

God as the Wholly Other First Cause: A Feminist Reappraisal of God-Belief

Eula Junina M. Blanco

Abstract

Religion remains a compelling vantage point for feminist critique because of its significant role in perpetuating patriarchal ideology. This critique is often founded on the analyses of sexual hierarchies manifest in and further sustained by religious texts, beliefs, and practices. Most feminist alternatives to patriarchal religion involve either a rejection of God-belief or a recourse to feminist spirituality or Goddess theology. This article presents an alternative feminist analysis of God-belief: one that does not adopt the popular God projections or reject the concept of God altogether. Ultimately, this article argues that God-belief is compatible with feminism by reassessing the concept of God. It attempts to expose the gaps in popular God-belief and espouse a feminist God-belief in two steps: first, the rejection of the False God projections in religion, specifically in Christianity, identified by Mary Daly in *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*; and second, a reconceptualization of God as the wholly other First Cause using Thomas Aquinas' treatise on God's nature and existence in *Summa Theologica*.

Keywords: Feminist philosophy of religion, Christianity, God-belief, sexism, False Gods, First Cause, Mary Daly, Thomas Aquinas

Religion continues to be a powerful social institution that extends its influence onto the values and behavior of its adherents. Contrary to the assumption that the rise of modern science would lead to the eventual demise of religious belief, the birth of new religions and the steady increase of religious membership signal religion's enduring significance in public life. According to a religious demographic study in 2010, 84% of the global population, or 5.8 billion out of 6.9 billion, is religiously affiliated—2.2 billion are Christians, 1.6 billion are Muslims, and 1 billion are Hindus (Pew Research Center, 2012).

The Philippines is considered a deeply religious society, as evidenced by the strong Christian influence on Filipino mores, politics, and public policy. According to the 2020 Philippine census by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2022), Roman Catholics still constitute the predominant religious demographic in the Philippines, comprising 78.8% of the population. Meanwhile, 13% are members of other Christian denominations and 8.2% are members of other religious affiliations, whereas the non-religious comprise less than 1% of the population (PSA, 2022). Despite the Philippines' status as an officially secular state, Christianity still takes a central role in shaping the country's sociopolitical landscape (Yee, 2019; Baroña, 2022; Chen, 2022; Bordey & Panti, 2023).¹ Additionally, as an institution working in subtle yet potent

¹ The Roman Catholic Church and other Christian evangelical groups in the Philippines have very firm views about marriage, reproduction, and sexuality, which further perpetuate sexual stereotypes. Carolyn Brewer (2001) critically analyzes the Philippine condition and identifies the historic role of the Catholic Church in molding social attitudes and beliefs about gender and sexuality. Brewer asserts that Spanish colonialism and Catholicism “were co-determining factors that brought about and delivered a concomitant concentration of power, authority and control into male hands” (2001, p. 30–31). Catholicism had become a patriarchal tool that rationalized male supremacy as the natural world order, thereby providing “the logic that instituted a transformation of sexual relationships” (Brewer, 2001, p. 30–31). Conservative heteronormative views continuously nurture a culture of purity that polices women more than men, evidenced by the double standards on sexual morality. For instance, female virginity is considered a gift or prize for men in the context of marriage, whereas male virginity is largely considered a stigma (Manalastas & David, 2018). Peracullo (2017) also points to the role of the Catholic faith in reinforcing the image of the Virgin Mary and the character of Maria Clara as models of femininity, underscoring purity, weakness, and passivity as virtues.

ways in molding collective consciousness—in impacting the world both positively and negatively—it is necessary to subject religion to critical analysis. Sexism in religion is one area that demands such attention.

Sexism pertains to discrimination based on sex or gender. As an ideology, it is marked by the belief in a sexual hierarchy wherein one sex is perceived as better or superior to another, effecting oppressive gender roles and sexual stereotypes. Sexism manifests in values, attitudes, and behaviors that nurture these disparities and impose them as part of the natural world order. Although the term's usage has expanded to include discrimination against men, women are the primary victims of sexism, historically and structurally (Masaquesmay, 2024). Sexist ideology justifies patriarchy, a social system in which men hold power and authority and thus dominate and discriminate against women, leading to women's subordination and oppression in all social institutions. As feminist philosopher Kate Manne explains, sexism is the ideology (i.e., the beliefs and values) that rationalizes and justifies the patriarchal social order "by naturalizing sex differences... [and] by making them seem inevitable" (Manne, 2018, p. 79). Hence, overturning the patriarchy would entail quashing sexist ideology.

The counter-ideology for sexism is feminism. Instead of espousing the belief in a sexual hierarchy, feminism endorses the belief in sexual and gender equality. It resists the prevailing ideology that men are naturally superior, effectively challenging established sexual stereotypes and expectations. Feminism underlines the idea that sex does not determine the value and end of one's existence; thus, one's agency, regardless of their sex, must be fully recognized and upheld. As a movement, feminism aims to correct and transform the deeply entrenched structures of sexual inequality in our social, political, and economic institutions. Hence, with equality as its core principle, feminism's goal is not to establish the dominance of one sex over the other, but to emancipate the marginalized from the debilitating constraints of patriarchy.

However, it is noteworthy that feminism consists of varied perspectives from different fields on how equality is understood and how emancipation is envisioned. In this light, feminism consists of several movements within various strands. As feminist scholar Rosemarie Tong

(2014) describes it, feminist thought “resists categorization into tidy schools of thought” (p. 1). Moreover, because it finds itself linked to other fields of study, as well as with other systems of oppression, feminist thought is “interdisciplinary, intersectional, and interlocking” (Tong, 2014, p. 1). Hence, there is no singular kind of feminism but a plurality of feminisms, which is informed by different perspectives rooted from different contexts and utilizes of different approaches in dismantling sexism. It is the vastness of the feminist movement that impels the inclusion of all women and other disenfranchised groups. This commitment to inclusive dialogue and critical practice is also what allows feminists to venture in critiquing and correcting the different institutions that nurture and are nurtured by patriarchy.

One such institution is religion. For the past centuries, religion has been an object of feminist criticism, deeming it a patriarchal tool that justifies and strengthens women subordination in society (Frankenberry, 2018). Androcentric religions are criticized for contributing to the sexist ideology through its teachings and practices that effect sexist attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.² Feminist critiques generally challenge the commonly held idea of God having a male nature, as well as the sexism inherent in religious texts and practices. The dominantly male symbolism in Christianity is criticized for providing a fertile ground for a socialization that gives a premium on men, thereby sustaining the existing sexual hierarchy where women are at the end of the social ladder.³

² Andrew L. Whitehead (2012) examines the association between a masculine image of God and conservative gender ideology. Whitehead acknowledges religion as a crucial exposure-based explanation of gender ideology, especially toward attitudes and gender roles. He notes that across different religions, “those who hold their scriptures in high regard are much more likely to espouse traditional gender ideologies” (p. 141). He also reports that feminist theologians and theorists are correct in claiming that a male God-image “serves to legitim[ize] [...] gender ideologies that in turn function to perpetuate hierarchical arrangements in contemporary society” (Whitehead, p. 153). Whitehead’s findings underline the propensity of God-belief in influencing socio-political attitudes and behavior in both the private and public spheres, and more specifically, they foreground the propensity of a male God-belief in legitimizing patriarchy.

The scriptures that form the basis of Christian faith, and for others, the basis of morality, also sustain the patriarchy's paradigm by regarding male dominance and female subordination as the will of God.⁴ As a result, most feminist critiques of religion advocate a breaking away from institutions that normalize and sustain patriarchy and a recourse to feminist spirituality or Goddess theology⁵—proposals suggesting the incompatibility of God-belief with feminism.

This article attempts to contribute to the growing literature on feminist philosophy of religion by providing an alternative analysis of God-belief—one that upholds feminist values without embracing the traditional conception of God or rejecting the concept of God altogether. Ultimately, this article argues that God-belief is compatible with feminism through a redefinition of God using Thomas Aquinas' First Cause and

³ Rosemary Radford Ruether (1987) criticizes traditional patriarchal God-language (i.e., the metaphors and imageries in Christian theology). She argues that the God-imagery of Christianity is dehumanizing, as the image of God as ruler pervades and translates to all social relations, thus encouraging unhealthy human relationships. Ultimately, Ruether suggests replacing these with a plurality of creative imageries, both male and female, that shatter patriarchal stereotypes. Abigail Dolan (2018) also claims that the purely masculine view of God shapes how God is (mis)understood and negatively impacts how the Church and its members interact with women. Thus, she suggests the inclusion of a feminine imagery of God in God-language.

⁴ Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1885) presents a striking criticism of and challenges the assertion that woman is indebted to the Christian Church for the liberty she is purported to have achieved. She argues that the "injustice and degradation" that woman has suffered can be traced back to Christianity, and claims that "all religions thus far have taught the headship and superiority of man, (and) the inferiority and subordination of woman" (p. 389). Stanton cites several proofs of how religious practices and superstitions contribute to the moral degradation of woman, and she criticizes how the exclusively male nature of the Christian God justifies the dominion of man over woman. Her essay remains relevant and compelling centuries after its writing, as Christianity remains to operate through and for the existing sexual hierarchy.

⁵ An important strand in the feminist critique of religion advances projections of a female divine to overturn the male language and symbol systems of patriarchal religion, as seen in the works of Carol Christ, Mary Daly, and Luce Irigaray. Christ (1978) advocates for a Goddess symbolism in order to counter the exclusively male God symbolism of world's major religions. On the other hand, Irigaray (1996) forwards an immanent theory of divinity similar to Daly's (1985) call for the transcendental participation in Being. Irigaray asserts that for women to truly transcend the boundaries of debilitating religion, women must be elevated to the status of divinity.

Mary Daly's False Gods. More specifically, it attempts to address the following research questions:

1. Why does God-belief seem incompatible with feminism?
2. What are the popular God projections in Christianity?
3. What gaps, limitations, and inconsistencies persist in these popular God projections? and
4. How must God be understood so that it is compatible with feminism?

Hence, this article aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explain why God-belief seems incompatible with feminism;
2. To present the popular God projections in Christianity and their scriptural bases;
3. To expose the gaps, limitations, and inconsistencies in the popular understanding of God; and
4. To propose an alternative understanding of God that aligns with feminist ideals.

By employing feminist philosophical analysis⁶ as its methodology, this article critically examines God-belief vis-à-vis sexism. Specifically, it engages in the critique of the popular understanding of God and challenges the underlying assumptions of the belief that normalizes and/or endorses male dominance and female subordination. This is aided by applying Mary Daly's idea of False Gods in her criticism of patriarchal religions in *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (1973).

⁶ Feminist philosophical analysis is an approach in philosophy wherein concepts, theories, and issues are critically examined through a feminist lens. Feminism, as an intellectual and political movement, acknowledges the different experiences of women and the various contexts from which their feminist cognizance and analysis stem. But although feminism comprises a vast array of perspectives and approaches to the problem of sexism, they all essentially involve a critique of patriarchy, and the sexist beliefs and behaviors manifest in different aspects and levels of social interaction. In philosophy, it is feminist philosophy (and hence, feminist philosophical analysis) that responds to the inadequacies of traditional (male-centric) philosophy, such as the failure to account for the role of sex/gender in understanding and addressing concerns in the different fields of philosophy (e.g., metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, epistemology, social and political philosophy, and philosophy of religion).

Additionally, this paper engages in conceptual analysis and clarification by examining the concept of God, its meaning, scope and applicability, and the inconsistencies in its usage. Through a feminist reappropriation of Thomas Aquinas' idea of God as First Cause from the *Summa Theologica*, this article proposes an understanding of God as wholly other, therefore sexless and impersonal. By dissecting the implications of this reappropriation to the popular understanding of God and its intersections with Mary Daly's idea of False Gods, this article seeks to demonstrate how God-belief may still align with feminist ideals.

These will be done in succession in the proceeding sections. The section on Feminist God-Belief will discuss the seeming incompatibility between God-belief and feminism. The succeeding section on God Projections in Christianity will outline how God is popularly understood. The section on Daly's False Gods will assess the popular understanding of God using Mary Daly's False Gods. Meanwhile, the section on Aquinas' First Cause will utilize Thomas Aquinas' God as First Cause in reassessing the concept of God. The penultimate section (Implications) will discuss the implications of understanding God as First Cause. Finally, the last section (Conclusions) will present the article's conclusions.

As a work in feminist philosophy of religion, this article is not intended as an extension of Thomasian scholarship. Rather, it only intends to adopt some aspects of Thomasian philosophy without necessarily aligning with the whole Thomasian corpus. Moreover, this article primarily aims to provide an alternative understanding of God that avoids the sexism in popular God-belief; thus, the use of Thomas Aquinas' ideas is not a substantive claim on God's existence but is more appropriately intended as a dissonance reduction strategy for feminists who deem God-belief as intrinsically or instrumentally necessary.

Additionally, in dealing with biblical scriptures as objects of critical analysis, this article does not intend to engage in biblical exegesis. Although scholars and experts in Christian theology may challenge this article's claims about sexism in the Bible, this article further emphasizes possible lay interpretation or literal appreciation of the text to underscore how a reading (or a *misreading*, for that matter), of the

scriptures can have detrimental effects to social attitudes and behaviors. This article only aims to show how religious belief can be used to justify sustaining and reinforcing sexism in society. Moreover, this article takes a more general approach in its critique of Christianity and focuses on its basic tenets and doctrinal bases as its objects of feminist philosophical analyses. In doing so, this article hopes to be highly relevant in societies and cultures with prominent Christian influence.

In addition, although this paper uses Christianity as its vantage point for analysis, it is neither intended as a reconceptualization of Christianity itself, nor is the use of Thomas Aquinas' ideas intended as an endorsement of Christianity.⁷ What is arguably distinct about this article is the use of Thomas Aquinas' ideas to critique popular God-belief to support feminism, especially with Aquinas' reputation among some feminist scholars as sexist (Radcliffe-Richards, 1982; Daly, 1985; Romero Carrasquillo & Troyer de Romero, 2013).⁸ However, this article also does not intend to make claims on whether Aquinas was indeed sexist. Instead, it is more accurately an attempt to reappropriate an idea from one of the classical works in philosophy to aid the feminist movement.⁹

⁷ Although this article centers on Christian God-belief, further studies may use other religions as vantage points for feminist criticism and analysis. Similar trajectories may be pursued to explore the God projections of other religions vis-à-vis the wholly other First Cause God to investigate possible points of convergences and/or divergences with other religious beliefs. Moreover, since this article presents a broader approach in its critique of Christianity, further studies may engage in more situated analyses within specific cultural contexts. More than differences, it will also be interesting to see how this article's proposal may align with or even complement other feminist alternatives and proposals.

⁸ Janet Radcliffe-Richards (1982) states: "Aristotle, Aquinas, and the like contrived by some feat of their highly sophisticated reasoning process to... see [a woman's] whole essence as a series of inadequacies and absences..." (p. 162) Mary Daly (1968) specifically mentions Aquinas' view of women as defective: "Thus, following Aristotle, Aquinas held that the female is defective as regards her individual nature. He wrote that she is, in fact, a misbegotten male..." (p. 49) Francisco J. Romero Carrasquillo and Hilaire K. Troyer de Romero (2013) discuss these accusations of sexism made against Aquinas, arguing that these accusations are well-founded.

⁹ Feminist philosophy responds to the gaps and inadequacies of traditional, male-dominated philosophy through the inclusion and valuation of women's views and experiences (McAfee et al., 2023). In this light, feminist reappropriation involves the use of traditional philosophical ideas and reclaiming or reinterpreting them in support of the feminist cause.

Feminist God-Belief

God-belief is, to a great extent, tied to the idea of religious membership. Christianity and Islam, two of the most practiced religions with over three billion adherents worldwide, are marked by monotheistic belief. In contrast to the prevailing belief that religion is merely personal and abstract, rather, it is largely social and cultural. Religious beliefs have actual world impact, reflected in organized behaviors, practices, rituals, and morals attached to religious membership (Burns, 2018, p. 4–5). Although religion does have a personal dimension, perceived as an organized system with an organized group of supporters, it also surpasses the boundaries of the self, as the judgments, decisions, and outcomes it produces are social.

Religion has the capacity to guide behavior by establishing “powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations” (Geertz, 2004, p. 4) in its adherents. This power is seen in religion’s fundamental ability to shape the human psyche and influence moral agency. This pervasiveness is reflected in the extensive command of religion over its adherents’ social identity and socialization, and this long-lastingness manifests in the deeply held, enduring beliefs about the origin and value of life, which serve as foundations of their perceived identity and purpose. In this way, God-belief, understood in relation to religion, implies the propensity of it producing certain mental states and dispositions for action.¹⁰

¹⁰ For instance, Christian teachings underline the creation of only two sexes, male and female, which predisposes them to have negative attitudes and discriminatory behaviors against the LGBTQIA+ community, which digress from their heteronormative expectations. In the Philippines, religious influence and the lack of government support further contributes to their disadvantaged position in society (Tang & Poudel, 2018). This further extends to policymaking, with the dismissal of the SOGIE Equality Bill and the public outrage against same-sex marriage (Ochoa et al., 2016). Christian teachings also underscore purity as a feminine ideal, and women who go against the ideal are policed and punished. In the Philippines, this manifests in beliefs on virginity and sexuality, where only virgins and wives who maintain their virginal image are considered good women (Delgado-Infante & Ofreneo, 2014; Peracullo, 2017; Manalastas, E. J., 2018). This results in the stigma on premarital sex, contraception, and even sex education (Yamat et al., 2023).

Situated within a patriarchal system, religion works to legitimize and sustain patriarchal ideology. In Christianity, the sexist bias is visible not only in the male projections of God but also in how narratives in the scriptures operate under the assumption of male dominion and female subordination. Feminist readings and interpretations of the Bible reveal how scriptures covertly and overtly endorse the inferiority and subservience of women in society (Stanton, 1898; Christ, 1978; Daly, 1985). The Christian Bible, considered as the source of knowledge and morality among its adherents, promotes gendered hierarchical authority and, consequently, negative perceptions of and attitudes against women, thereby perpetuating sexist values and behaviors.¹¹

¹¹ Sexism in the text effects sexism in practice. To illustrate this, one may look at how overt sexism in the Christian Bible influences social attitudes and behaviors against women. For instance, in the Old Testament, the story of creation that talks about the nature of humanity signifies a sexual hierarchy. At the very onset, it has already designated the roles of subject and object and superior and inferior in human relationships: woman was created *after* man, woman was created *for* man, woman was created *from* man, woman was named *by* man, (NIV, 2011, Genesis 2:18–23), woman will be ruled over by man (NIV, 2011, Genesis 3:16–17). In the New Testament, this sexual hierarchy is reiterated, stating that “the head of the woman is man,” so the woman ought to cover her head to show her husband’s authority over her (NIV, 2011, 1 Corinthians 11:3–10). This was stated again, in 1 Timothy 2:11–15, albeit more overtly: “[11] A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. [12] I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. [13] For Adam was formed first, then Eve. [14] And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. [15] But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.” (NIV, 2011). This evidently (and quite directly) encourages and dignifies women’s powerlessness as God’s providence. For the sinful woman to redeem herself in the eyes of God, she must fulfill her destiny as man’s inferior. In this way, the Bible contributes to the sex role socialization of men who are taught to control and of women who are taught to be submissive. These form an image of the ideal man and woman lodged deep within the psyches of its believers, influencing their self-image and social identity, social participation, moral valuation and reasoning, and political beliefs about how society ought to be arranged. The Christian faith orients both the private and civic involvement of its believers in promoting a “natural” order characterized by inequality. As a result, this molds social perceptions on sexuality (e.g., virginity, promiscuity, rape), marriage (e.g., premarital relations, marital rape, domestic roles, divorce), and reproduction (e.g., contraception, childbearing, abortion), as well as social forms of control through rituals (e.g., purity balls, cleansing rituals) and punishments (e.g., female genital mutilation, domestic abuse, sexual violence).

Several feminist scholars and social scientists connect religion, especially those with an exclusively or dominantly male conceptualization of God, with the social acceptance and legitimacy of male authority across different sociopolitical contexts (Stanton, 1885; Gilman, 1923; Christ, 1978; Johnson, 1984; Daly, 1985; Ruether, 1987; Millet, 2000; Whitehead, 2012; Howard, Oswald & Kirkman, 2018). Moreover, a recent study analyzing the relationship among male God concepts, gender system justification, and sexism found that individuals who conceptualize God as male ranked higher in Gender-Specific System Justification (i.e., the propensity to defend and justify the gendered aspects of the status quo); thus, they are “more likely to legitimize the social and political authority of men in society, as well as legitimize and rationalize unequal treatment between men and women as just and appropriate.” (Howard, Oswald & Kirkman, 2020, p. 226).

In addressing this problem, some feminist thinkers have called for the development of a gynocentric religious belief, arguing that women can only effectively cast out the patriarchal God from their psyche through projections of a feminine divine (Christ, 1978; Daly, 1985; Irigaray, 1996). Meanwhile, others have argued to junk the belief in God entirely, underscoring how faith impedes humans from realizing their full potential (Stanton, 1885; Stanton, 1895; Gaylor, 1997).

Most feminist alternatives to popular, androcentric religion imply an abandonment of religion, (hence, of God-belief), signaling its incompatibility with feminist ideals. Since God-belief is attached to values and beliefs that further promote sexism, it only seems appropriate to reject the God that prescribes them. This phenomenon is widely discussed in psychology and can be explained by reference to theories such as Festinger’s (1957) cognitive dissonance theory¹² or Higgins’ (1987) self-

¹² Cognitive dissonance refers to the experience of psychological restlessness resulting either from the existence of two or more contradictory ideas or values within a belief system, or from the accomplishment of an action contrary to one’s words. Festinger notes how cognitive dissonance is the “antecedent condition” which motivates a person to engage in activity that would lead to “dissonance reduction” (p. 3, 1957).

discrepancy theory.¹³ Research conducted by Steiner-Aeschliman and Mauss (1996) shows that feminist women reared in patriarchal religious traditions, such as Christianity, tend to feel less close to God than non-feminist women. Using Higgins' self-discrepancy theory, they claim that women who are both feminist and frequent church-attenders experience unresolved self-discrepancy (i.e., discrepancy between an ideal feminist self and the self that one ought to be as impelled by religious belief), which weakens the feeling of closeness to God (Steiner-Aeschliman & Mauss, 1996).

Using Festinger's terms, both God-belief and a feminist advocacy could be producing a cognitive dissonance—a psychological restlessness that stems from the idea that God-belief necessitates assent to the hegemony of the patriarchal Church. However, aside from the recourse to Goddess theology, feminist spirituality, or atheism, I propose an alternative dissonance reduction strategy: reassessing the concept of God to avoid the sexist framework effected by adherence to patriarchal religion. I argue that one can have a feminist God-belief through a reassessment of the concept of God and, consequently, the rejection of the problematic God projections that persist in organized, monotheistic beliefs.

God Projections in Christianity

Biblical scriptures play an important role in the formation of one's ideation of God. Below, I locate possible scriptural bases and explanations for the popular understanding of God. This resulting summary is not exhaustive, although these may be considered central components in the Christian ideation of God.

¹³ The self-discrepancy theory states that individuals are more likely to develop negative affect (e.g., feelings of discomfort) at the presence of conflicting or incompatible beliefs about themselves. Higgins (1987) theorize that discrepancies in the actual self, ideal self, and ought self are what create motivations for reducing the gaps among conflicting domains.

God Is Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent, and Omnibenevolent¹⁴

Arguably the most prominent ideation of God revolves on these omni-characteristics (i.e., superlative qualities) that signify the all-powerful (The Holy Bible: New International Version [NIV], 2011, Genesis 1; Romans 1:20; Psalm 33:6–9), all-knowing (NIV, 2011, Job 21:22, Psalm 47:5, Psalm 139:2–6, Isaiah 40:28, Romans 11:33–34), all-present (NIV, 2011, Jeremiah 23:23–24, Hebrews 4:13, Proverbs 15:3), and all-benevolent (NIV, 2011, John 3:16, Psalm 100:5) nature of God, respectively.

Oftentimes, these omni-qualities are used to explain phenomena that lack logical explanations or scientific evidence. The Bible also provides details of God's divine miracles, specifically through the embodiment of God in Jesus Christ. Most of these miracles show Jesus as defying laws of nature and performing healings and exorcisms. (NIV, 2011, John 2:1–11, John 9:1–12, Luke 5:17–26, Luke 7:11–18, Luke 13:10–17, Luke 17:11–19, Luke 18:35–43, Mark 1:21–28, Mark 1:40–45, Mark 5:1–43, Mark 6:45–56, Mark 7:24–37, Mark 8:1–26, Mark 9:14–29, John 11:38–44, Matthew 8:23–27, Matthew 14:15–21, Matthew 21:18–22). In these circumstances, it can be said that God, through Jesus Christ, made the impossible possible. Such supernatural acts carried out through God's divine agency stands as one of the bases of Christian faith, inciting that through stern belief and prayer, all things are possible. (NIV, 2011, Luke 18:27, Mark 9:23, Mark 11:24, Matthew 21:22). Hence, the Bible, regarded as an authority of truth and morality, urges its believers to trust divine providence.

God Is Male

In the Bible, God is consistently referred to using male pronouns (he, him, his) and is mostly described using male imagery and symbols

¹⁴ Medieval theologians and philosophers have also written extensive treatises on God's existence and attributes. Philosophy of religion professor William Rowe (2005, p. 15–34) provides a helpful summary of the discussions on the maximal perfections of God (i.e., omnipotence, omnibenevolence, omniscience). Within the Christian tradition, Thomas Aquinas (whose argument I use in this paper) is also one of the medieval thinkers who presented compelling arguments on God by integrating Christian doctrines with Aristotelian philosophy. Yet what this section aims to focus on are the biblical sources of these popular God projections.

(father, son, king) (NIV, 2011, Genesis 1:27, 2 Corinthians 1:3, Proverbs 3:11–12, Psalm 47:2–3). Although it can be argued that the use of male pronouns in pertaining to God has a generic function and that it should not be taken as validation for God's essential maleness, it is a reminder of how even language itself plays a role in male privileging, since the male is considered the standard. Although male pronouns alone are not direct and certain manifestations of God's essential maleness, they indubitably augment the popular ideation of God as male. How language is utilized significantly influences how meaning is created, and the language used to talk about God definitely influences the image people have of God, and so to use male pronouns to refer to God is to predispose the mind to think of God as male. This predisposition to understand God as male is even reinforced by the extensive use of male nouns (father, son, king) to describe God. However, it can also be argued that although the imagery and symbolism for God is generally male, there are verses that emphasize female descriptions for God, such as mother (NIV, 2011, Isaiah 66:13). But such verses are very few, especially when compared with the rest of the text that mainly describes God in male terms. Moreover, the maleness of Jesus Christ signifies that God, when personified, is male.

God Is Anthropomorphic

Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics to non-human entities ("Anthropomorphism," 2002). In theology, it pertains to the attribution of human characteristics (e.g., form, capacities) to God. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, anthropomorphism is both criticized and defended due to differences in scriptural interpretation ("Anthropomorphism," 2009). Nevertheless, accounting for the biblical literalism in conservative Christian denominations and congregations, there is a real tendency to view anthropomorphic descriptions in the Bible as truth about God. There are verses that associate God with human-like physical attributes (NIV, 2011, Numbers 6:25–26, Leviticus 20:6, Deuteronomy 11:12, Psalm 34:15–16, Nehemiah 1:6, Psalm 33:6, Exodus 7:5, Isaiah 23:11, Deuteronomy 4:34, Psalm 89:10, Isaiah 66:1, Genesis 3:8) and human-like capacities. Although it can be argued that by creating humans in God's image and likeness, God is the source of

this human capacity, and thus, it is humans that are like God (not God that is like humans), there are still verses that display the human-like limitedness (e.g., God resting, relenting) and human-like experiences of God (e.g., God seeing, remembering) (NIV, 2011, Genesis 2:2, Exodus 32:14, 2 Samuel 24:16, Genesis 8:1). There are also verses that tell of God's emotions (e.g., regret, worry, jealousy, anger, compassion) (NIV, 2011, Genesis 6:6, Exodus 20:5–6, Judges 2:20, Psalm 7:11, Isaiah 54:7–8). Together, these develop an understanding of God's nature as largely similar to that of human beings—having human-like form, human-like thought processes, and human-like sentiments. This anthropomorphic ideation of God is even affirmed by the personification of God through Jesus Christ, who had a human body, went through the human life stages of conception, birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and death, formed relationships with other humans, and lived among and identified with humanity. This does not only convey that God is capable of human experience, but it also shows that God exists with and among humans and is directly involved in human life.

God Is the Adjudicator of Souls in the Afterlife

In the Bible, aside from the worldly sphere that is the Earth, several descriptions pertain to the otherworldly sphere of heaven and hell. Only the faithful are granted entrance to heaven where they can experience eternal life with God, whereas the disobedient are given a “second death” through eternal suffering in hell. (NIV, 2011, Revelation 21:6–8, John 17:1–3, Philippians 3:17–21, Romans 2:6–8). This suggests an ideation of God as the ultimate adjudicator of souls, granting either eternal life or eternal suffering based on human obedience to the rules set by God—rules founded upon the truth that God professes, all of which could be found directly in the scriptures. This creates an idea of God who sits on a throne in heaven, keenly observing humanity while keeping note of every thought and deed that every human being has undertaken to later assess whether one will ascend to heaven or descend to hell upon death on Earth.

Together, these form an ideation of God that influences its adherents' social identity, participation, and moral valuation. The Christian faith orients both their private and civic involvement by idealizing veneration

and steadfast obedience to God's teachings and dictates. Although this popular ideation of God may seem innocuous, closer analysis will reveal some gaps and its tendency to promote sexual hierarchy as part of society's natural order.

However, it seems that this problem only persists if the understanding of God is framed within the bounds of human, moral relations. To bridge these gaps, I argue that the ideation of God must be accompanied by what Mary Daly would call a "dethronement of false gods." (1985, p. 29).

Daly's False Gods

A radical feminist philosopher and theologian, Mary Daly is one of the pioneers of radical feminist theology. Her most famous work, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, criticizes patriarchal religions for contributing to the "sex role socialization" of women by reinforcing the values, attitudes, and beliefs of a "sexually hierarchical society" (Daly, 1985, p. 2). In Christianity, this sexual hierarchy has been imposed through reference to scriptures, but more fundamentally, through the "exclusively masculine symbolism" for God, for the divine incarnation, and for the human relationship to God. (Daly, 1985, p. 4) This, Daly (1985) argues, sustains the paradigm for patriarchy since the male God who puts primacy on the male steward that he created in his own likeness legitimizes the rule of a male over the female. In this way, religion is an oppressive force that sustains the dynamics of inequality by proclaiming the sexual hierarchy as a natural world order that is part of God's divine plan.

For this reason, Daly (1985) affirms that the "fall of man" can be rightly called the "fall of woman," since it is the woman who is blamed for the descent of humanity to a sinful existence of suffering and mortality. Daly notes that this has "provided legitimation not only for the direction of the self-hatred of the male outward against women, but also for the direction of self-hatred inward on the part of women" (1985, p. 48). This fosters a kind of consciousness that establishes the victimization of women, both by men and by themselves, producing a kind of self-policing similar

to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon.¹⁵ Having internalized their subordination, women willingly submit themselves under male power and control.

Daly (1985) observes that these conceptual systems of theology and ethics work through and for patriarchy, serving the interests of sexually hierarchical society, since a male theology effects a male ethics, thereby producing unidimensional claims and a male-centric morality that fails to include the experiences of women into account. Centuries of socialization aligned with sexist beliefs and value systems associated with patriarchal religion have therefore thwarted women's liberation in society.

Daly aspires for a psychic and spiritual revolution that would free women's consciousness from sexist notions. To do so, Daly insists on iconoclasm, or the rejection of beliefs, practices, and the institutions that promote them. This will consist in destroying these "internalized images of male superiority" by "exorcising them from consciousness and from the cultural institutions that breed them" (1985, p. 29). An important step in this exorcism is the "dethronement of false gods." Daly identified three false deities: the God of explanation, the God of otherworldliness, and the God who is the judge of sin (1985, p. 29).

The God of Explanation or "God as a Stopgap for the Incompleteness of Our Knowledge"

This refers to the projection of God as a sufficient (and sometimes, the only necessary) explanation for phenomena without ready scientific or logical explanations yet, or phenomena with scientific and logical explanations disregarded and made irrelevant due to negligence or ignorance. The God of explanation also refers to the projection of God as a sufficient justification for "anomic occurrences," or social injustices

¹⁵ The panopticon is an architectural design developed by philosopher Jeremy Bentham in 1791, which he intended for institutions requiring constant supervision. However, it became most famous as a prison design which he argues is more humane and efficient, since it operated based on a self-disciplining system. Due to its circular design with a central rotunda, inmates are more strictly watched, which drives them to behave more properly (Crimmins, 2021).

and social inequalities (Daly, 1985, p. 30). This projection denotes that social injustices and inequalities are willed by God as part of the divine plan, sometimes citing its role in soul-making and faith-building. Hence, social conditions remain unquestioned as they are regarded good by default, alluding to God's transcendent knowledge and goodness, the depths of which are unreachable given the limitedness of human capacity to understand the grand order of things.

In this God projection, God's omni-qualities are exploited to address all sorts of inadequacy in knowledge or action, urging the full submission and surrender to God's ultimate plan. Thus, when God is used to explain, justify, and legitimize even the prevailing disparities in power and privilege existing within society, one will allude to the God of explanation, instead of looking into the concrete, logical, and scientific explanations and investigating the actual, material conditions that contribute to existing social injustices and inequalities (Daly, 1985).

The God of explanation "does not encourage commitment to the task of analyzing and eradicating the social, economic, and psychological roots of suffering" (Daly, 1985, p. 30), and therefore will sustain the existing power relations within the sexist, hierarchical society.

The God of Otherworldliness

The God of otherworldliness refers to the projection of God as the ruler of heaven "whose chief activity consists in rewarding and punishing after death" (Daly, 1985, p. 30). This is anchored on the belief in judgment after death, wherein God will either grant a person with a life of eternal peace in heaven or eternal suffering in hell based on their obedience to God's commands. Daly cites Max Weber in describing the kind of socialization the God of otherworldliness nurtures (1985), noting that it effects an attitude of individualism in the personal pursuit of salvation through worldly vocational activity, thereby resulting to "an attitude of patient resignation regarding institutional structures, both worldly and churchly" (p. 31).

In other words, the pursuit of salvation based on one's personal relationship with God (nurtured through devotion and obedience) fosters a detachment from society, marked by apathy of the existing social

conditions and state of affairs.¹⁶ This produces in humanity a “personal vocational ambition” to please God through unwavering servility (Daly, 1985, p. 31), which breeds blind obedience for the sake of a good life in heaven, instead of actualizing the good life in this world through the criticism and correction of existing sociopolitical institutions.

The God Who Is the Judge of Sin

The God who is the judge of sin refers to the projection of God as the ultimate authority of right and wrong, determining which actions are praise- and blame-worthy on the basis of compliance and non-compliance with established rules. God who is the judge of sin “confirms the rightness of the rules and roles of the reigning system” (Daly, 1985, p. 31), which is patriarchal, thereby imposing and strengthening even more the sexual hierarchy in society.

This leads to the self-hatred of women who are made to believe that the way to salvation is by atoning for the sin of their sex—by accepting their suffering and subjugation as their rightful destiny (Daly, 1985). This leads to the undue hostility and unreasonable blame society imposes on women who are bound to silently abide by the unfair and sexist dictates of religion. As Daly argues, this God works by imposing “false guilt” (1985, p. 31) in women by declaring the rejection of their subordination as sin.

These False Gods inflict values and beliefs that sustain the sexual hierarchy, which is why Daly suggests that women’s liberation necessitates expunging these False Gods from women’s consciousness. These False Gods manifest in the popular God projections in Christianity.¹⁷ They intersect through the following ways:

¹⁶ This detachment from society does not pertain to the literal sense of non-membership in society or non-participation in social life. Instead, it pertains to the state of indifference one develops toward the existing social order and the conditions in which other people beyond oneself live. Having salvation as the primary object of religious life instead of loving service to the community breeds a kind of individualism that separates oneself from the reality of the human struggle against oppression. Such activity leads to detachment from society, as it is counterproductive to the idea of society, which is promoting the welfare of others alongside one’s own.

¹⁷ See Section III for reference on these numbered points.

1. The popular understanding of the omni-qualities of God is linked to the God of explanation by capitalizing on the idea of the infinite power, knowledge, presence, and benevolence of God, utilizing them as instant explanations for different phenomena. These phenomena then could be more accurately explained through critical and scientific practices. This is exacerbated by the Christian belief that life on Earth is a life of punishment, such that suffering and social inequalities are commonplace and even fundamental to human experience. This could lead to the passive acceptance of unjust social and political conditions, which could be ameliorated if not for the belief in God's ultimate plan and redemption through tolerance and obedience. As a result, believers also develop undue trust in miracles and the power of prayer in making the impossible (or seemingly impossible) things possible through faith and personal religious vocation. A rejection of the God of explanation, however, does not necessarily signify the rejection of God's omni- qualities, but it signifies the need to clarify what these omni- qualities more precisely denote.
2. The popular ideation that God is male is also inherent in the False Gods that Daly identified. As Daly (1985) radically expresses, "If God is male, then the male is God" (p. 19), since the worship of a male God creates a paradigm for male authority over women through a "mystification of roles" (p. 13). The male God legitimizes the dominion of men and the submission of women. However, this is not to argue that the male God must be replaced by a female God, or that masculine symbolisms must be paired with their feminine counterparts to be more inclusive to women.¹⁸ Although it is true that an exclusively male imagery has the tendency to limit how

¹⁸ In addressing these harms, others have thought of either replacing or supplementing male symbolisms with their female and/or neutral counterparts. However, nonsexist God-language, although appearing to be a viable alternative to the sexist, male-centric God-language of the Bible, does not solve the problem at its roots. It fails to recognize that: first, nonsexist God-language cannot rectify the overtly negative and sexist scriptures in the Bible; second,

women can relate and identify with God, female imagery alone is not sufficient to eradicate sexism in the Bible and in Christianity. Daly does not explicitly identify the essentially male God as a False God, but it is implicit in her work that all the False Gods possess this quality.

3. The anthropomorphism of God is also reflected in Daly's False Gods, especially because God's maleness is also understood in anthropomorphic terms. The God of otherworldliness and the God who is the judge of sin also produce two contradictory images: God as spirit residing in heaven and God as man who has human (sometimes superhuman) capacities. This anthropomorphism leads to an idea of God as personal, which can be understood in two senses: first, God as a person having a personality, with a characteristic set of behaviors, temperaments, emotional patterns, interests, and motivations; and second, God as involved in personal affairs and influenced by personal feelings and personal interactions. This idea is injurious because it produces in humanity a personal vocation to gain God's favor by blindly obeying scriptures reflective of a sexist, male morality. Thereby, it focuses on the afterlife where divine justice will be served or relies on divine intervention to solve all social ills, instead of criticizing and correcting the male bias in religious texts and practices, actively demanding for justice and accountability in this world, and critically working toward the amelioration of the plight of women and other marginalized groups. Hence, if the concept of God is to be reassessed, it must reject ideations that undermine social and political development.

nonsexist God-language alone cannot impact societal change and development if the other false God projections are not rejected; and third, even with a nonsexist God-language, religion still exists and operates within the patriarchal social order. Hence, if religion fails to drive its followers into actively addressing these existing inequalities in society by acknowledging the sexism that pervades their beliefs and practices, understanding their extent and impact, and making amends by correcting these sexist beliefs and practices, then despite its attempts to promulgate nonsexist God-language, God-belief will continue to be compatible with and, therefore, conducive to further sexual oppression (Daly, 1985).

4. The popular idea of God as the adjudicator of souls in the afterlife is also directly evident in Daly's God of otherworldliness and God who is the judge of sin. Through close examination, one will notice that these two False Gods combined refers to God the adjudicator of souls in the afterlife, since the God of otherworldliness pertains to God living in a different realm (heaven) that he oversees, and since the God who is the judge of sin pertains to God as the ultimate authority of right and wrong.

Although Daly's discussion of the God of otherworldliness mainly focuses on the provision of rewards and punishments after death, it can also be linked to the popular idea of God who grants rewards and punishments in this life by granting the prayers of obedient worshippers. This encourages believers to continuously pursue God's favor, pivoting on the idea that a personal relationship with God is possible.

God who is the judge of sin, by imposing compliance and obedience, can also encourage mere acceptance of current living conditions and existing inequalities in society, backed by the ideas that one's life is all part of God's ultimate plan and that struggle is necessary as it is God's way of instilling essential virtues in humans, such as modesty, patience, and resilience. For it is believed that in the end, God will redeem the good and punish the bad: if justice is unattainable in this life, God will uphold it upon death by denying sinners of eternal life; if happiness and prosperity are unreachable in this life, God will grant endless abundance upon death as long as one lived in obedience and piety. This effects an attitude of resignation—a submission to this God-given destiny even if it means accepting the harsh reality of oppression and inequality.

Given these harms, for God-belief to be compatible with societal progress and women's liberation, the false projections of God should be rejected, and the concept of God should be reanalyzed beyond scriptural ideation.

Aquinas' First Cause

Thomas Aquinas, a medieval philosopher and theologian, authored one of the most fundamental texts in the study of Christian theology: the *Summa Theologica*. The *Summa Theologica* is a theological treatise that consists of three major sections that discuss God, Man, and Christ. The idea of God as First Cause is developed in the first section. Aquinas is known for his cosmological proof of God's existence through The Five Ways (1947), wherein he demonstrates the existence of God by reference to observable phenomena in the universe using notions of contingency and causation.

The Five Ways, as an *a posteriori* demonstration, advances the idea that the existence of the external world entails the existence of God. However, although the effects of God can be observed, experienced, and known, God *per se* cannot be known sufficiently (Aquinas, 1947, Q12, A12, co). Nevertheless, through empirical observation and the use of human reason, one can establish some primary truths about God, such as that God exists and that God is "the first cause of all things" (Aquinas, 1947, Q12, A12, co).

What the First Cause idea entails will be the linchpin in my argument for a feminist God-belief. In Aquinas, God as the "cause of them all" means that God is the universal cause of all being—neither a cause of creation of one thing as derived from another nor a cause of change of a thing to another state or form. As First Cause, God is the principle of existence. This means that God is not a transformative cause that brings about change in things that are already existing. Instead, God is the creative cause that brings about the existence of everything from nothing, and so, is the very cause of the being of all beings (Q45, A2, co).

As the universal cause of being, God's existence is not caused by another. Although all created things have their essence different from their existence, essence and existence are the same in God. Through this, God must be understood as the principle of existence not part of any category of being in the universe (Q3, A5, co). This means that God as the First Cause is entirely different from anything in the world—that is, God as the First Cause is wholly other. The wholly otherness of God denotes

that God transcends everything that is—that God is not contained in any genus or category; thus, God cannot be said to have human qualities and capacities as part of its essence.

Nonetheless, Aquinas clarifies that names and descriptions may still be given to God, but only insofar as to make sense of the transcendence (i.e., the inconceivability and ineffability) of God with what our limited, human intellect and linguistic tools could reach. Names and descriptions are not meant to define God's essence as similar to corporeal things but to account for how the human language and experience apprehend God's effects (Q13, A1, co).

Therefore, it follows that first, God is impersonal—that is, God does not exist a person, has no personality, and cannot be said to have a characteristic set of behavior, temperament, emotional patterns, interests, and motivations; and that second, God is sexless—not as to ascribe God to such category of sexlessness but only to emphasize the impossibility of God's membership in any mode of classification given its wholly otherness. Hence, human names and descriptions given to God (e.g., God is the father, God is male) do not signify any truth about the essence of God. Rather, they are intended as analogical tools through which extrapolations from what is familiar are made in an attempt to understand the unfamiliar.

Furthermore, the wholly otherness of God makes it impossible for God to participate in human social interactions, for God transcends everything that exists. Thus, as the wholly other First Cause, God holds a position of absolute priority to the chain or web of causation in the universe.¹⁹ As the cause of all things—the creative cause—God is beyond the causal order (Fronza, 2018).

Hence, if we understand God as the wholly other creative cause that is at absolute priority to the chain of causation, then it means that:

¹⁹ "Absolute priority to" indicates that God precedes all things in totality and that God transcends everything that is created. It is not to be confused with "absolute priority in," which denotes that God is just another cause in the chain or web of causation and that God exists within the universe alongside everything.

1. God cannot be put alongside other causes and explanatory posits.
2. Everything is equally distant to God in the chain or web of causation.
3. God is invariably the cause of everything (Fronza, 2018).

Having established so, it follows that God cannot directly or indirectly cause change in the universe, because as *causa essendi* or the cause of being, God created everything from nothing and, hence, is the plenary cause of existence. God is not a *causa fieri* or cause of change or becoming that can be identified as an ultimate or intermediary cause within the chain or web of causation.

Therefore, to think of God as First Cause, is to challenge the view that God intervenes with the operations of the world and with human affairs, because God, in its wholly otherness, “cannot interfere in the universe.”²⁰ With this, it is arguable that God is impersonal in another sense of the word—not involved in human affairs and relationships and, consequently, neither participating in nor influenced by personal interactions and emotions.

Implications

Understanding God as the First Cause disputes the cogency of the existing, popular ideation and image of God that persists in Christianity. This invites us to transform the basic foundations of our God-belief. Although this does not entail an outright rejection of all popular God projections,²¹ at the very least, it requires that they be interpreted in a way that conforms to God’s wholly otherness.

1. For instance, God’s omni-qualities are not necessarily discordant with the idea that God is wholly other. Yet, it could

²⁰ The same idea was also presented by Herbert McCabe in his work *God Matters*. He argues that for something to interfere, that something must be alongside what it interferes with. However, in the case of God that is the “cause of everything,” there is nothing that is alongside it, which makes it impossible for God to interfere in the universe (2005, p. 6).

²¹ See Section III for reference on these numbered points.

become discordant if God's omni-qualities are understood to mean God's participation in the universe and engagement in human, moral life. As the First Cause that takes absolute priority to the chain or web of causation, God's omni-qualities cannot be deduced from corporeal experience. In this way, God's maximal perfection is more aptly understood through God's existence as the principle of being itself. The role of these omni- qualities, then, is to guide the human understanding in making sense of God's transcendence. Hence, God can be said to exhibit omni-qualities only insofar as they correspond to its wholly other nature.

2. Meanwhile, there are popular God projections directly challenging the wholly otherness of God. For instance, the belief that God is essentially male very evidently denies God's transcendence, because it entails that God can be categorized as part of the male genus. Moreover, this maleness is also coupled with the image of God as a Father, thereby as existent within the universe possessing physiological sex among other human capacities, demoting God to the corporeal realm. Yet, as the First Cause, God is the plenary cause of everything and is beyond everything that exists, which consequently signifies that God is sexless and impersonal.
3. By the same token, the idea that God is anthropomorphic contradicts the idea of God as First Cause. Understanding God to possess the same physical, mental, emotional characteristics and capacities as humans is to relegate God to the limitedness of the corporeal sphere.

To claim that God has physical attributes indicates a view of God as a person. To believe that God has the same knowledge constraints (as to make flawed judgments and have changing values and beliefs) and emotional response (as to be capable of regret, jealousy, contempt, affection, and gratitude) as humans is to deny God its transcendence, because this belief does not only convey that God is capable of human

experience, but it also depicts that God exists in the same plane as humans, meddles in human affairs, and directly engages in human life.

4. Understanding God as the First Cause also challenges the view of God as the adjudicator of souls in the afterlife. The latter supports not only the idea that God is not transcendent (by virtue of it being in the same plane of existence with other beings), but also the idea that God is not impersonal, because he actively participates in human affairs by attending to every human's thoughts and deeds and fostering attitudes and sentiments towards them, thereby defeating God's wholly otherness.

Furthermore, understanding God as the wholly other First Cause corresponds to Mary Daly's call for the dethronement of the False Gods.²²

1. The first of these False God projections is the God of explanation, wherein God, with the misunderstanding that surrounds its omni-qualities, is used as an instant, explanatory posit for things or phenomena that can be explained through critical and scientific practice. Analyzed through the lens of Christian belief, the God of explanation is used to justify the existing social inequalities by considering them as fundamental to human life and as natural consequences of the original sin.²³ Hence, to atone for the fall of man, adherents

²² See Section IV for reference on these numbered points.

²³ This can be gleaned from the story of the Fall of Man (NIV, 2011, Genesis 3) wherein the woman, through the sin of disobedience, and the man, through the sin of listening to his wife, blame the woman for their banishment from the Garden of Eden (NIV, 2011, Genesis 3:17). The woman is also punished with painful labor and the authority of her husband (NIV, 2011, Genesis 3:16). The hierarchical structure of man and woman's relationship, along with the power struggle that results from it, is more explicitly stated in the New Living Translation of the Bible. It says: "...you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you." (NLT, 1996, Genesis 3:16). This very evidently suggests that woman's subservience and inferiority are necessary, as both are ordained by God as part of her punishment. Thus, women are socialized by Christian morality to accept their secondary status as their destiny.

are made to believe that the submission and subordination of women is God's will. This leads to the passive acceptance of the unjust social and political conditions that can be ameliorated, if not for the belief in redemption through tolerance and obedience and in the ultimate plan.

This can be subdued by referring to the wholly other God. To circumvent the prying, patriarchal, male God implied by the God of explanation, God must be understood as the First Cause through which we underscore the detached and disinterested position that God has in the universe. This situates change and accountability directly in the hands of human beings. Hence, denying the God of explanation will encourage both men and women to reject passivity and blind obedience and criticize the state of affairs that impede the attainment of equality and the liberation of women.

2. The second of these False God projections is the God of otherworldliness, which pertains to the projection of God as the ruler in heaven who bestows rewards and punishments after death. Since good and bad are based on obeying the rules set by God in accordance with the scriptures, the God of otherworldliness furthers the passive acceptance of the patriarchal system. The prospect of personal salvation becomes the driving force for compliance to God-given decrees. This is injurious because it reinforces a kind of morality that is merely based on conformity. Hence, it produces a vocation in humanity to gain God's favor through submission, in hopes of prayers being answered, miracles being granted, and salvation being guaranteed, instead of ameliorating the material conditions they live in and demanding for justice and accountability in the material world.

This can be subjugated by alluding to the wholly other God. Since wholly otherness entails that God does not interfere in the universe, this means that God neither observes or assesses human deeds nor does God award or penalize

anyone for their actions whether directly or indirectly. Therefore, by understanding God as the First Cause, moral valuation and reasoning takes a more logical approach, elevating one's sense of social responsibility, since one is invited to understand morality beyond the rules and restrictions set by Christian faith. Without a God that promises redemption, men and women are more inclined to attain justice not through passive acceptance, but through active efforts and well-reasoned approaches to undermine the patriarchal system that hinders social and political development.

3. The third of these False God projections is God the judge of sin who confirms the rightness of the reigning system's rules and roles by identifying those that deviate from the established standards of morality as sin. By endorsing a male-defined understanding of sin, this God sustains the patriarchal and sexist dictates of the scriptures, whereas those who seek to challenge or overturn them in the name of equality are tagged as transgressors of the divine law. Hence, God the judge of sin keeps women in a state of inferiority and subjugation and conditions them to accept it as the righteous will of God.

However, this False God can be dethroned by turning to God the First Cause, which, in its wholly otherness, does not participate in any facet of human existence nor arbitrate in moral discourse. Therefore, it is not in a position to judge thoughts and actions, more so impose behavioral and moral dictates upon humanity. As a result, this quashes the notion of the reigning patriarchal system (in religion and in general) as a God-sanctioned world order, thus motivating a kind of morality grounded not on piety but on reason.

4. An addition to Mary Daly's three False Gods is the False God projection of the essentially male God. Understanding God as essentially male means that maleness is deemed as an intrinsic and necessary quality of God, such that, if God is not male, that entity fails to be considered God. The exclusively

male imagery and ideation of God creates and sustains a paradigm for inequality, since the male God who puts primacy on the male steward he created in his own image and likeness legitimizes the rule of men over women. This does not only grant men unreasonable ascendancy, but it also forces women in a state of inferiority and submission. Hence, God becomes an oppressive tool used to justify patriarchy.

However, this essentially male God can be eliminated by understanding God as the wholly other First Cause, therefore beyond membership in any existing genus or classification such as sex and gender. This opposes the essentially male ideation of God and, consequently, the sexual hierarchy and mystification of roles that result from such ideation. This invites men and women to reassess their place both in the private and public sphere, rethink their beliefs, and reevaluate the patriarchal system's rules and morals.

Through understanding God as the wholly other First Cause—therefore, as sexless and impersonal—women can refuse their victimization by expunging from their consciousness a male, patriarchal God that favors men and condemns women. Through an awareness of the challenges and inconsistencies in popular God-belief, women are urged to confront them and reject the antifeminist God projections. The wholly other God that does not interfere in the universe empowers women to embrace their agency and break away from the dictates of patriarchal religion, and thereby constitute a space in which they can reclaim their identities, define their own existence, create their own meanings, and modify the existing conceptual systems that exclude their genuine experiences and concerns in social, political, and ethical theorizing. Hence, through the wholly other God, women can reject a God-belief that inspires a purely male ethics and morality and replace it with a feminist God-belief that contributes to women's liberation in society.

Conclusions

By reconceptualizing God as the wholly other First Cause, this article proposes the compatibility between two seemingly incompatible positions: God-belief and feminism. Unlike other feminist critiques of religion that entail a Goddess theology, feminist spirituality, or atheism, this article presents an alternative dissonance-reduction strategy that maintains its adherence to God-belief but avoids the sexist implications of adhering to patriarchal religion. Through feminist philosophical analysis, this article exposes the gaps and inconsistencies in popular God projections in Christianity and addresses them by advancing a feminist God-belief through a reassessment of the concept of God using Mary Daly's idea of False Gods and Thomas Aquinas' First Cause argument.

This feminist reappropriation of the First Cause argument prompts the rejection of the kind of God-belief that inspires a male-centric morality and replaces it with a feminist God-belief that contributes to women's societal liberation and empowerment. Through understanding God as wholly other First Cause, one arrives at a God-belief that is not necessarily anti-feminist. Hence, this article demonstrates that what may be necessary for a feminist God-belief is not an abandonment of the belief in God *per se*, but a reconceptualization of God and a rejection of the False Gods residing in women's consciousness.

Ultimately, as this article forwards a detached and impersonal God-belief, it distances itself from the Christian tradition of religious participation. Hence, the participation of worldly beings in God's transcendence is not defined through organized rituals and other religious practices. With God as the First Cause, humans "participate" in God's existence just by the virtue of their being, since existence itself is only possible because God is the principle of being. This entails a very crucial point: God, the wholly other First Cause, through its disinterestedness, shifts the focus from the transcendental to the worldly and from passivity to activity. Such God-belief serves to emphasize humanity and freedom through rational agency and urges self-determination instead of gratuitous reliance on the otherworldly sense of security that Christian God-belief nurtures, thereby encouraging women to break free from the debilitating

dictates of patriarchal religion. And should the belief in the wholly other God be considered pointless or unstimulating because of its disinterestedness, it only further proves the point. One is urged to act not in the service of God but in the service of the people.

However, even if this God-belief encourages women to criticize oppressive institutions, the reversal of values, thereby the attainment of equality, is only possible through centuries of effective desocialization (i.e., rejecting old norms) and resocialization (i.e., adopting new attitudes and behaviors). This entails the crucial move of extending this feminist God-belief to the male demographic. By understanding God as the First Cause and not as the anthropomorphic, male God, men can also reject the sexist implications of the scriptures and expunge the perilous sense of entitlement to dominate, exploit, and dehumanize women from their consciousness.

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