

that they must continually wrestle with the basis for their efforts to synthesize feminism and Christianity into a distinctively new cultural expression. Does a feminist, liberation Christianity operate out of a hermeneutical circle of biblical texts which have some justice perspective on contemporary women's experience? Or must one throw the net of cultural sources and resources more widely? Can one explore marginated Christian groups condemned as "heresies", such as gnostics, Montanists, and others who seem to have female symbols of divinity and gave greater religious authority to women? Can one explore non-biblical religions with female images of the divine and enter into dialogue with Goddess religionists today? Can one write new stories out of women's religious experience today and make them paradigmatic for our religious consciousness? In short, given the poverty of the official Christian tradition for symbols and stories affirmative to women, why should women set any cultural limits to their search for alternative sources for their liberation?

Although the feminist version of this issue is particularly obvious, this ambiguity exists also in other forms of liberation theology that seek to contextualize themselves in the older cultures that were swept aside by Western European Christian proselytizing. Latin Christianity, as it was shaped into its successful form in the late patristic period, was a synthesis of New Testament faith and Greco-Roman culture, particularly philosophical culture. Moreover, the church shaped itself institutionally by modeling itself after the political institutions of the Roman Empire. Both as an organization and as a culture, Western Christianity made itself in the model of an imperialist society that claimed for its culture universal normativeness. To seek a liberation Christianity is to turn around that process by which the Christian church identified itself within an imperial ruling class over slaves, women, and conquered peoples. To seek an indigenous Christianity in the context of Asian culture, African culture, or Native American culture is to dissolve that process by which Christianity identified its normative cultural vehicle in a philosophical tradition that began with Plato....

Feminists tend to have a deep suspicion of dichotomized ways of thought and behavior. Whenever two apparently opposite and mutually exclusive options are set in conflict, our suspicion is the some larger context where both have their place has been lost. And so it is with the apparently irreconcilable differences between a biblically-based feminist liberation theology and a feminist spirituality based on a revival of the religion of the Goddess. One suspects that at work here are two different modes of being that have been dichotomized in Western culture and need to find a new whole.

Certainly, for me, the biblical liberation tradition is essential to my feminist (and not just my Christian) identity.... The denunciation of social practices which "grind the faces of the poor and deprive the widow and the orphan" is elaborated in the prophets and the Gospels into a critique of religion as well; not just a critique of other people's religion, but a critique of the deformation of biblical religion itself into forms and rituals that sacralize social oppression, the privileges of religious and social elites, and which ignores God's agenda of justice and mercy.

This denunciation of oppression and oppressive religion is complemented in prophetic theology by an annunciation of a new social order, a new humanity, a new heaven and earth....

This pattern of prophetic theology is precious to all concerned with social liberation because it is the cultural prototype of all such movements in Western