



Book Review

Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation

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Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation (2017)
Sharon D. Welch
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Through the lens of liberation theology, the Bible can be viewed as subversive document that encourages communities of faith to engage in resistance and solidarity with marginalized populations. This orientation also encourages the oppressed to speak for themselves, which is consistent with the aims of adult education. Liberation theology views faith as being rooted in practice and does not separate the spiritual from the political. In Welch's recently republished book, *Communities of resistance and solidarity: A feminist theology of liberation*, explores this critical approach to theology.

In Chapter one, Welch argues there is a fundamental crisis in Christian theology and a need for an alternative. Liberation theology is concerned with "political and social transformation and the role that religion plays both in fostering liberation and in maintaining oppression," (p. 15) and encourages Christians to engage in liberatory practices. Furthermore, a feminist theology of liberation seeks to counter sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression in its practice.

Chapter two explores theoretical connections between liberation theology and Foucault's analysis of discourse, which recognizes that universal truth does not exist and also recognizes the embeddedness of power. Additionally, Welch acknowledges the importance of "subjugated knowledge" (pp. 19-20) rooted in resistance to dominant discourse. Furthermore, Welch argues that a feminist theology of liberation acts from the perspective of the oppressed (p. 26).

Chapter three explores the discourse of liberation theology, including the history of conflict and exclusion, excluded content and meaning, and the struggle between dominant and subjugated knowledges. Welch conceptualizes this as “dangerous memory,” which includes people’s stories of hope and suffering (pp. 35-36). She references the civil rights movement, women’s exclusion from aspects of the church and the burning of women as witches, and challenges to Latin American economic development policy.

The fourth chapter expands on liberation theology’s emphasis on addressing human suffering. Welch argues against traditional theology’s focus on universal truths, which is based on a male-centric, dominant class’s understanding of the world. Welch also explores the function of sexism within the institution of Christianity. She argues for a Foucauldian understanding of power and the strategic value of liberatory theology to address oppression.

The final chapter of this book reiterates that a feminist liberation theology seeks an epistemic shift in the nature of Christian faith. Welch emphasizes the importance of examining the particular and engaging in action to address injustice.

CRITIQUE

This book has value for its theoretical explorations and potential implications for adult education practice. Since much of the history of Christianity has either remained silent or perpetuated injustice, liberation theology’s critical orientation addresses the gaps in a universalized understanding of the human-divine relationship as well as serving as a call to action. Its emphasis on reclaiming subjugated knowledge and enabling the marginalized to find their voice is fundamental to this task. In this current political moment of extreme polarization and the right-wing’s misappropriation of religion, adopting liberation theology is critical for Christians in the fight for social justice.

Welch claims in Chapter three that there is a scarcity of resistance. Although she agrees with Foucault that “manifestations of resistance [are] more subtle than armed rebellion or active withdrawal from an oppressive system,” (p. 40) she fails to acknowledge that efforts to build resistance movements occur daily. Her conceptualization of resistance is too limited. Although significant institutional changes are rare, people are consistently working to build social movements. The existence of grassroots, community organizations working to change policy, hold corrupt politicians and corporations accountable, and elect progressive candidates is evidence of this reality, which is consistent with Resource Mobilization theory in social movement literature (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996). Furthermore, her limited conceptualization of resistance discounts the daily actions marginalized people take to reclaim their power, which include, but are not limited to lobbying their legislators, writing a letter to the editor, or challenging an abusive intimate partner.

Furthermore, the world has evolved significantly since the original writing of Welch’s book 35 years ago. LGBTQ rights, the climate justice movement, and other movements have modified our understanding of social justice. It would be prudent to apply her original theoretical claims to this

current historical moment because we would benefit from putting a feminist theology of liberation into practice.

REFERENCES

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