

Empowerment of Korean women from a postmodern Practical Theological perspective¹

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to discuss the situation of Korean women from political, social, cultural and religious perspectives in a postmodern context. Postmodernity implies a denial of the “absolute”, including “absolute power” of men over women. Heideggerian thinking rejects the modernistic privileged status of the Cartesian subject. In this article postmodern anti-foundational, anti-totalizing, and demystifying categories are used to critique patriarchy in Korean society and literature in order to analyze social movements and cultural-religious values in Korea. It discusses a representation of sexual difference and values by means of feminist literary criticism. The article consists of a reflection on the relationship between theory and praxis in feminist Practical Theology, Korean women’s experience, the epistemology of post-modernity, and the empowerment of Korean women.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE THEORY BEHIND PRACTICE

Practical Theology has developed practical and theological theories and scientific methods with which to study the faith community, its context, and praxis. From a postmodern perspective, it seeks a better understanding of the worldly realities that make up human lives. Behind every explanation of praxis lie theories. A common pitfall could be to focus only on practical issues as though theory plays no role in description, reasoning and explanation. When theory is taken seriously

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data are explained in terms of a specific model. In other words, models function to describe and explain praxis theoretically. In Practical Theology, theoretical reflection includes the religious dimension (Burkhart 1983:42-60; see Ballard 1992). Gerben Heitink (1999:102-103) states that Practical Theology is “a theological branch of learning with a theory of action.” On a high level of abstraction Heitink distinguishes three possible theoretical approaches in Practical Theology: a hermeneutical theory, an empirical theory, and a strategic theory. This distinction arises from the nature of what is studied by Practical Theology. Human beings, within or outside of the faith community, communicate (hermeneutical) within a specific context (empirical dimension) which leads to changes in a specific context (strategy). These dimensions of being human result in a variety of experiences.

Practical Theologians recognize and analyze such experiences. To analyze an experience means to incorporate the various facets of the experience into human cognition. According to Ogletree (1983:85) “the possibility of objectifying a given experience is a phenomenon of self-consciousness, our power not only to relate to our world consciously, but also to do so with a consciousness of the manner of relating itself.” Epistemology involves knowing, doing, and being – in other words, the way of knowing which ensues from both the objectification of experience and the existence of someone who experiences the activity of such an objectification. The epistemological dimension of Practical Theology with an emancipatory purpose is a matter of interrelating communication in a specific context which leads to transformation – a matter of a dialectic between theories of hermeneutics, experience and strategy. From this perspective, Practical Theology aims to understand the dialectic between the theoretical and the practical – that is, according to Heyns & Pieterse (1990:31), the dialectic between the “objective” and the “subjective”; the dialectic between data and their value.

The strategic dimension of postmodern Practical Theology is both constructive and critical. From an emancipatory perspective the constructive aspect is concerned with interpreting religious metaphors in such a way that people are liberated to live in an authentic relationship with God. Aspects such as “self”, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age can be the cause of a lack of authenticity. The critical dimension is about transformation. The practical purposes of social action are both critical and constructive. It pertains to the ethical dimension of Practical Theology. Seen from the ethical dimension in

Practical Theology, since the whole realm of an emancipatory theological discourse is subject to criticism based on praxis, the traditions of the Christian believing community are criticized. This article focuses on the context and experiences of Korean women from such a postmodern Practical Theological perspective.

The aim of the article is to discuss the context of Korean women from political, social, cultural and religious perspectives from a postmodern frame of reference. Postmodernity implies a denial of the “absolute”, including “absolute power” of men over women. Heidegger (1977:128), whose philosophy preempted postmodern thinking (see Hekman 1990:65), rejected what he identified as the male-centeredness of the modern world. According to him, human beings are always historically rooted and the product of a particular manifestation of Being (Existence). Heideggerian thinking rejects the modernistic privileged status of the Cartesian subject. In this article postmodern antifoundational, antitotalizing, and demystifying categories (see Adam 1995:5) will be used to critique patriarchy in Korean society and literature in order to analyze social movements and cultural-religious values in Korea. It discusses a representation of sexual difference and values by means of feminist literary criticism. Virginia Woolf (1966:204) calls it “the difference of view; the difference of standard”.

2. KOREAN WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE

In Practical Theology human experience is the starting point of a cycle of interpretation of the world, society and even the Bible. The fact that women are biologically different from men is not a completely irrelevant factor. Women, through their bodies, have some distinctive experiences of the world that men do not have. For example, men have never experienced the pain and joy of childbirth. Rosemary Radford Ruether (1985a:113; cf also 1996) finds “women’s experiences such as these a paradigm of divine-human relationships.” According to Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jürgen Moltmann (1991:ix) the “difference between the sexes is governed not so much by the differences between their bodies, as by the different social relationships and insights that result from them, although sometimes, these are conditioned by the body.”

Difference should not be reduced to biological categories or to eternal modes of being (ontological categories), but it includes historical experiences. The historical experiences of women can be studied by means of the analyses of social psychologists as well personal statements of women. With regard to

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Korean women their experiences have changed throughout the various eras. However, rapid change has occurred in the last hundred years. It has affected all of Korean life, for instance Korean customs, lifestyle, thinking, manners, political structures, economic systems, educational methods, international relationships. In this article Korean history will be briefly discussed from the broad perspectives of the premodern, modern, and postmodern eras.

In the premodern era Korea was patriarchal. Korean patriarchy was institutionalized by the “kingship system” which was the politico-legal institution recognized by the Lee dynasty (1394-1910). It was supported spiritually by Confucianism. This authoritative power of kingship ruled the country politically, socially, and culturally. Every policy was underwritten by the king. No one dared to resist that power. “Patriarchy” literally means “rule of the father”. Patriarchy is the sanctuary of male authority over female and younger people. For five hundred years, male dominated societies accepted patriarchy as a “natural order”: women should serve men, and children should serve their parents. The reason for this was that women and children were considered to be the “weaker minds” who should serve the stronger. Subordination was linked with inferiority. The authority of men with regard to women was based on superiority. Patriarchy created order and controlled the economy and politics in society.

In the premodern era, Korean women were invisible, voiceless, nameless, marginalized, considered to be of less value and therefore treated as secondary. Women were not allowed to work in public places. They dedicated themselves to their families as loving wives, respected mothers and hard workers. Women had no rights in the family or in society. They were not allowed to speak or be heard either in society or in the family. Women did not have the right to express their feelings. When a baby girl was born, the parents were disappointed, because men were needed for agricultural labour. After marriage, women lost their names: they were either called somebody’s wife, somebody’s mother or somebody’s family member. Nobody remembered women’s names. Even women themselves did not want to be called by their official names; women were nameless. In the premodern era women were not allowed to study at any public educational institutions. They were required to learn only housework. In the spheres of politics, economy, culture and even religion they were marginalized. Women were victims, whereas men were given priority in all cases. Women accepted that they were to be quiet, obedient wives to their husbands after marriage. They strove to be a good assistant, cook, cleaner and a hard worker in the home.

Christianity came to Korea in 1884. At first women were shocked by the teachings of this new faith, but very soon became aware of their miserable situation in society on account of their cultural customs (see O O Jung Lee & Hyun Suk Lee 1989:15-19, 31). Christianity spread rapidly among the peasant classes. The first Korean churches were built in the shape of a “V” in order to respect and conform to cultural customs. One line of the “V” was for women and the other line for men. Or, alternatively, in a conventional rectangular building, a curtain was hung between section for the men and that of the women, in order to prevent men and women from sitting and talking together. People of different classes could not sit together either. Gradually, however, Christianity broke the barriers of social classes and changed the dominant thinking. Christianity was the “Good News of liberation” for the poor, slaves and women.

The modern era was for Korean women the time when they could start working and be educated. Their self-awareness developed and they learned to express their opinions individually or as a group in society. Generally speaking, the modern era was closely connected to the development of capitalism. The Korean dynasty changed to capitalism. This was not done by choice, but because diplomatic relations with powerful countries were forced on Korea by Japan during the end of the 19th century. At this time Korea became a Japanese colony. Colonization created specific circumstances for Korean women, for example that many women were forced to become prostitutes for the Japanese army. However, despite Japanese colonization, life changed for the better for Korean women as the left behind the premodern and entered the modern era.

During the Japanese colonization (1910-1945), many Korean women were forced to serve the Japanese armies in World War II as “comfort women”. The Japanese took two hundred thousand such “comfort women” to the battlefield. Some fifty to seventy thousand of them became prostitutes for Japanese soldiers (Hyun Suk Lee 1992:388-389). They were between sixteen and thirty two years old (Hyun Suk Lee 1992:388; cf Sang Yim Ahn 1992:345-353). This was nothing short of forced prostitution. The Korean government found this shameful and immoral and covered up the facts until 1992. The Japanese killed many of the comfort women when the Japanese lost World War II. Some women remained in Japan. A small number returned to Korea, but they were not welcome since they were deemed sinners and shameful persons. This means that these Korean women were both exploited by Japanese colonization and rejected by their own government and people.

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Following the education of women and the opening of the country to the outside world, the situation of Korean women began to improve. Educated Korean women engaged in the arts, teaching, and religious work, as well as the enlightenment of other women. The awakening of women included a new national consciousness and patriotism and strong feelings against Japanese occupation. Women took part in the independence movement with no less vigour, determination and courage than men did. A movement of women's liberation calling for more rights for women also began to emerge. Women began to evaluate what they themselves regarded as their responsibilities toward their society, class, and country. They began articulating their own understanding of the position and problems of women and how they could work together to solve their problems in a positive way. A number of educated elite women gained status in the eyes of ordinary Korean women. Those elite women challenged traditional views on, for instance, marriage, female education and female participation in the society. They were, however, not accepted by traditional society. Most of them did not marry because men did not want educated brides. Men were worried that they would not be able to control an educated woman. They feared that such women would want to control their husbands and would not respect them. Another reason for the elite women not getting married was that they passed the traditional young "marrying age" while they were studying. They themselves furthermore rejected traditional marriage because they did not cherish the thought of "being slaves".

The elite women brought the problems of women to the attention and were critical about Korean society. They indicated a new direction for the improvement of women's lives. In the modern era the majority of the Korean women were, however, still poor farmers and workers. The educated women began to speak and act for them and they began to realize that they too had personal and national rights as did women in other countries. However, this movement did not address the classic problems of women in Korea and there was little or no improvement in the social or official position of women.

With the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, women attained constitutional rights to equal education and job opportunities and to participate in public life. A growing number of parents came to believe that their daughters needed to be educated in various fields, since the contribution of the female population was also needed for the industrialization of the country. During the modern era both Korean men and women focused on the task of developing

industry. They had to start from scratch because everything had been destroyed in the Korean Civil War (1950-1953). During the modern era the Korean government built many factories. Women went to work in order to contribute to the economic and industrial growth of the country. Young women who were first employed in factories were happy to earn some money. Despite their service to the Korean industry and economy, they were discriminated against in terms of low wages, a poor working environment, long working hours and were treated as inferior to the male workers. The importance of women's labour was now recognized and for the first time women could rise from obscurity and show their value. However, women's voices were still weak. They still mostly endured their bad conditions just as they had endured the traditional structures of the premodern era.

It is difficult to pinpoint the beginning of the postmodern era since the modern and postmodern eras are closely linked. Postmodern thinking was introduced in Korea by American literature and literary theories (Ai Young Kim 1995:227). Koreans did not study and discuss postmodernity much, but were influenced by postmodern trends. Though Korean society had not spent much time in the modern era, its life-style does not differ much from that of North America or other western countries. In keeping with this, there is evidence of postmodern trends in Korea. It means that Korean society has been affected by the postmodern popularization of western capitalism, whose motto is "pursuit of profits" and "convenience" (Ai Young Kim 1995:227). Therefore postmodernity connects with the economical issues. Taking over Western ideas a postmodern consciousness in Korea started with the disillusionment of a dull labour market. Korea accepted postmodernity as a social stream with the collapse of the international socialism.

Present-day theologies, which are spreading in the world, seem to establish an American way of life in Korea. The American economic system and politics are intertwined with the politics and economies of the world. It can be seen as the late monopolistic capitalism. These factors do not make much allowance for pluralism in the world, with the possible exception of cultural plurality. Even though people speak positively of a variety of lives, various rhythms, theories, sounds, colours and opinions, reality does not reflect this positive view. The world can succumb to a kind of fascism, dictated by the American politics and economical system.

Knowledge of the world has changed in the past decades. Korea is not yet completely free from the ideologies of the Cold War, because the two parts of Korea still exist. Korea needs to consider postmodernity: who and what is considered to be postmodern; what the advantages and disadvantages of postmodernity are in Korea.

It is important for women to share equal discipleship in church and society, and to be witnesses of the true liberation of the oppressed. Women should achieve human liberty, equality, and full citizenship in contemporary democratic societies. Women should participate, for their freedom, in the feminist discourse of postmodernity. Women should no longer feel inferior, but rather, realize what the sexual and moral differences between men and women in the new society are. Furthermore, male or female Christians want to understand human beings as a whole. The “whole gospel for the whole world” should be seen through both female and male eyes, be understood with both male and female hearts, and be witnessed to by a new community of both women and men. Moltmann-Wendel (& Jürgen Moltmann) (1992:40) says, “for too long we have heard only half the gospel, with the male half of humankind. It is important today to understand it completely in the fullness of the female and male creation of humankind and with the fullness of Spirit.”

3. POSTMODERNITY

Cornel West (1985, 1989; see Lyotard 1984, 1993; Jameson 1991; Habermas 1981; cf Rossouw 1995:71-95) explains that postmodernity is understood in three characteristic ways, which can be described as “antifoundational, antitotalizing, and demystifying”. Postmodernity is antifoundational in that it resolutely refuses to posit any one premise as the privileged and the unassailable starting point for establishing claims to the truth. Antifoundationalism refers to the relativity of all truth claims. Postmodernity is also antitotalizing because the postmodern discourse suspects that any theory that claims to account for everything, is suppressing counter examples, or is applying warped criteria so that it can exclude recalcitrant cases (Adam 1995:5). “Antitotalizing” protects against the danger of systems. Lastly, postmodernity is also demystifying. Modernism tends to claim that certain assumptions are “natural”, but postmodern thinking shows that these are, in fact, ideological projections (Adam 1995:5). Demystification protects against the danger of theologizing ideologies as false consciousness, (the concept of Karl Marx [1988:110-117]), while personal and group interests of

a sociological nature are in fact the generating power behind these ideologies or ideological projections.

Postmodernity understands itself over against “modernity”. Some of the distinctions between modernity and postmodernity are the following (Hekman 1990:1;cf Ai Young Kim 1995:226):

	Modernity	Postmodernity
Criticism	absolute	relative
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • universal, unified, total • rests on a mystified account of intellectual discourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local, particular • rests on various forces
Implications	political and personal struggles	individual, various implications
Characteristic	the appeal of a naturalized, universalized conception of reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • antifoundational • antitotalizing • demystifying
Readers	the putative totalities are privileged the text or the reader as the focus of interpretive power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • readers encounter several different versions of the text • unauthorized interpretation
Approach to interpretation	the text itself	emphasis on the reader's experience
Dream	unified system of all purely relational knowledge	illusionary
Presupposition	specific attributes to their intellectual tradition	nothing is pure, nothing is absolute, and nothing is total, unified or individual
Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reliance on science and scientific method • transcendental authority of reason 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demystification with science and reason • various interpretations • various starting points
Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • valuable for interpretation as a historical record of the past • mystified past 	readers can interpret texts various ways from their experience or from their own perspectives

Research shows that the effect of postmodernity on hermeneutics has accepted various ideologies. For example, the Zion narrative, which is an affirmation of the centralization of the temple in Jerusalem, supports the neglect of God's

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righteousness towards widows, orphans, foreigners and the poor. The Jesus story also opposes the temple ideology.

Another function of a postmodern approach is on the field of textual studies. Modern critics tended to have emphasized the reader's direct engagement with the text and the autonomy of the text itself. However, according to Adam (1995:18-19), "postmodern critics recognize much more complexity in the interaction of the text and the reader." Postmodern perspectives break down the putative totalities of the text and the reader, hence readers encounter several different versions of the text. It is exactly this contribution of postmodernity that enhances the possibility to "read between the lines" in order to speak from the voiceless. Postmodern interpretations are unauthorized. There is neither a unified, nor a totalized reader, nor a unified or an autonomous text, so there are no authorized authors. Adam (1995:18) expresses, "the author" is recognized as an unsuitable foundation for criticism as "the text" of "the reader." Postmodern interpreters may work freely without knowing the original intentions of the author. This position represents a more "radical" postmodern reading. A more "moderate" position would be to balance authorial intention with readers' expectation. "Radical" postmodern reading focuses only on the present day reader. The more "moderate" method though, takes author, text, and reader all into consideration. It also considers the difference between the intended reader and the present actual reader.

The following comparative chart highlights some differences between modernism and postmodernity:

Modernism	Postmodernity
Political critics pay attention to modern interpretive discourses' foundational or totalizing claims.	Postmodern ideological critics pay attention to the ideological function.
Interpreters conceal an ideological aim.	There is no universal discourse of truth that can distinguish between a true interpretation and an ideological interpretation.
The nature of the historical argument rules out "advocacy" in interpretations.	Critics act in a particular local set of truth.

Postmodern critics would explore the psychoanalytical significance of any biblical text. The biblical texts are understood as the record of a theological consciousness, or as writers' expressions of God. Postmodern interpreters use midrashic amplification or allegorization freely to make sense of the texts.

Fredric Jameson (1981:31; cf Adam 1995:65-67) distinguishes four dimensions of significance of the biblical text:

Four Dimensions	Examples
The literal sense means the plain, grammatical, historical significance of a passage.	Literal reference: Jerusalem
The allegorical sense indicates the correspondence between the circumstances and other biblical narratives.	Allegorical significance: the Christian church or the city of God's people
The topological sense communicates the value for moral instruction.	The topological sense: the believer's soul or the dwelling place of the faithful
The anagogical sense connects the passage with the anticipated circumstances of heaven and of the times at the end of the age.	Anagogical (political reading) significance: the heavenly city promised in the apocalyptic visions

Postmodern critics engage the imagination, which is more in the mode of rabbinic midrash than that of theoretical faculties. Some postmodern interpreters have been impressed with the freedom that midrash seems to hold for interpretation (Adam 1995:65-67). Midrash and allegory permit interpreters to say what they imagine. But interpreters cannot make the Bible mean whatever they want it to mean, unless there are audiences which find those interpretations convincing. So postmodern interpreters may seek out different audiences in a variety of conditions, who understand their readings. Biblical critics of postmodernity engage the reader and the Bible, not on the terms set by a privileged institution (the academy, the synagogue, the church, or the state), but on the terms which interest particular readers and their audiences (Adam 1995:67). Thus, postmodern biblical criticism also opts for various gestures and means of expression such as games, drama, music, video, dance, writing, poetry and so on. Postmodern biblical criticism is bound up with political concerns as well as theoretical arguments about the nature of "criteria" and "disciplines" (Adam

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1995:75). In postmodern hermeneutics interpreters resist totalities, but use political criticism and deconstruction as sources for their interpretation. Postmodern ideological critics point out that the approach of dominant social groups to the Bible produces and reproduces oppressive social relations. They show how to counter-read and to compete with the prevalent interpretations. This counter-reading is not a dominant approach, but one of the alternative approaches to interpretation (Adam 1995:70). These approaches reflect the local truth for which the ideological critics stand.

In a postmodern ideological criticism, the Old and the New Testament are observed to express an internal contradiction with regard to the basis of the human relation with God. How people can rectify their relationship with God, is neither inconsequential nor ideologically innocent. An example is the sacrificial system that reproduces a hierarchical, social economy which pushed women to the margins in several ways:

- Women were not allowed to be priests in a sacrificial economy but were seen as potential sources of defilement (many women were treated as witches in the Middle Ages).
- Women could not offer sacrifices but needed a reconciler on her behalf, that is, her father or husband. The only woman described in the Bible as coming close to “offering sacrifice” is Hannah (1 Sm 1-2). Her husband, Elkanah, allotted Hannah a double share. Hannah did not bring the offering (or sacrifice) alone.
- The Bible shows that women themselves were value-laden assets (women disciples of Jesus: Mk 15:40-41; 15:47; 16:1), so women were sacrificed (see Schüssler Fiorenza 2000).

Any alternative to the sacrificial economy must address not only the theological model which enacts an exchange between men and God, but also the oppressive gender relations that exchange enforces, and the contemporary political and theological situations that make the sacrificial economy seem more or less “natural” (Adam 1995:55).

Another example is found in the jubiliary theology. Israel's obligation to care for an economy was based not only on exchange, but also on sharing. "Righteousness" is to "care for the needy". But the biblical jubiliary texts themselves are not ideologically innocent. The biblical texts do not envision women's participation in cultic leadership and the tendency to oppress women is much stronger than is the case in the sacrificial economy.

4. POSTMODERN FEMINIST THEOLOGY

Feminist theology has come out of Christian feminist praxis (Ruether 1985b, 1998; Graham 1990:2-9; 1996; Graham & Halsey 1993). Elaine Graham (1998:129; cf Heater Walton 2000:196-201) explains that "feminist Practical Theology emerges from the encounter between faith and practice in the form of the values embodied and enacted in the diversities of pastoral responses to women's changing needs and perspectives". It has been crucial to counter the invisibility of women. Women's experiences of motherhood, work, growing older, caring and inequality were not mentioned and were not recognized in the Christian ministry (see Graham 1998:130-131; Graham & Halsey 1993:180-191; cf Gray 1988; Ruether 1985b; Neuger 2001; Willows & Lynch 1998:181-187; St Hilda Community 1991). Therefore, women criticized androcentric traditions and brought a feminist perspective to Practical Theology. To criticize is necessarily followed by the task of "reconstruction".

The characteristics of feminist theology are feminist criticism and feminist theology as "liberation theology". The first and probably most familiar aspect of feminist criticism is the ideological criticism of the Bible. At first the historical-critical method which dominated for nearly a century was used, but its limitations and inherent prejudices are now widely recognized. Current biblical studies demonstrate a diversity of methods: literary criticism, structuralism, social and sociological interpretation, as well as the various forms of spiritual and psychological interpretation. The varieties of feminist studies challenge traditional patriarchy, traditional exegesis, and dominant ideologies. All hermeneutics are dependent on interpreters, premises of historians, intelligent concepts, politics and prejudice. Therefore from these premises, feminist theologians criticize tradition and traditional theology which is per definition male centered.

The other characteristic, namely feminist theology as liberation theology, is concerned with classism, racism, and pursues liberation to achieve freedom from various discriminating actions and dignity for all human beings. In other words, feminist theology is understood as an instrument to realize God's will of liberation for the whole human race. Letty Russell (1985:11-18) understands God as a liberator. She emphasizes various aspects of liberation namely the political, social, economical, psychological and religious dimension which are not separate from one another. Schüssler Fiorenza (1981:106) disagrees with Russell in that the different kinds of oppression cannot be generalized in one category. The oppressive experiences of women are obviously different in different cultures, religions, and backgrounds. Moreover, it is difficult for the oppressed to have concrete direction and a strategy. In spite of different opinions amongst theologians, they do agree that feminist theology is basically a liberation theology. Women's full humanity is the goal of feminist biblical hermeneutics in Ruether's (1985b:11-18) view.

Feminist theology is not just talking or thinking about God. It involves action which is informed by reflection on situations and conditions as seen from a theological perspective. Like liberation theology, feminist theology is intended to be put into practice. Feminist theology is called "doing theology" (see Russell 1985:115). Action is concurrent with reflection or analysis. New questions emerge from the action. For example, feminist theologians meet three women who survive by prostitution in the Philippines (Viginia Fabella, Peter K H Lee, & Kwang-Sun Suh 1992:1-10). The theologians instead of condemning these women for their immorality would seek to understand and expose the conditions that force women into prostitution. They would expose the dehumanizing aspects and the evil and sin of patriarchal capitalism including the hypocrisy of the church. In the case of these three prostitutes, feminist theologians revealed the oppression through international sex-tourism that encourages such evils as prostitution.

The purpose of doing theology in feminist theology is to discover a new way of action which brings changes to society, and to seek ways of expressing women's faith and confidence in God (cf Hampton 1990:48-150; Chung 1990:100; Graham & Halsey 1988:129-152; Ackermann & Bons-Storm 1998:75-102). This Practical Theology brings action and reflection together. Therefore, Elizabeth Tapia (1989:171) rather calls this theology "God-praxis". Theology is

not only a theoretical exercise. It is a commitment and participation in people's struggle for full humanity, and discernment of God's redemptive action in history. It is theology – *in action*.

Feminist criticism is a part of postmodern criticism (Anderson 1992:103-134). Feminist criticism has flourished in combination with every other critical approach from formalism to semiotics (see Anderson & Moore 1992:103-134; Strobel 1991; Showalter 1986:5-6). The most well known ideological criticism of the Bible is feminist criticism. Feminist theologians such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton ([1995] 1998; see Tribble 1984) have produced a wide variety of ideological-critical readings, among others by using horrifying stories about women in the Bible. Other feminist scholars criticize the androcentric and patriarchal ideology (see Gray 1982; Daly 1975, 1984; Ruether 1982). These scholars point out that men's lives are important and take priority but women have only secondary status in the Bible. Moreover, the problem is that the interpretive methods of modern historians are connected with patriarchal androcentrism. Cheri Register (1975:2) distinguishes three subdivisions in feminist criticism, each with its own target:

- The analysis of the "image of women" as it appears in works by male authors.
- The examination of existing criticism of female authors.
- Prescriptive criticism attempts to set a standard for literature in order to guide authors who are writing literary works from a new feminist perspective.

In its earliest years, "feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic and popular male literature, and the exclusion of women from literary history" (Showalter 1986:5-6). Feminist criticism focused on the connections between the literary and the social mistreatment of women, for example, pornography or rape. But over the past fifteen years, these efforts to make readers question the innocence, insignificance, or humor of antifeminist characterizations have succeeded in changing the atmosphere of the literary response. Sandra M Gilbert (1988:xiii) says that "assumptions about the sexes are entangled with some of the most fundamental assumptions western culture makes about the very nature of culture that is male dominant." Even literary genres were deeply influenced by

psychosocial notions about gender. Gilbert (1988:33) found that, “though the pressures and oppressions of gender may be as invisible as air, women are also as inescapable as air and, like the weight of air, they imperceptibly shaped the forms and motions of our lives”. The focus on women’s writing as a specific field of inquiry led to a massive recovery and rereading of literature by women’s specific perspectives.

Women of different backgrounds, have their own internal differences. Whereas Anglo-American feminist criticism tries to recover women’s historical experiences as readers and writers, French feminist theory studies the ways in which the “feminine” has been defined, represented, or repressed in the symbolic systems of language, metaphysics, psychoanalysis, and art.² Radical French feminist theorists also believe that the feminine is connected to the rhythms of the female body and to sexual pleasure, and that women have an advantage in producing this radicality in disruptive and subversive kind of writing (see Showalter 1986:9). They urge the woman writer to ally herself with everything in the culture which is muted or silenced, in order to destroy the existing systems that repress feminine difference. Mary Jacobus (1986:64) thinks feminist criticism has this underlying political assumption at its starting point, because women confront the basic theory of the language of dominance and literary tradition or culture that is manifested in writing by and about women. Luce Irigaray (1985:68-85) suggests that women should question all systems and all forms whether they are overtly oppressive or not. She criticizes not only reading and writing, but also gestures or manners which are beyond cultural boundaries. Schüssler Fiorenza (1985:126) expresses the opinion that “feminist consciousness radically throws into question all traditional religious names, texts, rituals, law, and interpretive metaphors because women all bear ‘our Father’s names’.” Carol Christ (1979:273-287) insists that “the central spiritual and religious feminist quest is the quest for women’s self-determination.” Feminist criticism started from a resistance against patriarchal ideologies, society, and religions. A critical analysis of patriarchy allows women to conceptualize the interaction of sexism, racism, classism, and militarist colonialism. Through feminist criticism, women explore all

² For Anglo-American feminist and their works, see e g, Bell Hooks (1989), Donna Haraway (1989:579), Cora Kaplan (1987:194), Joan Scott (1988). French feminist and their works are inter alia Rosemarie Tong (1989), Toril Moi (1986), Helene Cixous & Catherine Clement (1986), Claire Duchon (1986).

kinds of hidden connections between literature and sexuality, genre and gender, sexual identity and cultural authority, political issues and women, psychological feeling and historical facts. Riet Bons-Storm (1988:9-26) refers to this as women doing “feminist Practical Theology”.

5. EMPOWERMENT OF KOREAN WOMEN

Korean women had experienced various events through the Korean history. They have been educated to endure silently. Korean women, especially Christian women, become increasingly aware of the reality of Korean women, and wish to be liberated from oppression in Korean society and in the churches. Feminist theology, which gives a glimpse of postmodernity, challenges Korean Christian women to criticize and analyze Korean politics, economy, socio-cultural situations, and religious phenomena. Gustavo Gutierrez (1983:39) says, “a critical feminist theology of liberation does not simply seek to analyze and explain the socio-religious structure of domination that marginalize and exploit women and other non-persons.” Instead, it aims to entirely transform the structures of alienation, exploitation, and exclusion. Its goal is to change the theoretical and theological religious knowledge, and the sociopolitical systems of domination and subordination. Such a feminist theology understands itself as a critical theology of liberation because its critical analysis and its intellectual practice for the production of religious knowledge aims to support struggles for women’s liberation globally.

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