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## „Skandal i ekstaza. Nowy Feminizm na tle koncepcji pojednania według Jana Pawła II”, Aneta Gawkowska, Warszawa 2015 : [recenzja]

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Aneta Gawkowska, *Skandal i ekstaza  
Nowy Feminizm na tle koncepcji pojednania  
według Jana Pawła II*, 434 pp. Warszawa:  
Wydawnictwo  
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The author of the book under review is a recognized figure in the milieu of the social sciences. Aneta Gawkowska, Ph.D. hab. in sociology, works at the Chair of Sociology and Anthropology of Custom and Law at the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the University of Warsaw. She published many scientific articles about communitarianism and the book entitled *Taking Community Seriously? Communitarian Critiques of Liberalism* (2011; its earlier Polish version was published in 2004). Her new work *Skandal i ekstaza. Nowy Feminizm na tle koncepcji pojednania według Jana Pawła II* [Scandal and Ecstasy. New Feminism in the Light of the Concept of Reconciliation According to John Paul II] is a continuation of the the author's earlier area of interest. Gawkowska starts with pointing to the component of community which is not captured by the liberal anthropology or social theory. For her, in a sense, the starting point "must be" the community and reconciliation of individuals, often quite differing from one another, such as those described within the New Feminism, where man and woman, differing in quite an important way, only together form the most primary and elementary community, which becomes a matrix of other communities. With this approach, where community creates the framework for individuals, the title of the book comes to be understandable: scandal and ecstasy. Ecstasy refers to the physical unity of what is different, namely man and woman, while scandal comes from the very unity (or union) that goes beyond the individualistic anthropology. One can say that the author not only re-

constructed the position of the New Feminism, that is, the feminism inspired by the teaching of John Paul II, but also collated the anthropological vision that emerges from these analyses with the dominant liberal vision of individuals. While the New Feminism claims the anthropological need of the other, in a way expressing a certain incompleteness of an individual which can only be fulfilled by relations with other people, the contemporary liberalism sees the individual as somehow self-sufficient or even closed to otherness. It is precisely with this position that the author of *Scandal and Ecstasy* argues within the 412 pages of her extensive work.

The book presents the theoretical content of the New Feminism in the context of reconciliation issues as treated in documents and initiatives of John Paul II. The New Feminism is a specific type of a feminist standpoint which was inspired by the pope's theology of woman and his theology of sexuality, better known as theology of the body. (His theological anthropology developed there was largely based on the premises of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, whose communitarian personalism was presented as linked with the relational *imago Dei*.) The concept of reconciliation discussed in the book is combined with the New Feminism through their common, and sociologically important, assumption of the possibility of a deep sense of social unity. This sense of social unity corresponds to the meaning of community in theoretical positions opposite to liberalism. The so-called communitarians analyze social bonds and needs of unity in contemporary times. Similar position can be found in philosophical and theological investigations characteristic for premodern times. Gawkowska conceptualizes the problematics of reconciliation as reuniting (love in the social dimension) in reference to the theoretical background of modern thought about society. At the same time, she creates a synthesis of the theoretical foundations of the papal treatment of reconciliation with the New Feminist vision of social coexistence as an opposition to a pure liberal vision of rootless, self-sufficient, independent individual subject.

Modern theory of society is divided between individualism and collectivism. Modern authors often look for an ideal individual or an ideal of collective body, hence in modern times we see various philosophical projects of emancipation of the individual and many projects of ideal collectivities. Both sides of this inner dialogue between individualism and collectivism criticize the opposite intellectual position. Gawkowska shows these critical arguments in the writings of Georg Simmel, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, or modern social thinkers such as Michael J. Sandel and Charles Taylor. The goal of her book is to show that the real individualism needs "otherness" to fulfill itself. Viewed positioning this way, both theorists of individualism as well as the theorists of collectivism are wrong. It looks like we need a certain type of reconciliation of that position in a new anthropology where the individual is treated as not self-sufficient but largely dependent in many ways on others.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first one discusses the category of reconciliation in the teaching of John Paul II (56 pp.). In the second chapter the

author presents the practices associated with the idea of reconciliation, that is, the reconciliation initiatives during the pontificate of John Paul II (75 pp.). In chapter three Gawkowska presents the New Feminism with its papal sources and inspirations (100 pp.). Chapter four traces the practices connected with the ideas of the New Feminism, so the New Feminism in the writings and initiatives of women themselves (122 pp.). The book is thus a complex structure where it is assumed that there are some theological beliefs, in this case pertaining to the philosophical anthropology and feminism, which have their practical consequences. Indeed, the author presents the order emerging from the theological writings of John Paul II, points to its essential elements, such as the incompleteness of man, his need for social ties and reconciliation, and shows how these elements come to the fore in such an important dimension of human life as the differentiation based on sex. In this way, the author, starting from the theological vision of order goes to the reconstruction of social practices which are a consequence of beliefs held by people. As the Catholic confession has many followers and, moreover, it also significantly affects the followers of other Christian communities, the practical and social impact of Catholic theology in the field of reconciliation and sex relations remains indisputable. The questionable matter may just be its scope. Gawkowska shows some practices inspired by the theological teaching, follows their internal logic, and points to their influence on other social activities. Her book is thus a very successful combination of the theological-metaphysical reconstruction with the reconstruction of the social impact of religious beliefs.

One can argue that religious beliefs are totally asocial, since they concern the sphere of sacrum and they have an individual character. In her book Gawkowska argues in favor of the opposite view. She points out that religious beliefs relate to the metaphysical order, which is not only an object of faith, but it shapes the social practices and contributes to the transformation of the social order in a certain way. It is possible because religious beliefs produce a certain gap between the transcendental and the secular order. The social effect of these beliefs is constituted by a set of practices aimed at transforming the secular world in accordance with the prevailing transcendent vision and the implementation of the elements of this vision to the secular reality. Thus the order of faith produces an ideal for social reality and its point of reference as well as source of evaluation standards.

The result of theoretical research developed in the book is the analysis of the social phenomenon of the New Feminism inspired by Catholic theology. Theological reconstruction of an anthropological order in which individuals are dependent on God and also dependent on one another shows a new model for a society based on bonds. This theological reconstruction shows an ideal model for social changes. It also depicts a source of evaluation of social practices. Gawkowska illustrates that conciliatory and dialogical message may be sent to the contemporary individualistic society through practical activities provided by believers. In

addition, the study explores the importance of existence of such a type of feminism which, in comparison with other currents of feminism, presents a particular vision of reconciliation of sexes and complementarity of masculinity and femininity in the framework of reconciled humanity, together with the reconciled aspects of physicality and consciousness, as well as nature and culture.

It is not possible to enumerate all merits of this book. However, it is worth mentioning its clear language, proficiency in the presentation of theological and sociological matters, precise wording, and clarity of argument. Weaker sides of the work include its excessive amplitude. The reader can sometimes get lost in the maze of details that blur the main axis of the author's argumentation. Regardless of the shortcomings, the work reads very well.

Gawkowska uses theology to reconstruct the ideal model of relations based on reconciliation. She also uses sociology in order to reconstruct the model of relations which could become a model for social practices. Moreover, she tracks how social practices incorporate this model and thus contribute to real social changes. Her method, therefore, consists in tracing the relationship between the ideal and the social practices inspired by this ideal. This book is an extremely interesting piece of work because Gawkowska also reveals a broader meaning of the metaphysical order referred to by the members of society. It should be of interest to researchers in the field of sociological theory, social philosophy, and theology. It shows that the social sciences, despite the necessity of divisions between disciplines, are intrinsically open to analysis of the content presented to all areas of human activity. The book also brings a lot to the feminist debates and it should arouse interest among contemporary feminists. Its author, having completed much work on communitarianism, very smoothly "translates" the theological concepts into the language of contemporary political philosophy such as communitarianism. Thus, she enables a dialogue between the "secular" feminists and those who are religiously inspired. A kind of translation is possible via communitarianism and its terms that are understandable for both sides of the feminist dispute, so both the "secular" feminists and the representatives of the New Feminism. The book may thus be on the reading lists presented in the context of gender studies. Even if its reading does not lead to a general reconciliation, it will show the consequent social practices to which the assumptions and beliefs shared by the New Feminists may lead. Taking into account the scale of influence of Christianity, its impact on the society cannot be disregarded. The book by Aneta Gawkowska perfectly reconstructs this influence and presents it in a language understood by the representatives of other social sciences.

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