



Reviewed by Nadia Andrienas

Ursula King's reader, *Feminist Theology from the Third World* brings together the diverse perspectives of women engaging in feminist theology, giving recognition and honor to the often absent or underrepresented voices of women of the Third World and women of color in the United States. The title highlights the book's two controversial and misunderstood topics—the Third World and feminist theology. King dives right in with her introduction, setting the tone and context for the collection of writings which revolve around both concepts. She defines the "Third World" as referencing not only geographic location, but also marginalized communities, encompassing women of color in wealthy nations as well as the commonly identified geographic locations of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Feminist theology is defined by King for the purposes of the book as an ecumenical endeavor of "the experience and reflection of Christian women from the Third World" (4). She also presents a brief history of feminist theology, highlighting the creation of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in Tanzania in 1976 and the Women's Commission of EATWOT, founded at a conference in Geneva in 1983. Much of the work presented in the book is a product of the conferences and participants in the Women's Commission of EATWOT, spanning multiple continents throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The book is divided into five parts beginning with "Doing Theology from Third World Women's Perspective." Each of the eight chapters in part one presents a distinct identity of feminist theology, varying in tone and focus based on community of origin. Delores Williams, for example, describes black feminists as womanists—a concept adopted from novelist Alice Walker. A womanist engages the traditions, folklore, and words of the African-American community, such as mother-daughter advice shared in folklore and poetry and mutual aid and community-building in partnership with men. The experience of Hispanic feminists, or *mujeristas*, offered by Ada Mari Isasi-Diaz, draws strongly from liberation theology and its praxis is carried out without class distinction. Their task is the ongoing struggle for the liberation of

Hispanic women. Perspectives from Africa and Asia are also offered with equally distinct boundaries of membership, goals, and praxis.

“Women’s Oppression and Cries of Pain” are the focus of part two. These chapters focus on the gendered experience of the broader political, economic, and social contexts of the Third World, which oppress women through sexual and economic exploitation, domestic violence, discrimination in education, and patriarchy. Voices from Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Samoa, and other countries uncover the distinct battles of the women in these different cultures. Stories are offered with empathy in a shared experience of oppression, but the overall tone is not disempowering. Instead, the consciousness-raising serves to spur indignation—and transformation of systems by social equity and justice. This call is made not only to the church, but also to the governments and culture that aid oppression by not actively fighting it.

Parts three and four steer readers towards the Christian religious context, specifically engaging in “The Bible as a Source of Empowerment for Women” and “Challenging Traditional Theological Thinking.” Rich reflection is offered in the form of poems, Bible studies, and excerpts from autobiographies and essays. Rigoberta Menchu, winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize for her struggle as an activist for the Guatemalan people, explores the use of the Bible as a weapon and instrument of oppression, and reclaims it as a tool for empowerment of the poor. Several authors suggest re-reading the Bible from a woman’s perspective. This task is aided, according to Elsa Tamez, by reading Scripture as a stranger new to the text, from the perspective of the poor and being “conscious of the existence of individuals who are cast aside because of their sex” (198). Christology is examined from an African woman’s perspective and Mariology from an Asian woman’s perspective, reclaiming both figures as liberators—and models for feminist theologians in dismantling unjust social structures (267).

The last part explores “A Newly Emerging Spirituality” and ventures into the future of feminist theology. One vision offered by Maria Clara Bingemer reimagines a “female dimension of God” characterized by gentleness, creativity, and safety and women’s physical capacity to give life as “performing the divine eucharistic action” (317). Aruna Gnanadason suggests cultural concepts, such as “Shakti,” an Indian concept of a powerful feminine force, should be reclaimed as a manifestation of God, mirroring his desire for the empowerment of and solidarity with oppressed people. African Christian women share a tradition of empowerment in the church through words spoken in prayer or song, a history which should be continued according to Mercy Amba Oduyoye, a woman from Ghana. The other chapters encourage greater cultural contextualization of feminine forces or figures to empower women and make the gospel more accessible.

There are several weaknesses in the book’s content and presentation. The breadth of topics is sweeping—digesting the sheer amount of content is fairly difficult. Intense, layered discussions are packed into several pages, leaving many concepts half-formed for the novice theologian reader. For this reason, perhaps, there are extensive notes citing the excerpts’ original sources, both at the beginning of most chapters and in the end notes and bibliography. Another limitation of the book is its restricted timeframe. The writings clearly come as an outpouring of the 1980s, in relation to the creation of the Women’s Commission of EATWOT. For this reason, the book offers a valuable sense of the momentum building at a certain point in the history of feminist theology from the Third World, but is unable to comment on the present state of the movement.

The book's primary strength is its diversity of voices. Not only do the authors vary in nationality, ethnicity, and language, but they also hail from many different traditions within Christianity. The experience of women within and outside the church is examined across a variety of economic, political, and social terrains. Within this diversity, there is unity in identifying sexist oppression as a direct contradiction of the life-giving gospel. These women's stories are shared for the purpose of mutual encouragement to continue on in the struggle for equity. As a newly-forming and identifying feminist theologian from the First World, *Feminist Theology from the Third World* offered an eye-opening exploration of the complexity and diversity of feminist theology. In her reader, King offers a more equitable shared history and hope for the future in combatting the oppression and sexism in the church and world.

Nadia Andrienas is a second-generation supporter of CBE, after learning more about biblical equality from household copies of *Priscilla Papers* and *Mutuality*. She is currently pursuing social justice as an MSW student and working at a non-profit, serving people with disabilities. She lives in the suburbs of Seattle, Washington.
