Hegemonic feminist politics in Western society are derived from a deep humanist desire for self-determination and freedom from oppressive institutions, traditions and religious authorities. From this viewpoint a moral act is only moral if it is the product of the critical faculty of individual reason, not the result of social coercion, habituated virtue or subordination to a divine will. Consequently, religious bodies are regarded as prototypical examples of oppressed subjectivity which sometimes comes to consciousness and seeks freedom by means of subversive acts or carefully constructed exit strategies.

The discipline of theology and its hermeneutical reflection on religious subjectivity and agency occupies a paradoxical place in relation to feminist politics. With its foundational claim that the subject is already double, constituted in and by a preconceptual divine signifier, theology is positioned as an alternative political discourse to liberal, feminist constructionism. According to modern theology, one cannot speak the truth about humanity or morals without also speaking truthfully of the divine. In other words, there can be no profound discourse on the human situation without considering the grounds of being, the ultimate, God and likewise, no true God-talk without explicating the living (historical) person for whom and through whom God comes into being. This is not because theology agrees with post-enlightenment scholarship in asserting that God merely is a human projection, an ambiguous symbol of the social body writ large, but because ‘divinity’ and ‘humanity’ are the inter-instrumental fields and semiotic horizons within which they become and manifest as real in relation to the other. Thus, to destabilize the meaning of one category (divinity) also implies a destabilization of the other (humanity).

If this is so, if the theological project is forever intertwined with anthropology, we may turn the thesis on its head and argue that the

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1 Cf. for example Bonhoeffer 1998; Bultmann 1968; Lønning 1984.
contemporary search for a feminine divine, which can be observed both in feminist theology and in the popular culture, may be read as a sign that the supposed transcendent unity of divinity as Lord, like the supposed corporate unity of humanity as Man, has finally been fractured by critical theories of sexual difference, agency and authority. From a critical gender perspective, it is no longer meaningful to perceive God in terms of categories that work to legitimize the normativity of patriarchal hierarchies, be it in the cosmos, state or family, nor to regard as eternally self-evident the spatial order of a heavenly transcendent set up against an earthly immanent form of existence. Nor are simple symbolic reversals of the godhead from masculine to feminine sufficient. The contemporary search for a new regrounding and for new overarching symbols of divine reality may only succeed theologically if they also include visions of a new symbolic order, a new ethic, in which both gender and human-divine relations are recast.

In this essay I shall discuss two distinct examples of such a non-hegemonic feminist search, namely religious feminism as invoked in Dan Brown’s popular novel The Da Vinci Code and in the performative theology of the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco. Both agencies are deeply linked to and draw on popular culture, including its association with deviant superstitious practices. For this reason alone they are both highly controversial. Some feminist theorists may even regard them as insincere misrepresentations of what feminism is all about. I will argue that this is not a necessary conclusion: the author-activist and the community-activists in both my cases are engaged in redesigning the already utterly gendered field of religion by critically reflecting and invoking a feminine divine. Although their projects diverge at important points, both are situated at the intersection of theology and feminism, arguing that religious awakening and religious symbolism of a specific kind is imperative to women’s and men’s freedom and to the future of our civilization.

The Reclaiming community, which is inclusive of all genders and sexual preferences, was established in 1979. It is a typical representative of a fast-growing spiritual trend born in North America and Europe in the early 1970s in response to feminism, namely the Goddess movement. In addition, Reclaiming has renewed the loaded image

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2 The Goddess movement is part of a much larger feminist spirituality movement, not least in the USA, which includes practitioners of a Pagan, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Indigenous bent, cf. Eller 1993; Christ 1997; Griffin 2000; Salomonsen 1991, 2002. The Goddess movement was introduced to Scandinavian readers with Lene Sjørup’s