



STATEMENT DF-375

EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM

Witnessing to Radical Feminists

by Betty Talbert-Wettler

American radical feminist themes have recently found a forum in both the university setting and in popular American fiction (e.g., *The Color Purple*, by Alice Walker). In witnessing to radical feminists, it is necessary both to find common ground and to conduct an honest exchange of viewpoints. Prayer is also important, as is the need to demonstrate Christ's love. Beyond this, I would like to suggest six witnessing tips that clarify some common feminist themes.

First, you may find that in their battle against sexism many feminists are reacting to genuine sin in the world. You will therefore want to affirm the evil of such behavior and the need for justice. In order for justice to prevail, however, one must have a standard. You may find it beneficial to discuss how the feminist arrives at her standard of justice.

Much of feminism lays the ultimate blame for evil in the world on the oppression of the "patriarchy." Patriarchy is usually defined as a "hierarchical power structure." Hierarchy itself is held by many feminists to be a product of the male gender. When oppression is viewed this way, however, individual responsibility for personal sin tends to be avoided or downplayed.

Feminists try to argue that "oppressive sexism" is inherent in the Bible. (The incarnation of Christ as both God and man, for example, supposedly perpetuates male superiority and female inferiority.) Most of these radical feminist interpretations of Scripture assume relativism, oppression as the root cause of all other evil, and that the biblical God is a projection of the masculine mind. Many feminist objections are easily overcome when biblical passages are examined in their proper contexts. But you should offer to research anything you cannot answer and get back to them.

Point out that the Christian God is both just and merciful. Since God is sovereign and personally involved with us as Creator and Savior, He alone has the right to determine standards of justice.

According to His standard of justice, as delineated in Scripture, oppression of others is a sin. But sin is universal among humanity and is not localized in any particular (i.e., patriarchal) system of authority. A biblical understanding of evil recognizes the sin nature of men *and* women (Rom. 3:23). Salvation from the power and penalty of sin comes through Christ alone (Rom. 6:6-7).

Second, keep in mind that many feminists have experienced great pain within Christianity as well as in the world generally. Many women come from Catholic or legalistic Protestant backgrounds. Some proclaim a New Age or neopagan world view. As a result, Christianity is often perceived by feminists as a rigid list of man-made rules. Therefore, salvation through grace alone in contrast to a system of works must be clearly explained. In the process, try to actively display the love of God to them.

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Third, affirm the importance of both experience *and* objective truth in religious matters. Claims to the contrary notwithstanding, you must demonstrate that the feminist *does* appeal to objective, universal truth in evaluating and supporting her belief system. Absolute statements asserting truth cannot be avoided. Point out her own use of true/false statements. (Ironically, the religious "truths" asserted by many feminist camps contradict each other.)

Challenge the idea that there are no absolutes. If truth in religion is relative, even the most abusive patriarchal religious system cannot be dismissed by feminists. Subjective experience alone cannot be the final test for truth.

Fourth, remember that one goal of many feminists is to create a distinctly "female" religious system based upon women's experience. Practically speaking, this goal assumes that men and women are so different that they need separate religious revelations. The advocacy of a primarily feminine metaphor and symbol for God, such as "Goddess" or "Mother," also contains an assumption that religious language is less meaningful to women when expressed in terms of the male gender.

In Christ, the two sexes do not need separate revelations based upon gender distinctions. Men and women can communicate with each other and with God on issues of absolute truth. Women and men are not portrayed in Scripture as having two separate human natures; *both* are created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27). There is equality of the sexes in Christ, for both are equal heirs to the promise of God in Christ (Gal. 3:28-29). All are spiritual warriors (Eph. 6:10-18). All are part of the priesthood of believers (1 Pet. 2:5). Men and women each have the ability to understand doctrine and become mature (Eph. 3:13-14).

Fifth, be prepared to express the simple gospel to feminists. While doing so, present Christ's existence, death, and resurrection as historical facts. Many feminists assume that Christ is a myth and/or that Christians worship a dead man.

Finally, watch out for misunderstandings that arise over language used to describe "God." Many feminists insist that the Christian God is a projection of a "male" image. Feminists must be challenged on their assumption that Christians believe in a God that is a creation of their own minds. Distinguishing between pantheism ("all is God"), panentheism ("all is in God"), and God as the transcendent/immanent creator may be critical to achieving this end. The biblical God is personal but also infinite — He is not a finite masculine deity such as Zeus or Odin.

Since the issue of God as Father will usually arise, illustrate through Scripture that God is expressed by many other metaphors besides Father. In the same way that God is not literally a rock, He is not literally "male" but rather transcends gender (Gen. 32:4). Stress that God is Spirit, not man (Deut. 23:19; John 4:24; 1 Tim. 6:6). You might also point out that there are occasions in which feminine imagery is used of God in the Bible. For example, God is said to have "given birth" to Israel (Deut. 32:18). Jesus spoke of God in terms of a loving mother hen crying over her wayward children (Matt. 23:37-39).

Christ is sometimes rejected simply because He is male. But in His humanity, Christ confronted and overcame worldly powers and authorities as a "suffering servant" (Isa. 53:3). Moreover, Christ honored and even exalted women in a largely anti-woman culture. Jesus taught women right alongside men as equals, even though Jewish culture discouraged women from studying the law (Matt. 14:21; 15:38). Though Jewish rabbis said men should not speak to women in public, Jesus not only spoke to a woman but also drank from her cup in a public place (John 4:1-30). The first person He appeared to after His resurrection was a woman (Mary), not the male disciples (John 20). Jesus clearly exhibited a high view of women.

Because of the terrible death and rejection Christ suffered, He intimately understands the pain of genuinely oppressed women. Great pain is sometimes difficult to overcome. Feminists need Christ. But Christians will not be able to answer feminist questions if they do not understand the perspectives, assumptions, and concerns raised by them. Be honest, diligent in study, and loving. Give feminists reasons to believe, and trust that Christ will do the rest.

Betty Talbert-Wettler holds an M.A. in Apologetics from Simon Greenleaf University. She is currently pursuing a second M.A. in New Testament at Talbot Theological Seminary. Her article, "Secular Feminist Religious Metaphor and Christianity," has been accepted for future publication in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.