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FEMINIST THEOLOGY AND THE HOLY WOMEN OF THE MEDIEVAL WESTERN CHURCH: MAIN THEORETICAL ASPECTS IN ANGLO-AMERICAN LITERATURE

Abstract: *The paper presents the review of the most important contemporary theoretical perspectives of Anglo-American historiography and feminist theology, related to the perception and understanding of the holy women of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, and the interpretation of their social and gender roles, both in the ecclesiastical and secular late medieval environment.*

Keywords: *holy women, Roman Catholic Church, Western Europe, Middle Ages*

ФЕМИНИСТИЧКА ТЕОЛОГИЈА И СВЕТЕ ЖЕНЕ СРЕДЊОВЕКОВНЕ ЗАПАДНЕ ЦРКВЕ: ГЛАВНИ ТЕОРИЈСКИ АСПЕКТИ У АНГЛОАМЕРИЧКОЈ ЛИТЕРАТУРИ

Сажетак: *Рад представља преглед најважнијих савремених теоријских перспектива англоамеричке историографије и феминистичке теологије, везаних за перцепцију и разумевање светих жена Римокатоличке цркве у средњем веку, и тумачење њихових друштвених и родних улога, како у црквеном, тако и у секуларном касносредњовековном окружењу. Пошто је културализам добио снажан подстицај од феминистичких историчарки, од 1980-их година теме које играју важну улогу у развоју историографије односиле су се на жене, расу, етнију и класну припадност. Између осталих делова света, и у Западној Европи је током 1990-их постало значајно интересовање за жене, родну тематику и сексуалност, али је ово тежиште преовладало највише у Сједињеним Америчким Државама.*

Кључне речи: *свете жене, Римокатоличка црква, Западна Европа, средњи век.*

Introductory remarks

When it comes to Western historiography, as Smilja Marjanović Dušanić states, the intellectual climate of lively debates about the individual and society

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was developed in the field of social history, under the influence of the emergence of the new cultural history movement. It was launched in the 1980s by researchers from various disciplines gathered around the journal *Representations*. In its essence, this movement was a resistance to the simplifications of social relations that dominated theoretical views which had emerged under the strong influence of Marxism, but also to the discourse of later analysts, and was under the impact of the popularity of the theoretical work of Michel Foucault (1926–1984). (Марјановић Душанић, 2017: 13-14). Many works devoted to late antique and medieval studies of cultural history and social anthropology originated in the U.S. (Марјановић Душанић, 2017: 16, see Поповић, 2023: 22-23).

Views considered in this paper, related to the perspectives of the Anglo-American feminist theology and in its perception of holy women of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, are primarily influenced by anthropology and other social sciences and humanities. The impact of feminist historians and theologians is also evident. Being intended as an overview, the article is based on recent references of renowned authors and publishers. There will be also mentioned entries in encyclopedias and some general, but influential, English written history works, because they are the most read, often cited, and serve as basic reference for further reading, study and research. Although some authors of non-English speaking area and their theoretical stances mentioned in the paper, English written historiography and feminist theology papers have been taken into consideration for the most part, even though it is not necessarily, also because it is maybe not the most influential and does not bear the foremost achievements, but it is, due to the global dominance of the English language today, the easiest accessible, the most read and often cited. The goal is to present the theoretical achievements and stances of the historiographic and theology works under consideration, without analyzing deeply the sources and heuristics used and applied in them, for the purpose of informing not only experts in the field of history, but also the wider audience of educated readers on the topic of the holy women in the Anglo-American historiography and feminist theology of the past few decades.

Authors of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (2003) argue that the influence of the medieval Western social system was of great importance for the position of women within the Roman Catholic world. The military system, fundamentally feudalism, was based on inheritance by male heirs, and the position of women was relegated to the background. Women were secure within the framework of a noble standard of morality. The economic system implied the self-sufficiency of the family, i.e. men, women and children were included in a community of work in which stereotypes of "male" or "female" work could not be applied, except when the difference between men and women was emphasized due to needs that required male strength or, on the other hand, motherhood. In the system of inheritance and marriage ties, families continued the old practice of marrying off daughters and

sons out of interest.In the Middle Ages, monasteries were the centers of formal education. Men were devoted to war, chivalry, and being husbands; reading and writing were very often considered the work of clergy and women. The Crusades led to a deeper involvement and dominance of women in domestic affairs. Guilds generally did not exclude women. The rise of cities, international trade, universities, and the remarkable development of church architecture were influences that liberalized relations between men and women. Women were not only students but, not infrequently, university professors, especially in Italy and Germany. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* relativizes the position of medieval women, stating that women in the Middle Ages enjoyed more equality with men than in the most of the historical periods that followed (Cervantes & Harrington, 2003: 816; Поповић, 2023: 7-8).

There are other views, according to which women in the Middle Ages were subordinated to men, among other aspects, in the legal field. It was not easy for women to move out of the space imposed by the male world, i.e. from the household. In the medieval Mediterranean, frequent wars and the male lifestyle led to the fact that women were more numerous, especially those in mature years. In this way, when it comes to this geographical area, women left a much deeper mark on social life than can be seen at first glance. There was no significant influence in the field of culture and education, and the „normal" life of a woman in secular medieval society implied getting married and starting a family. Such a society valued a woman only if she met the expectations of the public and the Church, which implied the role of a good wife, mother and faithful (Blehova Čelebić, 2002: 315, 331; Поповић, 2023: 8; see also Christianne Klapisch-Zuber (ed.), 1992).

The authors of the second volume of the *History of Private Life* vividly describe the position of medieval women. In a noble household the safest axis in the system of values rested on the propositions from the Holy Scripture. According to them, women, considered the weakest creatures most prone to sin, should be kept under supervision. The first duty of the head of the family was to supervise and to kill if necessary his sister or daughter, the widow or female orphan of his brother, a relative or a vassal. There was a strong standpoint that the danger came from women. Medieval men tried to eliminate this ambiguous peril by confining women to the most secluded domestic space. In this way, the "women's chamber" was not a place of seduction or entertainment, but a place of confinement. These groups of women, who were causing unrest, were assigned special duties. Due to the previously mentioned, women were supposed to be employed because leisure was fatal to these weak creatures. The ideal was to find a balance between work and prayer, working with fabrics. A clear division into male and female separated the society of each household. It was institutional and echoed in most behaviors and spiritual attitudes (Диби, Бартелеми, ла Ронсијер, 2001: 77-79; Поповић, 2023: 8-9).

According to Jitske Jasperse, scholar specializied in the field of visual culture in the Middle Ages, a gendered perspective of Foucault's idea of government

includes “modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, that were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people“. When medieval women are being considered, „the latter exercise of power has been labelled agency informal/ soft power“. Jasperse stands out that „the fact that both agency and soft power are as hard to define or grasp as the term power itself“, considering „the idea that women’s power should need different words to describe how they could impact their own lives and that of others“. She says some interpretations give the general picture that women functioned in their own spheres, apart from men, and that they were rarely able to exercise the sort of “real” power attributed to elite men. Jasperse has an opinion that this picture does not encompasses all possibilities that both women and men had at their disposal to affect others. These options include financing civic architecture, creating alliances, or gathering an army. Jasperse continues: „Nor does it agree with the reality of men’s lives when they are treated as a homogenous group that held and shared in power equally, without acknowledging that their leverage greatly differed and depended on multiple economic and social circumstance“ (Jasperse, 2020: 9-10; Foucault, 2000: 341).

In the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* authors emphasize that there is a distinction between the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church that are immutable and those that are subject to change in accordance with historical evolution. Among the immutable teachings are those concerning the sovereignty of the individual, the equality of dignity and goals of both men and women, the single standard of morality, the indissolubility and sacramentality of Christian marriage, the denial that women’s role in society is reduced to that of wife and mother, the emphasis on virginity and a life dedicated to contemplation and social work, the recognition of the distinctive qualities and virtues of men and women, the invalidity of any marriage that does not result from the free choice of both partners, the promotion of education for women, and the institutionalized care of people with special needs (Cervantes & Harrington, 2003: 818; Поповић, 2023, 9). The practice of the Western Church has shown that often the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church themselves deviated from what the Church preached. There were various debates among Roman Catholic theologians themselves, and all of the above mentioned is the result of the spirit of the times and historical circumstances, which faithful and clergy often followed and which, in the end, partly shaped them as personalities (Поповић, 2023: 9-10). According to Richard Woods:

> In the early Middle Ages, it was commonly accepted, especially among religious writers, that women as a whole were not only deficient in reason, but morally weak and therefore prone to sin, especially sins of a sensual nature. Not surprisingly, women were deprived of legal status except as property, and found themselves hedged in by restrictive moral and physical sanctions not applicable to males. Access to educational opportunities were barred to all except the nobility, and careers for women in law, medicine, commerce, teaching, much less military service, were virtually non-existent. For any respectable woman, the only paths open to her were either marriage or a life of consecrated virginity as a nun safely walled into a monastery. Widows, even queens such

as St Elizabeth of Hungary, could be turned out of home or castle at the whim of the dominant male authority; Eleanor of Aquitaine was imprisoned for years by her husband, Henry II. Even in the Church, which was the most favourable environment for women of talent and ambition, even abbesses had few rights and little protection outside their own walls. Some of the sources of early Christian misogyny have been vividly adumbrated by Frances Beer in her recent book, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages*. As early as the second century, Tertullian (c.160 - c.240) accused women of responsibility for the fall of man, not just of men (Woods, 1997: 2-3).

Richard Woods sees the roots of misogynist stances in certain quotes of St Clement of Alexandria, St Jerome, St John Chrysostom, Andreas Capellanus, Gottfried von Strassburg (Woods, 1997: 3-4). He concludes:

> The logical outcome of such diatribes were works such as the *Malleus Mallificarum*, written in 1483, one of the most vicious misogynist works of any period, and one which provided both justification and procedures for the interrogation, torture, and execution of hundreds of thousands of women on the mere accusation of witchcraft (Woods, 1997: 4).

For example, Saint Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the greatest medieval Roman Catholic theologian, is often classified as misogynist and his words used for describing women are considered as one of the most influential in the western-European gender context for centuries. One may use some of the following formulations of St. Thomas as a proof of his misogynist stance: "Woman was made in paradise, not by reason of her own dignity, but on account of the dignity of the principle from which her body was formed" (Saint Thomas Aquinas, 2017:492). „[...] While in simple souls and women devotion abounds by repressing pride".[2] More recent works by Roman Catholic theologians, however, do not defend at all costs everything that Saint Thomas said about women. Moreover, they present many positive and favorable things that Saint Thomas said, and explain his personal attitude towards women (Pavlović, 1992: 3-34).

One must also have on mind, as Jeanne L. Schroeder states,

> To most modern readers, medieval theory seems unsophisticated, crude, cruel, and demonstrably wrong. Even more, to the modern reader medieval social institutions seem unjust. We should remember, however, that these theories were, just as ours are, the result of the most intelligent and sophisticated men (...) trying as hard as they could in good faith to understand themselves and the world around them, but always in the context of their own society from which they could not escape. (...) Rather, by reading the writings of the people of the time, one comes to the understanding that these people in this culture experienced themselves differently than we do today. Men did not prize equality, individuality, and autonomy not necessarily beacuse they didn't think of it, but because in their society these ideas were absurd and potentially culturally destructive (Schroeder, 1990: 1215-1216).

A picture of women in the Middle Ages in the West may be understood better, in the light of modern historiography, by reading Christiane Klapisch Zuber. This author claims that men in the Middle Ages have long understood 'woman' as a special category. Whether woman bacame a peasant, a lord or a saint, she was defined by her body, gender and family relations. Personalities of wives, widows and virgins were

2 St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Second Part of The Second Part, Question 82, Article 3, Reply to Objection 3. New Advent. Retrieved from:https://www.newadvent.org/summa/3082.htm

outlined in relation to a man or a group of men, from the legal side as well as from the side of everyday morality (Клапиш Зибер, 2007: 300; Поповић, 2023: 15).

It is important to underline, in the words of Katherine Weikert and Elena Woodacre, that:

> Growing initially from second-wave feminism's critique of the academy and the call to recognize women's place not only in academia but in history overall, gender studies in turn grew from third-wave feminism's recognition of the value of difference with "an inclusive and non-judgmental approach that refuses to police the boundaries of the feminist political." Indeed, it is only in a few far flung corners where gender studies in history are still considered as an "add women- and-stir" approach. Instead there is a much greater understanding that gender as a social construct—and a normative construct at that—can affect all corners of life. As another structure around which we build society, this social identity impacts societal expectations of gender roles, and so addressing gender as a part of a broader history should be a part of any narrative of the past (Weikert and Woodacre, 2012: 1-2) .

The study of medieval women and their religious practices is now a dominant theme in Western historiography, to the point that some scholars believe that women are overrepresented. Gender studies that relate to medieval holiness are still most often studies of female holiness. There are many scholarly monographs and collections of works whose themes are medieval women, women in communities, women in cities, women and power, young women, although in some books women's studies are still, perhaps unconsciously, considered as a complement to men's studies (Riches & Salih, 2005: 2-3; Поповић, 2023: 15).

Pious women were under the supervision of the clergy, as were women of the new "semi-religious" movements, such as the Beguines, who later came under the supervision of mendicant friars. Almost always, men, usually clerics, wrote the lives of holy women and had the power to determine how they were remembered, positioning themselves as intermediaries between the holy women and the public. If women wrote themselves, men often stood between them and the readers, as editors or at least scribes, and the clerics were thus the bearers of power and control. Men were also often devotees of the holy women, whom they admired, were their students, or friends. All this testifies to the deep connection between the clergy and the holy women (Coakley, 2006: 1-2; Поповић, 2023: 16-17).

Religious women relied on priests for pastoral care throughout the medieval period. Men did not subsequently consider such care as burdensome or that women were spiritually subordinate in their relations with priests. Ordained men and professed women met regularly and among them there were cases of intimate friendships and relations in which they provided each other with important spiritual support. Of course, there were prevailing fears that contact between the sexes must result in sexual temptation and sin, but that didn't stop ordained men and professed women in the Middle Ages from developing mutual intense spiritual bonds (Griffiths and Hotchin, 2014: 1-45).

Ordained man and professed women both viewed the pastoral care in their own way, inside which the fluidity of gender and authority within the medieval

religious life is evident. In this way, the volume edited by Griffiths and Hotchin offers new interpretations of the intersection of gender, religion, and spiritual power within the medieval world (Griffiths and Hotchin, 2014).

When medieval holy women are considered, the following lines will be dedicated to the impact of the feminist theology on the perception of these women. Barbara Newman wrote about St. Hildegard of Bingen, nun, mystic, author and composer from the 12th century:

Apropos of science and medicine, Hildegard has long been the unofficial patron saint of ecology and doyenne of holistic healing, thanks to her subtle teaching on viriditas—the divine "greening power" that is both biological life-force and source of spiritual vitality. Jean Evans aptly compares her as an ecological prophet to the American Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, a founder of Genesis Farm and moving force in its mission to promote "earth literacy" and eco-spirituality. Hildegard's prescient concern with the natural world, especially insofar as its damaged state reflects human sin, will come to the fore as the Church increasingly stresses ecological justice and the integrityof creation. [...] Official proclamations [proclaimed as saint on May 10th, 2012 and as doctor of the Church on October 7th the same year] about the new doctor have made no reference to her theology of the feminine. This is not for want of orthodoxy: Hildegard upheld clerical celibacy and explicitly supported the ban on women's ordination. Her twelfth-century views on gender complementarity might even be (slightly) more conservative than those of Benedict XVI. But she has nonetheless been the darling of feminists; her huge following among them may actually have served to delay her elevation until after the feminist spirituality movement had peaked (Newman, 2013: 50).

Analyzing Hildegard's feminine theology, the same author stands out:

Hildegard is well-known today for her "theology of the feminine," as I called it in the subtitle of my 1987 book, *Sister of Wisdom*. But I was not the first to systematically explore the abbess's reflections on women and the feminine. That honor belongs to Maura Böckeler's 1941 volume, *Das große Zeichen: Die Frau als Symbol göttlicher Wirklichkeit* (The Great Sign: Woman as Symbol of Divine Reality). If that book had been more widely read, there would have been little need for mine—but, given the exigencies of World War II, Böckeler's contribution made scarcely a ripple. In *Das große Zeichen* she develops her own, Hildegardian take on a style of gendered theology that is out of favor at present, but enjoyed wide sway in the early twentieth century. Such theologies begin with the axiom that a polarity of Masculine and Feminine governs all life in the universe, being rooted in the androgynous nature of the Divine (Newman, 2013: 38).

Considering medieval female saints and intimate partner violence, Nancy E. Nienhuis and Beverly Mayne Kienzle point out that the majority of persons who were recognized as saints in the Middle Ages were men, and then continue:

It was very difficult for women to achieve recognition as holy persons, because their physical bodies were associated with temptation and the demonic in a way that men's bodies were not, thus impeding their quest for holiness. In addition, women were perceived as innately inferior, an idea rooted in exegesis of Scripture, particularly Genesis, the Pastoral Epistles, and the Pauline letters. Achieving holiness was all the more problematic for the married woman, as her husband and children gave evidence of her sexuality. A woman's familial ties thus stood as an encumbrance to holiness, unless her physical ties to her family could be dissolved and replaced by spiritual ones. Among the married women who were venerated for their holiness, several are described as patiently and obediently undergoing trials inflicted by their husbands in what we today consider psychological or physical abuse. The stories of holy women

abused by spouses, like other historical narratives, need to be informed by scholarship on women's piety and views of the body, as well as by what can be gleaned about an author's often complex historical circumstances and purpose in writing the life of a particular saint. A series of questions can be asked of these hagiographical narratives: Does the hagiographer recount episodes of violence or battering to use as evidence for a woman's holiness? How does the suffering of violence depicted in the text contribute to the victim's holiness? Is the importance of abuse accentuated? How does the role of abuse compare to that of good works? What is the author's attitude toward the violent action and its perpetrator? What theological message do these textual models convey? (Nienhuis and Mayne Kienzle, 2018: 16-17).

Previously mentioned authors stand that in the Middle Ages struggle with intimate violence was not unusual and that escape or refuge for victims was not often mentioned in historical accounts. Their opinion is that better historical understanding of religious and cultural attitudes toward battering are important for finding solutions to problems of violence against women, and, subsequently, the analysis of historical examples of intervention, escape, and refuge may help to identify effective patterns for contemporary responses to violence. Many Christian narratives of battering present a complex theological grounding. Theological themes of suffering, obedience, and ownership are present, so, in conclusion, medieval and contemporary narratives show that women in abusive relationships feel the burden of religious beliefs. These beliefs, according to the authors, give wives a reason to endure suffering and by so doing maintain stable marriages (Nienhuis and Mayne Kienzle, 2018: 6-7).

Also, according to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, the emergence of feminist theology represents a search for the meaning and implications of the Christian faith from the perspective of a commitment to justice for women. This theology believes that official theological teaching has been distorted by the long-standing sexism of the tradition. Thus, patriarchy and ideological prejudices (androcentrism) have privileged men and been unfair to women, so that an intellectually and morally adequate theology requires significant changes in previous works in all theological disciplines. Another feature of feminist theology is the importance of women's experience, which involves a critique of sexist interpretations and practices and a reappraisal of women's contributions to church life and theological reflection in the past, and the construction of more just and accurate interpretations and practices. The emphasis on this theology is present in Roman Catholicism in the United States, but feminist theology has taken on ecumenical dimensions and included many Roman Catholic, Protestant, and even some Orthodox scholars around the world. This movement emerged in the period 1960–75, and gained a foothold in the period 1975–90. Thus, the wave of research on gender relations and women's studies, from the social sciences, including historiography, and within it medieval studies, also spread to the theological sphere, at a time when feminism as a movement was gaining importance and expansion (Patrick, 2003: 675-681; Поповић, 2023: 21-22).

Svenka Savić, in the introduction to the collection of papers *Feministička teologija* (1999), of which she is the editor, states that since the 1970s, women

theologians were active in questioning the role of women and men in the Church as an institution, in the fields of critical interpretation of dogma, which is based on canonical texts adopted by the Church, relating to the apostolate, original sin, the Holy Trinity; analyzes of canonical texts together with those rejected by the Church, which provide information on the role and importance of women when the Christian tradition was created, and later in its maintenance; in the field of finding opportunities for connection between churches within the program of ecumenism (Savić, 1999: 3).

Feminist theology, according to Lisa Isherwood and Dorothea McEwan, interconnects two disciplines reflecting upon and complementing one another, feminism and theology. Feminism is observed by the authors in a broadest context of social analysis reflecting societal inequality, not only as a movement demanding equal access for women in an unequal society. It means that feminism analyzes that society in all its aspects. Theology considers reflection upon the nature of God and the implications that will have in society. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition main interpretations of these reflections have been a work of men, and the society that resulted from such reflections is patriarchal. Isherwood and McEwan think that women have often found themselves operating in a world that dares not contemplate women's experience and feminism is the vehicle for women to own and express this experience, giving them space to accept it as legitimate in a patriarchal world. Feminist theology also developed due a series of significant moves in the field of theology, using the methods of process thought and liberation theology. „These methods enable feminist theology to envisage a world which is in the process of becoming and which achieves that most fully among people who live with justice and peace" (Isherwood and McEwan, 1994, 9-10).

Anne Carr, writing in 1982, pointed out:

> As feminist theology has developed, the critical correlation of the Christian tradition with the contemporary cultural situation has consistently broadened to include wider dimensions of women's experience. [...] The major work of Christian feminist theologians thus far has been negation, unmasking cultural and religious ideology that denies women's full humanity. While important studies of the forgotten history of women have indeed appeared, the first task has been analysis of the distorted traditions about women in the Bible, in the Church Fathers, in medieval, Reformation, and modern theology. From its historical studies it describes a first layer of ideology in which woman is the servant, object, or tool of male power, and shares inferiority with other reduced groups, lower classes, subjugated races. A second understands women as evil or fearful, representing bodiliness and carnality. A third layer is the romantic split or reversal in which women are idealized as more moral or spiritual than men, privatized, along with religion, art, and culture, and again used as mediators of a lost female side of the male, as havens in a materialistic, immoral, public, male world. [...] There have been some efforts, especially in biblical scholarship, which have already shown the possibility of interpretations that are both Christian and feminist, that negate and affirm, unmask and restore (Carr, 1982: 287-288).

Linda Woodhead in 1997 has argued what she considered the failure of constructive and critical endeavour of feminist theology. First, according to the author, it failed to engage with the complexity of Christian tradition because feminist

theology depends on modern misconstrual of religion, and, in most cases, it represents an out-and-out rejection of Christian faith in favour of an alternative ideology or spirituality. The author argues that feminist theology laid itself open to the charge that in turning away from Christianity it has served not to advance but to hinder the cause of women and of feminism, and has distorted our understanding of God, embracing idealism as a part of modern religiosity in the West (Woodhead, 1997: 205-206).

Margaret D. Kamitsuka summarizes modern trends in feminist theology:

> new theoretical perspective on women's selfhood helps expose troubling assumptions at work in the most venerable and deeply valued feminist theological themes such as the appeal to women's creation in the image of God; insistence on the oppressiveness of structural sins against women; rejection of the salvific significance of the maleness of Jesus; suspicion toward the masculinist, Christian creedal tradition; and the call for women's solidarity. The implications for feminist theology of attending to difference, thus, are not superficial but rather decisive, radical, and systemic. Attending to difference affects how feminist theologians engage each other's work, how we remain accountable to the needs and resistance activities of our various constituent communities, how we position ourselves in relation to the Christian tradition, and how we conduct ongoing self-critical reflection as we encounter new forms of otherness and new repressed voices (Kamitsuka, 2007: 4).

As a one side of the perspective considering the position of women within the Church in contemporary period, which may be important for the understanding of the stances of feminist theology, there can be given an example of how the place and role of women is presented in the newsletters of the Serbian Orthodox Church, based on the analysis of authors who are inclined to the views of feminism. Slobodan Vasić analyzed the representation of women in the newspaper *Pravoslavlje*, emphasizing that the basic idea of the work is to determine whether and to what extent cultural dualism is present in the texts of the newspaper *Pravoslavlje*. According to this concept, the male sphere is traditionally seen outside the home, in public, cultural and social life, while the female sphere represents the house, family, raising children, friendships, caring for the sick, the elderly, etc. In this way, a woman develops feelings, warmth, but not intelligence, except the intelligence of the heart (Vasić, 2014: 1196). During the research Vasić used the method of content analysis and the period taken into research consideration was from September to December 2011. According to the results of the analysis, women are in subordinate position compared to men in the authorship, and also is established that women do not write copyrighted articles neither interpret official theological doctrine of church. The journal promoted the desirable role of women in the society. It is most commonly related to humanitarian work as well as the work within private sphere. Quantitatively speaking, the greatest number of roles accounts for professional sphere and lower for religious and family sphere. Vasić sees evident discrimination because of the lack of representation of those actors of the social practice who belong to the working class (Vasić, 2014: 1195).

On the other hand, when Dragana Radisavljević Ćiparizović writes about the Orthodox attitude regarding the women's issue within the Church, she states that when feminism abandoned social problems and turned to religion, there were some interpretetations that were incompatible with the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Namely, the author compares the feminist point of view that the Bible is a cultural and divine product, written in the words of a man, and therefore subject to errors and corrections, with the traditional Orthodox point of view that the Bible is Divine revelation and that God's word is not weakened when spoken in human language. The assumption that male culture produced the image of a male God in order to support the religious system of Orthodoxy is being denied by the positions that patriarchal cultures near the Jewish people had both female and male deities; that the Bible warns Jews not to imagine God as either male or female, and Jesus also said that God is a spirit, not a being in a male or female form. Also, Orthodoxy refutes that women did not have the opportunity to express their views on the God through the examples of Orthodox female saints. The claim of feminists that women under the influence of the Holy Spirit will understand God in a "female" way is also disputed, since God is not determined by human thinking and judgment (Radisavljević Ćiparizović: 2006, 56).

Ending remarks

Culturalism received a strong impetus from feminist historians, and the themes that have played an important role in the development of historiography since the 1980s have been women, race, ethnicity and class. Among other parts of the world, in Western Europe, during the 1990s, there has been a significant interest in women, gender and sexuality, but this focus has been most prevalent in the United States. The concept of "power", as defined by historians dealing with this topic, is characterized by political meaning, and women's history, or gender history, is concerned with hierarchies of power. Women's historiography and gender history attempt to move away from Marxist theory of history, but, in some ways, continue Marxist ideology. It insists on how women have been subordinated to men in all spheres of life since the beginning of history, and that subordination and exploitation have been reinforced by capitalism. Georg Iggers concludes by stating as a remark on feminist and gender history that there was a clear contradiction between what many feminist historians advocate and what they actually do (Igers, 2014: 117-120; Поповић, 2023: 23).

A *U. S. Catholic* interview from 2016 points out the use of a usual stereotype about women in the medieval church. Authors who write about female saints like Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, or Catherine of Siena, consider them like they were perfect examples of feminine wisdom, virgin saints who cared for others and spread holiness serving the poor. Interviewing Elizabeth Dreyer, professor

emerita of religious studies at Fairfield University, scholar who spent decades studying these women, *U. S. Catholic* delivers her stances that these stereotypes sometimes make difficult for us to understand who these women actually were and what they believed. According to Dreyer: "For women like Catherine of Siena, we have to sort out the stories that were passed down from the actual Catherine of history," and also, "they don't always reflect the Catherine we all know and love; she isn't quite the Catherine who actually existed." Dreyer emphasizes the fact that the true stories of medieval women usually as fascinating, if not more so, as their conventional hagiographies. After years of reading and researching medieval women Dreyer hasn't lost the spark of her interest in them. "They're interesting. They're quirky. They're crazy. They're profound," she says. "They're my teachers, my spiritual directors, and companions." These women do not offer only interesting stories, but role models for people of faith today.[3]

As Susan Mosher Stuard says:

> It almost goes without saying that women's history and the history of gender should always be understood in relation to men's history and the social construction of masculinity. At this juncture medieval women's history might well turn more of its efforts at synthesis to a fundamental issue: demonstrating where, when, and how women contributed to the development of Western society. That endeavor promises continued rearranging of the canons of significance. More creative approaches for bringing to self-conscious consideration the underlying premises of our current histories would help. Both these efforts demand theoretical adventurousness. Above all scholarship must continue to refuse any untroubled distinction between literature and history and instead insist upon a "dynamic, unstable, and reciprocal relationship between the discursive and material domains." It is imperative that women's history and the historical investigation of gender proceed together. Success at this endeavor means that the complex understandings will continue to enrich our general historical understanding (Mosher Stuard, 2010, XIII, 21).

At the very end, one can offer a Catholic-view opinion of the author who is a woman, on the subject whether can one be both Catholic and feminist. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese regards as real questions why this is a question at all, and why many see relations between Catholicism and feminists as problematic. She concludes that if feminism considers the world as a place where women's self-respect and ambition come into danger, it also promotes a remodelled world that will bring happiness and fulfilment for women. Fox-Genovese thinks that both viewpoints are problematic in certain aspects, because hostility of the world towards women cannot be proved, as feminism thinks, and, on the other side, it is not clear that women's improvement in the short period of time increased their satisfaction with lives they live. So, Fox-Genovese underlines that improvements in women's position are of importance, but happiness and fulfillment do not by all means follow from them. She thinks that the two things last mentioned flow fom one's relations with other people and with God. So, „a Catholic feminism

3 „'A medieval woman for modern times': a U. S. Catholc Interview". *U. S. Catholic*. July 2016, https://uscatholic.org/articles/201607/a-medieval-woman-for-modern-times/

must be flexible and capacious enough to encompass human and divine love and all of the constraints and rewards that both afford“ (Fox-Genovese, 2003).[4]

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