

# Theme 3 – Feminist Theology and the Changing Role of men and women



By the end of this lesson you will have:

- Understood what is meant by feminist theology
- Looked at the contribution by Rosemary Radford Reuther and Mary Daly
- Considered the changing role of men and women in Christianity today

# Re-Cap – Letters A and B

- **Letter A – Wealth and Christianity**

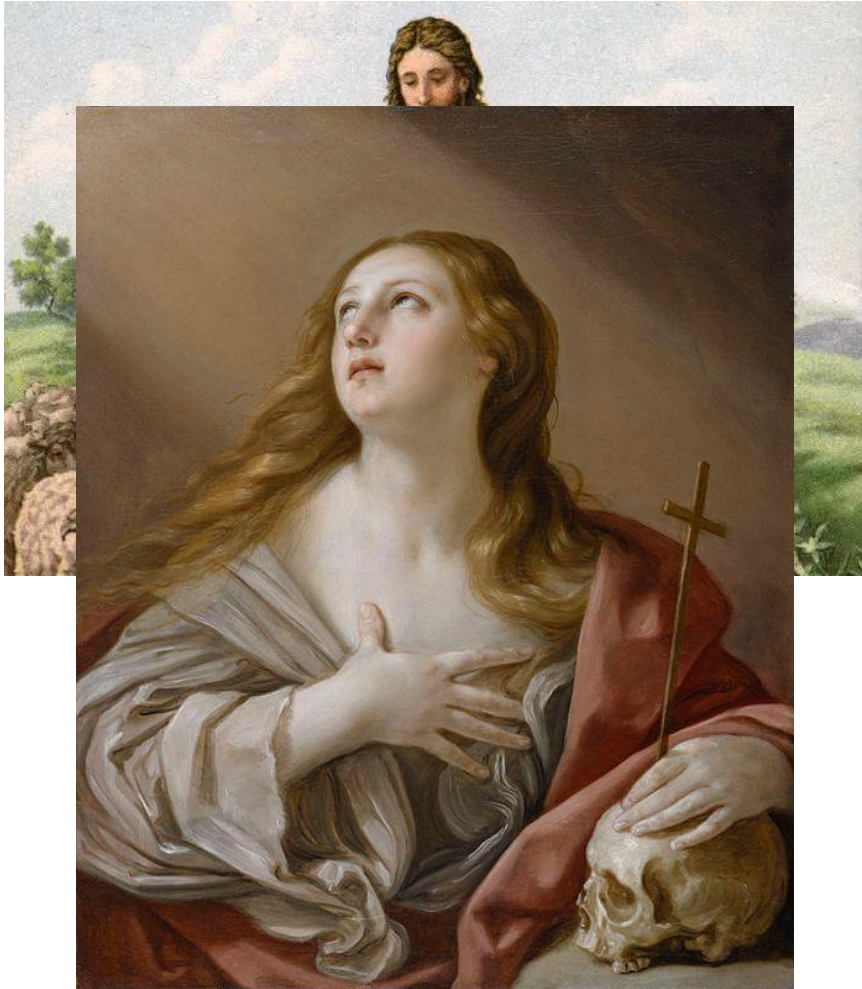
- What four gospel passages refer to wealth in Christianity?
- What are the differences between stewardship, asceticism and prosperity gospel?

- **Letter B – Migration**

- What is Pentecostalism?
- What is reverse missionary?
- What are some of the challenges faced by Christian migrants to the UK?

Starter – Who are  
what characteristi

l characters and  
y?



# Feminist Theology

- **Feminism** = the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes.
- **Womanism** = A term coined by Alice Walker (author of the colour purple). A form of feminism that acknowledges women's natural contribution to society (used by some in distinction to the term *feminism* and its association with white women). Walker explained 'womanism is to feminism as purple is to lavender'
- **SYNOPTIC LINK: Where have you come across feminist theology on the course before?**
- Sallie McFague and the nature of God



# Feminist Theology

- Feminist theology lies in the fact that **religion** has had a **significant part to play in the historic and continued oppression of women**
- *Can you think of any examples?*
- *Male saviour, Male only disciples, male only priests in Catholicism etc...*
- Feminist theology concludes that **God must be interpreted** as an advocate for women's rights (a partisan God), and that Christians at ground level need to alter and reconsider theology and practise to include women and men **equally**
- The two scholars that we will study (**Reuther and Daly**) both see the bible, Christian rituals and Christian practise as bound up in sexism

# Key Terms

- Use your phones to define the following key terms and note them in your book:
- **Androcentrism**
- **Androgyny**
- **Feminine**
- **Gender**
- **Biological Sex**
- **Masculine**
- **Patriarchy**



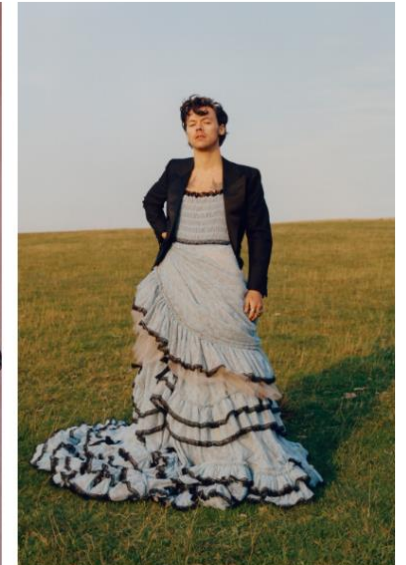
# Rosemary Radford Reuther

- Born in 1936
- American feminist and theologian
- Wrote *'Sexism and God Talk'*
- Catholic
- Advocate of women's ordination



# Rosemary Radford Reuther

- **Disputes** the idea that there is a difference between 'maleness' and 'femaleness'
- Believes that the only difference between men and women is biological function
- Human nature, for Reuther, is **androgynous**
- Culturally, we believe that men align their egos to the 'left brain characteristics' and women to the 'right brain characteristics'. However, we all have both sides of the brain!





# Rosemary Radford Reuther

- Believes that **androcentrism (male centred stories and myths) in the Bible has reflected the view that men are more authentically human than women**
- For example, in the fall **Eve was created from Adam's rib** and to blame for eating the forbidden fruit first
- Many medieval male theologians were inspired by **Greek thought** that women represented the more 'emotional and sensual' side of humanity whereas men were 'rational'
- **Aristotle** referred to women as '**misbegotten males**' and **Aquinas** referred to women as a '**defect in the uterus**' (*ironically modern science has since taught us that all foetus actually start of as women and then develop into men.....*)
- **Because 'A 'male' God created the world, and a male saviour redeemed us' there is an idea that men are closer to God than women.** This, for Reuther, is **idolatry**.

# Rosemary Radford Reuther

- Believes that the figures of Mary and Eve have both helped to (falsely) perpetuate 'maleness' and 'femaleness'
- **Think, Pair, Share:** What qualities do you think Eve and Mary have? How might these influence cultural attitudes to women in general?



For Reuther, the images of **Eve as the 'temptress'** and **Mary as the Subordinate Virgin** have haunted women in Christianity. It has led to a hostility of women as leaders and even encouraged witch hunting as women were more likely to fall prey to witch craft.



# Rosemary Radford Reuther

- However, Reuther points to several times in history where women have been given equal status to men in more marginalised forms of Christianity (i.e. not the main Church)
- Montanism, Gnostic writers, Quakers and Shakers
- *So why does Reuther stay with the Church and its patriarchy?*
- Simple – because she believes that **the fight against oppression of women is essential from within the Church for it to change**
- She sees **feminist theology in Christianity as another form of prophecy as found in the Old Testament.**
- Prophets have a tradition to challenge the status quo
- **Jesus himself was a ‘counter culture’** character. Reuther argues that Jesus saw himself as a ‘counter culture’ figure as opposed to an imperialistic Davidic Messiah

# Rosemary Radford Reuther

Historical solution to the problem of androcentrism and patriarchy	Reuther's criticism of the solution
<b>Solution 1: Romanticism</b> – believed that social progression would come from rejecting male qualities of war and violence and embracing female qualities of compassion	This just perpetuates the stereotype that there are male and female qualities and women are submissive
<b>Solution 2: Liberalism</b> – Fights for social reform, largely concentrating on women's right to democracy and education	Liberalism is too middle class and elitist. It focusses on liberating women in the already existing spheres of power as opposed to questioning the spheres of power themselves
<b>Solution 3: Marxism</b> - Both men and women should be viewed as equally contributing to society	This didn't work in practise. Many women in communist countries were still expected to work at home with families and women still remain subservient to the framework of communism



# Rosemary Radford Reuther

- *So what is Reuther's vision of a liberated Church? What is her suggestion?*
- Read the paragraph at the top of page 64 in your EDUQAS textbook and write in your own words what Reuther envisions as a liberated Church

# Mary Daly

- 1960s
- American raised Catholic
- Lectured at Harvard
- Wrote *'Beyond God the Father'*
- Identified as a radical lesbian feminist - banned any men from attending her lectures
- Encouraged women to leave the Church and create a 'sisterhood'



# Mary Daly

- Daly sees society as having created a **'sexual caste system'**, a rigid hierarchy whereby female gender is below male gender
- Believed that **women are treated as nouns and objects as opposed to verbs**
- One way in which this static view of woman has been encouraged is by seeing God as a static noun as opposed to a verb
- The **'white man in the sky with a beard' must be dethroned**
- Seeing this 'God noun' as a judge and a punisher prevents Christians from seeing **God as a source of growth and change**
- For Daly, **God is a verb**. In this sense, God is seen as having a **transformative power** as opposed to static power. This transformative power is genderless and for all.

# Mary Daly

- For Daly we need to rethink:
- **Original Sin** – this was not disobedience but turned woman into an object
- **Salvation** – should be participation into being and coming
- **Worshipping the ‘God man’** – is idolatry
- **Saviour** – there was no ‘fall’ so no need for saviour
- To believe in God is to believe in the power to become and be



# Mary Daly

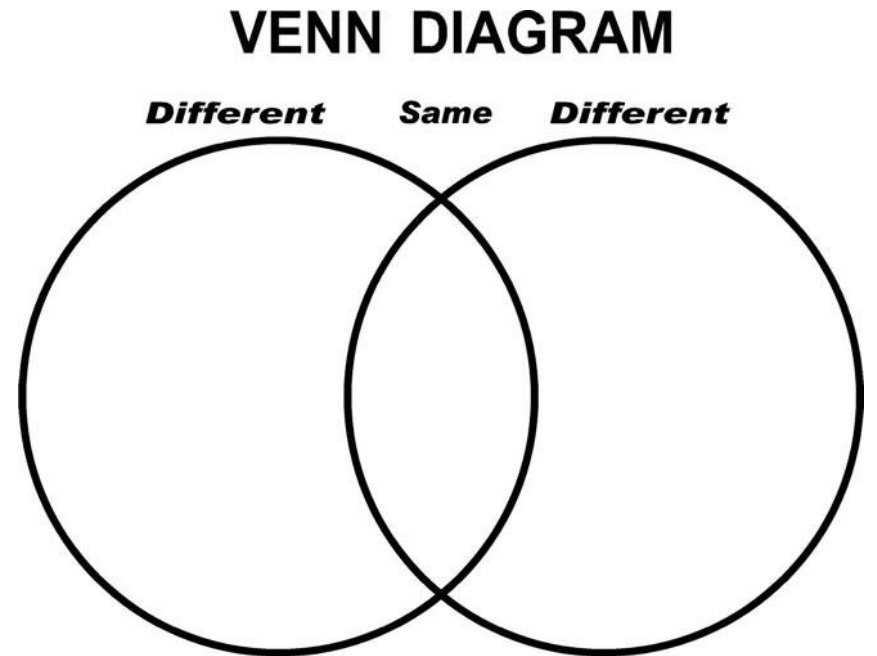
- For Daly, to readdress treating women as objects is a **matter of life and death**. The '**unholy trinity**' of genocide, rape and war is encouraged because we see women as a noun rather than a verb
- Daly believes that the **Old Testament** actually encourages genocide and rape as in **Number 31** it says "now, therefore, kill every male amongst the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by sleeping with him"
- Daly challenges the idea of awarding genders different values (i.e. 'courageous = manly, sensitive = feminine')
- Daly instead argues that **women should pursue androgynous values** where ethics is totally separate to gender
- Interestingly, Daly was quite critical of 'transgender' in the sense that a man can adapt the 'values' associated with woman and present in this way

# Mary Daly

- Daly's solution is that women need to abandon the Church altogether
- She believes that the patriarchy is too deep roots
- Women need the support from other women, as most other frameworks in life are rooted in patriarchy
- Therefore, women need to form a sisterhood to oppose a sexual hierarchy.

# Re-Cap

- Draw a Venn diagram which compares and contrasts the differences between Reuther's and Daly's viewpoints



# The changing role of men and women in the Church

- Ordination stems from the **Latin term ordinatio**, meaning order or rank. The New Testament does not refer to the rite of ordination but considers all Christians to be disciples (although Peter was asked to build the Church on the rock by Jesus)
- Many denominations in Christianity have a hierarchy, with priests, reverends or ministers being ordained to their specific roles.
- In early Christianity, women appeared to have a more prominent role in the Church. **Mary Magdalene** and **Junia** were mentioned as early apostles of the Church. **1 Timothy 3** 'in the same way the women are to be worthy of respect' refers to possible female deacons
- There were many **arguments in favour of male only ordination**; Jesus was a male, Jesus' apostles were all males, Catholic tradition has male only leadership
- Women did not hold prominent positions in Christianity until recent decades. **Arguments in support of female ordination** are; Jesus did not restrict his teaching to men, the Bible refers to ministry in inclusive terms, women were ordained in the early phases of the Church



# A Timeline of Female Ordination

- 1970: women's ordination becomes standard practise in some Churches
- 1992: women ordained in the Church of England
- 1993: CofE parishes given the option to opt out of having a female reverend
- 1994: nearly 500 male clergy left the CofE in protestation against female clergy
- 2014: Pope Francis affirms that women will not be allowed to be ordained in Catholicism
- 2015: first female bishop (Libby Lane) ordained in the CofE
- 2016: Roman Catholic Church commission a study to analyse the role of women in clergy
- Whilst progress has been made, women still face hurdles in being ordained in the Church. They may find it more difficult to reach senior positions, they can face opposition from the congregation and with respect to the Catholic Church, they can't be ordained as priests at all

# Current Issues with the Ordination of Women

- The **majority of Christians** are still in Churches which refuse female ordination (largely Catholic and Orthodox Churches)
- Even in institutions where women are ordained, they **still don't have equal access to pay or opportunities**
- Many **congregations oppose a female priest** where they are allowed, and fellow clergymen have left to become Catholic priests

# Female Faces in Christianity

