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# Christ the Pioneer of Transcendent Womanhood

**Demitria Selvita Alvianey**

*Fakultas Teologi Universitas Sanata Dharma  
Selvianey@yahoo.com*

## **Abstract**

*Topic about women is never-ending, and always evolving. Before the 20th century, women were always portrayed in literature as imperfect beings. This depiction ultimately placed women lower than men in all aspects of social, cultural and economic life. In the 20th century, feminism emerged, an ideology that fights for equal rights and obligations between men and women. One of the most popular feminist figures is Simone de Beauvoir. She stated that women must transcend themselves to show their existence. By showing their existence, women can demand rights that are not recognized. The feminist movement became more widespread and developed until it eventually gave birth to new schools of feminism. These new schools of feminism often bring impacts that go against nature, such as schools that advocate rejecting the existence of men and even refusing to give birth. Indirectly, these schools of feminism contradict the magisterium of the Church.*

*Feminism ultimately raises new problems. The problem that will be raised from this research is how the Church responds to the feminism movements that are echoing in today's society. The purpose of this study is to provide insight to the public regarding the Church's state towards the feminism movement. This research uses the literature review method, which is a series of research activities consisting of collecting data that is only limited to library sources, reading, and processing the data. This method has primary sources that are the object of research and secondary sources that support the study in the research. The researcher hopes that this research will contribute to the wider community for women to dare to act to break the stigmas that have been entrenched in the wider community.*

## Preface

Women are often portrayed in literary works by writers or in essays due to a writer's reflections. These writings generally dehumanize women. For example, Aristotle wrote, "Women are women with a particularly deficient nature," and "we must regard her nature as an imperfection of nature." Aristotle's statement views women as less than perfect beings. According to Aristotle, the perfect being is the man. Aristotle's statement is in line with that of St Thomas. St Thomas regarded women as imperfect men, "creatures" created by accident." St Thomas' statement is based on the Old Testament passage. In this verse, it is said that Eve was created from Adam's rib. According to St Thomas, Eve's body did not belong to her entirely. This means that a woman cannot live without a man by her side, while a man can live even without a woman by his side. Women are considered as other beings.

Ultimately, these thoughts shape public opinion that can demean the position of women. As a result, men acted arbitrarily toward women. Over time, philosophers realized that women experienced injustice in all aspects of life. For example, from an economic view, men have better positions and higher salaries when compared to women. The injustice was not because of poor performance or lower intellectual capacity but because they were women. It was the writings of these philosophers that eventually moved women to take action to fight for their rights that had never been recognized. Thanks to the encouragement of philosophers, women dared to act to fight for their rights that had been ignored. Women took to the streets to voice their opinions and demanded equal rights and obligations with men. When their voices were ignored, they took matters into their own hands, establishing health services, employment, and education services that were exclusively for women and did not accept male labor.

In Indonesia, gender equality has worked quite well. Long before the ideology of feminism entered Indonesia, Indonesian society, especially in Java, had already implemented gender equality. For example, fathers fish in the sea in fishing villages from late afternoon until early morning. The catch is handed over to the mother to be processed and cooked as a side dish, then some of the fish is sold at the market. Fishing fathers and mothers both work to fulfill the needs of the household. There is no heavier or lighter job to do. They work together and share roles. Likewise, in politics, many women hold important positions in the parliament building, such as Sri Mulyani Indrawati, who served as Minister of Finance, Retno Marsudi who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Susi Pudjiastuti who served as Minister of Marine Affairs. A female president, Mrs. Megawati Soekarno Putri, even led Indonesia.

The problem arises when women go further. Instead of equalizing gender, they try to shift the role of men. Many jobs are set up by women, for women, and by women; all staff and workers are women, not accepting men.

## Methods

The author uses qualitative research methods with literature study techniques. In this paper, the author collects scientific data and information in the form of theories in books, journals, manuscripts, notes, and documents related to this research.

## Discussion

### 1. History of Feminism

The feminist movement is thought to have emerged alongside the renaissance ideology in Europe during the late 14th century. Socialist activist Charles Fourier first coined the word feminism in 1837. Long before Fourier spoke about feminism, Montaigne first spoke about the injustices experienced by women. Women suffered from the rules made by men unilaterally. Michel de Montaigne was a French philosopher who lived in the 16th century. Montaigne was well aware that women have always received unfair treatment from men. It is no wonder that men acted arbitrarily toward women. Montaigne stated, "women are not to blame when they reject the rules imposed on them because men make them without consulting them. No wonder intrigues and disputes abound." Montaigne did not go further to fight for them.

In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *The Vindication of Women's rights*. Wollstonecraft called for the development of the rational side in women and demanded that girls should be able to study in government schools on par with boys. According to Wollstonecraft, women's education could develop their intellect to become independent individuals, especially financially. Later in the 18th century, more democratic men began to look at the issue objectively. Diderot said that women, like men, are human beings. Then Harriet and John Stuart Mill fought for the expansion of employment opportunities for women and women's legal rights in marriage and divorce through a book entitled *The Subjection of Women*. Women's struggle to show their existence paid off; in 1975, the UN announced the international decade of women. In 1979 the UN passed a resolution to stop discrimination against women. Women's struggle did not stop. Women continued to fight for their rights, giving birth to new schools of feminism.

## 2. Feminism Theorists

### 2.1. Michelle Foucault

Foucault never discussed women specifically, but his thoughts contributed to the feminist movement. Foucault talks more about the concept of power. Power structures are spread everywhere, from various fields such as politics, culture, law, social, and religion to health. In the context of feminism, women realize that power works over them, giving rise to the stereotype that men are more powerful and women are weak. These stereotypes perpetuate acts of violence and discrimination against women. Through Foucault's thinking, women can conclude that there is an imbalance in gender power relations.

### 2.2. Simone de Beauvoir

Beauvoir considers that women have always been considered and used as objects. It is not men who make women objects, but women themselves. Without asking for validation from men, women can become subjects. To become a subject, women must dare to transcend themselves. Transcendent consists of two words: trans, which means across, beyond, and the word scandere which means to climb. Overall, transcendent means beyond the limit. In the context of feminism, Beauvoir suggests that women can get out of themselves and then dare to act beyond the limits of humans in general. Transcendence can be done by thinking and acting differently from women in general, who are still bound by patriarchal culture to fight for justice.

### 2.3. Jacques Derrida

Similar to Foucault, Derrida does not talk much about women. Derrida talks more about his thoughts on deconstruction. Deconstruction is a way of carefully understanding language (semiotics) to distinguish paradoxes and inconsistencies in writing. Deconstruction is text-centered, so it has a vast range of meanings. Deconstruction rejects the old-fashioned structures that are so prevalent. The first step is to dismantle the text to bring out the opposition. In the context of feminism, feminist activists consider patriarchal culture an outdated social structure, and sadly patriarchy is taken for granted. Through deconstruction, women are able to reconstruct the patriarchal culture that is considered an ancient culture. That way, women can fight against men, especially those still shackled by patriarchal culture.

### 3. Schools of Feminism

#### 3.1. Liberal Feminists

Liberal feminism is the view that women have total freedom, including the freedom to have a purpose in life, make choices and be a complete human-being. This freedom encourages women to act independently and individualistically and always tries to realize that women are oppressed and consider domestic work unproductive. This theory relies on freedom, equality, and having the same abilities as men. Liberal feminists have led many women to achieve professional and high-ranking positions in the workplace.

#### 3.2. Radical Feminist

Etymologically, radical comes from the Latin *radix*, root, used as an adjective meaning or relating to roots or towards roots. Radical feminist activists consider that the root of gender inequality is the patriarchal system that has taken root in society. Radical feminism considers that the body of the patriarchal system makes women's bodies the main object of oppression by male power. Radical feminism takes issue with natural things such as childbirth, pregnancy, and menstruation.

Radical feminism is divided into libertarian radical feminism and radical cultural feminism. Libertarian radical feminism focuses on women's personal choices over their bodies and sexuality, whether they are heterosexual, lesbian, or transgender. This school of feminism believes that feminine gender identity limits women from developing as whole human beings and considers that the main enemy of women is patriarchy. Cultural radical feminism believes that besides patriarchy, men are also part of the objectification of women. They consider that men control women's sexuality for male pleasure. Many of these feminists see celibacy and lesbianism to be free from the restrictions imposed by patriarchal culture.

#### 3.3. Marxist-Socialist Feminism

Feminist socialism holds the view that "there is no socialism without women. There is no women's liberation without socialism." Socialist feminism is rooted in the thought of Marx. One of the Marxist doctrines is the creation of a classless society. In Marxist theory, humans in the era of feudalism and capitalism had class divisions in society. Classes in society indicate social strata as well as social status. These classes are determined by wealth, profession, rank, and education. These social classes made the

relationship between people to be compartmentalized and blocked. Discrimination exists between the rich and the poor, the capitalist and the proletariat, and the landlord and the laborer. In the context of feminism, socialist feminists believe that marriage is the legalization of the ownership of women's bodies. The husband has the right to act arbitrarily towards a woman's body and life because he feels the woman he marries is his property. With the abolition of marriage, a woman's body and life become her own.

### 3.4. Anarchy Feminism

Emma Goldman initiated the anarchist school of feminism. Emma Goldman said that: "Anarchism, then, really means the liberation of the human mind from the domination of religion; the liberation of the human body from the domination of property; liberation from the shackles and restraints of government. Anarchism means a social order that will guarantee the freedom of every human being to enjoy the necessities of life fully according to his or her desires, tastes, and inclinations." Goldman focuses on the feminism of the female body. Goldmann focuses on the feminism of the female body, urging women to take charge of their sexuality, establish their sexual autonomy, and challenge entrenched power structures.

## 4. Feminism in the Church

### 4.1. The Gospel

The Gospel had already discussed the women's movement to fight for their rights long before philosophers discussed it. In Mark 7:24-30, we are told that Jesus met a Syro-Phoenician mother. She asked Jesus for help to save her son, who was possessed by an evil spirit. She came and fell at His feet. Jesus said: "Let the children be filled first, for it is not right to take the bread set aside for the children and throw it to the dogs." Jesus used the words "children", "bread," and "dogs." It can be interpreted that the children Jesus is referring to are the Jews, the bread is the blessing or salvation, while the dogs are the Gentiles. Overall, it can be interpreted that salvation is only given to the Jews, in other words, Jesus refused to give salvation to this mother.

Jesus did not intend to refuse to save the mother's son. Jesus wanted to know how much the mother had faith in God, given that she was a Greek Phoenician and arguably did not believe in God. Jesus' response gave the mother the opportunity for transcendence. In general, when someone is called a dog, that person will get angry and feel that his or her dignity is degraded by being equated with a dog. For the Jews, dogs are unclean animals and should be eliminated. The mother was not angry at Jesus' answer. She realized that she was dealing with Jesus. She realized that she was a woman

and not from the Jewish community. She realized that she was in an inferior position, whereas Jesus was in a superior position, not only because He was a man and a Jew but also because He was going to save her son, He had the power to heal her son. In general, when someone is in an inferior position and is called a dog, he will feel small in front of the other person. The mother had transcended. She went beyond herself and the thinking of the average person. She dared to position herself as Jesus' partner and think and argue like talking to her partner. There was no master and servant status. The mother did not feel small or angry, calmly saying, "True Lord. But the dog under the table also eats the crumbs the children drop".

In Jewish tradition, dogs are unclean, but not for this mother. Dogs, in her understanding, are animals that are very dear to their owners. Some people love dogs so much that they will sacrifice what they have to make them happy; they are willing to eat simple food so that their dogs can eat expensive, branded food. They work hard to buy aesthetic kennels and even give salon treatments. The way those who love dogs treat their dogs is like the way they treat their best friends. In the same way, Jesus and Mrs. Sirofenesia were confident that Jesus would love her like a friend. A human being would give the food they were eating to their friend, and would protect their friend. Jesus would save the mother's son as the Father loves His son.

Hearing the mother's response, Jesus said, "because of your words, go now, for the demon has gone out of your son." Jesus did not immediately help the mother, like helping the helpless, weak, and small, because Jesus realized that the mother did not need to be pitied. Jesus knew she had the strength, intelligence, and faith to help herself. On the contrary, if Jesus had helped her immediately, Jesus would have undermined her dignity.

#### 4.2. Mulieris Dignitatem

The church supports gender equality as promoted by feminists. The publication of *Mulieris Dignitatem* evidences this. *Mulieris dignitatem* talks about the dignity of women. This apostolic letter was written by Pope John Paul II to coincide with the Marian Year 1987-988, and was published on 15 August 1988. *Mulieris dignitatem* is the Church's response to the feminist movement in the fight for women's rights. "The time is coming, and in fact, it has already come, when the vocation of women will be recognized in its fullness; the time when women in the world will acquire an influence, a result and a power never achieved until now.

The Pope's statement is a breath of fresh air for women. The Pope realizes patriarchal traditions are deeply rooted in society, especially in Europe. This culture deprives women of their education, career, and household rights. Women are often placed in second place. Women are often abused due to this culture, as men feel they have

power over women's lives. Of course, the people who benefit from this culture will continue to maintain this culture. They do not want change. They fear their position being displaced and their jobs being replaced. As we know that men dominate the Church, it also fights for justice for women. This attitude of the Church shows that the Church is here to bring salvation to all human beings.

Based on the passage Luke 1:31-37: "Behold, you will conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and called the Son of the Highest God." The church is reminded that a woman is essential in the Holy Spirit's work of salvation. The Saviour did not just appear, but was born from a mother's womb. The figure of a mother is significant because she is willing to sacrifice her life to conceive, give birth and care for the Son of God, indirectly, this mother helped bring salvation to the world.

"When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman." According to the KBBI (Indonesian Dictionary), a woman means a human with a vagina and a uterus. The use of woman from the passage is very appropriate because it has a neutral connotation that does not indicate social status. The passage does not use the word mother. The term mother is only carried by women who give birth and have children. The term mother can also be used by women considered physically mature, although unmarried women are reluctant to be called mothers. "Sending His son" means God wants to bring salvation on earth. Overall, it means that God invites all women to participate in the work of salvation. God is neutral by not looking at women's social status or profession. All women can do the work of salvation through the work done by women. Jobs such as teachers, doctors, housewives, and artists can bring salvation without demeaning one job to another.

## Conclusion

One of the feminist figures who aggressively voiced her opinion on justice for women was Simone de Beauvoir. Beauvoir stated that to be able to seize justice that is ignored is to do self-transcendence. Women must dare to get out of themselves, and they must dare to act, speak, and think beyond the average woman in general. She must dare to take risks and equalize herself with men. Before Beauvoir, Christ had invited women to take action. Christ invited other women to dare to come out of themselves by equalizing themselves with men. Women must dare to fight for justice. Self-transcendence is the way to realize gender equality. After dare to transcend themselves, women are more courageous to act, and they dare to voice their opinions and fight for justice. Women's courage often crosses the line. They rejected natural things, such as refusing to give birth and refusing to recognize the existence of men. They feel that their freedom is their authority. The Church disapproves of this phenomenon. The Church agrees that there



should be gender equality between men and women. Gender equality occurs when there is neither more nor less between one another. As long as men and women consider each other to be other beings, they will never realize gender equality. Gender equality will occur when women and men consider each other as colleagues, partners and partners.

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