



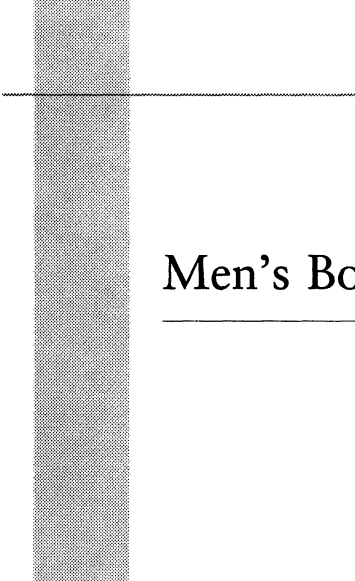
Edited by Björn Krondorfer

# MEN'S BODIES

Male Identities in a (Post-) Christian Culture

# MEN'S GODS

with an Epilogue by James B. Nelson



## Men's Bodies, Men's Gods

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*Male Identities in a (Post-)  
Christian Culture*

*Edited by*

BJÖRN KRONDORFER



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New York University Press books are printed on acid-free paper, and their  
binding materials are chosen for strength and durability.

Manufactured in the United States of America

For my sister in Vienna,  
my brother in Berlin,  
and others who inhabit  
non-traditionally gendered worlds.

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## Acknowledgments

Three years ago, I started to solicit manuscripts on the intersection of body, religion, and culture. I looked for scholars in religious studies and cognate areas willing to examine the cultural, religious, and social forces that have shaped male bodies and male identities in the Western tradition(s). Somewhat frustrated with the many new titles on neo-Jungian and archetypal approaches to male spirituality, I asked potential contributors to engage the issue of male gender in non-essentialist categories and to study male identities as part of a complex web of social relations, religious persuasions, spiritual experiences, sexual orientations, and racial differences.

Each contributor helped to define this book, and my special thanks, therefore, go to my colleagues who have taken up the challenge of mapping new terrains and exploring fresh possibilities in the interdisciplinary study of gender, religion, and culture. It was a pleasure to work with them, and I will remember many of our conversations.

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Last not least, I am thinking of my daughter Zadekia who often imitated me by typing away on her own keyboard. She grew from a baby into a toddler while I completed this book.

BJÖRN KRONDORFER



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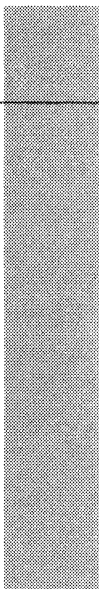
DAVID MORGAN is assistant professor of art history and chairman of the Department of Art at Valparaiso University, Indiana. He recently directed a research project funded by the Lilly Endowment on the production and reception of mass-produced popular religious art. He authored and edited *Icons of American Protestantism: The Art of Warner Sallman* (Yale University Press, 1996), and has published articles in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *European Romantic Review*, and *Religion and American Culture*, among others. He is currently a post-doctoral fellow in the Pew Program in Religion and American History at Yale and is working on a new book, *Imaging the Faith: Mass-Produced Imagery and American Protestant Piety, 1840-1960*.

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(1994). He is also the author of numerous book chapters and journal articles, and served as a board member on many committees and task forces on issues of human sexuality, including the *Sex Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)*, and the State of Minnesota Task Force on AIDS.

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PART I

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# Male Gender and Religion



## Introduction

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BJÖRN KRONDORFER

The depiction of man as *homo religiosus* is not simply a semantic accident that excludes women. Rather, it reflects a social practice of Christianity in which male religious institutions, patriarchal authority, and masculine images of God have been dominant. The central Christian doctrines, rituals, and world views were formulated by men for men, and although not all men have enjoyed equal status within the Christian moral and political community, most were assured a privileged position within that universe or, at least, were rewarded if they were willing to conform. We cannot, of course, ignore class, religious, ethnic, or sexual differences among men that have led to numerous forms of repression and persecution of men in Christian history. We only need to recall the oppression of peasants during the feudal system, the persecution of heretics during the Inquisition, the enslavement of Africans during colonization, the antisemitic assault on Jews, and the homophobic retaliation against gender transgressors to realize how many men and women have been marginalized, victimized, and brutalized by the dominant forces of European Christian cultures.

Yet, the fact remains that the dominant traditions have always favored men. Gender-conscious and feminist scholars have repeatedly drawn our attention to the fact that men are normative in theological

discourse and enjoy unrestrained access to positions of political, socioeconomic, and sacred power. Usually, such patriarchal systems are misogynist in their portrayal of women and negative in their assessment of the body. Women and body, or women as body, are depicted as corrupt and evil. What modern interpretations often overlook, however, is that the male body itself is treated preferentially. After all, men's bodies are like God's body.

The authors of this volume, who are with two exceptions scholars in the field of religious studies, examine different aspects of the male body in the religious and cultural discourse in the history of Western Christianity. How are male bodies constructed in different historical periods and contexts? How is the male body represented in religious and cultural systems? How do race, ethnicity, and sexual preference impact on the intersection of male bodies and religious identity? Does Christianity provide models to cope with the aging and ailing male body? Does it provide models for intimacy between men and women, men and men? Do men see themselves as having a sexual body, a religious body, a social body? How is sexuality linked to spirituality? How do men reflect the carnal dimensions of power, abuse, and justice? These are the kind of questions that the authors of *Men's Bodies, Men's Gods* will raise and discuss.

To provide some context to the book, I will review a few selected themes on the construction and representation of the male gender in the history of Western Christianity.

### Ascetics, Celibates, and Preachers

The gospels' proclamation of God becoming flesh through and in his son Jesus Christ is not gender-inclusive. The incarnation occurs in a specifically male body (notwithstanding its claim to universal significance), even if this body is viewed as asexual. To possess male genitalia has validated men's status as sole representative of Christ in the past, and in some churches this remains true to this day. Although theologians, visual artists, and iconoclasts have taken great pains in concealing the savior's pelvic nakedness—with the exception, perhaps, of the *ostentatio genitalium* in Renaissance art (albeit, the genitalia of only the Christ child and the dead Christ were unveiled; see Steinberg 1983)—the ecclesiasti-

cal traditions leave little doubt about the centrality of Christ's maleness. Those who have tried to interpret the sex and gender of God's son differently have been punished and marginalized. Whenever women have tried to represent God's son and, hence, move into positions of sacred authority, they were met with fierce resistance. Whether we look at the erasure of women's participation in the leadership of the early church (Fiorenza 1984; Torjesen 1993; Clark 1983), at the mystical visions of medieval women in which they asserted a direct relationship to Christ's body, thus bypassing the restricted access to the eucharist (Bynum 1987), or at contemporary battles over women's ordination, gender has always been a source of conflicts. The recent controversy over a small religious theater company, which cast a female Jesus in a performance during Pope John Paul II's visit to Denver in 1993, reminds us of the anxiety over the "correct" gender representation of Christ. Conservative Catholics called the performance "an assault on a very central doctrine, not only of the Catholic church, but of Christianity," while more liberal voices praised the play, arguing, like Sister Maureen Fiedler, coordinator of Catholics Speak Out, that if one represents "Jesus crucified, I can't think of anyone better in the church than a woman" (Niebuhr 1993).

Early Christian movements experimented with gender-variant behavior and equality of the sexes by manipulating the body. Some groups, such as the Encratites, renounced sexuality. Their practice of sexual continence allowed men and women to talk, travel, and live freely together. But the idea of continence did not gain enough support among the masses of antiquity. To renounce sexuality and live in poverty was a price that only few were willing to pay for a new eschatological vision and gender equality. Other groups, such as the Gnostics, tried to undo the separation of body and matter, man and woman, by developing androgynous images. Gnostic circles, for example, did not assign redemptive power to the continent body itself but, instead, emphasized the need for a spiritual cure with the help of the "feminine" principle of *sophia* (cf. Brown 1988; Meeks 1974, 1993). This is, perhaps, why the androgynous idealism of Gnosticism, even to this day, has appealed to a few spiritually curious men experimenting with gender variance (Conner 1993; Noble 1992). But it is important to remember that the Gnostics did not celebrate the body. Rather, they strove to become indifferent to it. Ever since Adam, according to the Gnostic myth, human bodies were the work of an inferior creation, a view that resulted in a "moral



emptying of the body's significance" (Meeks 1993: 138) and left the body with "little value as a declaratory agent" (Brown 1988: 110). Certainly, Gnosticism did not escape androcentric imagery. The non-canonical, gnostic Gospel of Thomas ends with Simon Peter's demand that women leave the community of disciples, to which Jesus replies, "For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Cameron 1982: 37). The text leaves no room for doubt: redemption lies in the male body, and the androgynous union will only take place in the spiritual realm.

Despite the existence of such groups as the Encratites and the Gnostics, the patriarchal Christian household, which modeled itself after the Roman *pater familias*, became the norm. Gender division was eventually reintroduced into ascetic practices: men's celibacy and women's virginity became models of spirituality that were no longer based on gender equality. This development coincided with the strengthening of a dualistic theology that equated maleness with soul and spirit and femaleness with body and matter (cf. Ruether 1974; Nelson 1978). Such a body-mind dualism, however, does not ignore the male flesh. On the contrary: though it is true that matter, body, and women were perceived as obstacles to men's spiritual liberation from the darkness of sin, Christianity's dualism and misogyny did not render the male body insignificant. Paradoxically, the male body remained men's spiritual battleground.

The issue of asceticism is a case in point. The early male ascetic wanted to free himself from social norms and biological necessities by manipulating the body at its most basic level: food and sexuality. For example, the desert fathers of the third century went into remote areas and refused any natural sustenance to the body. Athanasius reported that St. Antony thought he would blush if he were seen eating by others (Athanasius 1980: 65). Shame prevented those men from swallowing food and spilling semen. Literally and metaphorically, the bodies of the desert fathers dried up as their spirits began to flow—if only in the nightmarish state of *adiaphoria*, in which they experienced the breaking down of boundaries between "man and desert, human and beast" (Brown 1988: 220).

As much as the ascetics worked on effacing the sexual function of the penis, they did not escape phallocentric practices. For male ascetics, the ability to imitate Christ required physical likeness, warranted in the male

body. But Christ's body differed from their bodies in regard to spiritual perfection: Christ's body had not been touched by sin and desire while they experienced daily temptations. *Imitatio Christi* meant to live in a male body without masculine desires, a struggle that was impossible to win.

The unruly erectility of the penis constantly reminded men of their weakness. For Augustine, man's lack of control over his vital organ was a sign of humanity's inherent sinfulness. Even renunciation of sexuality did not help man to gain total control over lust. Nocturnal emissions offered conclusive proof. Augustine, like many celibate men before and after him, was bewildered by nocturnally recurring, sensual memories which moved from the realm of dreams straight down to the pelvis. After confessing to involuntary carnal emissions, Augustine, exasperated, prayed to God, "Grieve at my imperfect state . . . and perfect in me your mercies to achieve perfect peace" (1992: 204; see Miles 1992). The ultimate control of male virility was not in man's power but subject to God's mercy.

Despite the projections of male desires onto female bodies and despite men's fantasies about women's seductive power—themes that run through much of Christian literature—men's spiritual struggles were fought within and against their own bodies. The differently bodied woman was excluded from the despair and glory of male-embodied, ascetic practices. The denial of the penis—even in the most radical form of castration, a route Origin, for example, had taken (Brown 1988: 168)—did not remove the spiritual significance of the phallus.

Controlling one's body through asceticism and sexual renunciation, though popular among Christians in the first centuries, was not a model that could ultimately compete with the sexual regulations, gender divisions, and hierarchies of the evolving Christian household and Catholic church. The married Christian householder continued to use the body as sign of his or her moral and political commitments (Meeks 1993), but the more radical forms of bodily practices by which early Christian circles had achieved ritual visibility (e.g., extreme asceticism, celibacy, perpetual virginity, libertine rites) were pushed to the margins and declared heretical.

Ascetic practices, however, survived. They were either adjusted to or separated from the normative codes of the household movement. For example, virginity, as a form of female asceticism, turned into the elabo-

rate cult of the Virgin Mary (Kristeva 1986; Warner 1976) which no longer required perpetual virginity of all daughters of the Christian household. The adoration of the Virgin became compatible with the institution of marriage, thus easing the householder's fear that the practice of continence would disrupt his *oikonomia*. Male asceticism, on the other hand, was channeled into a celibate clergy and monastic orders, while the Christian householder was allowed to engage in a restrained but licit sexual life. As Christianity evolved, the married laity was separated from a celibate clergy—a process that was not completed until the twelfth century, and perhaps not until the sixteenth century, against the bitter complaints of married priests (cf. Barstow 1982; Ranke-Heinemann 1990; Lea 1907).

Yet, a fundamental conflict remained. The theological insistence on the simultaneity of Jesus' maleness and Christ's asexuality seems to have been experienced as a continuous source of frustration, for it produced a paradoxical notion of male spirituality by insisting on phallic power while denying the sexual penis. The only perfect man, Pope Gregory I wrote in the seventh century, is "the one who manages not to burn amidst the fire" (quoted in Ranke-Heinemann 1990: 142). The inevitable psychodynamic tension could only be resolved by entrenching patriarchal power in the ecclesia on the one hand and counterbalancing it with gender-variant imagery, rituals, and symbolizations on the other. This would explain, for example, why, in an all male institution, Christ was time and again represented in highly sensuous and androgynous images. Whether we look at paintings from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Sacred Heart iconography of the nineteenth century, or the popular portraits of Christ by the American painter Warner Sallman (Morgan 1996), Jesus has feminine facial features, long hair touching his shoulders, and a body wrapped in soft and flowing gowns. His posture on the cross sometimes suggests masochistic self-abandon, and his bleeding wound below the nipple suggests a (spiritual) feeding of humankind, just as Mary's lactating breast fed him (Bynum 1987). Even the fluids (blood, sweat, tears), which Christ's suffering body excretes abundantly, have a "feminine" quality. According to moral theology of the thirteenth century, bodily fluids are more typical of woman's nature. "Woman is less qualified for moral behavior," wrote Albert the Great, the teacher of Aquinas, because she "contains more liquid than the man, and it is a property of liquid to take things up easily and to hold

onto them poorly” (quoted in Ranke-Heinemann 1990: 178). Christ’s exuding body on the cross betrays a masculine anatomy tainted by “womanish” features.

A peculiarity in the history of Western Christianity is that it does not worship the *linga* directly but rather divinizes the male body by effeminizing it. Those sensuous and androgynous representations are, however, in most cases the product of “male phantasmatics” (Kristeva 1986: 178). Real gender transgressors—gay people, transvestites, men or women pretending to be another gender—have been, and still are, punished by moral and secular law. Though such androgynous imagery suggests the sublimation of the phallic presence in the Christian symbolization of the sacred, it negates neither patriarchal power nor the importance of the biological male sex. This can be seen, for example, in stories about Pope Joan, a female pope, that began to circulate in the thirteenth century. According to medieval sources, Pope Joan, who supposedly reigned briefly between Leo IV and Benedict III in the ninth century, had the misfortune to give birth during a long papal procession through Rome. She and her newborn child were stoned to death on the spot (cf. Pardoe and Pardoe 1988; Gossmann 1994).

Whether we view Pope Joan as a historical figure or as the result of historical fiction, the fact remains that her (real or apocryphal) infiltration into the institution of sacerdotal celibacy required severe punishment. The peculiar dynamic between absent penis and phallic presence—paradoxical, irreconcilable, yet held up to man as a path to spiritual perfection—does not allow the physical presence of a woman. She would be a mockery of the denied penis. Her presence would turn the idealization of celibacy into a sign of impotence and thus threaten to unveil the chimera of phallic power.

In the history of Western Christianity, it did not suffice to subject the clergy alone to the enigma of spiritual perfection (absent penis/phallic presence); moral theology put heavy restrictions also on the sexual pleasures of the laity. Intercourse was permitted on special days and for procreative purposes only, and contraceptive devices, abortion, and intercourse during menstruation were prohibited. Some regulations singled out lay men, such as the notion of *copula sicca* (dry intercourse) or *coitus reservatus*, the withdrawing of the penis after pleasuring the woman “without letting the seed of generation flow forth” (Cardinal Huguccio, quoted in Ranke-Heinemann 1990: 171).

When the Reformation reformulated the Catholic doctrines of venial and mortal sin, men who converted to Protestantism were freed from some of the moral constraints placed upon sexuality. Martin Luther ridiculed sacerdotal celibacy. He regarded sexual instinct as a law of nature that would always override man's vows of chastity. "I am satisfied," Luther once said, "that the saints stick in the mud just like we do" (quoted in Grisar 1971: 514). Although he acknowledged that some men may possess the rare gift of celibacy, he admonished man to "be married [and] have a wife." Calvin, too, wrote that man should "abstain from marriage only so long as he is fit to observe celibacy" (quoted in Douglass 1974: 295-96).

Luther's theology that humans are saved "by faith alone" and that the priesthood extends to all believers opened the door to a more egalitarian understanding of human relationships. Peasants, women, and the radical wing of the Reformation pushed to rectify social injustices, to redefine sacramental authority, and to rethink issues of sexuality and pleasure (Noble 1992: 189; Marshall 1989; Douglass 1974). Today, we know, of course, that these movements were eventually crushed by mainstream Protestantism which insisted on obedience to the state and introduced the idea of individualized piety. The clerical monopoly was replaced by the patriarchal family. Marriage was looked upon in a favorable light, but married couples were, as before, warned of the dangers of uncontrolled lust that polluted matrimony.

Despite the liberating promise of the Protestant spirit, women remained excluded from ordination. When the gates of the women convents and monasteries were opened in Protestant countries, women even lost what little religious autonomy they had retained as nuns (Wiesner 1989). Luther sneered at women saints (Erikson 1962: 71). Women's new place was the home where they could practice their faith as mothers and the wives of pastors. "If a mother of a family wishes to please and serve God," Luther wrote, "let her care for the family, . . . educate and teach her children [and] do her task in the kitchen" (quoted in Douglass 1974: 295). A submissive wife was respected by her husband, but a disobedient wife suspected of sorcery (Barstow 1994: 60; Noble 1992: 188f).

Husbands were also admonished to do their duties in the emerging bourgeois family. "[I]t is of greatest importance for every married man," Luther preached in a sermon on the estate of marriage, "to pay closer,

more thorough, and continuous attention to the health of his child's soul than to the body which he has begotten" (reprinted in Lull 1989: 636). Yet, Protestant men, married or not, held onto their leadership positions in the church and continued to determine theological discourse. When the Reformation turned celibate priests into married preachers, it eased the conflict between absent penis and phallic presence but did not change patriarchal dominance. The sexual penis no longer prevented men from offering the sacraments as long as their sexuality was controlled by marriage. Married men were not excluded from power but power remained exclusively among men.

The Reformation freed Protestant men from the psychodynamic tension of having to achieve spiritual perfection through the denial of desire, but it did not challenge phallic power. The Protestant spirit, if viewed as an early expression of modernity, managed to move phallic power from the ecclesia to secular institutions, such as the military, economic, and political elites. As the secular forces of modernity gained strength, men began to seek power, authority, and reputation in the economic, legal, or scientific spheres rather than ecclesiastical circles of male celibates (Noble 1992). Religion, now a matter of private convictions, became a less desirable male domain. Men are public, women are private (Elshtain 1981). With progressive secularization, men lost interest in private and "womanish" religion and withdrew their ambitions from traditional spiritual pathways. The privatization of religion explains, perhaps, why contemporary men feel spiritually impoverished despite the power and privileges they still enjoy. It may also explain why, in the twentieth century, women have been successful in their move into leadership positions in many Protestant churches and why women's ordination is now a fiercely debated issue among Catholics. Once religion is declared a private affair, men leave and women are admitted.

Today, though men may have many good reasons to celebrate the liberation from the religious yoke of celibacy, this comes with losses. A privatized religion has left contemporary men of faith without a medium to talk about their bodies religiously. As convoluted as the moral debates over such issues as *coitus reservatus* may have been, they provided men with a public religious forum to discuss the intimacies of the male body. In modernity, this discourse has become romanticized, sexualized, and medicalized. Like religion itself, the male body is a private affair. The male body excreting liquids is, for example, no longer a spiritual icon

but often a pornographic image. In the twentieth century, pornographic language and medical terminology rather than religious imagery seem to dominate the discourse on the male body. Perhaps, the dominant ideal of masculinity in Christian cultures has shifted from denying the penis to oversexing it, albeit never challenging the power and the presence of the phallus.

### Wildmen and Mythopoetic Spirituality

In light of this heritage, it is not surprising that many men in contemporary American society feel estranged from religion. Neither Christianity's severe scrutiny of male desires nor modernity's privatization of religion appeals to men in a competitive, consumption-oriented, and pleasure-seeking culture. But in the 1980s, informal groups and gatherings of American men in search for new forms of masculine spirituality gained public visibility. Today, they are known as the mythopoetic men's movement (cf. Kupers 1993: 146–50; Clatterbaugh 1990: 85–103; Nelson 1992: 76–80; Doty 1993). This movement of predominantly white, middle-class men has been able to articulate a sense of spiritual alienation. It also offers a cure: Revitalize the old sources! These sources include Greek mythologies (Bolen 1989; Doty 1993), the biblical traditions (Culbertson 1992; Arnold 1991; Judy 1992), pre-Christian and pagan religions (Rowan 1987; Conner 1993), the masculine wisdom of fairy tales (Bly 1990), and the generative power of male archetypes (Keen 1991; Anderson 1990; Moore and Gillette 1990).

The mythopoetic movement has recently come under serious criticism—though less for its aspiration to find new forms of male religiosity than for its representation of gender. Feminists have been particularly critical of the male mythmakers of the 1980s and 1990s, viewing them as the spiritual expression of the conservative backlash that American society is currently experiencing. Feminist critics have described the work and practice of such men as Robert Bly, Sam Keen, Robert Moore, and Douglas Gillette as a “depolitization” of the concepts of “masculinity” and “sexism” (hooks), a “grotesquely one-dimensional, easily popularized pseudoanalysis” (Randall), as “essentialist” and “dangerous to women” (Brown), an “anti-feminist backlash . . . of white men . . . reestablish[ing] the traditional male-dominant values of Western patriar-

chal culture" (Noble), and a "glorification of rapist divinities and sexist fairy tales" (Caputi and MacKenzie; all quoted in Hagan 1992).

Such characterizations unfairly homogenize these groups, glossing over some significant differences among them; yet, considering the numerous veiled and open attacks against feminism in the current literature on masculine spirituality, the women's passionate responses are understandable. Notwithstanding the occasional lip service paid to a woman-friendly agenda by individual authors, the general tone of their argumentation belies the rhetoric. The "wounded man" is the focus of their attention. But little is done to compare the gravity of their wounds to the damaging and painful disenfranchisement of other groups. Thus, the potentially liberating practice of a spiritual men's movement has too often yielded to efforts of consolidating patriarchal power (cf. Bordo 1993; Burant 1988; Nelson 1992: 78; May and Strikwerda 1992: xiv).

Patrick Arnold's book *Wildmen, Warriors, and Kings: Masculine Spirituality and the Bible* exemplifies the extreme end of masculinist religious writings. A "new cultural disease is developing," he claims, "an opportunistic infection so recent that most people neither know its name nor even recognize its existence." Arnold calls this disease "misandry," the hatred of men. "Misandry is an ideological spinoff of extreme feminism. . . . It is often present alongside feminist influence in such major institutions as academia, the church, the arts, business, and law" (1991: 52). In religion, feminists have been especially successful at spreading the disease. "Spirituality is an area where men are probably most vulnerable and where misandrists, in turn, seem to make the most far-reaching and malicious claims. The most virulent sources of this hatred are found in post-Christian feminist religious writings, especially in the burgeoning field of Goddess religion" (1991: 55). The language of more liberal writings may be tamer but the ideas are similar. In *Fire in the Belly*, for example, Sam Keen distinguishes between a prophetic feminism, which is aware of the wounds of both women and men, and an ideological feminism "animated by a spirit of a resentment, the tactic of blame, and the desire for vindictive triumph over men that comes out of the dogmatic assumption that women are the innocent victims of a male conspiracy" (1991: 196).

It is too painful to repeat other flagrantly anti-feminist and misogynist statements; these few examples may suffice to illustrate the emergence of a male-revisionist agenda. The mythopoetic movement is, of course, not



monolithic. The spectrum reaches from Patrick Arnold's reactionary views to Sam Keen's liberal androcentrism and the cavernous space hollowed out by Robert Bly's conservative paternalism (see Clatterbaugh 1990). What binds these writings together is their political and religious sentimentalism. By uncritically reappropriating androcentric myths and traditions, they play into the hands of a conservative gender ideology and policy.

Why do so many neo-Jungian writings on male spirituality end up reproaching women for men's lack of religious devotion? Why do mythopoetic men lament their condition of spiritual impoverishment, when, in fact, religious history is filled with books on male-specific, religious practices? It is important to remember that men, unlike women, whose centuries-long marginalization has left them with only a few sources to reconstruct their spirituality, have abundant material to work with. In 1888, for example, de Roskovany produced a bibliography on Christian male celibacy which alone filled seventeen volumes (Barstow 1982: 8). Considering such voluminous archives, are men really "spiritually challenged," or merely threatened by new social, political, and economic realities? Do they attend to their wounds because they wish to rectify the injustices of sexism and racism, or because they seek to regain power over a sphere that they voluntarily gave up when modernity promoted secular notions of progress? Is mythopoesis a spiritual pathway that leads to gender equality and to toleration of gender-variant behavior, or is it a code word for neo-patriarchal values?

The focus on archetypes in the recent literature on male spirituality creates considerable problems. Archetypes easily escape a critical analysis of the economic and political status of men in contemporary society. Archetypes express a nostalgic desire for an untroubled past and are enlisted in the task of envisioning the future of male spirituality—unfortunately, the future does not look so different from the patriarchal past. The "primal spiritual gifts that men can offer to their world," Arnold suggests, are "fighting for what you believe in, loving freedom, and taking responsibility. Masculinity means standing out from the crowd, . . . coming to the rescue when people get in trouble, . . . thinking logically and upholding the law [and] reverencing God as Totally Other" (1991: 50). Such formulations may have the power to reconcile public men with private religion, but they do not transform androcentric struc-

tures. They accommodate affluent men in search of a gratifying spirituality without challenging their socially privileged positions.

## Toward Gender-Conscious Embodied Spirituality

The contributors to *Men's Bodies, Men's Gods* do not dwell on masculine archetypes as models for a contemporary male spirituality but reflect on the complex and often ambiguous religious forces that shape male bodies and identities, taking into consideration the social, psychological, cultural, and historical dimensions of modern "manhood." The male figures of warriors, wildmen, kings, Iron Johns, lovers, magicians, or shamans may have therapeutic value for a limited group of men, but, more often than not, such archetypal configurations misname the problems, misplace the blame, and simplify the complexity of men's contemporary existence. "For actual men are not timeless symbolic constructs, they are biologically, historically, and experientially embodied beings" (Bordo 1993: 696). Archetypes, on the other hand, are disembodied, ahistorical figures (for a different view, see Wehr 1987). They have more in common with symbolizations of phallic presence—constant, eternal, erect—than the mutable and multiple forms of male bodies—flaccid, aging, excreting.

Particular male bodies continually challenge the transcendent rule of the phallus, religious or secular. Particularity requires that men's diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientations must be taken into account when moving toward a renewed understanding of male identity and spirituality. Many of the authors of this book not only analyze the problems but are already engaged in reinventing a religious discourse on embodiment, intimacy, and sexuality, a discourse that was lost when religion became a private affair. New theological, spiritual, and ritual pathways for men must take their bodies seriously. For example, in his critique of phallogentric theology, James Nelson admonishes men not to project the "values of *phallos* . . . onto our experienced worlds," but to make the "fully physical, sweating, lubricating, menstruating, ejaculating, urinating, defecating bodies . . . the central vehicles of God's embodiment in our experience" (1992: 94, 31). For men, to become aware of the vulnerability of their bodies is a positive starting

point. Rather than building up a muscular, athletic, erect, brave, wise, protective, competitive, iron body, we could try to stay closer to real bodies: itching, aging, flowing, hurting, loving, dying, smelling, praying, masturbating, spilling, adorning, fathering, nurturing, growing fat, getting sick.

Adopting the perspective of a gender-conscious, male religiosity would, moreover, require men to examine the preferential treatment that many of them have enjoyed in Christian traditions and post-Christian cultures. Such a perspective self-critically assesses the wounds that men have inflicted on others and themselves. It leaves behind the models of male celibates, warriors, kings, and wildmen, and investigates differences among men. It searches for spirituality in the unexpected: when men befriend other men, when they explore erotic fantasies, when they change their children's diapers or care for people with AIDS, or when they contemplate the symbolizations of the male flesh.

*Men's Bodies, Men's Gods* opens with Seth Mirsky's "Three Arguments for the Elimination of Masculinity" because his piece analyzes the academic and political context of the contemporary men's movement and locates the mythopoetic movement within it. Revising Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement to read, "One is not born, but rather becomes a man," Mirsky sets out to investigate the current emphasis on the idea of masculinity. He is skeptical about the renewed interest in masculinity because the latter is too "deeply entrenched in our culture" to become a tool for transformation and liberation. As an essentialist category, masculinity does not distinguish between sex and gender. A masculine (or masculinist) identity, therefore, is a construction that enshrines traditional male gender roles and "precludes the pursuit of a feminist political agenda." The "quasi-religious revaluing of masculine gender identity" advocated by the mythopoetic movement must be criticized for similar reasons. Although Mirsky concedes that the search for male spirituality can be a critique of patriarchal religions, he regards the quest for the "deep masculine" in the archetypal unconscious a "reactionary fiction."

Not every book that carries "masculinity" in its title promotes a conservative agenda, as Mirsky seems to fear. Such works as *Holy Virility: The Social Construction of Masculinity* (Reynaud 1983), *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity* (Clatterbaugh 1990), and *Rethinking Masculinity* (May and Strikwerda 1992) are good examples for