

Malua Theological College
TH 202 Modern Christologies
Semester 2, 2025

Lecture Notes Week 4 (b)

Recap...

1. Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation
2. Exploring some Biblical Text

1. Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation

Feminist theology is believed to have emerged during the early 19th Century social movements, mainly along the campaign against slavery and for people, including women, to be able to vote. The movement centred on the mentality that women had minds and wills of their own, and could and would exercise them independently. During the post-war period, the movement was basically carried by Roman Catholic women, who campaigned for 'equal rights' by those devalued because of their sex or race in particular. The struggle for justice for women had begun, and it is continuing up to today. Feminist liberation theologies embrace the work of women from both around the world, including our own small part of the world-Oceania!¹

Writing in *Discipleship of Equals*, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza asserts that "the women's liberation movement demands a restructuring of societal institutions and a redefinition of cultural images and roles of women and men, if women are to become autonomous human persons and achieve economic and political stability."²

For Fiorenza and her many allies,³ the issues in feminist theology are aplenty, the focus first and foremost being on women as **human persons**, thus demanding free development of full personhood for all, women and men alike. Secondly, if women's role in society is to change, then men's (and sometimes women?) perceptions and attitudes towards women have to change at the same time.

For far too long, Fiorenza added, the Christian tradition was recorded and studied by theologians who consciously or unconsciously understood them from a patriarchal perspective of male dominance.⁴ In other words, patriarchal discrimination is everywhere!

¹The likes of Lydia Johnson, Seforosa Carroll, Michiko Ete-Lima, Valamotu Palu, Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono, Asinate Samate, Ilisapeci Meo and many others

² Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1993), 56-57.

³The likes of Mary Daly (*The Church and the Second Sex*, 1968), Esther Fuch, J Cheryl Exum, Phyllis Trible, Mary Hunt (lesbian, **Judith Plaskow** (another lesbian theologian, famous for her 1991 book, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*) and many others.

⁴Fiorenza, 62.

Christian churches and theologies still encourage women's inferiority through their **institutional** inequalities (Taitaifono EFKS - a *tiakono tamaitai* in 2022?) and **theological justifications** of women's innate difference from men. (Paul says they must wear things to cover their heads, then sit and **listen** in church, never to teach, nor preach!)

One of the tensions in advocating for social, cultural and for religious changes (such as the EFKS current position towards **women ordination**) is the possibility that religious institutions themselves are perpetrators of structural oppression. For example, feminist theology has been critical of the patriarchal and sexist practices (e.g., women denied leadership roles) and beliefs (e.g., God as solely male) of many religious settings. This type of critique may be uncomfortable for many religious people, as congregations themselves may embody the hierarchical structures and attitudes that would implicitly need to be challenged and dismantled. The tension is how to take seriously a liberatory theology when such attention may challenge practices within the religious setting.

Therefore, the essence of this whole issue is to inspire women in our churches as well as religious communities in their particular struggles. Feminist theology as critical theology is driven by the urge to make the vision of Paul in **Galatians 3:28** real within the Christian community. Baptism into Christ's body is not, it seems, enough as an expression of women's dignity. Furthermore, what women had to say shall never be revealed, given the instructions of **1 Tim. 2:9-14!**

In our context, one can say that the exclusion of women from sacramental ministry is a violation of the equal rights that women have by virtue of their baptism as full members of the Church. The hierarchy (**inclusive of the EFKS for that matter**) has therefore to change its present policy of the exclusion of women from ordination. One hears of the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," **but where is the God of Sarah and Hagar, of Rebecca, Leah and Rachel?**" The tradition is powerfully ambivalent (uncertain) for women, both (in some ways) affirming women and (in other ways) diminishing their worth and value by treating the male as normative.

2. Exploring some of the Biblical Texts

Let us consider a few "proof-texts" of what feminist theology is all about:

1. The notion of 'Sophia-God' is important to express the gracious goodness in the divine by selective use of Jewish 'wisdom' theology, which arguably used elements of 'goddess' (see Proverbs 1:20-33)
2. Message of 1 Tim 2 is clear – no space for women!

3. Eph 5:22 – “Wives, be subject to your husbands - in the extreme, husbands have bullied their wives – globally!
4. Judith Plaskow attacks Moses’ instructions to the “people” of Israel – Ex 19:15 – “*Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman.*” Moses addresses ONLY the men; the issue is “ritual purity” of Lev 15:16-18....Plaskow maintains, Moses should address like, “***do not go near each other***”
5. Judges 19:29 – cruelty to “concubine” appears to be the norm, acceptable behaviour?
6. Ruth – see David Shepherd, “Violence in the Fields? Translating, Reading, and Revising in Ruth” in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*; July 2001, Vol. 63 Issue 3.
7. The Decalogue (Exodus 20)