

NBTS  
MTH  
Oj 5c  
230.082

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF FEMINIST  
THEOLOGY FROM AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN  
PERSPECTIVE

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
OGBOMOSO

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF THEOLOGY

J. C. POOL LIBRARY  
BAPTIST SEMINARY  
OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA

BY

JOHN ADELANI OJO

JUNE, 1996

99147

## ABSTRACT

This study, "A Critical Evaluation of Feminist Theology from an African Christian Perspective," examines the presuppositions, objectives of feminist theologians and their approach to solving what they consider as marginalisation of women in Church and society; and what could be an African Christian response to their feminist liberation theology.

The first chapter considers introductory matters, and general conception about man-woman relationship. Chapter two examines presuppositions, general theological concerns of feminists and positions of three main representatives of feminist theologians. It has been stated that women magnify their experience of exploitation as the key to biblical interpretation over and against traditional biblical hermeneutic they believe is androcentric. It has also been contended that man and woman are equal human being, but that is not a reason for rejection of man's headship in a family.

Chapter three looks into biblical and African perspectives on man-woman relationship. The basic summation of both the biblical and African worldviews is that a woman is not inferior to a man. African concept of womanhood is not demeaning as well as the biblical view exemplified in the teaching of Jesus and Paul.

Chapter four dialogues with feminist theology from an African Christian perspective. It affirms the good motive of feminists to fight social injustice and condemns their approach of tackling the menace.

Chapter five, the final chapter, contains the summary of ideas in the study, the conclusions that are drawn; and recommendations for further studies in the areas being examined.

African view of human person is that man-male or female - is a being in relation; women in the traditional African communities participate actively in socio-political and religious affairs in Africa and they do not consider their subordination to their husbands as oppression as feminists do. On the basis of these inferences, the following conclusions are made.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Feminist theologians should take the example of Rosemary Radford Ruether who stays within the Church to do her theology of women liberation rather than staying away. This is because correction is not always possible through withdrawal. They should stay within the Church to inform it of why it "must be actively involved in changing every social order by rebelling against any aspect of it that tends to dehumanise man created in the image of God."<sup>1</sup> By rebellion here, I take Imasogie's definition as follows:

Rebellion is a process of continual resistance (without violence) to the demonic elements in every existing social order with the main purpose of bringing about a greater enhancement of the human worth and freedom and the ultimate equitable distribution of social amenities and participation in the social process.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian feminists must cooperate with the Church because the Christian Church, properly understood, rather than supporting injustice as feminists allege, aims at addressing hearts of men so that structural and political

---

<sup>1</sup>Osadolor Imasogie, "Toward a Theology of Rebellion," An unpublished paper presented to H.H. Barnette (Kentucky: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, March 27, 1969), p.14.

<sup>2</sup>Imasogie, p.4.



changes can occur. It is the person that must first change before structure can change.

The Church should take up the challenge thrown by feminist theologians - the challenge to address oppression in the world since its Lord is not only the Saviour of souls and not of socioeconomic liberation (Lk. 4:18-20; John 10:10). The Church cannot close her eyes and keep mute to the oppressive realities in the world under the pretext that "Our commonwealth is in heaven..." (Phil. 3:20). The scope of Jesus' giving of life in abundance covers both the terrestrial and the celestial spheres of human existence. Church's negligence to bring the wholistic import of the gospel to bear upon the oppressive and demeaning factors in the world will be an encouragement to the striving of humanistic ideologies such as feminism.

While the Church is to stress personal salvation, it must balance its mission with concern for inequalities and injustice in the world. It must be sensitive to the presence of God in history; liberate itself from ideological bondage; and identification with the status quo because this is a basis upon which feminist theologians, like other liberation theologians, hinge their attack on the Church.<sup>3</sup>

Feminist theologians must accept the scripture as normative authority for life while rejecting sexually biased cultures and misogynist interpretation of the scripture. They are to use the scripture as the search light to illuminate their cultural contexts rather than using "existing social

---

<sup>3</sup>Osadolor Imasogie, Guidelines for Christian Theology in Africa (Achimota: African Christian Press, 1983), pp.39,38.

and political conditions as the necessary lens for viewing and interpreting scriptural data."<sup>4</sup> Such hermeneutical approach is prone to eisegesis not exegesis.

God as the God of justice, God of the oppressed, by His nature, opposes any inhuman treatment either across races or sexes. But for the liberation which feminist theologians pursue to be successful, it must not be with a selfish motive or self aggrandizement or a rejection of women's nature in view: but with an "awareness of the God of Exodus who acts in history to free men (males and females) from the shackles of tradition and any power structure, be it in form of religion or custom."<sup>5</sup> The equilibrium that feminists are anticipating cannot come without God being in the process. Since God is a God of order and of justice, He will support any fight against oppression but He (God) has to be considered in the agenda and process; and His principles must be followed (Exod. 3:7f).

As adumbrated earlier in this paper, Jesus' regard for women as persons of worth should encourage proper relationship of loving cooperation and mutual respect between both sexes.<sup>6</sup> This comes as a result of genuine conversion experience in Jesus Christ. And since the Holy Spirit endows women as well as men with gifts for witnessing, women need to participate in the programmes of the Church of which they are a source

---

<sup>4</sup> Carl F. Henry, "Liberation Theology and the Scripture," Liberation Thinking. Edited by Dayton Roberts (Monrovia: Marc Publications, 1987), p.30.

<sup>5</sup> Imasogie, "Toward a Theology of Rebellion," p.11.

<sup>6</sup> The Bible Speaks on Women. (Nashville: Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, n.d.), n.p.



of vitality.<sup>7</sup> However, women that are given role(s) in the Church should do it assiduously; not to impress men of their potentials but to glorify God (ICor. 10:31).

In view of the African concept of human person - male and female - as being in relation to the community, the African woman has no fear to entertain as to oppression or marginalisation in as much as she lives her life in relation to the community of both male and female and not in isolation or in ascendancy of men as being advocated by some feminist theologians. For African man and woman, what would help in solving the problem of severing relationship between both sexes, if any, is a return to the traditional African sense of communal togetherness over and against Western individualistic tendency that is creating not only selfish consciousness but other related vices.

Accepting submission to leadership does not connote inferiority. It is a natural necessity; only that all authority must be subjected to the Lord's authority. Domineering attitude from men is sometimes not based on feeling of superiority; but rather from a sense of fear and inferiority or insecurity; and that creates opportunity to help such a man in affirming his worth by not rebelling violently against his authority.

Since Africa women participate actively in their traditional religions, for Christianity to be relevant to them, they should be involved in religious - church activities. Participation is part of and is a sense of worship.

<sup>7</sup>Rose Zoe-Obianga, "The Role of Women in Present-Day Africa," African Theology En Route. Edited by Kofi Appiah-Kubi and Sergio Torres (New York: Orbis Books, 1979), p.146.

