

FROM THE EDITORS

Part of this issue of *Feminist Studies* is devoted to a symposium on "Women and Religion." The articles have been assembled to prompt cross-cultural comparisons, to suggest structural patterns, and to facilitate the intellectual and political connections on which feminist scholarship prides itself. *Feminist Studies* hopes to employ this format in future issues; we are planning symposia on domestic service, on women and state power, and on the work of Simone de Beauvoir as a way of commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of *The Second Sex*. We welcome proposals for other symposia from readers and authors.

The first three articles in this issue, by Anne Barstow, Sherry Ortner, and Irene Silverblatt, analyze the relationship between women and religion in early civilizations. They detail the existence of considerable variation in the stature of women, and speculate on the role religions may play in expressing and reflecting other gender-based social relations. In her introduction to these three essays, Rayna Rapp identifies the social structures which form the bases for these variations in the status and image of women; she calls for further investigation of the connection between such social and cultural structures and the process of state formation.

The fourth paper considers women and religion at a far different time—in the context of modern nation-states and their more secular ideology. In nineteenth-century America, formal religion and the Protestant church had in many ways become a female domain. Anne Boylan describes how American women founded religious institutions—her example is Sunday schools—and maneuvered within these institutions to create new roles, more positive images, and greater social influence for their sex. At the same time that Boylan recognizes that the women of the Sunday school movement were not conscious feminists and had not stormed a major citadel of social power, her analysis nonetheless illuminates the process whereby women worked to maximize their power and freedom within the constraints of history.

Questions of women and religion are not only of archeological or antiquarian interest. Myths and cosmologies continue to condition women's experiences and to demand women's responses. This symposium concludes with a section from Mary Daly's forthcoming book *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Daly challenges us to use both historical analysis and our deep anger at patriarchal religious institutions to create the "cosmic tapestries" of a transformed feminist culture.