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# Sinister Wisdom

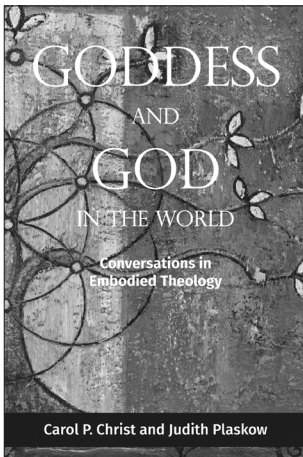
A Multicultural Lesbian Literary & Art Journal

**Passion Fruit  
and Wet Flowers**  
Edited by Julie R. Enszer

105

*Girl* reminds me of a courtroom drama with everything logged and put into evidence, backed up by substantiating fact or eyewitness testimony. Through dialogue and documented story, Davis conjures the gay scene in Greenwich Village and the Lavender Scare, making this an easy book to read despite the enormous quantity of information. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Lesbian Herstory Archives and their collection of boxes donated by the executrix of Angela's estate. Davis does not overlook the enormity of the archival component either, giving credit where credit is due. In her dedication of the book, Davis writes: "For Joan Nestle, author and historian," co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City. My thanks to both Davis and the LHA for providing an exacting and visceral glimpse into our history during the McCarthy era.

\*(Quote from Finally Feminism101.wordpress.com/2007/10/19/feminism-friday-the-origins-of-the-word-sexism/)



***Goddess and God in the World:  
Conversations in Embodied Theology***  
**Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow**  
 Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016  
 Paperback, \$29 - 364 pages

*Reviewed by* Rose Norman

In the 1970s at Yale, when Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow were working on PhDs in Religious Studies, God was pretty much white, male, and Christian. The story of how they started questioning those patriarchal assumptions and ultimately

pioneering feminist theology is the first half their new collaborative book *Goddess and God in the World*. They trace the life experiences that drew each of them to study theology, and then to reject or re-make the religious traditions with which they grew up. Combining their personal stories with rigorous theological reflection, the book invites readers to reflect on their own spiritual beliefs. What most interests Christ and Plaskow is how experience contributes to what they call “embodied theology,” the fact that we live our lives in bodies, and “our embodied thinking is always situated in relationships, communities, cultures, societies, and in the web of life” (139). Their own differing personal experiences lead the two scholars to theological differences that are the subject of the second half of the book.

Christ (rhymes with “list”) grew up in California, with a Catholic grandmother, a Christian Science grandmother, and parents who joined Protestant churches for social reasons. The death of an infant brother started her on a lifetime of looking for spiritual answers, first at Stanford, then earning a PhD at Yale, where she became a Roman Catholic, and then finding her spiritual home in an earth-based religion focused on the Goddess. She has published six books (and co-authored three more with Plaskow), and spent over twenty years in university teaching. When it became clear that feminist theology as she experienced and practiced it was not rewarded in academe, she moved to Greece, where she has directed the Ariadne Institute for the Study of Myth and Ritual since 1995.

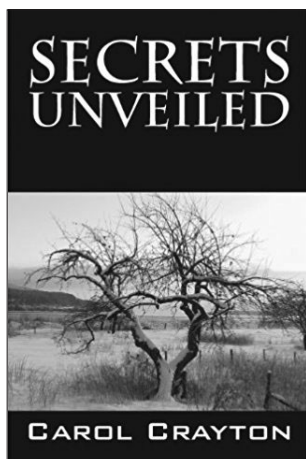
While Christ has lived on the island of Lesbos for twenty years and leads goddess tours of Crete ([goddessariadne.org](http://goddessariadne.org)), she is not the lesbian in this collaboration. Judith Plaskow was married to a man when she met the woman who became the love of her life and her partner for over thirty years. Plaskow was raised in New York City in a Reform Jewish home, although her father had been raised as an Orthodox Jew, and her mother as a Conservative

one. Growing up, she wanted to become a rabbi, but the family rabbi thought that violated Jewish tradition. It first occurred to her that God might be a woman when she was nine years old. Unlike Christ, Plaskow stayed with university teaching and chose to pursue her feminist theology within Judaism, seeking ways to make the language and imagery of ritual more inclusive and less patriarchal.

After meeting at Yale in a feminist consciousness raising group in the 70s, Christ and Plaskow began a writing partnership that led to two groundbreaking edited collections about feminist theology, *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader on Religion* (Harper and Row, 1979) and *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (Harper and Row, 1989). *Goddess and God in the World* is their first collaboration that is exclusively their own writing. It is conceived as a conversation, with both co-authored chapters and single authored chapters, first telling their personal stories and then moving to their explorations of theological questions. They introduce the book by inviting readers to explore with them “what you believe about the nature of Goddess or God; . . . the relation of theology to your own experiences; . . . how theologies make sense of our common world; . . . and which theologies provide the orientation we need as we seek to create a more just and harmonious world” (xvii). Their writing is clear and direct, even when discussing difficult theological arguments. Theirs is an intellectually honest conversation in which the participants genuinely want to understand each other’s beliefs and how they came to them.

While they agree on most key theological questions, they focus the second half of the book on two key disagreements about the nature of divinity: “whether divinity is personal or impersonal; and whether divinity is good or inclusive of good and evil” (299). For Christ, divinity is a personal presence in each individual’s life, “the intelligent, embodied love that is in all being” (261). For Plaskow, God is “an impersonal power of creativity that is the

ground of all being and becoming, including all good and all evil" (xiv). While writing the book, Christ modified an earlier definition of Goddess, but neither has moved the other to share the same experience of divinity, a remarkable difference considering how close are most of their theological beliefs. The disagreement underscores the power of personal experience to shape belief, no matter how persuasive the rational arguments for opposing beliefs. Following them on their spiritual journeys, and listening in as they grapple with different experiences of divinity, is a truly enriching experience.



### ***Unveiled Secrets***

**Carol Crayton**

Denver: Outskirts Press, 2011

Paperback \$15.95 - 266 pages

*Reviewed by Roberta Arnold*

The choices we make, the paths our bodies take change who we are--and these stories tell our struggles. *Unveiled Secrets* tells the story of the choices of several women within a linked nucleus of lesbianism, Catholicism, childbirth, and trauma of patriarchal law. Erin Meathe finds herself facing a choice of what to do about an unwanted pregnancy while traumatized by her mother's death from a backroom abortion. Spanning twenty years from the sixties to the eighties, two stories parallel each other. The first half of *Unveiled Secrets* is the story of the mother who gives her baby up for adoption after impregnation by a