



Feminist Theology

Eduqas A level R.S. G1A Christianity Theme 3C

Key Concepts:

- Rosemary Radford Ruether believes that **androcentrism** (male-centredness) permeates the Bible and theological traditions:
- Eve is seen as more responsible for sin than Adam, **Mary** valued for passive qualities that enable men to exercise power, women are presented as subject to men (Ephesians 5:24) and salvation is via a male God who appoints male leaders.
- Ruether believes, however, that androcentrism need not be the fate of Christianity, especially as there have been marginalised movements which viewed women as apostles (**Gnosticism**) and leaders (**Quakers**).
- The Hebrew **prophetic tradition** (including Jesus) was not feminist in nature, but can be seen on a trajectory toward feminism since it fought for the oppressed and criticised any religious ideology supporting inequality.
- The Church should reform itself through **inclusive language**, fighting for women's rights and establishing female **'base communities'**.
- Mary Daly agrees with Ruether that androcentrism permeates the Bible and Church traditions, but believes that Christianity is too aligned with **patriarchy** to be able to reform itself. She called for women to be **anti-church**.
- The gravest sin in the Bible was not the eating of the fruit in Genesis, but the pronouncement that women would be subject to men; this meant that half of the human race would be treated as objects in an unjust **sexual caste system**.
- The act of subjugating women is at the basis of the **unholy trinity** of rape, genocide and war (see Numbers 31: 17-18). Once people are viewed as objects, they are considered easy targets for abuse.
- The Church has turned God into a noun, a static, changeless judge and ruler. However, life is comparable to a verb: growing, changing, maturing, actualising. Daly views **God as a verb**; God is in the process of becoming with the universe.
- Women need to turn away from **Bibliolatry and Christolatry**, indeed, they need to reject all of patriarchal society and find their support in a 'sisterhood'.
- The **ordination** (literally 'setting apart') of women to Church leadership did not happen in any major way until the final decades of the twentieth century.
- However, most Christians today worship in churches (such as the Roman Catholic Church) where the ordination of women is forbidden.
- In 1992, the Church of England (CoE) voted to ordain women; congregations fought successfully for the right to reject woman priests in 1993. In 1994, nearly 1500 women were ordained; at the same time, nearly 500 male clergy left the CoE, many becoming Catholic priests (including married priests).
- Currently there is a higher proportion of unpaid women clergy than male clergy; the first female CoE Bishop, **Libby Lane**, appointed in 2015 and women clergy have had to fight for maternity rights and fair interview processes.

Key quotes:

"Constructing a church of liberation from patriarchy requires dismantling clericalism." (R. Ruether)

"'God's plan' is often a front for men's plans and a cover for inadequacy, ignorance, and evil." (M. Daly)

Key arguments/debates:

Many believe the Bible champions the equality of women; they cite Galatians 3:28, the ordination of women as deacons in the NT and the inclusiveness of Jesus. However, a sexual caste system can be seen in the Bible with its teaching that women should keep silent in the Church (1 Cor. 14:34).

Feminism is on the 'map' at seminaries and has developed a rich academic tradition. A recent Papal Commission has examined the possibility of the ordination of women as deacons and many Churches have inclusive language worship. However, it can be argued that all of this has had little impact on the majority of churches, especially those that take a more literal approach to the Bible.

Key questions:

- Have women been treated equally at any time in the Judeo-Christian tradition?
- Does the Bible promote women's equality or inequality?
- Are the commitments of churches changing?
- Does clericalism, even when women are ordained, reinforce inequality?

Key words:

Androcentrism | Mary | Gnosticism | Quakers | prophetic tradition | inclusive language | base communities | patriarchy | anti-church | sexual caste system | unholy trinity | god as a verb | Bibliolatry Christolatry | ordination | Libby Lane