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Christian Feminist Theology

History and Future

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What is Christian feminist theology and why do we need to do it? Basically, we need to do feminist theology as a corrective to a theology distorted by patriarchy, and in order to create a holistic theology that would not only include women as full members of the human and Christian community in their own right, but that would liberate women and men from sexist ideology and practice.

In theory, the task of theology in the Christian tradition should be the same for a woman as for a man. However, in practice, at this time in the history of Christianity, one must speak of a specific task and vocation for feminist theology in the Church. This is because, for most of its two-thousand-year history, the Christian Church has not only kept women from the ordained ministry but also from the study of theology and from the public roles of theologian and preacher.

In fact, proscriptions against women teaching publicly in the Church arose earlier and continue to be more stringent than bans against ordination. Perhaps this was because ordination was thought to be out of the question, while the possibility that the religious and intellectual gifts of women might afford them the status of teachers was continually seen as

a threat to be averted. Already in the post-Pauline strata of the New Testament we find the forbidding of women as teachers in the Church: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silence" (1 Tim. 2:12).

This early ban against women teachers reflects the fact that the earliest model of Christian leadership was drawn from the rabbinic role of teacher and also the likelihood that women were indeed engaged in teaching and public prophecy in the earliest Church. The ban against women teachers was repeated in third-century Church orders and reiterated in the Middle Ages and again in the Reformation in mainline Protestant traditions. Even in mid-nineteenth-century America, the Pauline dictum was used to object to women abolitionists who spoke in public assemblies.[1]

Christian theology was shaped in the patriarchal cultures and social realities of the Hebrew and Greco-Roman worlds and their medieval and modern Western heirs. This means that women were largely absent from the shaping of official Christian teaching, from its definitions of theology, spirituality, and sexuality, and the Church. Insofar as some women did participate in these arenas as contemplatives, teachers, and local leaders, their influence was seldom acknowledged; and when recognized, it was edited to make it acceptable to the patriarchal leadership. Women, half the human race, with their distinct psycho-physical and social experiences, have not been able to enter into conversation about God and humans, good and evil, truth and falsehood, sin and salvation, from their own vantage point.

Women were not only silenced and excluded from the shaping of the Christian tradition, but this tradition has been largely biased against them, through the need to justify and reinforce their silence and absence. The justification of women's exclusion has taken the form of endlessly reiterated dictates that define women as irrational and morally inferior expressions of the human species, or else idealized and sentimentalized beings whose essence is maternity, and in either case unfit by their very nature to teach or minister. Elite or dominant males and their experience were assumed to be normative for humanity as such. When women are noticed at all, it is only to define them as the "other," confined to limited roles and excluded from public leadership in church and society.

This exclusion of women and its justifications result in a systematic distortion of all the symbols of Christian theology by patriarchal bias. The imagery and understanding of God, Christ, human nature, sin, salvation, church, and ministry were all shaped by a male-centered, mi-

sogynist worldview that subordinated women and rendered them nonnormative and invisible. This must be seen not simply in the words or images for God, Christ, humanity, and ministry but also in the patterns assumed in the power relationships between all the key theological symbols.[2]

For example, God is not only imaged almost exclusively in male terms but also in terms of patriarchal power roles, such as patriarchal father, king, warrior, and lord. The relationship between God and humans is assumed to be one of omniscience, omnipotence, and absolute goodness and purity, over against humans who are weak, fallible, sinful, and impure. Spirituality or conversion has been classically conceived as a bottoming-out experience in which sinful humans recognize their utter worthlessness and submit totally to an all-powerful and all-good God as their only hope. Even this submission is seen as an arbitrary gift of a God who elects whom he chooses, since, in the Augustinian tradition, the dominant tradition of Western spirituality, it is believed that humans are so totally alienated from God that they are not even able to make the first act of repentence "on their own."[3]

Thus the relation between God and humans is seen as one of adversarial power, a zero-sum game of absolute power and goodness against worthlessness and powerlessness to choose the good. The relation is one of domination and submission absolutized. This view of God and relation to God reinforces the subjugation and denigration of women, since human nature considered in terms of sin, impurity, and weakness is identified particularly with women. Although men share these bad human tendencies, it is women who are seen both as epitomizing them and as being the original cause of the "fall of man" into sin.

In the sin-redemption relation to God in Christ, the male is seen as being transformed, caught up in a new humanity identified with Christ and able to represent Christ or God in the Church, while women remain only the objects, but never the agents, of redemption, at least officially. They receive redeeming grace, but they cannot be its official sacramental agents or exemplars. They are to be redeemed precisely by redoubling their acknowledgment of their unworthiness and their submission to God and God's agents, who are the male leaders in the Church, the family, and society.

The classical Catholic Christian insistence on the ontological necessity of the maleness of Christ epitomizes the patriarchal bias of the theological system. Christ must be male because, in some sense, God as both Father and Son is male, and so only a human male can represent God. The scholastic use of the Aristotelian tradition also defined the male as

the one who possesses full and normative human nature, while women are defective and lack a humanity capable of representing the normatively human as such.[4]

The masculine distortion of God and Christ, human nature, sin, and salvation also biases the view of Church and ministry. Early Church Fathers, such as Saint Augustine, spoke of the Church as the virginal Mother who rescues us at baptism from our sinful origins in sexual procreation and birth by our fleshly mothers. The Church undoes the sin of Eve, represented by all women but particularly by sexually active women. Only males can represent God and Christ in the sacramental priesthood, channeling the grace won by Christ to overcome sin. The clergy-lay relation is represented as dominant all-knowing sacral males who administer saving grace to a fallen, female-identified laity. This construct reinforces the patriarchal gender relations of the family and society. Other hierarchical relations—lords to servants, parents to children, teachers to students, professionals to clients, ruling class to working class, dominant race to subjugated race—have also been reinforced through this basic hierarchical model of God to human, clergy to laity.

Feminist theology is a systematic critique of this patriarchal bias as it pervades the theological symbol system, both overtly in explicitly misogynist statements about female inferiority and culpability, and covertly in a pervasive androcentrism that makes the male the normative human in a way that renders the female invisible. Feminist theologians —particularly in the last thirty years, as women gained some access to formal theological education—have been unpacking this bias, both across the whole system of theological symbols and across the historical development of these symbols. They wish to make clear that this distortion is both broad and deep. It cannot be solved by a little linguistic tinkering. The whole symbolic system must be reconstructed, re-envisioned in all its parts and interrelations and in their implications for the practice of ministry in the Church.

Feminist theology moves through a three-stage dialectic, not simply as a linear process but as a continually deepening spiral of critique and reconstruction. The first stage consists of naming the problem. The patterns of androcentrism and misogyny in the tradition are recognized, analyzed, and delegitimated.[5]

The second stage takes the form of a quest for an alternative tradition in the scriptures and history of theology. Is androcentrism and misogyny the whole story? Is there no basis within the tradition itself for delegitimating the male bias? If there is not, perhaps Christianity is simply not capable of reform, and perhaps women and men concerned for

liberation from patriarchy should leave Christianity and join or form some religious, social, and spiritual community that does recognize sexism as an evil from which we should be liberated. Several important feminist theologians, such as Mary Daly and Carol Christ, who began as Christians, have come to this conclusion and have left Christianity accordingly.[6]

Christian feminism, by contrast, regards sexism and patriarchy as deep-seated but not normative patterns in the Bible and the Christian tradition. Christian feminists believe that there are true resources in Biblical revelation, in Christ, and in the good news that flows from Christ, that not only do not validate sexism but undergird our struggle against it and liberation from it. Thus Christian feminist theology conducts its quest for alternative traditions to demonstrate this hypothesis and to make explicit the alternative traditions that stand against patriarchal distortion and point toward a new humanity and an earth liberated from patriarchy.[7]

The third stage of feminist theology, then, is concerned with reconstructing all the basic symbols of Christian faith to be equally inclusive of both women and men, and to lead toward liberatory faith and practice. What would it mean to reconstruct Christian theology from its androcentric, misogynist forms to egalitarian, liberating inclusiveness and mutuality? This implies a clear rejection of the lingering assumption that patriarchy is the divinely ordained order of creation and of the Church. It means naming patriarchy as sin, as unjust, as a distorted relationality that corrupts the humanity of both men and women. It also means a rejection of any gynecentric reversal of gender relations and symbols that makes women the primary exemplars of true humanity and the divine image, and regards men as defective humans, essentially prone to evil in ways that women are not.[8]

Such an anthropology affirms that both women and men possess the fullness of human nature in all its complexity. They are not to relate to each other as superior to inferior or as complementary parts of a human nature in which each has what the other lacks. Rather—woman as woman, and man as man—each possesses the fullness of human potential. Their relation should be one of mutually transforming friendship that nurtures and enables the full and equivalent flowering of the human personhood of each in relation to others.

Feminist theology and spirituality name sexism as sin and patriarchy as a sinful social system. Sexism and patriarchy express sin as distortion of human relationality into domination and subjugation, corrupting the humanity of both men and women. Grace and conversion, the spiritual

journey to liberation, then, is seen as beginning with the gift of critical consciousness to recognize and name such distortions as sinful, as illegitimate, to be converted from them and to struggle against them to overcome patriarchy, both in personal relationships and in social systems.

Redemption means building new relationships, personally and socially, that incarnate mutual co-humanity. God and Christ, far from incarnating patriarchal relationships, are the source of liberating grace to free us from such relationships and to ground and sustain our growth into mutual co-humanity.

The experience of Christ as the presence of God in our lives reveals the nature of God as the power of co-humanity. Christ is our revealed paradigm of the Logos-Sophia (Word-Wisdom) of God.[9] God's Word or Wisdom is both beyond male and female and yet can be personified in both women and men. The maleness of the human, historical person of Jesus of Nazareth in no way limits God or the incarnation of God to one gender. Rather Jesus' male gender is simply one expression of his particularity as a historical individual, just as his Jewishness was and the fact that he was born in a particular time and place and had particular physical features.

Jesus as a particular paradigmatic person is representative of God and authentic humanity precisely by pointing toward the true potential of all humans in all times and places, of all races and gender identities. In the ongoing community of faith we are called to encounter Jesus as the Christ, as that liberating potential of all humans, not limited by gender, race, social class, culture, time, or place. As a community called to witness against evil, we encounter Christ particularly in our sisters and brothers who are victims of injustice and who struggle against injustice, modeling transforming love.

A feminist view of ministry should begin with an understanding of Church as both a nurturing and a prophetic community of liberation from evil, including evil as patriarchy. As Church we seek to enter into just and loving co-humanity. Ministry should be the enabling of the community of faith to develop its life together as mutual birthing of our full humanity and as witness to the world of this people's exodus from patriarchy and its entrance into co-humanity in Christ.

This vision of an inclusive and liberating Christian community is not new. Feminists would see its roots in the original Jesus movement and early Church as a countercultural prophetic movement. But the patriarchalization of Christianity in the late first and second centuries obscured this vision within what became the canonical New Testament

and marginalized it in the history of the Church.[10] Nevertheless the basic outlines of this understanding of Christianity were sufficiently evident in the New Testament that prophetic renewal movements have continually rediscovered it. Groups such as the Waldensians in the twelfth century and Quakers in the seventeenth century have glimpsed this vision and opened their ministry to women.[11]

Although it is possible today to trace a continual line of movements that have renewed this vision of the Gospel, it was not until women gained access to theological schools as students and then as teachers, as well as to the ordained ministry, that it has been possible to recreate its history, as well as to develop it more fully in the contemporary democratic cultural context. Although some women were ordained in Protestant churches in the period of the 1850s to the 1880s, the real breakthrough to women's ordination in mainline Protestantism did not begin until the late 1950s, and the increase of women in theological schools followed in the 1960s. Today the student bodies of theological schools of denominations that ordain women are 40 to 50 percent female, while anywhere from one or two to half of their faculty is female. Scholarship on women in the Bible, church history, and theology, as well as the other fields of theological education, has burgeoned in the last twenty-five years so that titles of major books and articles would easily fill a thousand pages, just in English.[12]

Feminist theology, however, is not confined to the North American or English-speaking worlds. In recent years, networks of Western European women have developed a pan-European society for theological research, as well as many national and local groups.[13] Several religious studies faculties in British universities have developed specialties on women's issues, and feminist theology has become a requirement in Dutch theological schools, both Protestant and Catholic. There is less openness to feminist perspectives in university-based theological faculties in Germany, and feminism is virtually excluded from church-controlled theological study in France and Italy, but European women are finding alternative educational programs in which to teach and study feminist theology. In Gelnhausen near Frankfurt, a lively group of feminist theologians and pastors do grassroots training in feminist theology, liturgy, and Bible drama.[14]

Feminist theology is also developing in Latin America. The Methodist University in São Paulo, Brazil, has a major research center on women's issues, while the Methodist-sponsored Comunidad Bíblica Teológica in Lima, Peru, has a Mesa de la Mujer that studies topics of feminist theology and women in Latin American church history. The

Lutheran theological faculty in São Leopoldo, Brazil, requires all students to take a course in feminist theology. The Universidad Bíblica in Costa Rica also offers feminist theology and is the base for a network of feminist pastors and theologians throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.[15]

Asians are also developing study centers, networks of women theologians who meet regularly, and journals for the publication of their writings. Asian women founded the journal *In God's Image* in 1982 as a vehicle for Asian women's theology. Its contributing board spans Asia from India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, to China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines. Often particular issues focus on one or another Asian country. The Asian Women's Resource Center located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, organizes regular dialogues of Asian feminist theologians and publishes their reflections.[16] For example, in December 1990, delegations from seven Asian countries met for a week in Madras, India, to share papers on hermeneutical principles for feminist theology in each Asian context.

Africans have the fewest resources for such feminist reflection, but feminist theological programs are developing at some universities, such as the University of the Western Cape in South Africa. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians is the major network for periodic encounters and publications by African Christian feminists.[17] Even some Christian women in the Middle East, particularly Palestinians, are doing reflection on women's issues in the context of Palestinian liberation and contextual theologies.[18]

Since 1983 the major forum for Third World feminist theology has been the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). This organization was founded in the 1970s to network liberation theologians from Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Few women delegates attended their early meetings, and women's issues were completely ignored. But by the end of the 1970s some women theologians, such as Mercy Oduyoye of Kenya, Sun Ai Park from Korea, Virginia Fabella from the Philippines, Ivone Gebara from Brazil, and Elza Tamez from Mexico, began to raise the issue of women in liberation theology. Mercy Oduyoye called the women's issue the "irruption within the irruption," the challenge that would require liberation theologians to rethink their theology, just as liberation theology has challenged traditional Christian theology.[19]

There was much resistance to feminist issues among the male liberation theologians of EATWOT. It was argued that feminism was a "First World issue," that it was a diversion from the "class struggle," and that

it was alien to Third World cultures. But the women of EATWOT persisted, declaring that "it is not for First World women to define what feminism is for us, and also it is not for Third World men to say it is not our issue. We will define what feminism is for us." The EATWOT women called for a Women's Commission as a vehicle for the development of feminist theology in its various Third World contexts. As Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Virginia Fabella put it in the book that emerged from the major international gathering of this network,

> We, the women of the Association, were just as concerned to name the demons and to have them exorcised. Sexism was one such demon, and it existed within the Association itself. Our voices were not being heard, although we were visible enough. It became clear to us that only the oppressed can truly name their oppression. We demanded to be heard. The result was the creation within EATWOT of a Women's Commission, and not a Commission on Women, as some of the male members would have it. Rather than see ourselves solely as victims of male domination, we formed a sisterhood of resistance to all forms of oppression, seeking creative partnership with the men of the Association.[20]

Over the next five years, a series of assemblies on Third World feminist theology took place through the organizational initiatives of the Women's Commission. The assemblies were planned to take place in four stages. First there would be national meetings, then continental meetings, then a global meeting of the three regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Finally there would be a fourth meeting in which Third World feminist theologians would meet with First World feminist theologians from Europe and North America. The first three stages of national and continental meetings and a Third World global meeting took place over the period 1983–1986. After these assemblies, the Third World women began deepening their global ties and developing journals and networks.

The long-planned Third–First World gathering took place in Costa Rica in December 1994. Here the Third World groups met in a new stage of dialogue with feminist theologians from Western Europe and North America. But it was recognized that the fall of the Communist states in Eastern Europe had changed the definition of "Third World." It was decided to expand the dialogue to include feminist theologians from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Pacific.

The United Nations meetings in Cairo and in Beijing in September 1994 and 1995 brought fresh evidence that women's status worldwide is

not improving. In many ways the growing global split between wealth and poverty, the proliferation of armed struggles and local lawlessness, and the deterioration of the environment have the greatest impact upon poor women and children. The gathering of First and Third World women theologians in Costa Rica made these many-sided aspects of violence against women the focus of their theological reflections.[21]

What are the distinctive issues of Third World Christian feminist theology? How do feminist thinkers from such diverse regions as Brazil and Mexico, India, Korea, the Philippines, Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa contextualize feminist reflection in their ecclesial, social, cultural, and historical situations? Despite enormous differences in context, there are many similarities in the way Third World women construct a feminist critique on such major Christian doctrines as God language, Christology, Church, and ministry.

These similarities reflect the fact that these women are not only Christians but they received their Christianity, for the most part, from Western European and North American missionaries. In India, Christianity has been present since the second or third century, but even there the dominant Christian churches reflect the Catholic missions that began in the sixteenth century and the Protestant missions that arrived with British colonialism in the nineteenth century. Christianity came to the Philippines with the Spanish in the sixteenth century, and was reshaped by American Protestants from the end of the nineteenth century. Koreans also experienced earlier Catholic missionary efforts, but most of Korean Christianity today is the fruit of American Protestant missionary work from the late nineteenth century.

These predominantly colonial origins of Asian, African, and Latin American Christianity mean that the Christian women theologians of these regions have been educated in the Western European and North American Catholic or Protestant cultures imported to their regions. For some, even the languages in which they write were imposed by the European and American colonists: Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French. Their ancestors became Christians by being uprooted from their indigenous cultures and religions, which were represented to them by Western missionaries as inferior and idolatrous evils to be shunned.

Thus, Third World feminist theologians find themselves having to address theological problems imposed on them by Western missionaries, and also social injustices brought by the Western colonization that was the vehicle of Christianization. Third World women find common ground with each other in similar problems of socioeconomic and cultural colonialism and its contemporary expressions in neocolonial de-

pendency and exploitation. The issues of sexism and patriarchy add another layer to these issues of cultural and social colonialism, often worsening (contrary to the claims of Christian missionaries), rather than alleviating, patterns of sexism found in the indigenous culture.

Women in Mexico, India, Korea, Nigeria, or South Africa find themselves with colonial and missionary versions of Christian male clericalism. They hear versions, often in the most authoritarian, fundamentalist tones, of the same biblical and theological arguments that declare that God has created male leadership and has forbidden women's ordained ministry in the Church. Thus, Third World feminist theologians find the writings of First World feminist biblical critics, such as Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, highly useful in addressing the issues of the patriarchal nature and use of the Bible, not as a "First World issue" but as an issue that has been exported into their context and that they have to confront in their own churches and theological schools.

In the Asian feminist hermeneutic papers from the 1990 Madras gathering, the authors define a double dialogue that situates their own contextualization of feminist theology. On one side, they acknowledge their debt to First World feminist theologians and theorists but also recognize the inadequacy of this work for them and their need to do their own contextualization of feminist critique. On the other side, they are in dialogue with the male liberation theologians of their countries. They regard their feminist work as part of the struggle for national liberation, deepening that struggle to include gender and the oppression of women.[22]

But Asian women must also deplore the fact that hardly any of their male liberation colleagues have been willing to incorporate this feminist reflection. This is not necessarily because of a determined hostility but rather an apparent inability to understand women's experience and to place gender oppression on a par with class oppression. Thus it becomes evident that feminist theology cannot wait for "permission" from male theologians. It must first be developed by women.

Third World feminist theology typically begins with storytelling from women's experience, and moves on to social analysis based on women's stories. The paper presented at Madras from the Filipino women begins with five first-person stories: Lucy, a factory worker; Norma, a college student and victim of incest; Elisa, a former political detainee tortured in prison; Lotia, a bar girl; and Sister Jannie, a religious sister from a tribal region. The paper uses these five stories to analyze Filipino women's social context. Their vulnerability to sexual abuse at home and on the job, their low wages, and the double exploita-

tion of their labor in the family and in the paid economy are placed in a broad analytical framework.

The paper also shows how Christianity validated the cultural uprooting of the Filipino people and Filipino women's particular subjugation as women. But the paper also sees positive resources for women in the historical past—particularly in the reclaiming of indigenous Filipino spirituality, but also in the liberatory aspects of the biblical and Christian traditions and in the history of Filipino women's resistance to oppression.[23]

This analysis of women's subjugation consciously reaches beyond a middle-class feminism of equality to a liberation feminism. That is, it locates gender oppression, historically and socially, in relation to the history of class, race, and national oppression. It looks at women's situation within class hierarchy and in relation to both traditional culture and colonialism. Liberation theology's "preferential option for the poor" thus takes on a more concrete focus. It means particularly a solidarity with the most oppressed and exploited women of their societies, the poorest of the poor, or the *minjung* of the *minjung*, as Korean women put it.[24]

Third World women are also clear that exploitation and violence to women are not only an issue for poor women but rather cut across class lines. This is particularly true of domestic violence and sexual abuse. There is rape and incest of the female child in the home, and wife battering and denial of reproductive rights, even in affluent families. But these burdens are far greater for poor women.

While these patterns of women's oppression could be found in Western societies, Third World women also focus on aspects of women's suffering that are specific to their societies. For example, a major focus of feminist organizing in India has been the "dowry murders" or attempted murders. In India the dowry has become commercialized in recent years. It is not unusual for the groom's family to demand large sums of money and expensive consumer goods, such as stereo sets and motorcycles, as the price of taking a bride into the family. If the groom and his family are dissatisfied with these gifts, kitchen "accidents" have often been arranged to burn the hapless bride to death. The family then goes shopping for a second bride and dowry. Tens of thousands of Indian women have been killed or maimed in such assaults. The high price of dowries has also encouraged a widespread practice of female feticide. These realities had been ignored until Indian feminists gathered information and organized against them.[25]

A particularly sensitive issue for Third World Christian feminists in relation to the Christian churches has been religious pluralism. Chris-

tianity is the religion of a small minority in Asia, except in the Philippines and South Korea. Most Asians are Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, or they follow tribal forms of shamanism, often in combination. While Christianity is expanding in black Africa, the indigenous religions, as well as Islam, also persist. Even in Latin America there is a rediscovery of the indigenous forms of spirituality repressed for centuries by the Spanish conquerors.

Although Asian and African male liberation theologians claim a positive relation to the other religions of their communities, this issue has particular significance for women.[26] Third World feminists have questioned the ways in which male Christian theologians have appropriated aspects of indigenous culture and religion, seeing these appropriations as sometimes romantic and unhistorical but also as overlooking or justifying the oppressive aspects of these cultures for women.[27] Sometimes Christianity is even used to reinforce aspects of the traditional culture that confine women, such as Indian Christian pastors who enforce menstrual taboos from Hebrew scripture, perpetuating assumptions of women's ritual impurity found in Hindu caste traditions.[28]

At the same time, Third World feminists are also searching the indigenous heritage for positive recoverable traditions for women. Korean women reclaim elements of shamanism, while Filipino women discover useful tradition in precolonial Filipino myths and women priests. Indian women use the Hindu idea of Shakti, or the feminine cosmic power that underlies all life, as a positive motif, while the Andean women of Latin America explore the pre-Hispanic earth goddess Pachamama.

Third World Christian feminists also claim the liberating traditions of the Bible, despite the failure of the churches and even male liberation theologians to apply these to women. They are doing their own contextualization of biblical traditions to find usable elements for women's emancipation in their societies. They establish a relation to the religious cultures and social injustices of their societies that is complex and dialectical, refusing to repudiate their Western liberationist and Christian traditions in toto in the name of anticolonial liberation, but also refusing to reject their indigenous traditions in the name of biblical exclusivism. They wish to excise the patriarchal elements from both these cultures while bringing together the liberating elements of prophetic faith and holistic cosmologies in a new synthesis.

Today it is no exaggeration to say that Christian feminist theology is global. It seeks to bring together global consciousness with the rich particularity of each local culture. Feminists seek to position their theologi-

cal reflection on God, Christ, and the Church, sin and salvation, in the context of world patterns of structural violence and injustice to women and to the poor, as well as the impoverishment of the earth itself by exploitative misuse.

Although Christian feminist theology is now both widespread and diverse, the struggle for acceptance of its critique is far from over. Male theologians, even liberation theologians, often ignore it or seek to delegitimize it. The struggle to incorporate feminist reflection in theological education and in preaching and worship in local churches has only begun. Feminist theologians know that the power of the patriarchal church establishment, which buttresses the dominant hierarchies in society, is formidable. But they also know that prophets have never been well received, including the one whom Christians call their Lord. For them, only a gospel that is really inclusive of women in all cultures and peoples deserves to be called "good news."

Notes

1. On the conflict between abolitionist preachers Sarah and Angelina Grimké and the Massachusetts Congregational clergy who objected to their lecturing in public because it violated "biblical norms" for women, see Larry Ceplair, *The Public Years of Sarah and Angelina Grimké: Selected Writing, 1835–1839* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 135–299; also see Barbara Brown Zikmund, "The Struggle for the Right to Preach," in Rosemary R. Ruether and Rosemary S. Keller, eds., *Women and Religion in America: The Nineteenth Century* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 193–240.

2. For a fuller exposition of the perspective of this essay, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983, 1993).

3 For the primary sources for Augustine's theological anthropology in his controversy with Pelagius, see J. Patout Burns, *Theological Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 10–22, 39–108.

4. See the Vatican declaration against women's ordination and a critical commentary, ed. Leonard and Arlene Swidler, *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

5. See Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968); also Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

6. See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973), and Carol Christ, *The Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

7. See Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, eds., *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

8. For example, see Anne Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988); also Catherine M. LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

9. For an understanding of God developed from a Sophialogical perspective, see Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

10. See Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

11. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women Church: Theology and Practice* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986).

12. For a bibliography up to 1990, see Shelley D. Finson, *Women and Religion: A Bibliographic Guide to Christian Feminist Liberation Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

13. For feminist theological networks and teaching in Europe and the Third World, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Christianity and Women in the Modern World," in *Today's Women in World Religion,* ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 267–302.

14. This group is the Frauenstudien und Bildungszentrum, located at Burchhardhaus, D-63571, Gelnhausen, Germany. Among its organizers are Herta Leistner and Ute Knie.

15. In June–July 1996, I spoke for these groups in Brazil and Peru; thus these remarks come from personal experience.

16. The Asian Women's Resource Center is located at 79 Lorong Anggor, Taman Shanghai, 58100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

17. See the book edited by Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and Church in Africa* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992).

18. The Palestinian women's theologial critique is very low-key and is contacted primarily through the Sabeel Palestinian Liberation Theology Center, connected with St. George's Cathedral in East Jerusalem. See Rosemary R. Ruether, Marc Ellis, and Naim Ateek, eds., *Faith and the Intifada: Palestinian Christian Voices* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 119–32.

19. See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective," in *The Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology,* ed. Virginia Fabella and Sergio Torres (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 246–55.

20. Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Virginia Fabella, eds., *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), ix–x.

21. For an account of this conference see my column in the *National Catholic Reporter,* January 27, 1995, p. 19. The papers from this conference have not been published.

22. These hermeneutical papers are being edited by the Asian Women's Resource Center but have not yet appeared. I have unpublished typescripts of the Filipino, Indian, Korean, and Hong Kong papers.

23. The Filipino paper was published separately as a pamphlet titled "Toward an Asian Principle of Interpretation: A Filipino Women's Experience," by the Women's Center at St. Scholastica College in Manila.

24. See Chung Hyun Khung, "Han Pu-ri: Doing Theology from Korean Women's Perspective," in *We Dare to Dream*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Park (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), 135–46; see also her *The Struggle to Be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989).

25. On the campaign against dowry murders, see especially the Indian feminist magazine *Manuschi*, published in New Delhi.

26. The best-known African theologian who began the work of using African indigenous tradition is John Mbiti; see his *African Religions and Philosophy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970). The Sri Lankan Jesuit, Aloysius Pieris, has been a major figure for a Christian theology in dialogue with Buddhism; see his *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988).

27. See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995).

28. This information on the imposition of menstrual taboos by Indian Protestant pastors on women members of their congregations, based on the revival of texts from the Levitical codes, came from discussions with women seminarians at the Gurukul Lutheran College in Madras, India, in January 1991.