

By Catharina J. M. Halke

TO A NEW IMAGE OF MAN BASED ON FEMINIST THEOLOGY

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The second radical wave of the women's liberation movement is in the seventies a phenomenon not to be ignored, no matter how differently one is thinking about it. Who speaks of emancipation, feminism, oppression and liberation, change of role and growing self-consciousness is transmitting stimuli to which is reacted with extremely different emotions by both men and women of all ages and from social and cultural strata. No wonder if it concerns such sweeping processes of change. They always stir the emotions and certainly where it concerns the experience of human sexuality. In the first place, what does it mean: being a woman or being a man?

This fundamental question, which touches the very roots of our lives (and in my view also those of human society), is easier to ask than to answer, and, in consequence, excites the emotions evoked. Dealing with constantly new changes already makes heavy demand on people; but anyone who, regarding the changes of another image of man, the changing pattern of roles of men and women, is fog-bound and no longer sees even the white lines on the road, is bound to become emotional, either because of excessive resistance to any change or because of an absolutist attitude towards the revolution. Anyone who is not only intensely involved in this dynamism but who can have a critical look at it puts, in addition to exclamation marks of applause also question marks of concern. What criteria do we apply in the liberation processes of people; what values do we employ, stimulating processes of change; what image of man do we have in mind; man= man and woman?

I suppose that it is up to all women who have responsible functions and perform scientific work, at least, to try, through accurate research and careful reflections, to make the fog lift a bit, making us see a few lines on the road through life and the community, providing it with some structure; if only to indicate where one will leave the road and end up in the ditch.

Scientifically speaking, the complex matter of the liberation of women and the changes in the woman-man relationship has to do with many disciplines. For it does not concern a private or personal approach of interest only on the personal plane of every individual: it concerns, of course, the social consequences, the cultural, the political, or to look

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Scientifically speaking, the complex matter of the liberation of women and the changes in the woman-man relationship has to do with many disciplines. For it does not concern a private or personal approach of interest only on the personal plane of every individual: it concerns, of course, the social consequences, the cultural, the political, or to look

at it from a different angle: the women's liberation movement is as much a criticism of the existing form of our society, political system and culture, as it is, for women, a way of becoming more personal beings. It is also a form of counter-culture, on which various disciplines can throw their light: all social sciences, cultural anthropology, economics, historical disciplines. And, this is my conviction, also theology and the comparative religious sciences.

As a result of the churches and religions having often performed a preserving rather than an inspiring role in the personal and social processes of change and, notably having legitimized and theologically based the subordinate position of women, there arose a great and understandable distrust, especially among women, of these institutions. Many of them have, already for a long time, given up any interest in them and have found, inter alia in marxism, a view of life which appeals to them more. Others try, by way of a humanist view of life, to find a structure for their thinking and living project. Yet theology may render a good contribution, especially if one wants to regard it in the light of what it will be: one of the search-lights throwing its light on man and society and this from the angle of the ultimate meaning of our life, of the relation between relative and absolute, between finite and infinite between man and God.

I confine myself here, for various reasons, to the theology originated and rooted in the Jewish-Christian tradition; not only because of limited competency, but also because most of us are especially concerned with this and our Western culture finds its roots in it. In this context, I want to tell something about the origins and aims of what we call a feminist theology.

For its beginning I have to take you to the United States where "the feminine mystique" was, for the first time, penetrated in the meaningful period after world war II. After a dynamic and improvising period during which male and female roles and stereotypes were less important, if only life could go on, the rigid patterns of roles and expectations did indeed come back until the women released themselves from their forced imprisonment and got a clear insight into what was going on. In the United States, namely, women could also see the connections in the many histories of oppression going on there: the almost total extermination of Indians; the discrimination against negroes; keeping Southern America in control economically; the war in Vietnam. They saw - to confine myself to the role of religion - Christians,

inspired by the Gospel, take a stand against power and violence; but also the official churches choose the side of those in power. And they experienced their own powerlessness to exercise influence in those churches, to get room for giving official personal leadership in these churches. This very connection and these contrasts make it explicable that female theologians in the U.S. got so tremendously, but also so creatively, angry that they rebelled out of an irresistible longing for justice for all oppressed people and out of resistance to a dominant masculine culture and religion.

After this introduction to the theme, I first want to tell you something about feminist theology, also as an example of what has come to be called liberation theology. - Next religion will come under discussion, especially with regard to its two main functions; comfort and challenge, always showing an unstable balance or in a state in which one of the two has to give way.- Finally: the solidarity of women with all other oppressed women (and men), in: sisterhood, i.e. a new inspiration which again makes room for the spirit of God if the old churches are in danger of extinguishing the fire.

- I. Theology is, as the word says, thinking about and reflecting on God. Much as your religious feelings may differ, we may agree that we mean by God something like: the last full reality; the fullness of being; the Foundation of our existence. Confining ourselves to the Jewish-Christian tradition, we see that it originated, and, to a major degree, was formed, in a patriarchal tradition and in an age-old patriarchal culture, in which the patriarchs, judges, kings and prophets play a dominant part. In voices, visions and miracles, such as the burning bush, there develops for a nomadic people, which will be called Israel, a idea of God from which it derives security and freedom. Characteristic of this idea of God is that the people experienced it as revelation and in this direction: God reveals himself, JHVH, I am the being-who-goes-with-you; so as a relational being; and as: I am your God who liberated you from your slavery in Egypt; so also a dynamic being.

Two features which show that, in this revelation and the reflection on it - which we call theology - it is not about a god who is enough to himself but about a god of people. So theology also means thinking about man in her/his relationship to God. In addition, it is about a god who frees people from bondage, from isolation, and gives freedom;

from prison to freedom. Israel's history is again and again about a struggle of people who are disobedient to this purpose of liberation, and who then repent and only expect salvation from their God. Translated into psychological terms, we can say: in the Scriptures, especially in the Old Covenant, the Tenach, a growing, settling, and all too often settled, people experiences its history as a history of salvation, thanks to its faith in JHVH.

Going on with this development in the revelation of God, I move to the significance of Jezus of Nazareth, who calls himself the fulfilling of the law and prophets. He is so engaged in his mission to show God to people, so empty of himself and transparent in order to let the fullness of being pass through him, that he is called the son of God. He himself experiences his relationship to JHVH in such a way that he calls him Abba, Father: a relation which, in this culture, means a very intimate and close one. This revelation of God is reflected in the Gospel of St. John, giving the description: God is love. The still unclouded being of the Old Testament, brought closer by Jezus of Nazareth as Father-Son relation, is finally made concrete in God is love; to be realized in love between people.

So sober is, in fact, this way, and still so much a possible inspiration for us, women and men. But now there is the start of trouble: Though the commandment: to make no graven images of this god, sounds surprising in respect of Israel's religion, yet people cannot refrain from doing so. People make images and these three words contain the main reason for all difficulties accumulated by centuries of practised religion and which have become a barrier extremely difficult for women to overcome. For 'people' means in actual fact in the history of religion: Men. Men have thought about and reflected on themselves and their families, in their stories of history they have given them words and images, with regard to God, too, they have made images and expressed their religion in anthropomorphic images, parables, and analogies. They have attributed to God all qualities they considered sublime, have sublimated their masculinity in their image of God, and have let God make their masculinity, and the man-woman relationship as it was, sanctioned, normative, legitimate and sacral. The entire hierarchy in society has, therefore, become a religious hierarchy: the husband at the top - the wife subordinate to him and mother of his children (preferably sons) - the child - the slave - the cattle.

Men were in possession of all this. God, therefore, is expressed largely in male images: Strong, Mighty, Ruler, King, Judge, Revenging, etc.

The image of the relationship of God with His people is that of bridegroom and bride, of husband and wife. A human image, but the wife is the disobedient one, the unfaithful one; nay, the whore, who leaves and goes with other gods.

One more example: Looking back on its existence, Israel, too, has written its history of origin, as described in Genesis. In it there are two stories about the creation of man. The sober story can even now be a source of inspiration for our image of man and image of our selves; later on I shall return to this. The second story of the creation is more graphical and, for male chauvinism, more characteristic: the Adam-and-Eve story. Eve is made of the rib of Adam; she comes when everything has already been named by Adam, i.e. has been given its sense and place; she comes to help him, to be his equal.

- And, finally, there is the fall of man, symbolized in Eve, who succumbs to the charm of the Serpent and who tempts Adam to act similarly. In this way she becomes the second-rate human being, unstable because of her Fall; only to keep her husband happy; destined to bear children and to be submissive to her husband. Although all this may lead to a new exegesis, new reflections, a surprising and better balanced interpretation, meanwhile, however, the harm has been done, the "Wirkungsgeschichte" started, and passed on to the twentieth century by St. Pauls and the churchfathers, theologians and philosophers.

Numerous examples can be added, but you will not be surprised that it is one of the characteristics of a feminist theology that it will be iconoclastic, and that it prefers emptiness because it provides room for new experiences and, therefore, for new images. Here I want to refer to two characteristics of images and symbols:

- a. The power of images is that they refer, put reality in a surprisingly new perspective, that they are poly-interpretable, but also: that they are born, function and die. Anyone who, at all costs, goes on clinging to images, while they no longer transcend reality, violates their function.
- b. Image language is essentially different from concept language. It is the primitive, original language of man; it is, fortunately, still the language of poets and prophets: and, therefore, also the language of many stories and parables in the bible; it is, par excellence, the language to express experiences and thoughts of faith

Image language can, again, become the language of faith, if we let images keep their own values and if we do not translate them by concept language into objects, but have respect for their own field of language. This means in the concrete, inter alia, that images and symbols can clarify, deepen, and, if necessary, describe experiences; but they must not be used to prescribe, to lay down norms. For their effect then becomes restricting, strait jacketing, instead of room-giving, transcending.

We all know that, both in religion and in culture, people sinned very much against this, and that, particularly women, have become the victims of far-reaching curtailment because the almighty men used the images they had made of us against us. Sexual moralism can say something about that, but also the ambivalence in the science on Mary (Mariology) as an antithesis of Eve; theory and practice of liturgy, the concern with what is holy in temple and church, the access to ecclesiastical offices testify to this.

Now I have arrived at one of the nubs of the complex of problems, viz. the mysteries of human sexuality, the meaning of womankind and mankind.

We should bear in mind that the Jewish-Christian tradition is an infringement on and a protest against the existing natural religions, mother religions and fertility rites. It is infeasible now to deal with this properly. I am only trying to sketch an outline. An older layer of our culture experienced life probably more as belonging to and dependent on nature. It took a long course of development. Mother earth, mother nature was the providing, mighty deity, who gave life and fertility, to whom life also returned, who also destroyed life unexpectedly. The motherly principle is primal, is visible, is of a might which was still mysterious, and is, therefore, worshipped and feared. These processes continue in a cycle of being born, getting married, dying, death and new birth. There is an experience of cosmic unity, of all things with all people, in a cyclical rhythm. Opposite this there is, religio-historically speaking, the father religion, which directly opposes this cycle; which penetrates, opens up a road, summons, which picks up the child born out of its mother's womb, putting it on a road. As a result of this human autonomy increases, cosmic unity and security, however, are done away with.

Man versus nature is the beginning of technology. But with this there is not yet an new equilibrium. If there was in the one phase too much emphasis on nature, human fertility, the relation deity/man in the "hieros gamos", the sacred marriage with all its consequent ecstasy and chaos; in the following phase there will be another valuation of this very nature, of human sexuality, and women become the image of this "other", because woman is regarded to testify to this in her physique, her womb. Add to this Greek thinking, and we see woman as hardly spiritual and mental but especially sensual in her being, subordinate to man, who is superior to her as more spirit, more reason, more control. - The ambivalence of man is very great here: he is afraid of his sexuality, his emotionality and he controls them via one woman; or he indulges in dissipation via other women, who afterwards, he holds in contempt, whereas he holds one in honour, but sees in her especially the mother, his wife. Notably, the Christian religion has never quite known how to deal with sexuality and has placed virginity above all; it was only in this that woman, fallen as Eve, could also rise to the level of man.

This thinking in dualism (i.e. in antitheses which do not keep each other in balance, but which are of an absolutist nature) has particularly damaged us, women, but, in the end, (as we see now) also mother earth. Though Mary Daly is especially intrigued by the phoney imagery and wants to castrate, make impotent the entire masculine, patriarchal religion, in order to make woman belong to man; Rosemary Radford Ruether regards this dualism as "the" or at least, "a" source of all evil : making polarities into antitheses which curtail, stereotype, produce a low self-image and with it a behaviour which corresponds to it as well. As a result of this there arises a kind of absolute antithesis between good and evil. God and man, heaven and earth, soul and body, spirit and matter, which makes it difficult not to lose sight of the connections and relationships and which always identifies woman with lower things: she is earthly, inclined to evil things, materialistic, etc.

Once more, I return to my statement: people make images; this time not to elaborate the images further, but to say something more about the subject of "people". The people who reflected on and speculated about the questions of human existence and put them into words have, in fact, always been men. Putting belief into words and

theology are masculine occupations, dating from a patriarchal culture, seldom if ever contradicted by women, except where it concerned mystic experiences. Men expressed themselves in their conceptions of God and in their language as subjects and talked about women as objects. On the basis of their observation of us, their norms, they described an image of man and the world which was hierarchical in set-up, neatly arranged in structure, rest-giving by order and sacralized by their projection that God wanted it this way. Women lived religiously, went to church, and entertained morals as men had prescribed them. One of the very characteristics of a feminist theology is that women themselves become subject of theologization; that they allow themselves to have their own religious experiences, express them and dare rely on them. Being subject themselves is characteristic of all kinds of liberation theologies, as the black theology (negroes) and the first of this kind, from the socially repressed class in South-America. Referring to the original experience of a god who liberates people from the slavery in Egypt, the oppressed transpose this experience to their situation. The struggle is in the first place that oppressed people develop self-consciousness, a sense of self-respect, autonomy, if they are to become subject and to feel, think, speak for themselves. Only then the self-fulfilling prophecy will no longer apply, which, thousands of years, prompted women to say of themselves: I am only a woman

In order to come to this self-consciousness we need the community, the "we", experience of women who start listening to one another and, in so doing, induce one another to speak.

Feminist theology is nearly always a "communal" (growing in the community) theology springing from one of the most important sources: one's own experience and history. This community which gives a voice and face to the voiceless and colourless arrives at another image of God: not so much the almighty, announcing, speaking God, but the bearing, vulnerable, listening god who listens so creatively that, at least, women start speaking.

Feminist theology also want to be more "holistic", more as a whole, thinking less in antitheses, less Western, middle-class, masculine and comprising everyone and everything. This is expressed in the concept of sisterhood, i.e. solidarity with all people who have become aware of their oppression and who want to find and experience the evangelical inspiration in a new way.

III. By this I have again come to the religious dimension of our existence. Concerning religion, quite a number of definitions can be given, which unfortunately, I cannot deal with now. All of them have to do with indicating a dimension more than a level surface, with going beyond the superficially concrete, with room for giving sense and meaning to our existence, with cosmic experiences and broader relationships.

Though one can make a distinction between historical revelation religion and general religiosity, the one cannot go without the other. In general, each religion contains two clear elements: comfort and challenge: the function of security, consolation and encouragement, feeling integrated and part of a larger entity, on the one hand; and the challenge, the stimulus, the vocation, feeling called upon to follow some way and do so. Early christianity was sometimes called "the way" as, indeed, Israël's religion was a journey, an exodus, and with it a reaction to the natural and mother religion of the surrounding peoples, for which one could use the symbols of the cycle, the circle, the womb.

Feminist theology calls for a re-valuation and integration of both symbols, of both aspects: the linear and the circular; the rational and the emotional; the erect masculinity and the enclosing womb; the exertion and the relaxation; the human individual and the social structures. Paradise is no missed opportunity which we have lost by sin and guilt; but it is before us "das Prinzip Hoffnung", as the new earth and the new heaven, in which there will be no power hierarchies, but a community in mutuality. A utopia? Certainly, but one of which we believe that it is promised to us and for which we have been given a responsibility to help it realize.

Whether, through nature, culture, an artificial process of socialization, or no matter how, we are still speaking of "feminine and "masculine": it is a fact that there are two modes of being, one of which, the masculine, has been held in considerably greater respect, has become dominant and has laid down the norms as to what "feminine" was. Now we should get a clear insight into this polarity which is not merely between people, but which is also in ourselves: active, passive, receptive, and so forth, and which, both of them, call for realization and cultivation.

III. Has christianity still to offer inspiration for this?

I believe so, an evangelical inspiration namely, which wants to give freedom to all the oppressed and the not-known. Jezus of Nazareth and his message really mean what the poet Oosterhuis says: The world turned round. Jezus of Nazareth was, indeed, a man but not in a sense of masculine superiority. In his own emotions, deeds, language and symbols he really shows both aspects of our being human beings, he appeals concretely to the oppressed and poor people. Why then has so little been achieved? Because, far too soon, men took control of the church and encapsulated it in a masculine, imperialist culture. The signs of our day and age, particularly the rising and revolt of women, are, therefore, signals for a progressing revelation, on the basis of which we have to re-read and re-interpret the Scriptures and tradition. Where woman is concerned, christendom has introduced a significant metaphor: Eve or Mary;

woman as temptress or

woman on a pedestal.

One is degraded, the other is elevated; both were played off against woman. The woman, Eve, as the scape-goat, on whom all lusts of man, of which he was deeply afraid, were projected, and who was banned to the desert of stillness, voicelessness; the woman, Mary, who was put on a throne, as our Lady of courtly love, as the Madonna, the Muse; but also as a refuge of charity intermediate between a punishing god and man. Besides, Mary as the humble servant, from whom girls and women should derive their subservience. The time has come for us to realize that we must shake off all this dust from these images and that Eve means: the mother of all living people; that Mary in her encounter with the other woman: Elizabeth, sang a song of liberation, in which she saw prophetically how "salvation" means that all powerful people should come off their thrones and all humble people should be raised.

I believe passionately that feminist theology can render an essential contribution towards the quality of our human existence, not merely in a personal sense but also in the structural and cultural climate. It wants to hold a dialogue with the feminist-socialist movement in order to go on drawing its attention to the scope and transcendental dimension. Indeed, Marcuse has been saying for some years: if marxism is not humanized qualitatively by feminism, there

will not be any question of integration there either. For this reason, feminism is for me essentially different from and a criticism on women's emancipation, as long as it stands for equal rights, equal responsibilities, and from integration into the existing structures. After obtaining equal rights and responsibilities, there should be room for a critical re-valuation of dominant values and norms and an up-grading of qualities hitherto regarded as personal and private. Feminism, for instance, is not complementary to the existing theology either, but it will have to free the dominant, rational, conceptual, masculine theology from its one-sidedness. The worst mistake of culture and religion and politics is, by no means, that they are half, but that they think that "half" is sufficient; nay, that it means "whole"! Feminist theology is no feminine theology, but it wants to make a contribution towards a new approach of theology in which, in due course, women and men participate.

The concept of "brotherhood" has always been important in the Churches: understandable from the view of patriarchal Israel. If we now like to speak of "sisterhood", it is not only as a protest against it, neither is it meant as polarization and apartheid; but it is a new symbol for those women who are in a process of growing awareness and for all women and men who, wherever and however, live in curtailment and non-freedom. Sisterhood is an alliance of women having common interests, showing an accepting, unconditional love and solidarity. It opposes the dual morality which condemns women and exonerates men, a superior power which crushes, a technology which dehumanizes and depersonalizes, sexual libertinism which makes woman again an object and sees her only as a body, the exploitation by the super-men and then the Capital, of slaves, blacks, the powerless, but also the rape of mother earth, of nature and of the whole creation which is becoming unliveable and exhausted.

Feminist theology wants, particularly, to think about and reflect on the human dignity of woman and man; about the liberation of the oppressed and the oppressor. It could be that in this very thing lies the germ of her own contribution. I consider feminism as a necessary, clearly coloured phase, necessary for man and culture: but, I hope, a temporary one, as long as the exclusively male dominance still exists. The birth of the new woman can, however, influence the birth of the new man, and, as a result of it, produce the more whole man, in which both aspects are more integrated.

Women will make mistakes in life, as will men. Things will not be perfect here, also not through feminism. But anyone who can and will listen, with room to move, to the movements of God's spirit, dares hope for a movement, a development "from machismo to mutuality". The human being of 3,000 years ago may have had a vision of this, when he formulated that other story of the creation: God said, let us create man in our image and likeness God created man male and female. Here God has a number of masculine and feminine features: so man, too. This provides the assumption that the essence of man is: Living in the scope of relationships and of reciprocity in the I-you relationship; and: being inclined to Transcendence.

THESES or
CONCLUSIONS

1. If theology is not seriously concerned with the liberation of women, the church and christianity become irrelevant to women as, indeed, they have become to large groups of industrial workers and intellectuals.
2. The one-sidedness of the Covenant Theology (cf. the image of Bridegroom-Bride) urgently needs complementing from the creation theology, in which woman and man have been made in God's image and likeness.
3. Feminist theology places strong emphasis on the fact that the earth has not been given to man to be dominated by him but to be managed by him; that is, to be looked after attentively and respectfully and not to be "raped" by exploiting and exhausting it. "From machismo to mutuality" also applies to the relationship man-earth.
4. The principle of two independent ideas for good and evil (gnosis) has been rejected by the Jewish-Christian creation belief; but it has its effect in the story of the Fall and its "Wirkungsgeschichte".
5. Subservience, humility, background position, being silent, preached to women; power, influence, mastery, allowed to men, have, so far, prevented the real incarnation of God and obscured the figure of Christ. God's radical will to have equality, revealed through Christ, is being fundamentally blocked by structures and hierarchies of inequality. Women being part of man, their rising and speaking, should be seen on these lines.
6. It is high time for feminist theology to be included in theological faculties; for pastoral work and preaching to be imbued with feminist theology, primarily to make people more whole; but also to come to a renewal of theology itself.
7. From their very experience of curtailment, growing awareness and liberation, feminist theologians become, in an authentic way, sensitive

to any form of oppression by injustice of people and their structures. Therefore, feminist theology feels itself related to and is an example, arisen in our own culture, of a liberation theology like the South-American one, the black theology in the United States of America and that of South-Africa, like the red theology, etc. Feminist theology can make a critical contribution towards liberating Western unjust structures.