

## THE SECRET CODE OF GODDESS – UNWRITTEN REGULATIONS AND THE CRITIQUE OF VIOLENT THEOLOGY

Nadja FURLAN ŠTANTE

Science and Research Centre Koper, Institute for Philosophical Studies, Garibaldijeva 1, 6000 Koper, Slovenia  
e-mail: nadja.furlan@zrs-kp.si

### ABSTRACT

*The paper presents the question of paradigmatic change of perception of the ultimate reality, God/Goddess as a call for the creation of new collective awareness and the revival of female principle in the religious and secular sphere. This can also be understood as the liberating process which leads to thorough transformation and new forms of human relationship to oneself, to other people and the world. Lack of an empowered, liberated identity, lack of compassion and empathy, and failure to accept the others and the different without prejudice and negative stereotyping in the light of their humanity, consequently leads to intolerance, hatred, fear and fundamentalism. In this context, the hermeneutic key to equivalent acceptance of femininity in the field of the religious and the spiritual, is the ethical maxim which should become a sine qua non condition of the moral code in accepting the other, the different, and is the key to a humane sensibilisation of an individual in order to achieve a better coexistence in a cultural and religious diversity. Understanding religion as a precondition to a moral dialogue is therefore faced with the category of gender which is a sine qua non source of this moral dialogue.*

**Keywords:** Goddess, gender equality, interreligious dialogue, moral dialogue

## IL CODICE SEGRETO DI DEA – NORME NON SCRITTE E LA CRITICA DELLA TEOLOGIA VIOLENTA

### SINTESI

*Il documento presenta la domanda di cambiamento paradigmatico della percezione della realtà ultima, Dio / Dea come una chiamata per la creazione di nuova consapevolezza collettiva e la rinascita del principio femminile nella sfera religiosa e laica. Questa può anche essere intesa come il processo liberatorio che porta alla trasformazione profonda e nuove forme di relazione umana a se stessi, agli altri e al mondo. La mancanza di un potere, l'identità liberata, mancanza di compassione e di empatia, e l'incapacità di accettare gli altri e il diverso, senza pregiudizi e stereotipi negativi alla luce della loro umanità, porta di conseguenza l'intolleranza, l'odio, la paura e il fondamentalismo. In questo contesto, la chiave ermeneutica per l'accettazione equivalente di femminilità nel campo del religioso e spirituale, è la massima etica che dovrebbe diventare una condizione sine qua non del codice morale di accettare l'altro, il diverso, ed è la chiave ad una sensibilizzazione umano di un individuo per ottenere una migliore convivenza nella diversità culturale e religioso. Capire la religione come preconditione per un dialogo morale è quindi di fronte alla categoria del genere, che è una condizione sine qua non fonte di questo dialogo morale.*

**Parole chiave:** Dea, l'uguaglianza di genere, il dialogo interreligioso, il dialogo morale

## INTRODUCTION

With the use of the methodology of hermeneutic key of Christian feminist theology, the article draws attention to the importance of the transformation of sexist, male-centred image (monotheistic: Jewish, Christian and Islamic – with a focus on Christianity) of God, which is strongly imprinted in the collective memory of Western humanity. The main target would be to highlight the importance of positive recognition of femininity and consequently of the other in religious and secular sphere through the paradigm of the hidden code of the Goddess. Although the paper is focussed on the urge to recognize the equal importance of women and the feminine in the religious sphere to consequently achieve greater gender equality and real acceptance of the other, the different; this other is meant in a broader sense. It involves genders in plural and opens the floor for new imaginations of wholeness and new embodiments of justice.<sup>1</sup> The present paper emerges from the progressive view that the roles of men and women have mainly been shaped by influences arising from history, culture and society, and that they therefore change as society itself changes. The modern progressive conception and understanding of the gender order is certainly quite significantly related to the socio-cultural paradigm of power and power distribution.

Through the ethics of equal recognition of femininity and equality (parity) of genders in the religious field, the article consequently examines the issue of the importance of active, sincere interreligious dialogue that recognizes and breaks negative stereotypes and prejudices, and raises the level of tolerance, respect and strengthens mutual understanding both in the everyday life of individuals of different religions and spirituality as well as on the hierarchical institutional religious level. Emphasis shall primarily be put on the ethics of interdependence between theological ecofeminism and the function of empowerment through the input of gender equality in the field of spirituality and religion. The latter can be seen as a necessary, ensuing step in the evolution of inter-personal, inter-religious relations.

The main thesis is that the inclusion of female principle<sup>2</sup> shall be understood as a *sine qua non* condition

of moral dialogue of every religion in the context of cultivating sensibility and acceptance of another, different, and the ethics of non-violence. The contemplation on the true meaning of bringing a positive gender difference and equal acknowledgement of femininity and the others to the religious sphere and to interreligious dialogue can be opened by a symbolic narrative about Abba Macarius or Macarius the Great from Egypt, a Coptic hermit, an ascetic who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Abba Macarius or St. Macarius of Egypt tells a story of the time when he was walking across desert and came across a human skull restin in the sand. When St. Macarius poked the skull with a stick and the skull spoke. Macarius asked the skull: "Who are you?" The skull responded: "I was a high priest serving the pagans who had remained in this area. You are Macarius the spirit-bringing. Every time you show your compassion to the damned and pray for them, they feel some consolation". The Macarius asked him: "What sort of consolation is this and how is hell?" The skull answered: "The fire under us is great as the distance between the sky and the earth; we stay in the middle of the fire from our feet to our head. And it is impossible to see each other face to face, because everybody is tied back to back to the other. Whenever you pray for us, we can partially see the face of the other. This is the consolation" (Apophthegmata Sancti Macarii Aegyptii 38, PG 34:257, C-258A). The dialogue between St. Macarius and the skull can be interpreted as a metaphor for a human's relationship towards others or towards something different. Keeping in mind Plato's tragic assertion that a human being is a wolf to another human being or Jean Paul Sartre's idea that hell is other people<sup>3</sup> then we see that the metaphor between St. Macarius and the skull on the contrary expresses the ethics of mutual interdependence and the key ethical imperative on the existence of the fundamental conscience or the belief that a human being is the most fundamental category of humanity: it is the absence not the presence that causes pain and suffering, the absence of others, of different, the absence of both communication and relationships. The sexist, norminative role of man's domination over women's subordination, of one gender over other genders could be understood as human being

1 It also opens the floor for the disabled God, described by Nancy L. Eisland (1994).

2 Femininity (feminine principle) and masculinity (masculine principle) are defined here as personality traits and are understood as been mainly shaped by influences arising from history, culture and society, and therefore they change as society itself changes. Although none of the listed personality components is exclusively characteristic of one gender, the masculine forms are more typical of men and the feminine forms of women. Nevertheless, gender stereotypes about masculine and feminine personality traits are still very much present in the everyday world. Personality traits more characteristically masculine can in terms of contents be denoted as agency traits or traits referring to action and thus be related to power. The agency dimension comprises controlling tendencies (e.g., aggressiveness, ambition, dominance, efficiency, leadership behaviour) and independence from other people (independence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, individualism). Some additional agency attributes refer to personal efficiency (e.g., self-confidence, feeling of superiority, decisiveness) and aspects of personal style (e.g., straightforwardness, adventurousness, perseverance). Personality traits more characteristically feminine can be in terms of contents to which they refer defined as communions. The communion dimension primarily refers to the concern for the well-being of others (devotion, complete dedication to others, desire to appease, willingness to help, kindness, compassion, love of children). Some of the typically feminine traits refer to personal sensitivity and emotional expressivity as well as aspects of personal style (e.g., tender, soft-spoken).

3 The renowned sentence from the existentialist play *Behind Closed Door* (*Hius colos*).

is a wolf to another human being, and the hell described by Sartre.

### Male-centred Theology and Loss of Compassion

The concept of male-centred theology comprises the theology which builds on the principle of exclusion rather than inclusion and is based on the mental paradigm of lord vs. servant and most of its theology derives from the logic of domination and superiority of the chosen elite, which is, in all respects, set as the norm: a male, white race, Western culture, one religion (Christianity) over another, a human over nature ... Despite gradual raising of awareness in the light of gender equality and the call for the transformation of the relationship between a human and nature, the male-centred theology of the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian churches in its core remains centered around the norm of masculinity. Each “one-way” theology which builds and operates according to the principle of exclusion of one at the expense of another consequently brings a loss of compassion and sensibility to another. Nevertheless, the theology of male-centred characteristics in its core is deprived of the power of femininity, which is characteristically cable of transmitting life, is open and oriented to another. The logic of domination follows the logic of possession. Theology based on the discriminatory principle of male-centred hierarchical supremacy of the masculinity of God as the almighty lord who has subjugated all human and non-human beings, women and nature, is the theology of violence that helps to create and expand relations of domination and violence. From the perspective of Christian feminist theology, a negative stereotype of a woman as a passive listener and an obedient maid versus a patriarchal image of domineering Christian God as three persons in one God that is distant and dominant towards man and nature, such stereotype is a still very much rooted prejudice within the collective memory of Western human, despite the attempts of awareness regarding gender equality. The tendency for (pre)dominance which is visible in kiriarthal and patriarchal hierarchical structure of Christian Churches (especially Roman Catholic) which omits the voice of women and which represents the

majority stake of the Christian communion’s faithful potential, is strongly associated with the negative stereotype of human exploitative, unsympathetic dominance at the expense of nature.<sup>4</sup> This is the central thesis of theological ecofeminism (Furlan Štante, 2014).

The truth is that the voice of women was considerably silenced throughout history due to marginalization and fringe position in the society that they were determined to in Christianity and its hierarchical system, so is the conceptualization of nature stigmatized with a similar character of inferiority by the patriarchal system. Similarly, as Christianity treated women as scapegoats mainly because of the fear of their power and authority (Furlan, 2006, 65), so has, hand in hand, strengthened the domination of man over nature.

Women were frequently pushed out from the “orderly” social world of decision-making also referring to the prejudice of their “wild nature”, which has become both the major obstacle and an excuse for men to “expulsion” of women from the field of decision-making and public social life. Therefore, their position in society became marginal and limited to their basic function, which is solely the service of providing procreation, thus, giving birth to offspring (Furlan, 2006, 67). The argument that a woman is closer to nature<sup>5</sup> just because of her ability of procreation has frequently been used as a bias on which the strength of patriarchal power was built, women and nature were consequently stigmatized with instrumentality and inferiority.

A number of feminists (Rosemary Radford Ruether, 2005; Mary Daly, 1985; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, 1990 ...) criticize Christianity that it supported and expanded “the ideology of male superiority” instead of promoting the tendency for equivalence and gender equality. Reference is made to the fact that the Church has in recent times played the (most) important role in creating and maintaining cultural and social patterns of everyday life, that it was the institutional bearer of religious discerning of the worldly life and, as such, constitutes an inseparable component in the formulation of confidence in the existing regulation of human relationships and the understanding of the relationship between human and nature.

4 The concept of nature in this paper defines human and non-human beings or, in other words, vital life energy that the ancient Greeks conceived of as *zoe*, which simply means a fact of life, common to all living beings. Thus, *zoe* also generally refers to the existence of a living being, while *bios* means to live life in a certain mental manner, thereby, *bios* is, consequently, a moral deed (Tratnik, 2010, 104–105).

5 Some ecofeminists acknowledge that there is some truth to the ideology of women being closer to nature, but recognise in it traces of a skewed and distorted belief pushed by a patriarchy which wants to dominate women as well as nature and sets both in an inferior position. It is this very ideology that, according to them, remains firmly rooted in the essential truth claiming that women are more in harmony with nature, more in tune with their own bodies by virtue of their probity and their ability to bear life. From the pagan ecofeminist viewpoint, women are more in harmony with nature and should therefore strive for a life in tune with nature and Earth, for establishing new environmental ethics and ecological spirituality, and for asserting active ecological life practices. Still, most ecofeminists reject or oppose the hypothesis of women being more connected with nature due to their ability to give birth and engage in motherhood. They understand the concept of affinity between woman and the natural environment as a social construct naturalising women and feminising nature with the purpose of making them look more similar or cognate. At the same time, owing to the social determination of their position in the field of physical and material support of society, women are more exposed to the exploitation of nature and more aware of it (Furlan Štante, 2014, 109–111).

Just as “the sexual domination and subordination of women was maintained from generation to generation in a way that it was understood as something obvious and natural and at the same time explained and justified as the only moral” (Jogan, 1990, 36), so was maintained also the seal of domination of man over nature. Domination over women and nature is (was) justified at the expense of the references to the particular passages from the biblical texts, which are (were) exempt from the context and interpreted in the context of the agenda, which was more relevant to the ethos of the particular time.<sup>6</sup>

This requires the transformation of the mental paradigms and change in the overall consciousness of an individual and, consequently, the entire collective memory of Western society, not only in terminology but also in the paradigm. Therefore, there is a change in consciousness, the consciousness of talking about a female image of the God as a Goddess, which brings a liberation of the entire mankind from under the shackles of one-way entrapments within the discriminatory practice of Christianity. The vital part is the change that we can worship the Christian God as a Goddess, and doing so we do not fall into excommunication or heresy.

It is important to be aware that we can only speak about God and God’s revelation in human language, which is coloured and limited by time and culture in which it develops. In a patriarchal culture where the men are expected to possess the strength, authority and power, God, who is attributed all these properties, can only be a man. Or in the words of feminist criticist Mary Daly: “If God is male, then male is God” (Daly, 1973, 19).

This only consolidated the second-class status of women. Increasingly, more Christian feminist theologians became aware of the fact that God the Father is the most frequent appellation for the divine, and consequently, that the entire structure of the divine-human and human-human relationships is understood in a patriarchal framework (McFague, 1982, 8). Elizabeth Johnson, for instance, in her criticism of the outmoded language about God, which she defines as oppressive and religiously idolatrous (Johnson, 1994, 36), develops an approach which establishes tension concerning the secret of God and the promise of human and cosmic liberation:

*Only if the full reality of women as well as men enters into the symbolisation of God along with symbols from the natural world, can the idolatrous fixation on one image be broken and the truth of the mystery of God, in tandem with the liberation of all human beings and the whole earth, emerge for our time* (Johnson, 1994, 86).

Theological tradition had, on the one side, emphasised the analogical God/Goddess talk, thus showing that it was aware of the limits of the human language. But on the other side, it underestimated the power of symbolic God/Goddess-talk. Feminist theologians found the answer in symbolic language, the power of which was ignored by tradition. The problem of a patriarchal-tinted language is an area emerging in connection with the question of feminist hermeneutics and the issue of a feminist image of God.

Rosemary Radford Ruether carries on the thought of what needs to be done. She looks for an answer in new sources of religiosity in the sense of rediscovering the lost popular religiosity of women. Ruether rejects the androgyny model with which some feminists, following the trail of Gnosticism, would like to solve the problem. She prefers to talk about a process of double conversion. At the end she writes that humanity can only achieve reconciliation with God if the latter stops being a male God and instead becomes the basis of reciprocity in all creation. The death of God the Father would then destroy the alienated images of male selfishness in the sky, which sacralise any domination and servitude in the world (Radford Ruether, 1983, 58).

Namely, theological tradition has highlighted the analogue language about God and, thus, showed that it recognizes the limitations of human language. Therefore, to take the image of one gender and exclusively through this image and its social features describe God is a completely incorrect and unwise act. In society, a mutual interaction between the patriarchal image of God and the display of male power is consequently reflected. The theological tradition, on the other side, completely underestimated the power of symbolic talk about God. Patriarchalising the image of God therefore becomes and remains a challenge of modern times, while women view this challenge differently. If the image of God is only emphasized by one gender and if this gender becomes the leading group for the whole society, then God shall also obtain the seal of masculinity. The consequence being that a woman can only be *imago Dei*, the image of God through a man and can only enter into dialogue with God through a man. Feminist theologians are well aware of this, and in their search for the image of God they bear in mind St. Augustine’s warning *Deus semper maior – God is always greater than human attempts at understanding*.

At this point, a rhetorical question can be asked, the same question that was symbolically raised by a feminist theologian and a psychologist of religion Naomi R. Goldenberg (1979, 37): What happens if the father images of God become extinct across Western culture?

6 Regarding the question of gender hierarchy in the Bible we see that ambiguity and duality of traditions can be found throughout biblical texts. Two views are in fact present both in the texts of the Old and the New Testament: the patriarchal and the equal. In the past, the Church often chose patriarchal biblical texts and, through them, established and maintained patriarchy, while neglecting the texts that testified on gender equality (Furlan, 2006, 70).





**Figure 1: Gaia: Primordial deity of the Earth (Source: Wikipedia)**

What happens if the masculine image of God in Western culture dies out, disappears – just as the images of Paleolithic goddesses almost disappeared? Would this consequently bring the disappearance of violence?

Nevertheless, the context of the tendency towards a paradigmatic transformation in relation to femininity of the images of God / Goddess is implicitly oriented to questioning, re-defining and re-evaluating the relationship between humanity and Earth as a self-regulatory living organism (Lovelock, 1991), or nature. Lovelock's hypothesis on Gaia the Goddess significantly influenced the Christian theological ecofeminism in addition to its impact on the female component of the neo-pagan forms of new-age spirituality. The call to the Goddess has consequently developed the formation and strengthening of feminine forms of spirituality, has started to

receive and create its visibility both within traditional religions as well as in new-age matriarchal religions (neo-paganism, wicca, geomancy, the movement of the Goddess ...) In an aspiration to revive femininity of God, the Goddess was symbolically labelled as Her since the purpose of the title, in addition to the descriptive and denoting character, contains the character of appeal. The Goddess thus evokes all the symbolic ideas, values and frameworks that are attributed to femininity, womanliness.

Feminine eco-theology in its foundation brings the ethics of ecological egalitarianism based on the theology of peace and non-violence. Instead of patriarchal androcentrism and matriarchal utopianism, cosmic ecological egalitarianism is placed in the focal position. Unlike androcentric patriarchal theology, which in turn expands the relations of domination and exclusion, ecofeminist theology that focuses around cosmic organic egalitarianism, is the theology of non-violence, peace and hospitality. As such, it calls on all institutionalized religions and spiritual practices to replace the discriminatory paradigm of masculinity of the image of God and the consequent relations which are based on the logic of domination and the theology of searching for "scapegoats" with the logic of hospitality and the inclusive theology of non-violence and peace. The transformation of traditional, patriarchal and androcentric, exclusive Western (Christian) tradition which strengthens such relationships of domination and, consequently, establishes spirituality and the "scapegoat" theology and is thus a key to maintaining ethical consciousness of non-violence and hospitality (Furlan Štante, 2014, 90–92).

Religious symbols, such as the image of God or Goddess, are not only models of divine reality, but they also formulate the models of human life and relationships. Namely, religious symbols give a tone to an individual culture, as they direct and dictate what is right, what is real and important or they even dictate how people should live. Also, along with the rituals, they have a strong influence both on human psychological responses as well as on deep internalized emotions and values based on which we accept or reject certain things that are evaluated as good or bad. The community and the society are integrally linked through and with the symbols. According to the Christian theologian Gordon Kaufman, the recognition that religious symbols significantly co-shape and regulate our understanding of reality leads to over-questioning and a critical assessment of the compatibility of the dominant, traditional symbols with the current, ethical needs. If a discrepancy or a failure of these is discovered, we need to be, as Kaufman says, ready to consider the suitability of use of the respective symbols (Kaufman, 1995, 28). In this respect, it is necessary to assess the adequacy of the respective religious symbols regarding their ability to strengthen the maintenance and cultivation of life on the planet and their impact

on raising and strengthening the human sense and sensibility for the other and for nature.

It is, therefore, necessary to critically analyse the existing religious symbols in the light of their (non)-compliance with respect to the strengthening of the human ethics and ethical challenges of modern times. Through analytical, intellectual approach a critical judgment regarding the appropriateness of certain religious symbols is possible, however, mere common sense is not enough to establish new symbols. Or, according to Paul Tillich: “Symbols cannot be created intentionally”, since they “emerge from the individual’s and collective unconscious and cannot be rooted without being adopted and approved by the dimensions of the unconscious in man” (Tillich, 1957, 43).

According to the process theologian Carol P. Christ, we live in the time of profound transformations of the symbol of religious image of God as the Mother, the Goddess (Christ, 1997, 49). It could be said that we live at a time when a critical mass has been reached, where a symbol of the patriarchal image of God is no longer relevant and is on the way of search and experimentation with new images of the Goddess.

#### THE MEMORY OF THE GODDESS

In addition to the Cartesian dualistic paradigm that consequently left in Western culture a strong mark of hierarchical binarisms, a male-centred theology (especially) of three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) which is favoured and enacted ensured the oblivion of the cult of the Goddess ...

“At the very beginning, people prayed to the female Creator of life ... At the dawn of religion, God was a woman. Do you remember? ” (Stone, 1976, 1). Those mythological words by Merlin Stone encouraged many seekers, both male and female, to reflect on the image of God in patriarchal legacy of Western culture. One of them is definitely an archaeologist and a cultural historian Marija Gimbutas and her archaeomythology<sup>7</sup> with the hypothesis that the “neolithic Europe” or “old Europe” worshiped the Great Goddess that combined one power (which was not divided into good and bad) and, which would connect all into oneness (Gimbutas, 1999, 17). She certainly left a major impact on the Goddess Movement, both on neopagan feminism and Christian feminist theologians, even though the latter are considerably critical of the above stated thesis (Radford Ruether, 2005, 21).

The Goddess was supposed to be the original deity of human (pre) historical reality and only relatively late, at the end of the Neolithic period, was supposedly pushed aside by male religious symbolic figures. The latter was supposed to be associated with spiritual and

historical turning point that meant a change in cultural scheme and that happened at that time. The religion of the Great Goddess was supposedly practiced as long as the ancient societies kept the matriarchal social order. However, matriarchal order did not signify the social dominance of women in terms of analogies with the modern patriarchy, which would result in relations of power. On contrary, it meant the cultural predominance of female values and principles that was reflected as a state of peace, harmony, social and religious equality, closeness to nature ... Matriarchal civilization is, as idealized, described as a kind of “the golden age of humanity” when love represented the main principle of regulating relations among people and between man and nature. This matriarchal period was supposed to end with the arrival of Semitic and Indo-European peoples who destroyed the Civilization of the Goddess, and thus, when male deities were placed on the top of the pantheon, with the attributes of aggression, warfare and domination, and Patriarchate was legalised. Together with this, patriarchal values dominated, such as aggression, violence, and imperialistic possession, domination of men over women, of human over nature, of one religion over another ... Such patriarchal values supposedly helped in maintaining monotheistic religions. (Radford Ruether, 2006, 274–275).

The latter theory is supported by Carol P. Christ, in *Rebirth of the Goddess* (1997), who does not blame the bible for the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal social order and, more specifically, for the end of the period of the Great Goddess and the beginning of patriarchal God, however, she sees the reason for the transformation of the values of the Goddess into the values of warfare and Mediterranean military coloured pantheon, saying: „If we need to find the main culprit for the eradication and the serfdom of the Goddess in the Western world, then it is certainly the responsibility of the Christian rulers whose edicts commanded the deletion of all so-called “pagan religions” (Christ, 1997, 47).

Ecofeminist Christian theologies thus seek to revive the lost images and the symbol of understanding the universe as the body of God (Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie McFague). This used to be a typical metaphor (present in various forms) and the focal image of the sensibility of the western (Mediterranean) world, but was replaced by a mechanistic worldview model in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Carol Merchant and Vandana Shiva).

#### CREATION OF NEW COSMOLOGY OF COMPASSION AND RETURN OF THE GODDESS

Carol P. Christ asks in *Rebirth of the Goddess* (1997): “Why women need the Goddess?” The answer

<sup>7</sup> Marija Gimbutas developed a discipline she called archaeomythology, in which she combined different elements of archaeology, history, comparative linguistics, mythology, folkloristics etc.



**Figure 2: One version of the Spiral Goddess symbol of modern neopaganism (Source: Wikipedia)**

to this is found mainly in the meaning of the empowerment of women, which is, in turn, enabled by feminine personification of the Goddess. With this, the fundamental value and the importance of the so-called “return of the Goddess” is recognized, as this is one of the biggest surprises of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Feminine personification of the Goddess thus brings the image of feminine power and deep integration of all beings in the network of life, as well as the call to creating peace

on Earth. It brings the inspiration of hope of healing the deep discrepancies between men and women, between man and nature, between God and the world, which have helped in shaping the perception of life of the Western man (Christ, 1997, xiii). The cosmology of the “Goddess, who is back” is understood as the power of embodied love and wisdom that is the foundation of all beings. The Earth is therefore the body of the Goddess. All beings are interconnected and interdependent in the network of life. Nature is alive, conscious and wise. With the help of process theology, Carol P. Christ defines the understanding of the Goddess as panentheistic (all lies in God/Goddess), as the one that extends beyond the polarities of immanence and transcendence, beyond pantheism (all is God) and beyond theism (God is above all). The power of the Goddess is neither omnipotent nor omniscient, as is the case with the theistic God and his alleged transcendental characteristics which is supposed to be over nature and over history. The power of the Goddess through the eyes of process theology, as Christ arguments, is the limited power that works within a limited and changeable world. For herself, therefore, she cannot transform the crises afflicting the world, historical injustices, environmental, ecological destruction, pollution, threats of nuclear disaster ... without the cooperation of the perpetrators and those who are affected with it. Her power is not a compulsory one, but is interdependent – the Goddess is interdependent with us and we are interdependent with her. Her strength is real and our strength becomes bigger and stronger if we cooperate with her (Christ, 1997, 104–107).

We can say that the awareness of the ecological crisis and symbolically put “the call of the Goddess”<sup>8</sup> are interconnected and interdependent phenomena. A significant impact on environmental awareness and the growth of femininity in the religious field is certainly to be recognized to the new-age movement. In the sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely in the religious sphere, New Age Movements arose, environmental movements and politics, as well as some kind of mixture of both: environmental movements with the ideology of New Age. The “call to nature” expressed dissatisfaction and a general doubt regarding the appropriateness and ethics of the apathetic modern, technocratic, mechanistic society. The emergence and development of New Age movements is inseparably linked with the emergence of the so-called “subjective turn”, which is understood as a turn to oneself, to the individual’s unique experiences with the world (Črnič and Lesjak, 2012).

In this ideological context, the idea of the Earth as a living being or a holistic ecosystem (Gaja) appeared. The impact of the latter can be found both inside different

8 “The Call of the Goddess” in this paper is understood as a symbolic and metaphorical designation for the need for transformation of the mental paradigm of the Western world in terms of feminisation and ethicisation of the world that makes the world humane and, through a process consistent humanization which builds on the ethics of the intrinsic value of an individual and nature, strives for a change in values.



new-age religions as well as within traditional religions and religious feminisms.

In a field where new-age and female spirituality meet, as stated by Tina Ban (2007, 151) who recaps Rosemary Radford Ruether, several spiritual movements appeared, each trying to create a new spiritual, cultural and social balance between female and male. One of the most important among them is the Goddess Movement which occurred in the seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in North America and in Western Europe. This movement specifically discusses the form of discrimination that has been generated by different religious theologies. It also points to the broader ideological influence that dominated not only religion but also the wider culture for thousands of years. It criticizes specifically the traditional monotheistic theologies that use the male gender as something self-explanatory when interpreting their deities. As recalled by the Goddess Movement, this kind of thinking about the divine is culturally conditioned, and only indirectly touches upon God itself – only as far as a man seeks a contact with God through this pattern and, thus, establishes an intercourse. Therefore, there should be no reason why not putting this pattern into question again and again, and, in the name of gender equality, appropriately changing and repairing it. The patriarchal theology was proposed to be changed with a unique female “theology” based on female perception of the sacred, and a male God should therefore be symbolically replaced by a female Deity, i.e. the Goddess that would represent female religious ideas, values and experience.

The movement of the Goddess is actually one of the forms of modern paganism<sup>9</sup> which rejects any dogmatic definition and has no precisely defined concept of the Goddess, the Goddess can be legitimately interpreted in a monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic or panentheistic way. The most prominent representatives of neo-paganism are certainly wiccanist, psychotherapist and environmental activist Starhawk (Miriam Simos) and Carol P. Christ. Both have contributed significantly to the development of the Goddess movement and to

identifying and discovering pre-Christian images and worshiping female characters of the Goddess. The latter is the subject of research and analysis of numerous Christian feminist theologians (Rosemary Radford Ruether, Anne Primavesi etc.).<sup>10</sup>

Creation of a new cosmology of compassion, which could in our context be called eco-cosmology through the women’s perspective, is confronted with the presence of many prejudices and negative gender stereotypes, which hinder and inhibit the change towards which we strive. The seemingly simple change and transformation of patriarchal Christian cosmology, which has placed in its focal point the patriarchal figure of the male God, the (Christian) eco-cosmology of compassion, with a symbolic conception of God as a woman, the Goddess, is anything but simple. In the process of transformation, the integration of the female element in theological language and the image of God/Goddess is facing many fears and legalised historical images from the past. Patriarchal theological language, the definition and the depiction of God as exclusively male is a strong heritage of our collective memory.

The findings and the presence of Christian feminist theology, the movement of the Goddess (Goddess Movement), the revival of the lost folk religiosity of women and women’s pagan cults, theology and the movement of women’s spirituality are crucial both for the reconstruction of the past from the perspective of female perspective as well as in the process of transformation of collective memory and the current media of the religion.

As an alternative to patriarchal comprehension, women’s spirituality movements – inspired by various esoteric, mystical, but mostly pagan traditions – formed a completely different concept of the sacred, which is supposed to be close to a female nature. They believed that in women’s perception the sacred is not transcendent and separate from the world, but immanently integrated in it and as such omnipresent. Since God / Goddess is ubiquitous, in nature, in the body and in the human psyche, he is also accessible and can be experienced in the earthly world and in earthly life. His sanctity can

9 Modern paganism (neopaganism) is an umbrella term to denote a plurality of extremely heterogeneous groups of diverse origin and activities, different practices and traditions which have in common the fact that they understand nature as something sacred and alive, that they take inspiration from the pagan religions of the past. Usually, they are polytheistic, pantheistic and / or duotheistic conceptualisations of God which include in their pantheon both male and female deities. As defined by the religiologist Aleš Črnič, with the concept of Neopaganism we usually denote the contemporary interpretations and revitalizations of pre-Christian religions, for example, modern witchcraft, druidism, neoshamanism ... (Črnič, 2012, 86).

10 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza pointed out that the Goddess of radical feminist spirituality is not so very different from the God whom Jesus preached and whom he called care, peace, service, and community. By her opinion the traditions about the Goddess and those of the New Testament are conflated in the Catholic community’s cult of Mary. The more the Christian understanding of God was patriarchalized – the more God became the majestic ruler and the stern judge, the more people turned to the figure and cult of Mary. One could almost say that through the dynamics of this development of the gradual patriarchalization of the God image, Mary became the other face, the Christin face, of God. All the New Testament images and attributes which characterize God as loving, life giving, compassionate and caring, as being with people of God are now transferred to the mother of God, who is accessible as was the nonpatriarchal God whom Jesus preached. The cult of Mary thus grew in proportion to the gradual repatriarhalization of the Christian God and of Jesus Christ. The Catholic tradition gives us thus the opportunity to experience the divine reality in the figure of a woman. The Catholic cult of Mary also provides us with a tradition of female language and imagery to speak of the divine, so with the theological language which speaks of the divine reality in female terms and symbols. This tradition encompasses the myth and symbols of the Goddess religion and demonstrates that female language and symbols have a transparency towards God (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1979, 137–139).



be found anywhere, in oneself, in the other, or in nature (Bednarowski, 1992, 167–168).

The female perception of the world is said to have been neglected not only in traditional religions, but also in Cartesian science, which totally de-sacralised the world in which people live. Science views the world as something unconsecrated, something that consists of unconnected pieces which can be manipulated at will without any consequence for the whole. The prevalence of this perception has supposedly turned us into unconnected individuals who approach fellow humans and nature manipulatively. If we perceived the world in the female way, as integral and connected, and ourselves as an inseparable part of the world, we would try to take better care of it and of anyone living in it, asserts female spirituality. Such a vision would help modern people overcome their fears of living alone in an inanimate environment, of living a life that from the cosmic perspective makes no sense. As women's spirituality movements point out, the absence of the female principle in human awareness has much more complex consequences than just those concerning women and their rights. The disregard for female qualities, such as the ability of synthetic thinking, establishing connections, integration and compromise, actually affects the whole society. It is reflected by numerous social problems, discrimination, military conflicts and ecological problems, state women's spirituality movements, which are usually quick to link their theological rhetoric to political topics.

The movements dealing with the women's spirituality or any of its branches – new paganism, spiritual ecology, theology, etc. – usually proceed from the premise that the social and cultural balance between the male and female principles is ruined, and ascribe responsibility for this to the patriarchal system, which has prevailed in most human societies for the last few thousand years. They see their mission as the formation of a new collective awareness that should be able to recognise the problem of discrimination of the female principle and the urgency to establish a new cultural system enabling a balanced co-existence of the two genders and the two cosmic principles. As various authors have ascertained, such movements have been strongly influenced by certain feminist ideas, above all the ideas of the second wave of feminist movements (Bednarowski, 1992; Radford Ruether, 2006).

For this reason, women wanted to create circumstances in which they could satisfy to the full their female religious needs, express their religious imagination and fulfil the female religious potential. For this purpose, they formed various women's spirituality movements, which quickly intertwined with New Age beliefs.

Aspirations for “the call of the Goddess” are therefore the tendencies for re-revival of cosmology of peace, harmony, equality and integration of all living creatures in the network of life. And besides being the ideal of Christian feminist theologians and ecofeminists Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara, Anne Primavesi, Sallie McFague etc., this desire is actually the ideal of the holistic view of the world and many new-age feminist movements.

## CONCLUSION

The time in which we live forces us to undertake fundamental reflections and transformations of the sediments of the negative prejudice and discriminatory practices of “the written and unwritten moral codes” in (monotheistic) religions. Religions should *per se* be ethical and moral. The pursuance and the recognition of gender equality and equal recognition of the voice of women and the feminine mode of operation need to become the foundation and the criterion of ethics as well as the written and unwritten rule of the moral codes in the contemporary (monotheistic) religions. In this context, the understanding of religion as a herald of ethics and morality in the sense of responsibility of religious communities for the common good, needs to be subject to the principle of equal recognition of the female principle as a *sine qua non* condition of moral dialogue. It is spirituality and religion which build up on the basis of equivalent recognition of both female and male principles as well as the intrinsic value of genders that is (can be) the foundation for peaceful, dialogical, inclusive, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and harmony. Intersubjectivity, which exceeds the dialectic of master – servant relationship, is the starting point and the foundation for inter-cultural, inter-religious dialogue, agreement and coexistence. Theology/theology that returns a proportion of femininity to the relation with the Divine, with the face of the Goddess, is the theology of sensuality, compassion and peace. From the perspective of male-centred theology, the latter may seem like an unattainable, illusory ideal, however, a step towards this is absolutely necessary, even more so since we are, among other reasons, forced to do so due to the current challenges of the refugee crisis, which puts an individual in front of the mirror of (in)humanity in the form of social paranoia<sup>11</sup> and fear of the others, the different. With the means of negative stereotypes we “actually mirror our own images onto the hated Other” (Vezjak, 2015, 1). By doing so we agree with what is in psychoanalysis known as a mechanism of projection:

11 Although it is surprising how rarely it is mentioned, paranoia is becoming an ever more realistic and stronger psycho-political state of Europe. The refugee crisis with its endless troops of weary men, women and children on their way to a happier future has brought the disappearance of self-evident acts in the perception of the European Union, its identity has been put under question and, for example, the meaning of the Schengen border. It has not produced only the feelings of empathy and solidarity, it also opened the door to the negative psychology of the masses, which cannot be stopped by any borders or barbed wire (Vezjak, 2015, 1).

*Ever more aggressively the false beliefs, religious and other prejudices, stereotyping and hatred are entering the minds of people, which leads to the first conflicts and incidents of violence across European cities. To what extent the different forms of intolerance, often in the form of Islamophobic feelings flow into a unifying fear which sees the Islamic world and the incoming refugees as an enemy, and thus results in a permanent suspicious mentality that grows into what Richard Hofstadter once called "the paranoid style"?* (Vezjak, 2015, 1).

Lack of an empowered, solid identity, lack of compassion and empathy, and failure to accept the others and the different without prejudice and negative stereotyping in the light of his/her humanity and full of benevolence consequently leads to intolerance, hatred, fear and fundamentalism. In this context, the hermeneutic key to equivalent acceptance of femininity in the field of the religious and the spiritual, is the ethical maxim which should become a *sine qua non* condition of the moral code in accepting the other, the different, and is the key to a humane sensitization of an individual man or woman in order to achieve a better coexistence in a cultural and religious diversity.

## SKRITI KODEKS BOGINJE – NENAPISANA PRAVILA IN KRITIKA NASILNE TEOLOGIJE

Nadja FURLAN ŠTANTE

Znanstveno raziskovalno središče Koper, Inštitut za filozofske študije, Garibaldijeva 1, 6000 Koper  
e-mail: nadja.furlan@zrs-kp.si

## POVZETEK

*Prispevek s pomočjo metodologije hermenevtičnega ključa krščanske feministične teologije opozori na pomen preobrazbe seksistične, moško-središčne podobe (monoteističnega: judovskega, krščanskega in islamskega – s poudarkom na krščanstvu) Boga, ki je močno vtisnjena v kolektivnem spominu zahodnega človeka. Pod pojmom moškosrediščna teologija je razumljena teologija, ki gradi na principu izključevanja namesto vključevanja, ki temelji na miselni paradigmi gospodar : hlapec in večino svoje teologije izpeljuje iz logike gospostva in večvrednosti izbrane elite, ki jo v vseh ozirih postavlja kot normo: moškega, belo raso, zahodno kulturo, eno religijo (krščanstva) nad drugo, človeka nad naravo... Kljub postopnemu ozaveščanju v luči enakosti spolov ter klica po transformaciji odnosa človeka do narave, moškosrediščna teologija Rimokatoliške cerkve in tudi ostalih krščanskih cerkva, v jedru še vedno ostaja osredinjena na normo moškosti. Za to je potrebna transformacija miselne paradigme in sprememba celotne zavesti posameznika in posledično celotnega kolektivnega spomina zahodne družbe. Ne zgolj terminološko ampak tudi paradigmatško. Inkluzivnost enakovrednega pripoznanja spolov je tako razumljena kot pogoj sine qua non moralnega dialoga sleherne religije v kontekstu kultiviranja senzibilnosti in sprejemanja drugega, drugačnega ter etike nenasilja. Prispevek preko etike enakovredne pripoznanosti femininosti in enakosti spolov na religijskem polju, v okviru vprašanja konceptualiziranja podobe Boga/Boginje, posledično razvija vprašanje pomembnosti aktivnega, iskrenega medverskega dialoga, ki prepozna in razbija negativne stereotipne predstave in predsodke ter dviguje raven strpnosti, spoštovanja in krepi medsebojno razumevanje tako v vsakdanjem življenju posameznikov različnih veroizpovedi in duhovnosti kot tudi na hierarhični institucionalni religijski ravni.*

**Ključne besede:** Boginja, enakost spolov, medreligijski dialog, moralni dialog

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Apophthegmata Sancti Macarii Aegyptii** 38, PG 34:257, C-258A.

**Ban, T. (2007):** New age in ženska duhovnost. [New Age and women's spirituality] In: Furlan, N. & A. Zalta (eds.): Ženske in religija. [Women and religion]. Poligrafi 45/46, Ljubljana, 145–161.

**Bednarowski, M. F. (1992):** The New Age Movement and Feminist Spirituality. In: Lewis, J. & J. Gordon Melton (eds.): Perspectives of the new age. Albany, State University of New York Press, 167–179.

**Christ, C. P. (1997):** Rebirth of the Goddess, Finding meaning in feminist spirituality. London, New York, Routledge.

**Črnič, A. (2012):** Na vodnarjevem valu. Bog s.p. Ljubljana, FDV.

**Črnič, A., & G. Lesjak (2012):** Nove religije v Sloveniji. Religija.info. <http://www.religije.info/NoveReligije> (10. 3. 2012).

**Daly, M. (1973):** Beyond God the Father. Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation. Boston, Beacon Press.

**Daly, M. (1985):** The Church and the Second Sex. Boston, Beacon Press.

**Gimbutas, M. (1999):** The living Goddess. Berkeley, University of California.

**Goldenberg, N. (1979):** Changing of the Gods. Boston, Beacon Press.

**Eiesland, L. N. (1994):** The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability. Nashville, Abingdon Press.

**Furlan, N. (2006):** Manjkajoče rebro. Ženska, religija in spolni stereotipi. [Missing rib. Women, religion and gender stereotypes] Koper, Annales.

**Furlan Štante, N. (2014):** V iskanju Boginje. [In search for Goddess] Koper, Annales.

**Jogan, M. (1990):** Družbena konstrukcija hierarhije med spoloma. Ljubljana, FDV.

**Johnson, E. (1994):** Ich bin, die ich bin. Wenn Frauen Gott sagen. Düsseldorf, Patmos-Verlag.

**Kaufman, G. D. (1995):** In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

**Lovelock, J. (1991):** Gaia, The Practical Science of Planetary Medicine. London, Gaia Books.

**McFague, S. (1982):** Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language. Philadelphia, Fortress Press.

**Radford Ruether, R. (1983):** Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology. Boston, Bacon Press.

**Radford Ruether, R. (2005):** Integrating Ecofeminism Globalization and World Religions. New York, Rowman&Littlefield Publishers.

**Radford Ruether, R. (2006):** Goddess and the Divine Feminine. Berkeley, University of California Press.

**Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (1979):** Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision. In: Christ, C. P. & J. Plaskow (eds.): Womanspirit Rising. New York, HarperOne, 136–149.

**Schüssler Fiorenza, E. (1990):** In Memory of Her. New York, Crossroad.

**Stone, M. (1976):** When God was a Woman. New York, Barnes&Noble.

**Tillich, P. (1957):** Dynamics of Faith. New York, Harper Torchbooks.

**Tratnik, P. (2010):** In vitro: živo onstran telesa in umetnosti. (Transars, 1). Ljubljana, Horizonti, zavod za umetnost, kulturo, znanost in izobraževanje.

**Vežjak, B. (2015):** Evropska paranoja in migracijska kriza. Dialogi, 9, 1–3.