

The spiritual roots of modern feminism

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Feminism proposes a complete rejection of the Judeo-Christian paradigm for male–female roles, relationships, and social structures, as well as the biblical understanding of God. The ultimate quest of the feminist movement has always been spiritual, and Satanism was anything but a marginal phenomenon in early feminist narrative. To the contrary, Satanism and feminist politics were interwoven from the first appearance of the theme of Satan as a benevolent figure and the liberator of womankind. Leading feminists regularly performed counter-readings of the Bible to conceptualise Lucifer as a feminist liberator of womankind and Eve as a heroine. This article explains how prominent feminists—primarily during the time period 1880–1930—used Satan as a symbol of rejecting ‘patriarchal’ traits of Christianity. It discusses neglected or unknown aspects of the intellectual connections of feminism with Satanism and the centrality of the latter in early feminist narrative and imagination.

The connections of early feminism with secular ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, and postmodernism are well known to the general public. I have, myself, written about them in several of my academic articles, including an entire chapter in my book on Western legal theory.¹ What surprised me, however, was to recently come across a seminal book addressing the spiritual dimensions to early feminism—such influence underpinning the early feminist movement in the nineteenth century. This was entirely unknown to me until I discovered this fundamental book on the subject.

Per Faxneld is a Swedish academic who holds a Ph.D. in History of Religions (obtained in 2014).² *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the liberator of women in nineteenth-century culture*³ is based on his doctoral dissertation, which was awarded the Donner Institute Prize for Eminent Research on Religion, and later republished as a book by Oxford University Press, in 2017. In a nutshell, it addresses how prominent early feminists—primarily during the time period 1880–1930—frequently used Satan as a symbol of liberation and rejection of so-called patriarchal traits of Christianity. It emphasises how these women were particularly inspired by the period’s most influential new religion, Theosophy⁴, and how anti-Christian discourses of radical secularism also deeply impacted the early feminist movement.

Based on this impressive academic work, this article aims at examining the spiritual roots of modern feminism. It contends that the ultimate quest of the feminist movement has always been spiritual. Mainstream feminism proposes a complete rejection of the Judeo-Christian paradigm for male–female roles, relationships, and societal structures, as well as its biblical concept of God. As noted by Mary Kassian, a distinguished professor of women’s studies at Southern Baptist Seminary:

“Feminism began with the deconstruction of a Judeo-Christian view of womanhood; progressed to the deconstruction of manhood, general relationships,

family/societal structures, and a Judeo-Christian worldview; and concluded with the concept of metaphysical pluralism, self-deification, and the rejection of the Judeo-Christian deity.”⁵

Lucifer as a ‘liberator’ of women in the 19th century

Satanism and feminist politics were interwoven from the first appearance of the theme of Satan as a benevolent, revolutionary figure and the liberator of womankind. Leading figures of the early feminist movement (including suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton, actress Sarah Bernhardt, and poetess Renée Vivien) viewed God as depicted in the Bible as the precursor of patriarchy and Satan as an ally in the fight against it. This feminist view of Satan was “intertwined with prominent anticlerical, left-wing, and esoteric currents of its time”.⁶ Examples include employing Lucifer as a symbol of revolution, and eulogizing him as an antipatriarchal figure. In those days, feminists performed counter-readings of the Bible in order to conceptualize Lucifer as a liberator of womankind and an ally in the women’s struggle against the ‘patriarchy’ supported by God the Father and His Son. Accordingly, “Eve’s ingestion of the forbidden fruit becomes a heroic act of rebellion against the tyranny of God and Adam.”⁶

Take, for instance, the contributions of Judith Sargent Murray (1751–1820). This celebrated poet is broadly regarded as the most prominent female essayist of the 18th century in the United States. She was also among the country’s earliest champions of financial independence and equal rights for women. In her 1790 essay *On Equality of the Sexes* Murray expressed opposition to certain biblical passages—most notably involving Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. She attempted to vindicate Eve with a counter-reading of the same passage. Eve’s behaviour in the Garden was motivated, according to her, by “a laudable ambition ... and a thirst for knowledge’, whereas Adam,

who ate the forbidden fruit that Eve offered to him, acted out ‘bare pusillanimous attachment to a woman’.⁷ In the words of Robert P. Wilson, an English literature academic at Binghamton University:

“The essay concludes with a ‘supplement’ in which Sargent Murray reverses the traditional ... reading of the Book of Genesis that held that Eve ... caved to temptation and dragged Adam (and thus all of mankind) into sin. Instead Sargent Murray argues that ... the devil appeared as a ‘shining angel’ and promised to fulfil her ‘laudable ambition’ for ‘a perfection of knowledge’—Adam followed not because of the devil’s wily deceptions or promises of enlightenment, but merely according to ‘a bare pusillanimous attachment to a woman!’ Sargent Murray thus reverses gender stereotypes by characterizing Eve as inspirational and noble, and Adam as shortsighted and weak.”⁸

Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826–1898) was a leader of the women’s suffrage movement in the United States. A founding member and later president of the National Woman Suffrage Association, she expressed a profound indignation over “the wrongs inflicted upon one-half of humanity by the other half in the name of religion”, and Christianity in particular.⁹ Gage convened the first feminist group solely devoted to the promotion of an antireligious secularist state via the strictest possible separation of church and state. In response to those who acknowledged the Christian roots of America’s society and its legal system, Gage stated: “in order to help preserve the very life of the Republic, it is imperative that women should unite upon a platform of opposition to the teaching and aim of that ever most unscrupulous enemy of freedom—the Church”.⁹ Gage delivered an address entitled “Woman, Church, and State” at a suffrage convention in 1878. She later turned this famous address into a book of the same name which denounces alleged abuses against women stemming from biblical doctrines, including the witch hunts. Gage declared:

“No rebellion has been of like importance with that of Woman against the tyranny of Church and State; none has had its far reaching effects. We note its beginning; its progress will overthrow every existing form of these institutions.”⁹

The first major systematic attempt at feminist Bible criticism was *The Women’s Bible* (2 vols, 1895–1898), a book edited by American suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902; figure 1) and written by her and her revising committee of feminist writers from England, Finland, Scotland, Austria, and France. Stanton was the leading figure of the early feminist movement and her negative view of Christianity was not unique in those early feminist circles. She had, for years, been denouncing the alleged role played by Christianity in the subordination of women in all spheres of life. The first volume of *The Woman’s Bible* covered the Pentateuch and it immediately became a bestseller, going

through seven printings in six months. A second volume of the book appeared in 1898, covering the books from Joshua, in the Old Testament, to Revelation, at the end of the New Testament. In her introduction to *The Woman’s Bible*, Stanton both contends that the church constitutes “the very powers that make woman’s emancipation impossible” and explains to female readers that “your political and social degradation are but an outgrowth of your status in the Bible”.¹⁰ Also in Stanton’s chapter to *The Women’s Bible*:

“She brings up the teaching that Eve caused the Fall of Man, and how this has been used to subjugate women ever since. In the detailed commentary on Genesis 3, she rejects the general idea of the Fall and states her view that the Darwinian theory of the gradual growth of the race from a lower to a higher type of animal life, is more hopeful and encouraging.”¹⁰

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her colleagues particularly felt they had to address the ‘patriarchal’ narrative in the book of Genesis, chapter 3. One way of doing so was to turn the narrative on its head, to turn Eve into a heroine and the serpent benevolent. Eve is eulogized in her consumption of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, and depicted in collusion with Satan as a liberator of women.¹¹ With a benevolent Satan, Eve’s actions in the Garden become laudable, and women are deemed superior to men ‘for being the first to heed Satan’s advice’.¹² In a letter to the editor of *The Critic*, she positively likens Satan to the woman’s thirst for knowledge.¹³ She describes the primary implication of deconstructing Genesis chapter 3, as follows:

“Take the snake, the fruit tree and the woman from the tableau, and we have no fall, nor frowning judge, no Inferno, no everlasting punishment—hence no need of a Savior.”¹⁴



Figure 1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) was an American suffragist and leading figure of the early feminist movement. She edited *The Women’s Bible* (2 vols, 1895–1898), a book that inverts the biblical account of Genesis by making Eve a heroine and the serpent benevolent. With a ‘benevolent Satan’, Eve’s actions in the Garden become laudable, and women are superior to men for being the first to heed Satan’s advice.

Across Europe, there were many examples of Genesis 3 being repeatedly treated in highly critical fashion. Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891; figure 2), to give just one example, was notorious for promoting Satanic inversions of Genesis 3 in order to argue that “Satan, the enemy of God, is in reality, the highest divine Spirit”.¹⁵ Her books *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) were “hugely commercially successful”, with the first selling half a million copies up until 1980.¹⁶ Throughout *The Secret Doctrine*, for instance, Blavatsky praises Lucifer and hails him as ‘Saviour’ of humankind. In vol. 1, *Cosmogogenesis*, she wrote:

“The devil is now called Darkness by the Church, whereas, in the Bible he is called the ‘Son of God’ (see Job), and ‘the bright star of early morning’ (see Isaiah) He was transformed by the Church into . . . Satan, because he is higher and older than Jehovah, and had to be sacrificed to the new dogma.”¹⁷

In vol. II, *Anthropogenesis*, she continues to exalt Lucifer and to raise him up as “the highest divine Spirit”. “To make the point clear once for all”, she stated, “that which the clergy of every dogmatic religion—pre-eminently the Christian—points out as Satan, the enemy of God, is in reality the highest divine Spirit”.¹⁸

A prominent component of Blavatsky’s writings was the emancipation of women, which in this respect involved a frontal attack on the ‘male’ God of the Bible. In her books, the biblical account of the Fall is depicted as a positive event that implies an up-valuation of women: “She is no longer responsible for mankind’s fall into sin but is instead actively involved in the gaining of spiritual wisdom from the benevolent snake.”¹⁸ Her sympathy for the Devil is particularly evinced in the publication of a feminist journal she published in England called *Lucifer*. This journal spread the notion of a possible connection between Satan and the struggle for women’s rights across the Western nations. Through its choice of name, in combination with a heavy emphasis on women’s rights, this publication disseminated the image of Satan and female emancipation as somehow closely related.¹⁹ According to Lee Penn, an American journalist who holds a BA cum laude from Harvard:

“[Blavatsky] urged people to return to the mother-goddess of Hinduism and to the practice of feminism virtues. This continued under the guidance of Annie Besant, who was in the vanguard of the feminist movement. Wicca and ‘women’s spirituality’ carry on this struggle against ‘patriarchal’ Christianity today.”²⁰

The actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923; figure 3) starred in some of the most popular French plays of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This included *La Dame Aux Camelias*, by Alexandre Dumas, and *Ruy Blas*, by Victor Hugo. One influential French journalist stated that Bernhardt “had the gift of being worshipped by officialdom, high society, people of the lower classes, as well as by elitist coteries of writers and artists”.²¹ As noted by Faxneld, “she did frequently play

with a symbolism closely connected to Satanism, and, for example, sculpted a figurine that can be seen as a portrait of herself as the Devil”.²² Parisian lesbians used her as a role model when forging subversive sexual identities because “much of her behaviour was clearly disruptive of gender roles: wearing men’s clothes on and off the stage”.²³

Take also the example of Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893–1978), the celebrated writer of novels, short stories, and poems. She contributed short stories to the *New Yorker* for more than 40 years. Educated by an atheist father of learning, she was acquainted with the Bible from an early age.²⁴ Her debut novel, *Lolly Willowses* (1926), tells the tale of Laura ‘Lolly’ Willowses, who becomes a witch liberated and empowered by Satan. The story is actually quite simple. David Carroll, an associate professor of English at the University of Maryland, explains it as follows:

“Lolly tires of her family, leaves London for the countryside and makes a surprisingly casual arrangement with Satan to enter his service as a witch. Lolly’s adventure is not really an adventure: it is as free of dramatic reversal or complications as it is of rhetorical flourish. Warner’s conclusion presents the reader with the disarming notion that Lolly’s submission to Satan is a form of freedom.”²⁵

Warner’s first novel, according to Dr Faxneld, “is quite possibly the most explicit and conspicuous literary example ever of programmatic Satanic feminism”.²⁶ In spite of that, *Lolly Willowses* caused a major stir and it received highly favourable reviews. The book draws on contemporary understandings of witch cults and there were aspects of the text that directly relate to “demonic lesbianism, a view of Christianity as a central pillar of patriarchy, and nature being coded as Satan’s feminine realm where he can offer immunity from the pressures of a male-dominated society”.²⁷ Thus Faxneld’s observation that:

“Warner is a contributor to a pre-existing discourse where witchcraft and Satanism are used to portray female emancipation. While her novel is extraordinarily explicit and articulate when it comes to making Satan a liberator of women . . . Warner’s text could be considered a reply to the literal demonization of feminists . . . , inverting it and claiming Satan and witches as positive symbols of feminist resistance.”²⁸

Informed by this legacy, some modern feminists seek to reclaim the ‘satanic revolutionary’ as a political and cultural force to empower women and create radical change. Echoing this anti-Christian sentiment, feminist activists increasingly identify the witch as a protector and benevolent figure. “The idea of the witch has always been about subversive feminist power that does align with conventional norms”,²⁹ writes Jex Blackmore, a feminist writer and political activist. She expresses her profound admiration for Satan as “a magnificent and powerful angel who rebelled against the tyranny of God”.³⁰ Blackmore’s feminist advocacy has included dumping gallons



Figure 2. Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891) was an early proponent of the Victorian religious movement known as modern Spiritualism. In 1875, she co-founded the Theosophical Society, an organisation that was concerned with ascertaining the ‘occult mysteries’ of the world. Blavatsky came from a long line of feminist thinkers. Her maternal grandmother, Helena Pavlovna Dolgorukov (1789–1860), was an early example of feminist thinker. In her widely read books, Blavatsky argued that “Satan, the enemy of God, is in reality, the highest divine Spirit”¹⁵ who, according to her, “brought mankind spiritual wisdom”¹⁶ and “the spirit of Intellectual Enlightenment and Freedom of Thought”.¹⁸

of milk outside pro-life demonstrations, and writing about her own abortion experience in the blog *Unmother*. She sees in Satanism an important liberating force in the ongoing feminist fight for reproductive rights. “Bodily autonomy is central to Satanic philosophy”, she argues. Indeed, recently *The Satanic Temple* filed a lawsuit against Missouri because of its enactment of a law requiring any woman seeking an abortion to wait 72 hours.³¹

Kristen J. Sollée is a lecturer in gender studies and founding editor of *Slutist*, a feminist arts and culture award-winning website. She has written for mainstream and academic publications; organized numerous music events and art exhibitions; and lectured at colleges and conferences in the U.S. and Europe. In these undergraduate lectures, Sollée traces the history of ‘witch feminism’ from early modern Europe to the present, delving particularly into the links between witches and women’s reproductive rights, as well as the role of the witch in feminist activism over the past century. Her first book, *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* (2017),³² was described in *The Guardian* newspaper as “a whirlwind history of the witch in America and her shared history with sexually liberated women and radical liberationary politics”.³³ Her famous *Legacy of the Witch* festival in Brooklyn (NY) “honors the witch as an icon of female power and persecution through

music, art and burlesque”.³² According to Sollée, it certainly should come as no surprise that many feminists are deeply drawn to Satanism:

“Occult practices—Satanism included—can be avenues to individual and collective empowerment that many feminists are seeking They are often viable alternatives to the patriarchal systems that seek to repress and police female and queer sexualities, bodies, and identities, because they provide access to activist-minded communities with life-changing potential.”³¹

Feminism’s hostility to biblical Christianity

Feminist scholars often claim that Christianity has been a major source of oppression of women throughout history. Amid ongoing denunciations that the Christian religion is inherently patriarchal and sexist, feminist scholars often ignore that the early church was particularly attractive to women. The first Christian communities were predominately female, not male.³⁴ As noted by Cambridge historian Henry Chadwick (1920–2008), in ancient Rome, “Christianity seems to have been especially successful among women. It was often through the wives that it penetrated the upper classes of society in the first instance.”³⁵

Rodney Stark is Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences and co-director of the Institute for Studies of Religion at Baylor University. According to him, “objective evidence leaves no doubt that early Christian women did enjoy far greater equality with men than did their pagan and Jewish counterparts”.³⁶ Stark comments that “there is virtual consensus among historians of the early church as well as biblical scholars that women held positions of honor and authority within early Christianity”.³⁷

This works in line with the Apostle Paul’s commendation of “our sister Phoebe” to the Roman congregation, stating that she was a “deaconess of the church of Cenchrea” (Romans 16:1–2). In 1 Timothy 3:11, Paul refers to women in the role of deacons, and in Corinthians 11:11–12 he talks about the right of women to prophesy, and that they are as essential as men in Christian fellowship: “For it is through women that man comes to be, and God is the source of all.”

In deeply elevating the status of women, the early Christians were simply emulating the example of Jesus Christ, who had numerous women as friends, followers, and supporters. Christ even saved a woman caught in adultery from being stoned to death (see John 8:1–11). As noted by U.S. theologian Gary Thomas: “Jesus challenged and confronted these attitudes about women, lifting women up and including them in his inner circle of confidants and supporters” (see Luke 8:1–3).

The Bible declares that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Arguably, in an ideal Christian

community all barriers of prejudice must be broken, including xenophobic nationalism (Greek or Jew), racism (barbarian or civilized), social discrimination (slave or free), and finally, of course, gender discrimination (male or female).

Some feminist critics have dismissed these biblical statements. They assume that such statements had no impact on the advancement of human rights, in particular the rights of women. However, according to Sanford Lakoff, emeritus professor of political theory at the University of California, San Diego:

“The Christian teaching with the greatest implications for democracy is the belief that because humanity is created in the image of God, all human beings are of equal worth in the sight of God. ... As Alexis de Tocqueville noted when he observed in the introduction to his study of democracy in America ... Christianity, which has declared all men equal in the sight of God, cannot hesitate to acknowledge all citizens equal before the law.”³⁸

Frequently, feminist scholars remain ignorant, or unwilling to recognize, what the Apostle Paul wrote concerning marriage and sex:

“The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to the husband. For ... the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:3–5).

This means that Christian husbands should not hold back from their role of fulfilling their wives’ sexual needs. Naturally, even this fact may not pacify those who are stubbornly convinced that Christianity must be an antiwoman religion. This is particularly so when a person does not understand the meaning of the instruction found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22–24).

Submitting to another person is an often misunderstood concept. For the Christian wife, this means obeying a husband who is acting in a godly, Christlike manner. For the Christian husband, this means putting aside his selfish desires so that he can care for his wife’s well-being. This is why Paul adds this important admonition: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). Paul is here stating that husbands must sacrifice everything for their wives. They must give away even their lives if necessary. A Christian husband is obliged to make his wife’s well-being his ultimate priority, “so husbands

ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself” (Ephesians 5:28).

The essence of Christian leadership is sacrificial love. This essence of sacrificial love can be found in Philippians 2, where Paul urges believers to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3–4). Paul then goes on to increase this self-sacrificial role of leadership by requesting believers to emulate the example of Christ himself, “who, being in the very nature God ... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant” (Philippians 2: 6–7). That Christ often expressed this principle is found in these passages of Scripture:

“But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many’” (Matthew 20:26–27).

“The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matthew 23:11).

“Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all’” (Mark 9:35).

“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Mark 10:43).

“But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves” (Luke 22:26).

According to Timothy Keller:

“Jesus redefined all authority as servant-authority. Any exercise of power can only be done in service of the Other, not to please oneself. Jesus is the one who did not come to be served, as the world’s authority figures expect to be, but to serve, to the point of giving his life.”³⁹

In the language of biblical Christianity, a leader is the one who is the most self-effacing, the most sacrificial, and the most devoted to the good of others. It takes an equal degree of submission for a faithful husband to submit himself to such a sacrificial role, as a ‘servant-leader’ in the marital relationship.

In contrast, the ultimate feminist goal is personal empowerment at the expense of all other interpersonal achievements. The expectations of husbands, parents, and children become less important than a woman’s ‘right’ to full autonomy and self-determination. What could be more departed from the Christian ideas of ‘love of the neighbour’ and self-sacrifice? It is therefore no wonder that Christianity is so hated by such feminists.



Figure 3. Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) was an actress who starred in some of the most popular French plays of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including *La Dame Aux Camelias*, by Alexandre Dumas, and *Ruy Blas*, by Victor Hugo. She often played with Satanic symbolism and even sculpted a figurine that is seen as a portrait of herself as the Devil. Parisian lesbians used her as a role model when forging subversive sexual identities.

The ultimate subversion: ‘evangelical feminism’

The thesis that the biblical account is construed by men in order to perpetuate their hegemonic power over women is one of the hallmarks of postmodern feminism. Such postmodern interpretation of Scripture claims that the roles assigned to women are not natural, but socially constructed. Male and female roles and behaviour are said to be not influenced by natural or biological differences, but are socially conditioned and construed in order to sustain social relations of power and domination. Inspired by the postmodernist rejection of biblical Christianity, feminists take aim at traditional biblical concepts of family, marriage, and sexuality, debunking them as no more than expressions of Western white male power.⁴⁰ According to these feminists, knowledge on these issues “is never more than beliefs constructed by men to justify existing power relationships, and there is no such thing as objective truth on which to base social structures such as marriage and family”.⁴¹

Feminist propositions based on postmodern philosophy stand in direct antithesis to biblical doctrine. They have moved as far away from the God of Bible as possible.⁴² However, in the 1960s Christian feminists set themselves on a course parallel to that pursued by other feminists in ‘secular society’. The major thesis proposed by Christian feminists in the early 1960s was identical to the thesis exposed in postmodern feminism: that there were no demonstrable differences between male and female. They believed that

women should be allowed to do everything a man can do, and in the same manner and with the same recognized societal status. Christian feminists view freedom as a process that rests within the individual. It is realized through personal experience. Thus, theologian Valerie Saving Goldstein argued that the greatest sin of women was too much sacrificial love and not enough pride in themselves.⁴³

Evangelical feminism is on the rise. These Christian feminists do not comprise a new group, but a revived group that is constantly reinventing itself for the next generation. Feminism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries included an interest in the place of women in religion. During the 1960s and the 1970s evangelical feminists began writing articles that addressed reproductive rights as well as inequality in marriage and in the religious hierarchy. In response to these articles, groups such as the “Evangelical Women’s Caucus” and the “Evangelicals for Societal Action” were formed in order to create a social movement in the church towards a ‘Christian feminist ideal’ of absolute gender equality and the denial of anything uniquely masculine in the natural order.

Christian feminists argue that women’s role is based on culturally variable factors. They seek androgyny by pursuing women’s ordination and the obliteration of structured roles in marriage. “With an androgynous definition of equality in hand”, writes Kassian, “early feminist theologians were able to argue that they had the right to define their own roles”.⁴⁴ Christian feminists then dispute the concept of immutable traits of men and women, and personally attribute any alleged differences between the sexes to the effects of education and cultural environment. One such Christian feminist, Dennis Ashborok, in an article in *Pastoral Psychology*, commented: “there has been no single exclusive patterning of masculine and feminine roles in history. Cultural relativity is quite prevalent in this regard.”⁴⁵ As a result, Kassian points out:

“Feminist theology and philosophy obscured, for many people, what it meant to be male or female. Many believers did not understand that masculine and feminist aspects of character coexist within the individual psyche of all humans and also coexist in the character of God. Men and women who adopted feminist precepts lost touch with the feminist interrelationships between themselves and God and correspondingly shunned masculine/feminine distinction in relationships between humans. They lost perspective of who God is and also perspective of who they—as male and female—are. An improper view of God led to an improper self-identity.”⁴⁶

Many prominent evangelical feminists advocate positions that deny or undermine the authority of Scripture. Feminist theologians take the liberty to discard passages of the Bible that do not agree with their vision of sexual equality. The hermeneutic espoused allows Galatians 3:28 to be included in authoritative canon, but it leaves out 1 Corinthians 11. It totally rejects the authority of Ephesians 5:22 and it scoffs

at 1 Timothy 2:11. They either dismiss these biblical texts as outdated—relative only to a particular time and culture—and the author of the text as misogynistic, or they reinterpret them and assign them a meaning different from what the author had intended.⁴⁷ In sum, they embrace only portions of Scripture that more directly appeal to themselves and align with their feminist vision for ‘women’s liberation’.

These feminist scholars often deny the authority or truthfulness of Genesis 1–3 by stating that these words of the Bible have a ‘patriarchal meaning’ that God did not intend, and that some events in Genesis 1–3 are not historically accurate.⁴⁸ These positions are normally followed by the endorsement of the moral legitimacy of homosexuality.⁴⁹ The common denomination in all this is a persistent undermining of the authority of Scripture, in particular the denial of the biblical account in the first three chapters of the book of Genesis, as well as of all biblical teachings on manhood and womanhood. The late Francis Schaeffer, one of the most celebrated Christian thinkers of the twentieth century, in his book *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, included a section called ‘The Feminist Subversion’, in which he wrote:

“The key to understanding extreme feminism centers around the idea of total equality ... the world spirit in our day would have us aspire to autonomous absolute freedom in the area of male and female relationships—to throw off all form and boundaries in these relationships and especially those boundaries taught in the Scriptures ... It is a direct and deliberate bending of the Bible to conform to the world spirit of our age at the point where the modern spirit conflicts with what the Bible teaches.”⁵⁰

He is not the only one who has reached this conclusion. Wayne Grudem, a prominent evangelical theologian, contends that evangelical feminism effectively undermines the authority of Scripture. These evangelical feminists, writes Grudem, aspire to blur and then ultimately deny God’s identity as our Father. According to him, “once evangelical feminism gains control of a church or denomination, the teachings tend increasingly toward a denial of anything that is uniquely masculine.”⁵¹ As Grudem also explains:

“The evangelical feminist agenda will not stop simply with the rejection of male headship in marriage and the establishment of women as pastors and elders in churches. There is something much deeper at stake. At the foundation of [evangelical feminism] is a dislike and a rejection of anything uniquely masculine. It is a dislike of manhood itself.”⁵²

Evangelical feminists are now heading toward the denial of anything uniquely masculine. They insist that God should no longer be addressed as ‘Father’, ‘Ruler’, ‘Judge’, ‘Master’, or ‘King’. According to Krister Stendal, dean of Harvard Divinity School, the maleness of God was a “cultural and linguist accident ... The time has come to liberate our thoughts of God from such sexism.”⁵³ However, as Kassian points out, “disregarding these names for God reduces and

castrates His character, for the words are not merely figurative, but reflect true aspects of God’s character”.⁵⁴ “Therefore, in changing these symbols, feminists attack the very essence of God’s character”.⁵⁵

Another related trend is the removal of masculine language from familiar hymns. The male-oriented words ‘King’, ‘Him’, and ‘He’ are removed. The new hymnal also eliminates references to God as ‘Father’ and ‘Son’. Christian feminists argue that these words bear patriarchal, male-dominant overtones. Some of these evangelical feminists openly advocate praying to God as ‘our Mother in heaven’.⁵⁶ The problem with such a theological approach is summarized by Grudem as follows:

“[I]f we call God ‘Mother’ then we are implying that he is a female person. That is contrary to the Bible’s descriptions of him as Father and King and Lord and ‘he’. The Bible gives no justification for calling God ‘Mother’, and in fact it is contrary to the consistent description of God as ‘Our Father in heaven’ (Matt. 6:9) ... Calling God ‘Mother’ is changing God’s own description of himself in the Bible. It is calling God by a name that he has not taken for himself. Therefore, it is changing the way the Bible teaches us to think of God. It is thus changing our doctrine of God.”⁵⁷

Final considerations

Satanism was anything but a marginal phenomenon in early feminist narrative. Early feminists regularly performed counter-readings of the Bible in order to conceptualize Lucifer as a liberator of womankind and Eve as a heroine. Relying on the same tradition, modern feminists have singled out Christianity as a key institution supporting the subjugation of women. In such a view, the Christian ideal of wifely marital duties is seen as incompatible with a woman’s right to govern herself.⁵⁸ Under this assumption, feminists may view Satan as a positive figure and Christianity as an obstacle that has to be removed for women to be fully emancipated.

Under these feminist narratives, Eve’s ingestion of the forbidden fruit becomes a heroic act of rebellion against the tyranny of God and Adam.⁵⁹ Satan is praised as an ally in the women’s struggle against the ‘patriarchy’ established by ‘God the Father’ and his male priests. The misinterpretations of crucial biblical passages, in particular the third chapter of Genesis, are responsible for the feminist claim that events in Genesis 1–3 are not historically accurate.⁶⁰ These positions are often accompanied by the endorsement of homosexuality and other anti-biblical practices such as abortion, which are positively condemned in Scripture.⁶¹ The common denominator is a persistent undermining of the authority of Scripture, in particular the denial of the historical record in the book of Genesis and other biblical teachings on manhood and womanhood.

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