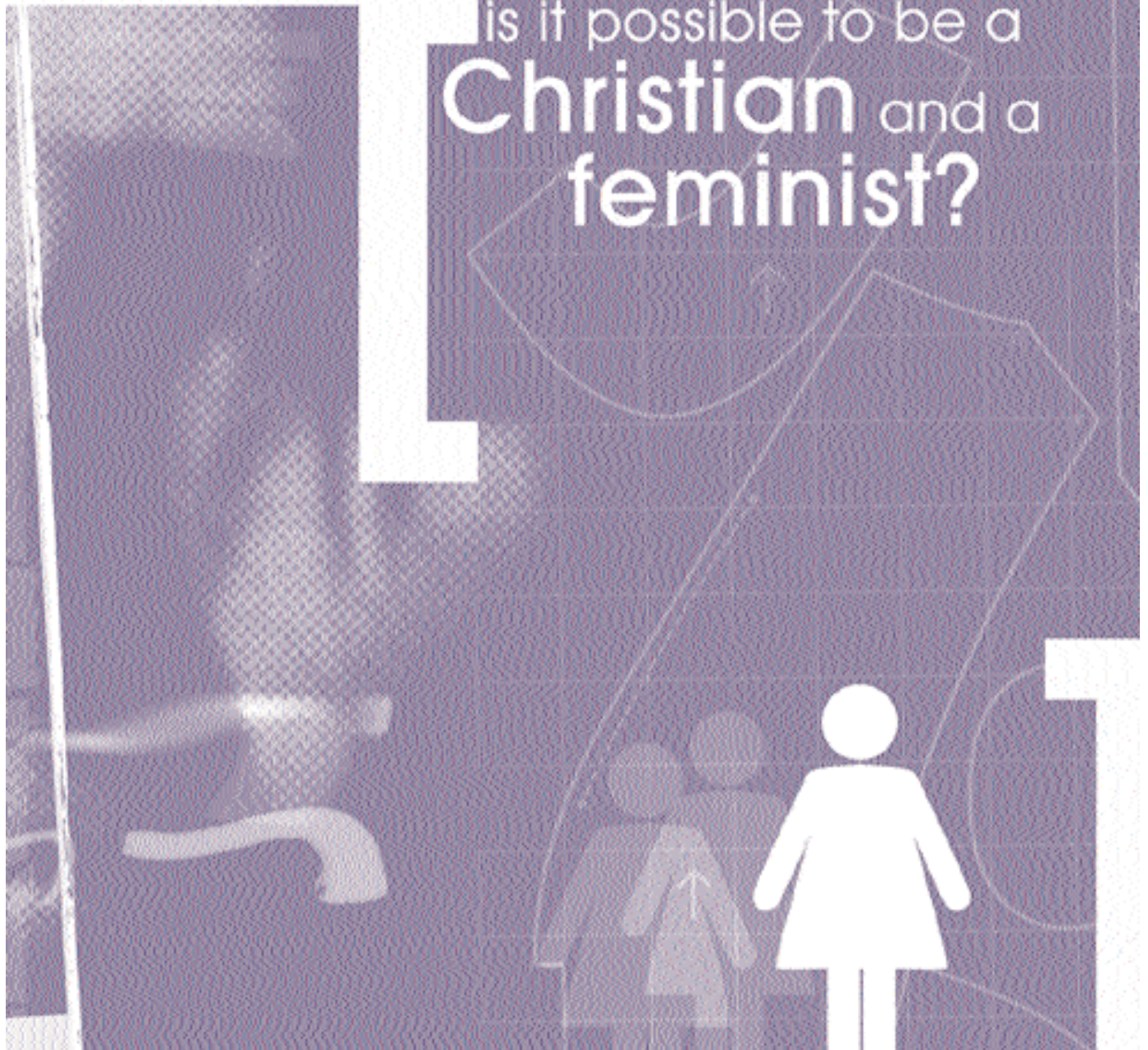


the 'f' word

is it possible to be a
Christian and a
feminist?



FEMINISM AND
THE BIBLE

Sue Robinson

BOOK REVIEW : THE
ESSENCE OF FEMINISM

Fiona McLean

VOX POP : WHAT DOES
FEMINISM MEAN
TO YOU?

Jo Crabbe

BOOK REVIEW :
WIFEWORK

Carolyn Wallace



Woman (Hebrew ishah). Woman, with man, was made in the image of God. 'Male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27).

welcome...

There was a bumper sticker that was popular a few years ago – "Feminism is the radical notion that women are people too". If it were only that simple. Today there is no single agreed-upon definition of feminism, more a tangled mass of "feminisms" – first wave, second wave, new wave. Working out what feminism means – and therefore what the movement's political agenda should be – is an international industry currently employing thousands of academics, journalists, politicians, researchers, policy analysts and political activists. They are concerned not only with defining feminism but also exploring how gender intersects with other identities such as race and class to fundamentally alter the experience of women. As Christians, however, our starting point is always our faith – is feminism compatible with Christianity? This is the thorny question that our writers have attempted to grapple with in this issue. And as with everything in this postmodern era, there are no easy answers.

While being open to what feminism has to offer us, we should be wary of uncritically adopting a philosophy without testing it against God's word. This is what we are trying to do in ishah – to encourage Christian women to use their faith to think critically about the issues that confront them. We are trying to make sense of the world and our place in it. We hope you'll take the journey with us.

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- 3.To equip Christian women to be creative, confident and effective in communicating the gospel.
- 4.To give women in a variety of roles and situations the forum to think about contemporary issues from a framework of Biblical theology and to articulate their thinking in a manner that stimulates themselves and others to live lives that are more faithful to God's Word.

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Feminism and the Bible

Is there such a thing as a woman's way of reading? Does a woman's reading of the Bible differ from that of a man? Feminists would argue that there is, and it does; that when the reader is a woman her reading and her response will naturally be 'gynocentric' because that is the world view she has formed since childhood, simply by virtue of sex and socialisation. She may notice aspects of a text which might escape a male reader, will identify with the parts of its contents which resonate with her experience as a woman and will be repelled by anything which appears to demean or discount that experience. When the reader is not only a woman, but a feminist, she reads with the knowledge of its dogma (though what precisely that dogma is varies from one adherent to another). I want to state here some of the principles of feminist reading, to explore what constitutes a feminist reading of the Bible, and to report some of the fruits of feminist readings of the Bible conducted over the last twenty or so years. I would argue that there is much that is encouraging, insightful and refreshing about what is known as 'feminist theology', though with the caveat that in my opinion it does not and cannot replace a more holistic Biblical theology.

Some feminist principles of reading...

The very first and most obvious feminist precept to consider when reading a set of texts as old as the Bible is that they form an unapologetically androcentric (male-focused) document. The Old Testament in particular is born of Jewish society so endemically patriarchal that it considered women to be 'in all things inferior to the man' (Josephus). The model of power vested in men has since then conditioned and shaped western society and its institutions (including, of course, the church). Gerda Lerner, in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), argues that male hegemony has arisen as the result of a kind of fundamental misconception, what she calls an 'androcentric fallacy', and that it is now something that cannot be easily undone. No matter how much we attempt to 'add women' to history, the majority of their lives has been written out and cannot be recovered; think of all the wives, sisters and daughters of the men of the Old Testament about whom we know nothing. Their existence is at best marginal, and at worst invisible. What woman would read the story of Jephthah's daughter — a war heroine in her own way—without shuddering (Judges 1: 29-40 NIV). The story of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11) is another which seems relentless in its exploitation of a woman's gifts of beauty and maternity.

Then, we have to ask whether the women who are mentioned in the Bible by name (especially as members of the early church) surface as the exceptional few or whether they are indicative of the widespread (but assumed, and possibly subordinate) participation of women. The impressively scholarly theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Fiorenza, 1990, 58) points out that the Bible is a stitching together of stories, somewhat like a patchwork quilt. Much of its connecting fabric has been left on the cutting room floor in the interests of a narrative whose aim is not ever to document a history or even to hand out a list of God's credits. That Biblical women are usually peripheral to the narrative has carried over into the Bible's reception, so that exegetes identify women according to relationship rather than as individuals (when I went to one of my Bible dictionaries, for instance, to discover who Apphia was, I found her identified in the entry for her son Archippus, even though she and her husband Philemon are together greeted by Paul).

One precept which follows from this is that the Bible must in some ways be an expression of the culture in which it was written: that it reflects the ordinances of that society, which is itself the result of what it has inherited and adapted. One particularly troublesome linguistic problem which arises is the use of 'men' for both generic and specific purposes. No one, today, would dare write 'God ... wants all men to be saved' (1 Tim. 2:3) when intending to mean either 'only men will be saved' or 'all men and women will be saved', but would be obliged to specify 'men and women' or to find a more suitable generic equivalent. Conundrums such as this abound in the letters of Paul, but there are many who would categorically deny the operation of circumstances on his preaching of the word: Peter Jensen believes that 'when Paul appeals to "tradition" or to the custom of all the churches, he is specifically indicating that his reasons for giving a direction are not to do with social pressure or the exigencies of the moment, but with the nature of God's creation and command'. According to him, the continuity of God's dominion is reflected in 'a church order which...is virtually unanimous over nineteen centuries' (Jensen, 1990, 13-14). This tendency to stand by existing commentaries and to claim the infallibility of the canon is incongruous to secular academia and represents an attitude I hope will come to be seen as unsustainable.

Yet a remark such as this only serves to demonstrate how the past shapes our own perspective and that we each devise a way of perceiving in accordance with our

“No matter how much we attempt to ‘add women’ to history, the majority of their lives has been written out and cannot be recovered; think of all the wives, sisters and daughters of the men of the Old Testament about whom we know nothing.”

individual experience of the world. This brings me to the third feminist precept (which is really an appendix to the second): that the reader as much as the writer is a culturally conditioned being. How tempting it often is to read into a passage what we want to read, rather than what God is saying to us. Surely our own views and experience of church life impinge on our reading of texts such as 1 Tim. 2:11-14 ('A woman should learn in quietness and full submission...')? One Australian male theologian believes that here is 'a consistent concept of a hierarchical relationship between man and woman, based, ultimately

(although not exclusively) in the order of creation' (Woodhouse, 1990, 47). At one extreme this view has fostered a definition of femininity which persists in the church, exemplified (and bolstered) by the public complaints of contemporary theologians who believe that women are not complying with their maternal obligations or enjoying household tasks as they should (Neuer, 1990, 72). Typically, this view is condemned by feminists as captive to androcentric presuppositions and in fact selective about the parts of the Bible it uses as evidence.

... and their application

How, then, does feminist theology apply these precepts? Firstly by honouring the stories of women as records of the lives of distinctive individuals of faith. I have mentioned Bathsheba, who seems to have been treated (from our perspective at least) little better than a sex slave. But Jewish tradition celebrates her as a woman of influence, and Christianity recognises her as an ancestor of Christ. Much more attractive to our notions of female agency is the figure of Miriam. Her presence in Exodus 2 is warranted only because of her relationship to a Great Man and the role she plays in the narrative of his life and deeds. Like the sister of Shakespeare imagined by Virginia Woolf, only her sex seems to preclude her from a more exalted part in the story. Nonetheless she is described by feminists as one of a group of 'transgressive' women who, though nameless, collude in defiance of the rules of race, class and government to preserve Moses' life.

Jochebed (Moses' mother) hid her son, Miriam guarded his cradle of reeds, Pharaoh's daughter acted compassionately and probably heroically to adopt him, Miriam contrived to ensure he continued to be nursed by his mother (who was paid for it), the upshot of their actions being that he was raised as the grandson of an Egyptian ruler. It is a story of how God works through women whose lives are confined to their domestic households and therefore seem inconsequential. What further role did Miriam play in the rescue of the Israelites? While she reappears in the histories of Moses and Aaron, little more is reported of her life and she dies a sudden and unexplained death in Num. 20:1.

Much more attention has been paid to women of the New Testament and to the social circumstances of their lives. Some years ago those writing the histories of ancient women began to connect the stories of women in the church and discover that, in the Roman Empire, religion presented women with opportunities to breach some of the restrictions of class and sex (McNamara, 1987). Within their homes women had considerable authority over family, slaves, unmarried female relatives and labourers. Women such as Apphia (encountered in Philemon 2) and Lydia (Acts 16) founded and led churches in their houses, hosted the daily 'table of the Lord' and gave hospitality to itinerant missionaries such as Paul (Acts 16:15). Wealthy, or at least prominent, women brought their personal benefactions to these churches (Acts 17:4, 12) and were given recognition not available to them in the public domain.

Phoebe (mentioned first in a list of greetings in Romans 16) is another of the women who presided over a house church, in this case at Cenchreae, probably an offshoot of the church in Corinth. Paul entrusted Phoebe with his letter to the Romans, and his terms of recommendation have been subject to intense scrutiny by feminists and non-feminists alike. There has been much squabbling over the translation of the words Paul uses to identify

her—'our sister', diakonos, prostatis—at stake being not merely the capacity of women in general, or the gifts of this one woman, but whether her example serves as a precedent for the role of women in the modern church. Highlighting the stories of the zeal and energy of women in the early church, and as missionaries, has on the one hand served to better identify individuals and their relationships, and yet on the other has been overtaken by our obsession with determining hierarchies, and pinpointing who it is who wields authority (something which of course says more about our capitalist upbringing than exegetical practice).

By describing Phoebe as sister and diakonos, Paul is equating her with Timothy ('brother') and Tychicus (in Col. 4:7 'brother' and 'faithful diakonos'). Paul is using a familiar word and one which it is agreed did not yet mean 'deacon' but rather 'minister' or 'servant': a diakonos was responsible for the ministry of food and drink at the communion table. Both 'minister' and 'servant' have been considered reasonable translations of the Greek, though many are suspicious that the fickle historical imaginations

"It should be no surprise that Jesus' interactions with women provide us with a model of relationship which transcends the very real barriers of sex, class and race, as well as social propriety"

of translators have ensured that women diakonoi are rendered as 'servants', and men as 'ministers'. In the RSV and NIV Phoebe is indeed a 'servant', in the latter with 'deaconess' as an additional

parenthetical hesitation. Yet this option is denounced because of the lack of feminine ending, so the NRSV has reverted to 'deacon'. F.F. Bruce for one argues that the word should be translated as 'minister', a judgement which allows for the possibility that Phoebe would have been called upon to explain the letter she was carrying, and that other non-Biblical sources incorporate preaching and teaching into their understanding of the role of diakonoi. The word prostatis has more of a connotation of leadership, being literally 'president' or 'benefactor', the one who 'stands over' (see 1 Thess. 5:12). But it is usually translated as 'helper' or 'patroness', again a judgement much debated, with some arguing that women had little scope for exercising patronage and others countering that this is precisely what Paul is acknowledging.

Interestingly, the meaning of diakonos and prostatis has been evaluated on a cultural as well as linguistic basis. This is not so much the case for the very thorny issue of the translation of Pauline use of kephale ('head'), which appears in 1 Cor. 11:3 ('the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God') and Ephesians 5:23 ('For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body of which he is the Saviour'). Here we discover a case in which the translation is much more conditioned by the stance of the translator and his lexicographical proficiency. Kephale is used in 75 instances in the New Testament, of which seven are Paul's direct references to Christ. One specialist in ancient Greek gives 27 possible interpretations of the word when used as a metaphor, though its use in this manner (such as in the passages quoted) allows for so much speculation that no one is able to prove their case one way or another. The modern reading of 'head' as 'brain' or 'mind' forgets that the ancient Greeks generally understood the heart to be the most important organ. And to associate it with 'director' or 'boss' is again to apply an anachronism.

There are some who read these verses as exemplifying

the unity of Biblical theology, and thus as part of the Bible's overriding prescriptions of the relationship between men and women—that man is the origin of woman (Genesis 2:23 states that Woman 'was taken out of Man'), and that a husband has, by extension, jurisdiction over his wife as 'subordinate helpmeet'. Elsewhere the same argument about the consistency of Biblical principles prioritises issues of leadership, so that 'all the talk about male "headship" in the sense of authoritative leadership and decision-making has no theological foundation at all and is in fact quite contrary to Christian ideas of leadership which involve not power but service' (Giles, 1986, 47). Leon Morris plumps for the option of 'source', with the proviso that 'all three headships are different. [Whereas] the Father's headship must be understood in some way other than superiority, Christ's headship over man is a relationship of superiority, but over women there is an element of superiority but also the possibility that neither is greater or lesser than the other' (Morris, 1990, 28). Meanwhile feminist exegetes have combed Greek lexicons and analysed the Septuagint translations to attempt to grasp the everyday usage of the word (Mickelson and Mickelson, 1986). They conclude that it may literally refer to the 'top' or 'crown' of the body or, again literally, 'source', in the sense that Christ is the source of life of the church. And yet they argue for a richer (and more appealing) interpretation in which Christ is exalted creator and completer of his church who by virtue of his death and resurrection is crowned with glory. Suffice to say that the tussle has served to banish implications of 'authority' from the translation and to open the doors to an acceptance of Paul's terminology as more vivid and probably more symbolic than has previously been allowed.

So what does the Bible offer feminists?

For all these contested sites in the Bible (and there are more in relation to 'headship' in Ephesians alone), which are those that feminists cherish? It should be no surprise that Jesus' interactions with women provide us with a model of relationship which transcends the very real barriers of sex, class and race, as well as social propriety. Dorothy Sayers, a Christian feminist and herself a noteworthy defier of propriety, wrote that Jesus 'never flattered or coaxed or patronized' women, 'never treated them as either "The women, God help us!" or "The ladies, God bless them"', who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously, who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female' (Sayers, 1946, 121-2). Even Mary Daly, 'post-Christian' author of *The Church and the Second Sex*, is able to revere Jesus' relationship with women. She finds 'no recorded speech of Jesus concerning women "as such" but that 'what is very striking is his behavior toward them.' In the passages describing the relationship of Jesus with various women, one characteristic stands out starkly: they emerge as persons, for they are treated as persons, often in such contrast with prevailing custom as to astonish onlookers' (and John 4:27 is a good example) (Daly, 1968, 79-80). Obviously, for a man (and therefore

a powerbroker) of patriarchal society to acknowledge the dignity of women (or Gentiles, or slaves) was a radical act. One of the most revealing of Jesus' encounters with social prejudice was his clash with the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7: 24-30) which appears to take place in a house in Tyre. He had no inclination to see her, a pagan, a foreigner and a woman—an outsider on three counts. But her wit and persistence succeeds in winning clemency and the healing of her daughter. As some have pointed out, these few verses fall between passages which illustrate Jesus discarding rules of uncleanness which separated Jew and Gentile. Thus injunctions made in the context of public life and religion can be seen to be applied equally within the home, the domain of women.

If there is one verse which encapsulates the revolutionary nature of an ideal Christian society it is Gal. 3:28: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus'. These words reflect Christ's own example and are restated elsewhere in Paul's writings (notably in 1 Cor. 12:13 and Col. 3:9-11). For many women these are life-changing words, and their significance is not dimmed by instructions about church life which call for women to be silent (1 Cor. 14:34) or submissive (1 Tim. 2:11-12 and 1 Pet. 3:1-6). Countless feminist studies (among them Keener, 1992) have deemed these to be specific to the situations of the church in question while Gal. 3:28 has a universal application.

In our post-Enlightenment (and supposedly enlightened) society, in which women expect to achieve equality and dignity but struggle with realities which often seem to fall short of either, the gospel remains as socially radical as when it was written. Feminist theology has done much to spotlight and affirm the lives of women in the Bible and the gifts of women in the early church. But even feminism's secular proponents (Marilyn Lake for instance) recognise that the preoccupation with ensuring there is 'neither male nor female' has obscured in Australian society the full application of the words 'neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free' (Lake, 1999, 270).

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through Christ. This is not to say that feminist theology cannot be seen as an encouraging and even exciting branch of theological scholarship, but that for Christians it is not an alternative gospel to the one which says 'For God so loved the world ...'.

SUE ROBINSON

Sue Robinson is a musicologist and member of St Jude's, Carlton. When she is not amusing her two-year-old she is researching the biography of an Australian woman composer.

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Some of us proudly call ourselves feminists; others of us decisively disassociate ourselves from the term; still others are ambivalent or confused about a term that has been defined and redefined so many times that it seems to have lost any clear meaning. There is no denying, however, that feminism has had a significant influence on our culture and society. In this short but stimulating and provocative book, Kirsten Birkett examines both the philosophical basis of feminism and its impact on society and culture. She concludes that feminism has caused more harm than good – "feminism is a selfish movement, with no sustainable philosophy, a fabricated history, and an incoherent morality. It does not bring freedom and fulfilment for women, and it will not right injustices" (p121). She argues that, as a result of its inherently flawed philosophy, feminism has not only failed to deliver promised freedoms, it has actually wrought changes which have led to "massive suffering for women" (p28). As evidence she points to destructive changes in both work and family life in the last thirty years.

Birkett argues that feminism is "based on a philosophy that says the ultimate goal for any human being is complete and utter freedom from any constraint. This naturally appeals to our innate selfishness. ... [T]he philosophy teaches that the only person who matters is oneself; complete self-determination is the ultimate good" (p99). Feminism's focus on self-centred freedom and fulfilment is in stark contrast to the submission and self-denial commanded of us by the gospel. The biblical view is that we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness (Romans 6: 18-22). True freedom and fulfilment lies in fulfilling our responsibilities – not evading them – and living in obedience to God's good law. Our aim as Christians should be to submit to God and put others' interests before our own (eg 1 Cor. 10:24; Phil. 2:4).

The concise nature of this book makes it an easy read but at times it is frustratingly brief. Birkett criticises flaws and inaccuracies in feminist research and history, but she often fails to provide evidence for her bold and controversial conclusions. It could also be argued that feminism is so multi-faceted and varied that it is impossible to identify conclusively what feminism is about and therefore dismiss it so easily. Has feminism completely failed women? Can feminists have good goals even if the motives and philosophical basis of their actions are incoherent and even immoral (see Phil. 1:15-18)?

Birkett's book models the challenge of critiquing modern ideologies from a Biblical basis. She deliberately leaves aside a study of the differences between feminism and Christianity, but her analysis of the morality and goals of feminism makes it clear that she considers feminism to be fundamentally incompatible with Christianity. Birkett's book helps us think critically about an influential aspect of our culture whose values and assumptions are so often taken for granted. I recommend this book as a provocative analysis of an ideology which seems to run counter to God's values.

FIONA McLEAN

Fiona is married to Gus and is the mother of two young children. She also studies part-time at Ridley College, is involved in the Church Missionary Society, and is on the Editorial Committee of this magazine. She and her family attend St Jude's, Carlton.



Q: what does feminism mean to you?

A: Feminism means to me acknowledging women as intellectual people who are their own person; that women can do and be anything they want. Important part of society. Female kindergarten teacher, age 29.

■ Inequality in favour of women. Female Health Science University student, age 22.

■ Womanly, feminine (not manly). I see man as the head of the family. Grandmother, age 85.

■ It is negative because it's pushed too far. The aim is to get equal or slightly better advantages for women in society and everything. Feminists can be overbearing and lose what they're trying to get at. Male computer programmer, age 30.

■ You can see it has a place because of different injustices in society which also have taken place within the context of the church. I don't think it has to be necessarily contrary to what God says in the Bible. Female librarian, age 30.

■ I think that it is important that women have equal rights to men in the majority of situations. However, I feel that some women take this too far and this sometimes results in the put-down of men. Female teacher, age 25.

■ Feminism means social equality between men and women, however, not to the extent of 'radical feminism', where we take on male characteristics. Female health care professional, age 28.

■ Acknowledging your worth as a woman in God's sight, equal with men in terms of eternity and soul value. No gender in heaven. God has a role for you as important as any other woman or man. I see Jesus as a feminist. Society and the church seem to put women down, Christ was the first person to lift us out. Mother, age 29.

The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines feminism as "the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of equality of the sexes". Not all would agree. One of the problems with attempting to come to grips with feminism is that it defies definition – it means many things to many people. To complicate matters further, it is both an ideology and a political movement, encompassing divergent, even opposing, views. And perhaps that is one of the important legacies of feminism – the right not to have definitions imposed upon us, the right to choose.

Avoiding dictionary definitions, academic qualifications and journalistic clichés, ishah decided to ask fifteen people the question "What does feminism mean to you?" The responses of these men and women from a variety of backgrounds revealed a breadth of thinking and demonstrated yet again the complexity of the issue.

■ Women (there are no male feminists) who strive for equality in society and they strive to have everything that men have and see themselves as equal, if not superior, to men. There are less extreme, 'weaker', forms, which strive for equal pay for equal work and women's rights. The 'strong' form is about power, whereas the 'weaker' form is about rights. Feminism failed. Male computer programmer, age 29.

■ A pendulum swing; as in they've had a reaction to things in the past, which is in some ways good, in other ways not. Female administrator, age 20s.

■ I understand feminism to be a fairly complicated, hard-to-pin-down term. Personally, there are a lot of ways I've benefited from the movement and I've enjoyed privileges as a result (eg. being university-educated). Often my thinking is unconsciously determined by feminism. Female in student ministry, age 20s

■ Probably the first things that spring to mind are Germaine Greer, no bras, troubled women ... and, at the same time, some genuine feelings of the female sex being sinned against by the male sex. A big melting pot of sorrow and misunderstanding - but feminism HAS revealed some genuinely terrible things that needed to be identified. Female in children's ministry, age 43.

■ I find feminism is basically women crying out because of what has happened to them, oppression; but sometimes they've gone overboard, trying to take the role of men. Female Theology student, age 30s

■ Feminism is a struggle against the vestiges of repressed patriarchy, which is carried over from Middle Eastern culture in our Judeo-Christian heritage. Male minister, age 50s.

■ I value much of what's been done by feminism: allowing women to develop their gifts, challenging the violence, emotional and physical. I don't like uncritical feminism that says women are superior, or always victims, or can do whatever they like. Female theologian, age 50s.

■ Feminism advocates change for women. It has had an impact on my opportunities in education, work, ministry and motherhood. But it remains a white, middle class ideology. How does it benefit the illiterate third world woman struggling to feed her family, risking death in childbirth?" Mother, age 30s.

JO CRABBE collated the interviews for this story. Jo is a nursery assistant and attends both Bundoora Presbyterian Church and St Jude's, Carlton.

book review > wifework

Maushart, S. (2001). *Wifework: What marriage really means for women*. The Text Publishing Company: Melbourne, VIC.

Susan Maushart's latest book should come with a warning label: 'Wifework' contains explicit ideas that may disturb some readers'.

'Wifework' refers to the care and maintenance of men's bodies, minds and egos for which there is no reciprocal husband work (p.9). Maushart argues that wifework ensures that men protect and provide for their wives and children. It is this instinctual desire for survival of the species that continues to lead many women into marriage and parenthood. However, Maushart believes that wifework is the reason why marriages in our western society are failing and why women in particular are feeling so dissatisfied.

Women experience inequality in domestic labour and child nurturing. They are exhausted by the emotional and physical maintenance required in their marriage and as a result of this work they are unhappy. Maushart argues that feminism has changed women's expectations of relationships, work and reproduction. Women are no longer as dependent on men financially and are in a position not only to consider if their marriage, and their wifework, really is making their life better but also to leave the marriage if they find it to be wanting.

Maushart advocates change but offers no real solution to the problems of wifework. She questions why women collude with maintaining the status quo even though marriage is so unsatisfactory for them. As she develops her theme of the destructive nature of wifework, several contradictions emerge in her argument. Her research is often deficient and she draws heavily upon anecdotes and her own two marriages and subsequent divorces. Paradoxically, Maushart urges readers to find ways to make marriage

work, particularly imperative for marriages involving children. She believes in an ideal of perfection (p.206), that justice in marriage should be achievable and yet somewhat defeated, she concludes, Marriage entails a sort of base level of unhappiness that couples need to learn to anticipate and accept. (p.234).

In contrast, the Bible offers a reason for the dissatisfaction felt by so many women in their marriage. One of the results of the Fall is that marriage relationships are not as God intended them to be (Genesis 3) but rather, flawed and far from the ideal. And yet, the creation story also describes the union between a man and a woman as one flesh (Genesis 2:24) which implies closeness like no other human relationship.

Husbandwork, which Maushart claims does not exist, is mentioned in the Bible. Husbands are exhorted to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25) and to love their wives as their own body (Ephesians 5:28). They are to dwell with their wives with understanding, recognising they are heirs together of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7). Even Old Testament patriarchal teaching reminds husbands that their wives are companions, bound to them by a covenant and made one with them by God's Spirit (Malachi 2:14-15). These teachings embody the justice, equality and emotional support Maushart sees as lacking in so many marriages.

Maushart concludes that marriage is undoubtedly the best environment for children, but does it benefit women? The destructive nature of wifework, as outlined in this book, contends that women are disadvantaged. The challenge for Christians is to live in whole and healthy relationships, whether married or single, with women and men working together.

CAROLYN WALLACE

Carolyn Wallace has been doing wifework for eleven years. She attends St Jude's Anglican Church, Carlton and works as the coordinator of a community centre. She has a four-year-old son and a two-year-old daughter.

STARTING POINT

Despite the number of times the horrifying sight of the plane slamming into the World Trade Centre building has been replayed on our screens, it is still difficult to comprehend the events of September 11, 2001. While *Starting Point* is intended to be a short, provocative analysis of a current issue, it did not seem appropriate given the horror we have witnessed and its terrible aftermath. Instead we asked an American now living in Australia, Catherine de Fontenay, to jot down her personal response to the attacks.

My reaction to the terrorist attacks was overwhelmingly emotional. I was in tears for most of September 12th, and incapable of functioning. In the weeks that followed, I burst into tears almost every time that the attacks were mentioned, and fell into a deeper depression than I had experienced for some time. I felt grief for the victims' families, and grief for what the attacks would mean for the Middle East. My primary emotion was one of pain for the people who had died. It was terrible to think of them facing death so unprepared. While I didn't know any of them, they were all just like people I do know.

Because so many Americans were experiencing similar emotions, and because the attack was aimed at America, I also felt vulnerable to patriotic emotions. I saw David Letterman and New York Mayor Giuliani (two of the most hard-boiled characters I know) burst into tears while mentioning a verse of *America the Beautiful* - "that sees beyond the years, thine alabaster cities gleam, undimmed by human tears". While in my head I know that God's new Jerusalem is NOT New York City, in my heart I long for such peace and joy for all the world. I pray that those emotions will help me wait patiently for the new Jerusalem.

CATHERINE de FONTENAY

Catherine de Fontenay teaches economics at the Melbourne Business School.