MFN, as in our sessions at Kalamazoo, as indeed at many other venues, is a strong indication of the success of such strategies. Building alliances is never fuzzy feminist politics but the way forward. Indeed, I will go further and recommend that we consider carefully our aims and strategies as a Society since we, as a community, united by our feminisms as by our scholarly interests, are now taking our place in Medieval Studies: a place from which we can share and debate our ideas and goals, and examine our attitudes and commitments toward them, with others, both within and without our respective disciplines.

WOMEN AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

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I have been asked to enter the discussion of the role of feminist medievalists in the academy from the perspective of religious and theological studies. It has been gratifying to reflect on the scope of our accomplishments—so much so that I have turned the question slightly away from professional issues and toward this pleasant task. My remarks are focused on the contributions of feminist interests and insights to the study and teaching of medieval Christianity in departments of religion and theological schools. I'll begin with a (very) brief narrative of selected developments, look at some significant changes produced by attention to the experience of women and by the use of gender as a category of analysis, and close with a note on professional concerns. My comments are restricted to my own field, the history of Christianity, but contributions of similar range and significance are being made, of course, by feminists in medieval Judaism and other areas.

Like our colleagues in other historical fields, feminist medievalists began by exhuming relevant "women worthies." In some cases (Joan of Arc comes to mind, as does Heloise), these female giants were not lost so much as shrouded in layers of sexist as well as religious ideology; they have been revisited in the light of what we know now about sexual politics. In the notable and extraordinary example of Hildegard of Bingen, rediscovery was followed (happily) by translations of many of her works, and by responses that ranged all the way from the profound theological analysis of Barbara Newman (*Sister of Wisdom*, 1987) to the Hildegard T-shirt franchise.

In the 1970s, while feminists in religious studies were renewing their attention to medieval women, they were also re-reading male Christians, from Paul of Tarsus to Paul Tillich. Much of that work was undertaken by those who approached Christian history from a theological perspective—seminary and divinity school professors, whose women students were preparing for ministry in Christian churches. There was much to be done: unfortunately, there is never a shortage of hateful texts. With a sharp eye for exclusion and misogyny, and fueled by anger at what they perceived to be distortions of the Gospel by church leaders and theologians, feminists set about the deconstruction of the Fathers. (Some early examples of this genre were gathered in Rosemary Radford Ruether's influential anthology: *Religion and Sexism*, 1974.) Deconstruction was an essential step toward historical revision, but attention to women soon spread far beyond exposing the sins of their detractors. (Reuther's next anthology, edited with Eleanor McLaughlin in

1979, was entitled—significantly—*Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Tradition.*) It was now obvious, and intriguing to feminist scholars, that empowerment was as significant as oppression in the religious experience of certain medieval women. The authority and independence of Hilda of Whitby or Catherine of Siena were unthinkable outside the context of Christianity, and of religious life.

Gender became a critical factor in the study of religion, and not in women's religion exclusively. Before she began to look directly at religious and social meanings in the experience of holy women, Caroline Walker Bynum drew our attention to the surprising discourse of some 12th-century religious men, who understood their relationships to God and each other in terms of feminine language and imagery (*Jesus as Mother*, 1982). New topics as well as new groups of people have been introduced into the history of Christianity in the last two decades. Family history, and the history of sexuality and sex roles, are central to the work of some of our eminent historians, male as well as female. (Notable examples include David Herlihy, Peter Brown, and John Boswell—all of whom acknowledge profound debts to feminist scholarship). We no longer imagine that we can discover a disembodied religious history apart from teachings and practices concerning sex, marriage, parenting, and gender.

The redirection of scholarly attention from the center to the margins is a persistent theme in discussions of medieval studies, as it is in religion and in women's studies. One cannot focus on "mainstream religion," or on ecclesiastical institutions and their leaders, and learn very much about those who were systematically excluded. We now look at lay people along with popes and clerics, at spirituality and practice as well as doctrine and prescription. It should be noted that the emphasis on popular religion, and on persons and phenomena outside the old "center," was overdetermined: it cannot be credited entirely to feminism. Under the influence of the "new" social history (not so new any more), and with insights and approaches borrowed from anthropology, historians in general were entranced by popular culture. As attention to cultural systems transformed history and religious studies, feminists were quick to take advantage of the new interdisciplinary alliances. (Natalie Zemon Davis's 1975 collection, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, signaled the value of these alliances for the study of women).

Interest in medieval Christian women has moved heretics, witches, and other marginalized people and groups closer to the center of historical scholarship. Our sources, which include such misogynist diatribes as the *Malleus Maleficarum*, direct us toward these disregarded groups by insisting that women were prominent among them. At the other end of the spectrum there is a revival of interest in holiness and holy persons—saints, prophets, and visionaries. It seems that holiness, too, is gendered: whether through some essential aspect of feminine "nature," or in order to circumvent ecclesiastical barriers to female leadership, women do it differently. The lives of the saints, including many newly-discovered or newly-edited lives of women, raise important questions about feminine voice and vision. How were these women able to speak with authority? What is the nature of authority that is not based in office?

Across many cultures and historical periods, women have consistently been associated with religion, so that attention to the interests and activities of women forces social historians to take religious commitments and experience seriously. The well-established connection between women and religion, in conjunction with the historical

exclusion of women from institutional ecclesiastical history, has had a similarly useful effect in the world of theological education. In divinity schools as well as departments of religious studies, those who study women's religious history have to look outside the traditional canons. The habit of subsuming the history of Christianity under the rubric of "church history" no longer works, and logically must be abandoned. (Logic or no, this has not happened in very many places.)

I have left no space to speak in any detail about the professional fate of feminist medievalists, and generalization is not useful—too much depends on who and where. My closing question leads in a different direction: why is religion ignored, and religionists seldom hired, in departments of women's studies? The tendency to concentrate on literary/critical questions (usually modern, or at least post-Renaissance), or on the social sciences and American history, excludes feminist medievalists along with all other scholars of religion. And yet religion, in my (biased) opinion, lies near the heart of women's studies.

MEDIEVAL FEMINISTS AND THE LONG TERM

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Feminists in medieval studies could not have expected it to be otherwise: to reform a corpus of scholarly work we would first have to confront those structures of thought that lay embedded so deep within our field of study that they were, like as not, in no need of expression.[1] Catherine MacKinnon set as her task to uncover the deep structures of the law that disadvantaged all women; our colleagues who are feminist anthropologists made it their express purpose to strip critical theory of anti-female bias. But medieval feminists confronted a distinct problem. For us, bias lay in the most enduring and perhaps the most productive of all our deep structures, that is, within what I will call the "long term." Few if any organizing ideas hold such consequence for us as the long term, for long-term considerations condition our approaches to texts, insuring our analysis against anachronism. That is, in Lucien Febvre's words, "a monograph which is no more than a portrait bust, without background or setting, is misleading. No religious thought—no thought of any kind—however pure and disinterested, is unaffected by the climate of a period. Or, if you prefer, by the hidden operation of the conditions of life that a particular period creates for all the conventions and all the manifestations that meet on its common ground—and on which it leaves the imprint of a style never seen before, and never to be seen again."[2] The passage of time becomes a filter, a means of assessing a period's unique style and then explaining it to our own age, with its unique style. But an approach that embraces this sense of the long term is both the chief asset and the chief challenge to our endeavors.

The idea of the long term pulls along with it some strong Victorian overtones. Somewhat over a century ago scholars discovered through archaeology and recovered texts the full compass of recorded history, and they developed an overwhelming enthusiasm for grand synthesis. Millenial thinking refocused at least some attention away from carefully crafted short term studies; in fact grand synthesis was applied at times in order to structure discrete studies into a vast tapestry of the past. The very