." So he stamped. [laughter]

Yes, this was Tuesday. He stamped my passport and said, "I will let you in, but when you go back to Ghana, go back to the-- if you want to come back to the States, tell the immigration, the Consulate there to give you a proper Visa. But since you are Methodist, I will let you in for 20 days." [laughter]

So for me, whether we like it or not, religion in any form affects our life. So let me quickly-- so we formed the Circle to write and research into the various aspects of our religious lives

and culture and how these in a way affect our daily living even today. The Circle has become very wide and complex, and it's become a big network of women theologians all over Africa. We have a website, and within these past years we have been able to produce about 40 books.

Then ten years after the formation of the circle, in the same seminary, again Mercy initiated the Institute for Women in Religion and Culture. And we deliberately put it in the seminary because it used to be one of the very conservative seminaries where women were not even admitted to be ordained or to do theology, and we deliberately put it there to sensitize the ministerial formation that they have to take the gender issue seriously, because those of us in Africa, many of our lives are being shaped and directed by religion, culture and gender. We created the Institute and the aims of this Institute is first of all to go to the villages, the grassroots, all over Ghana, to hold consultations with the religious communities and trade communities about the present issues that each particular area faces. So we've been to almost all over Ghana. Just last week I was-- in the other paper I distributed, I was at which-- incidentally, 20 years ago when I was here I wrote a paper on witchcraft, and witchcraft still exists and we have now even witchcraft comes to put all these women who have been accused of as witches. And we were there last week visiting them, helping them to live meaningful life and so on, so forth.

And one of the reasons, the aims of the institute, is to build a place, a center called the Talitha Qumi Center. Why do we call the name of this place Talitha Qumi Center. We took the name from the story of Jesus where he told a little girl who was declared dead to rise up. And we took the name because we believe that we are saying to the succeeding generations of girls that when you see the daylight, say so and do not wait for others. Because in our proverbs, there's a proverb that the hen knows when it is dawn, but traditions say it doesn't crow. So it allows the male, the cocks to crow. And we are saying that no, you can crow if you're a hen and so on and so forth.

We took that name because we want to tell the little boys that your sisters are not dead. They are alive to what it takes to live for-- in all its fullness. To live life in all its fullness. Again, we took the name Talitha Qumi Center because we want to say to all parents, teachers and others who have the care of their young ones that they are not dead, they are sensitive to what is around them. So nurture them into full humanity. This is our sacred duty, the duty to make persons living, caring, just, and compassionate.

And I think I want to-- I have to wind up and finish by telling us what are our needs. Again, one of our aims is to make a resource center for the university students and for researchers, both in Ghana and outside Ghana, to use for research. And so one of our needs is looking for publications and materials to equip our center. We are saying also to our sisters here that we need your continual support.

But we want to leave you this wise saying, that when two elephants, or any elephant, when they fight, the grass and the little creatures suffer. So we encourage you to use whatever means you have to be politically alert and to be concerned about your government policies. Because we know that whatever happens here, now we become a small village. Whatever

happens in one village affects the other village. So you become more close neighbors than we were before. And as we say in Ghana, your neighbor's death is your death. Thank you very much. [applause]

AUSTIN: Dhammananda bhikkhuni, please.

DHAMMANANDA BHIKKHUNI: Greetings from the warm country of Thailand, just the opposite [side] of the globe I came from. It's 12 hours. So it's now almost midnight in my country. So the fact that it's almost midnight and I'm still standing here, it's a surprise. [laughter]

They asked me to talk about leadership and women and religion. I think it's best to talk about my own ordination so that you will have first-hand information. At least I don't have to give you reference, because as academic-- I have been trained as academic for more than 40 years, always have to give reference. But when you talk about yourself, there is no reference. The reference is here.

In Thailand, it's a Theravada country. When I say Theravada country, it means something like a Catholic as compared to Christianity. They never allow women to be ordained. But in fact during the Buddhist time we did have women ordained, and it was the Buddha who gave us the heritage for women to be ordained. So in fact we do have one step ahead of our Catholic sisters. However, in my country, which is 700 years old ... we did not have women ordained. Why so? Because they keep quoting that in order for a woman to be ordained you need at least five ordained women, five ordained men. And because you don't have ordained women, how could you start this order? [laughter] It's just knocking your head against the wall.

However, in our history, 70 years ago in the year 1928 we did have the first case of women [being] ordained. And they were so badly treated, they were literally taken-- the robe was taken off of their bodies and they were put in jail. I considered that as first wave. The second wave was my own mother, who took the robe again in the year 1960s, and then she was fully ordained from Taiwan in the year 1971.

My ordination is the third wave, which happened in the year 2001. I will go to strategy, because so limited time and I have limitation with my English. I'm not so fluent like you, you know, so I will just go directly to the points. Strategy for my ordination is that number one, I will not criticize the male Sangha. It is for the public to see how weakened they are. Number two. [laughter] I must be very positive in my own-- the way I project myself, my ideas and my service to the world must always be on the positive side. Number three, it is always for socially engaged Buddhists. Number four, which I consider most important, is that we must be deep-rooted in our spiritual life, even at the expense of academic life. I think this is very important for all of us who are interested, not only in religion, even for-- Azza Karam, she was giving you the two extremes. For both extremes you need spiritual growth in order to anchor you in this troubled world.

Now, for my ordination, the context is such that it actually allows this ordination to be more possible than the other two ways. That is, the globalization. I have both positive and negative side, you know, and I'm concerned when Nawal say that she's very happy about globalization from below. I am very cautious about that. We'll discuss about that later on. Now, this globalization actually helps in a way that after my ordination, right after my ordination my American friends here already sending e-mail. They already knew about what's happening in the other side of the globe. So that was helpful. So they could not literally put me in jail, they could not literally strip me of the robe, and nobody knows about it. They cannot do that anymore.

The fact that the Sangha, the male Sangha is weakened, because they are so privileged, people put them put on the altar, so they are so privileged and they are enjoying all the rights and all the power, and power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely, so somebody said.

And right now there is a need for female monks, female priests. Society really welcomes female priests. Ordination for women actually opens up for alternative lifestyle. There are committed women, but they don't have place to enjoy on this other side that Azza Karam was saying. On this side, it's always men, you know, on that religious/political extreme. In my case, we have gone much further than the two waves of ordination of women in Thailand. That is, it is the senators-- Dorothy will be very happy to hear this. The senators in Thailand took initiation to set up a subcommittee to study about the possibility of giving ordination to women. So after six months of study, they came up with a very positive report. They have been sending out both book reports in written form as well as CD-ROM to educate people about the possibility of ordination of women. So this is-- we have really come a long way from what it was 70 years ago.

It was discussed in the parliament, and as late as March 11, this March 11, we had public hearing on ordination of women in the parliament. It was organized by the senators in the parliament. And we did get both pro and cons, as it is of any public hearing, but nevertheless it is known at the parliament level. The deputy prime minister actually came to respond to the request about ordination and he said that from the law, from the constitution point of view, they have no objection, but they have to ask from the Sangha. Now you're throwing the meeting into the tiger's mouth again.

So somebody says that you have to-- they have to set up a study group again. So it's going back, going back one step. So the Sangha will not-- they will just keep silent, the best they can do. They will not say anything. But the fact that they are not saying anything, they are not giving us the official statement that the ordination of women is correct, can be done. So women are afraid. There will be very few like me who would come forward and let my head get chopped off, so to say. But ordinary people would be afraid.

The white robe nuns, which are prevalent in my country, we have about-- let me give you the figure. In the whole country you have 60 million people. 95% of these people are Buddhists. And out of this number, you have 300,000 monks, male monks. And then you have about 10,000 white robe nuns. White robe nuns, they do not have ordained status.

Because they don't have ordained status, they don't have the fringe benefits that the monks do get. They don't get support, they don't get government support, they don't get-- people like to make merit by making offerings, and because the monks are filled of merits, so they would rather make offerings to the monks rather than the white robe nuns. So this is one big gap that we are missing out.

Now, for the ordination issue, people said, "Oh this is a women's issue." It is not a women's issue. It is a Buddhist issue. It is not a Buddhist issue only but it is for humanity. It is the problem of humanity, that if you talk about spirituality, available only for 50% of the globe, there is something wrong. There is something wrong with that. Whereas in the Buddhist context, the Buddha set up, established four groups of people: the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. And each one of them are equal, they have equal rights into this shareholder of this company, the so-called Buddhist company. You know, these four groups of people have equal shareholding to this Buddhism. And the Buddha even said that in the future Buddhism will decline, when the four groups of people do not have respect for the Buddha, for his teaching, for his community, when these four groups of followers do not respect each other. So this is where we are. The fact that they do not allow ordination for women is in fact what the Buddha already prophesized during his time, that we will come to a decline.

So I was looking at her, you know, whether-- oh, it's here. [laughter] Prospects for the future. Prospects for the future for the ordination of nuns. I look at Taiwan. I look at Taiwan. Taiwan is such a good example. Fifty years ago in Taiwan Buddhism was nothing. It was superstitious, nobody cared for Buddhism. And it was the bhikkhunis, the nuns, that actually brought about understanding of Buddhism, to raise Buddhism to a state religion. And if you look in Taiwan, the dean of the faculties, directors, publisher, radio programmer, all are nuns, all are bhikkhunis. So that is a real prospect for the future that I see Taiwan has led ahead.

Then the last one is about leadership and future of religious traditions. I think we should talk about common interests that we women in religion can do together. Environmental concern. We could share with each other common suffering. We do have, all of us suffer. We can start from that. You know, whether you're a Christian, whether you're a Muslim, whether you're a Buddhist, all of us suffer. How are we to get out of this suffering? All of us need peace and happiness. How are we to get to peace and happiness? So start something on common issues. Do not emphasize the difference. Don't talk about God, because right away I will feel very uncomfortable because in Buddhism we do not have that God concept. So let's start from something that we do share and we can be very positive and we can work together peacefully, harmoniously and for a better world. Thank you. [applause]

AUSTIN: Thank you, Dhammananda. And now, Daphne Hampson please. [applause]

DAPHNE HAMPSON: As Dorothy said, I describe myself as 'post-Christian'. So do other people in Britain these days, in part through my influence but it's much wider than that. I want to try and talk about what kind of leadership I hope I have been taking in Britain during the last 30 years since I trained here at Harvard Divinity School. It was I who

suggested that the sentence "In what ways should women be taking leadership in relation to religious traditions?" should be added since I didn't seem to fit the description of this session at first proposed.

And I have to be quite frank with you. The 'leadership' that I have taken has been telling people that we should leave Christianity behind us at this point; that we should be spiritual persons and find new ways to express our understanding of God which are free of Christian dogma.

I must start by setting this in the British -- and indeed the European -- context, which is very different from that here in the States and maybe much of the rest of the world. I will say it and repeat it: modern Europe is secular. Whether this is the first time that a major continent has become secular I don't know, but I suppose so. The overwhelming majority of British people are secular these days and have really no further use for Christianity. On Sundays they go to the garden center, not to the church: let's put it that way.

The people who still have some kind of religious obedience in Britain are, among Christians, those who are fundamentalists, whether evangelical, or the Catholics have to some extent survived but they are going down at a great rate; and otherwise people who belong to the immigrant community - Muslims, Sikhs, etc. I actually think it's created some kind of an imbalance, that the whole 'center' of liberal Christianity (which I came from myself) has just fallen away.

I'll give you one statistic which symbolizes the situation. I've lived most of my life in Scotland, where the established church is of course Presbyterian, not Anglican. If the rate of decline of the Church in Scotland continues as at present there will be no Presbyterians in Scotland by 2050. That's where we are. We're a secular country.

Britain isn't alone in this. Look at the Irish Republic. I remember in Ireland in the 1960s thinking what a poverty-ridden and deeply superstitious Catholic country it was! Modern Ireland is basically secular! -- would you believe it? Let alone the Scandinavian countries, Germany, Italy (to the Pope's chagrin) etc. I'm working in a secular context.

Now the question which arises is whether it is not however the case that many women want to continue in some way to be spiritual persons within this context. For I find that most of my friends have retained a spirituality. Some of my friends are Quaker. (It's a question whether the Society of Friends in Britain is tied to Christianity any longer; some Quakers are Christians, some aren't, but in any case Quakerism is wide open.) A close friend has taken up a Buddhist practice. And I have many older friends, wonderful and clearly spiritual women who, having come from a Christian context, have left the church behind at this point.

Let me give an example: Ruth Robinson, whose husband wrote an infamous book, *Honest to God*, in the 1960s - and she thought of the title and I am surmising most of the ideas. [Laughter] She's a good friend of mine. She remained in the church until quite recently but

she has now left it behind. So this is just the norm now. It is in no way unusual or problematic to be where I am. My friends, however variously, think likewise. Precisely what has been more problematic for me is the context of the Divinity School at which I teach. Whereas when I was first there as a young woman the older members of the staff were liberal Christians and outstanding biblical scholars, the members of staff younger than I -- I've been there 26 years and am now the oldest person there -- who have replaced them are basically conservative Christians and Barthians. They're the only people who want to do theology these days. [Having been coughing] I'm sorry about the problem with my throat. The bullying was finally so bad last year that I became both mentally depressed and physically ill and having managed there for this length of time I'm now resigning from my job.

Something just happened which shed light for me on what it has been like to be a woman and what kind of leadership I've taken in my life. I acquired my theological education -- thank goodness -- here at Harvard Divinity School. This morning at breakfast I uncovered more of the story of behind this. A man whom I was convinced I knew came into the room and smiled at me. This was Seamus Malin who used to administer the Knox Fund, I think an American fund, which brought scholars from the other of 'the two great democratic peoples of the world', which were the United States and British Commonwealth of Nations, to the U.S. to study. He remembered the interview I had had in London in 1969, which I had forgotten, after which he had apparently spoken up saying that yes, a woman could come to Harvard and study divinity. When I was first here, I was indeed the only woman in the advanced degree program in systematics.

Now to understand this story further you have to know that -- as I could recite to Seamus Malin -- the terms of the Knox Trust were that it was hoped that those given awards would 'return to their country of origin to become a leader in their chosen field'. Seamus Malin knew I was here [attending a conference at Harvard Divinity School] because his wife studying here had been given something of mine to read. He had said 'How do you know Daphne Hampson?!' To which she had responded: 'She's famous'. Well I'm not sure that I'm exactly famous but, as I could jokingly say, I have fulfilled the terms of the scholarship and become a leader in my chosen field! But that 'chosen field' has, as I say, been the attempt to find a way forward, for women in particular, the other side of Christianity.

That women and feminists have left Christianity behind has however to be set in the much wider context of people simply not believing Christianity any longer. The BBC has excellent discussions about religion: I'm glad I live in a country where there is a big debate about truth issues. A friend of mine, a theologian working in Cambridge, was talking to me about one such discussion (which I had not seen) at Easter this year. Don Cupitt, who has been very important figure in leading people forward, Rowan Williams, now Archbishop of Canterbury (whom I've known for many years) and others, we're discussing 'the resurrection'. I responded to her remarks 'but Rowan is much more conservative'. She questioned this saying "He may be, but surely he's thinking about the resurrection in largely spiritual terms these days rather than an actual event." Whether that's true of Rowan I don't know. What I want to put before you is the vignette of a BBC discussion of the truth or otherwise of the resurrection and a British theologian supposing (rightly or

wrongly) that the man who is Archbishop of Canterbury must as an intelligent human being have abandoned any such literal belief.

In this situation the question, thus, with which we are faced is that as to whether we want to retain this mythology which is Christianity (or Islam or Judaism and so forth). Does one continue to talk about the resurrection, only now in spiritual terms rather than as an actual event? Now I think that as women we must say not simply that it isn't true but that these mythologies have profoundly harmed women, as must all forms of transcendent monotheism, because woman becomes the 'opposite' to the transcendent God who is conceived of in male terms. What I am saying is that I think that on both grounds, that of truth and in accordance with moral criteria, we need to move beyond the mythologies of transcendent monotheism.

I have noticed that a lot of other people also seem to be moving in this kind of direction, indeed on both sides of the Atlantic. For once I'm not alone in theological circles! There's coming to be widespread discussion precisely of transcendent monotheism, or (as the Muslims say) of 'Abrahamic' religions, and whether we can move forward with them any further. On the board outside [this lecture hall] you will see a poster advertising this year's Villanova conference; the series of conferences is concerned with the issue of postmodernism and theology. This year they're discussing "Transcendence and Beyond". Is the concept of transcendence and a transcendent God of any further avail to us?

Last year at the American Academy of Religion I attended the sessions of the Continental philosophy section. During those days we'd heard a lot from Derrida, who was present at the conference. Although he's an atheist, when he comes to talk about religion Derrida is for all the world a Jew, taking transcendent monotheism for granted. So at the meeting for planning the next year's conference I brought up the question as to whether it was useful that we should reinstate the paradigms of transcendent monotheism via the work of Levinas or Derrida? The Continental philosophy section's call for papers for this coming year duly reflected my question: great. And I've had a paper proposal accepted. Okay: I want to propose that no, there is no way forward for the Abrahamic religions and transcendent monotheism; that through their very structure they must always make woman 'the other', subordinating her.

To conclude as to in what ways women should be taking leadership in relation to religious traditions? What kind of leadership has it been possible to give? What I've done, along the way, over the last twenty or thirty years, as you will probably have gathered, is write and lecture and go on radio and television. I am now resigning from my job but I want to continue these things. And I want to travel: I have loved traveling in recent years. It's no chance that I am wearing a piece of jewelery which, as you may have noticed, is not British jewelery! [Very clearly deriving from an Islamic culture.] I have particularly traveled in Islamic countries. Interestingly I've also met a lot of secular women who are educated in Islamic countries these days, particularly in Uzbekistan. (Fifty years of communist domination gave the women education: very interesting.) But I've also been elsewhere; for example to Nepal.

I really hope that women world-wide can begin to ask fundamental questions as to whether it is not the case that the world's religions have been ideologies which have profoundly harmed us, and indeed must continue to do so through their very structure and paradigms. I would say (with French feminist theory) that the subordination of women is no chance but the very *raison d'être* of these ideologies, what keeps them in place. However from the fact that we need to move beyond the religious mythologies which we have inherited it does not follow that we don't need to find new ways to express our spirituality. Thank you very much. [applause]

AUSTIN: Thank you Daphne. And now for Judith Plaskow. [applause]

JUDITH PLASKOW: I'm aware of a certain disconnection between what I have to say on this panel and our discussion of yesterday morning and of earlier this morning. I think that there are two clear strands in our work together these few days, one of them focusing on our discussion of the huge political, economic, social issues facing our world and the other the inter-religious dialogue strand, and although they ought to fit together seamlessly, they don't always. And it seems to me the question that we need to struggle with over the next couple of days is how do we put them together in a productive way that can help us to move forward. And I certainly see the huge challenge facing Jewish feminism over the next decade and decades is finding ways to take the extraordinary gains that we've made in women's leadership and connect them to women's struggles around the world.

This said, the story of women's leadership within the Jewish community can be told from a number of different angles, depending on who is telling it. And I want to try to suggest just a few aspects of the complexity of the picture. On one level, the development of women's religious leadership over the last 30 years has been an enormous success story. Through the 1960s, women were basically excluded from, or marginalized within, Jewish public religious life. None of the rabbinical schools ordained women, even the reform rabbinical school. With the exception of very few synagogues, women were not counted in a minyan, the quorum of prayer, quorum of ten men required to have a full service. Women were not called to the Torah, the center of the Sabbath service. They didn't read from the Torah. And while it was only within Orthodoxy that women were formally excluded from these roles, the situation was not that different in most liberal synagogues in the 1960s.

I grew up in a classic Reform congregation. Men didn't cover their heads; you would have been seen as weird if you covered your head. But women's participation was basically limited to lighting candles on Friday night, and the rabbi was opposed to the ordination of women because it was against tradition.

Many of my friends grew up in the conservative movement where they were given the same education as boys. They were the first generation to receive the same education. But bat mitzvah was the end of their participation in Jewish life rather than the beginning. So they were waved goodbye to at the point that they became bat mitzvahed.

__: ... (inaudible)

PLASKOW: Yes, it was graduation from Judaism, exactly. So when the feminist movement erupted in the late '60s and early '70s, some of the women who were analyzing their position in society began to apply those questions to Judaism. And beginning in 1970, a series of articles appeared questioning the position of women in Jewish law. In 1971 the first Jewish feminist group was formed, Ezrat Nashim, which is a pun meaning help for women. It's also the women's section of the synagogue. And in 1972 they went to the Conservative rabbinic association and demanded complete equality for women within Conservative Judaism. In 1973 there was the founding Jewish feminist conference in New York, with 500 women from all sectors of Jewish life, from secular to Orthodox, and this really marked the official launch of the Jewish feminist movement as a lively grassroots movement.

The changes that have taken place in the 30 years since that time, friends, are nothing short of revolutionary. Sally Priesand was ordained the-- well there was actually a woman ordained in Europe, but she was the first of a new wave of women. She was ordained in 1972. There are now over 300 rabbis who are women. The conservative movement agreed to ordain women in 1983, when Ezrat Nashim went to the Conservative movement they didn't think that change would take place in their lifetimes.

[TRANSCRIPT INCOMPLETE DUE TO TECHNICIAN ERROR]