

## An image of a liturgy. Explorations in women's studies in liturgical studies, with special reference to the work of Marjorie Procter-Smith\*

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This study – first written in the form of articles for theological journals – is composed of contributions to a construction and a reconstruction of the Christian liturgical tradition. In it, feminist Christian women are subjects of the liturgy. Their emerging liturgical tradition assumes its rightful place.

The *first chapter* describes the Feminist Liturgical Movement in the United States. As a movement for liturgical renewal it is remarkably active and influential. The description of its origin and growth is connected with specific developments in society. These developments include the second wave of feminism and a change in North American speech which has led, in certain areas, to a more inclusive use of language. Significant as well are developments in the field of theology and liturgy, such as the renewal of the liturgy in the wake of Vaticanum II and the birth of feminist theology. It is a starting-point of that theology that the world one lives in and the experiences one undergoes (also the gender-specific experiences) have a profound influence on the way a person does theology. Feminism, particularly religious feminism, is influenced by three intellectual traditions: evangelical Christianity, liberalism (the tradition of the Enlightenment), and communitarian socialism. The several choices and goals within the movement of religious feminism are marked by these traditions. Evangelical feminism has come to maturity notably in the United States where its import is great. The material focus of the Feminist Liturgical Movement implies critique of one-sided forms of liturgy oriented to the world of men. Such androcentric liturgy falls short of what liturgy is meant to be when it erects barriers which hinder the encounter between God and women. A number of centres playing an important role in the movement are presented: the Grail, Women-Church, the Evangelical Women's Caucus, and WomanSpirit. Projects and publications of these centres pass in review.

In two areas the movement is influential: its stamp appears on the churches' policy with respect to the liturgy, and its influence is felt in the academic discipline of liturgical studies. When the larger national churches publish hymnals and books of worship, representatives of the movement serve as advisors or as writers of texts and hymns. In a similar way they have made important contributions to the appearance of *An Inclusive Language Lectionary*, authorized by many national churches in which the prescribed readings in the worship-service have a language which is inclusive. This is true even for the 'God-language' which in various denominations causes feelings to run high. In liturgical studies the movement opens new avenues of enquiry: Who are the agents of the liturgy and who are being excluded? Who are made visible and presented as witnesses to the faith and who receive no mention? Who touches whom in benediction and who or what is denied a blessing? It is themes of this nature which women admit to liturgical studies.

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The emphatic presence of scholars in women studies of liturgy in professional organisations such as the seminar Teaching Feminist Liturgy in the North American Academy of Liturgy, their dissertations, monographs, and articles in professional journals contribute to the development of this field of studies and to the renewal of the churches' liturgical life. In this field of women studies of liturgy Teresa Berger and Marjorie Procter-Smith are the pioneers. They were the first to find words for the problems, goals, and tasks of this new discipline. They have continuously sought for an approach to this field that would be women's own. This they explored and developed. They offer reasons for a critique of androcentrism – if not the key-problem (Berger) then at any rate an important problem (Procter-Smith) – in the liturgy and in the history of the liturgy, in order to break with the exclusion and extreme invisibility of women in the liturgy and in the Christian liturgical tradition. They both submit considerations for the transformation of a liturgical tradition in which women shall have become visible and act as subjects. An example of the possible significance of Northup's 'ritual studies' approach to women studies of liturgy forms the close of the chapter.

Marjorie Procter-Smith (\*1948) is the LeVan Professor of Preaching and Worship at the Perkins School of Theology. At this seminary of the United Methodist Church, which forms part of the Southern Methodist University in Dallas (Texas), she is chairperson of the department of practical theology. The *second chapter* is her professional biography. It focusses on her contribution to the Feminist Liturgical Movement, to the renewal of the liturgy in the North American churches, and to the study of liturgy.

She grows up in Texas. Here she studies theology in a devotional environment which was then strongly influenced by evangelical Christianity: evangelistic preaching, biblicism, and altar-call. This shape of Christianity is common in the Texas churches, as it is in the Seminary of the United Methodist Church where she has been teaching liturgies since 1984. She studies theology at a seminary of the Disciples of Christ. A number of characteristics of this denomination will prove to be of particular importance to her later contribution to liturgical renewal: there is no official order of worship, nor are there rites rooted in tradition. The denomination renounces the authority of credal statements and accepts as a directive the Bible only. It attaches great importance to the concept of the 'priesthood of all believers'. During her study of theology Procter-Smith joins the Episcopal Church USA. She makes this choice when she becomes increasingly fascinated by the study of liturgical practices in the early church. In that same period she rejects the conservative opinions and discriminating liturgical practices of the local church with respect to women. This rejection is but a part of her involvement with the emerging feminist theology. Subsequently she opts for an academic career in liturgies, and not for the Episcopal priesthood to which women had been admitted in 1976.

Almost from the beginning of her career questions important to women have a central place in her liturgical publications. In the USA, at Notre Dame University, she is the first to write a dissertation in the field of women studies of liturgy. It is a study on the position of women among the Shakers, and on the use of feminine and androgynous images of God in that community. Like her doctoral advisors, James F. White and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, she has strong sympathies for a perspective in which liturgy and the search of justice form an unbreakable union. That is also evident in her subsequent involvement with the Liturgy and Social Justice seminar and with the establishment of the Teaching Feminist Liturgy seminar at the North American Academy of Liturgy. In her publications such concepts of Schüssler Fiorenza's as

'remembrance', 'imagining', and 'Women-Church' are made fruitful for women studies of liturgy. In this period she works in an ecumenical catholic environment where the adage of Vaticanum II: the people are the church, plays an important role; it is a thought, according to Procter-Smith, which has yet to be realized by the churches. In the areas of liturgies, Shaker studies, and women studies in religion her dissertation has demonstrated how women studies of liturgy, in academic terms, raises important questions. As the first feminist liturgist, in an article 'Women and Worship' which Davies included in his revised manual on liturgy (1986), she draws the full scope of the Feminist Liturgical Movement and gives voice to the movement's criticism of the churches' current liturgical practice. Her focus is on five issues, the most important of which are the question of inclusive language about humankind and God, and the question whether the traditional structures of Jewish and Christian liturgies have room for women as the equals of men. To correct the one-sidedness and remove the omissions in the traditional remembrance of women, she holds it necessary that a feminist construction and reconstruction of the liturgical tradition be undertaken. This implies, among other things, a relativization of the normativity of liturgical texts. If a Christian liturgy, as the etymology of the word implies, is to become the 'work' of women also, dialogue, remembrance, pluriformity in the liturgy, and the telling of stories about women as stories about God must be given due weight. Her influence on liturgical studies grows because of her attendance at professional conferences and her contributions to professional journals. Her work also influences the liturgical policies of the church. As advisor of national committees and subcommittees on liturgy of the United Methodist Church she uses her specific knowledge to comment on provisional liturgical materials. At the close of the chapter I once more underscore what is so captivating in the work of Procter-Smith.

From the beginning, feminist theology has pleaded for a transformation of the 'God-talk' in theology, which is almost exclusively masculine. The *third chapter* shows how women studies of liturgy, particularly the studies of Marjorie Procter-Smith, have addressed this question. Her argument to change the 'God-talk' opens with a plea to understand liturgical remembrance differently. She refers with approval to the dialogical character of remembrance in the Jewish tradition which remembers women because God remembers them. She urges that the Christian tradition, too, should pay explicit attention to speaking 'in remembrance of her' (cf. Mark 14:9), in such a way that the hard everyday reality of women's lives can be openly discussed, along with their rage and joy and grief about being forgotten. It is in this context that she speaks about 'praying with our eyes open'.

Procter-Smith outlines three solutions proposed in women studies of liturgy to change the androcentric and masculine 'God-talk' in the liturgy: the use of non-sexist language, the use of inclusive language, and the use of emancipatory language in worship. American and Dutch liturgical examples illustrate these solutions. Non-sexist usage of language implies a reduction or avoidance of gender-specific terms when talking about God or human beings. Inclusive usage of language in worship implies that female words for God appear and female personal pronouns are added to balance masculine pronouns when they refer to God. The 'God-talk' is expanded: symmetric images for God make both sexes visible in the language of worship. Procter-Smith herself prefers the third solution: the use of emancipatory language in the liturgy. Not that she completely rejects the first two strategies. She outlines their advantages and limitations. Emancipatory usage of language implies a concrete and specific liturgical language which exposes the injustice committed against women. This usage emphasizes

the cultural diversity of women's lives. The 'God-talk' she proposes has several dimensions. Women, as God's people, as individuals or as part of the congregation or of Women-Church, are 'heard into speech' (Morton). They mould a liturgical language of their own which unites them. The use of this language presupposes that God remembers their lives and struggle, and that God sees them (Hagar). Emancipatory 'God-talk' makes strong and incites to liberating social action. It is a prophetic language which proclaims the eschatological future in the here and now. At the same time it truly expresses the painful experience of the 'not yet'. It gives women room to speak the truth in the liturgy. This approach merits further study.

In order to study the construction of the Christian liturgical tradition and its reconstruction for the sake of women, Berger employs the concept 'liturgical inculturation' and Procter-Smith the concept 'appropriation'. The *fourth chapter* presents their theoretical researches.

Elaborating on these concepts, Berger and Procter-Smith enter the wide field of liturgical inculturation which was mapped out by Post. His critical-normative matrix of investigation has room for both concepts. In it he distinguishes four domains of 'qualitative interference': liturgy and culture, primary and secondary sources, appellation and appropriation, and present and past. The field of liturgical inculturation can thus be reached by several roads. Berger enters along the road of liturgy and culture, Procter-Smith chooses the gate of naming and appropriation. En route they come to ask similar questions, to have similar experiences, and to gain related results.

Further enquiry into the concept of liturgical inculturation owes much to Lukken. Berger follows Post and Lukken in pointing to the reciprocal movement within the concept. The first movement touches upon the way faith and life receive new forms from the context of a specific culture; the second touches upon the way the Gospel gives a new form to a specific culture. The process of liturgical inculturation is thus both a dynamic relation and a critical interaction between culture and Gospel. To Berger the Feminist Liturgical Movement with its liturgical practice is a specific culture, in the sense described above. She names a number of characteristics of that liturgical practice which make up its identity. Women are the creators and designers of liturgy. It is their dignity which is emphasized. Their celebrations are egalitarian and show an intense preference of symbols. There is room for remembrance (*anamnesis*) of women by women, and on their behalf. Theological concepts are revised or corrected with a view to the liberation of women. There is room for feminine metaphors and forms of address for God. Berger makes a plea for the inclusion of these themes in liturgical studies and explains why this new practice is of fundamental importance to the whole Church. With respect to the second movement, Berger emphasizes that symbols from women's culture cannot uncritically be included in the liturgy; they must be intrinsically fit for such use, considering the fundamental structure of the liturgical act. Liturgy must remain what it is: worship of God.

The exploration of the concept 'appropriation' owes much to a survey-article by Frijhoff. People make bearers of meaning, whether offered or imposed by others, their own by filling them with a meaning of their own. In this way they become acceptable and livable. Procter-Smith envisions a liturgy in which women as actors so appropriate the Christian liturgical tradition that in a process of togetherness it becomes 'a liturgy of their own'. She lays the framework of feminist interpretation upon the web of meaning of the Christian liturgy and claims the centre for the margin, also in the liturgy. That means war, and that war she wages. A new liturgical practice is born. Liturgical texts, symbols, and metaphors are placed in the world women live in. In the liturgy people

speak 'in remembrance of her', include in it (though critically) elements from other traditions, and render and proclaim those elements of the Christian tradition which the participants find interesting and meaningful. A new and legitimate history is born of women and their past in the liturgy through a theological and liturgical appropriation of remembrance; an *anamnesis* of women by women for the sake of the future. A feminist appropriation of the concept 'revelation' is equally important. God remembers the struggle of women and reveals herself/himself in their lives. That new history is nourished by encouraging emancipatory preaching and offering room for re-interpretations which lead to new meanings of the sacraments, new forms of addressing God, and another liturgical use of the Bible. Women cannot always take the room they need for this. In churches with a unitary tradition of prayer, for instance, women must pray 'between the lines'. With this expression Procter-Smith hints at the range of 'coding strategies' which women use. Specific attention is paid to such strategies as exaggerated accommodation, imitation, parody, and symbolic inversion. Where women use these devices to camouflage their message, they do not bring about real change.

A liturgy in which the language excludes or hurts people, a liturgy which legitimates unjust relations between people, is a far cry from what liturgy is meant to be. The *fifth chapter*, geared to the daily practice of the 'mainstream' Protestant churches, offers liturgical arguments to those who have become aware of the androcentric language of the liturgy and are in search of inclusive liturgical language. That such language always implies a choice is shown by the research of Verbiest and De Vries in which the relation between language, thinking, and gender holds central place. It is the selection from the available language-means, they say, not the structure and lexicon of the language, which influences the processes which for hearers and readers follow upon the language-expression. Language is a creative process. Hearers and speakers are not forced to use or reproduce an androcentric way of thinking. They can use other language-means. They can decide to speak in another way.

The liturgical arguments for the use of inclusive language in the liturgy are borrowed from definitions of liturgy which Procter-Smith has worked out more fully: liturgy as encounter, liturgy as 'work of the people', and liturgy as remembrance. Liturgy as the encounter between God and the whole congregation or parish falls short of the mark if androcentric language is chosen to communicate the good news of God. Liturgy as 'work of the people' is not up to measure when women are the objects rather than the subjects of liturgical activity, when it is not the whole people that is actor and subject of the language chosen. If important events in the history of salvation are only expounded to show their meaning for male believers, liturgy (as 'work of the people') exposes salvation-history as a history that excluded women. 'Work of the people' implies that the whole people does the (language) work of liturgy. Liturgy as remembrance fails when the *anamnesis* only includes male witnesses to the faith and distorts the remembrance of Jewish and Christian women. JHWH remembers women. Why, then, should the congregation and the parish not give voice to these good tidings? Whenever this does happen, the present one-sided masculine liturgical language, indeed the whole Christian liturgical tradition, is transformed. With a new sense of purpose and creative imagination a construction and a reconstruction of a Christian tradition is taking place, of women, by women, for women. (Translation: J. Faber)