

The Feminist Movement (2) Nothing to Lose But Their Chains?

To write about the feminist movement and its implications for the church is risky. It is almost impossible to question the feminist movement and the ordination of women in the churches without being labelled a biblical literalist, male chauvinist, fundamentalist, or sexist. Despite the risks. I am going to take the plunge and question the feminist movement, concentrating on its impact on the church. It should be evaluated as it has profoundly affected not only the church, but also political, economic and educational structures.

A feminist has been defined as one "who believes that women are entitled to the same opportunities, rights and privileges that men are entitled to." Feminism questions political, social and cultural institutions, ways of thinking and trends, and the very articulation of these thoughts. Women are invited to give their own view on issues, whether they be nuclear disarmament or planned parenthood.

Feminism has been "celebrated" as one of the most important "isms" that has shaken our modern times. Christian feminists claim that women are now finally discovering their personhood in God's universe, something God would applaud. Feminist language readily uses the words "oppression" or "discrimination." Feminists demand liberation from the shackles patriarchal male-dominated institutions have put on them, particularly in marriage and the family. Christian feminists would include the church. Some argue that the church is so male dominated and so patriarchal in its traditions that it will be most difficult (if not impossible) for the church to change. But we must take note, however, that not all women want to be "liberated."

A feminist wrote that one of the most difficult problems of the movement is that "most women have refused to recognize their own oppression." Feminists of the developed West have often been disappointed by the reaction of Third World women who have been exposed to the women's "liberation" movement. They don't want to be told by the West how they should live.. Women officials of the Sudanese government told Germaine Greer, once a flamboyant feminist who has changed sides, that they had given up going to international conferences on women, even though they were a tremendous treat for them. They didn't want to go anymore "because they were tired of being told about their own lives instead of being consulted." And it may be argued of course that perhaps not all women feel oppressed: hence they cannot see the need for liberation. Germaine Greer observes that the feminists have at least to consider the possibility that a successful matriarch in the Third World might well pity Western feminists for having been "duped into futile competition with men in exchange for the companionship and love of children and other women."