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**FEMINIST THEORIES IN THE SOCIOLOGY  
OF RELIGION<sup>1</sup>**

**ФЕМИНИСТСКИЕ ТЕОРИИ В СОЦИОЛОГИИ РЕЛИГИИ**

**Abstract**

Sociology could not be bypassed by the impact of feminist theories. Women's population in religions. The increase of interest in women's religiousness on areas of ex Yugoslavia. Why have women been ignored and marginalised by the society and the Church? What are feminist theories? Two kinds of feminist theories. Anthropocentrism. An attitude of traditionalists to feminism. A woman in written religious sources. How much has the stand view on the period influenced the position of women in religions? A woman in traditions of the Asian and Far East religions. A woman in the Abraham's religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). When do feminist theories appear? Gender studies. Feminist theories in different religious traditions. What is required in feminist theories? The position of a woman in society and culture. A woman in the role of the religious leader. Feminist theology. The critics of feminist theories.

**Keywords:** sociology; religion; woman; women's religiousness; feminist theory; religious leader

**Аннотация**

Социология не может не подвергаться влиянию феминистских теорий. Население женщин в религии. Увеличение интереса к религиозности женщин в областях, являющихся бывшими территориями Югославии. Почему женщины игнорировались и маргинализировались обществом и Церковью? Что собой представляют феминистские теории? Два вида феминистских теорий. Антропоцентризм. Отношение традиционалистов к феминизму. Женщина в письменных религиозных источниках. На сколько устоявшиеся взгляды определенного периода повлияли на положение женщин в религии? Женщина в традициях азиатских и дальневосточных религий. Женщина в религиях Авраама (иудаизм, христианство, ислам). Когда появляются феминистской теории? Гендерные исследования. Феминистской теории в различных религиозных традициях. Что необходимо в феминистских теориях? Положение женщины в обществе и культуре. Женщина в роли религиозного лидера. Феминистская теология. Критики феминистских теорий.

**Ключевые слова:** социология; религия; женщина; женская религиозность; феминистская теория; религиозный лидер.

<sup>1</sup> An extract from more comprehensive, unpublished manuscript.

If a theory of secularisation had been a «hit» topic in the Sociology of religion in the seventies of the last century, then feminist theories were surely such «hits» in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Naturally, we are interested in the field of social sciences, more precisely, of the sociology of religion. It is evident that neither the sociology of religion nor religious studies could be bypassed by the impact of feminist theories. Equally, nowadays, it is impossible bypassing feminist perspectives in studying religions.

Until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, discussions in the sociology of religion were reduced to how women were more religious than men. Sociological researches were showing a higher level of religious beliefs amongst women and their higher participation in the religious practice. Even in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was repeatedly mentioned in the sociological references that women are more religious than men according to many indicators of religiousness and in different types of religious communities [1]. It is estimated in the Adventist Church that there are app. 70% of women followers of that Church.

Even though men dominate in religious leaderships, women still make the majority of population in all the world's religions. They even make the absolute majority in some newer religious groups and movements. It goes without saying that forms of women's participation in religions are different. Women are started to be attracted also by theological studies. That trend can also be noticed in areas of ex-Yugoslavia where there are more and more women enrolling the studies of theology (women make 30% of students of some theological faculties).

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an interest in research of women's religiousness have also increased in the area of ex-Yugoslavia [2; 3; 4; 5 etc.]. A topic – religions and women. Or, «the women's issue» in religions. «Are all religions misogynous?» – it is asked

by [6, 154]. «Is the Church a woman or misogynist» – it is also a dilemma of [7, 45]? Or is it both? Is there any point and need to talk about it?

Why do women make more than a half of the interviewees of different religions? Is it perhaps a result of their unequal social position (especially in traditional communities) and religions and religious communities have offered them almost the only kind of some participation in public life (like work in charity associations, missionary activities etc.)? Therefore, the issue of their position and role in religious teachings and practice has its sociological (and not only that) rationale. There is a search for the answer to the issue of why women are ignored and depreciated – starting from society to the Church.

Proponents of feminist theories ask: why women participate that much in activities of religious communities led by men. And not only that: it is about belief in male God. And, male leadership leads them not only in religious communities but also in and out of their families. An objection can be heard that not only religious communities are patriarchal but also the sociology of religion itself – more men deals with it than women. Is it in which an explanation could be sought for that only at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the sociology of religion has been paying more attention to genuine studying of the relation of women and the religion? Within that, there were also feminist theories.

What are feminist theories? Those that are not that much informed consider that feminist theories are some anti-male theories directed against men, families (especially those traditional ones), that the theories are those through which western values are intended to be imposed to the rest of the world in the time of the globalisation and various modern means of communication. Those that consider the above should be instantly said that it is about an inter-disciplinary approach to the position and role of women in

society (writers, artists, sociologists, political scientists, theologians, anthropologists, economists). According to some opinions, a feminist theory was conceived in the field of literature (it promote women's literature and women's culture). Therefore, feminist theories deal with the position of women in society, culture, religion, production etc. Those theories are against neither men nor religion, but against their interpretations and practices that bring women into unequal position compared to men.

There are two kinds of feminist theories: a) liberal ones, those that put emphasis on individual rights b) radical ones, with emphasis on social solidarity. Gyno-centrism (gyno – woman and centron – centre) can be posted somewhere within radical feminist theories or woman-centrism that wishes to perform the revitalisation of suppressed femininity. It would be said that it goes beyond the policy of gender equality.

It was indicated that feminist theories are not anti-religious and anti-male theories but they are pointed against anthropocentrism, male monopoly over priestly vocations and interpretations of religious teachings, which excludes women from that process. Anthropocentrism reduces women to consumers, customers of the religious culture. It pervades almost all aspects of the religious culture, in particular in some Christian courses (story about Adam and Eve, Paul's attitudes to women, a myth on original sin and expulsion from heaven etc.). All that has impacted on a subordinate role of women not only in the Church but also in society.

According to the gender structure of those that go to churches, it seemed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that men walked out of churches, leaving them to women. It is for sure that even today, clericalisation and excessive institutionalisation bring (especially young people) away from the Church. However, there are examples different than the above. For instance, there were more men than women in Brasil (in 2010) that declared themselves

as Catholics during the census (e.g. there were more men even amongst those with «no religion» status).

There are conflicts between «traditionalists» and «modernists» in many religious groups about the issue of position, role and possibilities of women, not only in the religious community but also in society. Traditionalists think that the idea of equality of men and women in religions is too secular and ideological and that it «violates» diversity given by God. That attitude is hard to be accepted by a sociologist, but perhaps not that hard for theologians who are traditionalists. From the sociological point of view, it is important also to perceive to which extent the social position of women has made influence on women's status in the religious community and vice versa – to which extent the religious community has made impact on the society and the women's position in it.

Is it because of stimulating the birth rate, in a wish to have births delivered to as many new believers as possible, that it has come to the degradation of women, their being turned exclusively into mothers and house wives? A woman was excluded from the political power and social influence. Nevertheless, it is needed to have understanding for concerns of Jewish and Christian communities, especially in Europe and USA, for the fall of their birth rate. Rabbi Shmuley Boteach writes that «The birth rate amongst Jews is on a such a low rate today that studies foresee that by 2030, the world's Jewish population will be reduced from today's 14 million to five or six millions of souls» [8, 168].

*A woman in religious sources:* Male sacredness (embodied through male supernatural beings) is common phenomenon in many religions. Prophets and oracles of Abraham's religions are men. Gods, not Goddesses, are connected to the creation of earth, restoring moral principles (Indra and Vishnu in Hinduism, Olorun in the Yoruba, many tribal Gods). There are men behind many of sacred scripts and their expounding.

There are many female deities in polytheistic religions and some of those, like Goddess Amaterasu in Shintoism, are at the very top of the deities' pyramid. Women's holiness is especially emphasised in oriental social cultures and religions. They contain references to «Mother of Nature», «Mother of Earth». In some cases, that worship is connected to the virgin purity, motherhood (in Hinduism, Christianity), in other cases, it is connected with the national identity (Goddess Kannagi, the symbol of the Tamil's national identity). There are similarities that can also be found in Christianity in which there is a cult of Mother of God and Virgin Mary, as the national protectress. «Ave Maria, the Queen of Croats» is the song dedicated to the Virgin Mary that is known amongst Croats-Catholics.

However, many religious traditions have been misogynous for a long time. Those traditions were pointed at the role of women in family duties and rituals, and much less or even not at all at their search for religious vocations and spiritual perfections. It is enough to have a look at the theological literature that has been printed by religious communities to see the marginalisation, almost excommunication of authoresses.

It goes without saying that the attitude towards a woman as well as to her position and the role in a religious community is not the same in each of religions and religious communities. However, what is almost the same for all «traditional» religions and religious communities is the following stand view: the family is fundamental cell. Therefore, it is with no surprise that those religions have directed women to performing their role in the family (the status of a wife and a mother).

Feminist theories place a question before sociologists: is a period crucial for explanation of women's differences in living religions? Does it exclude women from ritual activities and sacred space (sometimes it also separates them from the family)? Majority of religions considered that women are

sexually impure during the entire time of their period, which is at least for seven days. However, there are some religions that used to preach that only seven days after the cessation of women's period, women can be considered pure. Arabs considered Tuesday as the day of blood. On that day, Hawwah/Eve had gotten the first period. There are ancient customs saying that it is not good when a woman touches many things during her period. Australian women were forbidden to touch anything that is used by men and to walk the same way that men did. Pots that a woman touched during her period used to be destroyed in Uganda [9, 263].

Written religious scripts contain a ban to get close to a woman while she is having her period i.e. while she is impure. And not only that. Women are considered impure for ritual acts exactly because of their period or a birth delivery in many religious teachings. The presence of blood is what makes a woman impure. The Old Testament does not only say about «impurity» of women (when they have their period) but also about the «impurity» of men when they ejaculate. It is just that this kind of impurity of men does not have any consequences for their status in a group.

Sikh guru Nanak asked those that consider women impure and incapable of undertaking religious rituals why they negate women when great people and kingdoms originate from women. Why to negate a woman that delivered our birth, to which we married, a woman who is our companion and a symbol of eternity of the human kind? Women in Sikhism take part in all religious activities. Since their early years, women have been taught that there are no differences between men and women (nevertheless, they are still separated in a temple!). A Sikh will not touch a woman in greeting her unless they are close relatives. Kisses are never shared in an encounter on a public place.

A woman is «sentenced» to isolation once a month, during her period, also in Hinduism that equals women and men. In particular, it

is considered that it is a sin if a woman cooks, clear and enters a room where there is a sanctuary of the home during first four to five days of her period. That is why she can never perform duties of a priest or a leader of the religious community. However, on the other hand, Hinduism points at the importance of Goddesses: there are many temples built up in honour of Goddesses (so, a woman can be Goddess but cannot be the religious community's leader!), and not of Gods.

It is said that a woman is «impure» (the ban of taking part in rituals), it can be said sinful, after she delivers a birth. Does it mean that the delivery of birth is «impure», sinful as well? According to the feminist theory, the stated attitudes toward the period and delivery of birth encourage gender inequalities in religious communities. Feminists point at when a woman exudes blood is considered impure, while when men do the same (spilling Jesus' blood or when undertaking circumcision), it is considered differently (a symbol of unifying, making the union with God).

*A woman in traditions of the Asian and Far East religions:* Hinduism is a living religion with the most of the Goddesses. For instance, Saraswati is patron Goddess of knowledge which is particularly respected by students and teachers. Even nowadays, Hindus and Buddhists in Nepal pay respect to the chosen girl from the Buddhist family as a «living Goddess». They consider her as a reincarnation of the powerful Goddess Kālī that is respected by both Hindus and Buddhists. She withdraws herself from the position of the «living Goddess» at the time of her first period. It can be read in Bhagavad Gita [10, 34] «Among women I am fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and patience». If a woman possesses each of the above mentioned features, then she is glorified.

It goes without saying that worshipping Goddesses does not necessarily mean that women in the tradition of Hinduism used to have the same social status like men. There

were many social and even legal limitations for women: life in a house, a widow with, in principle, no more marriages, low educational level of women etc. As soon as a woman gets married in Hinduism, she is fully devoted to the life of her husband. It is expected that she puts her husband's needs before hers. Hinduism teaches that a woman has to be always subordinated to the man – it is her father in her childhood, her husband in her maturity whom she always needs to treat as God, her sons in her elderly years. Men (Brahmin) always used to be preachers of sacred scripts in Hinduism. Women are forbidden to know the Vedas or to teach Sanskrit. Due to the fact that Hinduism was more practised at home than in a temple, it determines more positive status of a woman in that domain. Nevertheless, a bonfire with a dead body is always set on fire by the oldest son or a male relative by the side line of next to kin.

Traditional Hinduism underlines that parents choose to whom they will marry their daughter and which girl their son will get married. It can happen that bride and groom meet for the first time on their wedding (that is from where the Hindu's proverb comes: I did not marry a woman i love, but i love a woman i got married). Parents practised to give their daughters who were minors, sometimes even little girls, to marriage.

Incineration of widows has been practised in Hinduism for a long time. So, a woman used to give to her husband not only her love but also her life by genuinely burning herself at the bonfire next to the body of her dead husband (there was no the other way around practice i.e. to have a live husband burn himself next to the body of her dead wife). That custom of genuine burning of widows was forbidden in 1829 but even after that, it was sporadically been practised.

For certain time, it was believed that a woman cannot achieve Nirvana. To achieve Nirvana, she should have first been born as a man.

Still, in order not to be unfair towards Hinduism, it should be mentioned that women have a better position in Hinduism than in many other living religions. We can find yoni which is a symbol of female genital organ in temples of Hinduism. That symbol has been worshipped more than a male genital organ (linga) for a long time. Not only that women in Hinduism visit temples but they also take part in religious rituals as dancers and singers. There it can be seen that Goddesses are still worshipped (especially in regions in which agriculture and rice farming are developed). It most often refers to the Goddesses of fertility.

Buddhism has neglected women in comparison to men. Initially, Buddha was against having women as nuns as by their preserving the cycle of birth, women impersonate greediness for life. «As when a disease breaks into the field of rice that thrives, the same happens when women approaches a science or an order, as there, a holy life cannot last for long» (Buddha). Later on, Buddha changed that view. He founded the first women's order's community with certain conditions. His step mother was amongst those nuns. However, women's orders' communities started to slowly vanishing in some areas like Ceylon (in the 11<sup>th</sup> century), Burma (in the 13<sup>th</sup> century). Today, such communities are still present in Sri Lanka Thailand, Laos, Cambodia. In spite of that, bearers of hierarchical functions are men.

The Holy Book of Sikhs, Adi Gran'th, proclaims gender equality, and rejects centuries old images of male domination. Sikhism abolished the practice of incineration of widows next to their husbands' coffins, rejected the system of dowry and murder of female children (although, all that has not been entirely eradicated until today). Equality of men and women is advocated for in the theology of Sikhism. The blood that comes from a woman's period is not something that is impure but the result of the natural process of a female being. Also, a ritual impurity related to

the act of delivery of birth is rejected.

Amongst Sikhs, men and women can read Adi Gran'th freely and recite holy verses in their families or in public rituals and they can also lead rituals within their community. However, there are rituals led exclusively by men (those related to memorials of births and death of guru, rituals of transition).

Jain course that practices nudity considers that a woman cannot be naked when in move because of her inborn impurity and physical characteristics and that she cannot achieve salvation before she is born as a man in her another life. However, there are some groups amongst Jains that consider that it is also allowed to women to teach sacred scripts. They have developed religious endogamy and girls get married immediately after their sexual maturity. Men do not use scents so as not to seduce their own wife.

The supreme deity in Shintoism is the Goddess of Amaterasu. The sanctuary in her honour is located in the city of Ise.

«Yin» and «Yang» represent the dark and the bright aspect of Tao, female and male aspect in Taoism. «Yang» is a male reality, the male side of Tao, it is the centre in all things. «Yin» is the female side of Tao and of reality. None of those two sides of reality is supreme over the other. It is «Yin-yang» and never «yang-yin». Nowadays, it would be said: «Ladies first». The female principle is the one that comes first, and followed by the male one. At this point, it seems relevant to stress that the ethics of Confucianism implies that every woman needs to learn how to become a good wife and how to take care of parents. Little girls are taught to speak quietly and in obey.

*A woman in Abraham's religions:* Has the attitude of religions toward a woman as a temptress been important for the position of women in Abraham's religions (Ellen White was building up that view in Adventism)? Isn't the provision in Quran on covering intimate parts and on clothing the product of such view of a woman as a temptress?

According to the Old Testament, men rule over women as it is the punishment for Eve's disobedience. The Genesis contains references of a woman: «Pregnancy will multiply your pain, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and thy desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you» [3, 16]. There is a Jewish prayer: «Bless you, our Lord, because you did not make me be a pagan, nor a woman, nor the ignorant!».

Since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Jews had started separating women from men in Synagogues and turning women away from reading Torah. The Old Testament gets us familiar with a negative social status of barrens (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel). It is said for them that they were caught by the God's punishment. Because of that, they had faced contempt and humiliation in social relations. On the other hand, Miriam, Deborah, Judith, Esther were those women that had taken part in public life. Michal is also mentioned (a symbol of a wise woman) as well as Ruth that is characterised by honesty.

How was the social position of a woman at the beginning of Judaism? A woman did not have any inherited rights. Different from men, women could not even submit a request for divorce. A husband could give a divorce letter (get) to his wife, but a wife could not do the same to her husband. Talmud proscribes all the work which a wife needs to perform for her husband: reap, bake and wash, cook and feed her child, make his bed and process wool [10, 253]. Judaism is determined as per mother, not after father. A woman must not study Torah, wear a prayer's scarf (tallith), have a bandage with the script over her forehead, blow into saffron, build a cottage (suka), take part in a group that makes minyan etc. Women are exempted from the pilgrimage: «Three times next year shall all your males shall appear before the Lord God» (Exodus 23.17).

As related to Jews, women took care of religious purity of home, applied rules for nutrition, lit up candles before Sabbath (Satur-

day), delivered birth for continuation of the Jewish tradition and they were to build up the habit and the need of their sons for studying Torah.

Based on scripts of the old Testament, can it be concluded that a woman is to be looked at as someone that is less valuable than a man (who will predominate over her), as a person that needs to be characterised by obedience? A woman is the one that has brought to disobedience and sin. Her obligations towards the family are posted before all her other duties.

Is Christianity a misogamy religion that is ruled/managed by men? When it comes to the attitude of Christianity towards a woman, it seems as if Christianity continues with the Jewish tradition. First there was a man, and then a woman; first there was a snake that was deceived by a woman; first there was a woman that fell into a sin; teaching sacred scripts is only for men. The authors of the Gospel and Epistles are men, so should the cause of such stand view of the New Testament on women be perhaps sought in that fact?

A woman in the Bible has a «multiple identity». She is a mother and a wife; a girlfriend and a fiancée; a daughter and a sister; a mistress and a Sybil; a widow and a maid; a concubine, prostitute and a adulteress. The New Testament asks from a woman to love her husband (Titus 2,4); to respect him (Eph 5,33); to be faithful to him (1 Cor 7,3-5); to submit to him (1 Cor 14,34, Eph 5,22 and 5,24; Titus 2,5 etc.); to live with him for a lifetime (Rom 7,2-3; 1 Cor 7,10). Christianity taught women to be obedient and submissive towards their husbands as their «heads». To conclude: women's identities in the New Testament are reduced to the motherhood and «coordinators» within the family life.

From the foremother, Eve had transformed into the sinner in Christianity. From a witness of the resurrection, Mary Magdalene had turned into a sexual sinner. Junia, as a

prominent female apostle (by the Romans), distinguished herself as the Junius etc. Why should Eve be a symbol of something sinful because she wanted to taste an apple? Why should not that wish of hers be considered as a wish for cognition? Is [11, 34] right when says that Christianity had initially been in opposition to intellectualism? «I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes» (Matthew 11:25).

A few women are mentioned in the Biblical narratives about Jesus: Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist); unknown woman by the well whose name is not mentioned; Tabitha (symbol of the Christian charity); Susanna (benefactor of Jesus and his disciples); Lydia (gives her home for a gathering of followers of Jesus); Junia (Paul hailed her as the most prominent among the apostles); Phoebe (called a servant of the Church); Virgin Mary (mother of Jesus); Mary Magdalene (which some claim to be the closest of women with Jesus); Martha (sister of Lazarus); Veronica (what is said for her is that Jesus had appeared on her veil).

The name of Mary Magdalene is often mentioned in the New Testament, who seemed to have played an important role in the early Christian community. After the resurrection of Jesus, Mary Magdalene is not mentioned any more (in the Book of Acts and the Epistles). Obviously, with Jesus, there were no restrictions for women in the community. Those restrictions would have later been imposed by Paul.

God had become a man in the image of a man in Christian theology. But, there are some novelties compared to the Old Testament. While the Jewish Old Testament tradition did not consider that a woman could be a witness, according to the New Testament, women were the first witnesses of Christ's resurrection. After the resurrection Jesus had not first appear to a man but to

a woman, Mary of Magdala (Jn 20.15-17). While for Jews, only a man used to enter the community by the act of his circumcision, for Christians, also women would enter the community by the rite of baptism. The daughter of Abraham is a woman. She may participate in public prayers.

Nevertheless, although Jesus did not choose any woman amongst the twelve apostles, the women were there, through his whole life until his suffering (Mary Magdalene, Martha, Elizabeth etc.). Moreover, according to the Gospel of Thomas, and Mary Magdalene and Salome are among the six (rather than twelve) of Jesus' first disciples. And Mark confirms that women are among those who follow him: «There were also women ... Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome ... then many others» (Mark 15.40-41)

Jesus appeared to women after his death, and they were the first messengers of his resurrection («... first appeared to Mary Magdalene» - Mark 16:7). It was scandalous for Jews to talk with a woman in a public place. And Jesus, who was Jewish, had talked with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4.7 to 9). He treated women (Mk 1: 29-31; 5.2 to 42 and from 7.25 to 30). Given the time in which he had acted and how he had acted (in violation of the socio-religious attitudes about women), advocates of the feminist theories among Christian women can celebrate Jesus as their precursor.

M. Weber believed that one of the reasons for the success of early Christianity was exactly the attitude to women. While other religions have been very «masculine» and excluded women, Jesus is constantly in the «surrounding» of women. They follow him, he heals them, they want to anoint his body, he has first appeared to them etc. Even the Church itself is called the «Holy Mother» (feminine).

Paul mentions Lydia, Damara, Phoebe,



Evodia, Cynthia in his letters. It could be expected from his message to the Galatians where he says, «no longer male nor female» (Gal 3:28) that the Church has overcome gender differences. Unfortunately, it did not happen. History of Christianity, however, shows that the dominant line of divisions was the one with the focus on the men's role. It turned out that Paul's letters were the basis for the degradation of women in Christianity. Is St. Paul determined the place of women in traditional churches by his attitude «that your women keep silence in the churches». «As in all churches of the saints, women should remain silent in the meetings» (1 Cor 14:34)? «It is unquestionable that his judgment, conditioned by time, is coloured in a sexist manner,» says theologian [12, 231].

In pre-Islamic era, there were goddesses among the Arab tribes and they had songs to celebrate the beauty of women. Nevertheless, the Arabs of the pre-Islamic period were not favourable to a woman. She was owned, as a thing, by a man. In addition, they had the custom to sacrifice virginity to the goddess, salacious Akora. Marriage was mere coincidence, and they married sisters, daughters, mothers. The birth of a female child was taken as disfavour of Gods. One of the tribes in Mecca had a practice of burying female infants.

Historically, in comparison to the pre-Islamic practice, the Quran brought substantial progress in relation to the woman: it forbade burying of alive female children in the sand, reduced the number of women to four, gave some protection of women's rights in marriage (form dowry to the possibility of preserving a monogamous marriage). Unlike the Bible, Qur'an does not know for an «original sin» as related only to the woman. A woman in Islam is a manufacturer and a retailer (Khadijah was successfully engaged in trade). Let us not forget that one of the surah in the Qur'an (Surah XIX) is dedicated to Maryam (Mary). Analysts warn that this is the only female name that is,

in such way, mentioned in Qur'an.

A woman is not allowed to catch the eye of foreigners by its embellishment and flirting, but must keep her beauty and attraction only for her husband. She should dress modestly and decently. She should not put a wig on her head (at the Traditions) because it is a delusion, and it is prohibited. The Quran lays down an obligation to a woman that after the death of her husband, she needs to wait for four months and ten days to get married again [2, 234].

Duties of a woman to her husband are: not to avoid his bed, to fulfil the word that she has given, to treat his wishes worshipfully, that she does not leave home without consent with him, that she does not have a person whom her husband does not like in their home. A woman should keep her husband's reputation and his property. The mother of the family is extremely honoured. In her honour, Muhammad said: «Paradise is located in front of the mother's feet». However, on the tombstone (gravestone), the name of the father is written, not the one of the mother.

If Islam emphasizes the equality of men and women as human beings, it does not mean that Islam does not point at the diversity of their roles and functions in society. So, is, then, the gender inequality born there?

Is the Quran unfair to women, not because women do not go to the funeral, but when it reduced the importance of her testimony to the measure of a man that is less in double (the witness can be one man and two women)? Can verse II, 282 – («I specify two witnesses, two men of yours, and if there are no two men, then one man and two women, who accept as witnesses; if one of the two of them forget, let the other remind her») – be used for theses on the inferiority or superiority of one sex over the other?

What is it with the behaviour of women in the public space? Hadiths warn that when a woman goes to the mosque, she should not be perfumed and should not display her

ornaments, those that adorn her as a woman. Muslim women are required to cover themselves with a veil so as to hide themselves from the eyes of others, except for the husband's. According to Islamic teachings, women do not shake hands with men except those who are not allowed to marry them (father, brother, uncle). A woman will not even greet (salam) those men back.

Entry into the temple may be denied to women. Thus, women in Bengal are banned from entering the mosque. Sometimes, as an indicator of the poor status of women in Islam, the Taliban's practice of prohibiting the education of women, not allowing women to participate in public and political life is mentioned, but the question is whether these attitudes are the result of Islamic teachings, or something else which should not necessarily be close to the Islamic doctrine.

Was Muhammad jealous? All could marry widows, but it was forbidden that someone marry his widows; the other women were not obliged to wear the veil, and his were (when a woman wears it, isn't it that no one can see her face, eyes etc.?). And even if he was jealous, why should it be wondered, as he was a man after all. Can it be said that the Prophet Muhammad was a defender of women's rights: gender relations, right of inheritance, prohibition of murder of female children, women's equality with men before God, right to property, the ability to testify (even though a voice of two women was taken as the one of one man), prohibition of violence in marriage? Of course, this does not mean that Islamic tradition did not have the views that we could describe as very bad for women (unlike men who can have up to four wives, women can only have one man; a man can marry the follower of the Book but a woman cannot marry to the follower of the book; a husband may hit his wife, but the wife cannot do that to her husband; allowing rape of women prisoners etc.).

*When feminist theories ensue:* increas-

ing specialization within the social sciences has opened the door to spreading feminist theories at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the XXI century. Feminist theories and gender studies were created in western societies. Its roots are back in the Enlightenment era. The very concept of feminism derives from Charles Fourier from the first half of the nineteenth century.

Can we determine the start of feminism by the first fights for women's right to vote and their social status? Historically, the first discussions took place on women's right to vote, and then extended to other issues. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) is one of the pioneers of the struggle for women's rights in America. Her works were the inspiration for the feminist movement in America. She was challenging the traditional male authority. She had an analytic approach to studying of biblical passages which relate to women. Based on that tradition, feminist theories have continued to point at specificities and diversities of women's religious experience.

Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) had that role in Germany and she was guiding the revolutionary women's movement. Since 1907, she was the Secretary of the International Alliance of Women. Based on her proposal, the 8<sup>th</sup> of March was declared as the Women's Day in 1910.

Some will locate the start of feminism to the appearance of an essay «The Second Sex» in which the French writer Simone de Beauvoir advocated for emancipation of women, and their first sweep will put in the middle of the twentieth century.

The feminist theory emerges in the late nineteenth century and then significantly develops in the mid and late twentieth century. Feminist theories come to the fore at the end of the twentieth century, although ideas of the equality of women, as we could see, are far older. The place of women in religious teachings and communities becomes attrac-

tive to sociologists of religion (and even more to female sociologists) only in the 60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and especially at the end of that century. At the end of the twentieth century, researches of some previously almost taboo topics such as homosexuality and religion (gay-lesbian issues within various religious traditions) have started. Some would say that the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the period of post-feminism, and the emergence of a period in which gender studies were in the spotlight.

*Gender theories:* Ethnicity, class, social class, gender, race – all are terms that are commonly used in sociology. Why? Because it turned out that they are in direct correlation with the life chances of individuals in heterogeneous societies. Sociologists divide all population into two socio-biological categories: men and women. Gender issue (with the given modalities «female», «male») is always mentioned in sociological researches, amongst general data on interviewees.

The term «gender» is not the word for «women». Gender is a socio-biological category relating to hierarchical relationships, unequal access to power and resources. It should also make a distinction between the terms «gender difference» and «gender diversity». The word «diversity» is often found in recent sociological literature, and its preservation is highly ranked value of the European institutions, and their documents. The term «difference» carries negative values, as opposed to the word «diversity». Gender diversities (plural) should be encouraged rather than gender difference (singular). The difference emphasizes the relation to gender issues in other religious cultures and traditions. Whether we like diversity or not, all of us encounter with it on a daily basis. Checking the value of everyone's stand view is the attitude towards diversity. Not only to accept it, but also to ensure that it develops. The right to diversity does not mean diversity of rights.

There is a difference made between the terms of *sex* and *gender* in feminist theories.

Sex is a biological identity that women differ from men. On the other hand, gender is a term that refers to different roles that some cultures, religious traditions, etc, attribute to women and men. And it is in this area that the feminist movement is engaged: abolition of gender differences and inequalities imposed in society, even by religious traditions.

So, gender differences indicate differences between men and women. One could say that these are biological tags which ignored the socialization and social context. Sex derives from biodiversity, and gender from the socio-diversity. Experience shows that biological sex is often one of the essential foundations on which social roles and behaviours are built.

Masculinity / femininity are taught from an early age. Female children follow the work of mothers and identify with those roles while male children follow the work, life and behaviour of fathers and identify with that role. Aren't all of us encourage masculine / feminine identities when we go to birthday parties of grandchildren or children from the neighbourhood and those of our relatives: we will not bring a car for a gift to girls or a ball, bulldozer, but a doll, mirror and a comb with which girls will adorn their «Barbie doll». We will buy a dress to a girl, and trousers to a boy. Gender notions and attitudes are developed through socialization (family, school, church, group). We would say that gender identities are developed. Sex based studies of religion deal with the analysis of sex differences in religion, and gender studies deal with social practice, position and role of men and women in it.

What about gender differences in society? If one would judge by some external indicators, one might mistakenly conclude that they are behind us: both men and women dress the same (like pants), talk about the same topics, are educated in the same professions, make careers in politics, science, culture, sports etc. Today, gender theories set the issue of the equality of women in the

family, education, workplace, participation in decision-making, recognition, even in religious life.

Although the gender studies began to develop in the 70s of the last century, they were introduced as post-graduate studies, at the University of Sarajevo only in 2006/07 school year. 44 women and five men have completed their studies by the end of the 2013. According to this data, these studies are extremely «women's Studies». I conducted religious studies at the University of Sarajevo where they were introduced in 2007/08. The discipline of *Religion and race* is also taught within those studies. 20 women and six men completed those studies by end 2013.

Let us mention here the women's studies, which, starting from the equal dignity of equality, deal with life and religiosity of women. Those studies were developed in the second half of the twentieth century. Women's studies deal with researching of diversity of women's religiousness in different cultures and religions; women's participation in religious activities, religious leaders, women's involvement in new religious movements, etc. These studies show that men very much interfere into women's life: rapes, sexual harassments, debates about abortion, etc.

Men's studies of religion (after women's studies, feminism and gender studies) are a new field of scientific researches. Those studies are mainly developed within western European Christianity and Judaism. The task of the men's study is to contribute to raising gender awareness on any aspect of the position and the role of men in religious traditions. There are also problems of gay population in religious traditions. We would say that the men's studies deal with the male side of the religious experience. It is intended to strengthen the male identity in religions of the West after the rise of secularism and abandonment of religious local communities in churches and denominations (primarily in Western Europe).

Thanks to feminist theories and gender studies, from being the object of study, women became the subject of study in many religious traditions. A large literature on the status of women in religious traditions written by women has been generated.

*Feminist theories in religious traditions:* When it comes to religious traditions, we can find in them many examples of gender discrimination, but also praising women. It is therefore not surprising that contemporary feminist movements have different approaches and focuses. They firstly point at marginal status of women in the world's great religious traditions. They point out that the interpretation of sacred texts in current theology has not sufficiently promoted equality and dignity of women, but more of male dominance (while relying on those parts in the scriptures that can be the basis for such an interpretation, and neglecting of other parts that would go in favour of the interpretation of equality and dignity of women). The ceremonies are performed and interpreted in a way that they (largely) exclude women (in some cases even their physical presence – Morning Prayer in Jews; funeral ceremony in Jews and Muslims etc.). The ritual clothing usually is meant only for men (yarmulke and tallit in Jews, Ahmadiyya in Muslims, miter among Catholics etc.).

Some authors write about the Islamic and Christian feminist theories [13]. As if there are no such theories in Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism etc. Closer to the truth is that the last decades are considered as those in which it comes to the «feminization», not only of Islam and Christianity, but also of other religions. Let's see, in short, how that looks like in which particular religious traditions.

*Feminist theories in Asian and Far East religions* are focused on criticism of traditional views on the role of women. The traditional practice of marriage in which parents make decisions about everything is exposed to the critique. There is also criticism of the dowry, and of still present practice of burning widows

on the pyre with the deceased husband (despite the legal prohibition). Feminists oppose the practice of aborting female babies.

*Feminism in Buddhism* is a modern challenge to patriarchal views in that tradition. These ideas occur in Buddhism only at the end of the twentieth century. They point yet again to the importance of women's religious orders in early Buddhism. In late twentieth and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was a renewal of female religious orders in many Asian Buddhist traditions. Feminists rely on the Buddhist theory of empathy, elimination of suffering, spreading of peace for the sake of happiness of all living beings. Some will say that the feminist theory is a modern, contemporary interpretation of Buddhism (modernism in Buddhism). It points to the violation of human rights which women face in many Buddhist communities, as well as to their sexual harassment and exploitation. Frequent practice of denying opportunities to women to educate themselves is also exposed to the critique.

*Feminist theories in the Abraham's religions*: God is masculine and he has no wife (or daughter) in monotheistic «Abraham's» religions. And just when feminism appeared in Judaism in the USA in the 70-ies of the last century, the question of sex of God has been asked. The interpretation that God created a man and a woman based on his image means that God is neither male nor female. However, But it is still spoken about God in masculine gender in ritual services.

Feminist theories assume that the Abraham's religions, especially Catholicism and Orthodoxy in Christianity, exclude women from many parts of religious practices, assume that those religions are sexist, patriarchal, that do not take into account the contribution of women throughout the history of religions etc. Of course, the feminist theory is not only limited to the Christian tradition. Feminists also point at Judaism and Islam as being patriarchal and as those that support subordination and oppression of women.

Which parts in the Bible face criticism of feminism? Those that speak of obedience of a wife to her husband; of Eve's temptation; fragments of adulteresses which Jesus forgives<sup>1</sup> and of prostitutes (Jn 8, Rev. 17), etc.

The biblical God is a *male* God: King, Judge, Father, Winner. From the very beginning of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, God is described as the Father (in masculine). God was also described as a Son in Christianity, again in the meaning of a man. It is interesting that «Pope John Paul I said at the beginning of his pontificate that God could be very easily also shown as a woman, because there is no sex! He also pleaded in favour of contraception. A few weeks later, he died under circumstances that were never explained» [6, 161].

Feminists criticize the Christian concept of «female sin» related to Eve in Christianity. In addition to their criticizing the Christian views on Eve (the symbol of sin, seductress, death, licentiousness), they also criticize the Christian interpretation of the Virgin Mary as the New Eve (symbol of virginity, motherhood, which is offered as an ideal type of woman).

Less radical advocates of feminism recognize the importance of the Virgin Mary as a female character whom Christians worship and turn to that character in their prayers, pilgrimages, beliefs. Thus, Mary's devotion emerges as an important aspect of a part of the feminist spirituality.

Advocates of the feminist theory reject the Christian view of marriage as an institution solely for reproduction. They criticize the views of the female body primarily as an object of male desire. They reject the traditional role of women in marriage, offering friendship and mutual partnership as a the model of living together.

*Feminists in Islam* are focused on justice and equality between men and women.

<sup>1</sup> Some will say: it was easy for Jesus to forgive to a woman who was the adulteress – she was not his wife.

They point at the marginality of women in the religious community [14]. Muslim feminists point out that many practices in the Muslim world that are bad for women have no basis in the Qur'an (such as covering of women with burqa, circumcision of women, the murder out of «honor» etc.). They criticize the position of women in marriage, citing the Koran («He creates for you, from yourselves, women so that you rest next to them» – XXX, 21).

Feminists amongst Muslims are constantly faced with criticism that their learning is based on western values that can be «devastating» to the Muslim world. They point out that originally, Islam gave more rights to women than they had in Christianity (one surah, Surah XIX, in the Koran is devoted to a woman; rights of women to inheritance are regulated, which had been, at that time, unthinkable in the Christian tradition etc.). Muslim theologians suggest that the problem of women in the Muslim world is not lack of rights, but lack of education.

*What is required in feminist theories?* Almost all of the patriarchal religious traditions have been exposed to the feminist critiques. What is common to all feminists, regardless of which religious traditions they originate from, is the request for review or re-formulation of parts of sacred scriptures which deal with women's issues.

Initially, the feminist theory maintained on issues of gender. Sexual violence against women, women's rights, particularly the rights of women in their religious traditions are the subject of the feminism's interest. Later on, the issues that have attracted the attention of feminists expanded (the issue of class and racial equality and women, sexual orientation, gender issues). There is also the issue of religious fundamentalism and its effects on the social position of women. Feminist movements emphasize the importance of human rights, point at environmental problems, problems of eco-

nomical inequality and not just at «women's issues». Marxist-oriented feminists accused capitalism for an inferior position of women. Indeed, socialism in Europe of the twentieth century has fundamentally changed the position of women (although not enough): women were provided with possibilities for education, employment, political participation, they were given the right to vote, etc.

*The position of women in society and culture:* Deleting the feminine from the sphere of the divine and religious has been transferred to deleting the feminine in public and social order. In fact, around the world, among members of different religions, theological interpretations have left their mark on the overall social status of women and gender relations. Thus, religion has had, and still has, an important role in the social discrimination of women. Many patriarchal values contained in religious doctrines have contributed to it.

Is an inadequate position of women in comparison to men the specificity of only religions and religious communities? Or is that also a characteristic of some other fields such as science (except social sciences?) and scientific research, politics etc.?

When we look at the area of science, in total, there is less women that pass their doctoral dissertations in relation to men. The Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo, has had 118 candidates that obtained their PhDs from 1992 until 1 March 2014, of which 25 are women. Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo (the group of Pedagogy and Psychology), has had 57 candidates that obtained their PhDs from 1965 to 2013, out of which there are 42 men (73,7%). The first woman that obtained her PhD was in 1983, and 14 women obtained their PhDs in period of 1990-2013. Even in period of 2010-2013, there were only 6 women and 3 men who obtained their PhDs. As if it is left for women to deal with various peace movements, environmental protection and similar, while the rest is considered a privi-

lege of men! There are areas in which there are at least some percentage of female PhD students (psychology, pedagogy, sociology), while men are more prevalent among physicists, engineers, managers. In Sarajevo, Out of 1037 streets in Sarajevo, there are only 15 of them with names of women [15, 72].

Sociologists have compared the status of women and men in the work process. It turned out that the «female jobs» are teachers, librarians, kindergarten teachers, nurses, cleaners, maids etc. Men earn more money and are better paid for the same job than women; they are more represented in the political leadership and they are also more represented in decision making bodies than women.

But, let us back to *the position and the role of women in the religious community*: This fact leads us to thinking about how gender inequalities are associated with written religious sources, beliefs, rituals, theological teachings etc. Most of the religions are founded by men; they dominate in religious communities, amongst professors at theological studies, religious leaders, heads of religious communities. To tell the truth, there are numerous nuns' communities and women's organizations in religious communities. But in most cases, nuns do not have the same power in the religious community as the monks do, not even close to.

What would happen to the Church if a «feminist union» would organize a collective women's boycott of the rite of Mass / liturgy, etc? Would church remain empty?

It must be admitted that, at the beginning of the XXI century, significantly more women were in the role of *religious leaders* than in the past (some Christian denominations elected them for priestesses and Bishops; for gurus in modern Hinduism; for rabbis in some Jewish courses etc.). Even in communities in which women are enabled to perform the duty of religious leaders, it is still questionable what is their real impact in the

community, how much they can affect decision-making, and how much they can thrive in the hierarchy of religious communities.

Women are given with roles that are more of administrative nature in many religious groups than those of «the masters of ceremonies». Is it just a matter of the tradition of performing the priests' service that goes into favour of men? Or is it something else? It is hard to explain it by women's «inability» to perform that role. So, by which then is possible to explain it? By stereotypes about women and her role in society that still prevail in religious ideologies? Is the problem really in the fact that living religions are religions «male God»?

In most Christian denominations, women are in the majority. As a rule, men decide on the extent of their participation in the denomination (they are very influential in the «ecclesiastical bureaucracy»). Women are also allowed to be members of many religious communities in Buddhism and Christianity (but not in all courses, for example, it is not the case in Protestantism that rejects religious orders). It did not help women to come to power in the hierarchy of the religious community to which they belong. Only in some sects and denominations, women are allowed to perform the role of priestesses. To tell the truth, there is a small number of the Christian denominations in which women are in the leadership positions: Bishops, preachers, (rabbis in Judaism, they have the role of the guru in some Hindu communities etc.).

It may be assumed that in the future, small religious groups, those that accept the entry of priests in marriage, will easier accept a woman in the role of a priestess.

The Buddhist teaching is far more gender-neutral learning than the «Abraham's» religions. In Buddhism, the «problem» of women is not bound by religious norms that much as it is bound to long historical dominance of men in the religious community. Until the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhists used to ac-

cept women into their orders. In 1998, Buddhist were formally established the women's order for Sri Lanka, Japan and India. They referred to the practice from the age of Gautama who was the first to accept women in the priesthood (only in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, priestesses vanished amongst Buddhists in India and Sri Lanka).

After the World War II, Shintoism has «opened the door» to priestesses. They perform a sacred dance offered to Kami in the temples.

There is no ordination of women in the Roman Catholic and Serbian Orthodox Church. More than half of Catholics are women. The question arises as to the equality of women in the Church, although most of the work is carried out there by women. They can visit the sick, but cannot give them a blessing. They can talk to people, but cannot confess. The Congregation for the Doctrine, in «Inter insigniores» (1976) put forward the view that the Church does not allow the ordination of women. However, in a secret ceremony in the summer of 2005, a new priestess was ordained. Earlier ordained priestesses that the Roman Catholic Church had excommunicated, were present at the ceremony of introducing the priesthood. In principle, Catholic and all eastern Churches that claim for two-millennial tradition, excludes women from the priesthood.

Orthodoxy excludes any possibility that women carry out any duties in the Church, except that they may be nuns (and teachers of religious education at school). It is left to be seen if the openness of modern Orthodox theology to women to study it, will lead to radical changes in the position of women in the.

Feminists argue for the return to Jesus' original teachings and practices of early Christianity, claiming that women had shared leadership with men in that period.

At the end of the twentieth century, women became priestesses and Bishops in various Protestant communities (including the

Anglican church). The first woman priest was initiated into Congregational Church (USA) 155 years ago, and yet today, the number of priestesses in that church is below 1%. In 1859, Antoinette Brown became the first priestess of the Congregational church in New York State [16, 108]. Episcopal Church in the USA (1974) accepted priestesses, and elected (2006) the first woman (Katharine Jefferts Schori) for Primate – Chairman of the bishops. Otherwise, the church falls under the auspices of the Anglican Church. She was famous for her liberal attitudes regarding homosexuals and the possibility of their ordination to the religious leaders, so in 2003, she appointed Gened Robinson for a bishop priest, who never hid his gay orientation. The Anglican church community consists of 37 members, and only New Zealand and Canada have women bishops, while some other members accept women as priestesses.

Until 1992, women could be deaconesses, but not priestesses (could perform the baptism, but could not bless nor take the wedding rite) in the Anglican Church in England. Since 1994, the Anglican Church began to ordain women priests. On that occasion, one hundred thousand Anglicans, unhappy with this act, passed in the Catholic Church. In Blackburn Cathedral in Lancashire during Sunday Mass, believers can choose whether to accept the wafer of male or female priests. Already in 2008, there were 23 women bishops in the Anglican Church. Even in 2006, more women (213) were ordained than men (210) in the Anglican Church.

The Seventh-day Adventists is the denomination founded by a woman (Ellen G. White). Women's groups – such as the Association of women Adventists are organised.

Since 1832, women can perform the pastor's service in the Lutheran communities. Lutherans ordained three women for priests in Denmark (1948). Maria Jepsen



(for the second time in 2002<sup>1</sup>) was the first woman elected for the bishop of the Lutheran Church in Germany. Swedish Lutheran Church (78% of the population in Sweden are Lutherans) approved the conclusion of a homosexual marriage in 2009. Even one lesbian was appointed for a bishop of the Lutheran church in that country (2009).

Women priests can be found in the Evangelical-Methodist, Reformist, Metropolitan church of fellowship. Most followers of Candomble in Brazil are women. They are elected also for the community leaders. In 1956, the Presbyterian community in the United States has started introducing the practice of posting women in leading posts in the group. Of course, there are those who, like Nazareno, that do not allow women to hold any spiritual function: they cannot hold worship, preach, pronounce public prayer etc.

Women rabbis can be found in all Jewish courses except in the orthodox. Since the beginning of the 70s of the last century, women have been ordained for rabbis in the Reformed Judaism (first in the U.S. and then in the UK etc). Over 50% of the student population at the rabbinical universities in the United States is made of women who are future rabbis. Reformed Jewish community established equality between men and women. Men and women sit together in their synagogues. Women can perform all the rituals and roles (and the role of the rabbi since 1972). The conservative course accepted that only in 1986.

It seems that the debate on the position and the role of women in Islam is more often led at the West (often with a lack of understanding of Islam) than in the Muslim world. The topics are broad: violence against women, women's rights to education and work, human rights, covering women, the murder out of «honour», etc. Some of these issues are still taboo in some Muslim countries.

Although all Muslims refer to the same

<sup>1</sup> *Lutherans do not have a central spiritual authority and bishops are elected for a term of ten years.*

source (the Quran), the position and the role of women are different in many countries that are considered to be Muslim (or Muslims are those that make the majority). The position of women has been particularly worsened in countries where Islamists came to power (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sudan etc.). Malaysia has introduced a taxi service for women, and even since before, (2010) separate buses for women and railway wagons in pink colour only for women exist [17, 47]. Discussions are made about the practice of circumcision of women, primarily in some African countries (Sudan, Ghana, Kenya etc.), and about so-called «murders out of honour».

Was Aisha, the Prophet's wife, the first female muftis in Islam [18, 129]? If so, why that practice has not been continued in Islam? Have Muslim women, in times after the Prophet, suffered the same fate as the one of the Christian women after Jesus? While it has still not been thought of among the Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina six women were appointed as assistant mufti in Turkey (2006). «In 1986, which is probably unique case in the world, without much hesitation, a woman was named as the warden of a mosque in Skopje, authorized at the same time to hold Friday prayers sermon» [19, 86].

Women founders of religious communities are most often met in new religious movements in the second half of the twentieth century. They are women founders, prophetess, theologians, preachers. Of course, there are some movements that insist on traditional gender roles. New movements based on religious traditions of India (Hinduism and Buddhism, such as the movement of Sai Baba, Hare Krishna, etc.) in which women play an important role, make a special attraction for women in the West.

Is the attitude towards women in new religious movements the reason that women, more than men, «cross» into these movements?

*The feminist theology* has arisen as a reaction to the Christian theology that marginalizes women and that is sexist and andocentric. It evolved in the 70s of the twentieth century in Western Christianity, and then in Judaism. Initially it dealt with women's experience in the assessment of religious teachings, the position of women within religious traditions (which are mostly male ones). Later on, they covered also issues of language and artistic expression of divinity, the position and the role of women in religious group etc.

Today, the feminist theology is not limited to the Christian religious tradition, and it is developed in the Jewish and Islamic religious tradition (as well as among Hindus, Buddhists etc.). Over the time, their criticism has been focused not only on the institutional practice, but also on the doctrine of these religions. From the focus on inequality of women in the religious community, it has been moved to the fight for all marginalized groups (Afro-Americans, members of the lower class, disabled etc.), not only within the religious community, but also in society.

*Criticism of feminist theories:* Those women that advocate for the feminist theory do not seek the abolition of sex differences (because it is impossible), but of gender ones. For that, it is not enough (although it is important), to establish a legal gender equality, but also the real one. Political elites sometimes wonder why it is required that there should be certain number of women in the parliament, government etc. when the Constitution and the law is the same for all (except for the minorities?)? They do not wish to see the reality: if there were no such demands and pressures on political elites, women would have remained even more politically marginalized.

Criticisms of feminist theories come from the most conservative in religious communities that would not change anything in current religious tradition. However, the period in which religious communities

can no longer ignore feminist theories have enter into force. Those communities need a dialogue with feminism. In that dialogue, religious communities should be prepared for different interpretations of the position and the role of women, not only in society, but also in religious communities. It can be assumed the modern world, that religious communities would necessarily need to abandon the principle of «male superiority» within their structures.

Have we entered a period of post-feminism, as Tourainie believes: «Identity is individualized ... to the area of sexuality, but in the broadest sense ... These women are explicitly turning to themselves, very little talk about men, do not like the word feminism as a political slogan, they are post-feminists» [20, 3]. This would mean that equality between women and men have accomplished. Can today, any society in the world, and any religious community, offer enough evidence that there is such equality of men and women established in their environment so as to make feminism as an issue of the past?

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