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Maria Redux: Incarnational Readings of Sacred History

Abigail Rine

Noah and the Ark. Jonah and the Big Fish. Mary's *yes* to the Angel. Jesus's *yes* in the Garden of Gethsemane. Pilot's *no* and his wife's *please, don't*. Lot's wife and her last, homeward look. To whom do these stories belong? And how should we read them, each from our particular corner of incarnate humanity? Here is what my corner looks like: I am a woman; I am a feminist; I am a literary critic; I am a product of Westernized Christianity. I write and read from the space where these words overlap, but what does that mean when it comes to Scripture, to the stories that my tradition holds sacred? Should I be exempted from rereading, rewriting, re-spinning these stories because they are sacred? Or, is it because of their sacredness that I must continue rereading and retelling them?

Too often, feminist reading is a merely deconstructive gesture. We feminists want to dismantle the patriarchal scaffolding of the Bible; we want to see what crumbles, and what remains. We have learned to read like bloodhounds, routing out gaps in the texts where women disappear and are dismembered, gaps with too much unsettling silence. This type of reading is necessary, but it is also limited – and ultimately unfulfilling. I am interested in finding another way to read the stories that have wounded me, the stories that have seemed impossibly refracted through the prism of men's experiences and authority. My question is: once we have broken open their stories, their words, their ideas, how do we draw renewed meaning from them? How do we make them life-giving again?

In order to engage better with these questions, I would like to turn to Luce Irigaray's recent writings, in which she revisits the stories of her Catholic upbringing to approach them again, reframing them from her subject position as a woman. I intend to focus particularly on her reinterpretation of the Annunciation and Mary's virginity, and to question

how this new reading is connected to her view of incarnation. While these revised interpretations are certainly intriguing and potentially transformative in their own right, I would like to consider them also as case studies of sorts, examples of incarnational readings that overcome the traditional Christian schism between body and word.¹

Luce Irigaray is hard to label; she is best known as a major figure in French feminist philosophy, but she is also a poet, and her theoretical writing displays an attention to the musicality of words and the incarnate dimension of language. Without a doubt, she is a highly influential force in feminist thought, particularly in the Anglo-American world, although her recent work on religion has been unduly criticized or overlooked by feminist critics.² Far from being tangential to her undertaking of creating a culture of two sexuate subjects, however, Irigaray's engagement with religious discourse is essential to that overall project, and any exploration of religious elements in her work must be explored from that angle.

Becoming incarnate, becoming divine

Despite the supposed secularization of the Western world, our culture continues to be shaped by religion, and a crucial thread through much of Irigaray's work reminds us of the need to not merely move beyond religion, but rather to reconsider this dimension of human experience in the context of sexuate difference.³ In *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray describes the inevitability of religious thought, adding that we must 'rethink religion' because 'we are unable to eliminate or suppress the phenomenon of religion' ('Women, the Sacred, and Money', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, p. 73). The religious dimension, she writes, 'is an important aspect of our culture' and it is essential to consider 'how we have been determined by this dimension and how we can, in the present, situate ourselves with respect to it' ('Introduction to Part IV: Spirituality and Religion', in *Key Writings*, p. 145). The religious dimension corresponds to an external cultural force, but its words, concepts and tenets are internalized on an individual level; as such, religion 'in some obscure way ... holds together the totality of the self, of the community and culture' ('Spiritual Tasks for Our Age', in *Key Writings*, p. 171).⁴ Religion, then, is both intensely personal and communal, and its revision has the potential to transform oneself as well as relations between self and other, allowing alternative models of subjectivity to emerge. It is important to highlight Irigaray's contention that religious words and traditions cannot simply be denied; they must be rethought entirely. Merely rejecting traditional religion forgets its continued, pervasive

influence in Western culture, and leaves its terms unquestioned. What Irigaray is calling for is the transformation of religious discourse in fundamental ways, which is no easy task in an age when 'many imagine they have put an end to [religion]' ('Introduction to Part IV: Spirituality and Religion', in *Key Writings*, p. 147). But this, according to her, is one of the 'spiritual tasks for our age', one that opens the way towards a culture of two sexed subjects.⁵

The realization of two subjectivities – one in the masculine, one in the feminine – is inextricably connected with women becoming divine. Irigaray's work depicts a mode of being that is always in becoming; for her, subjectivity remains in process and is not merely obtained at birth or through an androcentric Oedipal crisis. My understanding of this aspect of Irigaray's thought is drawn from her essay 'Divine Women', which describes becoming as an ongoing realization of potential: 'to become means fulfilling the wholeness of what we are capable of being' ('Divine Women', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, p. 61). In order for the development of the subject to occur and continue, it must project itself towards an unattainable horizon, a never-realized goal or ideal that necessitates continual transformation. In our tradition, women have been unable to become subjects *as women*. The woman has been identified solely in comparison with the man, who defines himself through his male God. Women, by and through themselves, have no relation to the traditional infinite. Current religious discourse obscures qualitative difference, especially sexuate difference, promoting a culture of and between men and a God who is estranged from human experience, absolutely other, and who serves as an ideal or guarantor for masculine subjectivity. Qualitative difference is not conceived between and among humans, but merely indicates 'greater or lesser proximity to the supreme reality' ('Spiritual Tasks for Our Age', in *Key Writings*, p. 174). This absence of an adequate religious discourse, one reflective and inclusive of women's embodied experiences and necessities, has resulted in stasis for them, paralysing their becoming. According to Irigaray, until the divine is reinterpreted, sexuate difference will remain unthought and a true encounter with the other *in difference* will remain unrealizable.

How, then, can we – specifically as women – rethink the divine? The answer offered by Irigaray is to work to reconsider the artificial gap between humanity and divinity that stems from 'the domination of one sex over the other' (*ibid.*). Conceiving the divine as situated within a sexed humanity could allow for the development of a feminine spiritual subjectivity. As in all of Irigaray's work, sexuate difference is crucial here; there is no un-sexed human flesh, and thus the

divine must be incarnated in women as well as in men. Becoming divine as sexuate human beings is an essential part of Irigaray's vision of a culture of two subjects. As she expresses it: 'God is us, we are divine, if we are woman and man in a perfect way' ('The Age of the Breath', in *Key Writings*, p. 169). For women's bodies to be transfigured into divine flesh, their relationships to their natural belonging must also be reinterpreted, so that women do not remain purely nature, while also not in denial of their nature.⁶ Therein lies the radical potential of an incarnated feminine divine – a woman who would not have to 'renounce' her body or 'relinquish her natural environment to reach the divine' (ibid., p. 167).

Thus, for Irigaray, divinity does not go without incarnation. She questions the traditional opposition between divinity and humanity; becoming divine is an incarnate process that women and men must realize for themselves, as sexuate subjects. As she writes, the spirit must 'remain soul in the flesh: a necessary path towards the accomplishment of the divine in humanity' (ibid., p. 169). Becoming divine means to cultivate one's own incarnation, to realize oneself as both flesh and divine spirit. Irigaray's view of incarnation is, of course, inspired by Christ's incarnation, an essential tenet of Christian theology: Jesus Christ is the Divine Word made flesh. What is crucial to recognize is that the very notion of incarnation has the possibility of confounding the traditional religious oppositions between divinity and humanity, spirit and flesh, Word and body, and thereby has the possibility of subverting the binary schema at the root of Western discourse. According to Irigaray, however, this possibility remains unrealized:

Now, what Jesus presents to us as the mirror of God is the absolute necessity of love in a human becoming, in a divine becoming ... The historic contribution of the message is worth keeping, but applying it indiscriminately often leads to practices which oppose its intention. Thus, as a feminine body subjected to a masculine Word going from the Father to the Son through Mary, I cannot truly love myself, nor the other, nor God. ('The Redemption of Women', in *Key Writings*, p. 150)

Despite the subversive potential of incarnation, traditional religious discourse maintains a split between embodiment and the divine, asserting a theology that only conceives of the male word-seed becoming male flesh. There is traditionally no viable model of *female* divine incarnation. Irigaray's insistence upon the need for women to formulate a

theology of incarnation is an attempt to destabilize the underlying and interconnected hierarchical oppositions of Western religious and philosophical discourses: Word/body, spirit/flesh, divine/human, man/woman.

Although the notion of incarnation appears in Irigaray's written works, it was in her 2008 doctoral seminar at Queen Mary College that I heard her elaborating on the vital connection between women's incarnation and women's use of language. Before this seminar, my research was focused on the role of *imagination* in engaging with religious tradition, more than on *incarnation*. My work was lacking a sufficient articulation between body and text. During this seminar, Irigaray encouraged me to shift my focus from the rather disembodied notion of imagination to incarnation. She explained how spiritual incarnation is a process that requires the participation of words in order for women to express themselves and communicate *with* the other, instead of passively receiving words *from* the other. In her theology of incarnation, 'the *word* is a vehicle of the divine'; language is revealed as potentially transformative, particularly language that tells the life of the sexuate body (ibid., pp. 151–6). In this seminar, she affirmed that when the Word is not incarnate, but cut off from the sensible dimension and no longer embodied, it remains an absolute entity outside our reaching, outside any possible experience and therefore unable to be cultivated as a living discourse that also reflects and expresses the feminine. Irigaray's rereading of incarnation reminds us that words are born within and formed by our flesh; we participate in language as incarnated beings, and furthermore, our incarnations are not sex-neutral, but sexuate. Rather than 'a redemptory submission of the flesh to the Word', as traditionally conceived, Irigaray's idea of incarnation interrogates the pervasive devaluation of the body, notably through its opposition to the divine, and manifests 'a different relationship between flesh and word', a bond 'in which human and divine are wedded' (*Marine Lover*, p. 169). In other words, an incarnational way of thinking, as thus practised by Irigaray, redeems women from being relegated to mere matter by uniting divinity and the creative power of the word with – and within – the female body. The violent dualisms of patriarchy and phallocentrism, which privilege what is at once male, divine, rational, immaterial and transcendent, are confounded by this interpretation of incarnation.

Irigaray's theorization of the divine asserts that women must begin the work of thinking *and* incarnating their own notions of 'God' and, in this way, articulating a renewed religious dimension that facilitates becoming. Her perspective emphasizes the crucial importance of

language and discourse in refiguring the divine, as well as the need for creative aesthetic and narrative depictions to propose an alternative divinity. Furthermore, the language that cultivates becoming must be *incarnate* – not an abstract, disembodied discourse, but words that spring from the life of the body and express the realm of the senses. This incarnational relationship between word and body is vital to both Irigaray's religious thought and the focus of this chapter, as it challenges the traditional subjection of female corporeality to the masculine authority of the Word. When I advocate, then, the transformative potential of incarnational reading, I am referring to the ways in which this mode of interpretation can criticize and disrupt the hierarchical oppositions that privilege masculinity, divinity, spirit and logos over femininity, desire and the flesh. This alternative model undermines a divisive conception of the Word by offering *words*, words that 'create bridges' between language and the sexuate body and begin the work of articulating a subjectivity in the feminine ('Introduction to Part IV: Spirituality and Religion', in *Key Writings*, p. 145).

'How is this story to be interpreted?'⁷

If it is our task to heal this division between body and word, how do we begin this work? Although I believe there are many possible answers to this question, in this essay I would like to suggest that a key first step is cultivating an incarnational relationship with the texts and stories of our religious traditions, which for myself, and Luce Irigaray, is Christianity. As Irigaray points out in her writing, the work of interpreting these stories and texts has almost always been done for us and on our behalf; we have had dogmatic and divisive interpretations, especially about Christ himself, 'handed down to us by tradition' (*Marine Lover*, p. 166). We have never been allowed to encounter these texts from an incarnated feminine subject position; we have never been allowed to hold them up to the light with our own hands, and read them afresh with our own eyes and hearts. Irigaray writes that women must 'discover their word(s), be faithful to it and, interweaving it with their bodies, make it a living and spiritual flesh' in order to live out a 'theology of incarnation' ('The Redemption of Women', in *Key Writings*, p. 151). Through her rereading of the story of Mary, she practises a mode of interpretation that intertwines the words of the text with the body of the reader, interpreting them in a way that nurtures, rather than inhibits, feminine becoming. Before delving into Irigaray's incarnational reading of Mary, however, I would like to explore her account

of the traditional interpretation, in order to show how this authoritative reading imposes the separation between body and word, between women and the divine.

In *Marine Lover*, Luce Irigaray explains how 'the most common interpretation' of the story of Mary and Jesus has produced an oppositional model of incarnation that 'consecrates an historic stage where man stands between nature and God, flesh and Word, body and speech' (p. 165). Mary, in this interpretation, serves as 'merely the vehicle for the Other':

She, a dumb virgin with lips closed, occasionally receives the favor of a word, which she must bring into the world in the shape of a child of God. Mediatrix between Word and flesh, she is the means by which the (male) One passes into the other. Receptacle that, faithfully, welcomes and reproduces only the will of the Father. Grace that no longer abounds in her womb, even though it is from her womb that she will birth the child. (Ibid., p. 166)

Mary's *yes* to the Angel is simultaneously a *no*; her assent serves as a denial of her own incarnation, her own word, her own becoming – a 'no to everything, except the Word of the Father' (ibid., p. 167). In this reading of the traditional interpretation of the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary represents the female body as subjected to the masculine word; Mary mediates the incarnation of the masculine Word made man, but her own word(s) are never made flesh. Christ, in turn, signifies the masculine Word separate from the realm of the body. Irigaray argues that 'Christian institutions and dogmas' have erased all trace of the sexual corporeality of Christ, and, ultimately, his body must be sacrificed to fulfil God's Word: 'Who interpreted him in this way? Who abominated the body so much that he glorified the son of man for being abstinent, castrated? And why was it necessary for Christ to die and rise again in order for men to believe he was God? Why could his presence in the flesh not be perceived as divine?' (ibid., p. 177). Similarly, in her essay 'Equal to Whom', Irigaray links the erasure of Christ's sexed body in traditional interpretations of the incarnation to patriarchal hierarchies and the oppression of women:

The denegation of Christ's incarnation as a sexual being and the use to which that denial is put in the service of sexual hierarchization and exploitation seem to have blocked an understanding of that sexual nature and confined it to the province of the patricians and Pharisees. ('Equal to Whom', p. 74)

Christ's incarnation has the potential to subvert 'those pairs of opposites that continue to tear the world apart' (*Marine Lover*, p. 168). But, as Irigaray shows, the incarnation has been interpreted in a way that reinforces a masculine model of divinity and subjectivity, a model that furthermore is divorced from and debases the realm of the flesh, to which women are relegated. In addition, the fact that we are only given a model of the Divine Word becoming *male* flesh does not offer women 'certain needed representations of themselves, of their genealogy, and of their relation to the universe or to others' ('Equal to Whom', p. 80). Irigaray's work advocates reinterpreting the notion of incarnation in light of sexuate difference and calls for 'the incarnation of all bodies (men's and women's) as potentially divine' (ibid., pp. 68–9). This practice of reinterpretation necessitates returning to the sacred stories and reading them again, to break open the old words and infuse them with renewed meaning.

In *Marine Lover*, where Irigaray recounts the old way of reading the figure of Mary, she poses several questions, questions raised by the stories themselves that have nonetheless remained unanswered in our tradition. In framing these questions, she emphasizes how meaning does not lie dormant in the text, but is rather created through the interpretative relationship between text and reader, between flesh and word. She asks: 'what is meant by the spirit? What is Mary listening to in the message of the Angel?' She asks: 'how is she to be understood?' (*Marine Lover*, pp. 171–3). In *Key Writings*, she begins to propose answers to these questions that arise in her reinterpretation of Mary, devoting an entire section of the book to her own relations to Christianity. The essays included in *Key Writings* read differently than many of her earlier works, because she starts *from herself*; she begins by discussing her religious and cultural roots in Roman Catholicism:

The teachings of the Roman Catholic tradition, my cultural tradition, led me to the heart of a certain number of contradictions. The strongest, also the most painful, lies in the way in which faith in the incarnation of Jesus was presented to and imposed on me ... For years, I have tried to navigate on the raft of such truths, such dogmas. I trusted them, was wounded by them, and then distanced myself from them. I have come back to them, but to question and no longer submit blindly. To me, this task seemed a necessary one. ('The Redemption of Women', in *Key Writings*, p. 150)

Irigaray's interest in returning to her religious tradition and renegotiating her relation to it is not a purely intellectual exercise, but springs

from a deeply personal place, a place of spiritual desire. She writes, unequivocally, from her particular subject position as a woman, asserting that Christianity, as a religion that affirms an incarnational relationship between body and word, must be read from an embodied place, thus one marked by sexuate difference. She states that she is guided in that endeavour by Christ's declaration that it is essential to retain the *spirit* rather than the *letter* of the sacred text; hence, the necessity for continual rereadings of Scripture that are not confined to the level of the literal (*ibid.*).

One of Irigaray's concerns is that women must not, in spite of their cultural assignation, remain reduced to their bodies and their maternal function; however, by the same token, women must not be compelled to escape their feminine belonging or maternal capacities in order to be seen as active and capable subjects in the world. She asserts that women should not be considered 'purely body, with only a natural capacity for engendering children'; yet, at the same time, a woman should not have to 'quit her body, to leave herself' in order to 'reach the divine' (*ibid.*, pp. 151, 167). The challenge is to negotiate a balance between these extremes. The Virgin Mary, as she has been presented to us by tradition, seems to evoke the first extreme; she is characterized by her corporeal status as virgin *and* mother, a double status that no woman can emulate. It is impossible, of course, for any woman to be both virgin and mother simultaneously.

Or is it?

What happens if virginity signifies more than simply the presence of a hymen?

Irigaray's rereading of Mary attempts to do this, to rethink Mary and her 'virginity' beyond phallocentrism and beyond the historical male anxiety about paternity. The traditional conception of virginity is problematic from a feminist perspective, in that it roots a woman's moral and social value in her physical integrity and her affiliations with men. As Irigaray writes, 'virginity has been discussed above all by men, or by women in relation to them, but few women have done so in relation to themselves and in the context of female evolution' (*ibid.*, p. 161). Literally, virginity refers to a physical state; what might virginity mean when interpreted beyond the letter? Irigaray's reading urges us to consider virginity as something more than physical. She suggests that Mary's virginity could also indicate:

the existence of a spiritual interiority of her own, capable of welcoming the word of the other without altering it. Virgin and mother

therefore mean: capable of a relationship with the other, in particular the other gender, respecting the other and oneself. Virgin and mother could correspond to a female becoming, on condition that these words are understood in the spiritual and not just in the material-natural sense. It is with her 'virgin' soul, as much as if not more than with her body, that Mary gives birth to Jesus. The figure that she can represent for us is that of a woman who stays faithful to herself in love, in generation. (Ibid., p. 152)

Here, Mary is far from the mere acquiescent intermediary presented to us by patriarchal tradition, as described in *Marine Lover*. Here, virginity surmounts the division between body and word by making a woman's body a place transformed by her word(s). Such virginity does not signify a mere assent to a masculine deity, but rather a simultaneous *yes* to both oneself and the divine. Irigaray's rereading of the figure of Mary offers a concept of virginity that is actively cultivated, rather than passively received, one that roots the spirit within the body, joining these two realms together. Virginity, rather than an inert physical state, becomes a spirit-driven mode of being and relating to others. In this light, virginity expands to concern woman's relationships, not just with men, but first with her self, and also with others and God.

Irigaray's reinterpretation of virginity is linked to her conception of 'sin in the feminine', which comes from a rereading of the Christian tradition's notion of sin (ibid., p. 153). One of the supreme commandments of the Christian Gospel is the golden rule: to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. This love of the neighbour, or the other, as presented in Christianity, depends upon the premise of self-love. However, as Irigaray is quick to point out, in a culture that undervalues the feminine, it is the self-love that can be more challenging for women to achieve fully. In the Christian tradition, most of the specific examples of sin – dishonesty, pride, lust – refer to an imbalance in love between self and other, generally in terms of self-love overpowering or preventing love of the other, and this, according to Irigaray, is a masculine view of sin. In a culture where masculinity is privileged, men are more prone to sin in these traditionally conceived ways. Women, on the other hand, are more prone to sin in ways that obliterate, punish and forget the self. Sin in the masculine amounts to self-exaltation, while sin in the feminine amounts to self-abnegation. Irigaray advocates that we think of sin in a way that draws attention to both of these models, and that women be encouraged to discover and develop self-love, as well as love and respect for other women. In this feminine interpretation of sin

and grace, virginity becomes a critical way of maintaining self-love and self-respect, which then enables love towards the other. Here, virginity involves developing and safeguarding a spiritual interiority, where the divine can quicken and dwell (*ibid.*, pp. 153–8).

Irigaray's innovative reading expands our interpretations of virginity, sin, grace and motherhood beyond the body, while nonetheless remaining rooted within the body. She conceives 'virgin' and 'mother' in an embodied *and* spiritual sense, and this new reading makes it possible for Mary to be an example that every woman has the potential to emulate, whatever her sexual or marital status. To be virgin is to hold a divine balance between self-love and other-love, to show deep respect for oneself and the other as divine beings. Mary becomes, through this reading, a liberating and transformative model for women, instead of merely a passive figure in a patriarchal tradition.

Conclusion

In *Key Writings*, Irigaray calls women forth to be 'messengers' of a new age, an age of spiritual becoming for both sexes, and she presents incarnational rereadings of Scripture as one means of ushering in this new era ('The Redemption of Women', in *Key Writings*, p. 164). Rather than merely rejecting the words and concepts that have historically been defined by men, and often wielded as weapons against women, Irigaray's rethinking of 'sin' and 'virginity' urges us to return to sacred stories, to seek out the spirit over the letter, and to propose renewed interpretations of the texts. This method of reading mirrors her understanding of what is potentially transformative within Christianity: the notion of an incarnational relationship between body and word.

In this chapter, I have suggested that Irigaray's work in *Key Writings* offers a creative and incarnational model of feminist reading. While advocating that women incarnate their own word(s), her writing simultaneously exemplifies one means of accomplishing this task. Her readings, which spring from an incarnated, sexuate space, bridge the split between body and word, revealing a mode of feminist interpretation that moves beyond the purely deconstructive. Rather than merely criticizing masculine religious discourse, or producing a separate and oppositional discourse, Irigaray's work calls for women to be constructive as well as deconstructive, to maintain an ongoing dialogue with tradition while simultaneously exceeding and reformulating it. This would accomplish the dual task of conservation and creation, as described in *Key Writings* – to keep alive what remains life-giving and to discard what inhibits

women from becoming divine (see 'Fulfilling Our Humanity', in *Key Writings*, p. 187). Irigaray asserts that women must be actively involved in cultural production, including in the realm of religion, in order to 'share in the definition and exercise of truth' with men ('Writing as a Woman', in *Je, Tu, Nous*, p. 56). She is careful to stress that rethinking religion does not stop at utterly discarding current religious discourse. Rather, it means finding the path between blind submission to religious tradition and 'thoughtlessly critiquing, destroying or forgetting that which exists' ('Fulfilling Our Humanity', in *Key Writings*, p. 187). The goal, as she writes, is to *conserve* at once what remains fruitful – and only what is fruitful – in existing discourse and to *create* new ways of facilitating sexuate human becoming.⁸ In this way, Irigaray's work illuminates a vital path for women, a path that enables us to navigate the stories of our religious traditions without denying our own incarnations.

Notes

1. This chapter has grown out of my doctoral research, which analysed alternative readings of religious myth and tradition in contemporary women's fiction. Luce Irigaray's work on religion formed the theoretical backbone of that research, and it was her notion of incarnation that framed the entire doctoral thesis. Here, I have chosen to focus on elucidating this notion of incarnation, and how it might function as an interpretative key in performing renewed readings of religious tradition and mythology. Rather than exploring this in light of the fictional work of contemporary women writers, as my doctoral thesis did, I would instead like to focus on the rereadings that appear in Irigaray's own work. Her writing not only offers the transformative concept of incarnation; it also provides examples of incarnational readings of Christian story and theology. In this way, Irigaray's work has a dual function in this chapter as both the theoretical backdrop and as a case study in incarnational reading.
2. For examples of critics who downplay or ignore Irigaray's interest in the divine, see: Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*; Carolyn Burke et al., *Engaging with Irigaray*; Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros*. See also Rosi Braidotti's Foreword to Adriana Cavarero's *In Spite of Plato*. Braidotti commends Cavarero's resolute secularism and distance from Irigaray's 'glorification' of a feminine divine (pp. xvi–xvii). For more on the general trend of overlooking these aspects of Irigaray's work, see Ellen T. Armour, *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology, and the Problem of Difference*, p. 131; and Grace Jantzen, *Becoming Divine*, p. 7.
3. Although the vast majority of critics use the term 'sexual difference' in relation to Irigaray's work – and she herself uses the term in her earlier works – in her 2008 doctoral seminar at Queen Mary College, she expressed a preference for the term 'sexuate' rather than 'sexual', to avoid confusing sexual choice with sexuate identity, as well as to distinguish her concept of sexuate relational identities from mere biological sex differences. This shift

in terminology can also be found in *Key Writings*, which employs the term 'sexuate difference'.

4. Similarly, in 'Divine Women', in *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray writes that 'only the religious, within and without us, is fundamental enough to allow us to discover, affirm, achieve certain *ends*' (p. 67).
5. See the essay 'Spiritual Tasks for Our Age' in *Key Writings*.
6. During her seminar, Irigaray discussed how she prefers to use the word 'flesh' to denote a body intertwined with words, a body that, thus, can become divine, or 'transfigured'.
7. See Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, p. 164.
8. See the essay 'Fulfilling Our Humanity' in *Key Writings*.

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