

ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY: AFRICAN WOMEN'S THEOLOGIES

THEO716/816

Introduction

Welcome to the Honours/Masters elective African Women's Theologies, which is jointly offered by the Gender and Religion; African Theology and Systematic Theology Programmes, School of Religion & Theology, University of KwaZulu Natal. It is a module offered by Professor Isabel Apawo Phiri (phirii@ukzn.ac.za) and Professor Sarojini Nadar (nadars@ukzn.ac.za). The course coordinator is Professor Isabel Phiri and all queries should be directed to her via email. Please note that this is an advanced seminar course rather than a series of lectures. As such, the work will be intensive and will require many hours of critical reading and intensive independent research by the student.

Course Description

This course is an in-depth examination of the contributions of African women theologians to the disciplines of feminist theology and African theology. Both the fields of feminist theology and African theology belong to the category of liberation theologies. African women's theologies were an "irruption within the irruption" in other words, a liberation theology within liberation theology. Hence, the field of African Women's Theologies began to be developed as a result of African women theologians feeling that their experiences were not taken seriously enough in the fields of feminist theology and African theology. The former analysed mostly Western, middle class experiences of women, while the latter focused on African male experiences as sources of their theology. African women's theologies then began to focus on an African identity of wholeness in religion and culture. As such, African women's theologies cover a wide range of disciplines including, history of Christianity, biblical studies, religious studies and practical theology. In this course, however, we will examine African Women's Theologies from a Systematic theological perspective only. Therefore we discuss and analyze for example, what African women theologians are saying about God; Jesus Christology, on being human anthropology; the household of God ecclesiology and hospitality and spirituality culture. Through our seminars, readings and videos we will examine how African women theologians dialogue with classical feminist theologians from the West.

Course Outcomes

At the end of this module you should through written and practical assignments, be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the methods and theories offered by feminist systematic theologians.
- Critically compare African Women's theologies and feminist theologies.
- Identify the issues that emanate from African Women's Theologies and apply them to their respective communities of faith for gender transformation.
- Formulate an independent and considered position with regard to African Women's Theologies.

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Overview of Seminars at a Glance

	Seminar	Topic	Convenor	Readings	Assignments
1.	27 July	Personal introductions (our selves and our stories)	Prof Isabel Phiri and Prof Sarojini Nadar	Phiri (A) 145-160; Nadar(A) 15-32	
2.	3 Aug	Introduction to Feminist Theology	Prof Nadar	Rakoczy 4-27; Clifford 1-45; King 1-38	
3.	10 Aug	The Circle and Mercy Oduyoye	Prof Nadar	Phiri and Nadar (A)1-18 Kanyoro(A) 19-42; Russell 43-58; Njoroge 59-76	Assignment #1 due
4.	17 Aug	Features of African Women's Theologies	Prof Nadar	Phiri and Nadar (B) 5-23; Oduyoye 9-38 Kanyoro 13-31; Landman 137-148; Phiri 68-76	
5.	24 Aug	Bible: Made in God's Image? Anthropology	Prof Nadar	Reisenberger 447-452; Rakoczy 144 – 199; 28-60; Oduyoye 66-77	
6.	30 Aug	Bible: African Feminist Ethics – Gender Violence	Prof Nadar	Nadar 77 – 95; Akoto 96 – 112; Phiri 113-130; Owino 146-168	Assignment # 2 due
7.	7 Sept	African Feminist Ethics – HIV	Prof Nadar	Dube 131-156; Chirongoma 173 – 186; Ackermann 221-242	
8.	14 Sept	God in African Women's Theologies	Prof Phiri	Oduyoye 39-50; Abbey 140-159; Rakoczy 28-60; Clifford 92-131, Kaunda 5-29	
9.	21 Sept	Class Presentations on Term Essay	Prof Nadar		
	26-30 Sept	VACATION			
10.	5 October	Christ in African Women's Theologies	Prof Phiri	Oduyoye 51-65; Hinga 183-194; Rakoczy 98-143,	Assignment #3 due

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				Mombo & Joziasse 169-190	
11.	12 October	The Church in African Women's Theology	Prof Phiri	Oduyoye 78-89; Phiri 119-138; Nadar 139-158; Njoroge 3-15; Clifford, 133-176; Watson 1-15	
12.	19 October	Women's spirituality	Prof Phiri	Oduyoye 90-110; Oduyoye, 161-171	
13.	26 October	Eco-Feminism in African Women's Theologies	Prof Phiri	Rakoczy 302-341; Phiri 63-105; Clifford 219-260; Ruether 72-85; Rakoczy 257-301; Farley 238-255; Moyo 2005?	Assignment # 4 due

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Attendance

Attendance and participation in class is required. You will only be given a DP if you have attended 80% of the module. The course will be taught on Wednesdays from 11:00 to 13:00 in Room 107.

Class Marks

Your class mark counts for 50% toward your final mark. This will be made up of 4 short assignments. Your assignments should be typed and it must be 1200 to 1300 words long. Please make sure to submit the electronic version of the assignment before class. The printed version of the assignment should be submitted at the beginning of class.

Assignment 1:

Write an essay in which you critically reflect on the following definition of feminism by Joann Wolksi Conn:

"Both a coordinated set of ideas and a practical plan of action, rooted in women's critical awareness of how a culture controlled in meaning and action by men for their own advantage, oppresses women and dehumanises men." - Joann Wolksi Conn in Clifford (2005:17).

- a) Critically analyse the above definition of feminism.
- b) Show how feminist theology has developed over the years to embrace both theory and practice.

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Assignment 2:

"Our various religions are the source of our ethics. So all our Scriptures give us a great deal that is of great value. But also, I think it's true to say that all our Scriptures are patriarchal. And one has to look at the Scriptures with a kind of tension. You've got to look at them for the value they have given us, but you also have to look at them with a certain sense of suspicion for the way in which they have presented women and the fact that they have presented an inequality in their basic understanding of...the way in which humanity is divided into hierarchical groups of men and women, the men always being perceived as the higher being than the female." Jocelyn Hellig in the film "Other Voices"

Write an essay in which you critically analyse the above statement with regard to the Bible as sacred Scripture. Your answer should include the following:

- a) A discussion on how feminist biblical scholars in both Africa and the Global North have shown the bible to be patriarchal.
- b) Examples of the hermeneutics developed by both feminist biblical scholars in Africa and the Global North, with special reference to ethical issues such as gender violence and HIV.

Assignment 3

"Ecclesiology is not simply studying and talking about the Church. It has to do with being the Church...To seek to be the Church calls for costly sacrifice. Several Circle members can testify to this. Our experience in the Circle calls us to see the Church as a community that has to learn to make costly sacrifices in order that the whole of God's people may come to experience abundant life." (Oduyoye 2005:153).

Mercy Amba Oduyoye describes the experience of members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians with the church as one of costly sacrifice. Feminist theologians in the Global North have made similar claims regarding the relationships of women with the Church. Therefore feminists in Africa and in the West have proposed new models of being church. Write an essay in which you

- a) Critically discuss the features of these various models of being church from a feminist perspective.
- b) Give at least one narrative of women's experiences with the church, followed by a critical reflection of the narrative.

Assignment 4

Mercy Oduyoye has argued that there is an injustice "of telling creation stories that make the divine source of life into a male who is good and does what is good, and femaleness as an opposing principle that destroys God's goodness, typically causing the felt distance between God and humanity" (Oduyoye 2001: 42).

Mary Daly's famous statement "If God is male then male is God" is also a critique of the consequences of envisioning God as being only male.

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Write an essay in which you:

- a) Show how feminists in Africa and in the Global North reflect on God.
- b) Discuss the implications of the reflections you have written about for churches and Christianity in Africa.

Term Paper

- Completion of a term essay in consultation with the course co-ordinator is required. This is worth 50% of your final mark. PLEASE NOTE: There is no exam for this course. Your term paper replaces an exam and has to be substantial in content and analysis. Therefore you will be required to do a **two-page proposal** highlighting the thesis of your paper, your general theoretical framework, a literature review clearly positing how your essay contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the chosen area of research and a preliminary list of readings you will use for your essay. The proposal has to be e-mailed to the course coordinator on **7 September**. Thereafter, you will receive feedback by e-mail, so that you can begin writing your essay. Topics will be provided, but should you wish to write on a topic of your choice, please be in touch with the course co-ordinator. Your essay should be 4000 words in length for Honours students and 5000 words for Masters students properly referenced, using the school guidelines on referencing.
- Your term paper is due on **7 November**.

Term Paper Topics:

Topic #1

Phylis Trible has argued, in reference to the creation account in Genesis 2, that:

"Throughout the ages people have used this text to legitimate patriarchy as the will of God. They maintained that it subordinates woman to man in creation, depicts her as his seducer, curses her, and authorizes man to rule over her."

Taking cognisance of the gendered nature of the HIV pandemic, write an essay in which you show how the creation account referred to by Phylis Trible above can be read in a way that de-legitimises patriarchy. Your essay must include the following:

- a) An exegesis of the text in question, showing how mis-translations of the text have contributed to its patriarchal interpretations.
- b) A description of a clear feminist theoretical approach.
- c) A conclusion detailing how a feminist reading can be helpful in contexts of HIV.

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Topic #2

The now classical feminist statement by Simone de Beauvoir that "woman is made not born," elucidates the argument that gender is socially constructed not biologically determined. This has contributed to an understanding of how patriarchy shapes the lives of women in general including women in Africa. From your understanding of the ways in which gender functions in African Christianity:

- a) Identify and describe gender construction in African culture and Christian theology (give concrete examples)
- b) Discuss the various theories and methods devised by African women theologians to critique patriarchy within African culture and Christian theology.

Topic #3

Rose Teteki Abbey has argued that:

"The metaphors that we have of God have nothing to do with the form of God. Because we know 'personhood' in terms of male and female, we think if God is personal, then God must be either female or male. Neither is it a question of allowing God's femininity to supersede as His masculinity has done. That need for a balanced view of God cannot be overemphasised" (148-149).

- a) Outline the general debate that Abbey is responding to.
- b) Why are issues of Christology linked to this debate?
- c) In Abbey's opinion what is the solution for the African church and why?
- d) To what extent do you agree with Abbey?
- e) In your opinion how would you implement her proposal in your own church?

Topic #4

"Ecofeminist theological reflection is developing a number of images of the relationship of persons and creation which are more positive than the hierarchical dualism and which show affinities with traditional African understandings of human beings and nature" Rakoczy (2004: 313).

- a) Discuss the 3 images of the relationship of persons and creation by showing their affinities with traditional African understandings of human beings and nature.
- b) Show how the 3 images of the relationship in (a) describe the principles of ecofeminist action as proposed by King
- c) Give one example of how African women are acting according to these principles and making a difference in the ecological future of the earth.

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Prescribed Books:

Many of the prescribed readings for this module can be found in the following books. Therefore it is recommended that the following books be purchased. They can be purchased from the relevant lecturers at a nominal rate:

Rakoczy, Susan. 2004. *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar (Eds). 2006. *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis

Detailed Reading List

Seminar 1 - Personal introductions

Phiri, Isabel Apawo. 2000. "Stand up and be Counted: Identity, Spirituality and Theological Education in my Journey of Faith" in Denise Ackerman, Eliza Getman, Hantie Cotze and Judy Tobler,(eds.) *Claiming Our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity and Spirituality*. Stellenbosch: EFSA Institute for Theological and Interdisciplinary Research, 145-160.

Nadar, Sarojini. 2000. "Emerging From Muddy Waters." in Denise Ackerman, Eliza Gateman, Hantie Cotze and Judy Tobler,(eds.) *Claiming Our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity and Spirituality*. Stellenbosch: EFSA Institute for Theological and Interdisciplinary Research - 15-32.

Seminar 2 – Introduction to Feminist Theology

Rakoczy, Susan. 2004. *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. Chapter 1, 4-28.

Clifford, Anne, M. 2005 *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1-45.

King, Ursula. 1995. "Introduction: Gender and the study of Religion." In Ursula King ed. *Religion & Gender*. Oxford: Blackwell publishers, 1-38.

Seminar 3: The Circle and Mercy Oduyoye

Phiri Isabel and Nadar Sarojini. 2006. "Introduction: Treading Softly but Firmly" in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1-18.

Kanyoro, Musimbi. 2006. "Beads and Strands: Threading more beads in the story of the Circle" in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 19-42

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Russell Letty. 2006. "Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye, Wise Woman Bearing Gifts" in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 43 - 58.

Njoroge Nyambura. "Let's Celebrate the Power of Naming." in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 59-76.

Seminar 4: Features of African Women's Theologies

Oduyoye, Mercy A. 2001. *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 9-38.

Kanyoro, Musimbi 2002. *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perspective*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. Chapter 2 and 3, 13-31.

Kanyoro, Musimbi R. A. 2002. "Engendered Communal Theology: Women's Contribution to Theology in the 21st Century." In Nyambura J. Njoroge and Musa W. Dube eds., *Talitha Cum! Theologies of Africa Women*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 158-180.

Landman, Christina. 1998 'African Women's Theologies' in eds. Simon Maimela and Adro Konic. *Initiation into Theology: The Varieties of Theology and Hermeneutics*. Pretoria: J.L.van Schaik Publishers, 137-138.

Phiri, Isabel Apawo 1997 "Doing Theology in Community: The Case of African Women Theologians in the 1990s." in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* No. 99, November, 68-76.

Seminar 5 - Bible: Made in God's Image? Anthropology

Reisenberger, Azila T. 1993. The Creation of Adam as Hermaphrodite – and its implications for feminist theology. *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 42,4: 447-452 can be accessed on:

http://www.shammai.org/genesis_2_essays.pdf

Rakoczy, Susan. 2004. *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 144 – 199; 28-60.

Seminar 6: Bible and African Feminist Ethics – Gender Violence

Nadar Sarojini. 2006. "Texts of Terror-The Conspiracy of Rape in the Bible, Church and Society: The Case of Esther 2:1-18." In *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*," edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 77-95.

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Akoto Dorothy. 2006. "Women and Health in Ghana and the Trokosi Practice – An issue of Women's and Children's Rights in 2 Kings 4: 1-7 in *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*," edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY:Orbis, 96-112.

Phiri Isabel. 2006. "Dealing with the Trauma of Sexual Abuse: A Gender-based Analysis of the Testimonies of Traditional Healers in KwaZulu-Natal." In *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*," edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 113-130.

Owino Kennedy. 2010 "“Maleness” and its Possible Influence on Abuse and Domestic Violence in South Africa: A Critique of Some Expressions of Evangelical Theology.’ In *Journal of Constructive Theology*. Volume 16 (2), 146-168.

Seminar 7: African Feminist Ethics - HIV

Dube, Musa. 2006. "Adinkra! Four Hearts Joined Together. On Becoming Healing-Teachers of African Indigenous Religion/s in HIV & Aids Prevention." In *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*," edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 131-56.

Chirongoma, Sophia. 2006. "Women, Poverty and HIV in Zimbabwe: An Exploration of Inequalities in Health Care" In *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*," edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 173-186.

Ackerman Denise (2006) 'From Mere Existence to Tenacious Endurance – Stigma, HIV/AIDS and a Feminist Theology of Praxis' In *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*," edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis,221-242.

Seminar 8 God in African Women's Theologies

Abbey, Rose Teteki. 2001. 'Rediscovering Ataa Naa Nyonmo-The Father-Mother God'. In Njoroge, N. and Musa W Dube, eds. *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 140-159.

Kaunda, Chammah J. 2010. "Reclaiming the Feminine Image of God in Lesa and its Implication for the Bemba Christian Women at the Evangel Assembly of God Church in the post-Missionary Era." In *Journal of Constructive Theology*. Volume 16 (1), 5-29.

Oduyoye, M. A. 2001. *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 39–50.

Rakoczy, Susan. 2004. *In Her Name: Women doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 61-97.

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Tappa, Louise. 1986. 'God in Man's Image.' In Pobee, John and Barbel von Wartenberg-Potter, eds. *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological reflections by women from the Third World*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 101-106.

Seminar 9 Christ in African Women's Theologies

Hinga, Teresia M. 1992. 'Jesus Christ and the Liberation of Women in Africa' in Oduyoye M. A. and Kanyoro M. R., eds. *The will to Arise: Women tradition and the church in Africa*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 183-194.

Oduyoye, M. A. 2001. *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 51-65.

Rakoczy, Susan. 2004. *In Her Name: Women doing Theology*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, chapter 4, 98-143.

Ruether, Rosemary R. 1983. *Sexism and God-Talk*. Boston: Beacon; London: SCM, 116-134.

Seminar 10 The Church in African Women's Theology

Clifford, Anne M. 2005. *Introducing Feminist Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 133-176.

Mpumlwana, Thoko. 1991. 'My Perspective on Women and their Role in Church and Society' in Ackerman, D. Draper J.A., et al., eds. *Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the church in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 369-385.

Nadar, Sarojini. 2002. 'Journeying in Faith: The stories of two ordained Indian women in the Anglican and Full Gospel Churches in South Africa' in I.A. Phiri, D.B. Govinden and S. Nadar, eds. *In Her-Stories: Hidden histories of women of faith in Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 139-158.

Njoroge, Nyambura J. 1996. 'Groaning and Languishing in Labour Pains' in Kanyoro, M.R. and Njoroge N., eds. *Groaning in Faith: African women in the household of God*. Nairobi: Action Publishers, 3-15.

Oduyoye, Mercy. A. 2001. *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 78-89.

Phiri, Isabel A. 1997. *Women Presbyterianism and Patriarchy*. Blantyre: CLAIM, 1997, chapter 3, 71-90.

Phiri, Isabel. A. 2002. 'Called at Twenty Seven and Ordained at Seventy Three!: The story of Rev Victory Nomvete Mbanjwa in the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa.' In Isabel Apawo Phiri, Betty Govinden and Sarojini Nadar, eds. *Her-*

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Story: The histories of women of faith in Africa. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 119-137.

Rakoczy, Susan. 2004. *In Her Name: Women doing Theology.* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, chapter 6, 198-254.

Ruether, Rosemary R. 1983. *Sexism and God-Talk.* Boston: Beacon; London: SCM, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. chapter 8, p.193-213.

Watson, Natalie. 2002. *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1-15.

Seminar 11 Women's spirituality

Oduyoye, Mercy. A. 2001. *Introducing African Women's Theology.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 90-109.

Oduyoye, Mercy. A. 'Spirituality of Resistance and Reconstruction' in Oduyoye, Mercy A., Letty M. Russell, John Mananzan, and Shannon Clark. 1996. *Women Resisting Violence: spirituality for life.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 161-172.

Rakoczy, Susan. 2004. *In Her Name: Women doing Theology.* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, chapter 10, 374-412.

Russell, Letty M. 1996. 'Spirituality, Struggle, and Cultural Violence. In Mananzan Mary John, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Elsa Tamez, J. Shannon Clarkson, Mary C. Grey, Letty M. Russell, eds. *Woman Resisting Violence: Spirituality for life.* Maryknoll: Orbis, pages 20-26.

Seminar 12 Eco-Feminism in African Women's Theologies

Moyo, Fulata. 2005. 'Sex, Gender, Power and HIV/AIDS in Malawi: Threats and challenges to women being Church.' In Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds. *On Being Church: African women's voices and visions.* Geneva: WCC Publications, 127-143.

Phiri, Isabel. 1996. 'African Traditional Religion: The role of women at Chisumphi Shrine in preserving ecology.' In Rosemary Radford Ruether, ed. *Women Healing Earth.* Maryknoll: Orbis, 63-105.

Pillay, Miranda. 2006. The Church on Abortion: Moving beyond the pro-life/ pro-choice debate – an Anglican view? In *Journal of Constructive Theology.* Volume 12. (2).65- 87.

Rakoczy, Susan. 2004. *In Her Name: Women doing Theology.* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, chapter 7, 256-298.

Rakoczy, Susan. 2004. *In Her Name: Women doing Theology.*

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Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, chapter 8, 299-338.

Ruether, Rosemary R. 1983 *Sexism and God-Talk*, Boston: Beacon; London: SCM,
chapter 3, 72-85.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. 1996. Ecofeminism: First and Third world women. In
Mananzan Mary John, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Elsa Tamez, J. Shannon Clarkson, Mary C
Grey, Letty M Russell, eds. *Woman Resisting Violence: Spirituality for life*. Maryknoll:
Orbis, 27-37.