

FEMINIST LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Rosemary Radford Reuther, in an article in *Theology Today*, raises the question of re-contextualizing theology in the experience of women. She writes:

Unlike subordinated races who have preserved some remnants of an alternative culture (such as blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians),... the subordination of women takes place at the heart of every culture and thus deprives women of an alternative culture with which to express their identity over against the patriarchal culture of family and society. Some cultures give women distinct religious rituals and cults and quasi-autonomous social and economic groupings, providing some basis for a women's culture or "sub-culture". But even these female groupings remain largely invisible to the public culture, defined as male culture. Western Protestant Christian society since the Reformation has largely eliminated separate female communities, such as women's religious orders...

The question of Christian identity rooted in the Bible is also raised in a more radical way for feminists than it is for ethnic liberation theologies. Black Theology, Asian, and Hispanic theology tend to see their conflicts with Christianity as going back four or five hundred years with the rise of those forms of racism, colonialism, and slave economies that shaped their particular group into an exploited and dependent folk. The Bible, on the other hand, is seen as a positive side of a liberation gospel that can be used to criticize this later church tradition....

Forgotten is the question that sorely plagued nineteenth century abolitionists, namely, that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is predominantly "pro-slavery" in the literal sense of both taking a slave society for granted and also justifying it for Israel and for the church. Since slavery was an integral part of the patriarchal family, as it was understood in the Bible, the same passages that justify the subordination of women also justify the maintenance of the master-slave relationship... For women, it is clear that the Bible is a patriarchal document that both assumes throughout an androcentric perspective, in which the male is the nonnative human person and interlocutor with God, and which explicitly justifies the subordination of women by myths of women's intrinsic inferiority, dependency, and sinfulness....

Women, faced with the androcentrism and misogyny of the Bible, ask in a much more radical way the question whether it is possible to be feminist and Christian. Some feminists have resolved this conflict in the negative. For them, it is patently clear that the Bible, and the two major religions that spring from it, as well as other historical religions, such as Islam, have, as their essential agenda, the subordination of women....

Some women attempt to retrieve an alternative cultural base by seeking repressed, female-identified religions from some period before the rise of patriarchy....

Other feminists are less sure that such an alternative culture and religion is available in this way... What they can recover of the religions of the ancient goddess worshippers and late medieval women accused of witchcraft does not sound very much like women's liberation. Moreover, they are unwilling to surrender the biblical texts about justice and redemption... But that means