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# Feminist liturgies – religious or post-secular movement? \*

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to analyze the phenomenon of feminist liturgies to ask whether they are *strictly* religious or, rather, they constitute an element of post-secular culture understood here as ascribing some forms of religion/spirituality a positive meaning for the desired political and social change. It is based, first of all, on the material gathered by Catholic/Catholic-raised women activists. The analysis of the organizing principles of the feminist liturgies has led me to see convergence between their ideological grounds and the functionalist-structural understanding of the relationships between society, culture and ritual. Against this background, the instrumental approach to liturgical forms becomes clear, as they have become tools to embody and propagate feminist consciousness. This allowed me to conclude that the nature of this phenomenon is post-secular.

**KEYWORDS:** feminism, feminist liturgies, post-secularism, post-conciliar Catholicism

## STRESZCZENIE

*Liturgie feministyczne – ruch religijny czy postsekularny?*

Celem artykułu jest analiza zjawiska liturgii feministycznych pod kątem pytania, czy mają one charakter ruchu *stricte* religijnego, czy też

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stanowią element kultury postsekularnej, rozumianej tu jako przyznanie jakimś formom religii/duchowości pozytywnego znaczenia dla pożądaných przemian politycznych i społecznych. Bazuję tu przede wszystkim na materiale autorstwa działaczek katolickich/wywodzących się z katolicyzmu. Analiza zasad organizujących liturgie feministyczne doprowadziła do zauważenia zbieżności ich ideowego podłoża z funkcjonalistyczno-strukturalnym rozumieniem relacji społeczeństwa i kultury do rytuału. Na tym tle widoczne staje się instrumentalne podejście do form liturgicznych, które stają się narzędziami ucieleśniania i propagacji feministycznej świadomości. Pozwala to na sformułowanie wniosku o postsekularnym charakterze omawianego fenomenu.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:   feminizm, liturgie feministyczne,  
postsekularyzm, katolicyzm posoborowy

Discussing Rosi Braidotti's article, *Wbrew czasom. Zwrot postsekularny w feminizmie*<sup>1</sup> contained in the anthology entitled *Drzewo Poznania. Postsekularyzm w przekładach i komentarzach*, the book's reviewer Katarzyna Szkaradnik used the following bottom-line: "For me, however, this mindset contains too little of the sacred and too much of a 'let's change the world' attitude; faith here is identified with a hope for new social norms and values."<sup>2</sup> This, actually, is a connotation of Braidotti's considerations. She starts with acknowledging the Enlightenment and rationalist roots of feminism, trying to show that the negative oppositional consciousness dominant in this tradition is, at least in part, overcome by a more affirmative "neovitalist" approach present in contemporary feminism, implying some kind of spirituality. The key, however, is not the latter, but "a political subjectivity", for which "the residual forms of spirituality", contrary to the wide-spread secular schemes, turn out to be useful.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, I would like to reflect on the phenomenon which at first glance seems to belong to an entirely different category than both secular feminism and the post-secular one (as understood by Braidotti). I intend to focus on the "feminist liturgy" movement, a specific aspect of the

1 R. Braidotti, *Wbrew czasom. Zwrot postsekularny w feminizmie*, in: *Drzewo Poznania. Postsekularyzm w przekładach i komentarzach*, red. P. Bogalicki, A. Mitek-Dziemba, Wydawnictwo FA-art, Katowice 2012, ss. 284-314.

2 K. Szkaradnik, *Drzewo Poznania. Postsekularyzm w przekładach i komentarzach*, red. Piotr Bogalicki i Alina Mitek-Dziemba, Wydawnictwo FA-art, Katowice 2012, s. 384. *Po owocach ich poznać? Obiecujące widma postsekularyzmu*, „Ex Nihilo” 2/8 (2012), s. 144.

3 Cf. R. Braidotti, op. cit., s. 306 nn.

women's movement created in the 1960's within the religious feminist circles. I will focus primarily on its Catholic form, and more specifically on the theoretical dimension, as it appears in the texts of Catholic activists, or ones with a Catholic background.<sup>4</sup> I will be interested in the first place in answering the question whether, in fact, the phenomenon is qualitatively different from post-secular feminism or whether it fits into the overall logic of the latter, i.e. the pursuit of political, cultural and social change through activities taking place within the secondary (instrumental) forms of spirituality. Catholic provenance and reference to liturgy, and thus act(s) of religious worship, would lead us to an expectation – to put a shortcut – of a primacy of religion over politics. Is this the case?

The history of the feminist liturgy in the area of Catholic culture is associated, on the one hand, with the growth of the women's movement, especially after World War II, and on the other with the (obviously related) radical transformations of society in relation to the civil rights and social justice movements, on top of counter-culture phenomena, and finally, with the processes of change within the Church and her relationship with the broader "modernity", which were taking place after Vatican II.<sup>5</sup> In the third case there were, as we know, also far-reaching changes

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4 As Sr. Mary Collins, O.S.B., writes, the very phenomenon has a much wider range and includes both Christian and Jewish feminists, as well as African-American, Native American, or neo-Pagan ones, and even those that do not admit to any relationships with a spiritual tradition. In this context, she suggests a certain problematic nature of the use of the term "liturgy" to refer to the entire phenomenon. In her opinion, it would be more relevant to speak of "ritualization". Cf. eadem, *Principles of Feminist Liturgy*, in: *Women at Worship. Interpretations of North American Diversity*, ed. M. Procter-Smith, and J.R. Walton, John Knox Press, Westminster 1993, p. 19-20. Ultimately, Catholic authors most often use the term "liturgy", in the sense of "the process and/or the result of 'ritualization'", deliberately distancing themselves from its classical meaning – in the anthropological terms consistent with the traditional Catholic approach to liturgy – i.e. as a ritual, a canonical structure "not entirely encoded by the performers" (cf. R.A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 24). This partly reflects postmodern critique of the ritual theory (cf. for example, C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford University Press, New York 2009, passim), although the author seeks grounds for it primarily in the feminist criticism of the official liturgy. Collins (op. cit., p. 19) writes that feminist liturgies are intended to achieve a "ritual subversion and transformation of precisely those spiritual and social relational schemes of traditional liturgies that are believed to constitute a good order."

5 For historical background, cf. J.R. Walton, *Feminist Liturgy. A Matter of Justice*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville 2000, p. 14-30. Walton sees the origins of the feminist liturgy movement in the United States in the transformation of the socio-professional position of women associated with the needs of war, on top of the revolution in the social awareness which occurred within the protest movements of the sixties and the impact of second wave feminism in its American form, i.e., initially associated with the current liberalism (Betty Friedan and her *The Feminine Mystique*), then contrasted by the critique pointing to its limitations (in terms of lack of interest or reservation to the issue of class, economic, racial and sexual inequalities).

in the Catholic system of rituals, which in the years 1964-1970 underwent deep transformations at the level of the official discourse motivated largely by pastoral criteria (the imperative to adapt to “the needs of our times” or the mentality of “the modern man”) and ecumenical ones. An imminent dimension of the post-conciliar period in Western Europe and the US were trends (emerging in particular at the level of social strata with higher economic and cultural capital<sup>6</sup>) to treat the Council and the subsequent changes in the liturgy associated with it as a prerequisite to expect the impending radical opening of the Church to the values, ethics and culture of the liberal democratic world. It was expected that the Church rite, too, will be redesigned according to them, so as to reflect the democratic relations and strive for the achievement of social justice and/or for the elimination of exclusion.<sup>7</sup>

In many places, the faithful actively tried to anticipate the expected changes, organizing group worship in private homes or other locations, with experimental liturgies modeled and conceived according to the belief of the given congregation concerning the proper worship.<sup>8</sup> However, because these hopes have not been realized as part of an official reform, and the Vatican and the Church hierarchy responded negatively to this grass-roots revolution, there was an escalation of separatist tendencies from the institution of the Church and far-reaching attempts to create alternative

6 As Kathleen Kautzer notes (cf. *The Underground Church. Nonviolent Resistance to the Vatican Empire*, Haymarket Books, Chicago 2012, p. 1) the “reform movement” mainly included “highly educated, middle-class Catholics”.

7 Cf. M. Marczewski, *Wspólnota kultu a akomodacja liturgii*, „Collectanea Theologica” vol. 44, no. 1 (1974), p. 96 (the text contains postulates of those dissatisfied with the official shape of the reforms): “So according to some contemporary authors, the liturgy should become desacralized and lost its solemnity, as it must speak the language of today, it needs to give up its unilateral referral to the worship of God and must teach fraternity instead. It should be characterized by pluralism and flexibility, which means it should be diverse, according to the participants’ preferences. This calls for regulating the liturgy by the situation rather than regulating it centrally. The implication of this is generally the avoidance of rigid texts and rites in favor of creativity and spontaneity”. As regards association of the liturgy with social justice, it is worth noting that it was already vividly present in the early Liturgical Movement, and especially in its American variant. Cf. K.F. Pecklers, *The Unread Vision. The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America: 1926-1955*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1998, p. 81-149. This allows us to take a look at the emphasis placed on it in the context of unorthodox communities of “the underground Church” as a specific radicalized interpretation of this motif.

8 K. Kautzer (op. cit., p. 202) describing the basic assumptions of the ideological founders of communities sprung up on the basis of this movement highlights their emphasis on “informal structures and ... experimental and individualistic approaches to religion by introducing a smorgasbord of liberal theologies and forms of spiritual practice that sometimes include sources from non-Catholic denominations and non-Christian religious traditions.”

forms of Catholicism,<sup>9</sup> using more or less isolated, self-designed liturgies tailored to the congregations' own ideas and opinions.<sup>10</sup>

It seems that this very moment/process of depriving expectations about the implementation of a specific vision of the Catholic religion's relationship to "modernity" in the sense of liberal democratic Western culture, its crisis and the breakdown of its great narratives followed by the emergence of new limits of social sensitivity was one of the key impulses for the movement of feminist liturgies (or, as some authors call it, the "Feminist/Women's Liturgical Movement"),<sup>11</sup> at least in its Catholic version.<sup>12</sup> Even if Catholic feminism did not constitute an integral part of the "underground Church"<sup>13</sup>, it stemmed from the same source, i.e., the far-reaching

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9 Cf. K. Kautzer, *ibid.*, p. 1: "Since the 1970s, liberal American Catholics have sustained and the Reform Movement to counteract the conservative drift of the Vatican and to preserve and expand on the vision and reforms of Vatican II. The Reform Movement ... is intent on creating an alternative model of church that exemplifies Vatican II's open, receptive attitude toward the modern world".

10 Cf. J. Hitchcock (*Recovery of the Sacred. Reforming the Reformed Liturgy*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1995, p. 35-36): "The 'experimental liturgies' which first began to attract attention at the Liturgical Week of 1966 now become bolder and far more common; soon no city of any size and scarcely any Catholic college were without experimental groups. An ironically well-publicized 'underground church' began to surface, and numerous Church members, dissatisfied with the irrelevance of regular Sunday worship, left the parishes to join these new groups."

11 Cf. the manifest on the WATER (Women Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual) website: <http://www.waterwomensalliance.org/liturgy-ritual-and-ceremony-planning/> (access: 15-03-2018); C. Damm, T. Gur-Klein, K. Karkalla-Zorba, et al., *A Dialogue on Women, Ritual, and Liturgy*, "Journal of the European Society of Women in Theological Research" vol. 9 (2001), p. 16.

12 The term "Feminist Liturgical Movement" is a clear reference to the Liturgical Movement(s), dating back to the nineteenth century, combining the efforts of different people and communities in the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations for the revitalization and renewal of liturgical life of these communities. In the case of the feminist movement it is not easy to clearly identify its variety with Catholicism outside the biographies and/or declared affiliation of those involved. This is due to an intentional understatement of one's own confessional identity, an immanent "ecumenical nature" of the movement, etc. (Cf. J.R. Walton, *op.cit.*, s. 29). It seems that the primary reason is the belief in the universal (meaning: non-confessional) nature of the oppression of women.

13 Certainly the "underground Church" was a space for an unprecedented admission of women for the preparation and celebration of the liturgy in the Catholic Church. As noted by Mary Henold, practically the only thing that women did not do was the Eucharistic consecration – cf. eadem, *Breaking the Boundaries of Renewal: The American Catholic Underground, 1966-1970*, "U.S. Catholic Historian" vol. 19, no. 3 (2001), p. 111. However, the feminist liturgy theorists (or at least some of them) are not willing to recognize the liturgical aspirations of the "underground Church" as truly compatible with the objectives of their own movement. According to Marjorie Procter-Smith, the essential difference was that the former sought renewal in reference of the liturgical practices to the past (the liturgy of the early Church), while those with a high feminist awareness approached any past practices suspiciously as related to the patriarchy. Cf.

expectations for deep changes in the operation of the Church, the status of the laity (including women) and their influence on the Church as such on different levels: administrative, liturgical, and even the doctrinal one. In Catholic “proto-feminist” circles such as The Grail<sup>14</sup> or the groups of the “new religious”,<sup>15</sup> they went hand in hand with the changes of awareness inspired by the wider feminist hermeneutics of suspicion in the direction of the overall criticism of the current Catholic culture, including liturgy.<sup>16</sup> Among the practical expectations, a prominent place was occupied by the question of the ordination of women, which has not lived to see the outcome desired by the feminists, and in 1976, by the *Inter insigniores* declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it was resolved in a manner contrary to their hopes.<sup>17</sup> The disenchantment at this level was certainly one of the most important impulses<sup>18</sup> actuating a profound weakening (or complete abandonment) of Catholic feminists’ relationship with the Church and the “official” liturgy, followed by finding forms which would be adequate, in their opinion, for the new “feminist

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eadem, *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition*, Abingdon, Nashville 1990, p. 19. Anyway, on the historical level, Henold is probably right, claiming that it was the “underground Church” that paved the way for the feminist liturgical movement through the creation of “small community liturgies for worship, renewal, movement development, and protest” and paying attention to the knowledge and close relationships between the important figures of this movement. Cf. M.J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist. The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill 2008, p. 142. In fact, the groups organizing feminist liturgies, such as “WomenEucharist Communities” (cf. Kautzer K., op. cit., pp. 216-219) can be treated as “underground” even today, indicating their close, if not genetic, then ideological and practical relationship with the “underground Church” from the 1960s-70s.

- 14 The Grail is a women’s organization founded in 1921 by the Dutch Jesuit, Jacques van Ginneken. The members were assumed to be lay celibates, fully devoting themselves to the building of the Kingdom of God, unlimited by the rules of religious life and having a high degree of autonomy in relation to spiritual authority. The organization reached the US in 1940. Beginning in the late sixties, it became one of the nurseries of the Catholic feminism, organizing courses, “awareness-raising” meetings, etc. See. J. Kalven. *Women Breaking Boundaries: The Grail and Feminist*, “Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion” vol. 5, no. 1 (1989), p. 119-142.
- 15 Cf. M.J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist...*, p. 142.
- 16 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 143. An autobiographical description of awakening of the “feminist consciousness” under the influence of the “experience in consciousness-raising groups together with immersing ... in the burgeoning feminist literature” and the transition to the position of the “feminist critique of society and church” is cited by Kalven J., op. cit., pp. 128-130.
- 17 The issue contained in *Inter insigniores* was confirmed and strengthened by John Paul II in the *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* Apostolic Letter of 1994.
- 18 Cf. J.R. Walton, op.cit., p. 28.

awareness.”<sup>19</sup> As one theorist says: “Classical liturgical forms and contemporary feminist consciousness are discordant realities.”<sup>20</sup>

What is the relevance? It seems that on the basic meta-level this involves a relationship of reflection. An appropriate feminist form of the liturgical ritual consists in giving an expression of the feminist consciousness, or some aspect of it. As Janet Walton presents it, the “awareness” grounds for the feminist liturgy were provided by a growing feeling that the celebration of traditional/official liturgies in their entirety is “false”, because they are products of patriarchal culture, “where males, particularly privileged white males, are accorded power and authority while everyone else, including all females, are without status or identity.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, the purpose of organizing alternative liturgies is permanently an experimental search for such forms of collective ritualizing that would constitute “contexts that promote truth-telling”,<sup>22</sup> where the term “truth” is understood at a general level as the whole area of “femininity”, which had been excluded from the official liturgy,<sup>23</sup> and at the specific level as the awareness and life experience of each participant of a congregation. The idea was to allow the participant consider that the ritualized content flows from her own life and strengthens it back.<sup>24</sup> Key concepts are “relationships” and “stories”. The “untruthfulness” of the traditional liturgy would have to come from the fact that it imposes a scheme of the relationship between the human individual and God, between people, and between humans and other creatures, which is mediated in the field of male values and reflects the relationships of male domination.<sup>25</sup> Recovery of the “authentic” worship,

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19 Relatively often, this has involved the rejection of the Catholic tradition, according to which only men may be ordained as priests and attempts to circumvent it by “underground” practice.

20 M. Collins, op. cit., p. 19.

21 J.R. Walton, op. cit., p. 12.

22 Ibid.

23 “Femininity” is the principal point of reference, although it is also stressed that the consequence of the struggle for inclusive liturgy is to focus on other levels of exclusion, i.e. due to class, race, disability, sexual orientation and age – cf. *ibid.*, p. 32.

24 Walton (*ibid.*, p. 12, fn. 3) uses the concept of “organic character” in this context, borrowed from the feminist theologian Delores Williams. Feminist liturgies must be “organic” as they “grow-out of persons’ lives”. In practice, this also means that part of the feminist liturgies is organized *ad hoc* for the purposes connected with real people and has e.g. therapeutic goals. One example cited *in extenso* by Walton is “A Ritual of Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse”, *ibid.*, p. 61 and on. WATER’s website allows one to purchase scenarios of liturgy “for Women with Cancer” liturgy and others, see <http://www.waterwomensalliance.org/liturgy-ritual-and-ceremony-planning/> (access: 24.05.2018). From this perspective, the feminist liturgies seem to act as therapeutic psychodramas.

25 This coincides closely with the question of the impact the feminist liturgy movement has had on cultural feminism described by M. Henold. See. eadem, *Catholic and Feminist ...*, p. 143 n. As

therefore, requires ritualization of the “relationships that emancipate and empower women”,<sup>26</sup> exploration and celebration of stories, e.g. about female biblical characters, about women in one way or another important for the feminist movement, or simply for the female participants,<sup>27</sup> which is intended to lead the latter to “think deeply and afresh about [their] own stories of faith”.<sup>28</sup>

The theoreticians of feminist liturgy provide some general principles the latter are governed by. According to Collins, the first is the aforementioned ritualization of the “relationships that emancipate and empower women”, the second applies to anti-hierarchicality of the liturgy as the “production of the community of worshipers, not of special experts or authorities”, in accordance with the third one, feminist liturgies “critique patriarchal liturgies”, while the fourth one says that they produce “a distinctive repertoire of ritual symbols and strategies”, and finally, the fifth one refers to the provisional program and practice of the experimental nature of the feminist ritualization, which generates events rather than texts.<sup>29</sup> Analogous rules or ones forming a logical development of the above are

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it is characterized by R.P. Tong (*Mysł feministyczna. Wprowadzenie*, transl. J. Mikos, B. Umińska, PWN, Warszawa 2002, p. 67): “Very far from the belief that a liberated woman must manifest both female and male the characteristics and behaviors ... radical-cultural feminists expressed the view that it is better to be a person of the female sex – and feminine – than a male person – and masculine. Therefore, women should not try to be like men. On the contrary, they should be more like women, highlighting these virtues and values that culture associates with women (dependency, socialization, relationships, sharing, emotions, body, confidence, lack of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace and life) and would rather not emphasize the virtues and values culturally associated with men (independence, autonomy, intellect, will, forethought, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, asceticism, war and death).” In translation to the feminist liturgy logic, it will mean an effort in the direction of ritualized “feminine” features as neglected, discriminated against, victimized etc. in the traditional, patriarchal liturgies.

26 M. Collins, op. cit., p. 9.

27 See. e.g. the description of the Advent liturgy by J.R. Walton, op. cit., p. 51. The same element emerges e.g. in the feminist version of Santeria, where “our grandmothers, mothers, loved ones, friends, and others who are no longer present but are with us providing protection and energy” are mentioned <http://www.waterwomensalliance.org/july-2017-waterritual-feminist-santeria/> (accessed: 24.03.2018) and described as playing a large part in *mujerista* liturgies (a term coined by Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz to describe a framework of the liberation movement of Hispanic/Latino women), cf. A.M. Isasi-Díaz, *On the Birthing Stool: Mujerista Liturgy*, in: *Women at Worship...*, p. 195-196.

28 J.R. Walton, op. cit., p. 45.

29 M. Collins, op. cit., p. 11. The last point it is considered relative, i.e. one that may be not so much a rule as a characteristic of the contemporary stage of development of the feminist liturgy.

formulated by Walton and Dierks.<sup>30</sup> All of them can be considered as determining dimensions, specific objectives and strategies of the ritual that embody the feminist consciousness.

Of particular interest in this context are the second and fourth rules, concerning, respectively, social or community dimension of the feminist liturgy in terms of power/authority (which has the obvious, wider political effect) and the whole sphere of semiotic and performative feminist liturgy, and so – in short – the problem of the relationship between form and content.

Assuming certain fundamental inequalities contained and petrified in the official liturgy, as ruled by a “masculine” tendency to establish a rigid hierarchy, feminist ritualists very strongly emphasize the rejection of hierarchy in all areas. Therefore, it is not concerned only with the “dissolution” of the difference between lay people and ordained ones, and the distribution of liturgical power of the entire congregation.<sup>31</sup> The process of adopting the concept of the subject described by Janet Kalven, associated with the rejection of gender essentialism and its social implications, on top of the immanentization of authority and recognition of one’s own consciousness as a manifestation of the Spirit, seems more basic here.<sup>32</sup> The stress on the necessity to celebrate the diversity of individual experience as providing knowledge of God within the feminist liturgy without which some aspects of God remain invisible (as it is seen to be a feature of the official liturgy), seems to be build upon this concept.<sup>33</sup> Undoubtedly, it also lies at the base of erasing all references to the divine transcendence

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30 Cf. J.R. Walton, op. cit., p. 31: “We come together to name what is ‘true’ for us; we invite one another to listen, speak, and act; we know God as constant surprise, more than we’ve been taught, more than we can imagine; we use a variety of forms and resources, traditional and emerging; we anticipate new awareness and change; we resist whatever demeans or hurts; we account to each other for what we do; we struggle with differences; we play as we play; we expect to embody justice of ourselves, our world, and God”; S.D. Dierks, *Women Eucharist*, Woven Word Press, Boulder 1997, p. 16 (summary in: K. Kautzer, op. cit., p. 217): the given liturgy should reflect the following rules: “Community without hierarchy (sitting in a circle). Community without sexism (imaging God as female). Community without rigidity (reflecting members’ journeys and insights). Community without slavery to fixed space (dances and gestures in ritual). Community without judgment (offering gifts without fear of rejection)”.

31 Cf. J.R. Walton, op. cit., p. 46.

32 Cf. J. Kalven, op. cit., p. 128 (after quoting the fragment of Y. Pellé-Douël’s work, *Etre femme* as inspiration): “No more talk of woman’s nature, destiny or God-given vocation. No more searching outside of oneself for a task in life or attempting to conform to some external standard, predetermined destiny or idealized role. The source of authority shifted from external to internal. I began to examine my own perceptions, feelings, and experiences, and to believe that Spirit could speak from within my own consciousness.”

33 Cf. J.R. Walton, op. cit., p. 33.

of gestures or space arrangement: “Horizontal gestures prevail in feminist liturgies; they suggest equality and interdependence; they affirm God known among us.”<sup>34</sup> God is present in the community, since the community is comprised of theophoric subjects.

The separateness of the “repertoire of symbols and strategy” is a correlate of the rejection of the existing structures of the traditional liturgy because of its “patriarchal” nature. In other words, it is the conscious creativity in the design and preparation of the ritualization (it emphasizes the need for a planning process with subsequent evaluation).<sup>35</sup> There is not a fully-fledged system of forms in the sense of external rules. Everything, from the structure to the detail of interior design depends on choice, imagination and short-term goals of the organizer(s). In this sense, the whole spectrum of signs, gestures, symbols, spatial relationships, etc., which may become a material of a particular liturgy, is purely instrumental. These tools have been selected in the planning of the event from the repertoire of the “marketplace of signs” (analogous to the “marketplace of ideas”) as appropriate and convenient to use due to their “spiritual strength”. Characteristically, the confessional affiliation does not require one to settle for a choice of signs and reinterpretations of signs from the professed religious tradition.<sup>36</sup> Of course there is a difference in trends depending on the degree of involvement in this affiliation. Sometimes the effort of subversion and reinterpretation is more focused on the content of the participants’ own tradition, reaching back even to create some level of theodicy<sup>37</sup> (which can be seen as *signum* of the feeling of being in a relationship with it). As Collins notes, the eclecticism of semiotic tools grows when members of a given group do not come from the same religion/denomination.

34 Ibid, p. 37. It also means the rejection of cultural gestures expressing honor and respect because they can reflect the relationship of subordination associated with male dominance, or – e.g. in the case of the adoption of communion kneeling – recall situations of sexual violence. Cf. *ibid*, p. 38.

35 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 83-87.

36 For example, Kalven (*op. cit.*, p. 134) evokes the memory of the first meeting of a few dozens of members of The Grail, preceding the General Assembly in 1984, where within the feminist summary of the organization’s development it was noted that they had begun to include elements from other, non-Christian traditions, to the worship, for example, in the celebrations of the Holy Week native American and Wiccan motives were present. Four years earlier, a group of Catholic feminists organized a liturgical memoir, “Our Foremothers – The Witches”. Cf. M.J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist...*, p. 145.

37 M. Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 16: “So both Jewish and Christian feminist ritualizers regularly explore strategic ways to redeem identity of the living God whom they continue to trust as the source of their empowerment and the world’s salvation.” In other words, the construction of such an image of God that would not conflict with sensibilities sharpened by the awakening of feminist consciousness.

However, she concludes that due to the fact that “cultural and religious pluralism is a widespread phenomenon, especially in urban areas, feminist ritual explorations of saving relations often affirm and use whatever forms are congruent with feminist consciousness, wherever these might have originated.”<sup>38</sup>

There is a puzzling convergence of between the logic disclosed by the discussed rules of the feminist liturgy and a certain dimension of the general principles adopted in the official Catholic liturgical reform, noticed by authors such as Victor Turner and Kieran Flanagan. It concerns the evident, in the authors’ view, impact of the conciliar documents regarding ways of understanding the liturgy (with the consequences at the level of the major practices) which the dominant paradigm of structural functionalism has had on the social sciences in the nineteen sixties. The latter “holds that ritual structure reflects social structure – hence should change *in reponse* to social structural changes and that ‘social function’ of ritual is to reanimate the ‘sentiments’ on which a given formation depends for its successful running.”<sup>39</sup> There is no doubt that many actions of the radical liturgical reformers (such as those operating in the context of the “underground Church”) seeking liturgical forms “relevant” from the point of view of the way of life and values of the American middle class had just that paradigm for their theoretical background. It seems that on a somewhat different level and in conjunction with other characteristics thereof, it is also the “subsoil” of feminist liturgy. The difference is that feminists criticize not so much the incompatibility of the traditional liturgy and the contemporary culture followed by the changed social structure, as the “patriarchy” of the structure of the Church and the official forms of worship that are, using Collins’ wording, non-congruent with the feminist consciousness, along with its political dimensions. The functionalist concept acts in this case both as an instrument to describe the traditional patriarchal relations reflected by worship, and as the basis for constructing liturgical events which are intended to reflect their abolition or the process/action towards their elimination (e.g. by constituting a kind of political protest).

Feminist liturgies seem to generate a kind of ritualized *fait accompli*, a performative setting of the desired social reality. They use various tools from the realm of “spirituality” chosen to reflect the experiences, beliefs,

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38 M. Collins, op. cit., p. 17.

39 V.W. Turner, *Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas*, “Worship” vol. 46, no. 7 (1972), p. 392; cf. idem, *Ritual, Tribal and Catholic*, “Worship” vol. 50, no. 6 (1976), p. 504-526; K. Flanagan, *Sociology and Liturgy. Re-Presentations of the Holy*, Springer, New York 1991, p. 10-12, 36-39.

tastes, desires, etc. of the participants, their “equality” relations with each other and with God, and also to exert a beneficial, strengthening effect on their feminist identity. The main sphere of the sacred is identified with the “new” knowledge and “new” socio-political relationships. If we recognize “the compatibility of political subjectivity and actions that do not easily enter into the area of the secular feminist tradition”<sup>40</sup> as the core of the feminist post-secularism and, therefore, some forms of spirituality, the feminist liturgy movement should be regarded as a model example of a post-secular phenomenon.

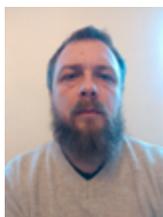
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40 R. Braidotti, op. cit., p. 306.

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