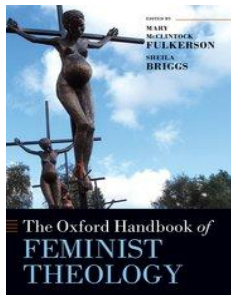


Paper 3: June 17th 2019 Afternoon: Gender, Society And Theology: Feminist Theology



Christianity has a turbulent history in relation to women.

Biological sex: Physical attributes. Some intersex (combination of both) **Gender:** Expectations of society. *Today many believe non-binary.*

Some Key Dates
1896: Elizabeth Cady Stanton published The Woman's Bible taking out sexism.
1918: Vote for women aged 30+.
1928: Voting age equalised.
1967: Abortion legal.
1970: Equal Pay Act.
1974: Contraceptive Pill.
2005: Civil partnerships legal.
2014: Gay Marriage legal.

Feminism encompasses many political, philosophical, economic, psychological, sociological movements to free (give autonomy to) women from male dominance/ rule (Patriarchy/ Androcentricity). Philosophers Hume, Bentham, Mill and Kant said there was no difference in reason (thinking) between men and women.

First Wave: Liberal / Equality Feminism: Advocates political, civil, social rights. Voting, education, equal pay. Eg **Harriet Taylor** (Mill's wife), "Enfranchisement of Women" (1851). **Suffragettes** (eg 1913 Derby horse race protest). **Mary Wolstonecraft** in "A Vindication Of The Rights Of Women" (1792) advocated education, wanted to move away from outward looks/achievements. Believed Christianity sexist.

Second Wave: Reconstructionism/ Reconstructivist Feminism: Further social change of consciousness needed applying a hermeneutic of suspicion (questioning society). Still patriarchy as women doubly enslaved (as workers / mothers). Focus on work place and sexual health. Domestic violence. **Betty Freidan** in "The Feminine Mystique" (1963) said women bored and frustrated housewives. **Freudians** question unconscious gender messages of society. **Marxists** question the capitalist system – most of world's poor are women. **Existentialists** want women to be true to themselves. They see gender as shaped by society. **Simone De Beauvoir** in "The Second Sex" (1949) said women should not allow themselves to be defined by men as inferior- "the eternal feminine" trapped as passive bystander, wife, lover, mother and sex object and avoid this false consciousness /bad faith where personalities / identities crushed. She said one is not born a woman but becomes one due to society. Women's jobs assigned. **De Beauvoir points out women give up their careers and interests for motherhood are left isolated when children leave home. Need to define who they are. Motherhood crushes women.**

Second Wave Feminism: Naturalist / Radical: Women and men not the same (**androgyny**) but stresses being an embodied woman and body difference. Essentialists believe there is distinctive male/female biology. Women not defined by men. Looks at root causes of patriarchy. **Virginia Woolf** ("A Room Of One's Own") said women were looking glasses for men that reflected them as twice their size. May lead to Separatist Feminism – living away from men.

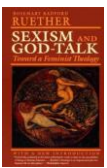
Third/Fourth Wave Feminism: Explores gender roles/identities. **Challenges stereotype of Western white heterosexual feminism.** Address Triple / quadruple jeopardy of racism, classism, sexism, homophobia. Includes care for environment (**eco feminism**). Inclusive of colour (**Womanism** is black woman's feminism according to the author Alice Walker in her book "The Colour Purple") and sexuality. **4th wave feminism also stresses body confidence / positivity.**

The Bible - polarised/ extreme picture of women as temptresses, virgins and mothers.
Negatives: Old Testament: Eve is created second as helper from Adam, tempts, made subservient to punish. **Dalilah** (Judges 16) affects Samson's strength, cutting his hair. **Rebekah** plots against husband (Genesis 27). **Jezebel** (1 Kings 21) persecuted prophets, turned husband against God. **Women are judged whether clean/holy** (Leviticus 24), **men only can divorce.** **Phyllis Trible** (in "The Texts Of Terror") pointed out where women are abused, raped, dismembered and silenced. **Negatives: New Testament:** Male Father God, male Jesus and 12 male disciples. **St. Paul.** **Bible Positives: Old Testament: Miriam/ Deborah** (leader, judge of Israel) were prophetesses. **Esther** (Queen of the Jews) saved. **Ruth-** childless widow who had a child through faith in God and became Great Grandmother to King David. **Jesus** liberated gender roles (the Covenant Ideal after the Fall), healed women (eg the woman with internal bleeding in Mark 5), helped a Samaritan woman, praised Mary for not doing housework and listening to his teaching (Mark 10), appeared to women first at Resurrection. **Phoebe, Lydia and Priscilla** (missionary with Paul) female leaders in Early Church. **Some interpret the Bible literally. Others see it in the context of its time and not so literal.**

St. Paul said there was no male or female in Christ (Galatians 3). But women are the "weaker sex" (1 Peter) to be "silent in Church" (1 Corinthians) not allowed teach (1 Timothy 2) should cover their heads. *Some people say Paul was liberal for the standards of the day /set him in context.* In Ephesians 5 verses 22-33, St. Paul gives a set of instructions for Christian households (called Household Rules in Greek/ Roman world) -Wives should submit to their husband who is head of the wife. Husband's leadership like that of Christ to the Church - they should love their wives like Christ loved the Church, giving up lives as Christ did.

Pope John Paul II, 1988 Letter, Mulieris Dignitatem (On the Special Dignity Of Women). Response to feminism. Emphasises respect for women, praised female saints, women's rights (but suspicious of secularism and feminism) and privilege of motherhood. "Equal but different." **Mirrored by Mary** (the obedient Mother of God or theotokos), at the turning point of history, without whom no Christ event. *Mary's acceptance of the message of the angel begins New Covenant.* Created equally /complimentary in God's image. **Motherhood part of the order of creation, follow-on from marriage. Both "one flesh", coming from the total giving of the couple to each other, sharing in God's creation.** Psycho-physical structure of woman (more sensitive/nurturing, able to cope with suffering, biological, liberating) made for motherhood. **The man learns parenthood from the mother who has precedence as the first teacher of the child.** Mothers must be supported when love challenged. **Does this patronise/ limit women by saying they should be virgins or mothers? "Biology is not destiny" (Cahill) – should be choice.**

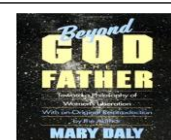
Conservative Protestant Christians and Catholic teaching: Some interpret timeless Bible literally, including patriarchy. Mother's primary role in the home. Adam/ Eve model for family (Order of Nature). Feminism confuses gender roles. Against non-traditional (eg same sex, blended) families. Gender not a choice. Family key for society. **Liberal Protestant Christians and (Feminist) Catholics** accept secular insights. All created by God. Bible a sourcebook of experiences. Jesus non-judgemental, non-conformist, against oppression, non-hierarchical, inclusive, with marginalised, advocated agape love. He said anyone that did his work was part of his family. The key is children are loved. (Jessie Bernard). Gender fluid. *Christians should adapt to society.*



Rosemary Radford Ruether is /Reconstructivist Feminist Theologian. Catholic. Eco feminist. Civil Rights leader. Founded the Women's Church in Chicago (1983). **Like Mary Daly, she believes patriarchy is in Christianity. A side effect of this is the assumption that men have power and dominion over nature and only women can save the planet. Unlike Daly, she does not advocate a women-centred approach to society or that Christianity should be abandoned.** Men and women can work together to bring change. RRR believes feminism re-shapes and re-invigorates religion and Christianity can be saved and changed. **Her classic book was "Sexism and God Talk" (1983).**

Ruether asks "Can a male saviour save women?" On the one hand, no – Jesus, a man, is the perfect person, who priests represent, and salvation requires "buy in" to. Aquinas said women were defective and the Roman Empire influenced patriarchy. **But on the other hand – yes.** Jesus was only male by chance. He engaged with women. Salvation was for all - women and men both given gender-inclusive Holy Spirit at Pentecost. God has been described and re-defined using feminine words. God the creator different than what Church emphasised. **Jesus challenges male stereotypes.** He was not a warrior king, macho masculine military Kingly Dividic leader, *using force to win arguments.* He was a liberating servant king, calling God "Dad" or Abba (the dominant subordinate dynamic was rejected). He believed in justice to the marginalised, had women followers as part of his inner circle, helped and healed women, appeared first to women at the resurrection (symbolising the Mother Goddess renewing the earth), challenged social, religious assumptions for both women and men. The Kingdom was about harmony not power. *The feminine aspect of God could be recognised in Jesus as presented as the Word in John 1 and "wisdom of God" in 1 Corinthians 1.* **Ruether believed the roots of religion were radically egalitarian before male monotheism took over. God has been described in feminine terms.** In polytheism, there were goddesses like Gaia, the ancient Greek goddess of the earth. **In the Old Testament, Isaiah 42 compares God to the mother in childbirth, showing suffering love for Israel. Ruether focusses on the Wisdom Tradition.** In the Ancient World, Wisdom was the source of life. **The Hebrew / Greek words for Wisdom are feminine.** In later Old Testament books, like Proverbs and Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom is the knowable /relational part of God, the "power/breath of God" who is the "source of knowledge and life", "reflection of eternal light", "emanation of the almighty" obscured by patriarchy.. In the NT, St Paul states Jesus is the Divine Eternal Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1) whilst John portrays Jesus as the Word. Wisdom has been lost in modern Christianity behind patriarchal structures. *There are other Reconstructionist Feminist Theologians. Catholic Elizabeth Shussler Fiorenza in her book "In Memory of Her" focusses on Jesus' ministry to women. Elaine Pagels focusses on a repressed strand in Christianity called Gnosticism which used the feminine to describe God and said Jesus' chief apostle was Mary Magdalene and there was a Gospel of Mary.*

By contrast, Mary Daly is a Radical / Post Christian Feminist who developed her ideas in "The Church and Second Sex (1968), Harvard Memorial Chapel Sermon (1971, where she physically left the Church and encouraged others to follow after suffering sexism when she could not teach Theology and could not be a priest), "Beyond God The Father" (1973) and "Gyn/Ecology"(1979).



Mary Daly's Views: Daly sees herself as a traveller going beyond patriarchy. She advocates a post-Christian spirituality. **She believes we cannot just replace male adjectives about God with female one because she believes religion is a tool of oppression which causes denigration, abuse and violence of/to women. It cannot be saved. Christian hierarchy has been the main reason women have been abused. It elevates men, developed by men for men. "If God is male, male is God." God (a male construct) is sexist, racist, classist (a 3 headed monster).** Religious buildings are sexist built by men. Mary was a "hollow egg shell" (a victim of abuse). **Religion is full of macho enjoyment of suffering promoting the following "unholy Trinity" where male power games infuse in our culture in three ways: 1. Rape: Patriarchy has led to the thinking that it is permissible to rape or attack women either literally or metaphorically.** "Armchair rapists" subscribe to this approach through pornography. Rapism is seen in jobs/professions, poverty, war, pornography, FGM, anywhere women imprisoned and repressed. **2. Genocide:** Follows from 1. There is a hierarchical gender caste system that gives men unequally large share of power over women who are objectified pitted against men. Normalised through socialisation. **3. War:** Inevitable in male-dominated society. *We live in a world of violence based on a male-dominated phallic mentality, praised by the Church. Abortion and euthanasia are not allowed but, hypocritically, war is.* **Daly wants to cut off and castrate "supreme phallus" of phallic/ male values.** Reject patriarchal systems and re-write culture which Christianity is interwoven with. **Daly was influenced by Nietzsche who said "God was dead. We have killed him" and we must develop a "will to power" and "transvaluation of values" and cast off the chains of religion.** *But Nietzsche had replaced the power of God but man. Daly believed the apollonian male nature was passive and veils society but the creative, energetic Dionysian female nature exposes society.* **In the foreground of society are male leaders (snools) supported by some women (grateful dead of hench women who are patriarchally possessed, who commit gynocide). But in the background radically deviant spinsters or wild women should work together and spin a new spiritual cosmic tapestry, reclaiming old words like hag, crone, nag and witch. In so doing, they connect to the Spirit and Essence of Nature (or quintessence) or Be-ing/Theology (study of the goddess), promoting the holy trinity of Radical Feminist Values of Power, Justice and Love in lesbian relationships.** God is not a fixed figure or object. Verbs like Be-ing are non-gendered and express unlimited and on-going spirituality and communion with nature better. Women need to be in control. Spirituality is unattainable unless women go beyond patriarchy –pervaded religion.

Evaluation 1. Use RRR to criticise Daly/vice versa. **2.** Hampson says Christianity is "irredeemably patriarchal." **3.** In Christian history, male and female mystics. **4.** Do not take Bible/ Christianity literally. **5.** Bible positive. **6.** RRR makes Jesus too political. **7.** Selective with Bible. **8.** Compromise God/ Christianity. God is spirit. **9.** White, middle class, western. **10.** Demonise men/religion. Exclusivist.

Sexism in History: **Plato:** Women inferior, failed men reborn, possessions of men who are created by gods and have souls. **Aristotle:** Women inferior, defective, deceptive, passive in reproduction. **Augustine:** Equal but body symbolically different, subordinate help mate, ruled by man. 2 souls. Obedient (women to man, man to God). Deliberative (Women at home, men at work). **Aquinas:** Defective males with inferior strength/intelligence. Subordinate. Some in Heaven. **Luther:** Women weak to men as moon to the sun. Man head of woman as punishment for Fall. Adam rules. **Barth/Bonhoeffer:** Women subordinate

