

THE HORNEED GOD

Feminism and Men as Wounding and Healing

John Rowan

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FEMINIST THEORY



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JOHN ROWAN

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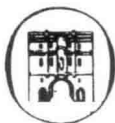


Cernunnos
Contemporary carved figure by Bel Beau

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This book is dedicated to
Neil and Sue

Introduction

In writing this book I felt great trepidation. For a man to write about feminism is problematic. It's like a white man's book on racism, or an Ulsterman's account of the Irish problem.

In trying to be aware of these issues, I resolved to do at least two things which would make the task possible. One was to write about men rather than about women. Men are my constituency, so to speak, in a way that women are not. I can speak to men about men more legitimately than I can talk to women about men or men about women. So this book is written by a man for other men. Women have much better books than this to read, written by women for women. I have read many of them, over the shoulders of women, as it were. In the same way, I suppose women can read this book if they want to, over the shoulder of a man. But it is not intended to enlighten or entertain women – it is intended to help in starting to fill various enormous gaps in the education of men.

The other thing I tried to do was to make it clear where I was coming from. One of the things we have all learned from feminist writing is that it is not OK to leave out the author. We are less interested now in whether a statement is true – in some totally abstract and pristine sense – and more interested in the place from which the statement is made, the ground on which the person is standing who makes the statement. So in this book I have tried to say what was going on for me in my life at the time when I made certain discoveries or faced certain problems,

and the way in which the discovery or problem came to me.

So this book is the record of a journey. It starts in a dark and difficult place, goes through another dark and difficult place, and ends up in a third dark and difficult place. But the first place is full of pain, the second place is a mixture of pain and pleasure, and the third place is more joy than anything else – a hard and bitter sort of joy, it is true, but joy none the less.

What I discovered during the course of writing this book was that virtually all the things people say about men are true, but they don't have to mean what they are usually supposed to mean. For example, men don't often like to be called Male Chauvinist Pigs. But I had a dream in which my passport had a photograph of a boar in place of my own photo. When I went into this with the help of the understanding engendered by this book, I discovered that some of the ancient tribes in what is now Germany worshipped the mother of the gods, and wore as a religious symbol the device of a wild boar. The Germanic boar-god became the doomsday-averting Saviour and Lord of Death. Accordingly the boar was sacrificed at the turn of the year, at Yule, with an apple in his mouth as a resurrection charm. 'Myths of dying gods like Tammuz, Attis and Adonis featured the boar, or boarskin-clad priest' (Walker, 1983). Coming closer to home, the boar was the sacred animal, more than any other, of the Celts. Above all, pigs were believed to come from the Otherworld, and to be guides to the Otherworld. In Britain, Merlin had a pig as a familiar. So the boar, masculine with feminine moon-tusks, has many connections with the Horned God, the Lord of the Animals, we shall meet later in this book. It is therefore very meaningful that the photograph in my passport should be that of a boar. The message is that in some sense I am a boar. And since in this book I am saying that to be male is OK, and the whole book is addressed to men, and is for men, it could be said that I am in myself a true Male Chauvinist Pig. The only difference is that I am in the service of the Goddess. And that makes all the difference, as we shall see in the later chapters of this book.

I would like to thank the men who read earlier drafts of

chapters from this work in progress and made detailed comments, though I have not adopted all of their suggestions and they should not be expected to support anything said here. They are Keith Mothersson, Daniel Cohen and Paul Morrison. I would also like to thank Batya Podos for a great deal of practical help and encouragement.

John Rowan
London
1986

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The wound

I am a man.

At first that may sound like an ordinary sort of a statement, pretty obvious really. So what else is new?

Yet in a way it is a confession, an admission – it is rather as if I were to say – ‘Yes, I dropped the bomb on Hiroshima.’ Except that it goes further, into the tiny details of everyday life. It is like adding – ‘And I’m putting a little arsenic into my wife’s tea every day.’

The days when I was discovering this were some of the worst days of my life. My wife had discovered feminism, as I had in theory too, and got busy to confront me on all the things she had been suppressing or not noticing or glossing over for eighteen years of our marriage. As a good revolutionary, I agreed in theory with everything she said: it was important to learn this stuff. But I was being wounded: it hurt. And as a good member of the growth movement, I allowed it to hurt.

This book is all about what I and other men did and are doing to heal that wound, or similar wounds. It is about how I and other men are affected by feminism, and what can be done about it. And I am going to argue that it is important for men to allow themselves to be wounded. The wound is necessary before any healing can happen.

Now obviously there are many different strands within feminism, and one could argue indefinitely about exactly who and what and how and when and where and whither, but what I

2 *The wound*

can't help feeling is at the heart of it is the most basic and straightforward version of radical feminism, which says that the male as such is suspect.

It is men who dominate, it is men who aggress, it is men who run things, it is men who ride roughshod over feelings and subtleties, it is men who run the media of mass communication, it is men who go in for linear thinking and terrible simplification, it is men who set up and maintain the basic hierarchy which goes up in the way shown in Figure 1.

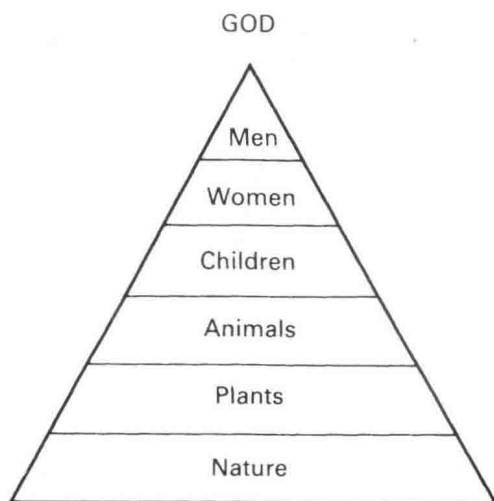


Figure 1 The world-map of patriarchy. (After Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Patriarchy as a Conceptual Trap, Wellesley, Mass.: Roundtable Press, 1982)

Now this system is often called patriarchy, but it is well to pause for a moment here and see whether this is really the best word to use.

Patriarchy

This is a term which came into currency in the early 1970s, though it had been used before. It seemed that we had to have a word which spoke of the whole system with all its levels, and

'patriarchy' did just that. It connected the political with the personal, it spoke of the conscious and the unconscious, it included the material and the spiritual, and it emphasised that the language with which we criticised patriarchy was itself patriarchal. The peace campaigner Donna Warnock says this: 'Patriarchy is a society which worships the masculine identity, granting power and privilege to those who reflect and respect the socially-determined masculine sex role' (Warnock, 1982). What is interesting, in fact, is the way in which people concerned with peace and ecology have found the word not only useful but inescapable. It fits very naturally into their argument:

When the intellect and the dominating, controlling, aggressive tendencies within each individual are defined as the most valuable parts of their being, and those same attributes are emphasised in the political and economic arena, the result is a society characterised by violence, exploitation, a reverence for the scientific as absolute, and a systematic 'rape' of nature for man's enjoyment. The result is patriarchy. (Swain and Koen, 1980)

What is so clear to emerge from this analysis is that feminism, by its opposition to patriarchy, makes patriarchy's boundaries clearer, its shape more well defined, its contrasts more stark:

The power of patriarchy is such that to see through it requires a special kind of vision, a consciousness of the most 'ordinary' experience. To understand it requires 'thinking across boundaries', as Mary Daly says. To overcome it demands the reinvention of revolution. This consciousness, this vision, this experience, this understanding, this revolutionary politic is feminism. (Warnock, 1982)

This is the language of paradox, because it is only thinking across boundaries which can establish new boundaries, which in turn need to be surpassed, since there is no single day of evolution after which everything is different and forever fine.