



Woman in Catharine Beecher (1800–1878)

Therese Boos Dykeman

Catharine Beecher defined woman as possessing intelligence, value, and dignity, and in that way being identical to men. Yet as dictated by Common Sense and articulated in the Bible, Beecher argued that the nature of woman as sexual is essentially different, which means she is physically weaker than man, in need of protection, and given responsibilities of home and children. Women are thus valued as conservators of the domestic state, nurses of the sick, guardians and developers of the human body in infancy, and educators of the human mind. By performing these activities, women are perfected, but, for lack of education, often unprepared to carry out these activities well. Consequently, having their activities devalued, women in addition often suffer from dishonor as well as from unjust laws, opinions, and customs. The “general principle” which the Bible inculcates is that “where there is *power*” which cannot be resisted, one is to submit to that power, but if one possesses it, one should use it. Men have the power of physical strength and the power of the purse. If a woman chooses to submit to that power, she does so by marriage. But in possessing that power, a husband must honor his wife as the “weaker vessel”. If that does not happen, she has the right to reclaim honor, for physical power means that men are to use that power to honor women as much as to “govern” them. As educators beginning with children and moving out toward other women, women with intelligence and virtue have the power to not only save themselves but to save their country dependent on an educated citizenry. Teaching being her essential occupation, a woman needs have the freedom and equality to pursue it as an independent livelihood and receive from it “honor” and “compensation.”

[Cf. Works by English William Paley (1743–1805, French Théodore Simon Jouffroy (1796–1842), American Francis Wayland (1827–1855)]

Primary Sources:

Beecher, Catharine E. 1845. *The Duty of American Women to their Country*. NY: Harper & Brothers.

Beecher, Catharine E. 1846. *The Evils Suffered by American Women and American Children: The Causes and the Remedy*. An Address to the Protestant Clergy of the United States. NY: Harper & Brothers.

Beecher, Catharine E. 1851. *True Remedy for the Wrongs of Woman with a History of an Enterprise having that for its Object*. Boston: Phillips, Sampson, & Co [Letters to sister Harriet Beecher Stowe].

Beecher, Catharine E. 1872. *Woman's Profession as Mother and Educator, with Views in Opposition to Woman Suffrage*. NY: Maclean, Gibson & Co [Delivered as an address 1870 Boston].

Dykeman, Therese B. & Rogers, Dorothy G. (eds.) 2002. *The Social, Political and Philosophical Works of Catharine Beecher*, 6 vols. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, vols. 4-6.

Secondary Sources:

Hanaford, Phebe A. 1882. *Daughters of America or Women of the Century*. Augusta, Me: True and Company.

Keywords:

body, common sense, education, freedom, honor, power, sex, value