Idoloclasm: The First Task of Second Wave Liberal Jewish Feminism


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Abstract

This article suggests that Second Wave liberal Jewish feminism combined secular feminist criticism of the ideological roots of social injustice with traditional criticism of idolatry. Together, these closely related discourses allowed Jewish feminists to argue, with Christian feminists of the time, that the monosexual God who demands that idols be broken is himself an idol: a primary ideational and linguistic projection whose masculine character obstructs the political and existential becoming of women. Liberal Jewish feminists such as Judith Plaskow, in dispute with early Orthodox Jewish feminism, therefore insisted that Jewish feminism must begin with a counter-idolatrous reform of the theological concepts that underpin the relationship between God, self, and world, not with making permissible alterations to halakhah. However, while liberal Jewish feminists reclaimed some of the female aspects of the Jewish God (notably the Shekhinah), the point of reforming a tradition is to be faithful to it. They did not join their more radical Jewish sisters in a more or less pagan break with ethical monotheism, not least because the latter’s criticism of idolatry funded their own prophetic drive to the liberation of both women and God from captivity to their patriarchal idea.
Second-wave feminism is closely linked to the radical voices of women’s empowerment and differential rights and, during the 1980s to 1990s, also to a crucial differentiation of second-wave feminism itself, initiated by women of color and third-world women. We end our discussion with the third feminist wave, from the mid-1990s onward, springing from the. This article suggests that second-wave feminist theology between around 1968 and 1995 undertook the quintessentially religious and task of theology, which is to break its own idols. Idoloclasm was the dynamic of Jewish and Christian feminist theological reformism and the means by which to clear a way back into its own tradition. The first moment of feminist theology’s criticism of patriarchal power is not that it is socially unjust, but that it has licence to be unjust because it is idolatrous. Feminism Women’s liberation Idolatry Feminist theology Religion and gender Patriarchy. This is a preview of subscription content, log in to check access. Citearticle.