

# Christianity and Feminism

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**Abstract:** *Feminists claim that modern women of the twenty-first century will end a patriarchal God, as the modern social construct is more versatile, cunning and gender inclusive. Content of epistemology is a preconditioned factor in regard to formation of the society. For instance, John Lock's epistemology differed from ethereal sentiment of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries of renaissance epoch, moving the needle in regards to observing the knowledge from the mind's and brain's standpoint. An equal distribution of labor and resources created a platform for female empowerment, as the general message provided for human society was to integrate valuable work ethic in society. Furthermore, it was one of the major steps that empowered women and created a new mantle for knowledge. We could not possibly argue if a Christian person's constructed epistemology is truer than a feminist's knowledge of the world, but we could argue if they differ or contradict one another.*

**Keywords:** Feminism, Christianity, mysticism, Plato, Aristotle, Neolithic Society

Christian doctrine, over centuries has been one of the dominant regulators of morality of almost one third of the world's population. When knowledge started to transfer from churches to universities, law found a new home, and yet its classrooms were attended mostly by men discussing matters of sin, rather than commitments of crime. In context with Christianity, law was interpreted in terms of faith, as it was based on the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the separation of church and state was one of the first steps towards female emancipation. While Christians prayed for masculine energy in the sky, the law emancipated from religion and nurtured women.

Christianity was not independent from the precedent school of thought, built on remnants of Greek philosophers, Plato (428-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384 B.C. – 322B.C.) constructed pre-Christian also patriarchal consciousness. Both philosophers agreed that women were incomplete men, only an afterthought of God. Men were believed to be provided with a soul while women by matter, in that regard women was and is considered less than off divine spirit. The Bible also creates man from the dust of the ground, but woman of the rib of a man. Although the Bible downgraded man in terms with the material of creation, the book of Lord relegated women even to further echelon. Therefore thus, to this day the Bible is considered to be a valid document to chastise females who according to the script are responsible for original sin. Conversely, that they are seen to undervalue Jesus's efforts to empower women has been undervalued.

For instance, when the crowd wanted to stone an adulterous woman, Jesus said, "Let *one among who is without sin cast the first stone*". Mary Magdalene is another sexually liberated woman, one who became Jesus's confidant. She is also one of the few people who witnessed his crucifixion, and one of the first ones who learned about his resurrection. She also travelled with him and his twelve disciples when Jesus denounced Jewish tradition and allowed women to travel with men.

Moreover, Rebecca is yet another strong female figure in the Bible. She is the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau.

Unlike the belief that only men were mediators between the divine and humanity, according to Genesis 25:22, she talked to the Lord about the twins in her womb. The Lord said: "*Two nations are in your womb, and two people from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the young.*" Genesis 25:23.

Christianity faintly emancipated women, nevertheless question remains in following: what major elements have been preconditioned as the factor of male empowerment? In a society where physical strength is in demand, society tends to estimate and appreciate its value. At the beginning of the Neolithic society, when human beings were tree dwellers and were nourished primarily by fruits, nuts and roots females were emancipated, because physical strength was not in demand. But in the middle stage of Neolithic society, when fire and weapons were introduced as means to gather acquire food, men gained their power. Therefore, labor was divided: men hunted, and women worked at home to nurture their children.

Over time men built bigger and better weapons for the purposes—of hunting. The chase, rivalry and acquisition of animals triggered inter-group fighting, and in due course, slavery emerged. Men began accumulating wealth in the form of animal's livestock and slaves, which resulted in the formation of ownership and the notion of private property. Females were domesticated and sexually regulated to control demographics. Men and women became stronger and wilder, as by utilizing fire and eating animals, they developed physical abilities and sharpened their teeth.

Judgments and practices on female inferiority became scientific in the 19th century. Darwin's theory of the "survival of the fittest" was one of the top talking points of patriarchal society in terms of the distribution of wealth, workforce, privileges and status.

Nature limited women for inferiority by the lack of their physical strength but Christianity put women in a secondary position for the docility of their soul. From a Christian viewpoint, the female existence is to be restricted, she is to

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carry the burden and guilt of the Original Sin. This led women to look for God elsewhere. Spirituality was strictly centered on to one's husband or to another prominent male figure in life social orbit. But Feminists questioned the androcentric nature of society and sought to understand the rudiments of feminist spirituality.

American theologian and feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether (1936-) believes that feminism began to reconstruct gender paradigms by questioning the one dimensional view of a Father-God, dominance, namely women's subservient place in church and in society. She noted that feminism critiques masculine dominance in Christian language (Ackermann, 2008). Author Carol Patrice Christ (1945- ) writes in her book '*Rebirth of the Goddess*,' that in Christianity, "*The image of God as Father, Son and Spirit was the root of the problem.*" She also wrote that God is more judgmental towards females, and his "dominating ethos is an integral part of the image of God as a patriarchal male".(Christ, 1997) Naoimi Goldenberg, (1947- ) in her book '*Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the end of Traditional Religions*,' states that God is going to change, and women are going to end the traditional God through female empowerment. She states that women will "*change the world so much that He won't fit in anymore*"; feminists are bringing in a world that will be "*less and less like the one described in the Bible*".

One of the most prominent feminists, Mary Daly (1928-2010) deflected Christian heritage and stated that Christianity is destructive to women. She wrote "*We will take our place in the sun. We will leave behind the centuries of silence and darkness.*" (Daly, 2017) Women sought escape in different forms of mysticism, as a source of an alternative route to reaching the divine. For instance Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) was a 12th century nun and mystic who integrated female symbols and advocated for female emancipation. She had visions and listened to inner voices, which she revealed only after falling severely ill. According to Rabassó in 2013, Hildegard stated: *the «inner» vision and audition are both means by which a soul understands divine Wisdom.*"

Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) was another prominent Christian mystic who believed God was an androgynous Trinitarian God, who was essentially both female and male: the Almighty Father and Mother.

Her view about sin was rather different from the viewpoints held by the authoritarian elite of the medieval church. Julian believed that people sin because they are ignorant and naïve, not because they are evil in nature. Concept of sinners has altered through the formation and emergence of democratic society where female emancipation becomes a key aspect. She believed sinning brought necessary learning experience to human beings. Female emancipation is indeed a democratic concept that falls in opposition to patriarchal Christianity. Feminism frees women from their duties to bear children, encourages them to enter workforce, and frees them from original sin, whereas, Christianity forces women to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of mankind. According to French

philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) women portray the nature *on en soi*, rather than *pour soi*, which means, they do not exist for themselves, rather they exist for others.

One of the strongest quakes that divorced Christianity from the society and consequently shaped the feminist movement has been forming since the World War One. The post great war society has been experiencing moral and spiritual dualism in the midst of embracing novel values while filtering out redundant ones.

T.S. Eliot was one of the few modernist writers and poets who blessed female emancipation and yet feared redundancy of Christianity. In the essay, named *The Idea of Christian Society*, he refers to Christianity as the only spiritual doctrine worth following, and compares the arrival contrasts the arrival of democratic values to pagan traditions. And yet he discredits female character Lil, in the Poem the Waste Land who has five children at 31 and is criticized for paying visits at the chemist for birth control pills. An author augments reader's pity towards when finding out that she must report to husband regarding the money has given to her. The poet also depicts transsexual Tiresias, an old man with wrinkled breasts, in his poem, as a symbol of democracy. The figure embodies a number of democratic values, such as gender fluidity, transsexualism, the empowerment of women, foresight, and dominance over time and the future.

To conclude,

Men are at fault for stripping women of their value and dignity and sweeping it under the rug, but it takes two to tango. The question is, why have women been allowing themselves to be bullied for so long? We must take female nature into consideration to understand her fully and completely. Sacrifice is a female quality that at times is taken for granted. Women are known to have been ready to sacrifice their bodies to leave their offspring to humanity, and to sacrifice their egos completely to adhere to their male partners. As theological and philosopher Sarah Coakley (1951- ) suggests, women should undergo a process of kenosis, and although it that is painful, she states, it empowers women to emancipate.

The only woman in the Bible who refuses to sacrifice her dignity in order to please her partner and society is Lilith. The Bible splits female nature into two parts and depicts two kinds of women: Eve and Mary. Mary is the mother of Jesus, a pure sinless woman and Eve, who lured Adam to sin. The third female prototype, who has been erased from the Word of God, is Lilith.

According to esoteric knowledge and the Torah, Lilith was the first female and a feminist idol who refused to obey Adam and fled. Lilith was created from the same material as Adam, therefore, they were meant to be equal. On the other hand, Eve was created from Adam's rib, making her inferior to him.

Although, feminism automatically cancels Christianity as it is the patriarchal religion. The modern society, in term of epistemology is multilayered and multifaceted.

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