

African Women Liberation: A Man's Perspective
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Have you ever thought of the issue of the liberation of women in the African context in terms of 'liberation theology' or 'ideology'? This concept is not a mere theoretical abstraction of a real social problem but a practical analytical approach 'which adequately meets our Africa women's needs, thought forms, mentally and, above all, their contemporary aspirations in their continuous struggle'.

That today's African woman is reasserting her individuality, humanness, self-worth and freedom is in no doubt whatsoever. However, this awakening needs to be made more aggressive and rapid in an effort to reduce and do away with male dominance and absolutism. This book is a contribution to this struggle whose object and subject have become even more vivid in recent history.

The central question raised here is the role that men, the authors and perpetrators of the possession and exploitation of women should and must play in liberating women and themselves from the bondage of the oppressive ideology and practice. Men are complementary to women and, they too, are part of humanity in its entirety. Neither part of humankind can claim freedom while the other suffers nor escape its obligatory commitment to liberate itself as well as the other half. Men, therefore, can not just afford to be simply sympathetic to the cause of women's struggle. They must be critical, pragmatic and resolute in their concern to contribute to that struggle, since, for one reason or the other, they may be the only ones who hinder or help the success of the struggle. Men must realise the liberation of women will mean the liberation of human kind.

So much has already been said about the need, not just to liberate the African woman from the enslavement of men through conservative traditional values and practices, but also to empower them her equal participation in the development of society in all spheres of life. However, rarely have the prophets of this liberation crusade proposed effective tools to be employed in the implementation of the actual programme of freeing and empowering the oppressed, exploited, suppressed and often dehumanised female gender.

In addition, most of the proposals put forward in this regard tend to focus only on one aspect of the predicament of women. In this score, the work under review makes an important departure and takes an inclusive and comprehensive approach to the issue. Thus, taking a pastoral and theological perspective, the books examines the traditional, the social, the political, the economic, the sexual, the intellectual as well as the religious

cum ecclesiastical spheres of real and symbolical subjugation of the African woman. What is more, the study suggests ways of combating the factors that promote unfreedom for women in general. Ways of enhancing positive and authentic living and growth.

The book distinguishes itself in that it advances the doctrine of Christology as an evolving approach to the endeavour to liberation and freedom of womankind which focuses on the words, deeds and life of Jesus as the prototype. The author uses examples of lives of selected women to underline the lesson of the book: suggestion of an African intercultural liberation theology that takes into account African and other traditional religious and cultures and how these affect the lives of women *vis-à-vis* that of men.

Some of the principal tenants of the above framework include its comprehensive nature in comparison with other approaches so far suggested as well as its insistence that true liberation of women as a socio-cultural problem with its roots in the attitude of both genders, must aim at the mental, social and spiritual conversion of both sexes. In addition, the liberation of the oppressed must include, if not be preceded, by that of the oppressor as a person and the demobilisation of all attendant tools and institutions of gender oppression. Needless to stress, the external liberation will be incomplete unless it is accompanied by a spiritual revolution culminating in the reversal of the oppressive environment and unless it prepares the oppressor as well as the oppressed for the new roles.

The book, however, acknowledges that since the world has crystallised into a kind of a 'global village', culture will continue to cross-fertilise each other, the need for liberation from such ills as socio-economic injustice, sexism, chauvinism, racism, and so forth will endure. In addition, such social factors as the emergence of liberation theologians, the multiplication of splinter independent churches breaking away from and challenging parent institutions, church-state tension and, often, antagonism, the theology of liberation will become perennial and indispensable.

This book provides a stimulating and critical standard reference not just for all in theological and pastoral work but also those engaged in the mass education of Africans in an effort to raise their political and gender consciousness. It also contains a useful bibliography for scholars in this field.

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