



A Study of the Tactical Approach in Addressing Gender Roles in the Bible

With Emphasis on the Episcopal Church

Seyyed Mohammad Hasan Saleh¹ 

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Religions and Mysticism, Faculty of Theology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. Email: m.hasansaleh@alzahra.ac.ir

Abstract

There are various conceivable connections between religion and gender, stemming from either opposition or support for gender roles as prescribed in sacred texts. In the Bible, particularly in the letters of Paul, some passages delineate gender hierarchies, where men are placed in a higher social rank than women. Today, within Christianity, there are different approaches to these passages, some of which are expressed with social aims and objectives in mind. Among these is the consolidationist approach, which seeks to legitimize and solidify traditional gender roles, viewing a literal interpretation of sexual concepts as the most effective means of countering secular and anti-religious movements. Additionally, there is the tactical approach, which, while adhering to the foundational spiritual structures derived from the Bible and distancing itself from radical feminism, advocates for internal religious changes. This article elucidates the key tactics of the tactical approach, with an emphasis on the theories and practices of the Episcopal Church, which include: justifying seemingly misogynistic passages of the Bible, employing a hermeneutics of recuperation, highlighting positive female figures, defining God without a specific gender, granting women clerical positions, and establishing organized women's groups.

Keywords: Tactical Approach, Gender, Feminism, Bible, Episcopal Church.

Introduction

There are various conceivable connections between religion and gender, stemming from either opposition or support for gender roles as prescribed in sacred texts. Christianity, as the world's largest living religion, faces the challenge of reconciling religion and gender more than any other. Among Christians, there are two major approaches to confronting the gender roles depicted in the Bible:

A. Consolidation Approach: This approach seeks to reinforce and legitimize the existing gender structure in the Bible. Its primary motivation is to counter liberal cultural movements.

B. Tactical Approach: The tactical approach attempts to interpret the existing gender roles in the Bible while maintaining a commitment to the sacred text. Since advancing the objectives of this approach requires specific tactics and planning, it is referred to as the tactical or strategic approach. One of the most prominent Christian denominations in this



regard is the Episcopal Church in North America. This article elaborates on the tactical approach with reference to the activities of this church.

Research Findings

The tactical approach has chosen a practical strategy in addressing what is perceived as the patriarchal structure of the Bible, which includes several tactics: The first and most significant challenge for the tactical approach is the seemingly misogynistic passages of the sacred text. The Bible contains statements that explicitly reinforce patriarchy, but the tactical approach strives to interpret them within their appropriate historical context. Advocates of this approach emphasize that Jesus Christ never assigned a subordinate role to women; on the contrary, he always treated women equally to men. In this view, male dominance over women is neither God's original design for creation nor a punishment for women's original sin, but rather an injustice and deviation brought about by church authorities. The second tactic involves using the hermeneutics of recuperation, a method that, through theological frameworks, recovers and highlights specific figures and models in the sacred text. In other words, great women in Christianity and even in other religions like Judaism and Islam are mentioned to demonstrate that the activity or strength of women in religions has been validated, and modern women can find possibilities for agency by following these models. The third tactic emphasizes the non-gendered nature of God. Unlike the opposition approach, which is advocated by radical feminists who introduce God as feminine or a goddess, the tactical approach emphasizes God's lack of specific gender. The fourth tactic underscores the presence of women in church ranks and positions, advocating that women should rise to the episcopal rank, beyond just assisting in religious services. The final tactic involves the creation of women's groups, where women gather to discuss theological issues and their roles.

Conclusion

In the context of Christianity, approaches to the gender roles prescribed in the Bible have varied. The tactical approach has sought to take a middle ground, adhering to the Bible while also mitigating the perception of women as subordinate. Theoretically, this approach has tried to correct the mistaken interpretation of the Bible as being misogynistic, particularly by focusing on the life of Jesus Christ. Additionally, it has endeavored to highlight positive female models in the Bible, including prophetesses and women who played active roles in spreading Jesus' evangelical message. Moreover, rather than introducing God as feminine, it presents God as being beyond any specific gender. Practically, this approach believes that women should not only participate in church ceremonies and serve as assistants but also attain leadership positions within the church, such as priests and bishops, as has been realized in the Episcopal Church. In this vein, women's associations based on biblical structures have been established, facilitating the recovery of women's roles in sacred texts through effective social participation.



References

Bahr, Ann Marie B(2004). Christianity: The Illustrated Guide to 2000 Years of the Christian Faith, U. S. A, Chelsea House Pub.

Bart D, Ehrman(2000). The New Testament A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Carr, Anne(1993). The New Vision of Feminist Theology-Metod, in: Freeing Theology The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective, editid by Catherine Lacugna, San Francisco, HarperCollins.

Ferm, Verjilius (1945). An encyclopedia of religion, New York, the Philosophical Library.

Isherwood, Lisa & Stuart, Elizabeth (1998). Introductions in Feminist Theology: Introducing Body Theology, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press.

Jenkins, Philip (2006). The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cite this article: Saleh, S. M. H. (2024). A Study of the Tactical Approach in Addressing Gender Roles in the Bible: With Emphasis on the Episcopal Church. *Religions and Mysticism*, 57 (1), 161-179. (in Persian)

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

© The Author(s).

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.22059/jrm.2024.375130.630519>



Article Type: Research Paper

Received: 28-Apr-2024

Received in revised form: 21-Jul-2024

Accepted: 24-Jul-2024

Published online: 11-Sep-2024