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## **The Messiness of Actual Existence Feminist Contributions to Theology of Religions**

What does feminist theology have to do with interfaith dialogue and theology of religions? So far, feminist theology has not to a great extent dealt with the issues of theology of religion, that is, how to view other religious traditions from the point of view of one's own tradition. How do we understand other religious traditions: as heresies, as competitors, as other sources from which we can learn something about the Divine? How can we learn to live in harmony with adherents of other faiths? How can the followers of different religious traditions work together for a better world? These, in short, are the questions with which theology of religions deals.

It is true that feminist theology from the outset was interreligious in its character; Jewish and Christian feminists as well as those who seek the Goddess were among the pioneers, and there has been reflection and dialogue on interfaith issues. However, on the whole, this has not been an area of concern for most feminist theologians.

I would argue that it is necessary for feminist theologians to take part in the increasingly important field of theology of religions, and that these two fields can mutually enrich each other. Key questions to be considered include: what could a feminist theology of religions look like? How could it show the way forward for the reflection of religious plurality and the praxis of interfaith dialogue? What elements of feminist theory might prove useful in the theology of religions? What new issues and concerns can feminist theology bring to interfaith discourse? And conversely, how can theology of religions enrich and challenge feminist theology?

In this essay I will offer some tentative answers to these questions. As this is virtually uncharted territory, I hope that there will be many further explorations in this field. It will be especially important that such explorations are done from the vantage point of other religious communities, since my perspective is Christian.

### **Lack of connection between theology and practice**

In my doctoral thesis, *Other Voices: A Study of Christian Feminist Approaches to Religious Plurality East and West*,<sup>1</sup> I found that although more work has been done in this area than is generally realised, there still is not a lot, especially in the area of systematic reflection on religious plurality from a feminist perspective. Moreover, I found that there was very little connection between feminist dialogue praxis and feminist reflection upon religious plurality.

Women have met for dialogue according to the fundamental feminist rationale that women have been absent from interfaith dialogue, and that their involvement would bring up new issues having to do with women's subordination in religious communities and in society, as well as new ways of doing dialogue. However, there has not been much effort to bring feminist theory to bear on the structure of the conferences, or the discussions. On the other hand, feminist reflection in the area of theology of religions has seldom drawn on the experiences of women in interfaith dialogue, or offered a theoretical analysis of the learnings from them. This lack of connection between dialogue praxis and theology of religions is a serious flaw, not least because feminist theology has always emphasised the need to be praxis oriented, to take its starting point in experience, and to contribute to the liberation of women.

A number of themes that appear in the conferences and projects I study in my thesis,<sup>2</sup> are treated in depth in feminist theology. Supported by the experiences in my material, these could be developed further into a feminist theology of religions.

The first and primary theme that echoes in the reports of women's inter-religious conferences is that close relations were built and cherished, and that a "common we" very soon was established, which was felt to be stronger than the divisions caused by different religious belonging. This did not mean that all was harmony. On the contrary conflicts abounded, showing real differences in opinion, often connected to geographical and social location. However, these conflicts were handled constructively and not seen as a threat to the relationships that had been built. It was rather the opposite: the establishment of good

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<sup>1</sup> Helene Egnell, *Other Voices. A Study of Christian Feminist Approaches to Religious Plurality East and West* (Studia Missionalia Svecana 100: Uppsala 2006).

<sup>2</sup> The main ones being Women, Religion and Social Change at Harvard University in 1983, the WCC consultation Women in Interfaith Dialogue in Toronto in 1988, and The Women's Interfaith Journey carried out by the Henry Martyn Institute 1998-2003.

relationships prompted the participants to take each other seriously, neither glossing over nor building walls.

### **The role of conflict**

It is quite often asserted that women avoid conflict, because they are anxious to preserve harmonious relations. However, the role played by conflict in all these projects was striking, as was the common explanation that conflicts were possible and could be handled precisely because the participants had built up relationships and cared about each other. The fact that conflicts arose, however, seemed to be attributable to the fact that some of the women, often those from a non-western and/or non-white context, insisted upon making differences visible, pointing out that their perspectives and aims were different from those of white, western women. That is to say, although a “common we” was established, it was not a homogenous entity. Difference and similarity were held together.

The “common we” was created through methodologies developed by the women’s movement: sharing life stories in small groups, starting in the realm of concrete experiences rather than with abstract problems or dogmatic statements, paying careful attention to seating arrangements and to the planning of introductory sessions and rituals in order to create a “safe space”.

However, the shaping of the “common we” did not simply result from methodologies geared towards relation-building. There were indeed commonalities to be found between the women. Although this is a contested concept, I have chosen to summarise them under the label “women’s experiences”. As long as the concept is used in the plural, in order to allow a wide spectrum within it, I think it is useful to talk of women’s experiences both in the sense of “women’s traditional experiences” and of “women’s feminist experiences”.

With “women’s traditional experiences” we mean those connected to women’s biological functions and the social roles assigned to them, while “feminist experiences” are those connected with the oppression of women, giving rise to anger and the urge to struggle for change. Both these kinds of experience played a part in the building of the “common we”, but the “feminist experience” appears to have been the more decisive. There were examples in parts of my material, which lay outside the scope of my main interest,<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> One such example can be found in Annette Wilke, “Interreligiöses Verstehen. Rahmenbedingungen für einen gelingenden christlich-muslimischen Dialog”, in: Doris Strahm / Manuela Kalsky (eds), *Damit es anders wird zwischen uns. Interreligiöser Dialog aus der Sicht von Frauen* (Matthias Grünewald: Ostfildern 2006), 14-26.

that suggest that “traditional experience” alone would not have allowed for the acknowledgement of differences, which made conflict possible to handle.

### **Critique of institutional religion**

What distinguished these dialogues from malestream<sup>4</sup> interfaith dialogue, was the feminist critique of religion. All participants came with the experience of belonging to a religious tradition which had denied women access to the writing and interpretation of sacred texts, the performing of sacred rites etc, and many had struggled to achieve the right to do so. There was also a shared conviction that religious traditions are not static, but constantly changing, and that change is desirable.

Another way to express this is the notion of marginality. The women experienced themselves as being on the margins of their religious traditions, and this was seen as an asset: they did not have as many “vested interests” as those holding centrist positions.

At the same time, they had experienced faith as comfort and inspiration in their personal lives as well as in their struggle for justice and peace. The stress on lived faith rather than doctrine was another distinguishing mark of women’s interfaith projects. One reason for this is that these were not theological conferences in a strict sense. Some participants were theologians, but many were social workers or educators, and all were, in one way or another, activists. Consequently, what is known as “the dialogue of life” played a more important role in these projects than in malestream dialogue. It also appears that “the little tradition” or “religion as practised” – that is, religion as understood and practised in everyday life, as distinct from “the great tradition” or “religion as prescribed” – was more prominent.

Another concept, which has to do with this connection to lived faith, is messiness – “the messiness of actual existence”. The women taking part in dialogue questioned the very concept of interfaith dialogue as implying that religious traditions were clearly defined entities, “boxes” from which the dialogue participants negotiated well-defined standpoints. Their own experience was that it was not so easy to find a “representative” who fitted into the box of a certain tradition. Their spirituality was inspired by many traditions, and

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<sup>4</sup> I have borrowed the term “malestream” from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. It exposes the fact that in a male-dominated society, what is considered mainstream is male dominated, and that what is considered universal is in reality particular.

they were well aware that insofar as they identified with a tradition, they could only represent part of that tradition.

The themes I have identified above are all fundamental themes in feminist theology: the critique against institutionalized religion, relationality, difference, the role of experience, marginality, messiness, the theology of lived faith. But in the reflections upon, and the analysis of, these projects, these themes have seldom been developed in a dialogue with current feminist theology. I will now try to chart the intersection between feminist theology and theology of religions at these points.

### **The hermeneutics of suspicion**

The most obvious contribution of feminism to the theology of religions is the “hermeneutics of suspicion”, the critique of institutional religion. Theology of religions needs to learn from feminist theology how to criticise religious traditions, while at the same time holding on to their liberating and life-enhancing potential, and work for change within them. For too long interfaith dialogue and theology of religions has suffered from mutual and one-sided apologetics, in which the courage to face the adverse sides of religious traditions has been absent.

It is understandable that the first stages of interfaith dialogue must focus on presenting and discovering the positive traits in each others’ traditions. Mutual understanding must begin with mutual appreciation of what is good and beautiful in the other’s way of expressing our faith – what Krister Stendahl has called “holy envy”. However, if interfaith dialogue is to be able to contribute to world peace – as Hans Küng put it “no world peace without peace between the religions” – it is not enough to go on explaining that Christianity is not about crusades, and Islam not about jihad interpreted as holy war; nor is it enough to highlight the parts of our scriptures that talk of peace. We must have the courage to scrutinize our scriptures and theologies to understand why they are in fact such eminent tools for inspiring hatred and violence, why indeed crusades and jihad in the sense of holy war against infidels are part of Christianity and Islam in history as well as in our world today.

Feminist theology has not only developed the tools for scrutinizing the negative sides of religion, but also has some experience of doing this interreligiously. There is still a long way to go, but Jewish-Christian dialogue between feminists has grappled with the Christian habit of contrasting the “patriarchal God of the Old Testament” with “Jesus the feminist”. The similarities and

connections between misogyny and anti-Judaism have shed light on both phenomena.<sup>5</sup> While respecting that the two traditions have different interpretations of common texts and concepts, Jewish and Christian feminists have been able to carry out fruitful joint critique of such texts and concepts, and suggest new interpretations and new images.

An important task for feminist theologians is to analyze and criticize how women function as cultural and national markers, and thus as symbols in conflicts in society. Whether a woman covers herself or appears naked, her body is the field where political and economic conflicts are played. How we dress (up) as women – with hijab or mini-skirt – can be interpreted as being simultaneously a sign of, and a resistance against, the significance attributed to women’s bodies. This is a question that especially Muslim and Christian women must tackle together, so as to avoid being the symbol that the “clash of civilizations” is focused upon.

### Christology

Much of the Christian feminist critique has concerned christology. Rosemary Radford Ruether’s question “can a male savior save women?” has not yet received a definite answer. However, it is not only that the maleness of Jesus has been a problem for feminist theologians – other ingredients of traditional Christology have been questioned as well, including imperialistic or exclusive claims for Jesus as the only saviour.

“Saving Jesus from those who are right” is a contribution to the rethinking of christology from Carter Heyward, which can show the way for theology of religions as well.<sup>6</sup> In the Preface, she explicitly addresses her book to adherents of other faiths.<sup>7</sup> She cautions against a Christology that “too often obscures the Christic – redemptive – meanings of the Jesus story” and claims that “it is hard for us not to get stuck in the faulty assumption that Jesus was, and is, *the* Christ in a unique and singular way that applies to him alone; to imagine that he – not anyone else with, before, or after him – was and is *The* Savior, who saves only those Christians who hold this “right” view of him.”<sup>8</sup> Heyward

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<sup>5</sup> The standard work in this area is Katharina von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings* (Scholars Press: Atlanta 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus From Those Who Are Right. Rethinking what it means to be Christian* (Augsburg Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Heyward, *Saving Jesus*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

goes on to confess: “With you, I see that neither you nor I, nor any person or culture, nor any tribe or religion or species, nor past, present or future holds the keys to heaven, and that only together can we save this earth and liberate one another from those who are right – thank you Jesus, sweet sister.”<sup>9</sup>

The critique of the notion of Jesus as the only saviour also comes from Asian feminist theologians, who choose to bypass the christological developments of the early councils, and construct a christology in dialogue between the biblical stories and soteriological motifs found in their native religious traditions. Kwok Pui-lan claims that Jesus’ question, “Who do you say that I am?” must be answered anew in every new context, and that there can be many answers to that question. With the help of post-colonial theories, she proposes Jesus/Christ as a hybrid concept as a viable christology. Jesus/Christ has always been a hybridized concept, as it has travelled between the human and the divine, between the Jewish and Hellenistic world, and through the quests for the “historical Jesus”, always set firmly in their own historical context. Today hybrid images of Christ are consciously produced in new contexts, like the Black Christ of the Afro-American community, the Shakti of Asian feminists or Jewish theologian Susannah Heschels’s notion of Jesus as a “theological transvestite”.<sup>10</sup>

Wisdom christologies are another option for feminist theology as well as for theology of religions. Hochma of the Hebrew Scriptures provides us with a female metaphor for God, which, though not unambiguous, is closely connected to creation and to a holistic concept of knowledge. Understanding Jesus as “Sophia’s prophet”<sup>11</sup> or as Wisdom incarnate offers a less triumphalist image than traditional christologies. As there are female personifications of wisdom in other religious traditions, including Hinduism and Buddhism, a quest for wisdom in a feminist key opens a new road for the theology of religions.<sup>12</sup>

## Salvation

Closely related to the issue of christology in the Christian tradition is that of salvation. Feminist theologies have criticised traditional soteriologies for being

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>10</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination & Feminist Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville 2005), 168-185

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet. Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (Continuum: New York 1994).

<sup>12</sup> I have developed this idea in an unpublished M. Phil thesis at the Irish School of Ecumenics, *Sophia in Interfaith Dialogue* 1997.

too focused on transcendent, after-life, end-of-time salvation. In its place, they have advocated an imminent concept of salvation, concerned with well-being here and now, a “now and then” instead of “once-and-for-all”, a process rather than a product.

Christians have, says Carter Heyward, “had great difficulty living as participants in an unfinished, imperfect creation,” and “the church has tried to complete the redemption story by suggesting that, in Jesus’ death, God’s desire for right relation with creation was finally completed or ‘satisfied’.”<sup>13</sup> Instead of being the completion of God’s saving work, Heyward understands the uniqueness of Jesus as “a window into the ongoing processes of a creation that is unfinished, and as a partner in the saving work of healing and liberation.”<sup>14</sup>

The theme of salvation as a process in which humans participate, easily lends itself to a pluralist understanding. Jeannine Hill Fletcher develops this idea in *Monopoly on Salvation*: “through active attention to solidarity and liberative relations to others, humans are agents in co-creating salvation. In the Christian story, none other than Jesus of Nazareth provides the pattern for salvation in solidarity and wholeness”.<sup>15</sup> However, as the Jesus story is told and interpreted in today’s multireligious context, salvation understood as restoring the world to wholeness must be “‘worked out’ in solidarity with the religiously other.”<sup>16</sup>

## Difference

Feminist theology has criticised the way in which gender has been constructed through the categories of hierarchy and difference. There are parallels in the way religion has been constructed, where in triumphalist versions of Christian theology other religions have been constructed as not only different, but inferior. Therefore, theology of religions could learn from the way feminists have grappled with central concepts like “difference”, “relation” and “the other”.

In its infancy, feminist theology had strong universalising tendencies, which were challenged by womanists and feminists from the Third World. Since then, an affirmation of diversity, and reflections on how to live with differences

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<sup>13</sup> Heyward, *Saving Jesus*, 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation? A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (Continuum: New York 2005), 122.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.



without glossing over tensions due to power relations, has been part of feminist discourse. Only through acknowledging difference can relations be built, argues Audre Lorde: “it is not those differences between us that separate us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behaviour and expectation.”<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the idea of multiple, hyphenated or hybrid identities has arisen from women’s experiences of never being completely at home in any context, for example as a feminist in the church, or as a Christian in the women’s movement, and their need to negotiate these situations of inclusion and exclusion, of identification and “othering”.

Feminist theologians like Maura O’Neill and Jeannine Hill Fletcher have criticised theologies of religion for their universalising tendencies and failure to affirm diversity. Current theologies of religion stand in an impasse of sameness and difference, says Jeannine Hill Fletcher,<sup>18</sup> because they view difference as a problem to be overcome, not as a theological resource. Either differences between religious traditions are collapsed into an essential sameness, or the differences are seen as so essential as to preclude dialogue. The solution would be to cease viewing religious traditions as bounded wholes, and instead see them as diverse and fluid. The feminist experience of, and reflexion upon, hybrid identities, and of not being able to identify with a religious tradition in its totality, but always being “the other” can show a way out of the impasse.<sup>19</sup>

Kwok Pui-lan offers the term “theology of religious difference” instead of “theology of religions” as a means of moving beyond the pluralist paradigm and bringing postcolonial as well as feminist insights into the discourse. Like Hill Fletcher, she wants to move away from the idea of “religions” as bounded wholes, stressing that “religion” is a Christian theological category, which has been constructed within a colonial framework. She calls on theologians to make use of religious studies and cultural studies, to study how religious difference has been constructed, and “[i]n the age of globalisation, how religion intersects with gender, race and transnationalism.”<sup>20</sup> In such a study, the reality of hybridized religious identities must also be taken into account. The feminist contribution to a theology of religious difference would be to analyse

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<sup>17</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (Crossing Press: Trumansburg, N.Y. 1984), 115.

<sup>18</sup> Fletcher, *Monopoly*, 62-81.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-101.

<sup>20</sup> Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 207.

how gender has played into the construction of Christian identity and religious difference.<sup>21</sup>

### Relation

Relationality is a key concept in feminist theology, and here too feminist theologies of relation have much to offer the discourse on interfaith relations. A relational ontology, according to which we understand God in relational terms and see human existence as being-in-relation, has consequences for how we perceive the religious “other”. The philosophy of Levinas exerts a certain influence on theologies of religion today. For Levinas, the foundation for ethical behaviour is the radical demand of “the face of the other”. However, the problem for Levinas is how to enter into relation with the other without either dominating or being crushed by it. The feminist critique would point out that for Levinas’ male enlightenment subject, constituted by separation, to enter into relation to the other is a threatening project. By contrast, in a relational ontology, the self is constituted by its relations.

Additionally, feminist experience of being “the other” and reflections on the construction of woman as “other” (“the second sex”) can help deconstructing the “religious other”, and make mutual relation possible. Carter Heyward in her theology of mutual relation identifies “self-absorption”, to be turned in toward oneself, as a detrimental consequence of western individualism. Redemption from this self-absorption comes through God understood as “power in relation”.<sup>22</sup> Heyward understands reality as radically relational, interconnected in such a way that “all parts of the whole are mutually interactive”. “Mutual” is understood metaphysically as well as ethically: everything is interconnected, but we must also struggle against self-absorption to notice and make this mutuality the basis for our existence and acting in the world. God, then, is to be found in this mutual relation: “God *is* the movement that connects us all”.<sup>23</sup> This sacred power of mutual relation can be understood through the Buddhist concept of “dependent co-arising”, as well as through the image of the Trinity: “A Trinitarian faith [...] would never require that people be Christian in order to be saved.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Heyward, *Saving Jesus*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 73.

Carter Heyward understands self-absorption as not only concerning the individual him/herself, but also one's family, property, race, class, gender and religion. By extension then, we can understand Christianity as a self-absorbed religion, as long as it does not understand itself in relation to other religious traditions. Only by realising our interconnectedness with people of other faiths can we develop mutual relations, which will bring us closer to the mystery of God as "power in relation".

### **Marginality**

In the women's interfaith events I studied for my dissertation, marginality was a significant feature which was often commented upon. The women operated from the supposition that women are marginal in religious traditions; the very impetus for the events was a reaction to the fact that women are marginalised in interfaith dialogue so that they have not had much impact on malestream interfaith dialogue. At the same time, marginality was turned into an asset. "The margins is a good place for dialogue" said Diana Eck, commenting upon the WCC women's interfaith consultation in 1988, "the reach is not so far, the investment in centrist positions is not so great".<sup>25</sup>

Standpoint epistemology has been a contested issue in feminist theory. It has been questioned whether the marginalised perspective is a truer, or better perspective, why should a marginalised perspective be privileged? I would, however, like to exclude the question of standpoint epistemology from my reflections on marginality. For me, Diana Eck's words "the reach is not so far", conflate the image of the margin with that of the border or boundary. If we consider what happens at borders of cultures, this opens up exciting perspectives which can also be applied to religions..

Contemporary cultural theory increasingly puts a focus on what happens at the boundaries of culture, arguing that this is where culture is shaped and renewed through interaction with surrounding cultures. Cultures are not seen as sharply bounded, self-contained units, but as fluid and constantly changing. In this process of change, a culture is held together, not by sharp boundaries or consensus, but by a common focus of engagement, in the struggle over the meaning and place of cultural elements. In this understanding, cultural elements can cross boundaries without jeopardizing the distinctiveness of a culture. Cultural identity is then constituted by the way these elements are to be

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<sup>25</sup> Diana Eck, "Moderator's Report", in: *Current Dialogue* 16 (1989), 20.

appropriated or resisted within the culture. This is an interrelational, hybrid understanding of cultural identity.

Kathryn Tanner has applied this to Christian identity, as it is shaped by its interaction with the surrounding culture. Christian identity is not constituted by sharp borders, as proponents of neoliberal theology claim. Instead, argues Tanner, the boundary is “one of use that allows Christian identity to be essentially impure and mixed, the identity of a hybrid that always shares cultural forms with its wider host culture and other religions (notably Judaism). [...] Christianity is a hybrid through and through; nothing need be exempted out of fear that the distinctiveness of Christianity must otherwise be lost. Moreover – and most significantly – [...] the distinctiveness of a Christian way of life is not so much formed *by* the boundary as *at* it; Christian distinctiveness is something that emerges in the very processes occurring at the boundary, processes that construct a distinctive identity for Christian social practices through the distinctive use of cultural material shared with others”.<sup>26</sup>

Tanner’s argument is that Christian tradition is not fixed, but can and must change as the surrounding culture changes. Christian practices change, but are held together by “the common reference to the God to whom they all hope effectively to witness”<sup>27</sup> and new practices can not only be found within the tradition, but also from outside it. Such borrowed elements should not, argues Tanner, “always be subordinated to Christian claims; they should be permitted, instead, to shake them up where necessary.”<sup>28</sup>

Tanner’s use of cultural theory could also be applied to how Christian theology is developed in the interaction with other religious traditions. If the word “border” is allowed to retain something of its geographical meaning, then religious traditions might be understood as countries, with capitals in the middle – which is the place of established theology, authorized scriptures and liturgies, guarded by the religious dignitaries – and a borderland, where people, as often happens in a borderland, have more in common with those living on the other side of the border than with those in the capital, where languages merge and all kinds of more or less legal transactions take place. The capital could equal what in religious studies is called “the great tradition”, or “religion as

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<sup>26</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture. A New agenda for Theology* (Augsburg Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1997), 114-115.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

prescribed”, and the borderland as “the little tradition”, or “religion as practised”. Alternatively, the capital might equal orthodoxy and the borders new, still marginal(ized) developments in theology, such as feminist theology, creation theology or queer theology. Then the margins become a creative space, the place where religious change takes place, where religious identity is shaped, and the dialogue that goes on there would point the way forward, whereas in the capitals it would just reify old patterns.

### **“Religion as practised” and the messiness of actual existence**

Finally, feminist theology should take more account of “religion as practised”, and work in an interdisciplinary way with anthropology and religious studies. From the beginning, “women’s experiences” and “theology of lived life” have been the starting points of feminist theology. However, with the increasing suspicion against the notion of women’s experience, it has withdrawn to theoretical discussions, at least in the West. Necessary as this development has been, maybe it is time to return to the experiential method, but in a new way. Besides working from personal experience, we could draw on the work of feminist anthropologists, who have studied how women live their faith in everyday life. Susan Sered’s work on Jewish women as “ritual experts” and religions dominated by women are examples of such sources of knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

Feminist theologians in the Third world have concerned themselves more with ordinary women’s religious practices. The Korean interest in shamanism is a case in point. There is sometimes a tendency to romanticise “people’s religion”, but with the insights of anthropology and religious studies, the destructive sides of religion as practised can be criticised, just as are those of institutional religion, while the life-giving practices can be a source of inspiration. The point, however, is not so much to pass judgements as to create a theology of religion that takes account of the religion that real people actually practice, in all its messiness.

“Messiness” is another concept that appears in feminist theology, not least in its reflection on religious diversity. In Asia, says Chung Hyun Kyung, “there is a messy and fluid process of cross-permeation among the different religions.”<sup>30</sup> In the same vein, Marjorie Suchocki warns that we should not seek

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<sup>29</sup> Susan Starr Sered, *Women as Ritual Experts: The Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem* (Oxford University Press: New York 1992); *Priestess, Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women* (Oxford University Press: New York 1994).

<sup>30</sup> Chung Hyun Kyung: “The Wisdom of Mothers Knows No Boundaries”, in: *Women’s perspectives* (WCC Gospel and Culture Series: Geneva 1996), 31.

to control life through too clear definitions: “They are useful abstractions from the messiness of lived experience that leave the fullness of that experience behind. [...] Seeing the world through concepts, we become blind to whatever does not fit into our conceptual scheme.”<sup>31</sup> The implications for a theology of religions then, is that if God is not to be found in conceptual systems, “but in the messiness of evolutionary life, the expressions of this God, and the ultimacy thus represented, will necessarily be pluralistic.”<sup>32</sup>

A feminist theology of religions should then not only concern itself with “religion as prescribed”, but with “religion as practised”, lived faith. It should make use of the insights of feminist theology concerning the hermeneutics of suspicion, relationality, and difference, as well as feminist reflection upon Christology, soteriology and other areas of “classical” dogmatics – and above all, it should dare to dwell on the margins, in the borderland where everything is in flux, and in a creative state of becoming. In this way, it can challenge malestream theology of religions as well as lingering exclusivist and supremacist tendencies within feminist theology.

Feministische Theologie hat bislang keinen großen Einfluß auf die Theologie der Religionen ausgeübt. Sie hat auch kaum auf die Fragen der Theologie der Religionen reagiert. Außerdem besteht kaum ein ernst zu nehmender Austausch zwischen feministischen Praktikerinnen im interreligiösen Dialog und feministischen Theologinnen. Dieser Beitrag legt dar, dass Einsichten der feministischen Theologie, insbesondere die Hermeneutik des Verdachts sowie die Diskurse über Relationalität und Differenz, notwendige Beiträge zur Theologie der Religionen liefern können. Konkret kann feministische Theologie die Theologie der Religionen herausfordern, sich an die Ränder der religiösen Traditionen zu begeben, wo sich Traditionen im kreativen Grenzbereich verändern und das „Chaos realer Existenz“ greifbar wird.

Hasta ahora, la teología feminista no ha tenido gran influencia en la teología de las religiones. Y tampoco ha respondido a las cuestiones de la teología de las religiones. Además, hay una grave falta de comunicación entre las practicantes del diálogo interreligioso y las teólogas feministas. En este artículo se sostiene que la teología feminista puede ofrecer una importante contribución a la teología de las religiones a través de cómo percibe la hermenéutica de la sospecha, el discurso de relacionalidad y diferencia. En especial, la teología feminista puede desafiar a la teología

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<sup>31</sup> Marjorie Suchocki, *Divinity and Diversity. A Christian Affirmation of Religious Pluralism* (Abingdon Press: Nashville 2003), 41.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

de las religiones para que se sitúe en los márgenes de las tradiciones religiosas, en una zona fronteriza creativa en la que cambian las tradiciones y se admite el “caos de la existencia real”.

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