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Philosophy and Canon Law 1, 67-83

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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New Feminism as a Response to the Modern Crisis of Community*

Abstract: The article presents and analyzes a number of chosen major arguments of the New Feminists which base their theories on John Paul II's theological anthropology of sexuality and theology of woman. The New Feminism is a kind of personalist humanism which centers its attention on the human person realizing his or her nature within relations of personal self-giving. Assumptions of male and female equality, difference, and complementarity together with the specific female sensitivity towards the human and relationships form the basis for the New Feminist theoretical argumentation and practical postulates. The New Feminism is also a theologically inspired social response to the modern crisis of community and the deficit of affirmation of values such as person or human relations. By offering a serious correction or completion of the modern perspective of freedom and independence with its vision of fulfillment of freedom by love, the New Feminism seems to constitute a necessary kind of social philosophy which does not try to substitute the one-sided concept of freedom with any equally one-sided view of the social bond or addiction to others, but it rather attempts at the reconciliation of values which seem to be complementary.

Keywords: New Feminism, person, community, woman, man, individualism, modernity, freedom, love

* This is a slightly modified English version of the text published in Polish as “Nowy feminizm jako odpowiedź na nowożytny kryzys wspólnotowości,” in *Kobieta w Kościele i w społeczeństwie*, ed. Andrzej Pastwa. *Studia i Materiały Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach*, nr 78 (series ed. Fr. Bogdan Biela) (Katowice: Księgarnia św. Jacka, 2014), 15–28. More on the analysis of the New Feminism within a broader context of other feminist currents and within the background of the papal development of the concept of reconciliation, the reader can find in my book published in Polish entitled *Skandal i ekstaza. Nowy Feminizm na tle koncepcji pojednania według Jana Pawła II* [Scandal and Ecstasy. The New Feminism within the Background of the Concept of Reconciliation According to John Paul II] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2015).

We can say that sociology as a modern science was formed as an attempt to analytically approach the problem of the critical state of various types of social bonds. Within this discipline there even have been several trends particularly focused on reflection dedicated to the crisis of community. Naturally, they usually developed in relation to specific crisis waves of social changes. For example, the end of the decade of the seventies of the twentieth century in Western societies was the time of apparent weakening of social ties and increasingly deepening crisis of community widely understood. Sociologists and social philosophers of that time began to more and more clearly recognize and analyze the now widespread manifestations of withdrawal of individuals from various forms of participation in the public sphere and the decline in interest in social life, including the loss of involvement in the life of local communities. While the sociological researchers have tried to accurately grasp these phenomena, including the statistics such as the declining readership of newspapers or participation in political elections, many philosophical analysts tried to investigate the root causes of the observed changes.

Perhaps the deepest search of the roots of the crisis of community within the history of ideas has been accomplished by Alasdair MacIntyre,¹ who saw the beginnings of individualistic thinking at the dawn of modernity. In his view, the end of the Middle Ages brought an end to the teleological thinking, that is, thinking in terms of a common final goal. The common goal implied a common concept of tradition, virtues, and practices to achieve virtues, as well as assumed thinking and acting in terms of community as a certain social whole combined by origin and purpose. Meanwhile, the modern era began as the age of doubt and resignation from the assumption of the existence of perspective that combines people in such a deep sense. On the one hand, the end of teleological thinking can be connected with the consequence of the so-called atomization of modern societies and with the development of individualistically based systems of liberal democracy in politics and capitalism in economy. On the other hand, the end of a community perspective can be associated with totalitarian attempts to cope with the extremes of individualism, that is, the attempts to establish social wholes in ways which were top-down, imposed, artificial, and suppressing the freedom of individuals. Analyses of these issues led Western philosophers and social theorists to formulate a series of standpoints referred to under the name of communitarianism, because they have been united by their interest the community dimension lost somewhere during the development of modern societies. At the same time, they wanted to clearly separate the idea or practice of community from totalitarian projects. In my opinion, the most interesting analysis within this trend is presented by MacIntyre, though he dis-

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

tanced himself clearly from the banner of communitarianism. In a number of publications, MacIntyre demonstrated the attractiveness and superiority of the premodern realism, in comparison with the Enlightenment or the Nietzschean traditions, and accused both of the latter of the inadequate questioning of the fact of dependence of rational thinking and existence on tradition, community, realization of virtues, continuity of thinking, and acting within the framework of assumptions about the order of being and so on.

In a way, analogous arguments were presented by Servais Pinckaers OP in his book *The Sources of Christian Ethics*,² where he showed the modern departure from the Thomistic realism towards Ockham's nominalism in the form of domination of the subjective will over the objective reason, and the preference of constructed rules over the given order of being, etc. What unites these perspectives, critical of the development of modernity, is the diagnosis of the loss of categories of objective good, the common good, a good that is given rather than merely constructed by individuals, and a good as a component of being, which is a gift pre-existing an individual. The loss concerns also the perspective of such a relation between individuals which would not be the exclusive product of individuals, but which would be given to them regardless of their will, in the context of beings in which individuals happen to live. (An example of late modern thinking is the modern constructivist approach to sex and gender, which implies freedom and the possibility of its broad selection and formation.) To put it briefly, realism has been supplanted by nominalism, and organicism by individualism. The nineteenth-century sociological theory of Ferdinand Tönnies³ pictured it as a transition from community to association/society, that is, from communities as entities given by nature to associations as created deliberately by the will of individuals. However, Tönnies and many other sociologists emphasized that both community and association are just two faces of the same reality; the two mixed and always coexisting aspects of human relationships. Modern communitarians, especially those among them who are sociologists, also generally do not even allege that the communities are dead, but identify their state of weakness and try to show desirable ways to strengthen them or rebuild in balance with the development of associations and without hindering the autonomy of individuals.⁴ It could, therefore, be presumed that their position is not entirely nominalist, yet it seems that MacIntyre's or Pinckaers's theses are closer to the truth about the history of ideas, that is, that modernity or at least the Western part of humanity has chosen the way of nominalism and individual-

² Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

³ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, trans. Charles P. Loomis (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1957).

⁴ Cf. e.g. Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule. Community and Morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

ism, treating traditional community, for example families, as being only socially constructed, rather than given and based on nature.⁵ That is why any appeals made by sociologists to strengthen communities cannot be effective, as they do not call for a change in the dominant perspective of isolated individuals and only artificially and temporarily constructed relations in the face of fundamentally diverse or even radically conflicting final ends (if at all we can allow any meaningful talk about any final end).

It seems that in this situation there is no solution either, theoretical or practical, hence there is no point in the dialogue and search for a common position, or there is a great need for a specific cut of this Gordian knot of disputes by recourse to the practice, life, being, person, and last but not least, to communities which, despite their tendency to decay, somehow still continue to exist today. Basically, maybe one of the most interesting themes of communitarian theories is their common point that the problems which seem to be irresolvable in theory are in fact often resolvable in concrete practical local communities. The pure fact of persistent existence of some kinds of communities in spite of the adverse climate of domination of the individualistic language should raise certain hopes and should be read as a sign of mistake on the part of individualistic thinking. The very fact of continuous existence of many communities, however, does not make communitarians draw an adequate enough conclusion about the deeply social nature of human beings, which makes individualistic perspective inadequate, and about the existence of a certain order in nature, an order of being given to man, including the relational nature of human existence.

In a sense, the cut of the Gordian knot of modern individualism is not so much accomplished by, let us say, only half-communitarian communitarianism, but by an effective appeal to Christian anthropology that is nowadays undertaken by the New Feminism.⁶ It is the kind of standpoint promoting femininity that was inspired by the theology of the body according to John Paul II and the theology of woman and the relationship between man and woman based on equality, difference, and complementarity. The New Feminism is represented by Michele M. Schumacher, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Marguerite Léna, Beatriz Vollmer Coles, Mary Rousseau, or Janne Haaland Matlary, among others. It is a position of personalistic humanism, at the center of which is the value of the human person realizing oneself in relations of self-giving for others. The inspiration came from John Paul II who called for creating a new feminism and his theological anthropology concerning the sexual differences analyzed on the basis of the biblical vision. However, the choice of this anthro-

⁵ Very meaningful is the fact that the modern understanding of nature has been deprived of its metaphysical sense, being limited to the biological understanding.

⁶ I use capital letters in order to refer precisely to the feminism inspired by John Paul II, as well as to differentiate it from other new feminisms in the history of development of the feminist thought and movement.

pology as the basis for the orientation of the New Feminism was motivated by its resonance with the experience of women and their recognition of their nature focused on a specific relationship with the child during pregnancy, as well as the preliminary to this relationship, namely the fact of being a woman in relation to man. The latter relationship in the context of the theology of the body has been attributed the highest rank of importance because “*man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning.*”⁷ This particular relationship of exclusive, total, fertile, and mutual self-giving of spouses alludes to a special resemblance to the close community constituted by the Holy Trinity. The sense of creation of man and woman lies in approximating the experience of the Trinity to human beings through the union of man and woman. Thus, the bond between the Divine Persons could be somehow, though imperfectly, felt by people. This bond would then connect Christ to the Church in the new covenant of love performed through the Incarnation and Redemption. The pope took up and developed this topic first in the Wednesday audience catecheses devoted to the theology of the body and later in the apostolic letter on women.

The fact that man ‘created as man and woman’ is the image of God means not only that each of them individually is like God, as a rational and free being. It also means that man and woman, created as a ‘unity of the two’ in their common humanity, are called to live in a communion of love, and in this way to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God, through which the Three Persons love each other in the intimate mystery of the one divine life. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God through the unity of the divinity, exist as persons through the inscrutable divine relationship. Only in this way can we understand the truth that God in himself is love. (cf. 1 Jn 4:16) (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7)⁸

In turn, in the Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* published in 1995 the pope urged women to create a new feminism

which rejects the temptation of imitating models of ‘male domination,’ in order to acknowledge and affirm the true genius of women in every aspect of the life of society, and overcome all discrimination, violence, and exploitation. [...] You are called to bear witness to the meaning of genuine love, of that gift of self and of that acceptance of others which are present in a special way in

⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006) (9:3), 163 [Emphasis in all citations present in the original].

⁸ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, accessed 01.10.2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html. Hereafter as *Mulieris Dignitatem*.

the relationship of husband and wife, but which ought also to be at the heart of every other interpersonal relationship. [...] A mother welcomes and carries in herself another human being, enabling it to grow inside her, giving it room, respecting it in its otherness. Women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity which comes from being a person and not from other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health. (*Evangelium vitae*, 99)

In both documents it is clear that the New Feminism in the vision of John Paul II is not so much and not just a set of demands for legitimate advocacy of the equality of women to men in every sphere of social life in the name of defending the dignity of women,⁹ but also, and perhaps above all, a real attempt to counter the modern crisis of community. Creation of woman next to man as well as her nature itself, which reminds man of his call to personal relation, and the participation of the exceptional woman, namely the Mother of God, in the mission of Redemption (though in its uniqueness constituting a reminder of the beginning of creation and a new beginning of humanity, and a model for all), make men and women aware that even after the original sin the humanity constitutes a certain whole unity and that God invites every person to a love relationship with Him and our neighbors. By this argument the just claim to stand up for equal rights for women as persons, citizens, workers, female consumers, etc. is elevated to a higher level by means of grasping the basis and sense of equality, namely, equal dignity as persons whose simultaneous separateness and difference from a man is to remind him of the deeply relational, social, and loving nature of every human being. Female body, psyche, natural potential, and experience, therefore, demand recognition as they were previously under-appreciated, and because they have fundamental importance for society, especially in times of long already and well sociologically described crisis of social ties, group identity, and concern for others, and the deepening of the different processes of alienation and exclusion. The New Feminism is thus an interesting antidote to the philosophy and practice of individualism, as well as the real appreciation of corporeality neglected since the time of the Cartesian emphasis put on mentality.

What is more, the theological ground of the New Feminism delves even deeper, because an important feature of the female relatedness, which is receiving love in order to respond with love, is attributed to people in general and the Church as a whole: "In the Church every human being—male and female—is

⁹ See e.g. Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* 10, 13, 14, 29; Letter to Women *A ciascuna di voi* 3, 4; Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 51; Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, 99; Message for the 28th World Day of Peace "Women Teachers of Peace" 1995, 9, 11; Letter to the Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations, 5–9; Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 57; Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 22–24.

the 'Bride,' in that he or she accepts the gift of the love of Christ the Redeemer, and seeks to respond to it with the gift of his or her own person" (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 25). John Paul II thus links women's relatedness with its certain derivative character in the initiative of loving. A cry of delight expressed by the biblical Adam is a symbol of such a specific "fertilization" of Eve to love. On the other hand, the creation of Eve as second to Adam may show her existence as someone related to Adam (and, of course, to God) from the beginning. Thus, it may present her full awareness of what a person needs to meet his or her essence. Adam had to wait for Eve in order to find it out. Of course, the creation of man should be read in manifold richness of interpretation, including the one according to which the word 'Adam' does not apply only to man (male) but rather a human being in general. However, the latter interpretation does not make the former one invalid. It would appear that both interpretations, just as the two narratives of Genesis, can present to us a different, though equally important and complementary aspect of the truth about being human. After all, Adam (a male human being and just a human being) somehow senses the lack of a person equal to him even before the creation of such a person. The woman may not have to search long for this kind of meaning which can be found only in a relationship with another human, especially man in her case. She has a man with his delight over her right in front of her eyes since the beginning of her existence. And from the very beginning she is open to his love, receptive, and responsive: she receives and gives response.

In his Wednesday audiences the pope notices a still different motive of Adam's receptivity. Now Eve is a gift given by God to Adam, so just as Eve accepts the love of Adam (the initiative appears to be on his side), she constitutes the gift for him from God's initiative, while the first recipient is the man (the male human)! Receptivity and initiative, therefore, are mutually intertwined, although the initiative on the side of a woman is more the initiative of God and nature, while within the order of human consciousness and will, it seems to be in some sense more secondary to the male initiative. It is important that this game of mutual gift exchange of selves, according to the pope, does not have significance limited only to the intimate relationship of love between two people.

When we say that the woman is the one who receives love in order to love in return, this refers not only or above all to the specific spousal relationship of marriage. It means something more universal, based on the very fact of her being a woman within all the interpersonal relationships which, in the most varied ways, shape society and structure the interaction between all persons—men and women. (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 29)

The exchange of personal gifts thus forms a valuable background for understanding what women rightly claim as their rights. From the depths of theology

of the Book of Genesis the pope speaks up for the women's rights not only to be tolerated, or even only respected, but to be loved. Her person and her dignity demand love and the respect for her rights flowing therefrom, not the rights taken from individualistically understood autonomy of isolated individuals. By her mere existence a woman reminds that people should live with others and for others.

A clear reminder of this is femininity connoting openness to the fruit of love between the two, namely a child. This time it is not the man who physically receives a person, but he has to learn the receptivity towards a child from the woman, and in addition he cannot at all experience such a unique relationship which is available only to mother during pregnancy.

In the light of the 'beginning,' the mother accepts and loves as a person the child she is carrying in her womb. This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings—not only towards her own child, but every human being—which profoundly marks the woman's personality. It is commonly thought that *women* are more capable than men of paying attention *to another person*, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more. The man—even with all his sharing in parenthood—always remains 'outside' the process of pregnancy and the baby's birth; in many ways he has to *learn* his own '*fatherhood*' *from the mother*. (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 18)

Quite often one hears the criticism of the pope's term "genius of women" in connection with accusations of alleged vagueness of the term. Well, it seems that this criticism is unjustified and may indicate too cursory reading of the papal texts. Like in the case of the previous quotation, hence also in the following one, the meaning of that term can be seen as located precisely in drawing attention to women's sense of the value of a person. This sensitivity understood as putting people at the center of other values could be named as the feminine humanism and the message would probably encounter a more favorable reception, but the essence of it was basically already the same when the pope wrote that "[...] our time in particular *awaits the manifestation* of that 'genius' which belongs to women, and which can ensure sensitivity for human beings in every circumstance: because they are human!" (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 30). At the same time, the pope does not claim that man is deprived of this sensitivity or relieved of the responsibility for such an organization of the world that would suit the value of humans. The term only indicates the manifestations of sensitivity to the value of the human person which come both from nature and from women's experiences, while it calls both on women and men equally to develop their sensitivity in practice and to work together on such a shape of society which would be worthy of the human being. In the pope's view, women "[...] assume, together with men, *a common responsibility for the destiny of humanity* [...]"

(*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 31). One of the New Feminists, Marguerite Léna, writes as follows: "It is often thanks to the woman, who has sometimes been defined as 'being for others,' that the man becomes aware of this same vocation of 'being for others,' which he tries to forget in his striving for self-sufficiency."¹⁰ The author of these words does not radically separate or oppose the two ways of being human. On the contrary, Léna argues that man and woman have the same vocation, although the woman is more aware of it and she raises this awareness in man, which I guess is indeed well cast in the symbolism of the Book of Genesis, and which is often confirmed by the experience of women not only in family relationships but also in the public sphere. Another New Feminist, Helen M. Alvaré, links women's relationality with childbirth, which according to her can foster the development of a broader and deeper interpretation of human freedom: "As the members of the human race who bear the next generation, who have a special relationship with new life, we must never forget that all freedom is relational."¹¹ Precisely this characterization of freedom as relational is very important because it is absolutely necessary in modernity due to the fact that in times of thinking formed under the influence of William of Ockham and the later galaxy of political philosophers of the Enlightenment, freedom has been generally understood as the negative freedom, that is, as *freedom from*, not *freedom to*, or as the freedom to break out of the network of relationships and assigned roles with their social context, as an expression of independent, autonomous subject that is not determined by anything external to oneself.

It is not my intention to say that all modern thought stands on such grounds interpreting freedom, but I think that such position is more or less consistently dominant in modernity, including late modernity or postmodernity. That is why communitarians so strongly criticized this ideal, referring to the concept of freedom to act within the wider communities and with the sense of responsibility for them. But the strongest alternative to autonomously and individualistically understood freedom is love, and the most attractive argument is the one referring to practical and common experience. John Paul II expressed this vividly in his homily delivered on Jasna Góra during his first papal pilgrimage to Poland in 1979: "The fulfillment of freedom is love. The essence of love consists in belonging, and belonging means not to be free, or rather, to be free in a mature way. [...] This not-being-free in love never feels like slavery. Mother who is tied up with a sick child does not feel this as bondage but as the affirmation of her

¹⁰ Marguerite Léna, "A Creative Difference: Educating Women," in *Women in Christ. Toward a New Feminism*, ed. Michele M. Schumacher (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 322.

¹¹ Helen M. Alvaré, "A New Feminism," accessed March 22, 2012, <http://mural.uv.es/nocermo/alvare.htm>. (originally published in *Liguorian*, May 1997).

freedom, as its fulfillment! Then she is the most free!”¹² Of course the pope did not underestimate the general sense of tremendous fatigue and limitations felt by women in terms of their sleep deprivation, physical and psychological effort, tense use of time, space, restricted possibilities of development outside the home, etc. However, he draws attention to the fact that, despite these experiences, and thanks to the visible consequences of her work with a new human person, a woman may see deeper and farther, and often feels in a deeper way, over and above the perspective of these *ad hoc* limitations, in the direction of *personal* effects of her activity. The mother then shows the way for the father and the rest of society about the fact that certain sacrifice of *freedom from*, which does not harm her dignity, brings the fulfillment of *freedom to*, that is, freedom to love.

A number of New Feminist statements confirm this position. An example may come from Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who writes as follows: “As the bearers of life, women, including those who never bear a child, possess a special affinity for connection and, consequently, potentially embody a special gift for connection.”¹³ It is worth to pay attention to two issues, while considering this typical for New Feminists’ standpoint. First, nature is perceived here as a gift and a call for its full realization, rather than as full determination and limitation or enslavement, which can be an element of some theories of traditional feminism. Second, it is precisely this nature which contains the message that persons from their beginnings exist in relationships and develop, as well as realize themselves only through relationships. The modern concept of freedom, which in principle we “breathe” nowadays, because of its commonality in the public space of the Western societies, even if someone is far from the views of the mainstream, does not appreciate what is given from nature. Perhaps even more likely is the standpoint which treats nature as an object of contestation in order to win more area for freedom and self-determination. That is why the theses proposed by New Feminists, indeed somewhat classical and even banal, are in fact not banal at all in the context of the aforementioned universal understanding of freedom in modernity. In a sense, the New Feminism, starting this time not only with metaphysical theoretizing, but, above all, with the phenomenologically grasped experience of women, constitutes a real party contesting modernity and proposing its general rescue in the face of its deepening crises.

The origins of modernity are associated with the development of humanism, that is, with recognizing humans as subjects of the utmost importance and holders of gradually growing numbers of particular rights. At the same time, the

¹² John Paul II, Homilia wygłoszona w czasie Mszy świętej na Jasnej Górze, 4.06.1979, in *Musicie być mocni. I Pielgrzymka Jana Pawła II do Polski 2–10 czerwca 1979*. Warszawa: Polskie Radio, 2005. CD recording (Transl. A.G.).

¹³ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Equality, Difference, and the Practical Problems of a New Feminism, in *Women in Christ*,” 307.

decay or even disappearance of strong relationships with a number of other factors allowed the emergence of totalitarian systems, which have depreciated humans totally. An important exemplary factor was the development of utilitarian philosophy whose extreme practical effects, directed against persons and whole ethnic or national groups, could have been observed in the death camps and the use of parts of human bodies as materials for the economy of the invading nations. Of course, humanistic thinking *per se* is not responsible for the crimes of totalitarian systems, but it is a huge paradox of modernity that such anti-human systems were created in theoretically arch-humanist times. The result of the shock of the Second World War was the establishment of international laws defending the human dignity, yet, some years later, the social reality brought new challenges, for example in the form of genetic experiments with which humanity is no longer careful enough to effectively defend the dignity of the person.

John Paul II, therefore, strongly emphasized the need for admission of the voice of women, whose sensitivity to the persons could prove to be valuable and even necessary in order to establish their protection. The New Feminists responded to the pope's call positively and that is why the feminism promoted by them represents the personalist kind of humanism and personalist feminism emerging from it, according to Sr. Prudence Allen.¹⁴ That is because they want to defend the human dignity not by utilitarian justification, as they claim that a person is a good in him/herself. In turn, Janne Haaland Matlary writes that a woman's point of view in the house, the family, politics, and professional work sets the proportions properly when it assigns the central place to the human person and when it focuses on the common with men concern for human welfare.¹⁵

However, to effectively articulate personal and social concern for others, one needs to be able to successfully go beyond one's focus on oneself, which is well known to people taking care of children, often but not only mothers and good teachers. It is also a well known mechanism by which the child must first receive love in order to love others in return, while various deficiencies of attention, care, and love require serious solutions in the future. Only a human convinced of one's worth and one's ability to be loved, is able to bestow respect and love on others. In other words, one is then free enough to be able to give. We can say that one fulfills one's freedom as the freedom from enclosure and freedom to go out of oneself.¹⁶ Michele M. Schumacher transfers it onto the ground of her feminist reflections and analyzes it in the context of liberation from sin which was given by Christ: "The authentically liberated woman is [...] one who

¹⁴ Sr. Prudence Allen, "Can Feminism Be a Humanism?," in *Women in Christ*, 251–84.

¹⁵ Janne Haaland Matlary, *Nowy feminizm. Kobieta i świat wartości*, trans. Małgorzata Rajtaczak (Poznań: W drodze, 2000).

¹⁶ Cf. the so-called law of ecstasy according to Karol Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*, vol. I. Człowiek i Moralność, ed. Tadeusz Styczeń et al. (Lublin: TN KUL, 1982), 112.

experiences herself as eternally loved and forgiven, and thus as authentically free.¹⁷ It is also worth to notice that because every human being is able to raise one's awareness of God's love and liberation, these words concerning women in principle apply to everyone. However, because it was women within feminism who focused on the question of liberation, the New Feminists are using this as an opportunity to raise awareness of men that they must also first receive love in order to become free enough to love. Towards God and other people, men, just like women, are above all receivers of others' love and their debtors, and this fact obliges them to acknowledge these rich series of links and interpersonal bonds of love, as well as to express gratitude which should manifest itself also in deeds.

A similar argument of gratitude to the communities, starting from the family community, is a motive present also in the aforementioned communitarian theories, but it does not seem to be presented in such an attractive and concrete form as in New Feminist writings. In my opinion, it is crucial that women speak from the depths of their own experiences of maternity or at least from the depths of their potential maternity in the biological sense and quite often in a spiritual sense. Additionally, they do not hesitate to use the heavily loaded word "love," so wrongly relegated to the realm of private intimate relationship by male philosophers of modernity, while in public they left as legitimate only individual rights and interests, as well as associational contracts. The New Feminists criticize the culture of individualism and openly praise the Catholic social teaching together with the John Paul II's argumentation about women's acute consciousness of human relatedness. What, in my opinion, makes the New Feminists' position more attractive than the communitarians' standpoint is a clear demonstration that loving someone, understood as desiring someone's good recognized by sincere effort of looking for truth, and confirmed in deeds, is actually a necessary condition of self-fulfillment. Therefore, the proper self-love is not displaced here, but realized fully. Its deep character is simply shown to be connected with the love of others and the necessity of going out of oneself (literally, in *ecstasy*). One's realization, therefore, requires resignation from oneself in order to love others; however, the side effect of this would actually and paradoxically produce finding oneself and one's greatest good. This argumentation comes from the book by Mary Rousseau,¹⁸ though it is clear that her theory of love is a return to classical concept present in Thomistic anthropology. Love concerns wishing good for people (the others and oneself) recognized in the light of objectively existing standards rooted in truth and with the help of the subjective attitude of sincerity. Rousseau goes back to the traditional

¹⁷ Michele M. Schumacher, "An Introduction to a New Feminism," in *Women in Christ*, xii.

¹⁸ Mary F. Rousseau, *Community. The Tie That Binds* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991). The arguments quoted by me henceforth come especially from the following pages: 24–25, 58, 71, 81, 85, 88, 90–93, 98–99, 102, 154, 156.

and premodern understanding of this problem, according to which the objective truth exists and is shared by all, and it is possible to discover it, while goods of particular persons is not ultimately contradictory. Thanks to this, by affirming one human being, we actually affirm all humanity, and we link ourselves with all people and the whole community of being.

The basis of such understanding of community is a common reference to the Truth, which is something that goes beyond the person, that is common to them and prior to their decision to love each other, and therefore independent of the will of individuals. Our subjective fidelity to this standard, namely sincerity to our own best beliefs about it, is the cornerstone of the community, because it is a reference to the external point which is common to us all. Nothing in our similarity, even the basic fact that we are all human beings, would not as effectively link us together, because we could always find serious differences next to similarities, as Rousseau claims. Only a factor transcending us, according to her, can successfully unite us without annihilating differences and make the community more profound. What is important, Rousseau does not say that people need to share the conviction of the existence of God in order to participate in such a strongly understood community (though she identified herself with the Catholic faith and teaching). In her opinion, one needs to believe in the existence of Truth as a common standard which, even if it is not equally perceived and interpreted by people, constantly motivates them to be sincere, that is, living in accordance with their beliefs and the best possible recognition of the truth about them and the world. Therefore one has to assume that the basis of community is not created by people but only sustained by their will. Community exists in the form of a bond with reality transcending persons. This bond creates communality, which is accepted as common by persons through love. A kind of humanism in Mary Rousseau's theory is not based on a vision of man as a sole author of his own world, but rather a co-author, who creates on the basis of what was priorly given to him. His greatness is not thereby diminished, because reception of a gift as a material for creative treatment is not considered with suspicion or depreciation.

Mary Rousseau's argumentation seems to me the most interesting New Feminist (though this name is not present in the book) analogy to the papal theology of the gift, that is, the theology presented by John Paul II, for whom the dominant motif explaining human existence in the world is the fact of being endowed by God. The New Feminists do not only recognize the strong vision of community as possible to implement, but even say that it basically already exists, while it requires our recognition and maintenance. What is more, a certain feminine specificity (but not contrasted radically with the masculine way of existence in the world, and only more clearly visible in women) links the possibility of full realization of community with the manifestation of the human need to open, recognize and embrace what comes from outside

of us in order to endow us. (By this 'something' we can understand truth and reality that we can not endlessly question without simultaneous questioning ourselves.)

The New Feminists do not question the natural differences between sexes and see their creative potential in complementarity. Neither do they oppose men and women on the psychological plane. Instead, they see the differences in the level of awareness of certain features needed by representatives of both sexes to develop their humanity. That is why this new kind of feminism may constitute the prospect of reconciliation between men and women within many areas often perceived as antagonistic, such as roles and spheres of life associated with the sexes. It also contains an attempt at reconciliation of individuals and society because it is a theologically inspired social response to the modern crisis of community and the deficit of affirmation of the values of reality, personal and social life, person, and relationships. By correcting or complementing the modern (and perhaps more masculine?) perspective of freedom as independence with the feminine (because deeply experienced by women) vision of freedom fulfilled through love, the New Feminism appears to be a significant and gravely needed current of social philosophy that is not trying to replace unilaterally interpreted freedom with an equally unilaterally interpreted bond and dependence. On the contrary, by presenting serious arguments about the fulfillment of freedom in the context of interpersonal relationships, it raises hopes that the so far neglected value of dependence will not become an addiction. Prudently, not sentimentally, it seeks to make social ties fertile and fruitful, rather than locking people in cages of underdevelopment, thoughtlessness, or just shallow and external being next to each other. The goal is to have such bonds which create real being together, not just next door, as well as to have bonds motivated by inner desire for the good of persons, not just by a sense of duty caused by external coercion. I presume it is not utopian, since despite the long reign of individualism, communities are still present even in Western societies. And I do not think this is an ungrounded vision, because so far the attitude of doubt in the reality of truth and community has not become more credible or better supported by logical arguments than the attitude of faith in what people received and do receive all the time as life to be fulfilled as a fruitful experience rather than an experiment of a demiurge or a random chance of fate.

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Aneta Gawkowska

Nouveau féminisme comme une réponse à la crise contemporaine de communauté

Résumé

L'article présente et analyse quelques questions choisies parmi celles qui sont les plus importantes et le plus souvent abordées par les représentantes du Nouveau Féminisme fondé sur l'anthropologie théologique de sexualité présentée par Jean-Paul II et sur sa théologie féministe. Le Nouveau Féminisme représente l'humanisme personnaliste au centre duquel se situe la valeur d'une personne qui se réalise en se sacrifiant aux autres. Les présuppositions sur l'égalité, la différence et la complémentarité des femmes et des hommes ainsi que sur une sensibilité singulière des femmes envers les questions relatives à la personne et aux relations sont la base des arguments théoriques et des revendications pratiques du Nouveau Féminisme. Cette optique — au sens plus profond — est aussi une réponse sociale inspirée théologiquement à la crise contemporaine de communauté et au déficit de l'affirmation des valeurs telles que la personne et les relations entre les gens. En corrigeant ou complétant la perspective moderne de la liberté et de l'indépendance à l'aide d'une vision qui permet de réaliser cette liberté grâce à l'amour, le Nouveau Féminisme apparaît comme un courant fort nécessaire de la philosophie sociale qui n'essaye pas de remplacer la notion de liberté interprétée d'une façon unilatérale par un lien ou une dépendance également interprétés unilatéralement, mais tente de concilier des valeurs complémentaires.

Mots clés: Nouveau Féminisme, personne, communauté, femme, homme, individualisme, modernité, liberté, amour

Aneta Gawkowska

Il nuovo femminismo come risposta alla moderna crisi della comunità

Sommario

L'articolo presenta e discute una serie di alcune fra le questioni più importanti sollevate dai rappresentanti del Nuovo Femminismo sulla base dell'antropologia teologica della sessualità esposta da Giovanni Paolo II di sessualità e della sua teologia della donna. Il Nuovo Femminismo è una posizione di un umanesimo personalistico al centro del quale si trova il valore della persona che si realizza nel dare se stesso agli altri. I presupposti sull'uguaglianza, sulla differenza e sulla complementarità tra uomini e donne, e sulle donne particolarmente sensibili a tematiche di persone e di relazioni, sono alla base di argomenti teorici e esigenze pratiche del Nuovo Femminismo. Questa posizione, in senso più profondo è la risposta sociale, di ispirazione teologica, alla crisi moderna della comunità e al deficit di affermazione di valori come quello della persona e delle relazioni interpersonali. Attraverso la correzione o integrazione di una prospettiva moderna di libertà e indipendenza, per soddisfare questa visione di libertà attraverso l'amore, il Nuovo Femminismo appare come una corrente che necessita molto di filosofia sociale, che non cerca di sostituire una libertà interpretata unilateralmente, come se fosse vincolata o dipendente, ma rappresenta un tentativo di riconciliazione dei valori complementari.

Parole chiave: Nuovo Femminismo, persona, comunità, donna, uomo, individualismo, modernità, libertà, amore