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"(De)gendering Ecclesioiogy: Reflections on the Church as a Gendered Body"

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(De) gender ing Ecclesiology

Reflections on the Church as a Gendered Body

NINNA EDGARDH

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Ninna Edgardh introduced feminist studies to the research seminar in Ecclesiology in Uppsala through her doctoral thesis *Feminism and Liturgy—An Ecdesiological Study* (2001).

In this chapter she argues that social constructions of gender interrelate with churches' self-understanding of their existence and mission, both in theory and practice. (De)-gendering, as referred to in the title, is defined as a continuous process of questioning gendered structures that are sometimes obvious and explicit and sometimes hidden.

Feminist approaches to ecciesioiogy are confronted with several interrelated obstacles according to the author. The obstacles discussed are gendered symbolic language, the male gendering of the theoretical field of study, and hegemonic ecdesiological claims, legitimized by divine authority.

With the help of examples from her own extensive studies of liturgy and Christian social practice (*diakonia*), the author shows how a gendered approach to ecciesioiogy may accumulate new and critical knowledge. The main conclusion is that cracks, tensions, and disharmonies in theologies of the church reveal surprising ecdesiological

aspects of (de)-gendering, visible only with a mindful attention to both gender and theology.

All the authors in Part Three disclose ecclesiological aspects, but from different practices: Weman in liturgical space, Oljelund in liturgical texts, and Edgardh in gendered practices of both liturgy and *diakonia.* The researchers are in search of lived, concrete ecclesiology. The results may open our eyes to aspects of ecclesiology as lived church practice, insights which may in turn give impulses to change.

Ninna Edgardh (born 1955), professor in ecclesiology, especially social and diaconal studies, Uppsala University, and priest in the Church of Sweden. Her research is focused on both ecclesiology and social change, with particular attention to gender. This is reflected for example in *Welfare and Religion in 21st Century Europe: Volume 2. Welfare and Religion in 21st century Europe: Gendered, Religious and Social Change* (2011).

WORKING WITH "THE MALE AS GOD"

One day, while perusing my Facebook feed I find an update by a man who has realized that most of the books he reads, most of the films he sees, and most of the music to which he listens are all created by men. Now he has decided that over the next year, he will consciously choose books written by women, films directed by women, and music composed and performed by women. He wishes to see how this will change how he perceives the world around him. After reading his update, I cannot stop thinking about it. I find a Twitter campaign, #rcadw'omen2oi4, promoting a year of only reading books written by women. Enthused, I imagine what that would look like for me, but 1 quickly realize that, for me, such a year is impossible. Professionally, I am caught in a world of texts written almost exclusively by men.

Part of my working week is spent serving as a priest in the Church of Sweden and the other part as a professor of ecclesiology at Uppsala University. In both of these contexts I am bound to traditions where "the male is God," as Mary Daly has so poignantly formulated it.[1] Preaching and celebrating liturgy without referring to texts written by and about men—even just for a year—would be unthinkable, as would excluding male authors from the curriculum in theology. Exclusion of women's voices is, however,

i. Daly, *Beyond (uni,* 19.

neither impossible nor uncommon, though it is politically incorrect in a country known as one of the most egalitarian in the world.[2 3]

1 do not write this as a complaint from a victim. 1 have chosen both my jobs fully cognizant of their heritage. I see both positions as vocations that stimulate and challenge me, even in their gendered biases. What I want to do in this article is instead to give some examples of how I have been approaching the gendered worlds of both church and academy in my cedesiological research.

Doing research has in fact been a way for me of making sense of the gendered situation I work and live in, allowing me to discuss it, as if it was not ultimately decisive for my everyday life and inv very sense of being. Research helps me explore those small cracks in reality where, as Leonard Cohen says, “the light gets in.”[4]

(DE)GENDERING

Gender is part of how we perceive reality. It is a basic part of human culture. We are born into a gendered sea of social life, and the water in which wc swim limits our perception of reality. To research on gender is to question the quality of the water. It is to ask if the type of water where I swim is the only possible or the most sustainable water for human beings. It is to question normality.

From this statement it should already be clear that I do not see research as simply describing and analyzing “how things are.” Nobody can claim to recount exactly "what really happened,” either in history or in the contemporary world. Research is always made from a perspective, revealed in the questions posed and the theoretical and methodological tools employed. Interestingly, in this attitude towards reality the New Testament is good company, as it provides us with four versions of the same story in order to tell the Gospel.[4 *] To abstain from claims of telling absolute truths does not imply, however, that there is no difference between research and telling a good story. What makes my research credible is the extent to which 1 can make an argument that is possible for others to follow and test. The questioning of seemingly self-evident gendered orders in church and society belongs to my motivation for research. [5] In that way there is an obvious normativity in my

i. Sweden was ranked as number four in the *Global Gender Gap Report 20-3.*

3. Cohen, "Anthem.”

4. Lathrop. *1 our Gospels.*

S- For the role of normalization in our perception of gender, see Edgardh, “A Gendered Perspective,” S3-88.

research. Rut it doesn't mean that I have any more specific agendas for how such systems are to be changed or what the ultimate system would look like.

Gendering Church

In my research I study how churches understand and express their task and mission, in relation to changing gender relations in contemporary society. Now the crucial term "gender" is sometimes misunderstood to mean "women," or even "woman" in a generic sense. This has to do with the fact that social inequalities, negatively affecting many women, have been a major driving force behind the growing academic field of gender studies, as well as behind more activist and political feminist movements, both of which highlight gender inequalities in society. The situation of women in church and society was a major topic for the first generations of gender researchers in theology. Gender became visible when women began to question the normality of the given situation. To equalize gender with women (or even "woman") is thus to obscure what is at stake. A more adequate definition of gender has to include men and the relations between women and men. But even that is not enough.

As the feminist historian Joan Scott shows, for example, staying within the binary categories of women and men is to continuously rebuild the cage that locks you in. In one of her books Scott takes her starting point in the struggle for women's rights in France, referring to the dilemma these early feminists were faced with: Are demands for equal rights for women to be grounded in their likeness with men or in their difference from men? Both positions had obvious disadvantages from their relating to men as the norm. But as long as these two alternatives were seen as the only options, women were caught and confronted only with paradoxes.[6]

The option that Scott argues for coincides with the turn feminism took from the 1990s and onwards, redirecting the interest from the comparison between two binary categories of women and men towards the deconstruction of these categories and a new focus on differences within them:

> The only alternative, it seems to me, is to refuse to oppose equality to difference and insist continually on differences—differences as the condition of individual and collective identities, differences as the constant challenge to the fixing of those identities, history as the repeated illustration of the play of differences, differences as the very meaning of equality itself.[7]

6. Scott, *Only Paradoxes,* x.

7. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality," 14s.

As theories on gender have developed from the 1990s and onwards, it has become clear that the categories we call "women" and "men" are constructions undergoing continuous change, while still being very stable at some levels. Doing research on gender thus includes studying both how "women" and "men" are produced as binary categories and how this construction is related to the social organization of inequalities.'*

Following theories of intersectionality, gender studies also includes researching the intersectional construction of gender and other structuring factors such as race, class, ethnicity', sexuality, and even religion. A woman is never only a woman but has multiple identities, all of which contribute to her social position and freedom to act.[8 9]

Degendering as a strategy

(De)gendering, as referred to in the title of this chapter, may be defined as a continuous process of questioning gendered structures that are sometimes obvious and explicit and sometimes hidden. Tltis is done with the normative aim of enabling a freer approach wherein gendered structures do not decide to the same extent the quality of the water in which w'e swim and where it might be possible—or just interesting—to crawl in hitherto unknown directions, where the water may provide other and possibly better potentials for swimming:

> [DJegendering attacks the structure and process of gender—the division of people into two social statuses and the social construction of what we call opposites. In methodological terms, degendering is a counterfactual heuristic, posing the challenge of *what if?* I ask. What if we did not divide people by gender?[10]

Doing this in relation to the church implies exploring—and questioning—how specific understandings and embodiments of church interact with the construction of gender, as well as with class, ethnicity, and sexual preferences.

Degendering may sound confusingly like ignoring gender. But as the feminist theorist Judith Lorber observes, ignoring gender

> [. . -1 allows gendered processes and practices to proceed unhindered. To deliberately degender, you have to attend to those

8. Wharton, *Sociology of Gender,* 217.

9. For an introduction to theories on intcrsectionality see for example the thematic issue oi *the European Journal of Women's Studies,* 2006:13.

10. Lorber, *Breaking,* 7.

> processes and practices in order not to do them. You have to do gender to degender.[11]

There is a double edge in the process Lorber describes. Hidden structures need to be made visible and seemingly gender neutral realities revealed as gendered. There is however an obvious risk that this process reinforces the gendered structures rather than challenging them. Thus the need for degendering; that is for questioning, neutralizing, queering, or in other ways exploring "cracks" that may reveal new horizons.

CHURCHES AS GENDERED BODIES

As a researcher of ecclesiology, my specific interest is how the social constructions of gender relate to how churches understand their own existence and mission in the world, both in theory and practice. Hie binary categories of "women" and "men" are also produced and organized in patterns of inequality in church contexts. Likewise such patterns are continuously broken and disrupted in these contexts. This means that churches, like any other organizations, are suitable for sociological gender studies. However, churches also have traits that require a theological approach. From a feminist perspective, studies of church practices need to be complemented by studies of how these practices relate to the churches[1] own ideas of its task and mission.

T want to suggest three interrelated aspects of ecclesiology, which are quite easily observed, but which together constitute major obstacles for feminist ecclesiology. These aspects are the role of gendered symbolic language; the male gendering of the theoretical field of study; and hegemonic ccclesiological claims, legitimized by divine authority.

Gendered symbolic language

Anyone approaching the Christian church as a gendered body is hound to observe that the church is regularly called "she," implicating a person of female gender. An equally simple observation is that God is regularly talked about in male terms. This gendered symbolic structure is what Sallie McFague calls metaphoric language turned into a model; a metaphor with slaying power.[12] The Christian God is called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three in one, but male gendered. "Fie" is seen as having revealed "himself" in the historic man Jesus from Nazareth. "He" is almighty. "He" is good. "He" knows everything and has created everything. In fact "His" divine ex-

n. Ibid., 27.

12. McEague, *Models of God,* 31-40.

istence, earthly incarnation, and calling to discipleship, is understood as the very reason behind the existence of all Christian churches. "He" acts in the world through "his" church and "she" is supposed to listen and obey "his" will, as "he" is also to "her" as the head is to the body. They have a hierarchical relation. In this way a highly gendered symbolic language is tied to the very being of the Christian church as it has hitherto appeared.

.4 *gendered field of study*

A second observation is that while many church members, and many active such members, are women, most authors writing about the church are men. Women have not primarily expressed their ecclesial belonging in writing and lecturing, mostly because until the very last century they have not had the possibility to be ordained ministers, and in some churches they still do not have this option. As a consequence theological academic training historically has not been easily available for women.

This means that the church as a "she" is largely reduced to a symbol, with a lopsided relation to real women in the Christian tradition. The male dominance of the whole area of theological reading and writing is striking and a real problem for the researcher who wants to approach ecclesiological issues. Natalie Watson observes in her hitherto unique *Introduction to Feminist Ecclesiology* (2002) that mainstream ecclesiological literature does not include any major works written by women and thus, "writing formal ecclesiology from a feminist perspective, I am entering a conversation to which I have not been invited."[13]

Hegemonic, claims, legitimized by divine authority

The third observation I want to reflect upon has to do with the "theandric character" of ecclesial identity that Sven-Erik Brodd refers to in the introductory chapter.[14] This character implies that the theologian approaching ecclesiology has to deal with strong explanatory claims from the object of study. I am thinking of claims like the world being created and sustained by God, the church being a case of ongoing incarnation, or the ministry of the priest being instituted by God. Academic theologians handle such claims differently, but it is not uncommon in theological writings to see these claims adopted as implicit premises for the discussion. In this type of argument *the essence* or *the nature* of *the Church* is presupposed, quite like how the nature of women has been discussed historically.

13. Watson, *Introducing Feminist Ecclesiology*, s.

14. Brodd in this volume, 18-

Confessional writers have, moreover, regularly identified their own preferably Roman Catholic or Orthodox tradition with *the Church* and thus limited their discussion to that specific church tradition in a hegemonic way.

The central role of the idea of the incarnated God, the infinite taking shape in the finite, and the symbolic role gender have been given in this understanding may together explain some of the complexity of feminist approaches to ecclesiology. What is particular in a feminist study of the church, in contrast to the study of other social bodies, is that the power that is questioned is legitimated by claims on divine authority and that these claims are expressed in a highly gendered language.

FEMINIST ECCLESIOLOGY

From the 1960s and onwards Christian traditions have been criticized by feminist theologians from many different points of view. However, it seems that many feminist scholars have tended to regard church and feminism as a contradiction in terms rather than as an important field of study. In a preface to *Introduction to Feminist Ecclesiology,* Mary Grey observes that "it takes great courage to write about ecclesiology from a feminist standpoint (. . .) indeed many feminist theologians have shied away from the task, viewing it as inconsistent with feminist integrity."[13] Admittedly, there are exceptions. Some titles among the major early works of feminist theologians focused on the theological understanding of the church. I am thinking, for example, of Letty Russell's *Church in the Round* (1993) and Rosemary Radford Reuther's *WomenChurch* (1996).[15] [16] [17] As a sub current Western feminist ecclesiology has definitely had a role in the development of ecclesiology during the recent decades.[5f] However, comparably little of the large amount of feminist theological writing produced in a Western context over the last decades has been dedicated to the church as such.

It is worth observing though, that the same decades have seen a growing body of ecclesiological reflection produced by female writers from Africa, Latin America, and Asia, sometimes using the feminist label and sometimes consciously avoiding it because of its associations to Western feminist heritage. Contributions by authors such as Saroiini Nadar, Isabel Apawo Phiri, Elsa Tatnez, Yong Ting Jin, and Meehyun Chung highlight gendered aspects

15. Grey. *Introducing Feminist*, vii.

16. Russell, *Church in the Round;* Ruether, *Women-Church.*

17. Ve!»-Matti Kärkkiiinen includes a chapter on "The Feminist Church" under the sub-heading "Contextual Ecclesiologies" in Kärkkiiinen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 2002, 184-93. Bryan !:. Slone includes a few Western feminist scholars in his nearly all male reader in ecclesiology, see Stone, *Reader in Ecclesiology*, 2012.

lhal have to do with the shift of Christian gravity, from Europe towards what today is often labeled the Global South, which has taken place during the last decades.[18]* Whereas about two-thirds of the world's Christians lived in Europe a hundred years ago, today European Christians account only for about a quarter of all Christians.[19] Throughout the decade spanning from 1988 to 1998, proclaimed as a decade for *Churches in Solidarity with Women* by the World Council of Churches, important gender aspects of this challenge towards traditional Western ecclesial authority were highlighted.[20]

Many Western feminist theologians have instead chosen the option I initially stated as impossible for me and opted out of the church. Mary Daly, author of the groundbreaking works *The Church and the Second Sex (*1968) and *Beyond God the Father* (1973), was a Roman Catholic who eventually chose to leave the church. Her academic position at Boston College was called into question when she refused male students in some of her classes.[21] In her later writing she developed a post-Christian experimental feminist philosophy, of her own special brand, which envisioned a world where the root metaphors would not be male but female. Other feminists have, rather than envisioning such a future, projected their dreams backwards, trying to reconstruct a pre-Christian era of the Goddess, with the implicit message that it could happen again.[22]

Many women, especially in the Global North, have followed the Post-Christian feminists out of the church and today seek their spiritual nourishment elsewhere. And yet, women are church and have always been church. Natalie Watson's conclusion is that "Thinking about the church in theological terms has been a central part of being church throughout its history. It is time for women to participate in it on their own terms."[23]

'Iliis position has guided my own research. I have sought Ior sources documenting women "being church" in ways that have challenged gendered biases and symbolisms dominating the major Christian traditions. In doing so it has been obvious that the relation between the feminist movement and the churches is an ambiguous one.

.18. Nadar and Phiri, *On Being Church,* Nadar, "On being the Pentecostal Church;" Tamcz, "An Ecclesial Community;" Ting tin, "On Being Church;" Chung, "Korean Feminist Ecclcsiology;" Chung, *Breaking Silence.*

19. *Global Christianity.*

20. Ecdesiological reflection in the wake of the decade was documented in a special issue *of The Ecumenical Review,* vol->3/1, January 2001.

21. Daly, *Church and;* Daly, *Beyond God.* For her own version of her academic story, see Daly, *Amazon Grace.*

zz. See for example Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess.*

23. Watson, *Introducing Feminist,* 6.

'Hie feminist scholar of liturgical history, Teresa Berger, has shown that the issues at stake have to do with the positions of the "separated sisters" of the church and the asymmetrical gender divisions as a source of disunity and fragmentation within the church itself.[24] As a result of the enforced separation, feminist theologians often have defined themselves as on the margin, struggling to hold together loyalty and critique. Elisabeth Schiissler Fiorenza has suggested the metaphor of "resident aliens" to characterize this position.[25] "Defecting in place" and "dissident daughters" are other wordings used to characterize feminist ecclesiological ambiguity.[26 27 28]

Liturgy as a Site of Struggle

My dissertation (2001) focused on the feminist liturgical movement as it had so far been enacted in Swedish churches.[27] The last decades of the twentieth century saw a range of new forms of worship emerging, and women across the world shaped worship services in ways that they themselves found liberating.[26] "The feminist liturgical movement" was a label used by a number of scholars in Europe and the US who were trying to summarize what was going on when women tried to shape Christian liturgy in ways that questioned patterns of womens subordinalion in church and society.[29] In my analysis of expressions of this movement in Sweden 1 used theoretical tools from liturgical theology as developed ecumenically and in the US during the same period, in order to see how feminist worship related to ecumenically recognized liturgical patterns. With the help of feminist theory 1 analyzed the attitudes towards gender constructions expressed in my material. My main approach, however, was ecclesiological. My aim was to analyze how new patterns of worship, created within a Christian framework, challenged the gendered ecclesiological framework of the church settings where they took place.

Feminist liturgies are by definition created in order to he both within and outside of, simultaneously belonging to and leaving the church traditions from which they are born. The position may well be described as "on the margin." It is however important to note that this marginal position is

24. Berger, "Liturgical Renewal," 71..

25. Fiorenza, *But She Said,* 185.

26- Winter, *Defecting in Place*; Berger, *Dissident Daughters.*

27. Edgardh, *Feminism och liturgi* (diss. in Swedish). Shorter versions in English in Edgardh, "Lady Wisdom;" Edgardh. "Mrs Murphy's Arising;" Edgardh, "Theology of Gathering."

28. Berger, *Dissident Daughters.*

29. Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite.*

not purely negative. Poststructuralist theorists like Rebecca Chopp argue instead that it is exactly this marginal position that makes room for something new to be born.[30]

To summarize I found the feminist liturgical movement, as it had been expressed in Swedish churches in the 1990s, to be a creative example of women trying to reconstruct the relation between church and gender; though not always successful, from either a feminist or from a liturgical perspective, it still comprised an effort to give women a more explicit ecclesiological voice.

Christian Social Practice

While my initial research on feminist liturgies was focused on activities on the margins of the major church traditions, my later research has focused on the much more traditional held of Christian social practice or *diakonia*, as this service is often named by churches themselves. My interest in these studies is the obviously highly gendered role of the church in this held.

The opportunity was given to me thanks to a research grant for research collaboration on the role of the historic churches in various types of welfare systems in Europe in the beginning of the twentyhrst century. In the project *Welfare, and Religion in a European Perspective* we were able to document a held of church activity marked by a disti nctly gendered division of labor.[31] [32]

Diaconal work is still dominated by women all over Europe, especially on the ground level. The contributions of the churches as social actors are appreciated by both authorities and the European populations and often seem to serve as a legitimizing factor for the presence of the churches in the public sphere. This is reason enough to document and analyze the presence and influence of gender in these church-related practices. However, there is a dilemma built into the role of the churches as social caregivers. The increasing expectations on the churches in the social field might well be interpreted as a result of secularisation and loss of authority for the churches, pressing them to accept a devalued female gendered role rather than losing even more ground. Alas, few feminist researchers have been engaged in the study of diaconal work, perhaps because it involves women who voluntarily serve others, often with neither payment nor substantial influence on decision-making. Much of feminist analysis has been “religion blind” in that it has not been aware of the transformative potentials of Christian theology. [12] [3]

30. Chopp, *Power to Speak.*

31. Bäckström ct al.. *Welfare and Religion,* vol. 1 and vol. 2.

32. Edgardh, “Gendered Perspective," 96-104. The concept “religion blind” has

This is regrettable. Surprising potentials of change and transformation may be contained in the role of the churches in the social field if that role is combined with a gendered consciousness. To the extent that the churches manage to promote theologically-grounded values of care and solidarity, which are downplayed in society at large, while simultaneously promoting a higher status for women and for values associated with female gender, they might well play an important transformative role in society at large.[w] Christian social practice, in acting both as voices for the suppressed and as contrast examples of how care and solidarity may be enacted in search for social cohesion and wellbeing, could hence become a sign of so-called prophetic *diakonia.*

THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF ECCLESIOLOGY

Sven-Erik Brodd admits in the introductory chapter that he hesitated to accept me as a doctoral student, twenty years ago, as the seminar had no experience of feminist studies and would therefore not constitute a supportive milieu for a new doctoral student with an interest in such a perspective.[51] I appreciate the self-critical reflection and do think it is essential for feminist studies in ecclesiology to be supported by a benevolent atmosphere, with at least a basic orientation in gender theory. On the other hand, the lack of such a milieu made me look outside the framework of the seminar and put me into contact with research partners from other areas, partners who have highly enriched my studies. The researchers from all over Europe and beyond, engaged in the project *Welfare and Religion* referred to above, have taught me a great deal about religious change in late modern societies. I have found other stimulating conversation partners in feminist theologians and liturgical scholars from all over the world, whom I have met at conferences. A third example would he gender theorists, for example at the Centre for Gender Studies at Uppsala University, who have helped me to sharpen my tools for gendered analyses.

That said, I would like to express my gratitude towards the persistent interest in ecclesiology in the seminar I have been part of in Uppsala, especially with its unique double focus on empirical studies and systematic theological theories and methods. In the modern Swedish academic context empirical studies of multitudes of confessional church bodies are conducted both by Church historians and by sociologists in religion. However,

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been used in the Swedish context to describe the exclusion of religious motives from historic research on women's emancipation. Sec, Hammar, *Emancipation och religion.*

33. Rdgardh. *Social agent.*

34. Brodd in this volume, 23 -24.

systematic theological theories and methods are seldom applied in these areas of study. Systematic theological studies of ecdesiology, on the other hand, are not regularly anchored in empirical material, even if such studies have become more frequent. For feminist studies in ecdesiology aiming at challenging the three-fold gendered hegemony discussed above, the combination is indispensable. 'The non-confessional, but still distinctly theological character of the ecdesiology seminar in Uppsala has been an important prerequisite for my own work of problematizing the understanding of what it may mean to be a Christian church from the perspective of gender. 'This volume shows that ecdesiology may be enriched by but never reduced to, empirical and ethnographical methods. That is true also for studies from a feminist perspective.[35] [36]

GENDERED WATERS REVISITED

We swim in gendered waters. Church waters are full of gendered currents and reefs that feminist theologians have started to map. Much of the critique has concentrated on language. That is no coincidence, as gendered symbolic language is so pervasive in Christian theology and is closely related to a gendered order of male dominance.

Feminists have differed in their attitude towards the problem. One strategy has been to try to escape the gendered waters by de-gendering our language for God.[3<>] Another strategy has been to re-gender, that is to add feminine pronouns and female names to Christian God-language. The basic principle behind that strategy is that these words are equally adequate (and non-adequate) designations for God as male gendered words.[37] [38] Feminist theologian Sallie McFague talks about a double strategy of first disorienting and then reorienting gendered language for God and the world-disorienting by introducing alternative models and reorienting in underlining the metaphorical character of any theological language.[ifi]

Still, whereas “inclusive language" was a hot issue in the 1990s, causing endless debates, some of the energy seems to have been lost in recent years. A positive interpretation would be that feminist theologians have succeeded. At least in some churches that is true to a certain extent. My own Church of Sweden would be a case in point. However, as shown by

35. For an introduction to ethnographic and empirical methods in ecdesiology, see Idestrom in this volume, chapter 8.

36. Probably the most influential author representing this strategy is the Lutheran theologian Gail Kamshaw. Sec for example Ramshaw, *God beyond.*

37. One of the most influential books in this genre is Johnson, *She Who k.*

38. McFague, *Models of God,* 182.

Swedish colleagues both the Church of Sweden hymnal from 1986 and the order for Sunday High mass from the same year, is markedly dichotomous and value discriminatory to women's disadvantage.[39] Recent revisions of worship manuals have been guided by principles seeking a consciously liberating language for worship, which also applies in regards to the use of gender.[40] Looking closer at the actual revisions, however, not much seems to have changed with regard to the basic gendered symbols, irrespective of principles and guidelines.[41]

That these structures remain should not be a surprise. Qualities of water do change, and that is an acute problem in our time, at least with regard to temperature. But they change subtly and slowly and never by political decision alone. Quite the contrary, politics trying to save our climate from over-heating seems to result in endless discussions, without much effect, and I would argue that the same goes for the gendered quality of church waters. They do change, and hopefully the changes will be for the better. But they do not change because of theological decisions alone, and they do not change quickly.

The most important feminist contribution with regard to the use of gendered Christian symbolic language is probably the revelation of the inadequacy of its use. Feminist theologians remind us that there always has to be both a yes and a no in a language trying to reach beyond this world to express divine mystery.[42] Symbolic language aims at speaking the unspeakable. In doing so it both connects to, and breaks with, ordinary language.[43] [44] Sometimes, when language fails, while still trying, glimpses of a wider reality shine through. A major feminist critique concerns that this "yes and no" character of symbolic language has been lost. Gendered symbolic language has been reiiied in what the Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson calls an "ecclesiastical desire to make simple positive and authoritative statements about the divine."[4][5] She argues that the problem is not primarily the

39. Lejdhamre, *Psalm-kön-,* Eriksson, *Meaning of Gender.*

40. *Teologiska grundprinciper* [Basic Theological Principles].

41. Lejdhamre, "Genusperspektiv."

4?.. Mcpaguc, *Models of God,* 33; Ramshavv, *God beyond,* 108; Johnson, *She Who Is,* 1 is.

43. Both analogy and metaphor are used in this type oflanguage. Analogy primarily invites us to sec the similarities between human conditions and the divine, while metaphor works by surprising us in connecting things that have no immediate likeness. Analogical speech has roots in medieval Thomistic theology, whereas feminist theologians today rather have been inspired by theories on language as metaphorical. Cf. Johnson, *She who* is, 1.16 and Ramshaw. *God beyond,* 94-95.

44. Johnson, *She Who Is,* 116.

male gendering of the Christian language for God; “Rather, the problem consists in the fact that these male terms are used exclusively, literally, and patriarchal!}'.”’[5]

Gendered waters do not change as a result of political decision alone. But they do change in the communities using the waters. They change in churches. That is one reason for feminist theologians to overcome their instinctive reluctance towards ecclesiology. Gendered symbolic language will probably change in the long run, at least in its patriarchal, literal, and exclusive usage, as the community of women and men experience a need for more adequate ways of talking about God and the world. Gendered ecclesial relations will change too, as they change in society at large. Churches are no isolated spheres, as waters blend and mix. Gender is produced and it produces. It is reproduced, hut it is also broken. But this all needs conscious and qualified gendered reflection.

It is hard to dismantle the house of patriarchy with gendered tools produced in t hat very house.[45] [46] [47] The field of ecclesiology is full of gendered tools that have been used, and are still used today, in order to uphold binary gendered divisions of labor and status, often at the cost of women, hut also of homo-, bi-, and transsexual people, who do not fit into the established order of the house. However, as shown by Teresa Berger, among others, church history is full of surprises for a person shaped by the twentieth century’s ideas on normality with regard to gender and sexuality.'[17] The ecclesiological potential of these cracks, tensions, and disharmonies in theologies of the church largely remain to be explored. Feminist ecclesiology has a task of its own in providing churches with tools for understanding and expressing t heir own mission and thus helping them become more of what they understand themselves to be: spaces for transcendence and transformation, possibly also with regard to gender, race, and class. Ecclesiology might have been a house primarily designed by white Western male architects. Still, the house is full of cracks and hidden doors, through which light may shine from the future.

45. Ibid., 33.

46. Here 1 rely on the well-known image provided by the black, lesbian, feminist poet Audre Lourde, that “The master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house." See Lourde, *Sister Outsider*, 112.

47. Berger, *Gender Differences.*