

THE FEMINISTIC FACE OF HUMANISM

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Most Christians know that feminism is an influential modern point of view. However, if they were asked, most Christians would probably not be able to discuss intelligently the beliefs and ideals of feminism. If Christians effectively engage this modern philosophical enemy of Christianity, then Christians would do well to understand its history, philosophy, its contradiction to biblical perspectives, and its opposition to social science findings. Christians should also comprehend the objectives of feminism, the implications the acceptance of feminism would have to society, how feminists fight their battles in the political arena, and also how Christians must respond to the threats posed by feminism in modern times.

History of Feminism

Feminism is historically an outgrowth of women's quest for equal rights and is philosophically associated with modern humanism. In America the quest for equal rights of women historically falls into two periods. The first began about the time of the American Revolutionary War and continued until women secured the right to vote in 1920. The second is from then until the present.

Both the American Revolution and the War Between the States gave impetus and strength to women's fight for equal rights. The American Revolution was concerned with independence from British tyranny, while the Civil War was concerned with freedom of blacks from slavery. In both these causes women saw themselves also needing to be freed from the tyranny of some of their circumstances. They wanted certain rights that were then denied to them. They sought the right to equal education, the right to own property, the right to speak publicly, the right to spend their own money, the right to a professional career, and the right to vote.

While there was some agitation for these rights before the Civil War, it was not until after that war that crusades for women's rights really got started. By 1920 women had secured most of the rights they sought, including the right to vote which came with passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Most women were then satisfied, and the quest for women's rights almost disappeared. The rights for which women fought during this first period are rights with which almost everyone now agrees are legitimate.

For the next three decades there was a lull in feminism, but it began to grow again after World War II when increasingly large numbers of women began entering the work force and the philosophy of humanism acquired rising influence. The growth of feminism was given special impetus in 1963 by the publication of Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminist Mystique*. "The book convinced thousands of women that they were 'unfulfilled' in the home, exploited by their husbands, and treated as slaves by their children. This book had a profound impact on the

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attitudes of some women and made them vulnerable to the assault on their minds that was to come through the literature of the 60's and 70's. This literature prepared them to be sucked into the agitation for 'women's rights' and for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment which came disguised as a struggle for 'equal pay for equal work' (even though the Equal Pay Act passed Congress in 1963)."²

In 1972, while feminism was riding its crest of popularity, the Equal Rights Amendment passed in both houses of Congress and was ratified by thirty of the fifty states. Only then were there serious questions raised about it that brought its expected Constitutional Amendment to a halt.

Although that amendment died politically in 1982, and feminism began to wane, feminist forces are still exceedingly strong in our society. They are now seeking to achieve piecemeal what they could not accomplish before in one fell swoop with the Equal Rights Amendment.

Feminism has nothing whatsoever to do with being "feminine," that is, possessing qualities which are natural to womanhood. Since World War II, feminism has been a philosophy which, for all practical purposes, may be considered the same thing as the "Women's Liberation Movement." The largest and most influential feminist political organization is the "National Organization for Women" (NOW), founded in 1965 by Betty Friedan.

Philosophy of Humanism

As a philosophy, feminism is an outgrowth of, closely allied with, and supportive of humanism. That is, feminism is an application of the precepts of humanism specifically to women as a class of people.

Although feminism is generally consistent with humanism, feminism actually gives priority to females rather than to males. Whereas in humanism mankind is believed to be the measure of all things, in feminism woman is believed to be the measure of all things. Whereas in humanism man makes himself God, in feminism woman makes herself God. Whereas in humanism mankind rejects the authority of God and Christ, in feminism woman rejects also the authority of man.

A substantial number of founders of the Women's Liberation Movement were themselves humanists, socialists, or Marxists. These include Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Margaret Mead. In fact, Betty Friedan, "the mother of the Women's Liberation Movement", was a signer of *Humanist Manifesto II*, and co-recipient of the "Humanist of the Year" award in 1975.³ Close observers of feminism know that a central thrust of women's liberation is to promote humanistic

²John and Irene Conlan, *Beyond 1984*. (Scottsdale, AZ: FaithAmerica Press, Inc. n. d.), 37.

³This award is given each year by the American Humanist Association "to one of its members who has achieved distinction in some field of endeavor relevant to the philosophy and purpose of humanism." *The Humanist*, March/April. 1958, 108, via Claire Chambers. *The SIECUS Circle: A Humanist Revolution*. (Belmont, Mass.: Western Islands. 1977),59.

values.”⁴ For example, Warren Farrell, of the National Organization for Women, is quoted in the June 25, 1972 *New York Sunday News* as saying, “Ultimately, this is a humanistic movement.”⁵

Feminism is the belief that women have equal rights with men in all things. It is also the belief that natural differences do not exist in either the authority or in the sexual roles of men and women. Feminism is therefore primarily concerned with equality, authority, and gender roles. These beliefs are set forth in *Humanist Manifesto II*.⁶

Because feminism is basically a humanistic philosophy and world view, it must be understood in terms of humanistic ideals. From feminism’s primary concerns about equal rights, authority, and sexual roles of men and women flow a significant number of social, political, moral, ethical, religious, and economic issues of importance to individuals, families, churches, and the nation.

Feminism Is Contradicted by The Bible

In order to understand the fallacies of feminism, we must first determine whether women do, in fact, have equal rights with men. If not, what rights do men have which women do not? Are there natural differences in the sexual roles of men and women? If so, what are those differences? For Christians, the only way to determine the rights and responsibilities of men and women is to examine Scripture. While feminists and humanists will reject God’s word as a standard of authority, Christians must begin there, and then demonstrate the consistency of God’s word with natural characteristics of men and women.

Both men and women were equally created in the image of God (Genesis 1:17). Both men and women are equally worthy of eternal salvation (Galatians 3:28). And both men and women are equally cared for by God as “heirs together of the grace of life” (I Peter 3:7). The Bible makes no distinction between men and women regarding their personal worth.

However, scripture declares that in the matters of authority and leadership men and women are *not* equal. God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman (1 Corinthians 11:3). A woman is not to exercise dominion or authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:10- 11). Two reasons are given why men have authority over women. First, “it was Adam who was first created, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:12). Although man originated from God, woman originated from man (1 Corinthians 11:8-9.). Second, “it was not Adam who was

⁴Claire Chambers. *The SIECUS Circle*, 78, 79.

⁵Claire Chambers. *The SIECUS Circle*, 80.

⁶These statements from *Humanist Manifesto II* document the beliefs of feminism. “In various societies, the demands of women and minority groups for equal rights effectively challenge our generation” (Preface, *Humanist Manifesto II*). “The right to birth control, abortion and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitive, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults . . . individuals should be permitted to express their sexual proclivities and pursue their life-styles as they desire” (*Humanist Manifesto II*, Sixth). “We are critical of sexual chauvinism - male or female. We believe in equal rights for both women and men to fulfill their unique careers and potentialities as they see fit, free of invidious discrimination” (*Humanist Manifesto II*, Eleventh).

deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 3:14; See also Genesis 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:3).

More specifically, Scripture declares that in marriage “the husband is head of the wife” (Ephesians 5:23). That this was God’s intent from the beginning is evident because the woman was created to be a “helper” for man (Genesis 2:18). When Eve sinned, God told her, “your desire shall be for your husband.” By that he probably meant not her sexual desire, (for that would have been a part of the original creation), but her desire to rule over her husband. However, God specifically said, “he shall rule over you” (Genesis 3:16).

Moreover, in the assembly, (i.e. church), women are to learn in silence (1 Corinthians 11:34-35). It is men, not women, who are instructed in every place to lift up holy hands in prayer (1 Timothy 2:8). Rulership over the church belongs to men, those who are “husbands” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). A ruler in the church must be one who “rules well *his* own household” (1 Timothy 3:4), God gave the roles of authority and leadership to men over women. He did *not* give those roles to women over men.

Not only does the Bible make distinctions regarding the authority of men and women, but it also distinguishes between the gender roles of men and women. The primary role of man before sin entered into the world was to “keep” the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). The role of woman was defined as a “helper” (Genesis 2:18). After sin entered the world, the role of woman was declared to be that of bringing forth children (Genesis 3:16), while the role of man is to “toil” the ground (Genesis 3:17) in “the sweat of your face” (Genesis 3:19). Thereafter, the occupations of men are declared. For example, Cain was a “tiller of the ground” and Abel was a “keeper of sheep” (Genesis 4:1). No occupations are mentioned of women. In fact, their names are not even given in the genealogical lists except in rare cases. It is assumed the role of women was that of helping their husbands and raising their children.

In both the Old and New Testaments the husband and father is considered the primary provider (1 Timothy 5:8) and teacher (Ephesians 6:4) in the home. The role of the wife and mother is that of assistant to her husband in home and family duties. The Bible declares that young married women should love their husbands, love their children, *keep house*, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach (1 Timothy 5:14). While the Bible does recognize that unmarried women may be gainfully employed, (for example; Lydia was a seller of purple, Acts 16:14-15) such cases do not in fact contradict the normal and distinct sexual roles God intended for men and women.⁷

Feminism Is Opposed By Social Science Findings

The inequality of men and women in matters of authority and sexual roles may also be demonstrated as a natural fact through findings of anthropologists and sociologists who have examined many cultures of the ancient and modern world. Regarding authority and power, one scholar “examined most of the anthropological and sociological literature on the subject of political leadership and authority. In particular he scrutinized every report of an alleged

⁷For an analysis of New Testament perspectives of the roles of women, read Neil R. Lightfoot, *The Role of Women: New Testament Perspectives*. (Memphis: Mercury Printing Co. 1978).

matriarchy, where women were said to hold political power. He found no evidence that a matriarchy had ever existed or is in any way emerging today. He found no society in which authority was associated chiefly with women in male-female relations. In a review, Margaret Mead agreed with these findings and described his presentation of the data as ‘faultless.’ The degree to which women take power seems to depend on the extent to which men are absent. George Murdock compared some 500 cultures and found that, in all of them, fighting and leadership were associated with men.”⁸ Regarding the male role as provider in marriage, “Margaret Mead maintained, ‘in every known human society (men are) to provide for women and children.’ In order to marry, in fact, Malinowski says that almost every human society first requires the man ‘to prove his capacity to maintain the woman.’”⁹ It is therefore evident, not only to Bible believers, but also to non-biblical scholars, that there are profound and significant biological differences between the sexes which are then translated in sexual inequalities in all societies. Whenever a society pretends there are no differences or inequalities between the sexes – then that society begins to disintegrate.

Objectives of Feminism

The basic unit of all societies has been the nuclear family wherein husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, have had different gender roles. The continuation of a society demands that children understand those gender roles from their parents and follow the role of their particular gender. However, feminism (and humanism) declares that the basic unit of society should not be the nuclear family, but the autonomous individual. Humanism specifically declares that “*the principle of moral equality* must be furthered through the elimination of all discrimination based upon . . . sex, age. . . . We believe in equal rights for both women and men to fulfill their unique careers and potentialities as they see fit, free of invidious discrimination.”¹⁰

This means that, by its very nature, feminism is an attack against the family. Feminist are very explicit about this. Their objective is to destroy the patriarchal marriage institution. “The end of the institution of marriage is a necessary condition for the liberation of women. Therefore, it is important for us to encourage women to leave their husbands and not to live individually with men.”¹¹ “The nuclear family must be replaced with a new form of family . . .”¹² Feminism is intent upon restructuring not only the family, but also other basic institutions of society, namely, the church and civil governments. Feminism now “rests on the belief that it is up to women . . . to build a Feminist-Socialist Revolution.”¹³

⁸George Gilder, *Men And Marriage*. (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company. 1986), 21, ref. to Steven Goldberg. *The Inevitability of Patriarchy*. (New York: Morrow, 1973), and quoting Margaret Mead, *Redbook*, Oct. 1973, and George Murdock, “World Ethnographic Sample,” *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957).

⁹George Gilder, *Men And Marriage*, p. 15, quoting Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of The Sexes in a Changing World*. (New York: Morrow, 1949) quoted from the paperback (New York: Dell, 1968), p. 195, and also Robert Briffault and Bronislaw Malinowski, *Marriage: Past and Present*. (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1956), 79.

¹⁰*Humanist Manifesto II*, Eleventh.

¹¹Karen Clark, Sandy Gerber, Nancy Lehmann, Susan Miller, and Hellen Sullinger. *The Document: Declaration of Feminism*. 1971, 11, 12.

¹²Same source, 13.

¹³Karen Clark, *et. al.* *The Document: Declaration of Feminism*. 2.

Because Feminists believe that women, as a class, are oppressed by men, then to break such tyranny “it is necessary to establish a socialist order based on two premises: 1. The economic independence of women from men. 2. The elevation of ‘women’s work’ to the highest status, making the primary function of the society that of meeting the basic human needs of all the people.”¹⁴ Feminism is now trying to force its beliefs upon our whole society. Notice how the basic beliefs of feminism would be translated into practical matters regarding the family. Since feminism believes that men and women are equal in all gender roles, then it must also contend that women are as naturally endowed as men for careers in providing for their families, and also that men are as equally capable as women in the mothering of children.

Moreover, since feminism believes that men and women should have equal rights, then homosexual and lesbian marriages must be equally acceptable as are heterosexual marriages, and also that communal marriages are equally as acceptable as are those of couples. Like humanism, feminism requires easy access to divorce. Because feminism contends that women must have control over the reproductive function of their own bodies, it also contends women must have safe and effective birth control and access to free, legal, and safe abortions. Regarding the raising of children, feminists “support parent controlled child care centers as a necessary step toward the feminist-socialist revolution, but our vision of the upbringing of children extends beyond them. With the destruction of the nuclear family must come a new way of looking at children. They must be seen as the responsibility of an entire society rather than individual parents.”¹⁵

Tactics Used By Feminists In The Political Arena

In order to obtain these goals, feminists are extremely active in the political arena, bureaucracies of civil governments, influential social service agencies, and in the schools. Christians are generally repulsed by homosexuals and lesbians and react with some disgust to abortion and other feminist objectives. However, many Christians, being unaware of basic feministic beliefs and goals, often appear to be easily led into the feminist camp. Feminists use noble sounding causes such as “Parental Leave,” “Comparable Worth,” “Unisex Insurance,” and other like attempts to push feministic ideals upon society through economic laws and political policies that are then enforced by civil governments.

Feminists want to get more women into the work force. In order for working mothers of pre-school children to have child care services, feminists also lobby for government subsidized day care centers. (Admittedly, if mothers of pre-schoolers must work, they need someone to care for their children). However, a major reason why mothers of pre-schoolers cannot stay home and care for their own children is because humanism has created an economic environment which often makes mothers participants in feministic objectives either unconsciously or against their own wills.

During the 1970’s about a third of the states passed “no-fault” divorce laws while most other states allowed divorce on such grounds as “irreconcilable differences” which translates into essentially the same thing as no-fault divorce laws. (All this was in keeping with the philosophy of feminism). With these easy divorce laws came diminishing economic

¹⁴Same source, 5.

¹⁵Same source, 14.

responsibilities of former husbands for alimony and child support. Large numbers of divorced mothers with pre-school children therefore now find themselves in financial straits and must either work outside the home or be on government welfare programs.

For families remaining intact, real family income was also declining. A combination of economic factors meant that “in the current generation of two-earner couples with children, both spouses together now have less real income than their fathers had as a single wage earner (while their mothers were full-time homemakers). The current generation of parents is working longer hours for less real income and much less family life than their parents had.”¹⁶ What was this combination of economic circumstances? It includes “especially the inflation that started with the 1973 oil embargo and reached double-digit under Jimmy Carter, and the steep increase in taxes that resulted from bracket creep and the doubling of Social Security taxes. A third major factor which exceeded the demand for workers and made it unnecessary to offer higher wages. This large labor supply was created both by the large number of baby boomers and by the flooding of millions of women into the job market.”¹⁷ Add to that the facts that housing costs were escalating drastically, and that the costs of energy for both homes and automobiles rose more than fifty percent. In short, because politics have given endorsement to humanistic ideals in economic matters, then feminism has been able to promote many of its social objectives in spite of having lost its major push for the Equal Rights Amendment.

Christian Response To Feminism

Now the question is, What should Christians do to win the war against feminism? Two responses seem appropriate. One is instructional, the other is political. Both must be done at the same time. First, Christians must insist that the basic unit of society is the nuclear family of a husband and his wife and their natural and/or adopted children. Christians must teach about the sanctity of marriage, the responsibilities of fathers, the importance of mothers, and authority of parents. And this teaching must be presented not only to those who assemble with the saints for worship, but also to the non-Christian community.

Second, Christian citizens must promote state and national legislation consistent with and supportive of biblical teachings regarding the family. Legally, divorce should not be easily acquired. Husbands and fathers should be held legally accountable for economic provisions for their families. Wives and mothers should have child care priorities over employment outside their homes. And parents must be given back legal authority over their own children which civil governments have all too frequently taken from them.

Christians must be the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and a leavening influence upon the world. Because Christians have too frequently failed in these responsibilities, feminism has grown and been able to win many victories in the political arena. Many people of strong Christian convictions are now awakening to the reality of what has happened and are now beginning to meet their philosophical enemies in the political arena to do battle. Whenever enough Christians are knowledgeable of the nature of the conflict, whenever enough Christians

¹⁶Phyllis Schlafly. *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, (Box 618, Alton , IL 62002), Vol. 20, No. 5, Sec. 1, Dec., 1986. 2.

¹⁷Same source, 3.

possess the will to engage the enemy in battle, then, with God's help, will Christians be victorious over feminism and other humanistic philosophies. Then Christian homes in America will become much stronger.